
PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH... BUT WHAT TO PREACH? AND HOW TO PRACTICE?

Marc Lepage



My job is to make sure that we learn from what we already know. It sounds easy, but it's not as straightforward as one thinks.

Cover Explaining the Knowledge Management model, Uganda
(Photo: Joelle Seme-Park)

Right Participants during the meeting organised by UNDP in Uganda
(Photo: Joelle Seme-Park)

For several years I worked with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at the regional hub for Africa. I wanted experience capitalization to become a regular part of UNDP programmes, and in the end, of everybody's work. However, it was clear that knowledge management is too often not getting

the attention it deserves. In practice, it meant I had to advocate for knowledge management activities like experience capitalization in work plans, but also organise workshops to train the implementers at different levels in the organisation. This is where my experience as a facilitator came in.



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Learning along the way

I facilitated a workshop (organised by UNDP) on knowledge management in East Africa in October 2016, where I successfully pushed for people from the field to participate. I thought it was very important that community members, those who really hold development knowledge in local communities, also learn about knowledge management. I used the knowledge sharing canvas, “a toolkit for knowledge enthusiasts to succeed”. The approach turned out to be a bit too theoretical and abstract, and after a while my participants were no longer “knowledge enthusiasts”. We saw that key messages were “lost in translation”; not just because of the language, but also because the concepts didn’t resonate with the participants’ daily practice. Too much time was lost in explaining why they were participating, demystifying concepts, and motivating them to value knowledge sharing approaches.

After that workshop in East Africa, I joined a four day workshop on experience capitalization in Ghana, organised by CTA. The concepts were not new to me, but the workshop had a practical bent that was namely to work towards creating a “knowledge product”, such as a story, that could be easily shared. After my experience in East Africa, the value of this approach made an impact on me, and I was keen to try this new approach in my next workshop.

Experience Capitalization fast forward

My next workshop was in Kampala, Uganda (organised by UNDP) in April 2017. I had two days with participants from Ministries, local government departments and development organisations who are working on the UNDP project called “Inclusive and Sustainable New Communities”. Instead of getting too bogged down in concepts and making the case for knowledge management, after a short introduction and explanation of the concepts, we dived straight into planning for creating a knowledge product. At the end of this hands-on workshop we had 15 excellent plans for stories, ranging from the production of power via a micro dam to engaging with local leaders dealing with the refugee crisis. What’s more, all the participants were super excited and engaged and ready to follow through with their plans.

What to keep in mind

When reflecting on the two different workshops, a couple of observations came to mind.

First, it is important to *know your audience*. In the first workshop I was talking to community members. Whereas in the second workshop in Uganda, thanks to the participants’ professional backgrounds, they were



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more used to thinking conceptually, and convincing them about the value of knowledge sharing was less time consuming.

Another observation is that a “hands-on workshop” is a good way to be able to end up with some great plans that are ready to be put into practice.

Keeping in mind that every group of participants is different, there is always the need for tailor-made programmes. There is no single blueprint. Some of the variables that I think about include: the time available, the pace of the programme, the balance between theory and practice, and the amount of “handholding” you provide to the participants. There is no such thing as facilitating the perfect workshop but these recent experiences have certainly helped me to get better results for knowledge management.



Marc Lepage worked as Knowledge and Innovation Advisor at the UNDP regional hub for Africa, Addis Ababa. He joined the workshop and all the participants whose stories were later published as “Insights on rural development in West Africa”.
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<http://experience-capitalization.cta.int>

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