SPARC Knowledge Management Toolkit

Innovation Diaries

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Content **List**

The Knowledge Management Cycle 1
The Purpose of this Tool 1
Description of the Tool 1
How to Use this Tool 2
Suggested Questions 2
Lead KM Specialist 3

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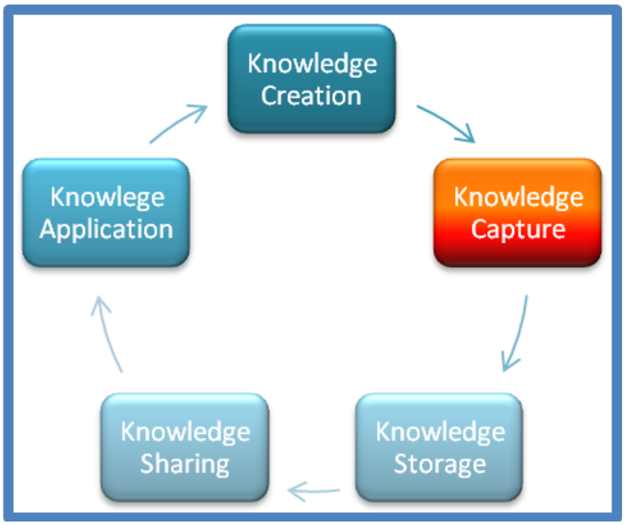
The Knowledge Management Cycle



The Purpose of this Tool

The purpose of innovation diaries is to contribute to lesson learning in order to improve project performance and to share lessons more widely. They are a tool to assist knowledge capture within the KM cycle. The objective is to capture knowledge which sheds light on the factors which have been critical to the success of an initiative, particularly *tacit knowledge* which is more ephemeral and less likely to be captured by conventional monitoring and reporting processes. Often, the important knowledge is not just 'what was done', but 'how it was done', and how the roles and relationships of people and institutions contributed. It needs to be captured in real time – as it happens – since it is difficult to reconstruct this information in retrospect, and particularly to identify key turning points and critical decisions, as well as any failed approaches. The result will be a narrative report of the institutional history and lessons of the project, which includes an account of how concerns were met and how innovation occurred.

Description of the Tool

The knowledge capture process uses the Innovation Diary as the central organising document. It consists of three components:

Timeline	Narrative	Key documentation
Dates of main events Location (State)	Description of activity, comments and notes, and the contents of key documentation. Longer commentaries will be contained in separate documents. Comments on the perceived significance *at the time* of any event or action are especially useful. Author of comments should be identified	Reference or link to documentation (files, presentations, workshop proceedings, AV material etc) which contains fuller details or relevant background information, held in the SPARC Innovation Hub or on the intranet.

Other key components in the process can include:

- Partners and roles;
- Institutional arrangements;
- Innovation triggers and successes;
- Failures and lessons;
- What has been learnt.

How to Use this Tool

Where should it be used? An innovation diary can be kept for any major stream of work or project which runs over an extended period and which will be examined for success or failure at its conclusion. Ideally, all pieces of work should keep an innovation diary, but in practice the most substantial, complex or novel are likely to generate most insight. One is not trying to identify 'innovation' at the outset; it is only in hindsight that it will be possible to see whether the project success was secured by technical or procedural innovations, and the innovation diary will help identify those insights.

Who does it? Building the basic framework of the diary – the timeline, key events and documentation – should be straightforward and it must be assigned to a designated person, ideally in or close to the project team. But it can be a difficult task for project staff to capture 'soft' or process information. They will be heavily preoccupied with delivering the technical components of the programme; they may not have the necessary skills to identify some key lessons; they may be too close to the action to 'see the wood for the trees'. If a team member cannot be allocated this task, a good solution is to use a skilled, objective but knowledgeable person from outside the project team to conduct a structured interview at regular stages, such as the State Office KM Technical Officer or a KM consultant.

How is it done? This interviewing may take place on a one-to-one basis, or it can be part of a facilitated discussion with team members at a suitable occasion such as a workshop event. (Some suggested guidelines for questioning are given below.) This minimises demands on project staff, and allows for an independent analysis and reflection. If there are differences in opinion or viewpoint, it can be useful to record them.

When is it done? It is important for information to be captured as nearly as possible when it happens, when memories are fresh and not overlain by later events or decisions.

What is captured? Anything that is felt to be relevant. As well as a record of the progress and process of a project, we are interested in the key 'turning points' , and these may relate to important decisions, the formative role of individuals, the importance of bringing particular stakeholders together, or even just fortunate events! A list of suggested questions and approaches is given below to help people writing the diaries to consider what might be relevant and useful. It is for guidance purposes only.

What is it used for? An innovation diary is simply a tool for collating information and insights which will help an evaluation of the reasons for successes and failures in a project's lifetime. It is only useful if it feeds into a process of reflection and analysis – lesson learning. Such analysis will occur towards the end of a project's lifetime (but can also happen at other times), and can run in parallel with a more conventional evaluation of whether the project has attained its aims, and provide key information on *why and how* it might have succeeded.

Suggested Questions

- The timeline
    - Use the diary to record how the project evolved over time. Record key events (meetings and workshops) but also other points at which critical decisions were taken or reviewed, or when partnerships were formed or dissolved.
    - What events outside the control of the project affected the course of the project?

- Key documentation
    - What documentation – reports, analyses, meeting and visit notes – was generated by the project?
    - Where is it accessed? Provide a link.

- Partners and roles
    - Who are the main partners in the project, and what are their roles?
    - Record any changes to the roles of partners, whether any partners become more or less significant. Have partners been added or dropped, and why?
    - Is there a champion organisation or individual who actively promotes the ideas of the project? How do they exercise that role?
    - In considering the roles that members play, it might be useful to see them in terms of 'users of knowledge' or 'suppliers of new knowledge', or whether they perform some 'intermediary function', helping suppliers and users of knowledge to understand each other and to bring other inputs to the innovation process.

- Institutional arrangements
    - Is the project managed in a collaborative sense, or are the partners simply representing their formal roles?
    - How are decisions made?
    - How are conflicts resolved?
    - How are lessons identified and shared?

- Innovation triggers and successes
    - What were the key findings that the project team needed to respond to? If so, how did they respond?
    - What were the important sources of insight and knowledge that they drew on?

- Failures and lessons
    - List any things that went wrong. What was learnt from this?
    - Were there any unforeseen or unintended outcomes or impacts?

- Innovations
    - Were new ways of doing things devised?
    - Have any new methods of working or collaboration been identified?
    - Have any new ways of learning, sharing and accessing information been developed?
    - Have any constraints been identified and removed?
    - Have any members resolved to adopt different ways of working?
    - Has the project had to modify its aims and objectives as a result of any of these?
    - Have any new institutional alliances been formed?

Lead KM Specialist

The coordinator and lead specialist for this tool is Sabrina Nwonye. Any questions and suggestions should be directed to her.

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