

# **Knowledge Management in the Limpopo Province: A case study**

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## **Introduction**

Knowlead was contracted to develop a knowledge management (KM) strategy and implementation plan to enable the Limpopo Provincial Government (LPG) to institute effective KM practices in the province. The KM strategy not only provided the framework for structured KM implementation, but also outlined how the KM strategy would align to the province's overall strategic objectives. The KM implementation plan, in turn, identified the major steps and processes needed to give effect to the strategy and fully imbed KM best practise within the LPG.

## **Rationale for the Project**

In 2011 the Limpopo Provincial Government (LPG) was under severe pressure because of poor service delivery, low productivity, and problems with governance and finances. The Public Service Reform Programme identified the following specific areas of concern

- Lack of strategic leadership capacity in the Office of the Premier (OtP)
- Need for improved monitoring and evaluation of institutional capacity, efficiency and service delivery effectiveness
- Need for improved communication to the public on governmental programmes, and
- Need for improved international and intra/inter- governmental relations

Central government consequently decided to intervene and took over certain management functions of the LPG. While this provided management support and improved efficiency, it also created a number of problems, viz. multiple centers of power and lowered staff morale which impacted on service delivery. One of the suggestions put forward to alleviate these problems was that a structured knowledge management programme should be introduced throughout the province.

An initial scoping exercise was conducted to establish KM maturity levels in the LPG. The study showed that although pockets of KM practices existed in the organisation, KM was generally at a very low level of development. Knowlead was therefore contracted to develop a KM strategy and implementation plan for the LPG in general as well as specific strategies and implementation plans for three pilot departments (the Office of the Premier, the Education and Public Works departments). The province received financial support for the project from GIZ, a development agency of the German government.

## **Project objectives and benefits of KM for Limpopo**

It was argued that the structured implementation of KM would create better awareness of, and access to relevant information, 'know-how' and experience. It would also encourage effective retention and use of strategic knowledge, promote knowledge sharing and collaboration, and leverage employees' tacit knowledge and intellectual assets. All these factors would ensure that the LPG would improve its governance, efficiency, performance, service delivery, and work output. This would result in value

being added to the processes and operations of the LPG, accelerated growth in innovation and improved human resource development.

## **Work plan**

The first step in the project was to expand on the initial scoping study and gather further information of relevance to KM strategy development. This included key knowledge needs as well as levers and barriers to KM implementation in the LPG. The information that was gathered, although underscoring the need for KM, also highlighted major impediments to KM implementation. These included a lack of understanding of KM and its benefits, staff apathy and distrust created by the intervention by central government in the management of Limpopo. The tendency to work in silos and to compete rather than collaborate was a further negative factor as well as the lack of resources for KM, e.g. staff capacity and skills, financial constraints and IT problems. These barriers were, however, offset by the strong leadership and support given by senior management in the information technology and records and knowledge management units in the Office of the Premier.

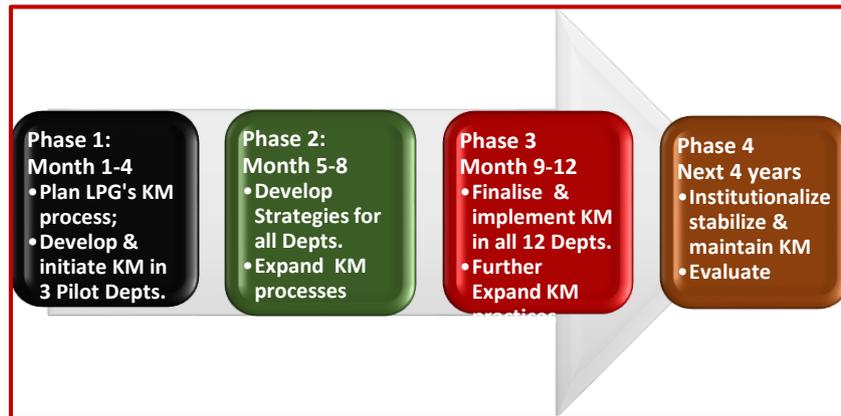
To obtain support, address barriers and encourage ownership of the KM project we adopted a participatory approach by engaging in consultative forums and workshops with key role players in all departments in the province.

## **Deliverables and outcomes of the project**

The main deliverable of the project was the development of a comprehensive transversal KM strategy and implementation plan for the Limpopo Provincial Government as well as specific KM strategies and implementation plans for the three pilot departments (the Office of the Premier, Education and Transport). The departmental strategies and implementation plans, although addressing specific needs followed the same framework as the transversal strategy. This included

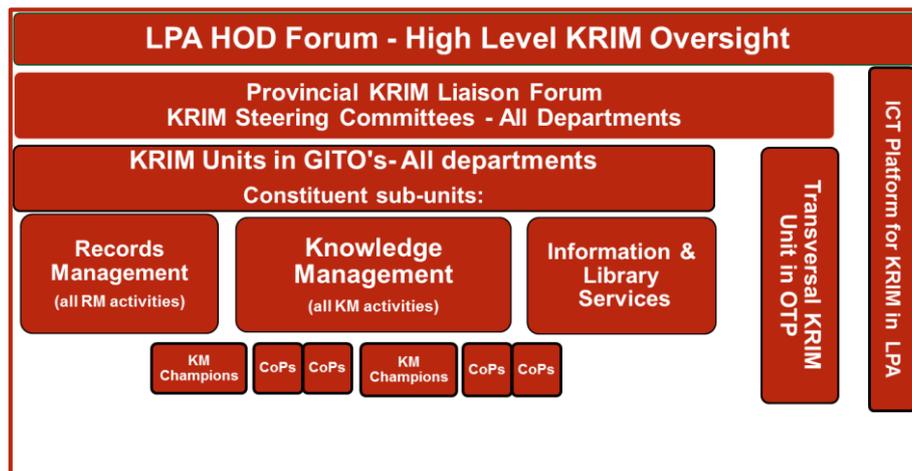
- An outline of the value of KM and how it can be applied in the LPG. The value and benefits of KM were identified by means of group and individual interviews with employees at various levels of seniority in the departments;
- A framework for effective KM implementation and institutionalisation;
- A monitoring and evaluation structure to measure the success of KM implementation;
- Capacity development for prospective KM champions in each of the departments in the LPG by means of a five day training programme;
- Overseeing and supporting the implementation of the KM strategies in the three pilot Departments;
- Developing a new organisational structure for Knowledge, Records and Information Management (KRIM).

KM implementation was based on a phased approach as outlined below:



**Phased KM Strategy Implementation**

The KM implementation plan proposed a high level of autonomy for the various provincial departments coupled with transversal oversight by the knowledge, records and information management (KRIM) unit in the Office of the Premier. In addition the relationship and collaboration of the KRIM unit with related functions such as the departmental libraries, records management and IT units were emphasised to ensure that the responses to the information and knowledge requirements of knowledge workers would not be fragmented to the detriment of service delivery quality.



**The new knowledge, information and records management structure**

**Key lessons learnt from the project**

Although KM strategies were adopted by all provincial departments, the actual implementation varied considerably between departments and even between units within departments. The differences observed in the success of KM implementation could be ascribed to a number of factors. These included

- varying levels of buy-in and ownership of KM;
- high levels of staff uncertainty due to ongoing organisational restructuring;
- varying strength of governance and management styles;

- variation in organisational cultures within departments;
- variation in maturity level of KM legacy systems across the LPG;
- lack of ICT standardization across departments;
- acceptance of the coordinating role of the Office of the Premier in overseeing KM in the LPG.

It is our view that the actions that had the most positive impact on KM acceptance and adoption were

- the extensive consultative forums we engaged in to clarify the benefits and role of KM in the province;
- the appointment and training of KM Champions in all departments - this played an important role in creating and understanding of the benefit of KM for both individual employees and the LPG overall; and
- probably the most crucial was the sustained and high level of support given by senior management in the Office of the Premier and more specifically the head of the information technology office and the knowledge and records management unit.

There were, however, also a co-incidence of several factors that impeded the smooth rollout of the KM initiative in the province. These related to the impact of central government's intervention in LPG; financial mismanagement in many departments; global economic constraints; political upheaval in Limpopo and the subsequent staff turnover in the LPG; and the absence of a clear career path in KM.

The key lessons we learnt from this project are that

- support and buy-in, especially from top management, should be secured to ensure the effective implementation of any KM initiative;
- all role players should be persuaded that KM skills are a necessary component of the skills set and daily working procedure of all employees in the organisation; and
- the application of KM practices should be included in the job description and KPI's of all employees.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, although KM strategies were adopted by all provincial departments in the LPG, the roll-out of KM practices varied considerably. A number of factors were identified as contributing to this varied adoption of KM. The main challenges were

- lack of, or varying recognition of the importance of KM by the organisational leadership in the various departments;
- lack of buy-in and enthusiasm by some line managers;
- the negative impact of the various internal and external factors noted in the previous sections;
- varied commitment to the KM champion programme; and
- lack of KM career path planning.

It is clear that the success of KM in the LPG is dependent on the improved and sustained support and buy-in for KM, regular evaluation and benchmarking of the state of KM across departments in the LPG, ongoing training for both KM practitioners and champions in all departments in the LPG and the incorporation of KM in the performance appraisal of all employees in the LPG. It should be recognised that the sustained and effective practice of knowledge management would enhance organisational learning and innovation as well as ensure organisational renewal.

We are convinced that KM has the potential to transform the LPG into a learning and innovative organisation that builds on its fundamental strengths and past experiences. It is the means by which the LPG can achieve its vision and mission of providing '*Good governance, integrated planning, sustainable growth and development*' by means of '*Innovative and strategic leadership and management for service excellence*'

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