

Activity-based Knowledge Mapping

Introduction

Activity-based Knowledge Mapping is a tool which enables knowledge inputs and outputs to be linked in a systematic fashion to ongoing organisational activities and processes – from office mail to strategic reviews. Activity-based knowledge mapping enables tasks and activities to be in terms of both the overall organisational process – to understand how activities are ordered and why – as well the requirements and dependencies for an activity – who performs the activity, what inputs are required and how knowledge and information flows support the tasks.

This results in a series of diagrams that visually display knowledge within the context of a business process. In other words, the map shows how knowledge is currently used within a given process and sources of this knowledge, and points to how improvements can be made. If undertaken and applied correctly, activity-based knowledge mapping and workflow approaches can help to identify key activity-based priorities for improving knowledge and information flows within a group or department.

Detailed description of the process

Activity-based knowledge map is created in a facilitated workshop, which will vary in length depending on the nature of process. The key steps are as follows:

Determine the process to be analysed: The workshop should start with open discussion of the process and a brainstorm of the different activities making up that process. This process brainstorm may be undertaken prior to the workshop to save time, with the details of the process provided for comments to the workshop participants.

Prioritise key activities and focus the discussion around key activities. Factors to consider in prioritisation are: the number of people across the organisation involved in undertaking an activity; the effectiveness or otherwise of the activity; the ‘tacit’ knowledge needed to undertake the activity; etc.

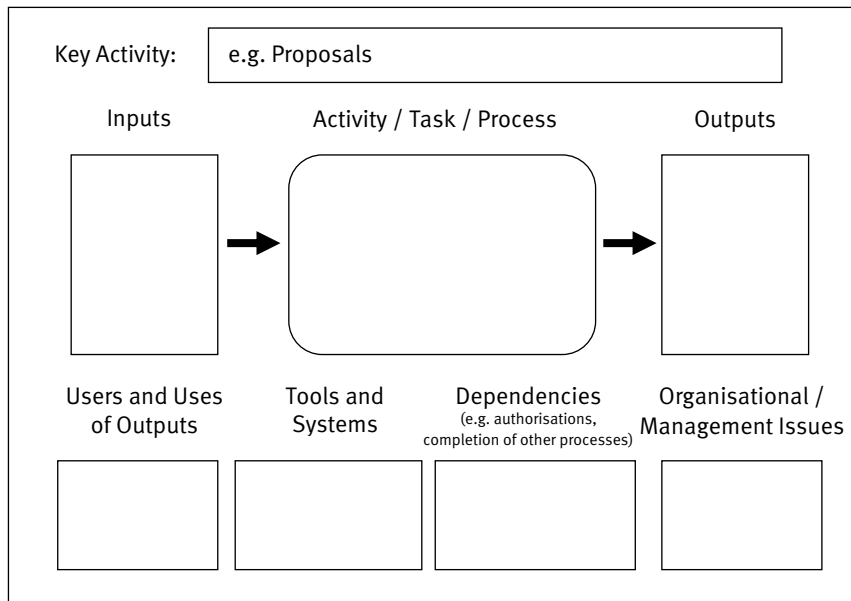
Map key activities: Using the template provided, analyse each of the priority activities and fill in the relevant boxes, using the following guidelines.

- The name of a given task or process (e.g. dissemination) should be entered into the central box. Distinct sub-activities should be entered below.
- Then consider the main resources or inputs needed to carry out this task. Enter these and any specific attributes (e.g. ‘through management guidance’ etc.) in the boxes on the left. Include people as well as departments, documents, knowledge etc.
- Now list the outputs generated through this activity in the right-hand box, again with important attributes, in particular trying to identify how the activity has ‘added value’ to the inputs.
- There are then four related boxes to fill out: first, the main users and uses of the outputs; next, the systems and tools that support the activity; then, any critical dependencies; and finally, organisational and management issues.
- Pointers: within each box, order each item in terms of its relative importance. If different outputs relate to different people, systems etc., linking arrows may be useful.

Analyse findings: Invite participants to analyse the activity-based knowledge map, using probing questions, such as: What knowledge seems most critical to this process? What knowledge is missing?

Application of findings: Brainstorm how the knowledge maps can be used to make improvements in activities across the organisation. Identify applications as individual, group or team, and organisation wide. Conclude with an action plan, documenting tasks, owners, and timeframes.

Figure 6: Process mapping template



Key points/practical tips

Facilitation: The facilitator should be expert in group facilitation and knowledge mapping techniques, and have expertise in the development of business processes.

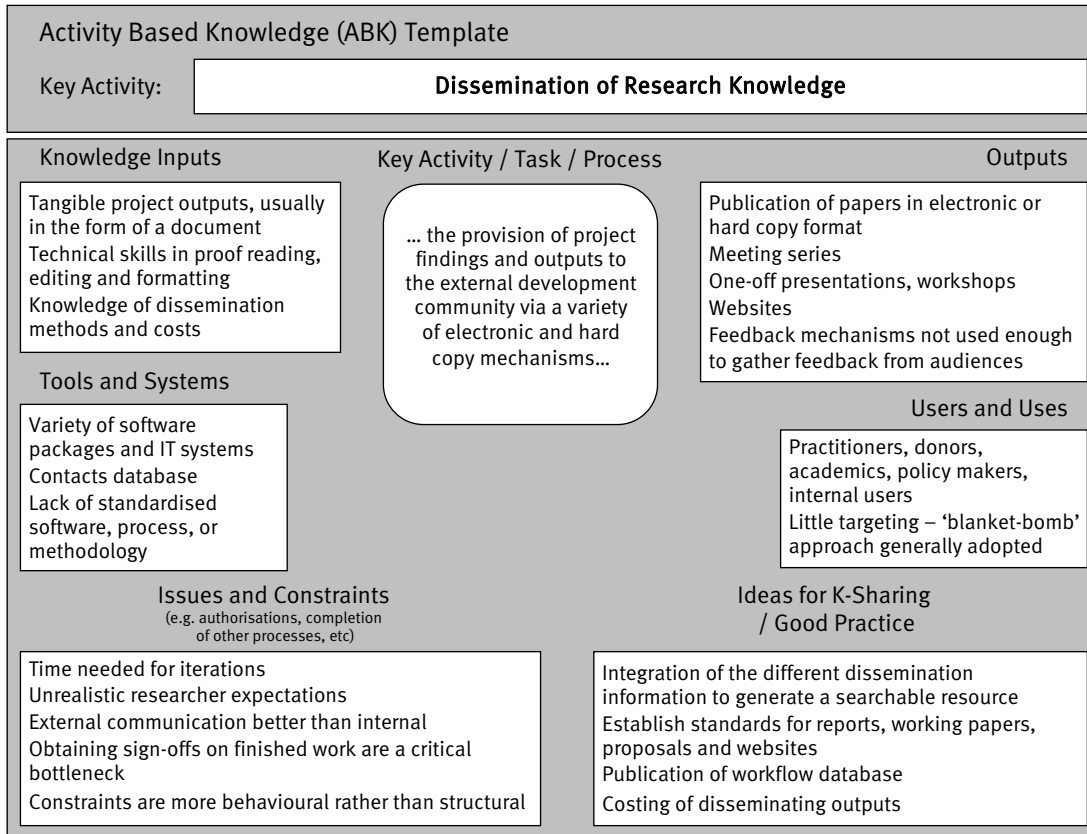
Ownership: A senior staff member should be assigned as a responsible owner for the end product. This person should be committed to achieving the result, and be willing to allocate resources (people and money) both to the workshop and the work afterwards. Champions should be identified within the workshop. Assign responsibility to a working group and provide them with the necessary authority to make changes internally, and to represent the group or department when dealing with organisation-wide constraints or bottlenecks.

The **analysis** phase of the workshop is crucial to the success of the effort. The facilitator needs to formulate questions that provoke answers enhancing the knowledge map and that also help to define and develop the deliverable.

Example: Knowledge Audit at ODI

As part of a Knowledge Audit (see Tool 2) at ODI, teams of administrators were brought together to reflect on the knowledge they use that is most important to organisational life. This was an important process because administrative knowledge is frequently undervalued and, further, there are not very many effective way of mapping it. The participants decided to focus on two main areas of work: 'bid development' and 'dissemination', and used activity-based knowledge mapping to identify the key inputs and outputs for these processes, as well as ideas for how this should be taken forward. Figure 7 shows the 'dissemination of research knowledge' template, as filled out by participants. As a result of this workshop, a working group was formed to take forward the recommendations, and to help the administrators work together better. There was also greater clarity on the 'must haves' for the knowledge management strategy, and 'administrative knowledge' was accorded a primary place in the strategy, alongside the more obvious research-based knowledge.

Figure 7: Activity-based mapping template for preparing bids



Sources and further reading

- Plumley, D. (2003) ‘Process-Based Knowledge Mapping: A Practical Approach to Prioritizing Knowledge in Terms of its Relevance to a Business or KM Objective’, see: www.kmmag.com/articles/default.asp?ArticleID=1041.