

PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

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Personal Knowledge Management (PKM) is the set of actions applied to our personal knowledge. This includes learning, sharing, writing, teaching, imagining, and forgetting. The focus is on Personal Knowledge: what we know and can apply. It may well be that you have always been practicing PKM without knowing it.

If we focus on the Knowledge Management part of the definition, our attention is drawn to the systematic organisation and use of such processes. It is not a random practice of browsing the news, making notes and occasional reflective thinking but a virtuous circle of practice to build a set of competencies toward a goal.

PKM and self-development

The driver of PKM is professional development. We set our goals at the self-development level, we set measurable objectives of professional development and we sketch our PKM itinerary: steps, milestones and interesting detours. PKM is the engine of professional development and where most action takes place. A well executed PKM practice helps us achieve our professional development objectives.

How to adopt PKM

PKM is not specific to learning and development. It is practiced in every domain but the form may vary. I learned PKM from my own practice as a

manager and I developed tools around it. I observed others, experimented, and I shared what I learned. Many knowledge workers like managers and engineers practice PKM. As it is not the object of intense reflective thinking, it often stays informal.

PKM can be overwhelming. The deluge of free information can be both a bonanza and a threat. It is easy to get trapped into a never-ending habit of consuming information. It is a challenge to make sense of it and keep the information overload at bay. The goal of a pragmatic PKM practice is to become more efficient and organised while keeping time spent on it under control, limit the cognitive load, and preserve our motivation.

Learning and Development and PKM

PKM plays well with independent self-directed learning. PKM brings self-directed learning to a new level where you can control and regulate your learning. It is especially appreciable if you work in a small organisation or by yourself.

As learning and development practitioners, you have several further reasons to become interested in PKM. It will let you grow a network, extend your reach and your reputation. You may be noticed and could become the reference person on a topic in your organisation. PKM is likely to catch the attention

of middle and senior management. They too will need to grow to master PKM for their own sake. This promises opportunities of delivering benefits of PKM in your organisation.

Elements of PKM

Social

PKM is social first. You will use peer-to-peer learning, small networks and meaningful conversations to stay abreast. Social includes maintaining relationships, building networks, and using knowledge streams from others.

Material

Posts, books, videos, and courses serve as foundations of knowledge. They serve again when we reference them like landmarks. It is much more agile to share a concept name and a reference to a book or a person than to try to describe it once again in detail. Streams deliver new material continuously. We need to filter and organise incoming material before we can dedicate attention to it.

Priorities and Compass

Knowledge processes take time and consume cognitive resources. It is easy to learn something every day but harder when it comes irregularly by big quantities. To practice PKM in limited time, it is best to mitigate our ambitions and focus on what is important. To avoid cognitive overload we use fixed size buckets for each stage of learning.

References are concepts, people, organisations, events and important books or artefacts.

Actions should stay aligned with our professional development objectives. Refer to them when deciding on priorities.

References

References are concepts, people, organisations, events and important books or artefacts. They serve as the map of the knowledge we know and aim to acquire. Learning paths are like trajectories on this map. References are also used as tags and keywords for bookmarking, organising and sharing.

A Personal Mix

Your own PKM practice will include different processes. Depending on your role and your interests it may include: searching, social listening, Working Out Loud (WOL), maintaining a Personal Learning Network (PLN), curation, sense-making, critical thinking, reflective thinking, questioning, sharing, experimenting, learning from experience, ideating, synthesising, analysing, sketching, writing, commenting and chatting.

Blending PKM into your day

With a modular approach to PKM, it is easier to accommodate parts of processes in our daily routines. You can:

- Replace listening to the radio with listening to podcasts. Learning something new every day is satisfying.
- Listen while walking or cleaning.
- Skim posts while commuting.
- Hook some routines into habits such as checking a Twitter list every morning after your breakfast.
- Reserve time for careful, in-depth reading, and for writing.

- Take notes all the time, bookmark what you acquired and turn them into blog posts.

Expanding your PKM

As you know yourself better you can adjust the size of your PKM to keep the load sustainable. Start small and increase. Keep each level for two weeks.

Example for every week:

- 150 posts under consideration for reading
- 15 posts to read
- 5 posts to study in depth and apply reflective thinking
- 2 new ideas to experiment
- 1 post to write
- 2 curated posts

PKM needs to be regular so know your limits and stretch carefully. Include feedback and reflective thinking on your process, try new things, let go what doesn't stick and iterate.

Get started

To get you started on your PKM journey use a regular notebook and a pen. Stay low-tech until you are sure of what fits perfectly. You will occasionally read it and take time for reflective thinking. Being away from a screen is a benefit.

Set goals and context

- Write a short biography, what you will share, what you are interested in learning. Reuse it for your biography on social media and on your blog.
- Write what you wish to learn, deepen, reflect on or be recognised for.
- Write down what will change in your biography as you make progress. It's an

interesting way to measure progress.

Keep a journal of progress

- Jot down short notes on what you did and what you learned from it.
- Write down what goes well and what is harder to turn into regular practice.
- Dare asking others how you did.
- Maintain a stack of possible enhancements and experiment with changes.

Starting points

- Map your Personal Learning Network. Take a sheet of paper, place your name in the middle and start branches: for people in your field, for people in your ecosystem, people from your organisation, your friends with whom you share about your work. Add people as they come to your mind.
- Make reference list in a spreadsheet: Important concepts of your domain, books, people, organisations and events.
- Join a community group on Facebook or LinkedIn in your domain, preferably a group in your time zone to ensure that engagement will be effective. Groups with 30 to 200 members are the most promising. Make sure the group is a community and not just a wall of announcements.
- Open a Diigo account and start social bookmarking, ask people in your Personal Learning Network if they also have an account and follow them. Check what they shared once a week.
- Start a blog and share your experiments. Blogs are free at wordpress.com and elsewhere and a great place to start.

Going further

- Join Twitter chats in your field such as #OzLearn, #LrnChat or #Chat2Lrn. You can start by observing the conversation. When you become comfortable, introduce yourself with a tweet and include the hashtag.
- Join a Working Out Loud Circle. Working Out Loud circles come with two benefits: Learning how to build a network and practice working out loud. Networking will also be applied to build your PLN, and it is free.
- Curate a niche domain. It is better to be unique and recognised in a tiny domain.
- Go for mastery and join a PKM workshop such as the one by Harold Jarche. (follow @hjarche on Twitter)

Twitter Lists

Open a Twitter account and create three private lists. I suggest Twitter because streams are public, one way and offer the best content.

- **My PLN:** A list of people in your field. People you know and could reach out to in real life. This list will become your PLN list.
- **Sources:** A list of thought leaders and organisations in your field. This will be a one-way stream. Start it by adding @aitd1. If you end up having exchanges with list members you may want to move them to the PLN list.
- **Info:** A list of people or organisations sharing around your organisation concerns. If you work in a bank, it will be your organisation, competitors, regulatory bodies, finance minister. This will let you become aware of what managers and SME have in their head.

To find people use the search box. Add people, test them and remove them without hesitation if they don't deliver what you expect. I suggest private lists to start, turn them into public when you gained some fluency. Public lists send notifications when people are added.

Check each list twice a week. Each time write a line in your progress log with the date, the name of the list and your top takeaway. It will help you keep track of your regularity and the value of it. The takeaway can be something you learn, discovered but also a conversation, an action you took or simply how you felt doing it. Material shared via Twitter should suffice to fill your buckets.

Establish Reference Lists

Establish a written list of useful references that you can refer to and systematically reuse. Start each list on a different page to be able to add to it. A spreadsheet is great for this. Entries are candidates for building your Twitter lists, search keywords, tags for bookmarks.

- Important books in your field and name of authors. Add a code name like Bk1 for each to ease further reference.
- Key people in your field, living or not. For the living ones find them on Twitter and add their handles.
- Important organisations in your field or having a strong impact on it.
- Key concepts in your domain, add a hashtag if you notice them used. Eg "Working Out Loud, WOL, #WOL".
- Important events with approximate date and hashtag used. Use an actual occurrence, not the generic name. Eg AITD National Conference 2016, May 2016, #AITD2016

Keep your practice of PKM sustainable, regular and agile. It is your personal practice and you have nothing to prove. Be creative in your practice, let go what doesn't fit your style. New tools can also be game changers for you. The real goal is to fuel your professional development and you are the final judge.

Share your practice with others: what did you try, what failed, what worked and what you get from it.

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