## Icebreaker: Knowledge Management Typologies

**Objectives**

1. Identify the degree to which your staff roles correspond with vital knowledge management (KM) capacities
2. Compare current roles of staff to the ones expected from the organization
3. Compare current roles of staff to the ones that staff want to develop

**Overview**

KM is a strategic approach to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of health and development programs around the world. It is the systematic process of collecting knowledge and connecting people to it so they can act effectively.

[KM is being adopted and applied](https://knowledgesuccess.org/how-knowledge-management-improves-global-health/) in as many forms as organizations take. From the World Health Organization, which developed a [KM strategy in 2005](http://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/69119), to NGOs like the African Population and Health Research Center, which is [integrating KM](https://aphrc.org/runit/synergy/) into their research work, KM is gaining widespread interest and acceptance.

This exercise on KM typologies was developed to raise awareness of KM as a valuable discipline by making the work of KM more accessible and personal. It is also meant to highlight the KM work that many people are already engaged in on an as-needed basis and showcase KM’s interdisciplinary nature.

**Time**

Total: 55 minutes

Prepare for this activity (10 minutes), then explain the exercise and ask the participants to act on your guidance (20 minute). Bring everyone together to discuss the results of the exercise (25 minutes).

**Knowledge Management Types**

The types identified here draw on the work of Fahy and Nisbet (2011)[[1]](#footnote-1) and Reinhardt et al. (2011).[[2]](#footnote-2) They are also influenced by the work experiences of staff from the Knowledge for Health (K4Health) Project, which is based at the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs with support from the United States Agency for International Development.

Here, we describe 10 KM types. These types encompass the capacities most often seen at organizations, but they are not exhaustive nor should they be presented as such.

1. **MONITOR:** People who monitor performance (of people, services, products, etc.) based on raw data; for example, to identify and react to emerging problems
2. **SHARER:** People who disseminate information, including those who transfer information to teach others once they have solved a problem
3. **NETWORKER:** People who create personal or project-related connections with people involved in the same kind of work (for example, in order to share information and support each other)
4. **ORGANIZER:** People who plan activities by creating to-do lists, scheduling meetings, reserving meeting space, etc.
5. **RETRIEVER:** People who search for and collect information on a given topic
6. **SCOUT:** People who identify and call attention to important areas of research, trends, and issues
7. **SYNTHESIZER:** People who associate and mash up information from different sources to generate new information
8. **TRANSLATOR:** People who tailor and communicate complex information, often through the use of analogy in order to apply information in a new context
9. **CATALOGER:** People who develop and apply ways to categorize and catalog information
10. **CHAMPION:** People who champion KM in their organization

These 10 types may reflect positions that include KM in their title, such as Knowledge Management Officer, but more commonly KM capacities are included in other roles, for example, communications or monitoring and evaluation roles.

**Steps for Implementing the Exercise**

Before you conduct this exercise, form a small team to discuss whether the 10 types described here are comprehensive and inclusive of your organization’s or program’s goals. If not, add, subtract, or modify as needed.

1. Preparation – 10 minutes

* Print the 10 types and descriptions (listed on p. 2 of this document) in large font (44 pt for titles, 32 pt for descriptions) and post around the room at eye level, leaving two-inch margins.
* Bring one marker for each participant.
* Also think about how you want to describe the 10 KM typologies to the participants and prepare any necessary materials ahead of time. For example, you may want to develop a brief PowerPoint presentation or a handout that you can distribute. Or you may decide to informally discuss the 10 types and refer to the descriptions that you will post around the room (first bullet above). (Note that this additional prep work is not factored into the time estimates for this icebreaker.)

1. Exercise – 20 minutes

* Provide background on the basis of the idea of KM typologies (as described in this document) and any additional brainstorming your team might have done before this training to identify additional roles in your organization/project – 5 minutes
* Describe the 10 KM typologies by showing a PowerPoint presentation, distributing handouts, or posting the descriptions around the room – 5 minutes
* Then ask participants to do two things:

#1: Ask everyone to consider the roles they play in their organization (or program or project) and note which2 of the 10 types most closely match their day-to-day work – 3 minutes

#2: Then ask everyone to consider the roles they *want* to exemplify—this could include work they are currently doing but are not playing a primary role on, or new work they would like to take on – 2 minutes

* Ask everyone to take a marker and write #1 on the description that most closely matches their day-to-day work (primary role), write #2 on the description that they fulfill secondarily, and #3 on a new role they want to exemplify – 5 minutes

1. Discussion – 25 minutes

* What did you think about the KM types we identified? Did we capture all relevant KM types? Are some missing?
* Describe what it was like choosing a KM type for each question (primary role, secondary role, new role).
* Tell us what you liked about this activity.
* Tell us what you did not like.
* How might you use this activity internally? Externally?
* How can we build on this idea?

Possible discussion points at the organizational level

* Was there a diversity of KM types among staff? Or were staff roles clustered around only a few KM types? How could this be beneficial (or detrimental) to the organization?
* What can be done to encourage the staff to develop their secondary or aspirational KM type?

Thoughts for expanding the activity if time allows:

* Ask the participants to find someone who picked a different primary KM type than they did and tell each other about the KM type they chose.
* Ask participants to modify the primary (or aspirational) KM type to even more closely reflect their existing (or desired) role. This can include the job title as well as the job description; share modifications with the group and describe why they were made.
* Ask participants to think how their KM typology is perceived by others and if the KM type is different from the one they chose themselves, discuss possible reasons why.
* Ask participants to describe how they could use their identified KM typologies to bolster their individual work and/or their work as a member of a team—probe on how the KM typologies could be used to discuss their work with a supervisor.

1. Fahy D, Nisbet MC. The science journalist online: shifting roles and emerging practices. *Journalism*. 2011;12(7):778-793. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Reinhardt W, Schmidt B, Sloep P, Drachsler H. Knowledge worker roles and actions--results of two empirical studies. *Knowledge and Process Management*. 2011;18(3):150-174. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)