

A woman with dark hair is shown in profile, looking towards the right. She is wearing a vibrant top with a complex pattern of blue, green, and white. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

Share Fairs: Effects of Knowledge Management Techniques On Learning and Sharing in East Africa

Research Brief

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Research Highlights

- Participatory events, such as a Share Fair, present a unique opportunity for participants to discuss challenges and ideas to improve their work, yet how these events influence knowledge sharing and organizational learning capacities has not been systematically documented.
- For the first time, K4Health evaluated the facilitation and impact of a Knowledge Management (KM) Share Fair event, which aimed to strengthen regional networks among health and development professionals in East Africa.
- Key findings showed that the Share Fair effectively facilitated the learning and use of KM techniques, motivated participants to share their knowledge with their own contacts, and strengthened regional networks.

BACKGROUND

Social interactions are vital to facilitate collaborative learning and skill transfer within organizations and to build effective partnerships between organizations. Participatory events, such as a Share Fair, present a unique opportunity for participants to discuss challenges and ideas to improve their work, yet how these events influence knowledge sharing and organizational learning capacities has not been systematically documented. To fill this gap, K4Health conducted a study to systematically assess the effectiveness and success of the Knowledge Management Share Fair held in Arusha, Tanzania in April 2016, which gathered over 100 experts working in health and development at the country and regional levels.

The primary objective of the study was to identify and understand knowledge management techniques that are most effective to facilitate knowledge sharing and use in organizations and interorganizational networks.

The study sought to answer three research questions:

1. Which KM techniques most effectively facilitate knowledge transfer and exchange during the Share Fair?
2. Which techniques are adopted in practice by public health professionals after the Share Fair?
3. To what extent has the knowledge gained from the Share Fair been transferred from the participants to their own contacts?

METHODS

K4Health employed a mixed-methods approach that included paper and online surveys, mobile polls, and face-to-face and virtual interviews. The data collection phase included three sequential points—before (n=53), during (n=56), and after (n=17) the event—in order to enhance and validate findings. This study received ethical approval from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Institutional Review Board. Quantitative data were combined and analyzed using SPSS (version 24) and Excel. Qualitative data were manually coded and analyzed to identify common themes that emerged.

Two noteworthy findings include:

- **Learning of KM techniques:** participants rated their level of increased knowledge of each KM technique presented during the event, using the following scale (greatly improved, slightly improved, remained the same).
- **Use of KM techniques:** participants indicated whether they had used specific KM techniques after the event by selecting one of the following (yes, I have used it fully; yes, in the process of using it; no, but plan to use it), and if used fully, provided illustrative examples.

Definition of KM Techniques Included in the Study

After Action Reviews: A discussion of a project or an activity in which individuals explore what happened, why it happened, what went well, what needs improvement, and what lessons can be learned.

Communities of Practice: A group of individuals characterized by six essential aspects: (1) strong community; (2) clear, well-defined domain; (3) linked to practice; (4) personal motivation; (5) mandate for concrete outcomes; (6) informal structure.

eLearning for Continuous Professional Development: Learning offered via electronic media typically on the Internet for professionals to keep their technical skills and knowledge up to date and/or to obtain or maintain (renew) their professional licenses or certifications.

Knowledge Café: A series of small-group discussions related to a topic that is of interest to the group. After each round, participants switch groups while a selected host remains to recap the previous conversation at the start of the next one.

Knowledge Harvesting: A systematic, facilitated gathering of key learning from an activity or project which seeks to: (1) review the experience (what worked well and problem areas), (2) analyze the root causes behind successes and challenges; identify the lessons for the future, (3) document and validate the lessons (including gathering evidence to support the lessons). (Source: Nancy Dixon, Common Knowledge Associates)

Knowledge Sharing Platforms: Computer operating systems that are designed with an aim to connect organizations and professionals from various locations and enable them to share knowledge and collaborate remotely.

Share Fair: A technique for catalyzing sharing experiences and expertise using collaborative knowledge tools to engage a group in conversation around implementation methods that have been effective in participants' work. Tools may include graphic facilitation, knowledge cafés, peer-assist, and open space.

Storytelling: Used in organizations as a communication tool to share knowledge through stories and storytelling. The language used is authentic (focused on experiences rather than facts).

RESULTS

Learning of KM techniques

There were two rounds of Knowledge Café sessions:

- During the first round, the Knowledge Café had two tables, and participants had the opportunity to attend both—Knowledge Sharing Platforms and Storytelling.
- During the second round, the Knowledge Café had four tables and participants had the opportunity to attend three of the four tables—AAR, eLearning for Continuous Professional Learning (CPD), Knowledge Harvesting, and Communities of Practice—in the time provided.
- Because the number of participants attending each of these tables differed, the number of respondents ranged from 21 to 43 (see Table 1).



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Overall, responses were positive with a majority reporting that their knowledge greatly improved or slightly improved after attending each session.

Table 1: Improvement of knowledge on each topic

Knowledge Management Techniques	Percent		
	Greatly improved	Slightly improved	Remained the same
After Action Reviews (n=21)	81%	19%	0%
Knowledge Sharing Platforms (n=40)	65%	32%	3%
eLearning for Continuous Professional Development (n=26)	54%	34%	12%
Knowledge Harvesting (n=21)	43%	38%	19%
Storytelling (n=43)	42%	49%	9%
Communities of Practice (n=27)	41%	52%	7%

Use of KM techniques

Participants were asked after the event if they had used KM techniques discussed or demonstrated at the Share Fair. Many participants reported they currently use one or more of the KM techniques, while others indicated they were planning to use KM techniques in the future. Communities of Practice, After Action Reviews, and Knowledge Sharing Platforms were among the KM techniques that participants reported using (See Table 2).



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Table 2: Use of KM techniques discussed or demonstrated at Share Fair

Knowledge Management Techniques	Percent (n=17)		
	Yes, I have used it fully	Yes, in the process of using it	No, but plan to use it
Community of Practice	37%	25%	25%
After Action Reviews	25%	56%	19%
Knowledge Sharing Platforms	25%	50%	19%
Storytelling	13%	31%	31%
eLearning for Continuous Professional Development	13%	25%	31%
Knowledge Harvesting	6%	38%	31%

Several participants offered multiple examples of KM techniques they used. After Action Reviews were mentioned more frequently than other KM techniques as a useful tool to plan and organize meetings.

DISCUSSION

The study identified a number of key findings and recommendations that can be considered for future knowledge-sharing events or training opportunities both within and across organizations.

The Knowledge Café, in particular, can be an effective and practical way to introduce various KM techniques and any key technical topics relevant to the participants (e.g., regional health priorities).

Among KM techniques, After Action Reviews and Knowledge Sharing Platforms were mentioned consistently as the techniques participants intended to or already share/use at their work. Participants may need more time or additional opportunities to learn and practice KM techniques, such as Storytelling and eLearning, in order to become fully proficient in them. For KM techniques that require more advanced skills, connecting interested participants to additional training opportunities or resources, such as online courses or guides could be useful.

The reach and impact of a Share Fair can go beyond the participants themselves. The extent and reach of communication with other participants also suggests that Share Fairs have a networking value and help to create relationships that continue after the event. To meet participant needs and preferences and support their networking opportunities, it is advised to partner with various local and regional organizations—starting at the planning stage—and recognize their contributions.

Overall, the Share Fair brought together participants to share and learn KM techniques and to participate in growing a network of KM practitioners who work at the intersection of global health and KM.

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