

Mr. Chun Ting TSE

Visiting Lecturer, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

**BIO**

**Mr. TSE** obtained his MSc degree in Knowledge Management (Distinction) in 2008. He served as KM Officer in the Hong Kong Police Force between 2008 and 2011 and joined an NGO to lead a KM project in the past 4 years. He taught the postgraduate KM course in PolyU and also the executive diploma course in training and organization development in HKU SPACE. He is a Certified Knowledge Manager, Project Management Professional, Accredited Mediator, ITIL Expert and Global Career Development Facilitator.

# Facilitate Workplace Learning Through Knowledge Management

**Mr. Chun Ting TSE**  
**The Hong Kong Polytechnic University**

## **Abstract**

*Ideally speaking, learning should be faster than changes. Traditional classroom teaching and even e-learning might not be adequate for colleagues to learn rapidly to meet today's needs. Just-in-time knowledge and experience sharing can help an organization to survive, sustain its business and learn from mistakes to deal with the ever changing environment.*

*This paper will discuss how knowledge management can facilitate workplace learning. The author will give practical examples to illustrate how it works, including the use of knowledge management tools, experience sharing and collaboration. The paper will also address how to retain valuable tacit knowledge from colleagues in an effective way where colleagues can share, think and learn together.*

## **Introduction**

In our workplace environment, we understand that we should learn continuously to increase our competitiveness and even sustain our business. We should learn faster to deal with the ever-changing environment. Therefore, we provide training to our staff, including both traditional training and eLearning to equip them with the necessary knowledge, skill and attitude so they can do better for their job.

However, two questions are worthwhile for reflection and further discussion. Is training equal to learning? Imagine that we arrange a one-day training for our colleagues, do you think they can really learn something from it? Unfortunately, some

of them may just focus on their smart phone or even take pictures during the training session. Some colleagues gave the feedback “I learnt nothing” or “This is irrelevant” after the session. It is doubtful if they can do knowledge transfer afterwards to apply what they have learnt in the workplace. Then, should organizations continue to sponsor colleagues to attend such training?

People always come and go. It is a fact that we cannot control the turnover rate directly and easily in our workplace. The second question is whether there could be alternative ways for colleagues to learn just-in time knowledge to do a better job. To facilitate workplace learning for our colleagues to achieve better performance, knowledge management would be the solution. This can help to add value to our work and become important assets in an organization.

This paper will first introduce the concept of knowledge management including both application and benefit. Then, it will explain the use of three knowledge management tools, including after-action review, knowledge café and storytelling with practical cases for sharing purposes. Three ideas in knowledge management to facilitate workplace learning will be shared, including experience sharing, collaboration and knowledge retention. Implementation and smart tips would also be covered so that readers can master some brilliant ideas when they wish to implement knowledge management in their organizations.

### **What is Knowledge Management**

Knowledge Management (KM) is defined as the process of offering the **right knowledge** to the **right users** at the **right time** and helping people share and **put information into action** in ways that strive to **improve organizational performance**. (Schotte, 2003).

For instance, when new colleagues report duty in an organization, they have limited knowledge about what should be done and what risk they should avoid. If they pick the outdated guidelines and perform their job wrongly in matters, such as making an important decision, it could damage the organization instantly before they can give any contribution. This would be a typical example of insufficient knowledge management in which up-to-date knowledge could not reach the people concerned successfully.

Another example is that when new colleagues require applying for no-pay leave during the first week of the employment, what should the supervisors do? Can they just approve or reject immediately? This would involve a decision-making process, such as checking company guidelines and employment contracts, any precedent cases and justification, including the work schedule of the team. If supervisors can use the right knowledge at that time, they can make a wise decision immediately which may lead to a win-win situation.

Let's think about the latter part of the KM definition. If a school keeps all the student intake statistics in a Microsoft excel file, but no action or remedial measure is taken even if the intake number falls rapidly, the school will fail to put information into action as mentioned and cannot strive to improve organizational performance. With the good use of KM, the school should be able to get alert from such statistics, take both preventive and proactive actions to deal with the challenges and able to make timely decisions to keep its momentum to sustain its work.

What would be the benefit of KM? Three major ones are identified, as follows:

### **Retain knowledge**

Important knowledge and experience of the team, department, project and even the whole organization could be retained in a systematic way. This would be the most important asset of the organization where colleagues can re-use such knowledge in future.

### **Improve work efficiency**

As knowledge workers, time and effort would be focused on "reading" information rather than "searching" for making decisions, as they can get latest and accurate information. They can acquire the knowledge efficiently in a timely manner to get their work done. Duplication of work, repeated mistake and wastage could be avoided where colleagues can use minimum efforts to get maximum returns.

### **Mutual learning**

Colleagues can take reference from the critical knowledge and good practice from other teams and departments easily, learn and acquire such good practice as a way to facilitate workplace learning.

## KM Tools

KM tools are technologies or methods which enhance and enable knowledge generation, codification, and transfer (Dorit, 2001). The use of appropriate KM tools provides opportunities for colleagues and even the whole organization to learn more effectively and equip them to deal with the coming challenges. Three KM tools are selected for a more detailed explanation; After-Action Review, Knowledge Café, and Storytelling.

### After-Action Review (AAR)

#### Meaning

An AAR is a discussion of a project or an activity that enables the individuals involved to **learn for themselves** what happens, why it happened, what went well, what needs improvement and what lessons can be learned from the experience. The spirit of an AAR is one of **openness and learning** – it is **not about problem fixing or allocating blame**. Lessons learnt are not only **tacitly shared** on the spot by the individuals involved, but can be **explicitly documented** and shared with a wider audience (CDC, 2006).

Four major questions to be discussed in the AAR are:

- What we intended?
- What actually happened?
- Explaining the difference.
- What are we going to do next time?

During the AAR meeting, the facilitator can go through the above four questions and even can use a tabular form (See exhibit 1) to cover the issues for easy reference. For instance, the following issues could be discussed in an award presentation ceremony, such as stage and performance, reception, logistic, media and usher/floor.

討論內容 Discussion Items	當初行動的意圖是什麼?	發生了什麼事情?	為什麼實際情況和預期有差別?	我們下次應該怎樣做?
	What was the intent?	What happened?	Why did it happen?	What are we going to do next time?

Exhibit 1: AAR Table

Some ground rules should be set up to ensure the meeting is smooth and as expected for participants to share their thought and ideas voluntarily, including no personal attack and not finding faults. There must be a sharing culture and trust among all participants so they can explore the real truth of the case. Important lessons learnt especially the answer to the fourth question “What are we going to do the next time” should be well-documented where colleagues can refer to them easily in future, so as to facilitate workplace learning and knowledge reuse for everyone.

How about the application of AAR in other situations? Teachers need to deliver the lessons from time to time. They can even have their own AAR after class and jot down “What are we going to do next time” in the way they feel comfortable. These would be wonderful good practice for workplace learning and lessen the duplicated tasks in future. They can easily reuse the learning in the past and apply them in future classes.

Another situation is exam invigilation. When the examination is finished, all invigilators are gone and no review is made normally. In fact, they can have a very short AAR to capture the lessons learnt and good practice which are valuable for future examinations. Only if the organizers realize the need for AAR and conduct them appropriately can the important knowledge be kept, and everyone can learn together from mistakes.

## Knowledge Café

### Meaning

A Knowledge Café is a way to have a group discussion, **to reflect, and to develop and share any thoughts and insights** that will emerge, in a very non-confrontational way. A Knowledge Café suspends all judgment and normally leads to developing deeper insights and sharing than usual (Ronald, 2010).

Two major differences between knowledge café and traditional meetings are that it should be in an open and relaxing environment, normally with snacks and drinks. Participants can share the knowledge and experience freely in a café setting. Secondly, there would be group rotation during the process. Normally, participants will change to another group in the second round of discussion. The ideas and discussion they have learnt in the first round might change completely when they meet new people in the second round (See Exhibit 2). This is the magic of knowledge café as new discovery and learning usually come at that moment.

Group	No.	1 <sup>st</sup> round	2 <sup>nd</sup> round
<b>A</b>	A1 (Host)	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>
	A2	A	B
	A3	A	C
	A4	A	D
<b>B</b>	B1 (Host)	<b>B</b>	<b>B</b>
	B2	B	C
	B3	B	D
	B4	B	A
<b>C</b>	C1(Host)	<b>C</b>	<b>C</b>
	C2	C	D
	C3	C	A
	C4	C	B
<b>D</b>	D1(Host)	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>
	D2	D	B
	D3	D	C
	D4	D	A

Exhibit 2: Knowledge Café Group Arrangement

For instance, a knowledge café was held with participants from four schools, including principals, accounting officers and clerical staff. The topic was internal

management related to tendering and petty cash. During the first round, all participants from the same school were arranged into a group to discuss their issues with facilitation from the Accounting Managers. In the second round, they were arranged into different groups to go through the issues they identified before. The major discovery was that employing staff with procurement qualifications could give significant assistance during the tendering process. When there is a successful case of tendering, the template and relevant documents could be shared among the four schools. This can save time and effort from school staff and learn an effective way to prepare the next tender document together.

## **Storytelling**

### **Meaning**

Storytelling is one of the most powerful means of **expressing and transmitting tacit knowledge** within an organization. Stories provide a bridge between the tacit and the explicit, allowing **tacit knowledge to be demonstrated and learned** (Bhardwaj, 2006). There should be many wonderful stories in an organization, whether from the CEO or junior staff. The tacit knowledge from the story is the valuable asset of the organization. If this can be captured in a systematic way, colleagues can learn faster and even understand the insight behind the work.

There are two examples to conduct storytelling activities. One is to open a platform for colleagues to submit stories online. Their stories can include pictures, audio or video with some description. Frontline stories are the most interesting and inspiring for colleagues to learn others' work. Their unique experiences and unusual adventures can be shared where everyone can learn something accordingly. Another one is to organize face-to-face storytelling sessions. Each team in a department arranges one representative to share one story, which can be job-related or even about the daily life. Afterwards, all participants vote for their own favorite story. For instance, the most welcome story in one of these sessions was "When colleagues encounter difficulties at work, we should first consider colleagues' feelings and not just the work itself. This can let colleagues gain more confidence and work in a more relieved way."

## **Experience Sharing**

Sharing of experience can bring learning to colleagues in a more effective way; personal and practical experience in particular can usually attract more listeners. This can help to stimulate them and even give some insight into work in a much better way.



In this session, five ways to share experience are identified including practical examples so we can better understand how experience sharing can facilitate workplace learning.

### **Sharing session**

This is one of the common ways to share experience via a particular face-to-face session. One or two colleagues could be invited to share their unique experience during the session followed by a question-and-answer session. For instance, colleagues completing an overseas mission or training, those who have experienced an unforgettable adventure, and colleagues from different units doing similar tasks are all meaningful topics for consideration. In this way, colleagues attending this session can learn something new and relevant to their work and bring back to their job immediately. The valuable experience could be retained and will add value to both the organization and all participants.

### **Add “sharing” agenda in meetings**

If colleagues do not have time to organize or attend separate sharing sessions, another alternative is to add “Sharing” in the existing meetings, such as department, team or even management meetings. Just by scheduling around 15 minutes during the meeting, normally at the beginning or at the end, colleagues can then share their experience or something unique and meaningful with all participants. This could add value to the routine meeting where colleagues can learn something new, create more fun and interaction within the group and the whole group can learn together after such knowledge exchange.

### **“Sharing” folders**

Another way of experience sharing where colleagues can learn together would be creating “Sharing” folders on a common platform where colleagues can upload, download and read the shared materials. Various platforms can be used according to the actual needs and availability, such as shared personal computer, server, Intranet, KM platform or even social media. Shared materials can be in different formats according to the nature of sharing, such as article, photo, audio and video sharing, with appropriate naming and categorization. There should be content managers to review the folders regularly and have ways to notify appropriate readers when there is any update in these folders. In this way, colleagues can learn by themselves through these materials and learning can also be brought from team level, up to department and organization level. For instance, if a team member shares the overseas study report on a common platform, all colleagues can have access to such material to

facilitate workplace learning across teams, departments and projects.

### **Informal Lunch-time sharing**

Should all sharing be arranged in a formal way? There can be some informal experience sharing arranged by colleagues themselves, such as lunch-time sharing. For instance, teachers can have lunch together, sitting at a round table where they can share their teaching experience, including interesting moments and challenging questions in class. New teachers can even gain more tacit knowledge from the experienced ones at that moment, master the knowledge and skills through chatting, and learn something valuable for upcoming teaching. Two general rules should be kept in mind for such informal lunch-time sharing. Firstly, there should be no senior staff joining the sharing; it is not a formal way to evaluate teachers' performance but just a casual and relaxing knowledge exchange among teachers. Secondly, all sharing should be voluntary. We cannot require all teachers to do the sharing during lunch time as a mandatory process. Senior management should encourage such an informal learning opportunity but could not make it compulsory. Otherwise, no one would want to join such sharing as part of their job duties in non-working hours.

### **1-minute sharing**

Sharing could not be too long as we do not wish to keep ourselves overloaded. 1-minute sharing is a way where we can use audio recording in our sharing, but just around 1-minute; we must keep it short, simple and get to the point so that others might have the interest to listen and learn something. This can be a programme where colleagues can join the 1-minute sharing, record their sharing and upload it to a specific location. Then, colleagues can listen to the sharing and vote for their favorite one. For example, a 1-minute sharing is about handling e-mail. All colleagues should check very carefully before they send out their message, including name of recipients, correct attachment and e-mail content. All the dates, time, number and amount should be checked at least three times to ensure accuracy. Then, we can save time from doing corrective actions and handling enquiries due to a careless mistake released to all colleagues. 1-minute sharing could help all colleagues to learn something after listening to the sound track; such experience can add value to all colleagues or even the whole organization in dealing with coming challenges.

## Collaboration

Can we just learn by ourselves in our workplace without interacting with others? Yes but we always need collaboration to achieve maximum return to deal with future challenges. The formula  $(1+1>2)$  is a good example to show the effect of collaboration; we call this “Synergy Effect”. This is the key to effectiveness in knowledge creation and sharing, and also essential for workplace learning. In this section, three ways to use collaboration to facilitate workplace learning are introduced; they are the environment, tools and programme

### Environment

Colorful posters, innovative decoration and open space are examples of office environment welcome by colleagues to apply collaboration. Imagine that we are all kept in a traditional meeting room, crowded and dull; no one can be creative and willing to share innovative ideas. In this way, it is worthwhile for organizations to use some resources in the office setting where colleagues can collaborate in a better way. For instance, eye-catching colorful posters can help to stimulate ideas, and round-shape settings can help to facilitate discussion and ideas generation. In MTR, there is an Innov-Space which is a creative environment with innovative furniture. Colleagues can stand up, sit down or lie down on the sofa and write on every side of the white board in the room. This can facilitate discussion and learning and colleagues can work together in a relaxed way and may come up with new and innovative ideas easily.

### Tool

Collaboration needs some tools to facilitate workplace learning in a better way. For instance, we may wish to know the learning of colleagues after attending a training session. Traditionally, we may issue evaluation forms for them to fill in. With the use of the latest technology, we can use the discussion features on the KM platform to ask them to post three learning points they have learnt directly. To give more motivation, we can even give some gifts to them for their timely contribution. This would be more interactive, collaborative and fun, and we can also get learning points as our ultimate goals.

Another tool we can use is called “Poll Everywhere” (website: <https://www.polleverywhere.com>). We can help to gather a live audience or class and get their responses anywhere and anytime. We can use true or false questions to test the understanding of the audience, multiple choice questions to know the learning

status, and open-end questions to get feedback and innovative ideas. As this tool will not show the identity of the audience, they can vote and post their ideas anonymously, having fun without further worries. As the host of the tool, we can know the feedback and ideas instantly and convert the knowledge into another way for further analysis and report. Most importantly, as participants are using their smart phones in class, they can learn together throughout the process with their existing tool. (See Exhibit 3 and 4 examples)

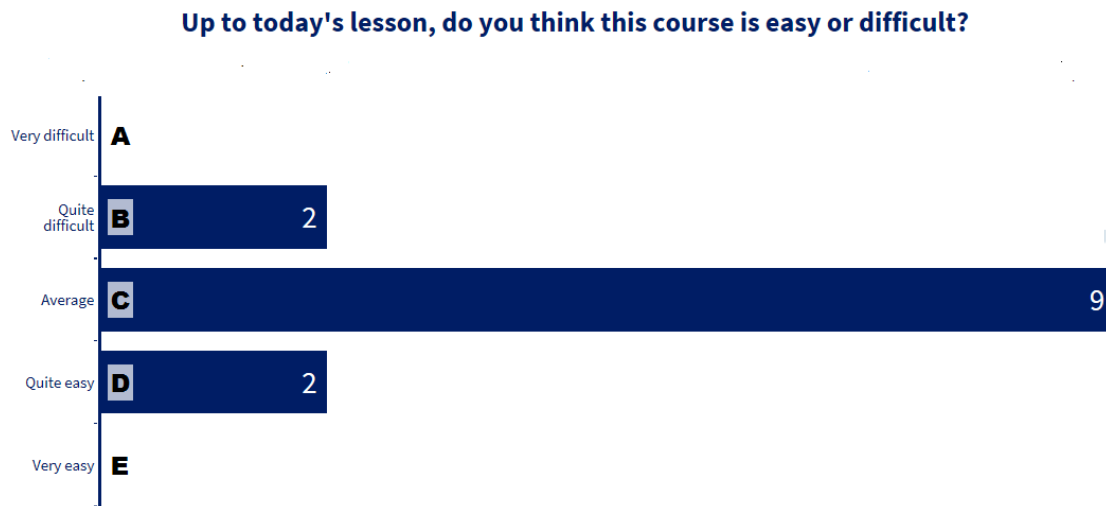


Exhibit 3: Using PollEverywhere for multiple choice questions

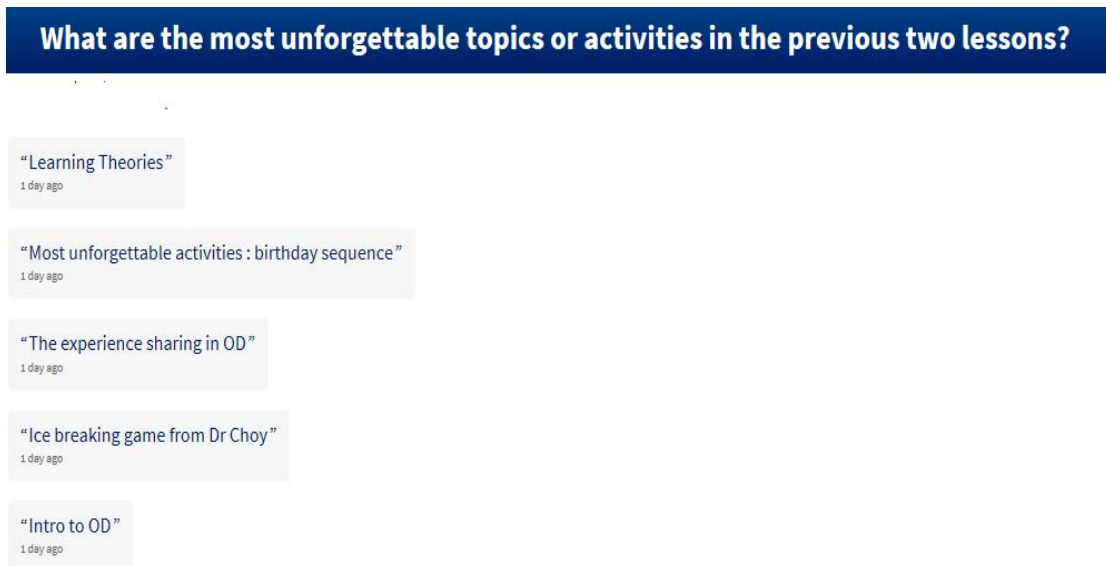


Exhibit 4: Using PollEverywhere for open-ended questions

## Programme

Using collaboration programmes can help to bring colleagues closer and learn to work together in a better way. For example, all teams in one department can join the collaboration session together. Each team can discuss what contribution they can offer and what assistance they need from other teams. Then, they can share their discussion results among all teams. In this way, all participants can understand what they can gain from each team, and offer help to any particular team. Lastly, all participants can vote for their favorite contribution. Through this, contribution is recognized and further learning and collaboration can be made visible. For instance, one team shared that they can offer personal coaching and career facilitation to other colleagues but they requested other teams to teach them Adobe Illustrator (AI) and Photoshop as their expectation (see Exhibit 5). In this way, contribution and request are now visible and colleagues can find ways automatically for further collaboration and learning.

Assistance/Contribution	Request/Expectation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Personal coaching</li> <li>● Career facilitation</li> <li>● Vendor contact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Photoshop</li> <li>● AI</li> <li>● Video Editing</li> </ul>

*Exhibit 5: Example of Collaboration Programme*

## Knowledge Retention

As discussed before, we cannot control the turnover rate direct and colleagues always come and go. We must retain our knowledge and let the new colleagues learn faster when they report duty, so as to maintain our competitiveness. To facilitate workplace learning, three methods can be used to retain knowledge in our workplace; they are KM journalist, enterprise wiki and knowledge pack.

### KM Journalist

It is hard to ask experienced or nearly retired colleagues to do knowledge sharing under the tight schedule but most important knowledge always resides in their heads. Alternatively, we can find the KM journalists to help to capture their tacit knowledge through interviews and writing processes. The KM journalist takes the role to help colleagues to capture their knowledge and experience. For instance, the CEO is too busy to write an article to share the unique experience but is able to tell the adventure in around 15 minutes. Then, the KM journalist can help to record the sharing, change

it into a visible form like articles and stories and share with all colleagues. Another way is that the KM journalist can walk through different departments to collect the valuable knowledge and experience under a specific domain. Through this externalization process, important knowledge can now become a visible form and colleagues can continue to learn such experience in the workplace. The KM journalist should have good listening and writing skills and able to capture and write articles effectively and efficiently. Who would be the KM journalist? Organizations can make use of students joining the internship program, summer or part-time job students, or even recruit volunteers in the organization to do the above meaningful job. Some organizations will also appoint colleagues as knowledge ambassadors and play the role of KM journalist, so as to retain knowledge in a continuous way.

### **Enterprise Wiki**

*Enterprise Wiki is an online collaboration platform used in an organizational context, especially to enhance internal knowledge sharing. It is an effective tool to build knowledge repository for individual and group learning (Wikipedia, 2009).* To facilitate workplace learning, some organizations use enterprise wiki to retain knowledge and also for workplace learning. For instance, an organization asks different colleagues to take turns to organize knowledge sharing sessions. All materials including lessons learnt are marked in the wiki. When colleagues are assigned with this job, they must first read the wiki by themselves to learn the ways to do it. After finishing the session, the responsible colleagues should also update the wiki and get prepared for the next colleagues to come and learn. This is a typical example to retain knowledge and facilitate workplace learning at the same time.

Another example is that common enquiries could also be uploaded to wiki. For instance, colleagues may wish to know the steps to add Hong Kong public holidays into the outlook calendar when a new year starts. Detailed steps could be shared in the wiki where all colleagues can learn by reading them direct. This can save the time and resources to handle enquiries and make it convenient for all parties.

### **Knowledge Pack**

We pack our stuff and luggage before we go for a trip. The same concept applies in knowledge management. Packing all required knowledge can help to ease the readers and serve the purpose to retain knowledge and facilitate workplace learning. For instance, some organizations will provide an induction pack to all new colleagues so they can receive all the necessary stuff in one go when they report duty. Even if some colleagues are required to attend overseas missions or business trips, they can also use

the same knowledge pack concept to get all the items they need. The same rules can be applied when someone needs to do mediation. They should get all the required knowledge especially latest laws and regulations so they can learn immediately and perform the job up to standard. The knowledge pack can be made in a wiki format shared on an online platform, linking all the important resources; it can also be hard copy but all documents need to be updated for immediate use. Regular update of knowledge pack should be made to make sure they are current, valid and fit for use.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, KM tools, experience sharing and collaboration were introduced with practical examples to facilitate workplace learning so as to deal with the ever-changing environment. To implement KM, some smart tips are as follows:

#### **KM from colleagues' perspective**

Always think about your colleagues; what would be the direct benefit? Don't do KM for KM.

#### **Buy-in from new colleagues**

It's easier to get their buy-in and turn them to become your supporters.

#### **Change management**

Think about quick wins and also cultural issues; some motivation would help you to drive changes.

#### **Top management support and participation**

Senior staff involvement and leadership by example would always attract colleagues.

#### **Continuous improvement**

Don't expect KM to do everything but it helps us to work smart and bring continuous improvement to the organization.

Knowledge management is an effective tool for workplace learning. We need some time, resources and space to apply KM. Don't only work hard, but work smart to facilitate learning. We always hear people say "*a busy working day*", but we can reframe as "*a productive learning in our workplace*".

## **References**

Bhardwaj, M. and Monin, J. (2006), *Tacit to explicit: an interplay shaping organization knowledge*, Journal of Knowledge Management, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 72-85

CDC (2006), *CDC Learns from Katrina: Understanding the Value of an After-Action Report*, Available at [http://www.cdc.gov/news/2006\\_11/katrina-aar.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/news/2006_11/katrina-aar.htm) (Accessed at 7 July 2015)

Dorit, N. (2001), *Developing Foundations for Knowledge Management Systems*, University of British Columbia

Ronald, Y. (2010), *Knowledge Management Tools and Techniques Manual*, Asian Productivity Organization

Schotte, T (2003), *Customer Knowledge Management: How does my customer look and feel?*, in AJ Beerli, S Falk & D Diemers (eds), *Knowledge Management and Networked Enviornments*, Accenture LLP., New York, pp. 17-36.

Wikipedia (2009) *Enterprise wiki*, Available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki\\_software#Enterprise\\_wikis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki_software#Enterprise_wikis) (Accessed at 7 July 2015)