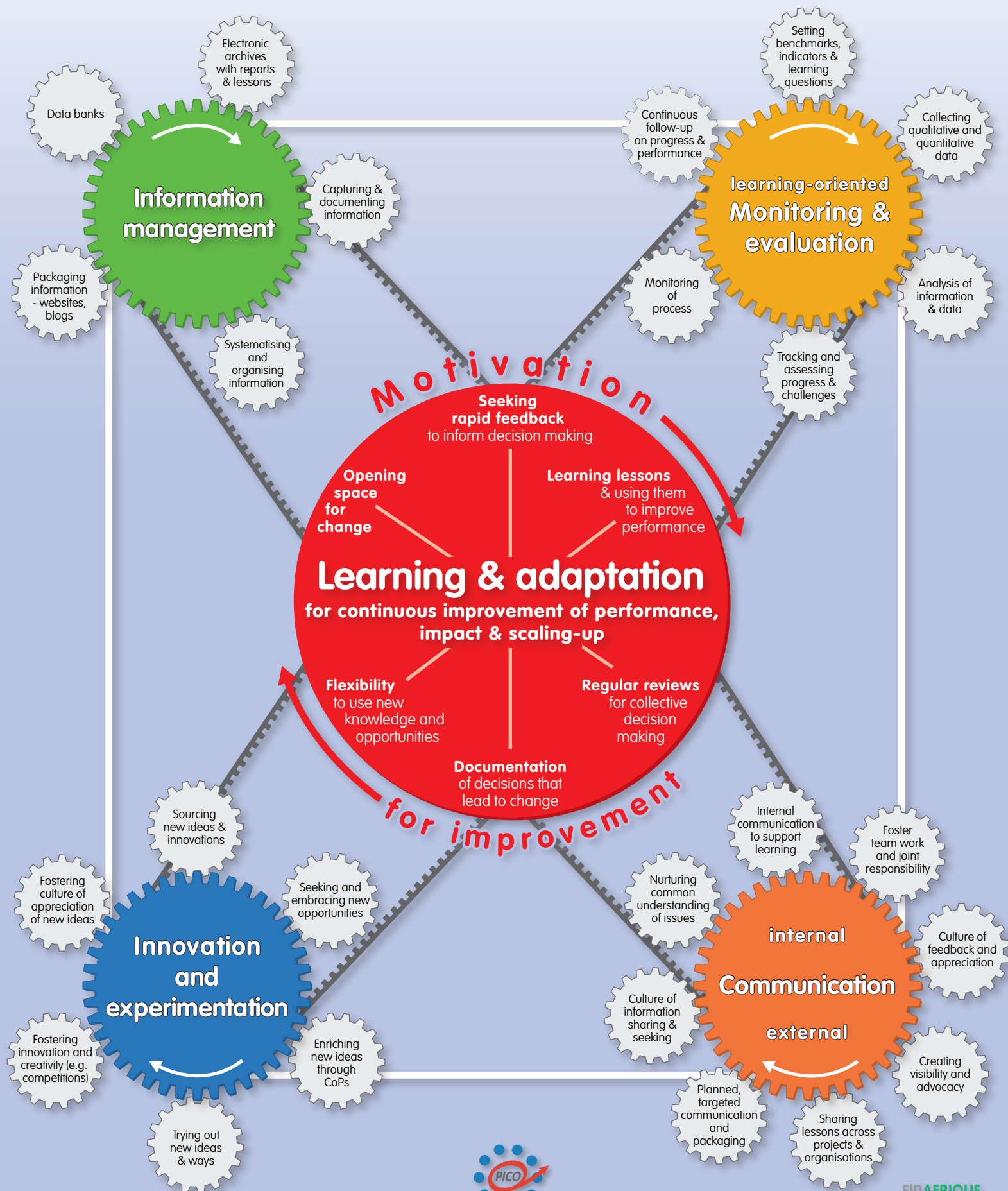


# Learning for improved performance

An integrated knowledge management system



Learning together for change

Concept and design: Jürgen Hagmann, Helen Gillman, Miriam Cherogony, Edward Chuma  
and participants in the East & Southern Africa regional knowledge management learning initiative, © Graphic design: DreierDesign.com

# Learning for improved performance

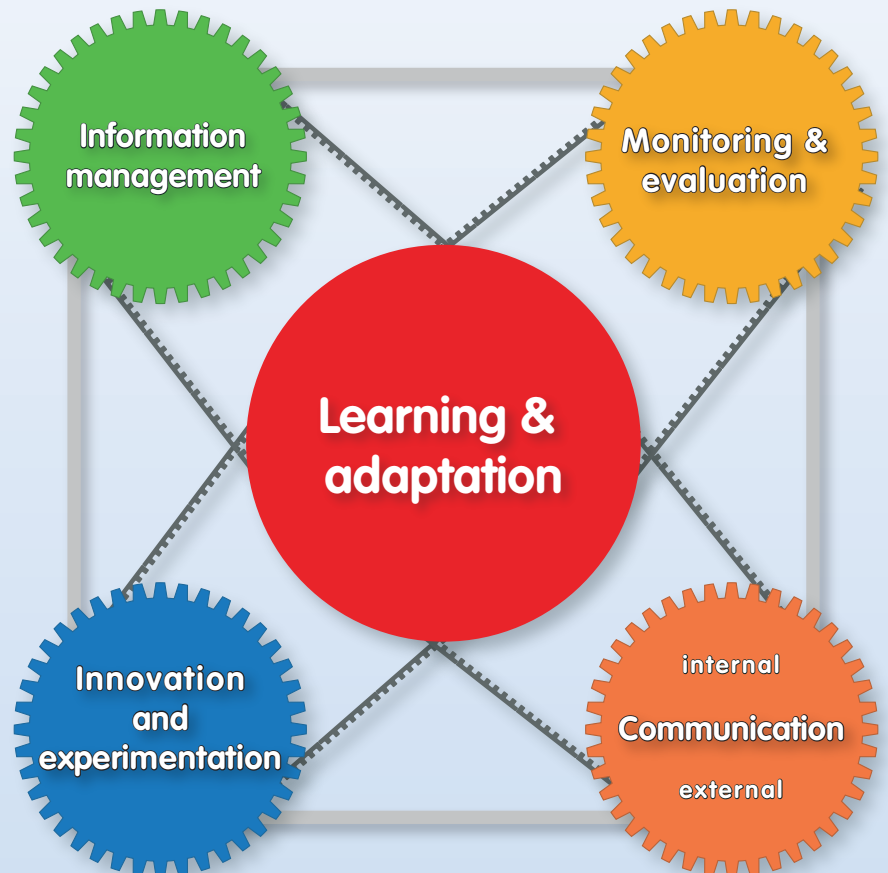
An integrated knowledge management system

## What is a knowledge management and learning system?

**K**nowledge management is more than managing information through data banks and document repositories. In our understanding and practice, knowledge management is about using knowledge more effectively to improve the way we do business and achieve impact.

**I**t is a continuous improvement process involving all members of project teams, who learn, try out new ways of doing things, reflect, share their wisdom, and then change and adapt their projects to become more effective and successful.

**K**nowledge management and learning (KM&L) is an approach to improve project performance and results. It integrates a number of functions and activities into a coherent and flexible project management system geared to performance enhancement.



## Five interconnected functions form the foundation of the KM&L system

### Learning and adaptation

**L**earning and adaptation is the heart of KM&L. It focuses on the purpose of knowledge management, which is to enhance performance and impact. It is driven by the motivation to change and improve. It drives the other functions towards coherence and supports decision making on changes required to make the project more successful.

**T**o work effectively, this function requires flexibility and willingness to take advantage of opportunities, and openness to new ideas from the whole project team. Knowledge and the insights that lead to decisions and resulting changes in planned activities need to be documented.

**T**his provides evidence of quality reflection and sense making and supports the deeper understanding and lessons needed for scaling up.

- Seeking rapid feedback to inform decision making
- Learning lessons to improve performance
- Regular reviews for collective decision making
- Documentation of decisions that lead to change
- Flexibility to use new knowledge and opportunities
- Opening space for change

## Monitoring and evaluation

Learning-oriented M&E is different from conventional M&E, which is focused on tracking indicators and activities. Besides tracking progress, learning-oriented M&E also focuses on process monitoring, which looks deeply at the effectiveness and efficiency of the way that results are supposed to be achieved.

It sets learning questions to which answers are sought by trying out ideas and learning lessons continuously and provides the right information at the right time for decision making and adaptation.

- Setting benchmarks, indicators & learning questions
- Collecting qualitative and quantitative data
- Analysis of information & data
- Tracking and assessing progress & challenges
- Monitoring of process
- Continuous follow-up on progress & performance

## Internal and external communication

Conventional communication focuses strongly on dissemination of information and creating visibility of the project. In KM&L, communication has additional aims: it fosters a culture of information sharing, team work, feedback and appreciation within a project. It aims to use the ideas of the whole team and reduce hierarchy so that information and knowledge can flow freely, rapidly and without fear.

External communication with stakeholders goes beyond dissemination and sharing of results. It emphasizes the importance of feedback loops with project stakeholders and the need to take into account their perspectives and ideas on how to improve the project. Again, this requires openness, proactive seeking of feedback and information, and readiness to share and discuss failures in an open and honest way.

- Internal communication to support learning
- Foster team work and joint responsibility
- Culture of feedback and appreciation
- Creating visibility and advocacy
- Sharing lessons across projects & organisations
- Planned, targeted communication and packaging
- Culture of information sharing & seeking
- Nurturing common understanding of issues

## Innovation and experimentation

In most conventional project management approaches, innovations are 'transferred' from outside. In KM&L, experimentation with new ideas by people at any level, inside and outside the project, is part of implementation.

It enables the team to continuously gain experience with new ideas and approaches. This fosters creativity and problem solving, and allows rapid scaling up of good ideas during the project.

- Sourcing new ideas & innovations
- Seeking and embracing new opportunities
- Enriching new ideas through CoPs
- Trying out new ideas & ways
- Fostering innovation and creativity (e.g. competitions)
- Fostering culture of appreciation of new ideas

## Information management

A good information management structure is critical to enable rapid access to and sharing of the right information at the right time in the project team and across projects.

Easily accessible electronic repositories, the documentation and storage of information and knowledge, and good organization form the core of this type of information management to inform adaptive management.

- Electronic archives with reports & lessons
- Capturing & documenting information
- Systematising and organising information
- Packaging information - websites, blogs
- Data banks

## What brings these functions together?

In most cases, these functions are not linked or fully integrated in project management. In a KM&L system, they are part of one overall process to improve project performance.

The driving force is the motivation of the project team to do better. Learning and adaptation, as a core process, links and integrates all of the functions.

## Who manages the KM&L system in a project?

**KM&L** requires team work. Led by the project coordinator, a team of professionals in M&E, communication and information management need to work together towards common goals and targets, to create rapid feedback loops and deliver the knowledge and information needed for decision making.

Improved project performance cannot be achieved by focusing on one function only, thus the shared success drives the integration in the team.

## How to put the system into practice?

It is crucial to develop **one** strategy and process for performance enhancement.

- Set clear goals and agree on targets for impact and performance.
- Agree in the team how the learning and adaptation process should be implemented, including critical reviews, learning events, decision making points in the annual cycle.
- Based on this process, determine what information is required from M&E and how continuous monitoring should be carried out by each team member, from the project manager to field level staff. Determine how this information can be used to inform learning and adaptation.
- Develop an efficient information management system with a structure that reduces the need for huge repositories, data bases etc.
- Agree on how to structure team communication and external communication to enable open and rapid feedback loops across levels and with partners.
- Identify the main areas that need experimentation with new ideas. Agree on how to identify new ideas continuously, how to try them out, and how to integrate the lessons into the project approach.



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