Knowledge Management in the Federal Government: 
Getting Started Before It’s Too Late

There are two known realities facing the Federal Government in the next five years: 1) a large Baby Boomer workforce retiring or taking early buy-outs and 2) the growth of Knowledge Management (KM) initiatives to support the President’s Management Agenda (PMA), Federal Enterprise Architecture (FEA), the Business Case (the 300’s), Performance Based Services Contracting (PBSC) and Lines of Business (LOBs). These two realities are inextricably linked, and government managers need to make that connection to remain agile and efficient under the new and evolving performance-based directives.

The Retiring Federal Workforce
The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has stated that 30% of the Federal workforce will be eligible to retire in five years with an additional 20% who may seek early retirement. Now, it’s highly unlikely that the combined 50% of Federal employees will retire at the same time; however, attention must be given toward succession planning, but more importantly to the retention of knowledge. If an organization waits until the Federal workforce exodus begins to initiate knowledge management practices, it will be too late as the years of experience and information will not transfer.

The Major Initiatives’ Impact on KM
The Strategic Management of Human Capital is one of the five key disciplines within the PMA. It centers on the adoption of technology to capture employees’ knowledge and skills, and the acquisition and development of talent and leadership. The FEA was designed to identify opportunities to reduce duplication and effort and foster collaboration, all related to the alignment of business, technology and information. The 300’s mandate adherence to the Clinger-Cohen Act to insure that any IT investments is backed by business case, carefully selected and managed to support the PMA and internal strategic goals. PBSC establishes the process to create results-oriented contracts, complete with metrics to manage and monitor contract performance. Lastly, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) introduced LOBs to encourage information sharing across agencies.

The PMA, FEA, 300’s, PBSC and LOBs, drive Federal market initiatives and must be a focal point of Government managers. The difficulty exists in how to address these initiatives within the framework of an organization’s strategic goals. The entrance of knowledge management practices helps corral these initiatives in efforts to share and retain information to do business more efficiently and effectively.

So how do you apply knowledge management toward the problems of the aging workforce and the Federal initiatives? Let’s step back a moment first to understand knowledge management.

Understanding Knowledge Management
To fundamentally understand Knowledge Management, one must understand what it is not:

- A management fad that is short-lived or easily replaceable
- A simple centralization of information to retain intellectual capital
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- A business transformation theory without best practices
- An off-the-shelf system or structure comprised of data and analytics.

Knowledge Management has often suffered irreparable damage by its very nature of extensible definitions. If something is so difficult to define such as Knowledge Management, then one may conclude that it must be difficult to implement. The truth is that Knowledge Management is not easy to grasp because of the challenge that faces the organization: it’s the breaking down of organizational stovepipes, the cultural changes, and the new business process enablers that stop organizations in their tracks when considering KM.

We define knowledge management as both a cultural shift and an enabler to capture, retain, share and reuse information to build, maintain and support a collaborative, learning organization. In simplest terms, the KM process:

**Capturing ► Retaining ► Learning**

*Capturing:* Knowledge capture focuses on the cultural emphasis to store information in a centralized repository for the basis of collaboration and process improvement.

*Retaining:* Knowledge retention does not simply revolve around data capture and centralization; rather, it keys on a commitment within the organization to share meaningful information.

*Learning:* The transformation of knowledge capture and retention into business agility, growth, and optimization.

So how do you get started with KM before it’s too late?

**Getting a Grip on KM**

Like any strategic initiative, KM must be championed by management to become a success. It’s not enough to move forward based on political pressures or directives.

- **Strategically plan for a KM initiative**
- **Define the vision for KM within the organization’s leaders through education and elicitation**
- **Lead by example to emphasize the importance of this initiative**
- **Allay fears of management and staff with regular communication**
- **Empower staff to get involved in the process, setting the foundation for collaboration**
- **Set expectations for the initiative and the return on investment**

Identify the KM components that meet your strategic goals, conform to directives and regulations, and are achievable.

- **Collaboration technologies such as team-based project management, messaging, or knowledge networks**
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√ Document Management technologies such as file storage, archiving, and versioning

√ Reporting technologies such as project reports, time utilization reports, and enterprise reports from full-text search

The key takeaway in moving forward with a KM initiative is the top-down commitment and willingness to listen to the staff to help define and adopt the KM culture and its technical components.

No matter the strategic planning and intent, the KM initiative will only succeed with a concentrated effort from management and staff.

KM in the Federal Marketplace
Strong growth is predicted in the Federal Knowledge Management marketplace in the next five years. INPUT, a business resource on opportunities within the Government, forecasts a $1.3 billion Federal KM market by FY 2010, growing at annual compound growth rate of 6%. Approximately 60% of the spending will come from civilian agencies while the remaining 40% will be from Defense.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Army are forecasted to spend the most on KM initiatives. The Army spearheaded the KM drive with Army Knowledge Online (AKO), the first and now largest knowledge management portal in the world. Other military branches including the Navy are building comparable systems to support their respective KM needs.

What to do Today
Assess your organization’s need to comply with Federal initiatives and the prospects of losing knowledge of retiring workers. Do strategic planning with key leaders to evaluate the adoption of knowledge management best practices and products. Understand the commitment and cultural shift required to successfully become a learning organization. Lastly, familiarize yourself with Federal initiatives including the PMA and FEA:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/
Read about the Federal workforce approaching retirement:
http://www.governmentexecutive.com/features/0403/0403view.htm

About the Author
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About CYIOS Corporation
CYIOS Corporation is a leading Systems Integrator and Knowledge Management solutions provider supporting the Department of Defense and other Government Agencies for over 10 years. CYIOS launched the first Army Knowledge Online (AKO) prototype and now offers CYIPRO (http://www.CYIPRO.com). CYIPRO manages PBSC and positions businesses to become knowledge-centric.