The Investigation of Strategies of Knowledge Management in Global Marketing Firms

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Abstract: This is a challenging time for global public health and particularly for the fragile health of populations in developing countries. However, the increasing resources for international health aid and growing demand to improve health systems offer an opportunity to foster health equity in countries most in need. Many of the solutions to health problems of the poor exist, but are not applied, leading to what is called the "know-do" gap: the gap between what is known and what is done in practice. The mission of WHO Knowledge Management (KM) is to help bridge the "know-do gap" in global health by fostering an environment that encourages the creation, sharing, and effective application of knowledge to improve health. This in turn is seriously aggravated by poverty, the continuing HIV/AIDS pandemic and other problems. In the face of these and numerous other complexities, governments are struggling to build and sustain their health systems.

Keywords: WHO, Knowledge Management, Strategy, global public health

1. Introduction

The KM strategy focuses on national policymakers, WHO programmers, and health professionals. The objectives of the strategy lie in three main areas – strengthening country health systems through better knowledge management, establishing KM in public health, and enabling WHO to become a better learning organization, through the following strategic directions:

Strategic directions

- Improving access to the world's health information.

Access to knowledge and information is inequitable, while information overload is widespread. WHO is promoting access to high-quality, relevant, targeted information products and services.

- Translating knowledge into policy and action.

Health inequalities persist despite known, effective interventions and steadily increasing investment in health. WHO is building evidence and capacity on KM approaches to address priority health needs in countries.

- Sharing and reapplying experiential knowledge.

Knowledge management methods and tools offer new opportunities for WHO and public health. WHO is providing guidance and facilitating the adoption of KM methods so that experience is reapplied and built upon in practice.

- Leveraging e-Health in countries.

Information and communication technologies offer great potential to improve health services and systems. As well as incorporating ICT in its technical work, WHO is supporting country health systems through advocating evidence based policies, monitoring e-Health trends, identifying good practice, facilitating networks of expertise, and promoting norms, standards, and the integration of ICT into health workforce training and practice.

- Fostering an enabling environment.

Creating an environment for the effective use of knowledge is vital to achieving WHO's mission. WHO is strengthening organizational capacity, advocating adoption of KM in the field of public health, and improving capacity for implementing KM at country level.

This document presents the strategic directions for WHO KM. In a companion document, the Operational Plan details the products, activities, targets and timelines, as well as the staffing and budget requirements to achieve the objectives.

2. Material and Methods

The changing global environment The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes the profound

challenges currently facing global public health on many fronts, particularly the fragile health of populations in developing countries. The gap in health between the haves and have-nots, both within and between countries, grows ever wider. There is a deepening crisis in access to basic health services in many countries. This in turn is seriously aggravated by poverty, the continuing HIV/AIDS pandemic and other problems. In the face of these and numerous other complexities, governments are struggling to build and sustain their health systems.

Yet WHO believes this is also a time when real benefits can be achieved. Most of the burden of premature death and illness among the poor is due to problems for which solutions are known and prevention is possible, even as innovation continues. With unprecedented amounts of resources now being allocated to international health aid, new technologies, and to the improvement of health services, the global health community has a rare opportunity to foster health equity in countries most in need. A substantial obstacle to exploiting this opportunity fully is the "know-do gap" – the gap between what is already known, and what is actually done in practice – at the individual, institutional and population levels. This gap contributes to huge health inequalities, such as unacceptably high levels of child and maternal mortality, the high incidence of infectious diseases, and the spread of chronic conditions across the developing world. Bridging this gap can contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Towards this end, a new balance in the creation, sharing, translation and application of knowledge is required.

WHO is a knowledge-based organization: the exchange and dissemination of information about health conditions and the maintenance of health has been a central activity of the Organization since its founding. In more than half a century since then, there have been revolutionary advances and new perspectives in society, technology and knowledge affecting all facets of the life sciences, individual and collective health, the environment, education, and in the means to communicate information. There has been both an exponential growth and specialization of knowledge about health issues. New stakeholders have emerged, and health issues have become increasingly connected to socioeconomic concerns as well as to individuals' everyday lives. More recently the world has witnessed the advent of new information and communication technologies, enabling the widest possible dissemination of health concerns and networked solutions.

These developments are driving the growth of knowledge management (KM). WHO considers KM to be the dual challenge of, first, managing information and processes and, second, managing people and their environment so that knowledge is created, shared and applied more systematically and effectively. WHO seeks to apply knowledge management to support the work of the Organization and its Member States in bridging the "know-do gap", particularly within country health systems.

Purpose and scope

This strategy serves as the framework for establishing the program of work for the WHO Knowledge Management team, consisting of headquarters, regions and country programs working in the area of knowledge management and sharing. It responds to the need for equitable access to knowledge, and for broader application of evidence in public health. This document sets out a medium-term strategy and its rationale and approach. The strategy will be reassessed in 2007.

This document outlines the main drivers for developing a WHO KM strategy, defines the vision, mission, main objectives, and approach and identifies and prioritizes areas to be addressed and key stakeholders.

A companion document, the Operational Plan for 2006-2007, details products, activities, targets, milestones, and timeline for implementation, performance and evaluation measures, staffing and budget requirements to achieve the objectives.

A unified approach to KM processes is critical to ensure that knowledge is considered a common strategic asset and is broadly accessible. Implementing technical services and managing the complexity of global operations to achieve WHO goals depend on effective information and knowledge management, and the technologies to support them. Trends in this area have made it an opportune time to mainstream KM global public health. The value of knowledge management is gaining broader recognition and the tools are improving. New opportunities exist to apply KM and deliver added value for WHO and countries. Not least, WHO must respond to the changing expectations and ever-increasing capabilities of its stakeholders.

The WHO Programme Budget 2006-2007 highlights the synergies between the departments of KMS and information and communication technologies (ICT), by combining them under a joint Area of Work called "Knowledge Management and Information Technology". The contribution of ICT is essential to the achievement of WHO's goals in knowledge management. Research policy, health statistics, health services management and human resources are other key domains within the Organization with which KM shares common goals and initiatives.

3. Results

Access to information and knowledge is inequitable, while information overload is widespread. Improving access to health information and knowledge is a core function of WHO, and is enshrined in the WHO Constitution. Despite decades of progress and the exponential growth in knowledge in public health, too many people worldwide do not have access to the information and knowledge they need to improve their health and quality of life, or to make informed decisions concerning the health and wellbeing of individuals, communities, and entire populations. This inequity may be for reasons of affordability, infrastructure, capacity to find and manage information, or simply because the relevant knowledge is not available in appropriate formats, languages or cultural contexts.

At the same time, others are suffering from information overload as a result of the proliferation of new technologies and requirements to gather and maintain data and information. The ability to use this information is therefore limited due to lack of understanding about context, purpose or reliability. These information challenges are shared by a wide range of stakeholders: health professionals, policy-makers, international development partners, and the general public. WHO serves all of these audiences, and is committed to the principle of equitable access to the world's health knowledge resources.

Making available and promoting access to relevant, targeted information products and services WHO delivers on this mandate and responds to the needs of Member States by developing and providing high-quality, relevant, and timely information products and services at global, regional, and country levels in formats and languages according to needs. In addition to providing classical and electronic library services, other services include document repositories, statistical databases, libraries of media material, and access to diverse electronic products and information resources. KM policies, standards, and tools will guide the Organization's efforts in developing, targeting, and providing information and creating knowledge with the end-user in mind. WHO will engage the public health community as a strong advocate for more equitable and universal access to the world's health-related knowledge.

Improving access to the world's health information is as below:

• Support for WHO publishing. Publish, market and disseminate in priority languages, relevant and high-quality information products reaching a widespread, targeted readership in both print and electronic formats. Establish publishing policies and guidelines to ensure efficiency and quality of WHO publications.

• WHO flagship publications. Publish WHO global and regional flagship products to communicate key issues and effective practices in the field of public health. Major products include the World Health Report, Bulletin of the WHO, regional medical journals, and regional director reports.

• WHO network of libraries. Provide access for key audiences to scientific and health information in print and electronic media via the WHO library and initiatives such as, such as the Global Health Library and HINARI.

• WHO Web communications. Provide multi-lingual access for millions of users worldwide to WHO health information via WHO websites at global, regional and country level. Provide guidance to health authorities and other institutions on effective use of the Internet and web technologies.

• Good practice and guidance on knowledge translation and scale-up. Following on the recommendations of the Mexico Summit for Health Research in 2004, identify and disseminate good practice in translating health knowledge into policy and action.

• Build capability in KM methods in public health practice. Assist public health communities to develop the capacity to translate knowledge into policy and action in their local context.

• Promote evidence for policy and decision making tailored for key audiences, through programs such as EURO's Health Evidence Network. Sharing and applying experiential knowledge.

• Improve ability to share knowledge in public health through KM processes. Employ KM techniques, including communities of practice, to assist countries and technical programs to manage and use knowledge.

• WHO and Global Health Histories. Document and analyse significant public health developments, milestones, trends and perspectives. Develop expertise in extracting and applying the lessons learned in public health.

• WHO Collaborating Centres. Improve the use of the knowledge held by WHO Collaborating Centres through peer networks.

• E-Health frameworks, guidelines and tools Make available evidence-based e-Health frameworks, guidelines and tools to support policy and practice in health systems and technical programs.

• E-Health services in countries Provide technical assistance for governance, monitoring and improvement of e-Health services in countries.

• Country capacity building via ICT Utilize ICT tools to build capacity in the health sector in countries.

- Public-private partnerships in ICT. Develop and utilize public-private partnerships in ICT to address priority issues in health systems and technical programs.

- Foster a knowledge management culture Promote a culture at WHO and the public health sector that encourages the routine capturing, sharing and application of knowledge to better deliver expected results.

- Develop and deliver KM training programs to build WHO and country capacity with emphasis on innovation, knowledge sharing and translation, and managing the reapplication and scaling-up of successful interventions.

- Support countries, technical programs and partners with KM approaches. Work directly with countries, technical programs, and partner organizations to identify knowledge needs and opportunities, to develop and implement KM plans.

4. Discussions

Knowledge management methods and tools offer new opportunities to improve WHO's work by improving effectiveness, efficiency and communication. Countries can benefit as well, particularly by exchanging experience and hard won solutions with each other. However, there are significant barriers to knowledge sharing and reapplication: relevant knowledge may not exist; it may exist in formats where people are unaware of it or cannot find it; the knowledge may exist in people's heads but it cannot be tapped; or existing knowledge simply goes unused. Barriers to learning include lack of time, skills and incentives; isolation; insufficient or unavailable tools and methods. Decision-makers, health professionals, communities, and WHO staff need to be able to find, use, manage and share knowledge – and require the competencies and tools to do so.

WHO aims to improve the exchange and reapplication of knowledge both in the Organization and in countries by identifying good practices and acting as a change agent for adoption of these practices. WHO will respond to the needs of our stakeholders and promote through evidence and practice the benefits of knowledge sharing in their contexts. WHO will also identify and strengthen KM core competencies within the Organization, and foster an environment that supports continuous improvement through learning and development, sharing and applying knowledge. This requires building Organizational capacity, strengthening knowledge networks, and adopting KM practices and information technology relevant to WHO's mission and goals.

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