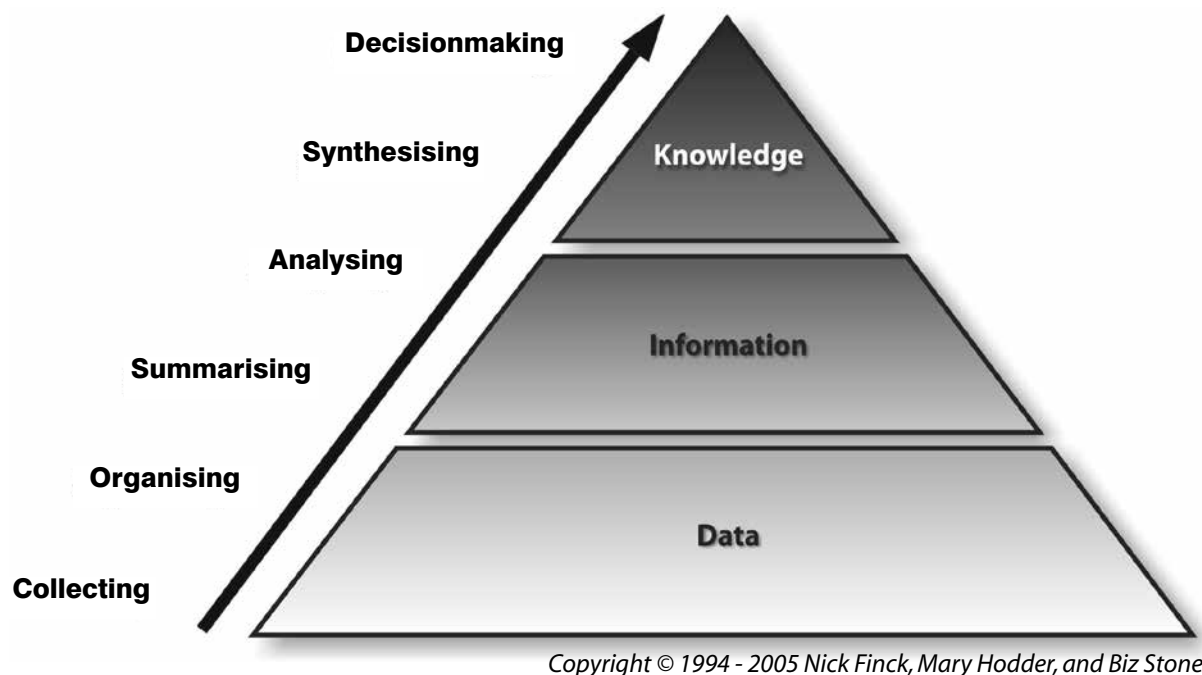


Using Monitoring and Evaluation to Generate Knowledge



Through monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities, a large amount of quantitative and qualitative information is collected and analysed. Over time, useful knowledge on what works and what does not is generated. This knowledge should be used both internally (e.g., to improve project performance) and externally (by communicating findings and lessons learned to stakeholders and a wider audience).

Knowledge management (KM) is often perceived as an activity separate from daily project management operations, and project managers and officers often view it as a drain on their time and resources. It is important to dispel this misconception. KM is about 'learning and applying knowledge' in a way that becomes part of the daily routine. It should be incorporated into every stage of the project cycle, including M&E, planning, financial management, supervision and human resources.

“Over time, useful knowledge on what works and what does not is generated through M&E activities”

Concepts

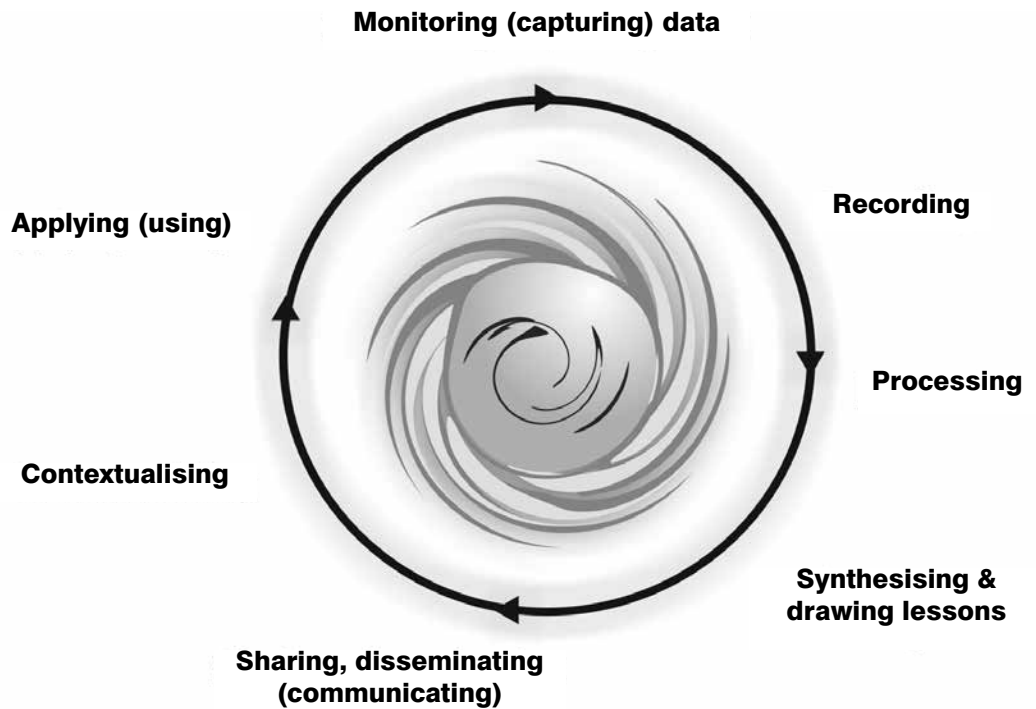
According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, **information** refers to facts provided or learned about something or someone. Information needs to be managed well, so that it can be used to generate knowledge. To start this process, first we need to identify the information required that are embedded in the project logical framework, design documents or the results and impact monitoring system (RIMS). The M&E system allows us to acquire and analyse the needed information. Information also needs to be organised and stored in a common information platform, such as a database, which should be easily accessible. It should be shared with relevant stakeholders through tools such as reports, newsletters, emails and websites. Finally, information should be used in various activities during design, implementation and completion review processes.

Knowledge is about what you know, how you know it, what difference it makes in your life and how you 'manage' it. Because of many definitions, people tend to get confused when trying to distinguish between 'information' and 'knowledge'. For example, knowledge has been defined as 'information in action.' It is 'information that changes something or somebody—either by becoming grounds for action or by making an individual (or an institution) capable of different or more effective action.' When information is applied to doing something it becomes knowledge. This definition, although valid, has one major weakness: It does not acknowledge that knowledge is a human creation—i.e., a social construct. Knowledge workers evaluate, analyse and adapt knowledge to their own material, political and social conditions. Thus, the development of knowledge is a process. This process of questioning and reflection on the information and knowledge leads to the creation of finished knowledge products.

Knowledge management (KM) is the facilitation of the processes by which knowledge is created, shared and used. It is about changing the way everyone works, which requires changing people's behaviours and work patterns. KM is essentially about people—how they create, share and use knowledge. Thus, KM programmes should have both a 'collecting' and a 'connecting' dimension. The collecting dimension involves linking people with information, by capturing and disseminating explicit knowledge. The connecting dimension involves linking people with people, specifically people who need to know with those who do know. The flow of tacit knowledge is enhanced through better human interaction and communication processes, so that knowledge is widely disseminated and not just held in the heads of a few. KM is an approach that focuses on **learning** (acquiring knowledge), **sharing** (communicating) and **helping people** acquire knowledge. Once this knowledge has been acquired, it can be documented (reports, case studies), recorded (in a common database), analysed (what worked and what did not), communicated (shared with others) and applied (used in our work).

The knowledge cycle: a way to manage knowledge

Knowledge can be viewed as a cycle (see figure). At each stage of the cycle, value is added to the knowledge generated in the context of project activities, which can be disseminated to a large number of stakeholders. Throughout the process, continuous training should be provided to project staff to enhance their capacities in consolidating grassroots and national data as well as in analysing results, reporting and sharing.



Why does KM matter?

- Work effectiveness can be increased, for example, through problem solving.
- Project performance can improve as lessons are documented and the same mistakes are not repeated.
- Funds can be used more strategically as new partnerships are formed and the 'wheel' does not have to be reinvented, as we (and our stakeholders) learn from the experience.
- New ideas and solutions can lead to more innovation, more outside-the-box thinking.
- Opportunities to learn through interactions with peers, such as the scaling up of innovations, will not be lost.
- Stakeholders will be better informed about project activities and results and will be more likely to take action.
- Policy decisions will be taken based on sound evidence.

But there are also challenges

- Lack of clarity in understanding the basic terms—data, information, knowledge, KM.
- Faulty perception—project staff are not aware of the benefits of KM because they see KM as a separate activity (sometimes even as a burden).
- Complexity—multiple actors have their own views, interests, values and development agendas.

- Various methodologies—variety of and gaps among approaches and tools for collecting data, measuring and assessing impact.
- Lack of reliability of data generated by the M&E system.
- Lack of critical reflection during data analyses to assess changes and trends.
- Poor quality of reporting, process of documentation and processing of information.
- Unclear functions—M&E officers versus KM officers.
- Operations—using M&E to add value to information the system generates to acquire knowledge.

Why share M&E findings?

The knowledge generated through M&E/KM processes should lead to the following:

- Evidence-based learning by documenting and sharing experiences.
- Taking decisions and ensuring they feed back into the project annual work plan and budget and are implemented.
- Supporting the project by adjusting actions to the realities in the field.
- Providing lessons to be used in new project designs.
- Informing policymakers as a basis for planning and taking policy decisions.
- Improving strategies for poverty reduction through accurate information on the status of the project.
- Building and enhancing partnerships as the development community is informed about the results of the programme.

So while M&E is often seen as monitoring progress and evaluating and reporting results against the project objectives, there is a need to go that 'extra mile' and reflect critically on the impact—what worked, what did not and why? What are the reasons behind these results? What are we going to do next? This should be a basis for generating lessons that feed back to the project and inform a wider audience.

Acronyms and abbreviations

KM	knowledge management
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
RIMS	Results and Impact Monitoring System

Source:

M&E/KM Tool kit, Asia Pacific Division, Unpublished materials. May 2011.