



## Knowledge Management in the Brazilian Parliament: The Role of the Centre for Documentation and Information

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### Abstract

*Brazil's current democratic regime is only a few decades old. Concepts like freedom of speech, popular vote and access to information are fairly new to its population of 180 million people. Knowledge Management comes to reduce social, cultural and regional disparities, because it represents a new vision on identifying, registering and sharing knowledge...*

*Brazilian Chamber of Deputies is at the stage of Designing and Launching KM Initiatives. It created a Work Group with the purpose of making a portrait of current initiatives and disseminating the concepts and benefits of this model.*

*This paper shows the journey the Brazilian Parliament has followed to reach the final stage of institutionalised KM, with its triumphs and obstacles.*

### I. Knowledge Management: Political and Historical Context

During the Industrial Revolution, organizations were structured according to a strict hierarchy and knowledge was trapped in the higher levels of the structure. The main objective of the industrial system was to achieve production quotas. The industrial society followed the principles of mechanicism, where labour relations were characterized by total submission to the employer.

In the 20th century, after the Great Wars, scientists who had been involved in the war effort played an important role in the task of rebuilding their countries. Human knowledge proved to be of great value and was expressed in terms of planning strategies, analytical skills and innovations.

The Information Age began in 1946 with the first electronic computer and had a big impact on management theories. A number of new concepts emerged, like reengineering of administrative processes and Total Quality Control.

The Knowledge Age focuses on the role that each person plays in an organization and establishes a model for democratic management based on skills, initiative and innovation. The transition from the age of Mechanicism to the Knowledge Age was defined by a change in focus from machines and buildings to people. This is the time of globalisation, trade liberalization and increased competition for global markets.

In this new scenario, it is vital to provide greater aggregate value and constantly innovate in order to maintain and expand existing markets. Knowledge is an important production factor in the

modern economy. It is a key international power determinant and crucial to the economical and social development of any country.

Organizations and countries that realized the importance of knowledge to achieve sustainable competitive advantage have secured a most advantageous position *because of what they know*. Today's biggest generators of wealth are information and knowledge. Consequently, the most valuable commodities are now people, their capabilities and the productivity they are able to generate.

Brazil's current democratic regime is only a few decades old. Concepts like freedom of speech, popular vote and access to information are fairly new to its people. There are many social, cultural and regional differences among a population of 180 million people, distributed over a territory of 8 million km<sup>2</sup>. Brazil faces challenges on many fronts, particularly in finding resources to finance quality education, invest in top scientific research and tackle the problem of digital exclusion.

Brazil's unequal distribution of wealth means that a large part of its population suffers from different aspects of social exclusion, including differences in terms of access to knowledge. Only 14% of Brazilians own a computer and only 10% have Internet access at home. However, Brazil is the 5<sup>o</sup> largest market for fixed telephones services and it is expected to reach the 5<sup>a</sup> position in the global market for cell phones by the end of 2004.

In a country so full of contrasts, the establishment of "electronic government" should play an important role in reducing disparities among the population. The aim of the service is to build a new paradigm of digital inclusion through the computerisation of public services and to integrate projects from the federal, state and municipal spheres. It should also simplify government processes and increase transparency of government acts.

The Federal Government Plan (PPA) 2004-2007 includes a programme of Knowledge Management. Federal policies and procedures for the implementation of the e-gov should follow Knowledge Management strategies such as inter-institutional learning networks, strategic approaches to information and the use of information technology.

In Brazil, expanding e-government services may also help accelerate the social inclusion process, as each citizen becomes a generator of collective knowledge. Information and strategic knowledge generated and exchanged through electronic services between government officials and the population should improve interaction and communication with the government.

## **II. The concept of Knowledge Management - KM**

We are living at a time of globalisation and of fast changes. The ability to create or anticipate market tendencies is crucial to the success of any organization. In today's market, competitive differential advantage does not solely depend on Tangible Assets (machinery, buildings, furniture) but on the management of Intangible Assets - Intellectual Capital (knowledge, capabilities, skills).

Clearly, Knowledge is a resource that can benefit from appropriate management. Intellectual Capital management practices aggregate intelligence to processes, products and services in order to achieve strategic aims. Knowledge Management is not a novelty in terms of organizational

management. It is a new way to examine reality that focus on the people working at an organization.

There is a clear need for the establishment of an organizational environment compatible with Knowledge Management initiatives. This is not so much a choice as a survival mechanism.

In order to create a collaborative learning environment, an organization should draw strategic plans and adopt Human Resources policies linked to a system of competences. It is also important to map the route that the organization should take to achieve its goals. Without a clear strategy, the motivation to share knowledge can create informational chaos and lead to data saturation rather than organisational learning.

It is difficult to capture and transform elements of Tacit Knowledge, like direct experience and insight, into Explicit Knowledge. The process requires total interaction and interchange of information between colleagues to ensure the dissemination, sharing and appropriation of knowledge. Efficient knowledge workers are those who create, organize, learn and process information in a constant manner, integrating these invisible processes to their daily routines until these activities are institutionalised.

### **III. The Centre for Documentation and Information - CeDI**

The purpose of the Centre for Documentation and Information (CeDI) is to provide appropriate documentation and information to all those involved in the legislative process and to preserve national legislative memory. The CeDI has approximately 240 staff members, working in six areas of responsibility: Official Publishing; Preservation of Cultural Assets; Library; Archives; Legislative Studies and Call Centre.

The CeDI participates during all stages of the legislative process, from the introduction of the bills to their approval and promulgation. CeDI's research agenda focuses on bills texts, official announcements, member information, internal legislation, Brazilian legislation, foreign legislation, jurisprudence, original documentations and bibliographic information.

The CeDI has a special archiving centre and museum that stores manuscripts and printed documents; photographs; maps; audio and video recordings; architectural and engineering drawing and art pieces dating from 1826, during the First Legislature of the Empire. CeDI's library holds approximately 350.000 books, 3.000 journals, 4.000 rare books (dating from the XVI Century), 5.000 UN documents and 1 million newspaper articles. The wealth of legislative information that the CeDI captures, analyses, organises and presents coupled with the new management focus on the "virtual CeDI" creates an environment that fosters the exchange of both Tacit and Explicit Knowledge.

### **IV. Knowledge Management in the Chamber of Deputies**

The recent application of Knowledge Management techniques in the Chamber of Deputies is part of a number of substantial institutional changes that have occurred in the last three years. An important aspect was the change in middle and senior management, after 18 years of a centralized administrative model. These changes have brought renewed attention to the areas of Information Technology and Human Resources and led to the implementation of email and Intranet solutions.

In 2003, staff members inspired by their academic studies or by attending events about management strategies approached senior management and suggested the establishment of a Working Group to organize study sessions and encourage the practice of Knowledge Management. The objectives of the Working Group were: 1- To prepare a report that evaluated the extent to which Knowledge Management practices had been incorporated into Chamber of Deputies' processes; 2- To raise awareness among staff of the benefits of Knowledge Management.

In 2004, the Working Group was formally established. Participants included representatives of the Human Resources, Documentation & Information, Information Technology and Social Communication departments. The Special Projects department is in charge of coordinating the project.

An external consultant produced a diagnostic assessment after a series of workshop sessions with the Working Group members. The chosen framework for action was based on *APQC's Road Map to Knowledge Management Results: Stages of Implementation<sup>TM</sup>*, by the *American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC)*. The APQC is a US-based institution that helps organizations adapt to rapidly changing environments, build new work methods and succeed in a competitive marketplace.

APQC's road map identifies 5 stages of implementation: "Get started, Develop a strategy, Design and launch KM initiatives, Expand and support and Institutionalise Knowledge Management.

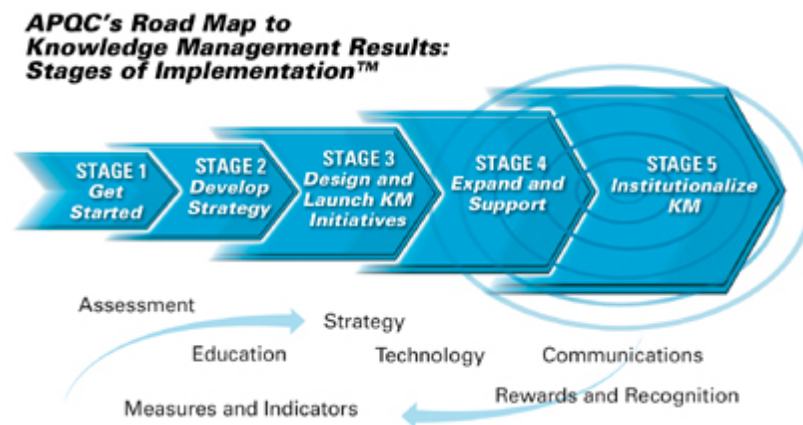


Diagram 1 – Road Map to Knowledge Management Results. Stages of implementation identified by APQC

The Knowledge Management diagnostic assessment placed Chamber of Deputies at the third stage of KM implementation. This result reflected the fact that Chamber of Deputies had already established a Working Group for the development of KM strategies and identified and allocated financial resources to KM initiatives. Now is the time to implement these projects and wait for their outcome.

There are a number of knowledge-sharing initiatives in development stage at the Chamber of Deputies, although these are not aligned to a well-defined KM strategy.

- Talent Bank – Information system that stores information about academic background, further training, professional experience and personal skills of staff members. This database should improve the institution’s ability to match staff members and positions according to individual skills, interests and organizational needs.
- Corporative Portal - The Chamber of Deputies website was chosen by the *Ibest Awards* 2004 as one of the three best sites in the category of “Politics in the Internet”. The site is currently being restructured to follow modern trends in web development. Internet providers and website users participated in a workshop to evaluate the service and develop an agenda for improvements. Aspects assessed included legislation and legislative process research; dissemination of institutional image; communication and availability of external and internal services. The Chamber of Deputies’ site aims to create an integrated environment that optimises the image of the institution, organizes its knowledge base and provides a service to all citizens. The Centre for Documentation and Information is the largest contributor and consumer of the information provided by the website. The CeDI contributed to the project with its knowledge of web navigability, research and customer support. The Centre has also pioneered an initiative to personalise the contents of internal sites. The IntraCeDI is in implementation stage and will contain information about CeDI’s staff, including photographs, individual competencies and contact details; internal forum; projects and partnerships; “High Demand”; technical memory; “Thursdays brainstorms”; links; technical texts and articles about quality of life; appointments; events; news and the “CeDI Watch”.
- Functional Classification Plan (taxonomy) – Work group established by employees from the Documentation and Information Technology departments with the purpose to map out functions and activities carried out within the organization. The CeDI will be responsible for managing this tool.
- Services Guide for the Chamber of Deputies – Electronic product developed by a multidisciplinary work group under the direction of the CeDI. The guide facilitates access to products and services available, and should become an important management tool for the Administration.
- Award *Ideas for Chamber* – Award linked to the *Minds at Work* scheme, part of Chamber's personnel policies and programs that encourage staff involvement in the improvement of administrative and legislative activities. In 2002, the award was presented to Project “Plenarinho”, Chamber’s site dedicated to children from 6-12 years old. This user-friendly site offers information about legislative history and process as well as fun educational games. The site is already fully functional.
- Information Management Work Group – Corporative data management initiative between the CeDI and the department of Information Technology that aims to facilitate the integration and standardisation of information systems within Chamber and avoid duplication of work.
- Corporative education – Negotiations are in progress for an agreement between the Education Ministry and the Chamber of Deputies to develop specialisation courses in the field of Legislative Process. E-learning and training by in-house legislative experts are some other initiatives aimed at improving staff capability through the exchange of strategic knowledge.
- Competence Management – Programme established by the department of Human Resources to assess competence requirements within the institution. Its aims are to evaluate, develop and improve the competence of employees according to internal requirements and strategic needs.
- Legislative Interaction Project – Web page accessible through Chamber’s homepage that aims to encourage institutional interaction between Chamber of Deputies and governmental organs at state and municipal level and develop a systematic approach to legislative action. Brazil has

5.561 towns and cities, 26 Federated States and a Federal District. There are 26 State Assemblies, 1 Federal District Assembly and 5.561 Municipal Assemblies and effective decision-making by individual assemblies can often be hindered by lack of access to up-to date legislative information.

- Centre for Parliamentary Research – Project for the establishment of a research facility that centralizes all parliamentary research and brings together a group of researchers specialized in the fields of legislative consultancy and parliamentary committees. The CeDI has several departments and work environments: a library specially designed for legislative studies; a department responsible for the Preservation of Cultural assets and the Museum of Chamber; a Call Centre; Archives and the Publishing Company. The Call Centre processes all research requests and redirects them to a number of different research units. A system of centralized research will improve standardization and quality control of research and offer a facility for knowledge sharing among CeDI and Legislative Consultancy researchers.
- Chamber of Deputies Publications – The publishing house of the Chamber of Deputies has produced booklets and fact sheets on various topics of public interest in print and electronic formats. The project is part of the “Educating Our Citizens” initiative.
- Organizational Climate Assessment – A study was conducted to assess current organizational climate and help CeDI’s strategic management planning. The survey should help the institution determine staff’s perceptions and feelings about the work environment. The purpose of the survey was to identify recent motivation factors and problems at workplace and find opportunities for improvement.

The Working Group established to bring Knowledge Management to Chamber of Deputies set as its second goal to increase employee awareness of Knowledge Management. In order to achieve this goal, a series of lectures on Knowledge Management have been scheduled for 2004. The lectures have been taking place in Chamber of Deputies and have been presented by leading experts in the field. Lecture topics include: Knowledge Management concepts; practicing Knowledge Management in the public sector; corporative portals; taxionomy; strategic information management; e-learning; corporative education; and virtual communities.

The institution also encourages staff to attend external courses and is collaborating with local universities to create a specialization course on Knowledge Management with special emphasis on the parliamentary environment.

The next step will be to deliver the results of the diagnostic assessment to senior administrators. The diagnostic summary should include specific recommendations for the systematic implementation of Knowledge Management in the Chamber of Deputies. Hopefully the institution will then advance to the Road Map stage of “Expansion and Support” and extend KM practices to the whole organization.

## **V. Difficulties and Results envisaged**

The implementation of Knowledge Management strategies in Chamber of Deputies has been hindered by the fact that strategic planning in the institution is still in its early stages. This scenario favours decision-making based on intuition and increases the risk of wasting time and resources in actions that do not match organizational priorities.

The fragile relationship between the CeDI and the Legislative Consultancy presents another obstacle for knowledge sharing within Chamber of Deputies. Both organs store and organize knowledge specific to the institution. Legislative consultants have come to rely less on CeDI and more on self-sought information via Internet, although CeDI services are still favoured in cases involving complex issues.

The establishment of facilities for top-level research could improve the relationship between CeDI and the Legislative Consultancy. The Centre for Parliamentary Research will play a crucial role in this effort by bringing together CeDI's specialist researchers and legislative consultants with large experience in providing advice to parliament members.

There is also room for improvement in the organizational culture of Chamber of Deputies. A 2001 survey of the institution identified problems like centralization of power, overly controlling leadership, lack of incentives for creative initiatives and resistance to change. These characteristics were partly responsible for the common perception of Chamber of Deputies as a bureaucratic organization averse to knowledge sharing.

As previously mentioned, a lot of work has been done to change this scenario over the last three years, but there is still a lot to be done.

The new administration supports all initiatives for the implementation of Knowledge Management strategies to the day-to-day activities of the institution. Projects like the Competence Management Programme are further evidence that the Administration wishes to improve work relationships and distribute powers within different functions so as to optimise administrative structures.

The creation of several multidisciplinary work groups has fostered creativity within the organization. There has been a marked increase in the number of partnerships among different areas of Parliament to achieve organizational goals. The quality of leadership and management capability is being improved by encouraging managers to attend specialisation courses.

The Centre for Documentation and Information has made an important contribution to the process of change seen at the Chamber of Deputies. CeDI's commitment to Knowledge Management is evidenced by many internal projects at developing stage and CeDI's involvement with projects from other parliamentary organs to preserve and share knowledge generated by the institution.

There are many obstacles ahead. We are at the initial stages, treading new grounds, exploring new ideas. We have just seen the first results...

Knowledge Management could be another tool to help the Brazilian Parliament guarantee the quality of its democratic system, fight social inequality and include all citizens in the process of creating a knowledge basis that should inform the debate on the history of our country and neighbouring nations.

*In the end, it is a gamble. Do we believe that the all citizens possess information relevant to democracy, the development of our country and social justice? Please, place your bets!*