

Knowledge Workers, The New Workforce

By Davis Tan, Oct 2002

Introduction

As businesses and economic models are moving towards globalize or internationalized markets, organizations are facing tougher and tougher times ahead as far as sustaining and improving their presence in the market. Employees and decision makers of the organization are experiencing more challenges ahead to improve in order to build a more responsive and dynamic organization model.

Wrong assumptions were made where knowledge workers mainly applies to career in IT. Anyone from any industry should be practicing the concept of Knowledge Worker (KW). For example, sales and marketing executives in insurance companies are now positioning themselves to be financial planners that provides wide spectrum of financial analysis and consultation rather than 'plain selling' of insurance. Accounting executives are changing their role from data entry and record integrity checking tasks to more of planning, estimating and controlling of credits, expenses, etc.

What is Knowledge Workers?

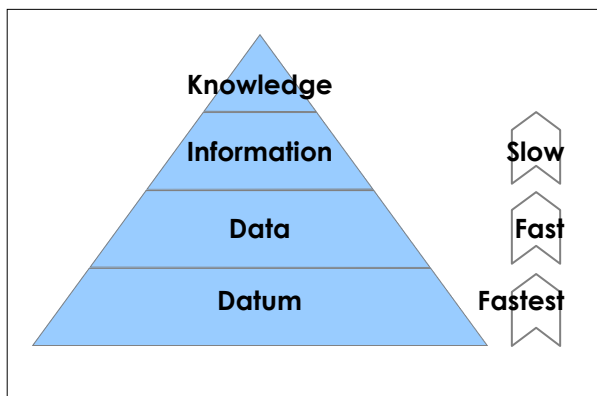


Diagram 1: Knowledge Pyramid

Based on the Knowledge Pyramid diagram, knowledge is a product from information, which is a derivative of data and down to datum. What this means is datum is a single piece of fact that forms the basis for data. Data is then gathered and comprehended into information, which is then used for higher level of interpretation, which then yields knowledge that is consumed for decision making process.

Knowledge workers are employees that work with knowledge, where knowledge is a product from the culmination and combination of different information.

To make things direct, not everyone can be a knowledge worker. Certain traits or attributes should be possessed by individuals in order to be a KW.

Worker must be analytical in nature. Always asking why, how come and what if questions. Rate of information absorption, interpretation must be high; in order to allow knowledge transformation to occur, otherwise the information will be forgotten or left aside.

A worker must be able to undertake certain decision making process (either with or without superior's approval) in order to complete their tasks.

A worker will need (from his/her own initiative) to outline possible solutions to overcome a given situation, ability to provide recommendations according to the best approach method, and to present such research or findings in proposal and/or presentation format.

Examples of current job positions that are expected to be KWs: Executives, Managers and above positions.

Is KW Important?

From the employer's viewpoint, KWs have better self-reliant and independent in work and requires less supervision. Independent does not mean that they are working alone but, not requiring as much dependency on their superiors or employers.

It is undoubtful that KWs will be more preferable to non-KW workers. In the individual's development, KW will change the way an individual's lifestyle. The individual will have better approach to problem-solving and to manage their life in various aspects.

Why Knowledge Workers happens now but not before?

Even though not being publicized or realized, KW exists long time ago. However, most of the KWs only exist in their later years of career where on-job information obtained from experiences is then only sufficient to be turned to knowledge. Furthermore, individuals' characteristics are also important where some individuals might not communicate or make use of their knowledge, therefore being insignificant from normal workers.

Internet has revolutionized the way we work and live. Information is readily available at a very affordable and convenient way. Therefore, the upcoming generation of workers will be divided into two different groups. The first group is that workers will be tempted to the ease of plagiarism and copying of information to complete their work (in which is not KW). The second group is those who digest the information from their findings and will turn it to knowledge to be applied to their work.

Both of the groups are quite similar and from a glance would not be able to differentiate them. However, it will be known once workers are being questioned on their works.

Obstacles towards the New Workforce

The process of information transformation to knowledge can only occurs effectively when all information is in one language. Otherwise, translation will introduce overhead to the model.

In current environment, language is one of the major barriers. Most current 'mass-produced' graduates do not possess good command of English even though they are graduated in universities or colleges from overseas.

Other obstacles are as below:

1. Not having good presentation or communication skills
2. Do not have good knowledge of high productivity tools (word processing, presentation or multimedia application, diagramming tools)
3. Information or Knowledge overload - have a way to do mind-mapping.

How to start preparing yourself to be a Knowledge Worker?

The expectations of having luxury 9 to 5 jobs should be avoided and be more task-oriented / focused.

Before knowing how to be a KW, let us look at how KW can happen. A person can become more KW oriented when he/she always absorbs information, comprehend and communicate their findings to others.

Start in a group, rather than working alone. It will be easier to practice KW concept in a group environment.

Be responsive to your own matters first. Am I in a dilemma? Having financial difficulties? I am lazy myself, can't help it... In most cases, individuals want to be pampered and using the brain is often being avoided. Do not forget, the rule for survival is competition and if preparation is not done, then probabilities for failures are high.

To overcome the "laziness" problem, always give oneself a due date and some pressure such as setting a near date for presentation of your work to a group. Do not think of delaying, postponing or trying to avoid the tasks.

The key to success is "Preparation".

Brush up on presentation and communication skills. Information exchange can occur in:

- Brainstorming
- Conventional discussion/chatting
- Presentations
- Reports
- Teaching/Training

Get yourself a voice recorder or notepad. Always have such tools ready beside you. You can bring it together, when you are driving, meeting friends, window shopping, in a coffee house, etc. You do not know when certain things can stimulate your brain to think and create new knowledge.

Don't be selfish, share! *"The more you share, the more you receive"*

This quote is one that many know but did not put into practice because they do not know whether it is real or not. At first, I don't feel that I am receiving when I share, however, later on; I find that miracle does happen. Not realizing, when you revise what you know and communicate the information or knowledge to others, certain knowledge or ideas related to it will pop up in our mind and once this happens, don't be lazy, always write it down in a comprehensive way. Sometimes, I look back to my notepad and I don't recall what I am writing there. So it will be wise to write as though you are explaining it to someone else.

Always remember that the difference between a normal worker and successful worker (KW) is that one just think and forget about it or, take note of it and execute.

Things to note:

1. It is not a 'One-Time Thing'; it is an on-going process.
2. Knowledge worker is needs to be in a group, not alone.
3. Discipline and a clear mind must be maintained or sustained at all times.
4. Negativism, stereotyping and biased viewpoint should be avoided at all times.
5. Even though younger aged employees can be KWs, but it should be realized that the way information absorb and comprehended is different from information obtained via real life experiences. Information from experiences will provide individuals with more sensitiveness and alert to the particular information or knowledge compared to the information obtained from other sources.