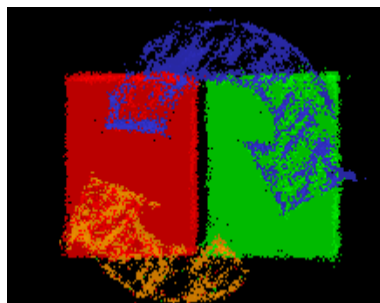


“Here is the
10-page
Guide to
eliciting
implicit
knowledge.”

Version 1.7

Eliciting is one of the critical processes of Knowledge Harvesting[®]. This document includes all the information that we can fit into ten pages. You will not know how to do effective elicitation by reading this document! However, you will have a good sense of what to do.



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At least 80% of what people need to perform their jobs is not written down.

We need an effective way to help knowledgeable people talk about what they know.

Preparing is the first step in leveraging implicit knowledge.

1. **Prepare**
2. Elicit
3. Organize
4. Package
5. Apply
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7. Adapt

What is the most valuable piece of know-how in your organization?

Knowledge Management efforts in most companies focus on the collection and organization of explicit knowledge – documents, manuals, specifications, procedures, and research materials. Although we tend to refer to the lot as “knowledge,” and to the domain as “knowledge management” most of the real knowledge in our organizations is not housed in electronic libraries. It exists "between the ears" of co-workers.

It is called implicit knowledge. It is the intuitive, experienced-based know-how that resides in people's heads. It is Tom Browne's ability to conceive new moneymaking services... the magical way he pulls a new idea out of the air. To get a picture of the value of this implicit knowledge, imagine what your profits would look like if you could transfer some of Tom's skills and expertise to the rest of the product development team! And what about George Bailey's ability to literally smell oil and know exactly where to drill? This is a skill you'd desperately like to teach someone else before George retires at the end of the year.

Normally, neither Tom nor George is consciously aware of all that they think and do. And even if they did understand, they would probably have a difficult time explaining it to others. In addition, think of all of the personal reasons why someone might not be eager to share what he or she knows, and you begin to get an idea of the challenge of harvesting implicit knowledge.

1. Prepare.

Knowledge Harvesting is a term used to describe the process of capturing and making implicit knowledge available for transfer and use by other people. It is predominantly an exercise of making implicit knowledge explicit.

Knowledge Harvesting involves these stages:

1. Identify and prioritize knowledge to be harvested.
2. Identify the experts who have the knowledge.
3. Choose elicitors to do the session(s).
4. Review the needs of target learners.
5. Elicit knowledge through sessions.
6. Make sense of session results.
7. Conduct post-session review and follow-ups.

1.a. Identify vital knowledge.

The first step is to identify the knowledge to be harvested. You can't, nor should you attempt to, capture all implicit knowledge in your organization. Select a few key areas and candidates based on the biggest “bang for the buck.”

How do you identify your most critical knowledge? Review your organization's business objectives and core competencies. What do you need to start doing or continue to do to achieve your objectives and remain competitive? What knowledge supports these strategies and objectives?

Key knowledge in your organization might be:

- How to manage a relationship with key customer(s)

Who's a contributor?
A contributor is a person who knows the domain-specific details, concepts, habits, and attitudes that make up good thinking and results-oriented performance.

Expertise is knowing what to do and how. Expertise yields consistent, effective results.

Expertise involves determining the relevance of certain data or behaviors, emphasizing certain rules that help to get good results, knowing when to break the rules, and explaining why certain results are better than others.

Eliciting is about understanding people and their style of thinking and expression.

- How to perform a key operational process
- How to use or evolve a mission-critical technology or application.
- Understanding of a geography or country and its business customs as it relates to securing new contracts
- How to pick the right person for the right job or how to put together a productive team
- Understanding of the internal infrastructure – information about the tools, the culture, and "how to get things done around here."

If you are about to initiate a pilot project, please consider narrowing the focus to a set of activities that can normally be accomplished in two to six hours. This will help to set boundaries around a task that is manageable in scope.

1.b. Identify experts who will contribute.

The second part of identifying key knowledge is to identify the people who have the know-how. There are several ways you can do this:

- Look for expertise profiles. Check systems that map internal expertise (like Company Yellow Pages, White Pages or skills and knowledge databases). Note: If you have not created a directory of people and skills, then ask KHi about our award-winning Work Profile process.
- Ask stakeholders and managers in the domain.
- Look for work documents on the subject and find out who authored them.

After identifying the experts, collect information that will help you structure the session.

Gather:

- work profile, job description or other related information about current roles and responsibilities
- work experience (types of jobs, geographies/cultures worked with)
- education and training
- essential work documents
- contact information (location, phone number, e-mail, etc.)
- personal preferences (for setting, timing, etc.)

1.c. Choose people who will elicit the expertise.

Effective elicitation is crucial. There are several key skills that are important in eliciting implicit knowledge in a session. One is building rapport. Another is active listening. A third is the ability to read non-verbal communication and know the difference between a pause, where the contributor is thinking and has more to say, versus a pause that means, "I'm done, we can move on." It is also the ability to understand the difference between an unwillingness to share versus someone who is just having a tough time verbalizing what they know. More importantly, it is having the capability to deal effectively with either situation.

The ability to do several things mentally at the same time is also important. Elicitors must focus, listen, reflect, filter, and refine simultaneously.

Perhaps the most important quality for an elicitor is a genuine interest in the contributor and what they have to say. Look for the wide-eyed curious ones who are eager to learn new things. Recognize that good elicitors have manageable egos. They don't need to be the

Eliciting is about gently and productively navigating the path of discovery for you and the contributor.

Understanding the needs of the target learner will help ensure that you ask the right questions and collect the necessary information in your session.

It is important to understand the contributor's mental models and "internal dialogue" that occurs during problem solving.

center of attention or do all the talking. A good elicitor listens more than talks.

In summary, the best elicitors have strong interpersonal skills, a love of learning, the ability to visualize the end product (the knowledge asset) and an understanding of the intellectual processes that target learners need to think when they are accomplishing their work.

Where do you find these people? Consider people who are effective communicators/interviewers. Look in the Human Resources department. Consider recruiters or people with a consulting background (especially in-depth process consulting). Here are others who have basic skills that are applicable:

- People with training and education backgrounds often make good elicitors because they typically have the interpersonal skills required, and enjoy the interaction.
- Journalists, fiction writers, and technical writers are also candidates for eliciting, though not all have the necessary people skills.
- At KHi, we have also had good success with nurses and other health practitioners. These people understand the "whole person" and can effectively engage the contributor.

Note: The characteristics mentioned above are good qualifiers for candidate harvesters. A harvester becomes a capable harvester after receiving orientation, mentoring, and experience. Usually, a new harvester needs mentoring for the first four or five projects.

1.d. Understand the target learners' needs.

It's important to have a description of the people who are likely to use the information you are eliciting before you begin harvesting sessions. Determine the target learners' level of knowledge about the process and an understanding of how or where the information would likely be applied. This will help you ensure that you capture the appropriate level of detail in the sessions.

Information to collect might include:

- Expected number of users/target learners
- Physical/Geographic Location and Cultural Nuances
- Experience Spread - knowledge of the process, technology or business area (i.e. one-half of the learners are highly experienced and one-half are moderately experienced)
- Circumstance/situation in which the knowledge will be applied
- Access to various kinds of performance-support media

1.e. Prepare the setting.

The setting has a significant influence on how effectively your contributor is able to tap into and articulate key knowledge.

The session should be conducted wherever the contributor is most comfortable. Ideally, you should work in an open, airy, naturally lit room. Select a room that allows all participants to move around.

Other times, it is effective to go to the contributor. This lets them know that you are making a concession, that you recognize the value of their time and want them to be in a comfortable setting.

Having said that, it is critically important that the session take place where the contributor will not be distracted by telephones, co-workers, or day-to-day work crises.

Environmental comforts are essential. That does not just mean a good chair and a comfortable temperature. The setting must be conducive to the thinking and communication styles of the contributor. If the person is highly visual, for example, you may need tools for enabling the contributor to communicate their information visually (flip chart and markers, for example).

If the person is highly kinesthetic, they may need to be in their work environment in order to show you how they physically do what they do.

1.f. Prepare yourself.

Although you don't have to be a domain contributor, you do have to be able to converse intelligently about the topic. This means having an overall familiarity with the subject area and its associated terminology.

In order to prepare yourself, collect articles about the domain. Study and gain an understanding of both the content area and the person you are interviewing. Look for documents that the contributor has authored. Talk to people who work with them. Become as familiar as you can about their area of expertise and how that expertise is used in the organization.

Make a list of content and context-specific questions you will want to ask the contributor, either for further clarification or to dig into a particular area a little deeper. Before going to the session, look over materials and try to get an idea of where you think the real nuggets of knowledge are likely to reside.

Try and find out if there are any reasons the contributor might not want to share what they know and be prepared to implicitly address these concerns. See section on *How to Deal With Busy or Uncooperative People* for more information.

2. Elicit!

The best way to capture implicit knowledge is to interview the experts face-to-face. Ask them to talk about what they do and to describe specific situations where they have applied specific know-how. Sounds easy enough, right?

Eliciting is both science and art. Science from the standpoint of using a methodology with standard questions, and art from the standpoint of how an elicitor builds trust, rapport, and subtly guides the contributor through a process of discovery and articulation.

This section covers the primary actions of eliciting implicit knowledge through harvesting sessions:

1. Build rapport.
2. Conduct the harvesting session.
3. Guide the contributor.
4. Follow-up.

Building rapport is not ten minutes of small talk.

When the elicitor uses some of the contributor's terminology, the session flows more smoothly.

When you begin the session, introduce yourself and the process.

Mention expectations, clarify roles and responsibilities and talk about what you expect to get out of the session.

A session dialogue involves five actions:

- Ask.

2.a. Build rapport.

Building rapport is something you do throughout the eliciting process – before, during, and after the session. The main objective of building rapport is to make the process of externalizing and transferring implicit knowledge easier. Rapport makes it easier in two ways. First, it helps create trust and credibility which makes the contributor more comfortable sharing what they know. When she is comfortable, she is more likely to provide good information. Second, rapport allows the common thinking processes which are heard during the discussion to emerge. This results in time savings and quality of the exchange.

Two critical components of building rapport are 1) establishing trust and credibility and 2) understanding the contributor's paradigms or mental models.

In order to be effective as an elicitor, you have to be seen as credible and trustworthy. One of the ways you can do this is to let the contributor know up-front (the first time you meet) that you are not a contributor on their subject, but that you do have expertise in capturing implicit knowledge.

Your knowledge of the subject is also a key component of your credibility. If the contributor does not perceive you as credible, you will not be effective.

Personal Values & Mental Models

People think and do what makes sense to them; they adjust perception to fit paradigm or model of the world. In order to understand how they do what they do and deliver that know-how to someone else, you must capture the context, mental models, and personal values of the contributor.

You will learn about the person throughout the process by paying careful attention to the words they use to describe what they do. Begin the session by asking them to describe their background, including not only professional work, but hobbies and external activities as well. This will provide not only a picture of the diversity of experience the contributor brings, but also will give you an opportunity to ask questions that will help you discern their values and mental models.

For example, if a person focuses on profits, results, and the bottom line, you will hear this. Likely as not, they will use those very words. If they value people and relationships, you'll hear those words. By recognizing the language of your contributor, you can identify what's important to them. By using those words in your questions and comments, you save time and build rapport.

2.b. Conduct the harvesting session.

When you start, here are comments that you should make early in the conversation.

- Let her know that she has been identified by X person as a contributor on this topic.
- Let her know you are here to help make the process of capturing and leveraging this knowledge easier (for her).
- Let her know that you recognize that her time is valuable and you want to take up

- Listen.
- Reflect.
- Restate.
- Refine.

Eliciting is about prompting knowledge to come out, knowledge that the contributor has, but maybe doesn't know they have or know how to articulate.

Capture:

- Process Flow
- Relationships
- Artifacts Used
- Signals

The session process is complete when you have enough for the target learners to perform the work with the aid of the information alone.

only that which is necessary to capture key know-how.

- Provide an overview of the session process. Let her know how long it will take, how the session will be conducted, expected results, etc.
- Discuss environment issues. Ask, "Is there anything that we need to make our collaboration more effective, easier? Ask, "Are you OK with the setting? Is it comfortable? Is there anything we could do to make it more comfortable?"

Use a recorder to tape the conversation or enlist the support a dedicated transcriptionist. Rarely will a contributor have a problem with recording, but it is important that you ask permission in advance.

2.c. Guide and encourage.

A good elicitor subtly guides the contributor through a process of discovery and articulation. Skillfully draw out information by asking the right questions and shepherding the dialogue. You are careful not to implant ideas, make suggestions or let your personal opinions, agendas or needs impede the process. It is critically important that elicitors are able to be neutral and objective throughout the harvesting process.

Eliciting is about nurturing the discussion of knowledge that the contributor has but does not know they have or know how to articulate. You (the elicitor) serve as a catalyst to spur what is "natural," that which is inside the person's head but has yet been spoken.

The best, and perhaps the only way to learn how to lead a session, is to practice. Through practice, you'll become better at recognizing quickly when you're off track and how to then gently steer the conversation back on course. You'll also learn how to recognize the key nuggets of information and be able to drill down and draw them out.

2.d. Capture this information!

Some questions that you ask are general, others are specific. Among the things you'll want to collect, regardless of the topic, are:

- Process flow (this happens, then this happens)
- Relationship(s) to other people and work, to include all interfaces and hand-offs
- Documents, information or people referenced in the process (in order to know how to do this, the contributor uses these materials, resources, people, etc.)
- Systems or tools used

How do you know when you have enough information? To determine when you're done, ask, "Do I have enough information and understand the information well enough to teach someone else how to do the work?" Also, "Have you filled out all of the information within the prescribed boundaries?"

How do you know if you have the right information? Managers and stakeholders involved in the process will determine who the experts are and the objectives of the harvesting process. Ultimately, they judge the validity of information gathered.

2.e. Exercise good etiquette.

Never interrupt. Show with your eyes and body language that you are paying attention to what they are saying.

Keep the flow!

If questions or ideas pop in your head during the course of the session, jot them down and ask later. Only interrupt the flow when a question is critical to your understanding of a particular part of the process.

Don't make assumptions. Don't assume you know what a word or phrase means. Ask. (Although this seems counter to item #1, it really isn't. It means you need to know when to stop the flow and ask a question or when to save it for later).

Recognize a hostile contributor early in the process. Know when to reschedule, cancel, or go back to stakeholders and ask for guidance.

Examples of Session Questions

Ask preliminary questions.

- What would make this process easier to understand?
- What would make the process easier to accomplish?

Gain clarification and stimulate discussion.

- Describe a time when...
- What's the first thing you do?
- How do you know to do that?
- How do you know when to do it?
- How do you accomplish this work?
- What does that mean?
- What do you do next? Why?
- What usually happens?
- Can you describe a time, a specific situation, when you performed this action?
- What happens if something else is done?
- What would happen if?
- Tell me more.
- Who is responsible/involved?
- What are the interrelationships among decisions?
- Where are the hand-off points?
- Is there a specific order of steps or elements?
- What are some common mistakes or misconceptions?
- What are the affective dimensions of this process?
- What is the most important thing to remember when you're doing this?
- What are examples of printed resources, support materials, documentation, procedures, manuals, instruction sheets, checklists... that are relevant?
- What rules are involved?
- Describe how you currently help others learn how to accomplish this work.
- What are the main obstacles that hinder learners' abilities to meet their goals and objectives?

2.f. Deal with busy or uncooperative people.

As an elicitor, you are likely to face resistance from time to time. In some situations, people volunteer to be interviewed and share their knowledge. In others, they are told to do so. In either case, contributors may have a difficult time communicating what they know.

The first step is to identify the nature of resistance. Do they feel threatened? Are they fearful of losing their job or power? Is it simply a matter of not having the time? Do they see/understand the value of the exercise? Once you know “where the person is coming from,” you can begin to build rapport and overcome the resistance. Here are a few of the common reasons why people might be hesitant to share, and tips for overcoming these obstacles.

Situation	Ways to Overcome
<p>“My knowledge is power. If I give it up, then I’ll lose it.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Give examples (stories) of how others have shared knowledge and personally gained from it. ▪ Play to their need to "hold on to knowledge" by explaining that you can share knowledge and still have it – it’s not as though you lose it when you give it away. ▪ Discuss ways sharing knowledge will reward them personally.
<p>“I don’t know what I know.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Because you're dealing with implicit knowledge, you're likely to run into experts who don't fully understand what they know. You'll hear them say things like "I just know" or "I don't know why I do it this way, I just do it." ▪ People tend to get frustrated when they can't answer your questions, so it's important that elicitors are highly skilled in asking the right questions that will help trigger the knowledge and help experts better understand and communicate it.
<p>“I don’t have time.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The "I don't have time" hesitation is generally based on one or several other things: 1) the importance of the effort has not been fully communicated to the person, and 2) this type of knowledge sharing is not recognized as a part of one's job and time allocated accordingly or 3) the person doesn't see the payoff - sees bigger payoff from doing their other work. ▪ As an elicitor, the best thing you can do is make the process time efficient and make sure that your contributor gets something "out" as well. You probably won't be able to influence the culture change (to one where knowledge sharing is the norm), but you can make a difference in how the contributor you’re working with feels about the experience.
<p>“What’s in it for me?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This question comes up so often in Knowledge Management, it has become an acronym. It is called WIIFM (pronounced Wiff-um). ▪ How do you deal with the “What’s in it for me question or attitude?” Simple, you answer the question. If there isn’t something in it for the contributor, and you aren’t able to articulate it, you can’t expect stellar results. The eliciting process has to be a win-win for everyone. ▪ The answer to the WIIFM question also depends on the person and what’s important to them. What’s important to one person

“Giving it up may be one of the best ways for you to personally gain.”

“Please be patient. Together, we’ll both learn a lot.”

“I can help you save a lot of time.”

“There are several ways that you’ll benefit from contributing...”

		<p>(recognition as a contributor for example) may be a negative thing to another person (who might agree to capturing the knowledge so that people leave him alone).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Know what motivates and drives the person. Present benefits from their perspective. ▪ Consider mentioning these benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being recognized as the contributor - Positive effect on your career, position in the company. - It's the right thing to do. The greater good. - Keep people from bothering you in the future (asking the same questions over and over). - Financial gain. - If you share what you know, others will share what they know/have with you - Threat/Fear...if you don't do this, this will happen....
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This is the end of our ten-page Guide. The next stage of harvesting is to make sense of what you captured during harvesting sessions. More information about harvesting principles and practice can be found on the www.knowledgeharvesting.org site. Hundreds of 'pages' of detailed guidance about how to elicit can be licensed as part of KHi's Knowledge Harvesting system.

Eliciting-oriented Terms

Elicit	To elicit means to effectively guide a contributor through the process of saying what he or she knows about a particular topic.
Elicitor	The elicitor is the other half of the Knowledge Harvesting session. The elicitor prompts, guides, and excavates the hidden knowledge shared by the contributor.
Expressed (Explicit) Knowledge	Expressed knowledge is knowledge that has been written down or recorded in some way.
Contributor / Expert	A contributor is someone who willingly shares his or her implicit knowledge.
Implicit Knowledge	Implicit knowledge is the know-how and contextual cues that reside in the heads of top performers. It is the knowledge that was previously believed to be incapable of articulating. Via Knowledge Harvesting, it can now be written down (and therefore, shared with others).
Knowledge Asset	A knowledge asset is a digital set of guidance and support information.
Knowledge Harvesting	Knowledge Harvesting is the systematic method for helping smart people express what they know. During Knowledge Harvesting, we elicit implicit knowledge, then organize and leverage it across the organization.
Session	A session is a scheduled meeting in which the elicitor and the contributor work towards articulating the know-how that will serve as the content of a knowledge asset.
Tacit Knowledge	Tacit knowledge is knowledge that cannot be written down.
Target Learner	A target learner is someone who uses a knowledge asset to learn and actually accomplish the work (simultaneously).