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LESSONS LEARNT FROM *REALLY* CHANGING INTELLIGENCE

In the December/January issue of *IK*, **Adrian ‘Zeke’ Wolfberg** introduced us to the US Defense Intelligence Agency Knowledge Lab. In the second of this two-part series, he highlights the importance of relationships as the core value of the Lab, along with lessons learnt and plans going forward.

The Knowledge Lab *is* relationships. The average person on the street probably thinks that intelligence agencies are rolling in money. In truth, every dollar in the national security arena was spoken for long ago. The budget process looks out five years, so planners must make assumptions and assessments about what their needs will be in what is, effectively, the far future.

For the Knowledge Lab to provide value, it has to meet the spoken and unspoken needs of four sets of people inside DIA.

Command leaders


The DIA director and chief of staff have been indispensable allies. In the beginning, director VADM Lowell ‘Jake’ Jacoby and chief of staff Louis Andre recognised the need to change the culture – and thus the operational functioning –

of DIA. They first sponsored and quietly guided the Knowledge Lab. Since then, the current DIA director LTG Michael Maples and chief of staff Phil Roberts have continued to support it. Why? The Knowledge Lab has consistently shown real on-the-ground results. Look at ‘Crossing Boundaries’, ‘Critical Discourse’, and other pilots. These are changing the way DIA employees think, work, and communicate.

Working-level employees

The Knowledge Lab could never succeed if it were just a creation of senior leadership. We engaged the workforce early on and still do. We got an initial group of volunteers from across the Agency to help





define the strategy, approaches, and values of the Knowledge Lab. That group transformed and grew into an informal network of volunteers from across the agency that provided leadership, vision, and hands to help execute pilots. Now the network continues to grow through pilot projects, informal monthly gatherings, and a constant exchange of news and views online.

Business unit leaders

We ask a lot of the lines of business in this agency. By this, I refer to DI and DT, as well as the Directorate for Human Intelligence (or DH, which manages the Department of Defense's human-based collection efforts), and the other directorates that manage ongoing mission operations (such as the Directorate for Human Capital). We ask mainly for their people's *time*. This is a dear resource. These same directorates are sending employees around the world to protect America's security. They operate at the edge of their capability as they respond to the needs of policymakers and warfighters. The Knowledge Lab is not just concerned with the problems of the future. We're also concerned with solving the problems of today in a way that builds the future DIA. For this reason, we engage with business unit leaders directly. We exchange ideas and look for opportunities to help address their issues. Most of the pilots that we conduct now are in direct or indirect response to the stated needs of line management. In many ways, these are our best customers.



We also have to engage communities outside DIA. Early on, the Knowledge Lab invested significant time in scanning the academic world for new practices that might be useful if tested within DIA

Mid-level managers

Change cannot simply leap from the top of a large government agency and land successfully. The career professionals who manage the teams, branches, and offices inside the directorates are a critical part of changing the agency. We have engaged them in the past as part of the process of helping our practice-level volunteers, who want to participate in pilots. We recently executed a pilot – *Full Spectrum Leaders* – designed particularly to help mid-level managers see and understand the bigger picture and develop new approaches to the challenges they face.

We also have to engage communities outside DIA. Early on, the Knowledge Lab invested significant time in scanning the academic world for new practices that might be useful if tested within DIA. We established relationships with Rob Cross' Network Roundtable at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, and with Rob's help we have executed several

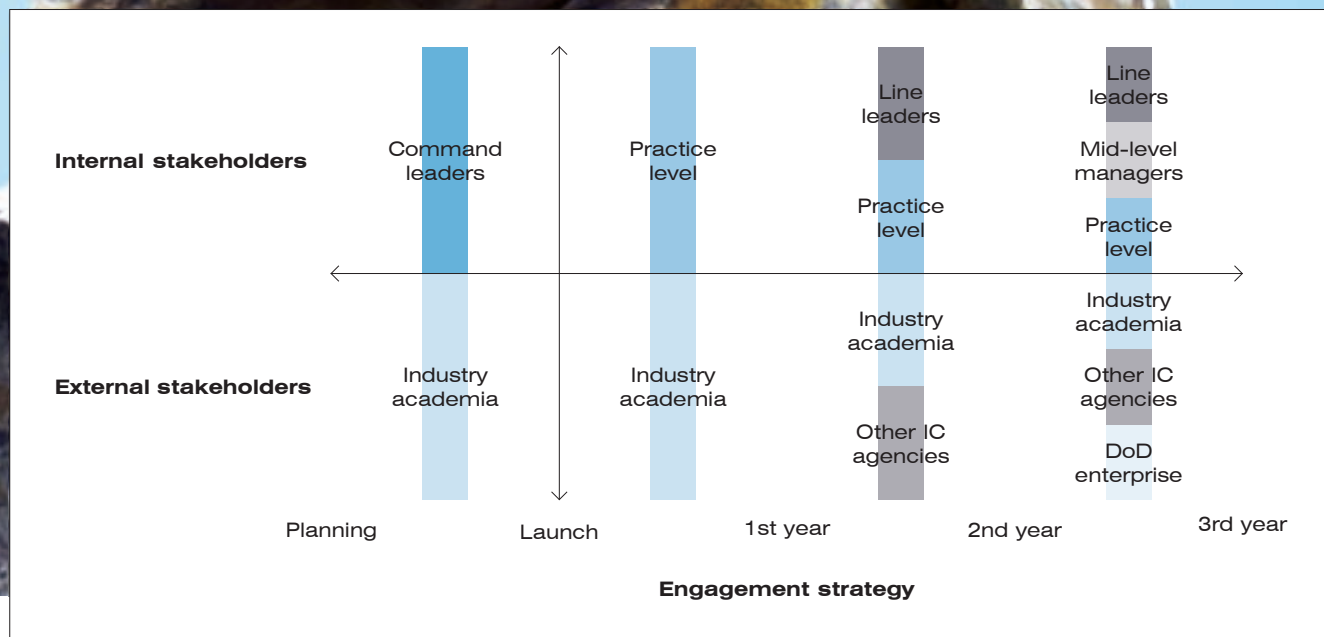


Figure 1: Stakeholder lessons

social-network analysis pilot projects. We are also connected with Larry Prusak at the Working Knowledge Research Center at Babson College in Boston.

Other intelligence community agencies

It should not surprise you to know that other agencies are trying to innovate as well. In the post-9/11 world, every agency recognises the public imperative to improve collaboration and performance. Other agencies are working on this problem too, in their own ways. We work with their innovators, where it makes sense, but our strategies are all different. At DIA, we believe we need to *become* something new: a knowledge enterprise.



We have recently extended the Full Spectrum concept to include middle managers. Many of these mid-career professionals are trying to find a way to help create the DIA of the future.

Not every agency has the same goal.

Figure 1 shows the gradual evolution of our focus in building relationships. We build relationships by demonstrating our value (or potential value) to each set of stakeholders. In the early planning stage, we engaged with director Jacoby, chief of staff Louis Andre, and others to understand what they mean by ‘knowledge organisation’ and develop a strategy for helping the DIA to become one. We looked outside the government too,

for new techniques that might help DIA become a knowledge organisation. We found social-network analysis, fast learning, full-spectrum analysis, and the seeds of other pilot projects.

When we launched the Knowledge Lab in 2005, we turned our focus toward the workforce. We engaged a group of 25 volunteers to form the core of the network, and asked them to recruit their friends and coworkers. We engaged a small group of heavily committed volunteers as a sort of ‘steering committee’, and focused on addressing the problems that caused pain both at the highest levels (such as, ‘What is the right way to do analysis?’) and at the working levels (such as, ‘How can we analysts get better support from our technology specialists?’).

Over time we have expanded our relationships. Most of our pilots are now supporting the leaders of major directorates within the agency. We are creating a new cadre of professionals trained in full spectrum analysis. This network extends across DIA and beyond to other agencies. We have recently extended the Full Spectrum concept to include middle managers. Many of these mid-career professionals are trying to find a way to help create the DIA of the future. We are helping them band together and become a network of mutual support.

For others, we work directly with the staff of the director for National Intelligence (DNI). For instance, last year we worked with the DNI staff to identify and share lessons learned from collaborative efforts between analysts and collectors. The lessons are classified, but we believe they point the direction toward more success for collaborative efforts in the future.

Programme perspectives

Three years into the Knowledge Lab, I have learned a lot about what it takes to launch a change campaign from

Process lessons

- **Senior-level champions are key to success**
 - Tremendously important during the first year ‘value-proving’ stage;
 - Continue to be important now to ‘sustain and grow’.
- **Minimal resource footprint important for initial acceptance**
 - In ‘zero-sum game’ environment, Knowledge Lab minimised resource competition;
 - To accomplish its mission within resource constraints, Knowledge Lab relies significantly on its Agency-wide volunteer network;
 - Prove value by focusing on real-world working-level problems;
 - In crises, novel, networked approaches outside the process norm succeed however, using such approaches in non-crisis situations was a novel experience because we tend to maintain the *status quo*;
 - To ensure success working in this novel way required great attention to detail.
- **Tackle important DIA-wide issues by identifying and successfully executing techniques and approaches to address them**
 - Stakeholders acknowledge Lab’s value when their problem is resolved;
 - These stakeholders will advocate Knowledge Lab’s contributions to their peers.
- **Build a Knowledge Lab ‘toolbox of capabilities’**
 - Concentrate on only one new problem at a time;
 - Managing multiple variables involved with behaviour change is too hard;
 - This does not exclude bringing together multiple capabilities against one problem;
 - Document value-added results and lessons;
 - As techniques are proven, consider or combine capabilities from the entire toolbox that can provide maximum value against the issue.
- **Carefully and deliberately craft all communications**
 - For example, the names of pilot projects use words that stick in people’s minds because the newness of the content has not yet been understood;
 - ‘Socialisation story’ to engage stakeholders and participants is a key aspect of project execution;
 - Precisely articulate Knowledge Lab approaches emphasising unique and distinctive characteristics, differentiating Lab events from established agency offerings;
 - Strategic communications strategy to publicise opportunities and successes;
 - Use words that are familiar to culture, yet inspire new ideas and directions.
- **Constantly ‘listen’ for issues and/or opportunities**
 - Often people are not aware they are describing a work-related challenge;
 - Careful listening and inquiry can identify both new Knowledge Lab challenges or potential pilot project venues.
- **‘Walk the talk’**
 - The Knowledge Lab member behaviour should reflect Lab’s mission – to help DIA become a learning organisation;
 - The Knowledge Lab must act like a learning organisation so others can emulate;
 - Change is continuously ongoing; Knowledge Lab must respond and adapt.
- **The Knowledge Lab is a ‘long-term’ strategy**
 - Recognise and accept that ‘baby steps’ are a win;
 - Cultural change takes years or decades to accomplish.



inside an organisation like DIA. Not that there are a lot of organisations like DIA. We are part military, part civilian. We are all across the world, protecting national security every day. Even as I write, a message comes across e-mail announcing that overseas deployment to support warfighters will no longer be strictly voluntary. The mission comes first. Soon my co-workers may be selected to deploy, whether or not they want to go. That is part of what we do.

That is why the Knowledge Lab must succeed. In Figure 1 [see Cover feature, December/January *IK*] you saw the conceptual business model for how the Knowledge Lab operates. We identify problems, we find solutions, we test-pilot the solutions, and we facilitate adoption across the agency. Sounds logical, right? Well, the realistic version of the business model appears in Figure 2. In truth, nothing proceeds simply from one step to another. The four 'steps' in our business model are really functions and capabilities that operate constantly, feeding information and ideas back and forth as we gradually uncover, unstuck, and try to help solve the problems that prevent DIA from becoming a knowledge organisation.

Three indispensable factors influence our ability to succeed. They should be no surprise.

1. Money (who could have guessed?)

If you have not worked in the Federal Government, get ready. Government funding procedure requires a two-year lead time to get 'guaranteed' funding as part of organisation's 'base' level. If you don't have base level funding, you compete for 'unfunded requirements' (UFR, *rhymes with two-fer*) funds, which makes it hard to realistically plan.

The timing of UFR funds approval and distribution always changes, and sometimes they are split into two disbursements, which makes the contract process a challenge.

In essence, the contracting process requires us to practice our own methodology. Our process model relies upon identifying and leveraging techniques in industry to solve problems. We have learned that creative ways of leveraging the contracting process are essential. To make it work, we have established two mechanisms where primes can sub-contract to others we need. We move resources around as we need to and as we must, to provide the greatest value to our stakeholders – the workforce and leadership of this agency, and our customers in the field.

2. Leadership

DIA leadership – in the persons of director Jacoby

and chief of staff Louis Andre – created the Knowledge Lab. Their successors – director Michael Maples and chief of staff Phil Roberts – have consistently supported the Knowledge Lab. While the Knowledge Lab does much of its work in areas that might not be seen by leadership, we are careful to ensure that they are aware of our activities. They see our value and support us.

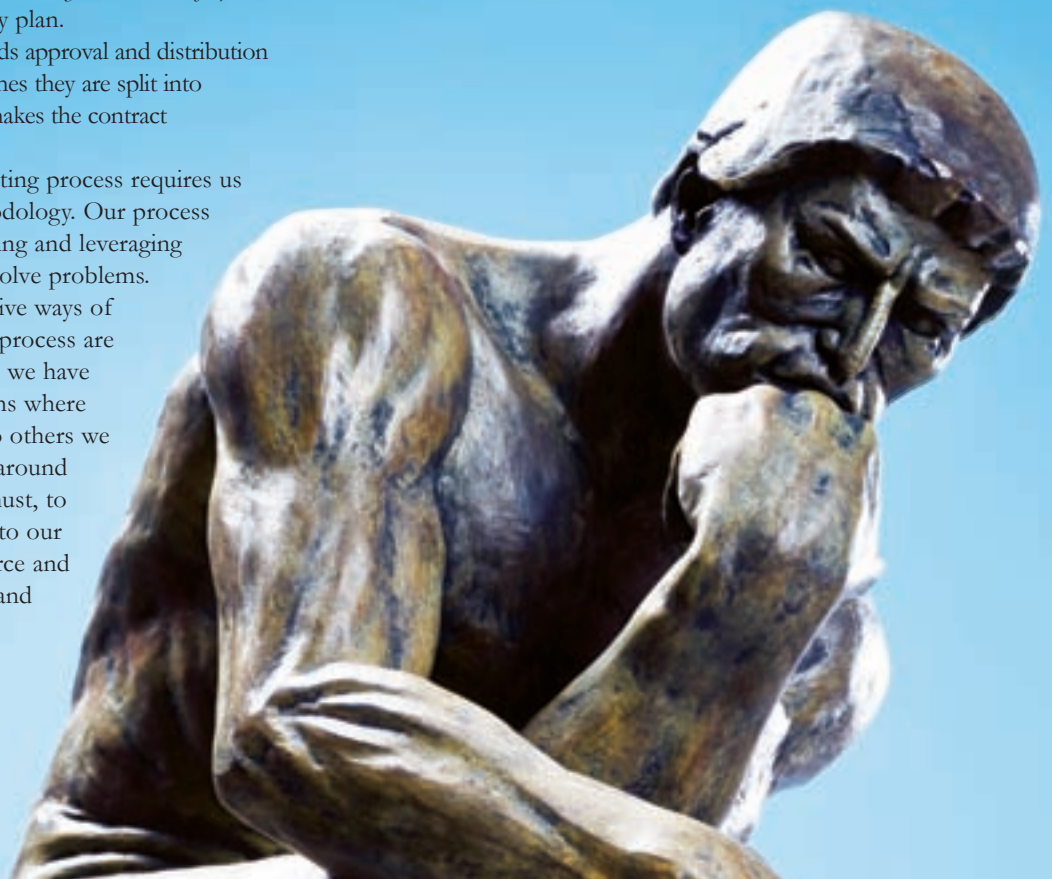
The leadership question really comes back to money. Agency leadership ensures consistent UFR approvals to keep the Knowledge Lab, with its small budget, functioning year by year. Over time, they raise the Base funding amount so that the Knowledge Lab is not so dependent on the UFR process.

We will, I am sure, prove ourselves more valuable as we overcome the last hurdle in the process model: facilitating broad adoption. Leadership support is critical to opening up doors across the agency as we look for homes for our pilot projects.

3. Acceptance

It ain't easy. Early feedback from some quarters was this:

- Too academic;
- No 'real' or clear impact;
- Too 'touchy-feely';
- No immediate impact;
- All communications, not enough analytics;
- It's a major time-hit, it's a grind;
- It's a nice-to-have, not a need-to-have.



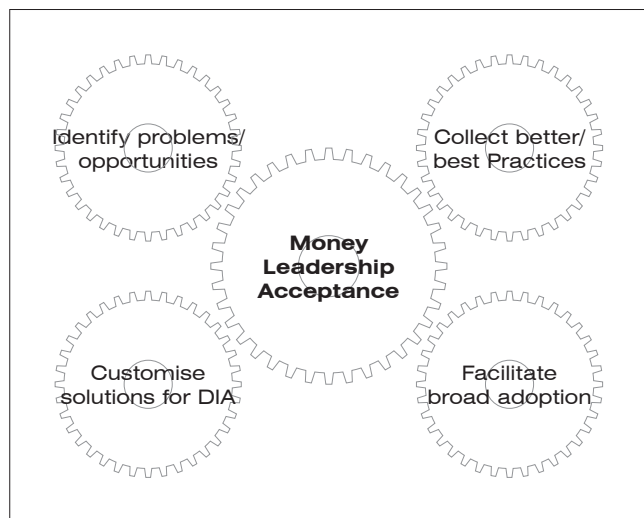


Figure 2: A realistic model of the Knowledge Lab

That was early on. The Knowledge Lab has since come a long way. By engaging leaders and employees, we have addressed problems of real importance. Knowledge Lab pilots are improving analysis, spreading the word about how to collaborate more effectively, changing policies, and helping DIA employees develop new capabilities.

A small number of directorates in the agency continue to use the Knowledge Lab to address difficult issues. Why? Because we bring new ideas, new techniques, and new ways of thinking to the fight. All true. But mainly it is because

or person with time and energy to spare. Although we have a number of unqualified successes in our roster of pilots, including critical discourse, crossing boundaries, fast learning, and full spectrum analysis, we have not yet found the right ‘home’ for any of them. At least not in the model we had imagined, in which another organisation (dubbed the ‘process owner’) would take on responsibility for delivering the service. Instead, in each of these cases, the Knowledge Lab has become the service provider.

We are glad to provide services of value to DIA, but in doing so we have been thinking we would become less exploratory by becoming more operational. We had been thinking that such a proposition was an ‘either/or’ – if we remained exploratory, we could not support organisational operations, and if we became operationally relevant, we would lose the exploratory advantage to change culture.

The way ahead

Recently, our leadership asked us to devise a strategy for embedding the role of the Knowledge Lab into the fabric of DIA so that the Lab would survive the transitions of personalities within the Knowledge Lab and at the leadership levels in the organisation. This request enabled us to increase the responsibilities and functions of the Knowledge Lab to explicitly connect the value proposition between the role of ‘performance improvement’ and successful mission execution. On the one hand, what the reframing has done is change the kind and type of internal customer requirements from one based on *ad hoc*,



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we go to them, we listen to their issues, and we propose ideas to help. Those ideas become Knowledge Lab pilots. It is a real ‘two-fer’. We get to test a new idea from outside DIA, while at the same time solving a problem and improving national security.

Reflective moment

The Knowledge Lab can only go forward. Although DIA is a knowledge organisation, we still have many opportunities to improve collaboration and knowledge integration. These problems don’t solve themselves yet. The Knowledge Lab will continue to identify problems in these areas, test new solutions, and spread the word about how DIA employees can improve the mission. We need to put these tools – these practices – in the hands of agency employees who can use them to improve their own workplaces.

‘Broad adoption’ has proven to be the hardest part of our process to realise. There is no one directorate, office,

relationship-based engagements (i.e., the traditional Knowledge Lab bottom-up approach) to one based primarily on systematic, leadership-driven (i.e., the new top-down ‘engine’ to drive organisational effectiveness) identification of mission-relevant deficiencies that need correction. On the other, the reframing has enabled us to create the organisational and data flow interfaces to transition and implement this new role.

We are very excited about this latest development. While it will take a couple of years to fully implement, we plan to see something unique and successful from which others can follow. We envision an organisation with a behavioral-based process improvement capability fully integrated into the ability to perform the mission successfully, where form follows function regardless of career field or organisational task.  Knowledge

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