Closing Address by Prof KJ Bwalya (University of Johannesburg) at the 2017 South Africa Knowledge Summit held at IDC Sandton on 31st August 2017

Preamble

Knowledge Management practitioners, researchers, educators and innovators are constantly found in environments which are ever-evolving. The changing contextual terrain of Knowledge Management entails that there is need for its players and stakeholders to be always awake, share ideas and constructively engage for the advancement of the field. The 2017 Knowledge Management Summit is a great opportunity for sharing advances in the field and coming up with a common voice for Knowledge Management practitioners and other players to engage and contribute to the current discourse on Knowledge Management, and provide a voice from the South African contextual setting on the advancement of the field.

A lot of interesting topics have been discussed in this summit. From my notes, I have five (5) key points that I'm taking home given the many presentations and engagements that have taken place at this Summit. The 5 key points are discussed here.

1. **DEFINING THE SCOPE OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**
   - Every practitioner needs to know what Knowledge Management is and what it is not.
   - Clear understanding of the business case of Knowledge Management (in your own context) – articulation of the opportunity cost to be paid if your organization does not engage in Knowledge Management.
   - Understanding the 5 main dimensions of Knowledge Management (individual; team; organizational; inter-organizational; global 'massive' Knowledge Management)
   - Knowledge as a critical asset in the organization and a key driver for efficiency, effectiveness and competitiveness
   - Knowledge as an intellectual capital of an organization and a source of sustained competitiveness
   - How to capture tacit knowledge and create value? (democratization of content)
   - Knowledge is personal and starts from an individual (as espoused in the second keynote speech).

2. **UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXTUAL TERRAIN OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA**
   - Broadly, South Africa strives towards establishing itself as a Knowledge Economy with appropriate policy and regulatory frameworks to drive this agenda
   - Many government institutions in South Africa such as the Western Cape Government, and the Eastern Cape (which is implementing Knowledge Management and e-Government within the broader 'Bathopele' project) are commited to putting in place enabling environments for Knowledge Management.
   - Specifically, the Western Cape Government is committed to Knowledge Management by:
     a) Appointment of Executive Steering Committee
     b) Appointment of a Sponsor from Executive Management
     c) Establishment of a departmental Steering Committee (Head Office and Regions)

→ These interventions further accentuate the fact that Knowledge Management needs a well-established leadership to drive the Knowledge Management agenda.

- In designing Knowledge Management projects, there is need to consider the best design principles as follows:
  a) Link Knowledge Management with organizational policies
  b) Unpack Knowledge Management to dovetail into a given context
  c) How to manage change? E.g., the ADKAR model used by the Western Cape Government
- How to position Knowledge Management systems to facilitate seamless flow of knowledge.

3. **UNDERSTANDING THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTILE OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AS A FILED OF ENQUIRY AND PRACTICE**
   - There is need to understand the relevance of Knowledge Management given the emerging 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) (machine intelligence, virtual reality, 3D Printing, big data analytics, predictive analytics, etc.)
   - 4IR – massive utilization of systems and mechanization in the management of knowledge, providing enhanced <u>access</u> to knowledge resources so that knowledge is used ubiquitously
   - 4IR entails the use of cyber-physical systems to monitor, analyze and automate businesses
   - 4IR enables the integration of data and knowledge into different business processes without the knowledge of a human being in an environment where machines and virtual systems take center stage in decision-making [Towards full business automation]
   - 4IR will enable knowledge categorization providing context to the knowledge resources. This will be done by carefully selecting meta-data and linking it to different knowledge resources (meta-data gives context to context, as espoused by Dimension Data which has designed an organizational knowledge portal which allows its knowledge resources to easily accessed)
     → One of the key questions is: How do knowledge workers and practitioners in South Africa position themselves to remain relevant given the changing business models and environments? – We need to define our space as KM practitioners.
   - Over-emphasis on technology in enabling knowledge is unbalanced approach to Knowledge Management as technology has a shorter life-cycle. There is need to focus on the <u>key</u> principles of effective Knowledge Management and from there to design operational Knowledge Management
   - By considering principles, people, technologies, strategies and processes, we can come up with standards
   - Spearheaded by the Japanese Knowledge Foundation, Japan is transcending from Industry 4.0 to Society 5.0 which will user in transition towards a smarter society. Johannesburg will be pursuing the Smart Cities projects where information and knowledge will be accessed ubiquitously.

4. **MATURITY MODELS FOR KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**
   - More efforts are being done towards 'Global Knowledge Economy and Standards' e.g. the 2017 ISO 30401 (Knowledge Management) and the 2014 ISO 5501 (Asset Management)

- Towards globally accepted definitions of Knowledge Management (scope, normative references and conditions, etc.)
- South Africa Knowledge Management practitioners are encouraged to actively participate in the standards creation.

5. CREATING KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS FOR SHARING KNOWLEDGE
- The Knowledge Management Summit intends to become an active community where engagement among members is highly encouraged. This cannot be achieved if networks are not in place
- Knowledge needs to be consistently shared and made to seamlessly permeate through organizational boundaries for it to have value
- I had expected more talk on Knowledge Management Systems and sub-systems given the emerging 4IR but I guess its business of another day.

In conclusion,

1. Knowledge Management practitioners need to re-check their organizational roles and responsibilities with a view of creating value [You may want to note that value is subjective depending on the context or organizational characteristics/aspirations];
2. Knowledge Management practitioners need to be agile and constantly re-invert themselves by diversifying their skill set to remain relevant in this highly dynamic profession;
3. Knowledge Management practitioners need to take cognizance of emerging technology capabilities (e.g. increased use of artificial intelligence applications in knowledge handling) and create ways of how to take advantage of the technology capability in the context of Knowledge Management;
4. In encouraging the management of tacit knowledge, there is need to push recognition of exceptional talent (ownership of innovation as an intellectual asset – case of Transnet);
5. There is need to work towards coming up with a global definition of what Knowledge Management is given the context of South Africa and correspondingly market it. This is important to demystify Knowledge Management;
6. Knowledge Management thrives in flexible learning organisations which are ready to change and reposition their organizational structures to accommodate new knowledge, further placing emphasis on people as a key driver for Knowledge Management; and
7. Although a lot has been done with regards to Knowledge Management in South Africa, a lot more needs to be done in order to create Knowledge Management identity. I commend the Knowledge Management Summit for arranging such a progressive congress for both practitioners and academics to engage and shape the Knowledge Management landscape in South Africa.

End