From Theory to Practice:
The Role of Prospect Research in a Knowledge Management Environment

Session Notes

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CASE Annual Conference for Senior Advancement Services Professionals
April 21, 2005
Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre
Vancouver, BC, Canada

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Prospect Research as a Distributed Practice

Prospect researchers tap a broad, strategically selected range of information sources including development officers and other members of institutional advancement; non-advancement personnel; external contacts; secondary and tertiary information sources; and the institution’s various data repositories. In a strong KM environment, no barriers exist between data and information maintained by researchers, development officers, and advancement services personnel. Advancement services activities, prospect management, and prospect research are inextricably linked.

Internal Training and Policy Adherence

As a prerequisite for institutional buy-in, Advancement personnel must be well-versed in KM-related research policies and procedures, proficient in the use of relevant tools/systems, and actively adhering to the same processes being requested of others. Leadership by example is essential.

- Research request protocols
- Location of research information (internally and externally)
- Decentralized data entry (prospect/trip notes, proposal details, etc.)
- Moves management status tracking guidelines/responsibilities
- Capacity and affinity rating guidelines/responsibilities

Knowledge Harvesting: Emphasizing the Tacit

Print and electronic information sources often paint a fragmented, and often misleading, picture of major prospects. The tacit knowledge available only from primary sources such as trustees, development officers, other internal personnel, and even external parties must also be explored. Just as for secondary and tertiary information, networks and processes can be established to ethically extract, process, document, and distribute human intelligence from multiple strategically chosen sources.

- Peer screenings (face-to-face and survey-based)
- Development strategy & PERC meetings
- Proprietary contact networks

Research Components of Global Information Flows

Research Data Integration

Ideally, prospect researchers and other research knowledge workers utilize the central database as their primary information repository and reporting tool. In short: research should flow directly to this database. This allows anyone with system access to view and retrieve all currently available information on demand, rather than forcing them to reference splintered data sources (e.g., the database and paper profiles) for a comprehensive – yet inefficiently jumbled – prospect profile.
Prospect Research Information Flow

*Structured to Promote Sharing*

**Organization-wide** research aggregation efforts should cover, at a minimum:

- Prospect/trip notes
- All known contacts (phone calls, individualized letters, mass invitations, annual fund solicitations, etc.) and associated responses
- Proposal details
- Moves management status (cultivation stage)
- Capacity and affinity ratings
- Basic demographics and giving activity
- Concise summary of current relationship/connection with the organization
- Other indicators of interest, linkage, and capacity (external philanthropic activity, known hobbies, committee appointments, etc.)

**CASS framework (Controlled Access Self-Service) for End Users**

Transparency is critical – very little (if any) research data should be hidden from those involved in cultivation and solicitation efforts. “Controlled Access” relates primarily to partially decentralized data entry, while “Self Service” implies the ability to locate and retrieve research information easily and efficiently.

- To broaden and deepen the accessible content base, business processes should force relevant information from multiple organization points through the central database.
• Fundraisers across the institution will likely require formal training to effectively query, export, and report information relevant to their respective development activities – as well as to enter constituent notes, proposal information, capacity/affinity ratings, and prospect management status codes.

Prospect Research in the Knowledge Cycle

Research information, like any other type, ultimately flows through one or more stages of the Knowledge Cycle. The traditional cycle model can be used to identify information and process gaps at each stage.

Prospect Research in the Knowledge Cycle

Representative sample of elements & activities

- Lead development (“prospecting”)
- Data mining (prospect ID)
- Prospect research
- Strategy formulation

- Cultivation / solicitation
- Enrichment of tacit/institutional knowledge
- Prospect pyramid dev.
- Adv. goal setting
- Moves management
- Research requests
- KM process gap ID

- Research/IA info
- Non-IA notes
- Internal meeting notes
- Trip notes / moves
- Documented strategies
- Mining List
- Expansion List

- Data aggregation (e.g., note consolidation)
- Synthesis (capacity, affinity, etc.)
- Push-button profiles
- Peer screening surveys

Research Information Mapping

Mapping specific research data elements against the knowledge cycle, and maintaining this map as a component of the research unit’s policies and procedures documentation, serves to help:

• Force a de facto “situation analysis” with regard to research operations;
• Inventory information sources and optimize “the mix;”
  o Identify and eliminate information gaps and redundancies
• Formalize sourcing, proofing, data entry, transformation, and distribution responsibilities; and

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- Optimize sourcing, proofing, data entry, transformation, and distribution processes;
  - Identify and eliminate critical process gaps and redundancies

The illustrative information map depicted below, though by no means comprehensive, is intended to provide a starting point for the design of institution-specific models:

## Research Info Map Model – Part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification, Acquisition, and Creation</th>
<th>Capture / Storage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data</strong></td>
<td><strong>Primary Source(s)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affinity</td>
<td>1. Cultivation Cycle Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Trip Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Personal/Prof Interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Indirect Instit. Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>1. Hard Financial Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Trip Notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Analytical Prospect Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Data</strong></th>
<th><strong>Primary Source(s)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Human Filter(s)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Data Entry/Import</strong></th>
<th><strong>Primary Storage Location</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Consolidated Prospect Info &amp; Analysis</td>
<td>2. Researchers</td>
<td>2. Research Mgr</td>
<td>2. Researchers</td>
<td>2. CDB - Relationships Section</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Data</strong></th>
<th><strong>Primary Source(s)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Human Filter(s)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Data Entry/Import</strong></th>
<th><strong>Primary Storage Location</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Proposal Info (Major Gifts &amp; Grants)</td>
<td>2. Prospect Mgr / Grants Admin</td>
<td>2. Prospect Mgr / Grants Admin</td>
<td>2. CDB - Prop Proposals Section</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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## Internally Synergistic Information Management Tools and Tactics

Knowledge management practices encourage and enable the production of value-added tools that often, in turn, further expand and improve KM efforts. Examples include:

### Multi-Level Notes

A multi-level notes system can be adopted to serve the needs of front-line development officers and researchers. Note types designated for use exclusively by researchers may be used to aggregate information from multiple sources in profile-friendly form. These can then be “flowed” to broadly accessible push-button profile reports. Other note types (capable of feeding “research notes”) might be freely employed by personnel throughout the organization, while still others might be used to house textual information downloaded from external sources such as online communities.
**Block Profile Libraries**

Another “note level,” block profiles consist of short one-paragraph constituent backgrounders used primarily for prepping development personnel to “work” event attendees. Culled and distilled from information gathered across the organization, these can be stored as restricted access notes and flowed into event attendee reports (along with other details such as giving summaries, capacity/affinity ratings, etc.). Block profiles often cue requests for more extensive research workups.

**Lead Reservoirs**

One of the few data resources maintained outside the central database, “lead reservoirs” consist of lists of suspects for which no official record has yet been created. These reservoirs, continuously updated courtesy of multiple internal and external sources, can be used to track research activities to which each lead has been exposed (PERC meetings, peer screening surveys, etc.), thereby avoiding redundant coverage.

**Mining Lists**

Aggregated research information enables the creation of multivariate queries and reports (“mining lists”) designed to filter previously unknown suspects from the central database based on factors such as job title, giving history, zip code, capacity rating, and linkage intensity (e.g., trustee relationships). These suspects can then be “quick profiled” and featured in peer screenings and development meetings, after which newly applied data markers (such as prospect manager assignments) exclude the investigated records from future mining lists.

**Prospect Activity Monitors**

Centralizing information enables the implementation of numerous reporting and notification practices designed to keep development personnel abreast of activities impacting their assigned prospects.

“Prospect activity monitors” detail the range of notes, interactions, proposals, gifts, and other information added to selected constituents’ accounts during a specified time period. These reports can be used to trigger profiles, provide meeting content, facilitate note auditing/sanitization, and serve as “safety nets” for prospect clearance.

**Balancing “Push” and “Pull” Communication Tactics**

In today’s time-strained work environments, development staff cannot be expected to proactively retrieve and regularly monitor information that changes only sporadically and/or in unknown locations. It is necessary that such information be “pushed” (i.e., delivered) rather than “pulled” by the user. Likewise, successful distribution systems often require users to “pull” information in which they hold a strong interest. This forces system interaction and, if managed properly, raises the user’s comfort level with information retrieval and management processes. Examples:

- Profiles for newly researched individuals may be distributed broadly (“pushed”) across the development operation.
- Unscheduled information updates may appear in regularly distributed (“pushed”) prospect activity monitors, as described earlier.

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As part of a prospect clearance program, for external approval purposes, decentralized units may be required to “pull” lists of their prospects appearing on event invitation lists.

**Prospect Research Units as “Learning Organizations”**

Competencies in knowledge management often spark fundamental changes in how organizations operate and evolve from a learning standpoint. “Learning organizations” are skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge; continually extracting knowledge from collective experience; and leveraging this knowledge for positive organizational change. These organizations are characterized by personnel with a collective commitment to 1) regularly evaluating common goals and objectives, and 2) continuously developing more effective and efficient ways of meeting them. They are, consequently, dedicated to systematic, collaborative problem-solving and continual process improvement. Prospect research units can begin adopting the characteristics of successful learning organizations by:

- Cultivating internal “communities of practice” by encouraging researchers to continually share evolving professional expertise, best practices, and newly discovered information sources – either electronically or, preferably, face-to-face. These communities should, in turn, be linked to external communities via professional associations (e.g., APRA), listservs, etc.
- Grounding best practices management in comprehensive, continually updated, effectively communicated, and appropriately distributed policies and procedures documentation.
- Providing basic research training for all interested development personnel. This not only helps relieve researchers of non-critical early-stage qualification burdens, but also provides a forum and context for promoting knowledge harvesting techniques (e.g., elicitation) particularly suited to fundraisers’ face-to-face prospect interactions.
- Collaboratively developing and clearly communicating common research goals and objectives (which should ultimately be tied to those of the organization, as demonstrated in the next section).

**Aligning Research and Organizational Goals**

Defending the legitimacy of research efforts in a KM environment requires a constant focus on “the big picture” – namely, adding tangible business value and aligning with critical organizational goals. Research objectives and goals should be explicitly tied to those of the organization, preferably in the clear and concise context of a planning grid such as the one shown below. (An actual working grid would consist of a much larger goal/objective set; this scaled-down example is provided for illustrative purposes only.)
### Aligning Research and Organizational Goals

*Note: many-to-many relationship between objectives & goals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Objective</th>
<th>Research Goal</th>
<th>Organization Objective</th>
<th>Organization Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implement direct-to-database policy for archiving and tracking prospect research information</td>
<td>Enable broad access to prospect information to maximize potency of development efforts</td>
<td>Increase scholarship funding by an average of 8% annually</td>
<td>Make College affordable for students at all income levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement quarterly survey-based peer screening program for trustees</td>
<td>Optimize ability to identify prospects for major event sponsorships</td>
<td>Launch an annual signature fund raising event fully sponsored by high-level constituents</td>
<td>Build a reputation for excellence and innovation in arts and media education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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