

Knowledge architecture

How a new, contemporary way of understanding customers' and users' real-time built space needs can help property providers in knowing how to develop superior products and experiences and to capture greater, lasting value by meeting better their targets' unique and evolving accommodation requirements

Our attention was alerted when in our own research on workplace strategy, the senior researcher of a top, ASX-listed Sydney CBD office owner told us how little it knew of how its tenants used their spaces.

How many other providers unwittingly sacrifice customer knowledge, when the minds that regularly occupy any built environment can tell you better than anyone precisely what they need, and how it could, or should, be modified to provide a better fit for their needs?

Those minds represent that space's "knowledge community."

A knowledge community comprises a unit with a shared and often committed interest in improving the nature of both the facilities it occupies and, possibly in combination, the related services it receives or is offered.

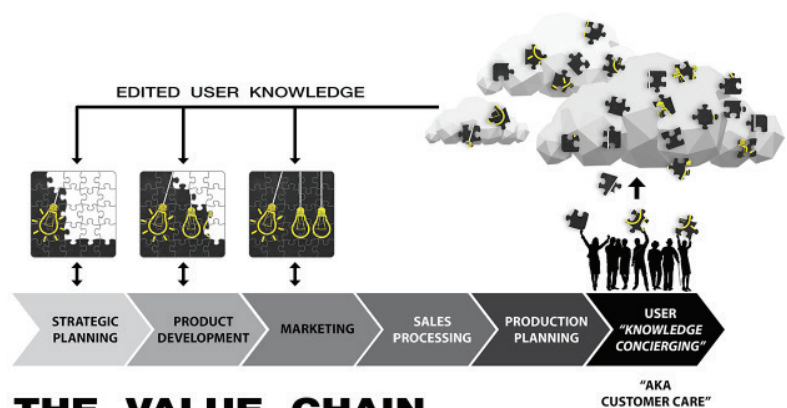
As a group, it cannot avoid developing deep knowledge, strong opinions and expectations about the spaces it occupies. And it can tell you exactly what needs to be overhauled and where attention would be best spent.

And, as in any community, there is more intelligence, knowledge, opinion and potential feedback than ever currently gets put to use in discovering the optimum balance of value for users and providers.

Yet, in the knowledge age, we are best served in all dimensions of our society when we seek out, capture and put to work the best knowledge we have available to us.

And in transforming knowledge into learning, we now have, in technologies such as wikis, the best tools ever invented for capturing and distilling into sense a range of diverse views and opinions.

It is inevitable that the capacity of the internet to enable fine-grained social feedback will be put to use in improving property solutions for users, as consensual digitised collaboration between long-term suppliers and customers will transform many industries, facilitating, in each, consistent learning and responsiveness to change.



THE VALUE CHAIN

This is why, through our unique combination of skills and experience, and working closely with, and guided by, clients, we are introducing our ability to meet their decision-making needs for powerful real-time qualitative data about their customers and users, whatever the knowledge community being served.

Property's future will be built inside the minds of customers

Understanding customers better to get closer to them simply makes good business sense. Knowledge architecture meets this need by enabling property providers to climb inside the minds of their knowledge communities to develop the most appropriate and best-fitting combinations of products and services.

Knowledge architecture constructs an in-situ digitised, collaborative, social online space through which users' and their communities' needs can be explored, understood and the future of the property relationship be designed according to explicit, identified demand.

The diagram above is adapted from a pretty much standard industry map of value inputs and outputs. However, showing commitment to the occupancy relationship by demonstrating an intention to uphold product and service quality – however the customer perceives it – is QA, and makes simply for smarter marketing.

To those who move deliberately, it will also create the possibility of being first to deliver wholly new and novel bundles of products and services.

Because they can reach out to ask users real-time questions, it will enable providers to control the dialogue that creates the new learning and outcomes on which they will wish to build.

The knowledge architecture perspective

From the knowledge architecture point of view, a property is an opportunity to learn more about a building's uses and users to develop new knowledge of how to satisfy that target audience's need, and therefore how to attract others like it.

Advantage will be created by understanding how to build knowledgeable, knowledge-creating relationships with entire communities.

The learning knowledge architecture can deliver will inevitably be exercised in developing future strata and build-to-rent properties, each of which represents a discrete knowledge community that is representative of a greater whole.

A knowledge community may comprise the individual users of a single office unit, or those across a whole city-centre office building, a retirement village or community development.

A city block packed with knowledge workers naturally represents an extremely rich and diverse knowledge community.

But just as deserving of attention for some would be the knowledge represented by, for example, a new village development packed with internet-literate retirees, a community comprising young households, a student campus facility or a school.

In the knowledge age, each has diverse, intelligent, communicative, socially literate and vocal customers seeking their own form of satisfaction.

Simply dropping in technology and hoping residents will use it is, however, unlikely to work when what matters most is the ability to foster enduring, trusting, collaborative, knowledge-building relationships built on repeated human learning and *curious* enquiry among residents and their communities.

Paying customers expect respect and intelligent responsiveness to their needs, making this, as a rolling, continuous service, less like survey research than it is attentive, constant, if remote, virtual concierging.

Managed well, nothing can compare currently with the qualitative data it can deliver.

And clearly, against this emerging backdrop, those who seek to work with the knowledge of a community to achieve a better understanding of its needs in pursuit of superior customer relationships are likely to prosper most from their learning.

Building new knowledge creates new capabilities and reduces risk

The learning knowledge architecture will deliver will trigger rapid improvements in supplier insight, and the ability for the party engaged to test new ideas, and to drive and respond more rapidly to changes in its market.

Gaining access to user knowledge and knowing how to use it will transform not only the new combinations of products and services the property provider can introduce, but also forever the way it works as a result of the new learning and advanced capabilities it develops.

Likewise, whatever the space or scale of the project, through acting on superior source material, knowledge architecture can minimise risk for those who wish no longer to implement a design based on random luck, guesswork, or impetuous designer taste and instinct.

Knowledge architecture introduces an information-driven methodology whose findings can be thoroughly iterated, documented and tested long before going on site.

Using our own growing knowledge, we can, of course, show you how to test and experiment with your designs.

A future built on collaborative internet social literacy

The fuel for knowledge architecture lies in knowing how in a socially internet-literate world to capture and make what is known by customers work to their own benefit.

Clearly, pervasive internet literacy and use will not go into decline anytime soon, and our model is based on a methodology we call "narrative learning." (See next page.)

We seek relationships with those who aim to learn to build the future

Ours is a practice built on award-winning architectural design skill, and now we are looking to cultivate partnerships with builders, owners, developers and investors keen to embrace the coming age of knowledge-driven architecture and the new future-shaping understandings and services it can deliver.

We believe knowledge architecture has a big future because, at minimum, it simply adapts long-standing qualitative market research practices found in other industries to the emerging needs and idiosyncrasies of property.

It also offers the most direct, economic and least risky route to sustained feedback, focused customer and user-community happiness.

Those who can learn to use it well are likely also to benefit from the distinctive branding and reputational differentiation and business growth being seen to engage thoughtfully and appropriately with long-term customers can bring.

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Narrative learning for knowledge architecture: my credentials

Narrative learning combines the use of collaborative social internet technologies with the professional media's long-proven publishing practices to capture and enable learning by sharing and making sense of what is known by any disparate group of individuals.

It works in much the same way as media does, exploring, picking up, transforming, polishing and presenting previously unexplored community knowledge in a consistent, comprehensible cycle of assumption-checking, "double-loop" learning. (Double-loop learning entails the modification of goals or decision-making rules in the light of experience.)

In applying this, my professional skills are almost certainly scarce, and, as being, to the best of my knowledge, the instigator of narrative learning, I believe myself possibly uniquely qualified and experienced at present to take on this work.

For one, I am a national newspaper-grade sub-editor and former employee at the Australian Financial Review newspaper group at Fairfax Media in Sydney. That is, in my professional publishing role, in writing, I am a paid sense-maker.

I am also a qualified former UK marketing manager, with research experience.

Perhaps more pertinently, I have an MBA (Technology) from the University of New South Wales in Sydney, whose forward-looking focus is on creating the organisations of the future, through the management of organisational strategy, knowledge, innovation, new product development, sustainability, people, culture and change, as driven by technology.

I also have first-hand experience of the collaborative workplace publishing practices of which I write. In 2013, I worked on documentation for a major software development at the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, using collaborative workplace social technologies, from which much of my hands-on learning has come.

Please read the related LinkedIn post, based on that experience, *Some rules for effective workplace wiki publishing* (<http://bit.ly/1T7A54P>).

Narrative learning itself can be deeply strategic, as it is concerned with preparing an organisation and its intellectual resources for its future, and its own adaptability to change in the face of its competitive needs for perpetual digital transformation and evolution.

I first got excited about the scope for collaborative innovation and learning in 2006 on reading the work of then Harvard Business School professor Andrew McAfee on the potential of "Enterprise 2.0." McAfee's insight was that the traditional barriers to innovation result when people with ideas are hindered by distance or hierarchy, or simply by not

knowing who is whom, who is qualified, interested or accomplished in what, or even that each other exists.

Yet through blogs and wikis, McAfee and his supporters proposed, an organisation could open up and enable those within to identify and reach each other and thereby capitalise on the specialised sum of personal knowledge of those within the firm, wherever it could be found. And they could be effective in capturing precisely the emergent organisational learning that results from change.

Through that reading, my skills and subsequent study, I discovered a passion for documenting and transforming knowledge to drive organisational learning, using the best tools ever invented for the purpose.

Through my work as a director of Shiro Architects, I also acquired an innate interest in how the "knowledge architecture" of faster learning organisations will inevitably transform their workplace strategies, behaviours and knowledge communities.

On the back of researching and publishing a piece entitled, *The evolution of workplace strategy into a discipline of FM* (<http://bit.ly/2n8fR39>), for Australia's *Facility Management* magazine, I was invited to chair an expert panel session addressing the evolving workplace at the Total Facilities Conference at Darling Harbour, Sydney, in March 2017 (<http://bit.ly/2tD7ps7>).

As knowledge productivity will likely come to feature more prominently as a concern in office environments, better, more scientific processes will emerge for evolving their design in alignment with the knowledge and needs of tenants and their teams.

As the workplace becomes increasingly virtual and remote, workplace configuration itself must necessarily centre on the evolving design of the work the organisation must execute, the knowledge it must articulate and capture, and the tools it uses to continue to do so.

This means, as its impacts will inevitably be felt in both physical and virtual dimensions, however the organisation of commercial community is exercised, organisational learning, development and transformation will likely become every bit as important in the businesses owning and operating commercial property as in all others occupying it.

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