This issue draws from our May 2000 Conference on Knowledge Management. The first article explores knowledge binding, the process by which knowledge is created and applied. The second describes how one leading company is dealing with the challenge of sharing its knowledge base across its organization.

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Lucent's Leading Strategy: Know What You Know
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Lucent Technologies represents a vast repository of knowledge that receives an average of more than four new patents every business day and has produced 11 Nobel laureates. This makes Lucent unlike any institution in the world.

Lucent's roots lie at the very beginning of telecommunications technology in the 19th century and have grown to produce the most advanced telephone equipment for the global marketplace. Bell Laboratories, whose innovative research scientists gave us the transistor, the laser and the communications satellite, continues to evolve. Lucent's goal is to bring about the next generation of networking communications.

With such a vast embedded knowledge base, the challenge for Lucent since its spin-off from AT&T in 1996 has been to utilize that knowledge base to the fullest. Like many highly successful corporations that are reaching out to global markets and seeking to meet customers' ever-changing needs, Lucent's leadership knows all too well it cannot waste resources and remain competitive.

Know What You Know (continued from page 1.)

In four years, Lucent has moved swiftly to adopt a strategy that builds on its hallmark strengths of quality and expertise, while emphasizing technologies that are fast defining the future of communications. It's a strategy that demands efficient and innovative approaches, both externally and internally, and the discipline of knowledge management, quite naturally, is now playing a key role.

Knowledge sharing, as many large, diverse companies now realize, is essential for growth and continued momentum. It's not enough to have talented, hard-working employees and a cache of learning if there's no easy way for that collective knowledge to be easily shared and used enterprise-wide. You need to "know what you know."

Discarding the "Silo"

It's a fact that unmanaged knowledge costs companies huge amounts of money. Companies are challenged with a more transient workforce today. As employees often leave for new jobs, knowledge may leave with them. Another challenge is the traditional "silo of knowledge" business design that makes it difficult for knowledge to flow across organizations. As a result, companies waste time and resources. They're often forced to continually develop solutions, and are slower to make decisions.

With its overflowing reservoir of intellectual capital and collective experience, Lucent's leadership took an opportunity to incorporate knowledge management into its long-range plan. In 1998, an initiative began with the mission of instituting knowledge sharing across the entire business.

The effort, seeded in Lucent's CIO (Chief Information Officer) organization, quickly grew as needs were identified. Early work involved creating value for knowledge sharing and designing a "connection point" for the company. A relationship manager was recruited to focus on the issue of cultural transformation. A new team was commissioned - the KU team –to support Knowledge Management discipline within the company by providing a wide range of associated knowledge-sharing products and services.

A main areas of development targeted by the team is the creation of Knowledge Communities of interest and practice. These new work environments are being established so that an enterprise-wide knowledge sharing can be realized. Thus, the new team spent time identifying groups working on knowledge initiatives and creating a way for them to connect with others. Once relationships began forming, a research/process manager joined the

team to structure ways to handle enterprise knowledge. A web manager joined the team to look within the company and externally, to capture and share best practices available in the associated disciplines of knowledge management. Creating roadways for knowledge is a critical part of the enterprise landscape, because information often has a short "shelf life". The use of technology, a key to embedding knowledge-sharing in the corporate culture, sparked a lively debate and resulted in the addition of a technical integration specialist to the team. This team member examined the diverse systems and created an integrated solution. Finally, two multimedia specialists were added to create engaging delivery vehicles.

Growing a Neighborhood

The team focused immediately on the value of using Lucent's Intranet as a knowledge rallying point. A site called the KU Web Tool was created, and word spread that this was a place where groups could easily and inexpensively collaborate on projects across multiple time zones and organizations. These virtual teams, known as Knowledge Neighborhoods, are supported by the KU team but entirely self-managed by the various groups. They quickly caught on – some 150 currently reside on the site and more are being added all the time.

The first neighborhood design was fairly simple, offering four basic tools: a directory, discussion board, chat room and document repository. Recently, a new model took its place, providing a higher level of security and other features that give organizations more control over knowledge sharing based on their specific requirements. It's been a hit.

Moving between the virtual world and the real world, the KU team also explored designing an event that would give KM even greater visibility and promote connectivity among early adopters. The team first tested the waters by sending out a call for papers, and the response was overwhelming. The resulting 2 ½-day conference attracted diverse speakers from Lucent and other forward thinking enterprises. The conference enabled associates to discover others within Lucent who shared similar needs and interests.

The informal setting spawned some great successes. Some groups found they were working on similar projects and decided to form coalitions. Others found ways to save the company money by effectively reusing knowledge. More than that, attendees founded a knowledge-sharing network that would be used to

Know What Your Know
(continued)

distribute findings broadly.

The KU team also began looking at tools that would make it easier to establish knowledge-sharing behaviors. The first, "After Action Review," was modeled after a tool used by the U.S. Army to capture lessons learned. To get the widest audience of users, the KU team designed and deployed a web-based course and template that guides associates through the process online. The tool has been well received, as has another one called "Find an Expert." This tool, based on a search engine called LUCID used for years by the R&D community, comprises personal profiles of people across Lucent who have agreed to share business knowledge with others in the organization.

The small group at the core of Lucent's knowledge-sharing initiative has had significant impact thanks to a cadre of trained volunteers called Knowledge Ambassadors. The KAs use seminars, expert forums and other activities to educate and encourage their peers about knowledge sharing. The program has been very successful in promoting the greater use of Knowledge Neighborhoods.

Now in its third year, the Knowledge Sharing initiative at Lucent could hardly be called mature, but it has come quite a long way. In the foundation-building first year, it focused on cascading the concept of knowledge sharing throughout the organization. In the second year, it started making the connection between increased knowledge sharing and business performance. Now, with the framework in place and considerable buy-in across the enterprise, talk is turning to the creation of a new model of knowledge sharing. As Lucent charges into the emerging "e-economy," knowledge sharing or, "knowing what we know" will be an important piece of Lucent's strategy for success. Expect great things!

Stephen Stokes leads a Lucent organization called the KU. He and a team of professionals support the Knowledge Management discipline within the company by providing a wide range of associated knowledge sharing products and services.

Stephen has 25 years of service with the Lucent family. He has a diverse business background ranging from manufacturing to many corporate initiatives. He holds a BA in Psychology from the University of Arkansas and has completed work towards an MBA/JD. He supports the KU organization in Georgia, North Carolina and New Jersey.