

APQC MEMBERSHIP CASE STUDY

Flying High: How One Aerospace Company Tapped the Power of APQC Knowledge Management Research

BOMBARDIER
the evolution of mobility

COMPANY STATISTICS

- ◆ Industry: Aerospace and Transportation
- ◆ APQC Member Since: 2012
- ◆ Total Employees: 70,100
- ◆ Aerospace Segment Total Employees: 31,200
- ◆ Headquarters: Montreal, Canada

APQC is the most comprehensive source of best practices and research to develop tools and methodologies that improve the productivity and quality of an organization."

*-- Nathalie de Preux, Knowledge Management Advisor,
Product Development Engineering, Bombardier*

As Bombardier began to deploy its knowledge management (KM) practice in 2012, APQC membership quickly became an invaluable resource for best practices, ideas, and methodologies.

"APQC was mentioned by some colleagues and in university textbooks as a good source of information, so I initially subscribed for one year," says Marco Beaulieu, head of knowledge management, Bombardier Academy. The subscription proved so valuable, Bombardier now has an ongoing APQC membership accessible by anyone in the company.

"Our APQC membership was very useful to us at the early stages of our KM practice, and it's still useful now," Beaulieu says. "There is lots of good reading and presentations that are accurate, up-to-date, and address current trends in KM. There are studies, outcomes, benchmarking, and cases from other companies that help us compare and see if we are on the right track."

WORKING SMARTER, FASTER, AND WITH GREATER CONFIDENCE

The Bombardier aerospace segment's engineering department is divided into 28 KM networks: communities of practice that bring together the most knowledgeable people in each domain to capture, transfer, and preserve knowledge. The networks initially grew organically through in-person interaction, but now – thanks to the work of the KM team – they have a SharePoint portal where they can collaborate online and access a growing knowledge base.

Knowledge Management Advisor Nathalie de Preux and her four-member Knowledge Management Practice team support KM for the Product Development Engineering team, helping to capture and disseminate the knowledge that has made the company a global leader in aircraft manufacturing.

While developing the SharePoint resource and other KM initiatives, de Preux has frequently mined the APQC [Knowledge Base](#) for best practices, benchmarking findings, and case studies to inform her team's work.

"We have looked at all of APQC's KM case studies, and they have been gold for us," she says. "We see how other companies apply KM concepts, metrics, and initiatives, and that has given us a basis for our own KM initiatives and a baseline from which we can start measuring."

Instant access to proven best practices and tools has saved valuable time, she notes.

"Otherwise, I would have had to search for all the information on the web myself to try to learn how others did their framework," she says. "I might have found some information, but that takes time and may not be vetted. APQC's Knowledge Base summarizes it all for us in one place, and I can find exactly the parts that are relevant to us. We get targeted information that is exactly what we need because it's specific to our KM practice."

Because APQC data is backed by solid benchmarking and research, de Preux trusts its quality and accuracy more than other sources she might encounter with a web search.

"The APQC Knowledge Base gives me access to verified information," she says. "We know that what we are reading there has been benchmarked, checked, and revised. It's a very trustworthy source of high-level information."

PROJECT APPLICATIONS

In addition to the SharePoint project, the KM team has applied information gleaned from APQC resources in many other areas.

For example, while researching metrics to measure the value of KM, de Preux found APQC articles about developing KM metrics models. These convinced her and her team of the need to establish a baseline for the KM practice before developing key performance indicators (KPIs). This prompted the team to evaluate their existing KM measurement system, establishing a baseline against which to gauge improvement.

Additionally, the KM team has adapted [APQC's Levels of Knowledge Management MaturitySM](#) model to measure the progress of the company's knowledge networks.

The five levels of maturity have helped provide a foundation for the Bombardier aerospace's overall KM practice, Beaulieu notes. "The maturity model was especially helpful in generating the real-world, step-by-step methodologies we needed," he says. "We read a lot and adapted certain methodologies for our own environment within the engineering group."

"This model really helped us look at the stages of how you go from establishing communities to sharing knowledge and innovating," de Preux adds. "We were looking at the maturity levels and seeing how we can develop activities to help reach those higher levels."

The KM team has also used [APQC's Knowledge Management Framework](#) as a starting point for its own custom framework, saving time developing an optimal KM strategy while accessing pre-populated links to content, best practices, tools, and templates in APQC's Knowledge Base.

THE CULTURE SHIFT

APQC KM resources have helped the KM team create the culture change needed to ensure the knowledge transfer is sustainable.

"To install this culture change requires gathering some solid arguments to make people aware of what KM is, and what the value is for each one of them, as well as for the organization as a whole," de Preux says. "APQC articles are an invaluable source for me to gather valuable arguments to make these presentations and create awareness among my colleagues."

Some of the resources Beaulieu and de Preux have found particularly valuable include APQC's KM Framework, [Improving the Flow of Knowledge in Product Development](#), and [Connecting People to Content](#), to name just a few. "I also like the benchmarking articles where we see how other industries apply KM concepts and initiatives," de Preux notes.

Beaulieu, De Preux and the KM team soak up additional knowledge through [APQC webinars](#), which they watch as a team about once a month over lunch.

"For example, the webinar on [accelerators of KM maturity](#) touched on all the problems we have, so that was an excellent resource for us," she notes. "It's excellent to hear other KM practitioners share their experiences."

Years after first joining APQC, Beaulieu still accesses APQC resources at least two or three times a week as he conducts research to support Bombardier's KM practice. "Part of our role and responsibility is to keep the KM practice up-to-date by developing new tools and methodologies," he says. "I sometimes read the same document three times, coming back to it as our project evolves over time. As we reach new stages, I can see how other companies compare to us. Sometimes I'll find a specific chapter that talks to us as we reach new challenges, and it's great."

As "KM evangelists," Beaulieu and de Preux value the ability to tap directly into the KM knowledge and experiences from within a wide variety of organizations as well as from APQC's own KM experts and advisors. Beaulieu encourages others within the organization to access Bombardier's APQC membership by sharing relevant material as he encounters it and promoting APQC resources within the organization's quarterly newsletter.

"Being a member of APQC gives you access to the latest thinking in our domain from different angles and industries," de Preux says. "It also gives you the possibility of comparing what you are doing with your peers and companies in similar industries. It is the best source to build your 'KM evangelist' toolset."

ABOUT APQC

APQC helps organizations work smarter, faster, and with greater confidence. It is the world's foremost authority in benchmarking, best practices, process and performance improvement, and knowledge management. APQC's unique structure as a member-based nonprofit makes it a differentiator in the marketplace. APQC partners with more than 500 member organizations worldwide in all industries. With more than 40 years of experience, APQC remains the world's leader in transforming organizations. Visit us at www.apqc.org, and learn how you can make best practices your practices.