



**European Bank**  
for Reconstruction and Development

**SPECIAL STUDY: SUMMARY REPORT**

# **LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AT THE EBRD**

**OCTOBER 2021**

**EBRD Evaluation Department | Corporate | EvD ID: SS20-161**



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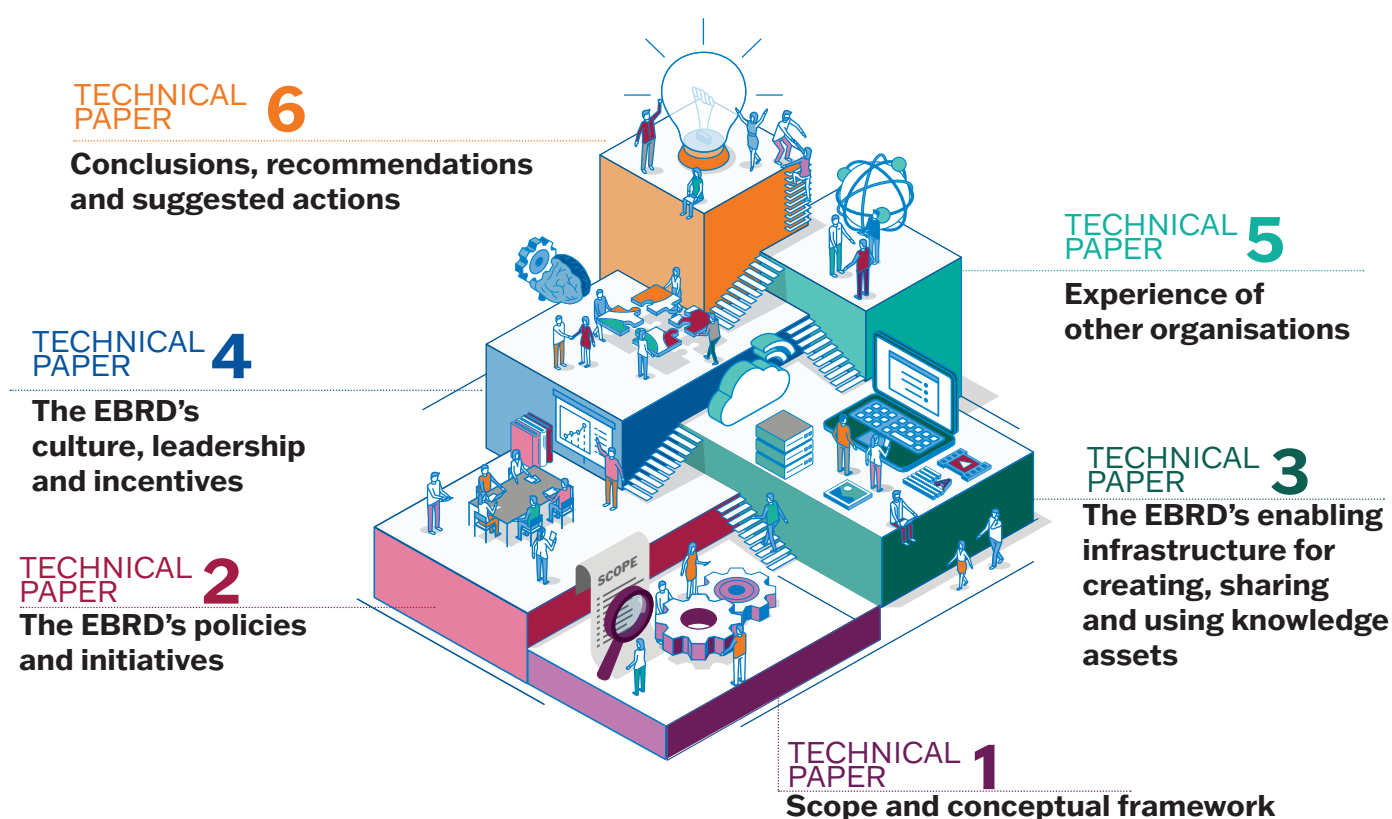
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This is the Summary Report for the suite of papers and annexes which together comprise the EvD Special Study on Learning and Knowledge Management at the EBRD. The structure of the full study is shown below:



# CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION
2	SCOPE
4	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
7	FINDINGS ON KEY BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE LKM SYSTEM AT THE EBRD
16	ANSWERS TO EVALUATION QUESTIONS
22	ISSUES REQUIRING ATTENTION AND ACTION
23	RECOMMENDATIONS
24	ANNEX – EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW

# INTRODUCTION

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Learning and Knowledge Management (LKM) at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is a thematic evaluation included in the Evaluation department's (EvD's) 2020 work programme following a recommendation of the 2019 independent external evaluation of the EBRD's evaluation system (the Kirk Report).<sup>1</sup> Although this study stems from a recommendation directed at learning from evaluation, it takes a broader perspective on the way the EBRD learns as an organisation and what place knowledge has among its operational assets.

**Knowledge is the new currency.** Many industries, particularly consulting and financial services, have been applying this concept for years. However, for it to be widely accepted and harnessed in the most productive ways, including in organisations like the EBRD, the understanding what it means has to be formed, nurtured and owned by the majority of staff. This report aims to contribute to an enhanced understanding of the significance of knowledge and organisational learning for improved corporate performance and innovations in delivering the EBRD's mandate – supporting countries in their transition to open market-oriented economies and promoting private and entrepreneurial initiative.

**Continuous improvement and innovation are key for successful organisations, particularly those working in the challenging area of supporting global development and transition to competitive, sustainable and inclusive economies and societies.** Innovations are essential for the organisation or company that strives to grow dynamically and offer continuously greater value for its clients, shareholders and stakeholders. Innovation is possible either through acquiring external knowledge (exploration), or through mobilisation of internal knowledge assets and continuous improvements driven by internal demands (exploitation). Innovation is made possible by nurturing an organisational culture that values new ideas and creative thinking and proposes incentives for bottom-up creativity.

**The EBRD's five-year strategy – Strategic and Corporate Framework (SCF) 2021-2025 – made an explicit commitment to strengthen the Bank's learning and evaluation culture** by committing to establish an effective system for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) as one of its priorities.<sup>2</sup> The evaluation team reviewed the assumptions about LKM made in the SCF and subsequent Strategy Implementation Plan (SIP) 2021-23 to help the Bank deliver on the commitments made.

**Establishing the value proposition for LKM relative to the Bank's strategic objectives and transition mandate is fundamental for promoting innovation within the organisation.** The EBRD was set up in the belief that its existence would be relatively short, therefore little need was seen for the capture of knowledge from experience and learning. There is now a growing recognition that to maximise the Bank's contribution to building competitive, sustainable, inclusive, and well-governed economies, the Bank needs to be innovative and bring integral solutions to its clients that include a knowledge component. To do so, it must embrace new ways of doing business, including through mobilisation of its talent and skills base, digitalisation, use of new technologies such as machine learning or cognitive search, and learning from its own experience and that of others to understand what works, what doesn't and why. Innovation is essential to the EBRD's competitive edge and for maximising its impact in its countries of operation. Therefore, **LKM should not be seen as an add-on to the Bank's operations and procedures, and even less as a cost – it should be an integral element of core strategies, processes and investments.**

**The purpose of this evaluation** is to demonstrate how the EBRD learns as an organisation and how it mobilises its knowledge assets for delivering high-impact operations across a wide range of sectors, geographies and development contexts. **Its specific objective** is to suggest a range of potential actions to improve existing policies and practices. The evaluation focus is on internal structures and culture, which unlock available knowledge and expertise to ensure its availability and accessibility for decision makers at all levels, importantly including operational staff.

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1. Kirk, C. 2019. *Independent external evaluation of EBRD's evaluation system*.

[www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/evaluation-full-report.pdf](http://www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/evaluation-full-report.pdf).

2. EBRD Strategy and Capital Framework (SCF) 2021-2025.

[www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/strategies-and-policies/strategic-and-capital-framework-2021-2025.pdf](http://www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/strategies-and-policies/strategic-and-capital-framework-2021-2025.pdf).

# SCOPE

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**The scope of the evaluation covers organisational learning (which includes experiential learning) and the knowledge management (KM) processes that contribute to it.** Both explicit and tacit knowledge are considered. Learning from evaluation is an element of the enquiry, and a separate discussion paper covers the LKM processes and practices inside EvD. The evaluation does not look into the EBRD's role as a source of knowledge for clients or external stakeholders – a separate paper on this topic may be prepared at a later date. This is the first EvD evaluation to offer a comprehensive analysis of key building blocks enabling the EBRD to be a knowledge and learning organisation.

While it is important to specify what is included in the evaluation, it is equally important to identify what is not. First, the evaluation scope does not include formal learning by individuals, typically through short courses run by the Bank (the exception being the Policy Academy). Second, the evaluation does not investigate the quality and performance of IT infrastructure, although it does acknowledge it as part of the enabling environment for effective KM and organisational learning. The evaluation team incorporated the relevant evidence emerging from the ongoing reform of project self-evaluation led by the Self-evaluation and Results Management Working Group, however it was not the subject of this evaluation.

This report does not under-estimate the importance of IT (including in collecting reliable and relevant data and in using cognitive search and machine learning to facilitate knowledge access and use), and the role of self-evaluation in ensuring an effective learning process. It also acknowledges that the end objective is for the EBRD to be able to deliver knowledge assets and solutions for external stakeholders. The intention of EvD is to cover these topics in future evaluations.

**This is a summary report presenting core findings, issues, conclusions and recommendations.** It does not contain detailed evidence and analysis – those are provided in six separately attached and referenced technical papers (TPs):

- (TP1) the approach, historical context and a conceptual framework for evaluating LKM;
- (TP2) an overview of the LKM ecosystem in the EBRD, comprising the policies, processes and initiatives aimed at managing its knowledge assets and learning;
- (TP3) the underlying IT infrastructure and communications for enabling efficient creation, sharing, management, brokering, and use of the Bank's knowledge assets;
- (TP4) the EBRD's culture, leadership and incentives for LKM;
- (TP5) insights into LKM approaches and experiences of selected international financial institutions (IFIs), philanthropic organisations and private companies;
- (TP6) overall conclusions, recommendations, and suggested potential actions.

**The scope of the evaluation covers  
organisational learning and  
the knowledge management processes.**

**The report and underlying technical papers answer the following evaluation questions:**

1. What do the EBRD's actions, policies, and strategies (and the evolution of these) tell us about its objectives regarding LKM?
2. What evidence exists regarding the nature, extent, and value-addition of LKM practices in the EBRD, and what perceptions exist internally about the actual and potential role of LKM?
3. Are there problems or missed opportunities for value-addition in the EBRD's approach to LKM, and if so, what are their proximate and underlying causes?
4. What future actions are available to enhance and create further value from LKM and would they represent value-for-money?
5. How does the EBRD's approach to LKM compare with that of others financing development and in the corporate world?

**The evaluation team applied the iterative learning approach** as the EBRD has very few LKM accountability frameworks (policies, strategies, frameworks, or action plans) upon which to base an evaluation. At its start there were uncertainties regarding the definition of a problem or problems and these uncertainties remain.

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extent, and value-addition of LKM practices in  
the EBRD, and what perceptions exist internally  
about the actual and potential role of LKM?

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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In the absence of an EBRD LKM strategy, **the evaluation team developed a conceptual framework** capturing what research has shown to be the necessary components required for organisations to learn and for knowledge to be managed effectively and efficiently to feed into the learning process. Its details are provided in TP 1.

The framework consists of two distinctive elements. **Figure 1 illustrates the status of knowledge in an organisation** and how it affects its nature – whether it can be characterised as a knowledge organisation, learning organisation, or innovative organisation. There is no good or bad model in this range – the ideal option is shaped by the organisation’s mission, vision, sector(s) of operation, and size. Also, these models are not mutually exclusive – it is plausible that an organisation can have some elements from two or even three types. According to the conceptual framework, the status of knowledge can be defined by five building blocks: (1) culture and incentives; (2) leadership; (3) human and other resources; (4) policies and processes; (5) IT and other supportive infrastructure.

**This evaluation suggests that the EBRD is at an early stage of being a knowledge organisation – it is “a prototype knowledge bank”.**

**Figure 2 shows a data - information - knowledge - understanding (wisdom) cycle**, where added value, growth and innovation lie at the heart. It provides some specific examples of EBRD systems, events, processes, and policies which in the opinion of the evaluation team illustrate each stage of the cycle.

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Figure 1: Status of Knowledge in organisation

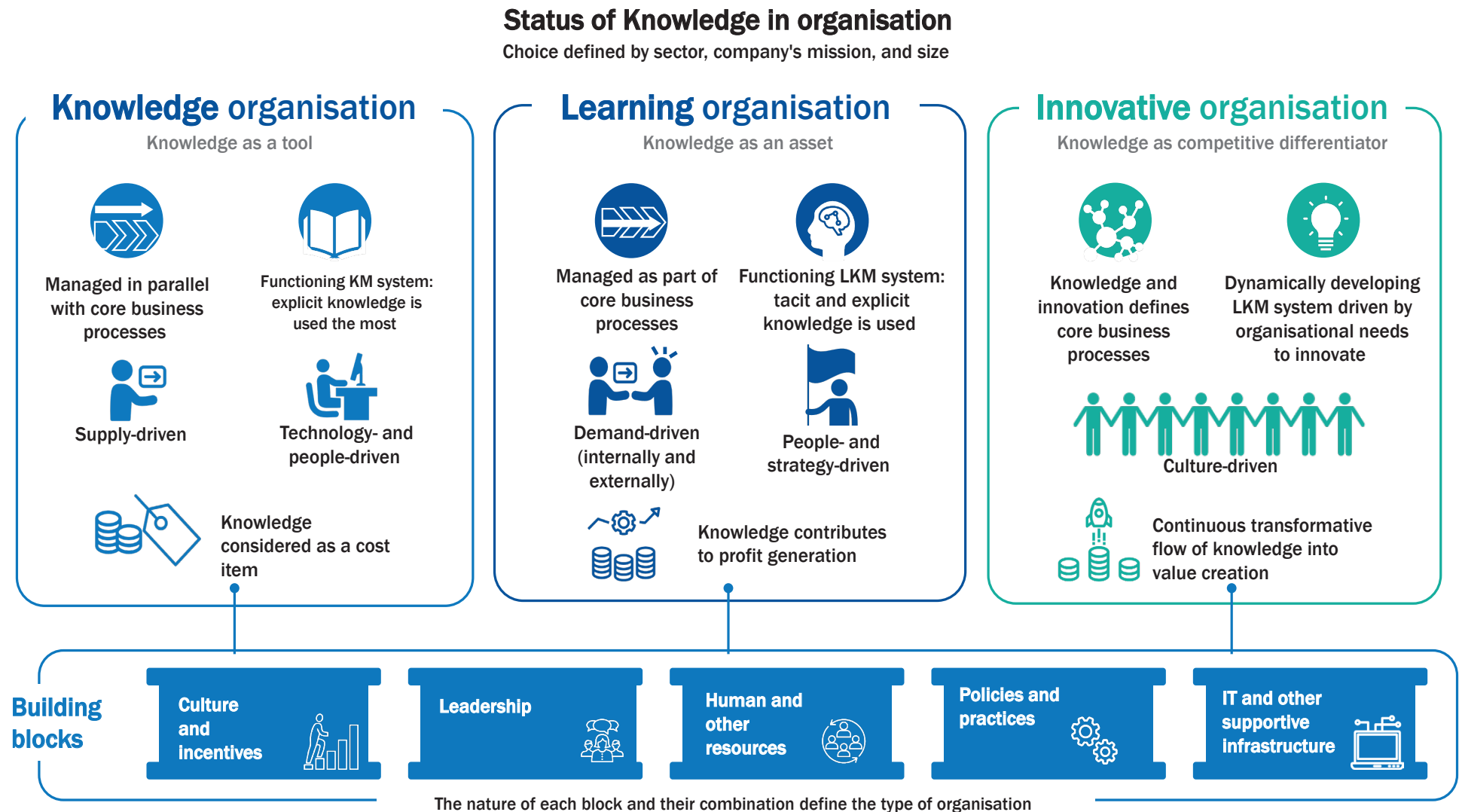
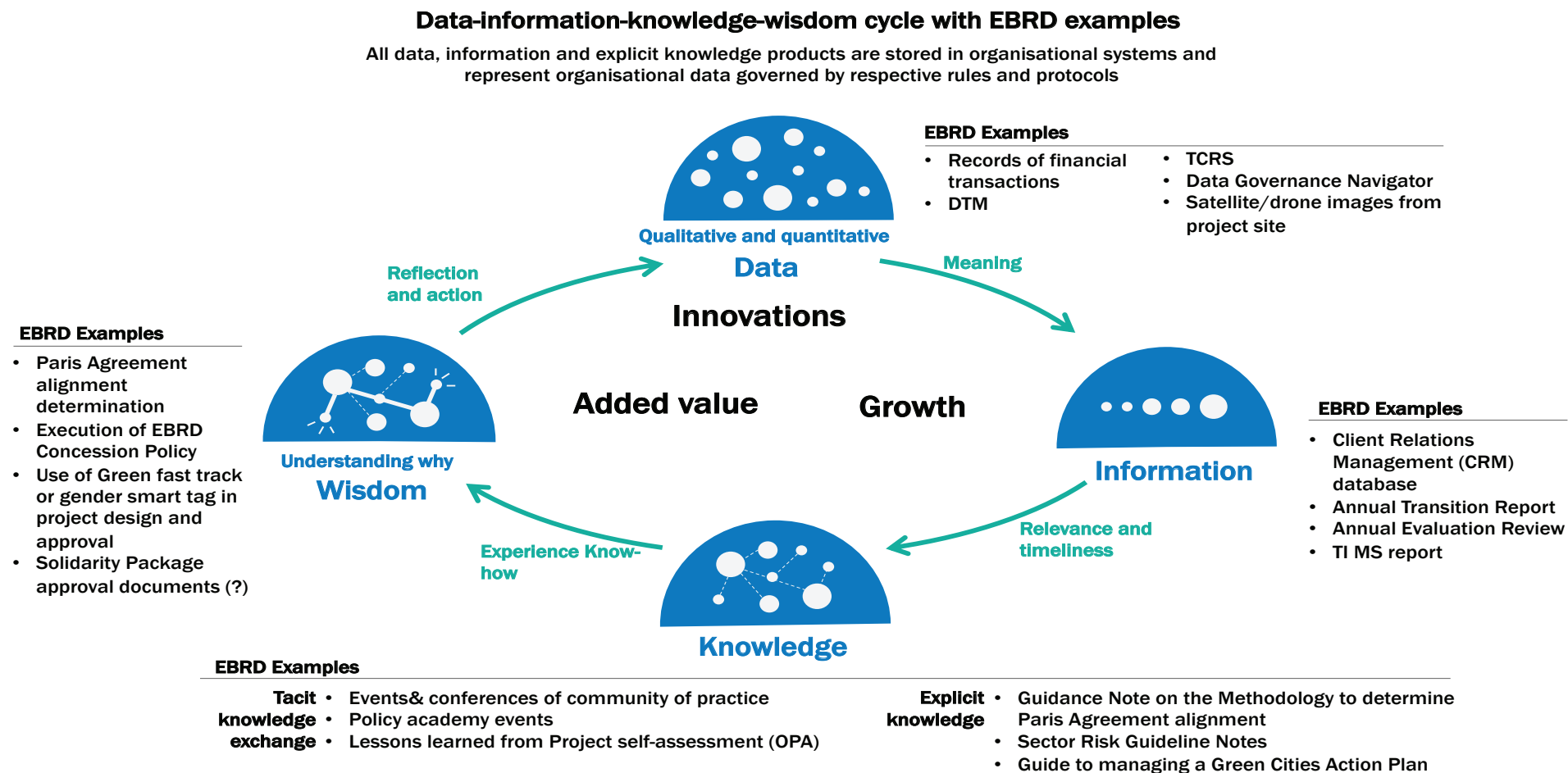




Figure 2: Data-information-knowledge-wisdom cycle with EBRD examples



# FINDINGS ON KEY BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE LKM SYSTEM AT THE EBRD

The text below provides findings and issues block-by-block.

## Culture and incentives



**To be innovative the organisation needs an attitude to risk that allows for the inevitable failures that may occur from trying new approaches, and a culture that learns from failure as well as success.** Culture is shaped through formal and informal norms of behaviour, some of which are embedded in the organisation's competency framework; demonstrated in the behaviour of senior leadership leading by example; and reflected in the performance/incentives framework that encourages creation and sharing of knowledge that in turn drives innovation through

learning. Evidence presented in TP4 suggests that the EBRD has some of these elements in place to varying degrees. Its own organisational culture is less favourable to LKM than that of peers, in part due to the sunset status present for the first two decades of its operation. It is possible to improve the culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing within the organisation. This typically requires strong leadership commitments translated into deliberate and consistent effort and targeted initiatives (Box 1).

**An organisation's competencies framework helps shape organisational culture by providing a 'common language' for communication about talent management, performance and behaviour** of individuals and parts of the organisation; this is to support the achievement of strategic goals and deliver value to shareholders and clients. At the beginning of 2020, shortly before the pandemic crisis struck, the EBRD launched its revamped behavioural competencies framework *Leading the Way*, identifying eight competencies<sup>3</sup>: (1) drives vision and purpose; (2) strategic mindset; (3) drives engagement; (4) develops talent; (5) ensures accountability; (6) communicates effectively; (7) collaborates; and (8) instils trust. Two more competencies were added to the framework in September 2020: (9) situational adaptability and (10) being resilient.<sup>4</sup> Elements of these two competencies represent a significant share of recommended behaviours helping organisations adapt and innovate in a crisis situation.

### Box 1: Culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing at Deloitte

Deloitte has a longstanding culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing – employees understand the value of leveraging the organisation's expertise and intellectual property to deliver the best solutions for clients. According to the APQC case study, knowledge hoarding is a rare problem for Deloitte, as the organisation is known for its collegial, collaborative culture, but historically employees have not always known what knowledge might benefit others or where to contribute it. In 2018, Deloitte launched an initiative to take its knowledge-sharing culture to the next level by encouraging employees to share not just when asked, but proactively.

**The evaluation team could not verify whether individual performance matrices and development plans incorporate the recommended competencies and behaviours.** The analysis of departmental roles as defined in scorecards, did not provide evidence that the behaviours are reflected at the group/department level.<sup>5</sup> The evaluation team also acknowledges the widespread view that despite statements about recommended behaviours, other incentives, such as the so-called 'approval culture', may not support the expression of the desired behaviours.

**The Bank celebrates its achievements**, which are recognised by various international organisations and initiatives. Internally, there are a range of EBRD awards that celebrate the best initiatives and project activities across a range of priorities. Awards are non-material, and mostly bring Bank-wide publicity and

3. Figure 1 in Technical Paper 4

4. Intranet post, *How are you leading the way this year?* [intranet.ebrd.com/12909/how-are-you-leading-the-way-this-year](https://intranet.ebrd.com/12909/how-are-you-leading-the-way-this-year)

5. Technical Paper 2

recognition of individuals and teams, including by top leadership. However, the evidence presented in TP4 suggests that **the EBRD has relatively weak manifestations of open discussion of mistakes and failures**, which are equally - if not even more - important than success, for learning and innovation.

**Staff surveys and reviews are a good source of perceptions about the Bank's culture with regards to LKM.** EBRD's *Culture Review* performed around 2019 identified "Expertise and Capability" as one of two strengths; while two out of four challenges most relevant for LKM, are "Learning and Development" and "Senior Management Capability". Engagement surveys, performed annually and the results of which are open to all staff members, provide good insights into the status of culture relevant to nurturing learning and development. The most recent Engagement survey performed in 2019 according to Gallup methodology, which is compatible with three previous annual surveys, identified improvements in *Learning and Growth* and in *Development Opportunities*. However, these remain lower than the overall engagement score and the EBRD scores below the industry mean.<sup>6</sup> The survey also revealed that *Learning and Growth* has the widest gender gap, with EBRD female staff perceiving their opportunities much lower than male colleagues.

**The EBRD does encourage LKM as part of its culture and values proposition to its staff. However, the implementation and enforcement of the competencies framework is patchy. And the perceptions of staff about the openness of the organisation to learning from both mistakes and achievements are mixed.** Ongoing reform of the project self-evaluation system identified the challenges of learning from experience and focuses the new model on learning, as well as the results management, in order to achieve enhanced organisational performance.

Interviews conducted with more than 50 staff in HQ and ROs provided evidence of reflections and discussions on improvements happening behind closed doors, with staff lacking motivation to open up about mistakes even if they provide a valuable source of learning. A significant number of interviewees noted the existence of a risk-averse culture in the Bank and a lack of "post-op" reviews to enable effective learning and integrating lessons into future operations that is not limited to a single unit or department. Inadequate handover processes for newcomers also inhibit the ability to transfer knowledge effectively, since little of it is transformed from tacit into an explicit shareable form. Silos continue to inhibit a culture of Bank-wide sharing and trust, which is a necessary condition for a thriving LKM ecosystem.

As with the absence of explicit organisation-wide LKM objectives, with a few exceptions, **there are no stimuli for staff members to take time to reflect on their experiences, prepare useful knowledge products, share, and communicate their messages in a meaningful way that reaches the right audiences.** According to interviewees even high-value learning activities that benefit specific teams, are rarely reflected in personal performance matrices and development plans.<sup>7</sup> Most often LKM activities are voluntary in addition to full-time jobs. Champions of Communities of Practice (CoPs); leaders of policy academy module production; coordinator of discontinued Innovation Hub; head of EPG's Knowledge team; participants of gender champions' network – all have fulltime jobs that do not include the LKM activity in their work plan. Even when included in the personal annual objectives, the value assigned for delivering LKM objectives is significantly lower than the value assigned for delivering on core business objectives. **It means reflections and integration of innovations into the core business processes is inconsistent and limited to specific teams.**

6 Technical Paper 4

7. Technical Paper 4

## Leadership



Most of the LKM initiatives and activities across the Bank are initiated and supported by MDs in order to deliver solutions to the most pertinent “pain points”. **There is a substantial group of MDs who are driving LKM within their areas of responsibility.** However, the visibility of this commitment, which often comes with dedicated full-time staff, is limited. Commitment at the highest level and buy-in across the management chain are critical success factors to nurture KM from nascent to mature stages (Box 2).

**The KM Initiative, the most prominent Bank-wide initiative that has been recently implemented, has a sponsor at the level of Managing Director for Economics, Policy and Governance.**<sup>8</sup> The KM team is part of the Client Services Group and has the most prominent LKM roles and objectives in the Bank. Interviews suggest that there is limited scope for this unit to induce change in the core business areas – namely the banking and legal function. Initiatives and actions conceived in EPG (under the Vice Presidency for Policy and Partnership) have little traction with core business units and their initiatives are only “recommended” rather than “required”, without effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. There is no ExCom level sponsorship of this initiative. Rather than being a top-down driven Bank-wide KM Initiative, it is mid-down driven.<sup>9</sup>

The assessment of most recent Bank-wide transformative initiatives, both by management and by the Internal Audit department (IAD), confirms that **strong top-level championship of the change programme is essential for its success and for reducing internal resistance.**<sup>10</sup> Making LKM a competitive differentiator and substantial contributor to the Bank’s assets requires a great degree of internal transformation.

**For LKM to be elevated to the next level, the collective commitment of sector MDs should be made more visible. Sponsorship by a top-level leader at ExCom is also essential.**

### Box 2: Leadership to promote knowledge management at Shell

Strong senior-level sponsorship was, and continues to be, a critical success factor in achieving KM maturity at Shell. The organisation’s technical employees showed grassroots enthusiasm for KM, but leader sponsorship and resourcing was essential to secure buy-in up and down the management chain so that the programme could grow. Throughout implementation, the KM team could rely on senior executives to not only commit resources to KM, but also to walk the talk.

8. Although the originator of the idea has left the Bank and an acting MD is now leading the initiative

9. Technical Paper 2

10. OE&E Self-assessment by management and IAD Audit of Monarch project.

## Human and other resources



Despite the importance of LKM being acknowledged in the current SCF and mentioned in SIP, the EBRD is one of the very few IFIs that have no dedicated knowledge management function financed from core resources.<sup>11</sup> A KM team was created in 2016 and is largely funded by donors – Republic of Korea and Taipei China (Table 1). It has four staff members (two full-time consultants, one full-time staff on fixed-term contract and one secondee from a Korean institution) and one part-time team leader who is also leading KM WG activities (and has

a full-time job as Deputy Director of Country Economics and Policy at EPG). Most of the central KM activities are funded by the above-mentioned donors. **In this respect, there is a risk that the team's activities might not necessarily be prioritised on the basis of the Bank's needs, but the donors' own priorities.** In addition, donors may potentially cease funding LKM activities if they conclude that the Bank is not willing to support this function from its own resources.

Another weakness of this approach is that **there is no balanced combination of external subject-matter expertise with an equal measure of knowledge and experience about how different business processes and groups function in the Bank.** While, as shown below, there are many examples of LKM activities at the department level these are generally not reflected in the budget, making it difficult to quantify resource allocation. The evaluation team identified full-time staff with LKM objectives embedded in some business teams (OCG, OCCO, Risk, DCF).<sup>12</sup>

### Organisational development was added to the HR function in 2019.

It creates a path of initiatives and activities that contribute to organisational learning, such as the introduction of “tacit knowledge capture” from leavers (emerging); redesign of the induction process for new joiners (emerging); and transformation of the learning offer to Bank staff (expected). Additionally, the induction process for staff moving to new positions, including to a different geographical location, is inconsistent and needs improving. At the IFC, a central unit directly reporting to the Vice President of Operations coordinates these aspects of knowledge management (Box 3).

**Table 1: TC funding of KM team**

Donor	Staff Costs	Project costs	All costs
Taipei China (2020-2022)		€230,000	€230,000
Republic of Korea (2017-2021)	€1,150,000	€1,026,000	€2,176,000
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>€2,406,000</b>

Source: EPG

11. IFIs have institutionalised knowledge management in various ways and varied depths: On rare occasions, knowledge management has its own dedicated vice presidency whereas in others knowledge management functions is not centralised and roles and responsibilities are spread across units horizontally:

- World Bank - The Knowledge Management Global Theme under the Development Economics Vice Presidency
- ADB - The Vice Presidency for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development
- IDB - The Knowledge and Learning Sector under the Vice Presidency for Sectors and Knowledge
- AfDB - Vice President for Economic Governance and Knowledge Management
- IsDB - Economic Research and Institutional Learning under the Vice Presidency of Country Programs
- IFC - Global Knowledge and Learning Office under the Vice Presidency of Operations
- GCF - Unit of Knowledge and Change Management under the office of the Executive Director (No 1 at GCF)

12. Technical Paper 2

**Staff mobility (secondments, rotations and attachments) is potentially a powerful way of sharing tacit knowledge.** The EBRD has approved its Mobility Policy; and there are several well-established departmental-level exchange programmes (rotation from Banking to Risk is the most notable). However, the evaluation found little evidence of a centrally managed, centrally funded and visible staff mobility programme. This programme should have a clear objective of enhanced flow of knowledge, expertise and innovation across the organisation and a well-structured toolkit for enabling staff with relevant skills to pursue development goals in varied geographical and topical contexts that contribute to overall organisational performance (see Mobility interviews in TP4).

### Box 3: Global Knowledge and Learning Unit at the IFC

IFC has a Global Knowledge and Learning Unit with 13 positions. This unit reports to the Senior Vice-President Operations. The purpose of this office is to ensure that the creation, management and reuse of knowledge at IFC is deliberate, coordinated and strategic. Recognising that IFC's knowledge is 'owned' by the business, the role of the unit is to:

- Develop, manage and track IFC's corporate learning and KM strategy.
- Improve staff effectiveness by enhancing access to quality knowledge and learning.
- Cultivate knowledge and expertise to grow the business.
- Create and sustain a knowledge and learning culture in IFC.

Unlike most IFIs, the EBRD does not have a dedicated knowledge management function financed from core resources.



## Ecosystem of policies, processes, practices



**The EBRD does not have a stand-alone institution-wide strategy, policy, or framework on LKM.** Several internal policies have distinctive elements dedicated to organisational LKM. Among them are: Evaluation Policy (2013), Project Accountability Policy (2019), and People Plan (2018). The Kirk Report concluded that there is little learning emanating from the Bank's evaluation function – both self-evaluation and independent evaluation. It triggered a number of corporate initiatives, including a reflection on self-evaluation, on the need to strengthen independent evaluation

knowledge management, and this evaluation. Some other MDBs attempt to address this issue via embedding KM plans into overall corporate strategy (Box 4).

**However, the Bank has a rich ecosystem of LKM processes, activities and repositories of knowledge products related to the Bank's investments, TC and policy dialogue operations (Figure 3).**

Analysis of corporate documents, Intranet and interviews with more than 50 staff allowed the evaluation team to cluster those in four types:<sup>13</sup>

### Box 4: Anchoring KM strategy in the overall corporate strategy

WB, IFC and ADB do not have a current LKM policy. Rather, they anchor their KM strategy and plans in their overall corporate strategy – *Strategy 2030* in the case of ADB, *IFC 3.0* in the case of IFC – or in the commitment made under the 2018 IBRD Capital Increase in the case of WB.

#### (i) departmental initiatives with operational objectives

- Generally operate 'below the radar' and are often not formalised or easily accessible by those not directly involved. Knowledge products/assets are not tagged according to a universal taxonomy limiting the ability of would-be users to locate them.
- Examples are: OCCO platform on Monarch; ESD database of training materials; feasibility studies and other consultants' reports.
- Interviewees believe all non-commercially confidential knowledge products should be more widely available across the Bank.

#### (ii) departmental initiatives with specific LKM objectives

- Include tools designed by a department to reduce or deal with repetitive issues or problems, or to provide regularly requested information proactively.
- Examples are: Capital Markets Development team's Trello boards that provide up-to-date information on what's happening in the capital markets in each country of operations; Library of presentations case studies launched by the Business Development department; Risk department's Sector Guidance notes.
- Also part of this category are the 17 knowledge hubs on the EBRD's Intranet that serve specific business needs, often those where there is a need to comply with international standards and requirements.
- Such initiatives often have a staff member with a designated responsibility for the KM activity, one or more repositories of knowledge, and a consistent communication plan. Notwithstanding the designation of responsibility, typically this is not matched with an adequate provision of time in work programmes meaning those responsible often must work long hours to fulfil both their 'regular' and KM roles. The KM activity is often not reflected in the department's budget as resources are diverted from other ends. The 'champion' of the activity is at the MD or director level.

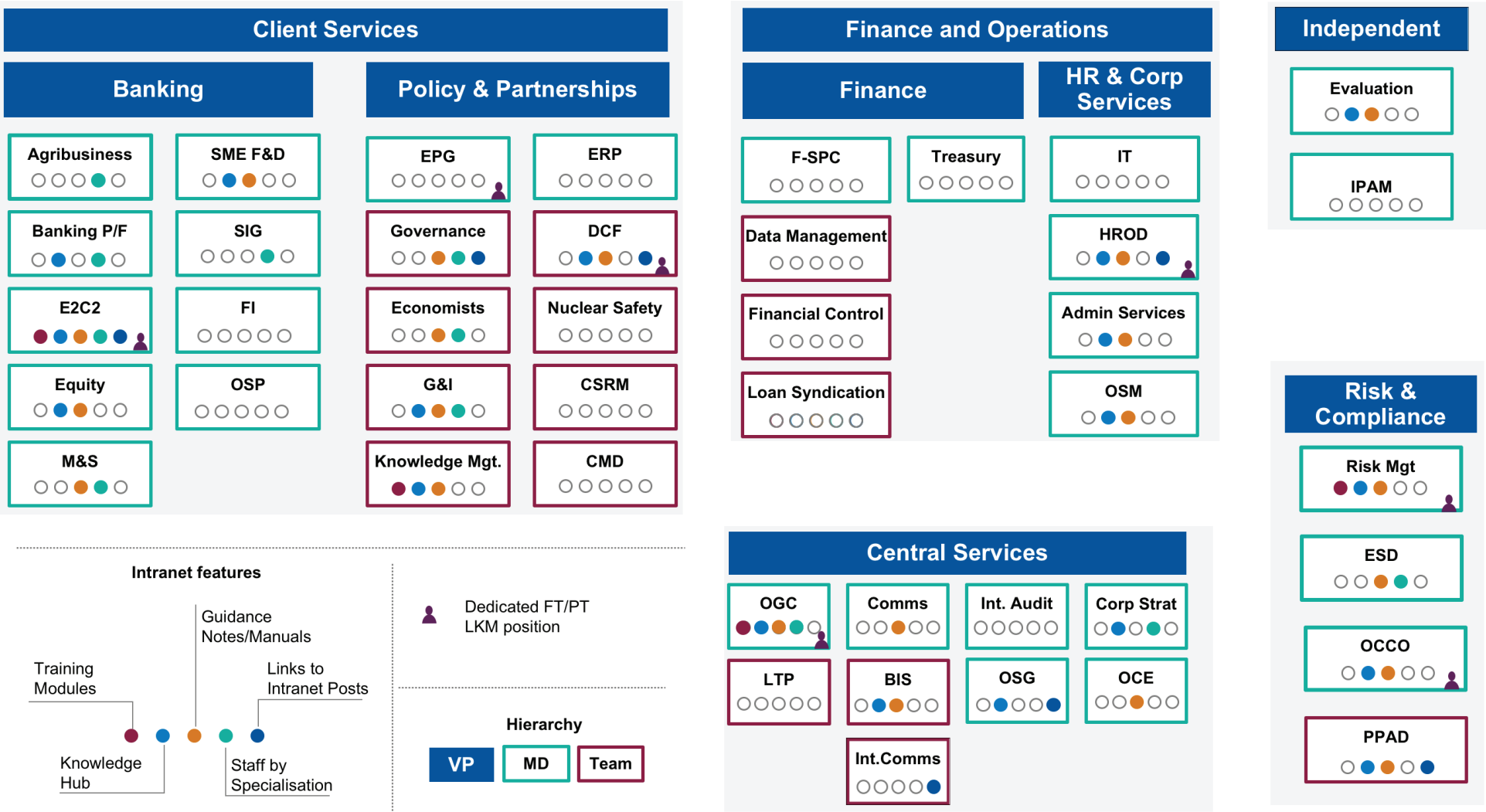
#### (iii) inter-departmental initiatives

- Occur where there is a shared responsibility across a number of departments with a common response to the need to develop a shared approach and communicate a common message. Alternatively, the initiative may involve the movement of people from one department to another on a temporary basis (i.e. Climate Action Network; Banking Risk Rotation Programme; Guest Auditor

13. In-depth analysis is presented in Technical Paper 2



Figure 3: Organigram of departmental LKM resources



Programme; Thematic networks including the Gender Network and GET Ambassadors' Network; the Mobility Programme).

- These groups are often formally constituted – they may be created for a fixed term or a fixed end, or they may be open-ended. They are among the most visible departmental LKM initiatives, but they attract little if any central funding, and are not centrally managed or communicated effectively.

**(iv) Bank-wide initiatives.**

- **KM team** established in 2016 within the Economic Policy Governance group comprising one part-time staff member as unit head and four staff (a mixture of consultants, secondees and fixed-term contract staff) funded by donors.
- **KM initiative** launched in 2016, run by the KM team, that has supported the establishment of CoPs, Policy Academy, KM Intranet Hub, Korea-to-Transition project, rejuvenation of the Transition-to-Transition programme and production of knowledge products. It prepared a KM Framework that was discussed by SPCom in 2017, but not approved.
- **Knowledge Management and Learning WG** established in early 2020 (learning has subsequently been dropped from its title) is an interdepartmental entity charged with revitalising the KM Initiative although its stated focus was narrower, being on fostering learning from evaluation. It meets around four times a year. In March 2021 it produced a document entitled A Fresh Approach to the KM Initiative with no clear direction emerging. It was discussed by SPCom and presented to the Board at workshop. It previously prepared a document KM at the EBRD: Short-term plan and long-term vision. An action plan was prepared, which largely reflects the departmental initiatives described below.
- **Self-Evaluation and Results Management WG** was also established in early 2020 – self-evaluation and results management is not covered by this evaluation though they are recognised as very important elements of an LKM ecosystem.

The Bank has a rich ecosystem of LKM processes, activities and repositories of knowledge products related to the Bank's investments, TC and policy dialogue operations

## IT and other supportive infrastructure



**The Bank has made meaningful and purposeful progress in improving the enabling IT infrastructure, data management, governance framework and flow of knowledge within the Bank.**<sup>14</sup> Work on this accelerated with the adoption of the *One Bank Initiative* in 2013. Some of the more recent and more significant advances are:

- A strategic approach to IT transformation captured first as Tech2020 that aimed for better capture, use and analysis of data, and improved internal and external collaboration.

- A post-pandemic *IT Multi-Year Investment Programme*.
- Tech2025, a revised strategic approach with an extended and ambitious set of KM-related objectives
- Creation of a Data Management team in 2017 and a management committee (DataCom) - a decision-making body on all matters related to data architecture and governance, and a Data Architecture Working Group.
- Roll-out of tools such as EBX, Data Quality Monitoring Tool, and Tableau.
- Revamp of the Intranet starting in 2017 with inclusion of tools such as staff profiles, an ability to post directly, collaborative spaces, dashboards, bookmarks, and an improved search function.
- Fostering of collaborative groups such Data Forums and Tableau Users' Group.

Technologies such as machine learning, computational data mining, data lake environment and recommender systems are shaping the offerings of KM across industries. These new elements of IT architecture call for a new breed of KM professionals and a new KM model, based on rapid delivery of the right knowledge to the right people at real-time speed. MDBs have started to make use of these new tools (Box 5).

Yet, effective utilisation of these technologies depends on the organisation's overall LKM vision. Within this context, the introduction of a unifying LKM model (one that is comprehensive, coordinated, coherent, easily and widely accessible and used) would enable the Bank to enhance its capacity to develop integrated solutions to address clients' needs as well as advancing transition. Additionally, it would reduce the risk of further compartmentalisation of knowledge while investing in collaboration platforms.

### Box 5: MDBs recognise the need for a technology jump to break the silos

A common trend to facilitate knowledge flow is to tap into new technologies such as machine learning, auto-tagging and cognitive search. The typical use of these technologies consists mainly of improving search functionality and automatic generation of content. For instance, machine learning augments the search function used by the IMF, European Central Bank, IFC and WB. Additionally, auto-tagging combined with text analysis help IFC to categorise projects with respect to environmental and social risk. Similar applications include the classification of projects with respect to their SDGs' alignment. ADB successfully pioneered its Digital Innovation Sandbox that enables the adoption of new digital technologies for addressing various business and process challenges in a gradual and collaborative way, including internal and external stakeholders.

# ANSWERS TO EVALUATION QUESTIONS

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## 1 What do the EBRD's actions, policies, and strategies (and the evolution of these) tell us about its objectives regarding LKM?

**LKM is not embedded in the EBRD's core business processes, it is not part of the organisation's DNA. The objectives of LKM in the EBRD, its value proposition, have never been clearly articulated.**

The findings from interviews with staff show that nobody is seeing LKM as the Bank's current main business activity – it is something nice to have but not essential. Other organisations, including those in the private sector, have established a clear value proposition from LKM.

**The Bank has committed to its shareholders that it will enhance its ability to learn and to transfer knowledge across the organisation (as stated in SCF 2021-2025 and SIP 2021-2023).** Accordingly, Management established a working group to push forward the learning and knowledge agenda. However, in its current format the working group and its leadership do not have a mandate or the authority to bring about Bank-wide change. Unless the related problems of marginalisation, resourcing, unclear value proposition, lack of leadership support, and a culture that doesn't value learning and knowledge are addressed, any existing or future initiatives are unlikely to be fully successful or sustained. This has been the experience of the EBRD and of many others.

**How does the Bank measure up in terms of being a knowledge institution?** The evaluation team drew on the literature to construct a conceptual framework to benchmark the EBRD's position. **Despite its clear need to be a "knowledge bank" where know-how and advice represent a significant part of its business proposition, the EBRD is only at the "prototype" stage.** While having skilled and capable people, a formal competencies framework, and some policies that are aimed at enhancing organisational learning, the Bank's priorities for allocating resources, and its practices and instruments are not unified or coordinated to position knowledge and learning at the heart of its mandate. It also lacks incentives for stimulating LKM and enforcement mechanisms for implementing existing policies with an LKM element, including the Evaluation Policy.

**The reality is that centrally, there is largely a vacuum on LKM, one only filled to a limited extent by donor resources.** There is a much richer picture at the departmental level of what the American Productivity and Quality Centre (APQC) calls "localised and repeatable practices". These initiatives, driven by mid-level managers, aim to address local needs. As admirable and value-adding as these are, in the absence of a clearly stated overarching vision or objective for LKM, and a persuasive value proposition, LKM will likely remain a marginal activity for the Bank as a whole while being locally important in certain parts of it.

**Without a degree of standardisation of processes and approaches (including a universally applied taxonomy) and central coordination, knowledge will struggle to cross organisational boundaries.** The huge asset of tacit knowledge derived from the EBRD's experience will remain largely in staff members' and consultants' heads (with some sharing person-to-person through teamwork) or lie buried in consultants' reports, only to be lost as staff move on and consultants finish their assignments. Also, without a central LKM 'centre of excellence', within-departmental staff expertise develops in an uncoordinated way, with many missed opportunities for exchange and advancement to remain on a par with MDB peers and best practices models.

## 2 What evidence exists regarding the nature, extent, and value-addition of LKM practices in the EBRD, and what perceptions exist internally about the actual and potential role of LKM?

**The evaluation did not discover a single example of a systematic effort to determine and document the value-added of current LKM practices in EBRD** aside from selective examples of efforts to capture the value of CoPs, as presented in the activity reports of the KM WG. Given the lack of dedicated core resources for LKM, it is not surprising that the little that is available goes on ‘doing’ LKM rather than measuring outcomes and impact. However, the absence of explicit and compelling evidence on the value-added of LKM initiatives makes it difficult to convincingly justify the need for more resources, particularly to those who are sceptical of the value-added.

**Comparators have shown that value-added can be assessed in theory and in practice.**<sup>15</sup> Despite challenges with quantitative metrics for measuring the results from LKM initiatives, they have their place and should be included when valid data can be collected, as part of a tripartite approach to the assessment of value-added – theory-based analysis, case studies and metrics. For instance, the Bank can track adoption/performance of systems, regularly review the completeness of people profiles and monitor usage of the Intranet to access and share data and information.

### Perceptions on the actual and potential role of LKM

**There are often contradictory views among staff about the Bank’s unique offer.** Some see that the EBRD offers what it does best through a limited set of products and services. Others see that it offers many bespoke products that match clients’ needs, but which are often developed by individual teams on a case-by-case basis without necessarily calling on the wider Bank knowledge and expertise. They might overlap/duplicate other bespoke solutions that remain undetected due to poor systems for circulating explicit knowledge and the difficulties of sharing tacit knowledge. Staff perception is that this is inefficient and it limits the Bank’s broader value addition, including its ability to be innovative. Evidence collected by the evaluation team confirms this perception.

Many staff interviewed (3/4 at managerial level) believe the core business objective of delivering investment volumes of an acceptable quality in terms of transition impact leaves little time for exploiting organisational knowledge assets, reflection, and developing more innovative and sophisticated products that offer greater value to the clients. **As an activity on the margin, experience in the EBRD and elsewhere has shown that LKM initiatives are unlikely to be sustained.** Priorities change, champions move on, resources are insufficient and uncertain, structures are weak, incentives absent, and organisational culture is not supportive.

**None of the staff interviewed for this evaluation supported the idea that adding another strategy or scorecard element** would fill the existing gap in learning from the Bank’s knowledge and experience. Their concern is that increasing the number of priorities would dilute the effort to achieve meaningful results in the areas that really matter for delivering the Bank’s mandate. In the interviews, the most frequently proposed alternatives were a gradual approach and a focus on transforming the organisational culture into a more open, learning and innovative one.

**A clear and simple Bank-wide LKM framework encompassing all essential components, which is well communicated, universally understood and closely integrated into core Bank strategies, policies and processes has also been highlighted on a number of occasions. This framework must be operationalised and thus adequately resourced from the Bank’s core budget.**

15. Technical Paper 5

### 3 Are there problems or missed opportunities for value-addition in the EBRD's approach to LKM, and if so, what are their proximate and underlying causes?

**There are systemic impediments in the way the EBRD exploits its knowledge assets and makes them value adding rather than cost dragging.** These are rooted in: (i) organisational culture, which is volume-driven, (ii) lack of top-level leadership instilling the value of LKM across the organisation, and (iii) systematic institutional design shortcomings (including almost no resources dedicated to LKM). Together these undermine efforts to embed KM into core business processes and harness its value added.

**Two decades of sunset status has prevented the Bank from developing the technological and organisational capabilities to drive change and innovation vis-à-vis comparators.** Chronic under-investment and reliance on multiple standalone systems well past their use-by date; the basic IT infrastructure, communications and human resources pillars do not provide the basis for building effective knowledge systems and tools for transformational institutional learning and innovation.<sup>16</sup> Its status as an international organisation exempts the EBRD from complying with national and international regulations and contributes to the relative backwardness of the Bank compared to its regulated peers.

**Despite a marked lack of success to date in establishing a Bank-wide operational LKM system, many initiatives are flourishing often 'below the radar' – in Banking, Risk, OCCO, OGC, and EPG to name a few.** They are championed by mid-level managers who see having an LKM function inside their business area more clearly as value adding. **Figure 4** provides the example of OCCO's LKM initiatives. This more bottom-up and organic process (driven by perceived need) offers not only valuable lessons, but also has the potential to become more 'joined up' thereby creating a more comprehensive LKM system in the Bank. However, in the absence of a unified vision, adoption of a common taxonomy, and the ability for data and knowledge to seamlessly cross boundaries, the various initiatives will not become joined up.

**The Bank has made useful progress in improving the enabling IT infrastructure, data management and governance frameworks, and the flow of explicit knowledge within the Bank and to its partners. Yet challenges remain.** With respect to IT infrastructure, there are risks associated with the Bank's capability to govern and deliver large scale IT reform programmes, and to effectively integrate lessons from past successes and failures of such programmes. With respect to data management and governance, the many heritage data systems across the Bank and the multitude of standards and formats of data assets create huge difficulties for streamlining business processes and re-engineering them for higher efficiencies. Finally, while the Bank has reduced the cost of accessing and sharing knowledge, including through internal communication channels and IT platforms, accessing knowledge via personal networks remains the preferred (or at least necessary) way of working. This means that knowledge is skewed towards staff with greater experience in the Bank and those based in the HQ. Remote working, effective from the beginning of 2020, sped up the digitalisation of the Bank's operations and the upgrade of its IT infrastructure and this offers an opportunity to level up access between HQ and RO staff.<sup>17</sup>

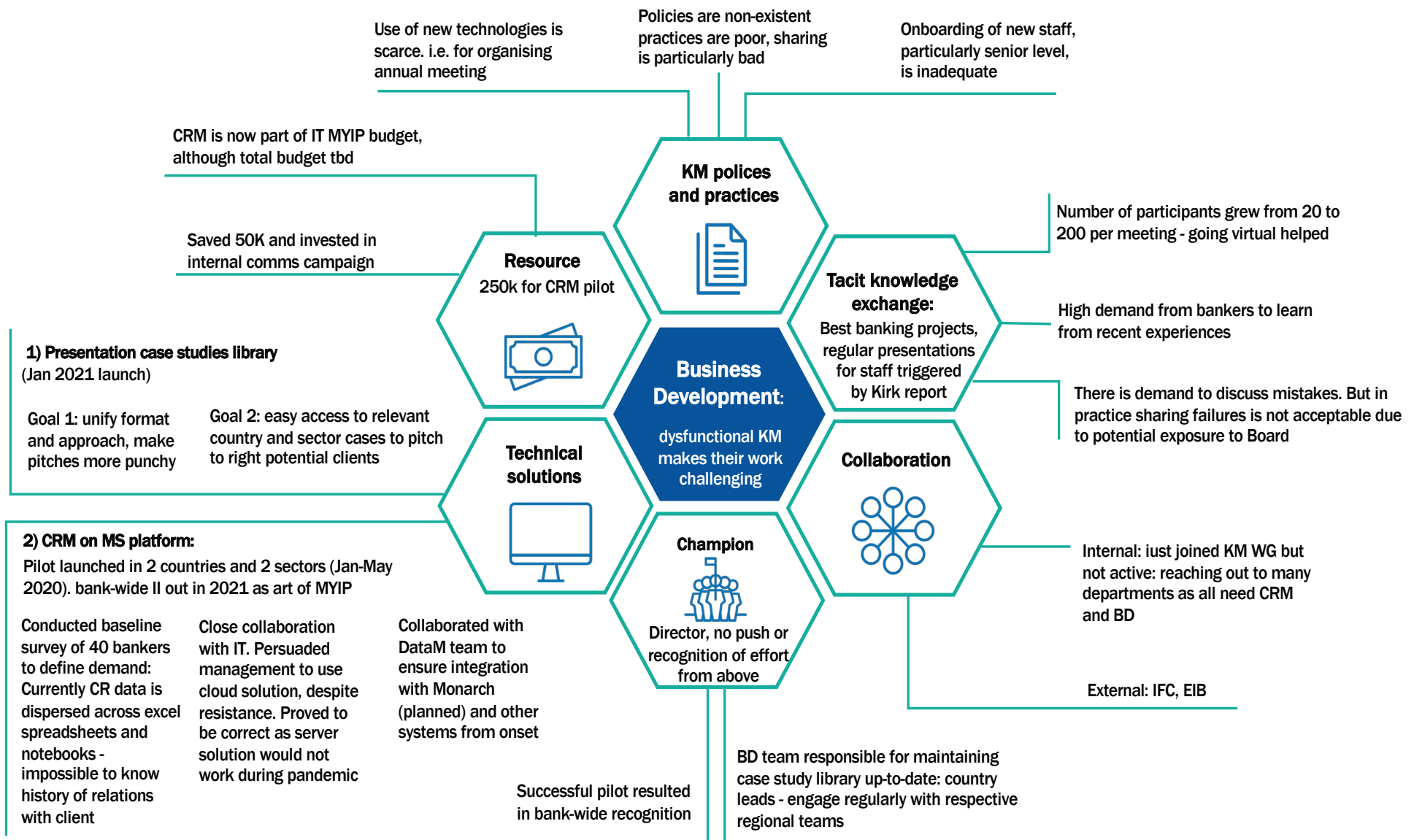
**The Bank does not exploit the potential of its staff mobility programme, one of the key instruments for circulating tacit knowledge.** The programme encourages short- and mid-term (up to two years) secondments, rotations and temporary job placements in other departments in HQ and ROs. Evidence from 40 interviews conducted with colleagues who participated in a temporary assignment proves the high value of tacit knowledge circulation by allowing staff to experience work in other departments and locations. However, this value is not captured at institutional level. Sometimes it is not even captured in individual performance matrices and development plans.

16. Technical Paper 3

17. Technical Paper 3



Figure 4: OCCO's LKM initiatives and projects





## 4 What future actions are available to enhance and create further value from LKM and would they represent value-for-money?

There are many actions that could be taken, and these are listed in the section on recommendations and suggested actions in TP6.

**A fundamental requirement though is the need to demonstrate and convince sceptical or unconvinced resource allocation decision makers of the net value-added of making LKM core to the Bank's business offer and a key competitive differentiator.** This will require a focused and coordinated programme involving advocacy with the identification of LKM champions, including at the highest level; measuring results of numerous LKM initiatives and using this data for advocacy; demonstrating good practices supportive of learning, communicating them and creating outputs stimulating collaboration and engagement; recognising and valuing good behaviour in LKM; and benchmarking with like-minded organisations/companies.

**Beyond this, the Bank needs to focus on the conditions necessary for a more joined up, coordinated and coherent function.** Rather than develop its own framework for LKM, it is better to start with one that already exists and is internationally recognised, customising this as deemed necessary. Use of ISO 30401 Standard: Knowledge Management Systems – Requirements will provide the Bank with an internationally recognised framework that will also allow it to track its progress. Ultimately, it may wish to seek certification.

**A key area requiring attention is the need to ensure that a common taxonomy is adopted and that all knowledge products are tagged accordingly.** Shell sees this as absolutely fundamental for its KM system. There is little point in generating and storing knowledge if it can't be found subsequently. Consistent tagging also contributes to generating structured data, that can be easily integrated into automation-empowered technologies and intelligent systems.

A fundamental requirement is the need to demonstrate and convince sceptical or unconvinced resource allocation decision makers of the net value-added of making LKM core to the Bank's business offer and a key competitive differentiator.

## 5 How does the EBRD's approach to LKM compare with that of others financing development and in the corporate world?

To increase the source of knowledge and ideas, the evaluation considered the experience of three MDBs (ADB, IFC and World Bank), four philanthropic organisations (David and Lucile Packard, Ford, MacArthur, and William and Flora Hewlett Foundations), and three private companies covering the financial sector (American Funds), industry (Royal Dutch Shell) and services (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu) (TP5 provides in-depth analysis).

**Looking at all three types of comparator organisations it is fair to say that the EBRD lags behind all of them, but in different ways.** The MDB comparison is the most obvious, and many sister banks have built a significant KM function, although not necessarily a coherent one. However, despite making observable progress in some areas, MDBs are struggling to resolve fundamental challenges to generating and embedding knowledge, and its use in their core business processes. KM action plans, frameworks and strategies do lead to action, but in the absence of a favourable context, they have not resolved fundamental challenges. For the EBRD, as for other MDBs, the challenge is in trying to graft on or embed the knowledge and learning process into a business model that has operated very well (at least in the eyes of those making decisions) without the intrusion of LKM.

**Philanthropic organisations are not commonly used as EBRD comparators, however their mission and contribution to achieving sustainable development goals and mobilising impact investment makes comparison warranted.** Also, the EBRD's outreach to these organisations is growing through the external partnerships pillar. Philanthropic organisations rarely mention KM explicitly in their policies and procedures but have firmly embedded learning into core business processes and the DNA of their organisations. They demonstrate a superior adaptive management approach, and utilise rigorous theories of change to drive LKM actions and to define results and value-added. The bulk of their LKM function is delivered by operational staff through their core responsibilities.

**Private sector firms also had to embed KM into systems that previously operated successfully without an explicit KM function.** However, the three firms selected as comparators (based on their excellence in KM) have been much more successful in this endeavour than MDBs. They also have been successful in building a business case for KM and learning, thereby gaining strong leadership support; they have adopted a phased approach to the introduction of KM systems; and they had or could create a more receptive culture for LKM. Their LKM toolkit is more advanced, underlying infrastructure is robust and upgraded regularly, driven by business needs. Business needs also define the scale of LKM team/expertise and its location (centralised or decentralised system), which could be flexible depending on the current priorities.

**The EBRD has much to learn from others.** In this regard, membership of the APQC could be a priority action, as it would let the EBRD benchmark itself against a wide variety of others. APQC's maturity level would provide a performance metric and target, and it would open a huge resource base and network of contacts. The annual membership fee is not insignificant (\$11,000), but the value obtained, particularly during the phase of developing and strengthening LKM would far outweigh the cost.

# ISSUES REQUIRING ATTENTION AND ACTION

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- The EBRD is at an early stage of being a knowledge organisation – it is “a prototype knowledge bank”. The KM Initiative in its current form lacks clear vision and purpose contributing to the EBRD business model.
- The EBRD does not have a stand-alone institution-wide LKM strategy, policy or framework. The importance of LKM is acknowledged in the current SCF and mentioned in SIP; but LKM is not firmly anchored in the overall corporate strategy. Consequently, LKM activities are funded by donors and not from the core budget.
- The EBRD encourages LKM as part of the culture and value proposition to staff. However, implementation and enforcement through individual performance matrices and departmental scorecards is patchy. LKM objectives are not evaluated on a par with the delivery of core business tasks; LKM skills are not systematically embedded in job profiles. Incentives and time for reflection and learning are scarce. Staff mobility programmes are rarely exploited for the purposes of tacit knowledge circulation.
- The LKM function lacks top-level leadership. As it requires upfront costs without clearly defined numerical rates of return, it is largely perceived as a cost element rather than a component contributing to offering value to clients and generating income.
- Scarce resources allow only essential activities and no upstream and downstream actions, such as designing metrics and producing cases that can demonstrate LKM value to the organisation.
- Many intra- and inter-departmental initiatives are “off the radar”. Without a unified taxonomy and accessible channels of communication their results and contributions to the EBRD’s overall business proposition and solutions for clients cannot be measured. It unfairly deflates their perceived value.
- Enabling infrastructure in the areas of IT, data governance, HR and organisational development is improving rapidly, however it is behind the industry standards and practices used by comparator organisations.

The EBRD encourages LKM as part of the culture and value proposition to staff. However, implementation and enforcement through individual performance matrices and departmental scorecards is patchy.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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This evaluation offers four clear and actionable recommendations. The evaluation team also went further and developed a set of potential actions that could be implemented along core LKM components by various EBRD teams and groups/networks. Those actions are of varied time horizons and their priority could be defined using a set of criteria. All of those are presented in TP6.

## **Recommendation 1:**

Define the value proposition for LKM relative to the EBRD's strategic objectives and transition mandate.

## **Recommendation 2:**

Prepare, approve and implement an LKM framework/enhanced approach to deliver the defined value proposition through core function. It should include all essential elements as presented in this evaluation.

## **Recommendation 3:**

Commit adequate core human and financial resources matching the ambition of the approved LKM framework/enhanced approach.

## **Recommendation 4:**

Establish a system comprising a theory of change, case studies and performance metrics for measuring and reporting on the achieved value-added of LKM; conduct regular reviews of the process and results of the EBRD's LKM to feed into budgeting and the SIP strategic process; and evaluate results achieved at the end of the SCF 2021-2025 period.

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# ANNEX – EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW

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August 12, 2021

This is a timely report on a highly relevant topic as development organizations grapple with how to use knowledge and learning to raise their game. The explosion of data resulting from technological advances and the opportunities that that offers for learning and for using knowledge to improve development effectiveness heightens the relevance of the topic.

By pinpointing gaps and grey areas in EBRD's learning and knowledge management efforts, the report provides EBRD with a clear path towards the fixes. Some key areas for attention include, for example, the heavy reliance on donors to finance knowledge management, decision makers who are skeptical or unconvinced about the net value-added of making learning and knowledge management core to EBRD's business, and the lack of sufficient efforts to determine and document the value-added of current learning and knowledge management practices. The literature emphasizes the importance of learning and using knowledge both to avoid repeating old mistakes and to innovate in identifying new solutions. It also emphasizes that organizations that do not learn, die. The good news is that improving learning and knowledge use is entirely within an organization's control and that the similarity of challenges faced by many development organizations means they can learn from each other.

The report's recommendations are actionable and relevant, offering EBRD the flexibility to decide the value it wants to derive from learning and knowledge management in the context of its strategic objectives and transition mandate while emphasizing the need to then backfill with – and implement – supporting actions (such as making available adequate human and financial resources) to realize that value.

The report usefully identifies the various levers EBRD must pull on to enhance learning and knowledge management: culture and incentives, leadership, human and other resources, policies and processes, IT and other supportive infrastructure. Other areas for emphasis from the literature include fully recognizing the potential of informal learning and tacit knowledge, and, based on insights from behavioral research, taking greater account of how mindsets and group/network dynamics influence the way in which operational teams work. These behavioral underpinnings can be reinforced by providing stronger incentives for learning and knowledge use, including through staff recognition, promotion, and performance evaluation.

The literature also points to the importance of nurturing a virtuous knowledge-learning-knowledge circle. Knowledge (a stock) and learning (a flow) while distinct are closely related and one cannot be addressed without the other. International experience indicates that effective development solutions require tailoring knowledge to development problems in different – and changing – country contexts, and then iterating, adapting, contextualizing, and enhancing that knowledge. So a key question is: how can EBRD get a virtuous circle going where the application of knowledge generates learning which then creates more fine-grained and context-specific development solutions which in turn enhance knowledge – and the never-ending knowledge-learning-knowledge circle continues?

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- It provides a critical instrument of accountability through objective, evidence based performance assessment of outputs and outcomes relative to targets; and
- It contributes to institutional learning for future operations by presenting operationally useful findings.

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