PROSPYR 305 · RESOURCE

Knowledge is the asset. The tool is only what spends it.

Every business that buys AI buys a tool first. The tool is never the gap. What the software cannot find is how the business actually works, and that lives in one person's head.

The purchase everyone makes

A business decides it is behind on AI. It buys a tool. The tool gets seats, a login, a Slack channel and a launch email. Six weeks later it is doing what the old spreadsheet did, except now two systems disagree and nobody is sure which one the invoice came out of.

The tool was never the gap. The gap is that nobody wrote down how the business works, and the software had no way to find out.

Context is not knowledge

Two words get used as one, and the difference is the whole thing.

Context is what a system has in front of it while it does a task: this email, this invoice, this customer record, this conversation.

Knowledge is the reusable understanding that lets it do the task correctly. What this metric means. Which source to trust when two disagree. How we handle the customer whose account is on hold but whose shipment already left.

You can hand a system every document you own and it will still get the work wrong, because the documents do not say which one is current, which customer tier overrides the policy, or that the fourteenth is the only day the invoice can go out. That is knowledge. In most businesses it is not written down at all.

> **The test.** If the software had to answer a question without asking a person, would the answer be somewhere it can reach? For most businesses the honest answer is no for anything that matters.

The three kinds

Skills: how the work gets done

The procedure, the order, the script. In a good business these were learned by watching someone. Almost never written down, and when they are, the document is a version behind the practice.

Domain knowledge: how the business works

Definitions, policies, facts about products, customers, suppliers, competitors. Written down, usually in several places, usually inconsistent, occasionally wrong in a way that costs money.

Data routes: where the truth lives

Which system is authoritative for what, what the field is called this quarter, who to ask when the report and the database disagree. Everyone assumes this is obvious. It is obvious only to the people who already know it.

Why documentation projects fail

Every business has tried this. A wiki gets built, an SOP library gets commissioned, a consultant interviews everyone. It works for about a quarter. Three reasons, and all three are structural.

1. **The people who know are the people with no time.** Your best operator will not spend Friday afternoon writing down what they do, because Friday afternoon is when the work is.
2. **The knowledge changes faster than the document.** A policy changes in March, the document says February, and now the document is worse than nothing because people trust it.
3. **Nobody owns maintenance.** Writing it down was a project. Keeping it true is a job, and nobody was hired for it.

So the document rots, people stop opening it, and the knowledge goes back into heads. That is not a discipline problem. It is a design problem. The system had no way to notice it was out of date.

The loop that fixes it

You do not need a bigger document. You need a small loop.

1. Flag. Give people and software one place to say this is wrong or this is missing while they are working. The person who hits the gap is the only one who knows it exists, and they will not remember to mention it next week.

2. Curate. Something runs on a schedule, reads the flags, reads what actually happened, and fixes the knowledge. Critically, the fixing is not done by whoever hit the problem. Their view is narrow and their fix will contradict the next person's.

3. Store. Wherever the business already keeps things. The format is the least important decision and the one most projects spend the longest on.

4. Prove. At the end of a month, count what the loop caught: questions with no answer, answers that were wrong, hours not spent rediscovering both.

The eight questions

Answer these as they are, not as they should be. Each one is a question a new hire asks in their first month, and the honest answer is what the business actually knows.

ANSWER WITHOUT ASKING A COLLEAGUE

1. Which system is the authoritative source for what you invoice?
2. When the report and the database disagree, which do you trust, and why?
3. What are the three things a new hire always gets wrong in their first week?
4. Who do you ask when an account status does not match what the customer is telling you?
5. Which written procedure has not been updated since the process changed?
6. What do you do differently for your largest customer that is written nowhere?
7. Which task would stop completely if one person were out for two weeks?
8. Where would someone look today for the answer to question three?

If you cannot answer five of the eight without asking someone, the knowledge is not in the business. It is in people. That is not a failure. It is the normal state, and it is the thing worth fixing, because it is the one asset that gets more valuable every year the business survives.

What it costs

Take the number of times a week someone asks a question only one person can answer. Multiply by the minutes it takes to find them and get the answer. Most owner-operated businesses we work with land somewhere between three and eight hours a week, spread across the whole team, and nobody counts it because it never appears on a timesheet.

That is the number that shows up as we are busy but nothing is moving.

The first move

Do not start with a knowledge base. Start with one recurring workflow and watch where the work stops. The stalls are the missing knowledge, and they are usually three or four specific gaps, not a library.

Write those down, fix them where they live, and put a way for the next gap to be reported. That is a knowledge factory. It is smaller than the word suggests.

Run it on one workflow in 30 days.

We build the loop on a workflow you already have, then show you what it caught: the questions with no answer, the answers that were wrong, and the hours that stopped going to rediscovery. If it has not caught and closed five gaps, you do not pay for the build.

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