

Benchmarking the ‘Oscar’ of International Knowledge-Based Organizations: The MAKE Award Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose / Significance] The “Most Admired Knowledge Enterprise” (MAKE) Award is currently the most authoritative knowledge management award at the international level. However, comprehensive introductions to the MAKE Award are rarely seen in formal publications, and first-hand experiences of participating in the MAKE Award are even scarcer. [Method / Process] Based on systematic collation and analysis of historical MAKE award winner lists and published reports, combined with the author’s practical experience from years of participating in the MAKE Award competition, this paper comprehensively and systematically introduces the fundamentals, evaluation criteria, evaluation process, award-winning organizations, lessons learned, and other aspects of the MAKE Award. [Result / Conclusion] As an increasing number of organizations adopt a global perspective, the introduction to the MAKE Award and the author’s experiences will be of great reference value to enterprises aspiring to achieve excellence and participate on the international benchmarking stage.

Full Text

Benchmarking with the Global Most Admired Knowledge Enterprise Oscar—MAKE Award

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Abstract

[**Purpose/Significance**] The “Most Admired Knowledge Enterprise” (MAKE) Award represents the most authoritative international knowledge management award. However, comprehensive introductions to the MAKE Award are rarely

found in formal publications, and first-hand accounts of participation are even scarcer. **[Method/Process]** Based on systematic collation and analysis of annual MAKE winner lists and published reports, combined with the author's years of practical experience competing for the MAKE Award, this paper provides a comprehensive overview of the MAKE Award's basic situation, evaluation criteria, evaluation process, winning organizations, and lessons learned. **[Result/Conclusion]** As an increasing number of organizations adopt a global perspective, the introduction to the MAKE Award and the author's experiences will offer significant reference value for enterprises aspiring to excellence and seeking to participate on the international benchmarking stage.

Keywords: knowledge management; Most Admired Knowledge Enterprise; MAKE; award; benchmarking

In the global knowledge management community, one acclaimed award demands attention: the world-renowned "Most Admired Knowledge Enterprise" (MAKE) Award. The MAKE Award, whose full English name is "Most Admired Knowledge Enterprise," currently stands as the most authoritative knowledge management award internationally, often called the "Oscar" of knowledge management. Numerous companies and knowledge management practitioners consider winning the MAKE Award a great honor.

Each year, the winners of the Global MAKE Award represent the elite across various industries. The latest list of Global MAKE Award winners announced in December 2016 included Accenture, Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Apple, ConocoPhillips, Deloitte, Ecopetrol, EY, Fluor, FMC, IBM, Infosys, Microsoft, PwC, Samsung, Schlumberger, Siemens, Tata, Tesla, Wipro, and other prominent companies—a truly impressive roster of renowned organizations. These enterprises represent the finest examples of global business excellence and, to some extent, reflect the 风向标 of most promising companies, with undeniable strategic brand impact. Among the winners, nine organizations (45%) were from the United States, four (20%) from Asia, three (15%) from Europe, three (15%) designated as global, and one (5%) from South America.

Regrettably, no organization from China has yet won the Global MAKE Award, while organizations from India, South Korea, and other countries have repeatedly claimed the prize. Therefore, this paper focuses on introducing the MAKE Award's basic situation, evaluation criteria, winning organizations, and evaluation process, while sharing the author's practical experience from years of participation, to provide reference and guidance for Chinese enterprises aspiring to excellence and international benchmarking.

1. Overview of the MAKE Award

1.1 Introduction to the MAKE Award

The MAKE Award was established in 1998 by Teleos, an independent British research institution with significant standing in knowledge management and intellectual capital, in collaboration with the KNOW Network [1]. The award globally identifies and recognizes organizations that excel at leveraging explicit and tacit knowledge and intellectual capital to create value for shareholders. Candidates are not limited to enterprises but also include government agencies, schools, and non-profit organizations. Through nineteen years of research and persistence up to 2017, it has gradually become a widely recognized international award.

The MAKE Award currently comprises national/regional awards (e.g., China MAKE, Hong Kong MAKE, India MAKE, Indonesia MAKE, Iran MAKE, etc.), continental regional awards (e.g., Asia MAKE, Europe MAKE, North America MAKE), and global-level awards. The relevant logos are shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper], and the physical crystal trophy is shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]. Since 2010, the Global MAKE Award has been subdivided into two categories: (1) Global MAKE: Awarded to parent organizations (including all their companies, business sectors, business units, and institutions), groups, or holding organizations; (2) Global Independent Operating Unit (IOU) MAKE: Awarded to private companies, business departments, business units, or organizational institutions.

The MAKE Award selection process employs the Delphi research method. The evaluation panel comprises renowned experts in knowledge management, intellectual capital, innovation, or organizational learning from Fortune Global 500 companies. They identify successful enterprises that systematically leverage knowledge to gain competitive advantage in the knowledge economy era, allowing pioneering organizations that excel in the knowledge economy to stand out.

1.2 Evaluation Process and Criteria

The MAKE Award evaluation involves three rounds of expert review. In the first round, the Expert Panel directly nominates organizations from anywhere in the world, which may be for-profit, non-profit, or public sector organizations, placing them on the “Nominations” list. In the second round, each expert selects up to three organizations from the nomination list, and those chosen by at least 10% of experts advance to the “Finalists” list. The third and final round involves comprehensive evaluation, ranking, and final determination of MAKE Award winners from all finalists across eight dimensions (the so-called eight MAKE evaluation criteria):

1. Establishing a knowledge-based organizational culture;
2. Senior leadership development of knowledge workers;

3. Developing and delivering knowledge-based products/services/solutions;
4. Maximizing organizational intellectual capital;
5. Creating a collaborative organizational knowledge-sharing environment;
6. Establishing and maintaining a learning organization;
7. Leveraging customer and stakeholder knowledge to deliver value;
8. Transforming organizational knowledge into shareholder or social value.

1.3 Award-Winning Organizations and Their Performance

From 1998 to 2016, the Global MAKE Award has been held for 19 editions, with a total of 65 different organizations receiving the Global MAKE Award. Analyzing the list of Global MAKE Award winners over 19 years, Accenture and Microsoft have each won 19 times; IBM and E&Y have each won 18 times; PwC has won 16 times; Siemens has won 14 times; Samsung has won 13 times; Google, HP, Infosys, McKinsey, and Toyota have each won 12 times; and Apple, Fluor, GE, and Schlumberger have each won 11 times. These organizations, repeatedly honored with the Global MAKE Award, undoubtedly represent exemplary knowledge-based organizations worldwide. Maintaining their leading position in this marathon competition is no easy feat.

To encourage more small and medium-sized organizations to join the MAKE Award competition, the Global IOU MAKE Award was added in 2010. By 2016, it had been held for seven editions, with a total of 34 different organizations receiving the Global IOU MAKE Award. The 2016 Global IOU MAKE Award winners included 11 organizations: Afcons Infrastructure, Hong Kong Police Force, Korea Water Resources Corporation, Nalco Water, Samsung SDS, Singapore Armed Forces, Singapore Mahindra, The Titan Company, and US NASA.

Successful knowledge management yields enormous dividends. Statistics from 2016 Global MAKE Award winners listed on the New York Stock Exchange/NASDAQ show that over the past decade (2006-2015), their Total Return to Shareholders (TRS) reached 13.5%, 1.7 times the median of Fortune 500 companies. The average Return on Revenues (ROR) for 2016 Global MAKE Award winners was 16.9%, 1.7 times the median of Fortune 500 companies. The average Return on Assets (ROA) for Global MAKE Award winners was 6.6%, 2.8 times the median of Fortune 500 companies [2].

2. Development of the MAKE Award in China

As an influential knowledge management award globally, the MAKE Award remained elusive for Chinese enterprises for a long time. Occasionally, Chinese enterprises were nominated; for example, in 2010, a Chinese mainland company entered the Asian MAKE nomination list but did not ultimately win. However, MAKE had gradually entered the 视野 of Chinese enterprises and organizations.

2.1 The First China MAKE Award

After national or continental regional MAKE awards were successively established in Asia, Europe, India, Indonesia, and North America, the MAKE Award entered Hong Kong in 2008, organized by the Knowledge Management and Innovation Research Center of Hong Kong Polytechnic University [5]. With growing voices from the domestic knowledge management community, the Knowledge Management and Innovation Research Center of Hong Kong Polytechnic University invited 51km.com as the authorized organizer in mainland China in 2011 to launch the China MAKE Award. That year, seven enterprises from mainland China won the 2011 China MAKE Award (sorted by English company names): Baoshan Iron & Steel Co., Ltd., China Merchants Bank Remote Banking Center, China Merchants Securities Co., Ltd., Fujian NetDragon Computer Network Information Technology Co., Ltd., Siemens (China) Co., Ltd., Tsingtao Brewery Co., Ltd., and Yonyou Software Co., Ltd.

Through selection, three organizations also won the 2011 Asia MAKE Award: China Merchants Bank Remote Banking Center, Fujian NetDragon Computer Network Information Technology Co., Ltd., and Siemens (China) Co., Ltd. This represented an excellent start, demonstrating that after years of effort, knowledge management levels in mainland China had gradually improved and begun to showcase on the world stage.

2.2 Subsequent Development of the China MAKE Award

Since the MAKE Award entered China, from 2011 to the end of 2016, six consecutive editions have been held in mainland China. The list of winners over the years is shown in Table 1 .

2.3 The Process of Participating in MAKE Award Evaluation

For enterprises or organizations in mainland China wishing to participate in the MAKE Award evaluation, careful overall planning is essential, with attention to important timeline nodes in the application process:

1. **March-May: Application and Report Writing Stage.** During this period, participating mainland Chinese enterprises must register with 51km.com (www.51km.com.cn) and prepare materials according to provided templates for submission.
2. **June-July: Online Evaluation and On-Site Defense Stage.** This period generally involves two rounds of screening: the first round is online evaluation, and the second requires on-site defense (usually in Shenzhen). The China MAKE winner list is announced by the end of July.
3. **August-October: Asia MAKE Award Selection Stage.** During this period, the organizer selects outstanding enterprises or organizations from the China MAKE winner list to represent China in the Asia MAKE Award evaluation.

4. November-December: Global MAKE Award Selection Stage.

During this period, the organizer selects outstanding enterprises or organizations from the Asia MAKE winner list to represent Asia in the Global MAKE Award evaluation.

Winning enterprises or organizations receive invitations to attend the MAKE Award ceremony, typically held in December or January of the following year. Outstanding cases may also receive invitations to share their practices in special presentations.

Previously, the Asia MAKE Award ceremony was held in Seoul, South Korea, alongside the World Knowledge Forum (WKF). In recent years, the Asia MAKE Award ceremony has been held in Hong Kong alongside the Asian Knowledge Forum (AKF).

3. Personal Experiences and Reflections

3.1 Participation Experience

As one of the earliest practitioners in mainland China to follow and participate in MAKE Award applications and competitions, the author led Siemens China's application and won the 2011 and 2012 China MAKE Awards and Asia MAKE Awards. Subsequently, the author led COFCO Nutrition and Health Research Institute's application, winning the 2014 China MAKE Award. In 2015, the achievement was elevated three levels, capturing the 2015 China MAKE Award, Asia MAKE Award, and Global IOU MAKE Award. This was the only mainland Chinese enterprise to reach the Global MAKE Award in 2015 and, to date, the second mainland Chinese enterprise to receive the Global IOU MAKE honor, as shown in Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper].

The author has also traveled abroad with domestic knowledge management peers to actively benchmark and learn from global excellent knowledge-based organizations, greatly broadening horizons and establishing numerous international connections.

3.2 Observations from Participation

From 2011 to 2016, the author witnessed the entire journey of Chinese enterprises in the MAKE competition. In 2011, attending the MAKE Award ceremony in Seoul, South Korea for the first time with Chen Xiaoxi from China Merchants Bank and Chen Lihua from 51km.com as a three-person mainland China delegation, the initial exposure to reports from other excellent knowledge-based organizations revealed noticeable gaps in practices, PPT content, language communication, and confidence levels compared to benchmark enterprises. In 2012, accompanied by Lin Hong from China Merchants Securities, Chen Xueling from Neusoft, and Jiang Wei from China Merchants Bank, the journey to South Korea continued. That year, both the author and Chen Xueling received invitations to share practices. In 2014, presentations were delivered alongside Jiang Hong

from Tsingtao Brewery, Jiang Ying from Yuexiu Group, and Ren Lulu from Far East Holding in Hong Kong.

In 2016, the delegation returned to Hong Kong for the MAKE Award ceremony with an even larger team, joining Li Rongbin from Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Dong Xiaoying from Peking University, Chen Yonglong from Taiwan Jiaotong University, Niu Xinghe from COFCO, and others (see Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper]) to gather with knowledge management professionals from other countries and regions, engaging in discussions as equals. This demonstrates the progress of overall knowledge management levels in mainland Chinese enterprises.

From January 12-15, 2015, the 2015 Asian Knowledge Forum and 2014 MAKE Award Ceremony were held at the Hong Kong Productivity Council Building. Twenty-one guests delivered speeches and shared knowledge management practices, including Professor Eric Tsui from Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Brigadier General BG ONG Ann Kiat from Singapore Army, Minister Zhang Shaobo from Tsingtao Brewery, Dr. Ricky Tsui from ARUP, Ms. Felicity McNish from Woods Bagot, Ms. Winnie Wan from Hong Kong Red Cross, Mr. Shyam from Infosys, and Ms. Brigitte Lreland from EY. The forum showcased knowledge management practices from various organizations, offering significant inspiration. Both the Singapore Armed Forces' "Knowledge Tree" model and Indonesia United Tractors' "K Diamond" model provided valuable references. Infosys' knowledge management journey since 1992 was particularly impressive. The event also included site visits to exemplary local knowledge-based organizations: Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC), ARUP, and Hong Kong China Gas (Towngas).

On January 21-22, 2016, the 2016 Asian Knowledge Forum and 2015 MAKE Award Ceremony were grandly held at the Cordis Hotel in Hong Kong. Nearly 200 knowledge management experts, scholars, researchers, and senior executives from 17 countries and regions across industries including energy, finance, manufacturing, and education gathered to exchange ideas under the theme "All companies are the same, but how they manage their knowledge makes the real difference." The organizer adopted a free trade fair format, showcasing selected best practices from knowledge management enterprises and technology service providers, enabling participants to engage in more free, flexible, and efficient dialogue with senior experts and scholars for face-to-face exchanges and consultations. This open, active collective experiential learning model was well-received. Multiple knowledge management veterans presented, delivering brainstorming sessions. Practical, substantial content followed theoretical and cutting-edge information. Subsequent visits to CLP Power and the Hong Kong Police College were also distinctive features.

3.3 Reflections on Participation

Although participating in the MAKE Award evaluation requires time and effort, the benefits to enterprises are evident. First, the application process requires summarizing and refining work according to the eight MAKE evaluation criteria, providing an opportunity to identify organizational strengths and weaknesses. Internal knowledge management champions need regular reflection and summarization beyond daily implementation. During on-site defense and subsequent communication, experienced MAKE evaluation panel experts provide constructive improvement suggestions annually, offering opportunities to exchange best practices with winning organizations—crucial for further enhancing organizational knowledge management levels.

Second, MAKE Award participation significantly enhances organizational brand recognition, establishing strong reputation and influence in the knowledge management community [3-4]. For example, Baoshan Iron & Steel Co., Ltd. listed winning the MAKE Award as an important achievement in its 2014 annual report alongside financial indicators such as revenue and profit. After winning the MAKE Award, the author's company frequently received requests for visits from external companies, facilitating exchange and cooperation, mutual inspiration, and reflection on future improvement opportunities. Only by examining oneself from a higher perspective can future improvement spaces be identified.

Additionally, participating in the MAKE Award evaluation provides an excellent opportunity for internal communication. As the saying goes, "The fragrance of flowers inside the wall spreads outside." One challenge in implementing knowledge management is addressing diverse internal voices and securing more resources. External recognition and awards can relatively reduce internal resistance and objections. Internal champions gain external validation, increasing confidence and conviction; teams receive recognition and motivation, boosting morale and pride; and leaders, seeing achievements, are more likely to provide additional resource support. To some extent, participating in the MAKE Award evaluation represents another form of internal promotion and guidance.

Of course, improving the odds of winning the MAKE Award ultimately depends on solid internal capabilities. Beyond organizational competence and daily accumulation, the following experiences and techniques may prove helpful:

3.3.1 Application Materials Should Be Detailed Yet Concise Evaluation experts first encounter the MAKE Award application materials, making first impressions crucial. Therefore, careful attention must be paid to material preparation. Currently, materials consist of three main parts: organizational background, knowledge management activities, and supplementary materials. Knowledge management activities form the core, written according to the eight MAKE evaluation dimensions (note: the Chinese material template subdivides each dimension into five sub-areas, while the English template does not require such subdivision). Each topic requires both high-level summarization and ex-

traction, as well as specific data and case support, making it quite sophisticated.

When preparing application materials, collective wisdom should be leveraged by coordinating resources across internal departments for collaborative completion. In 2011, when preparing the MAKE case for Siemens China, the author first invited relevant departments including Corporate Strategy, Branding, Human Resources, Management Training Academy, Intellectual Property, and Information Management to decompose tasks and clarify writing requirements. Each department then wrote their assigned section based on their expertise before final collection, compilation, and optimization. While this increased coordination workload, it eliminated blind spots and ensured first-hand information. The process also built strategic alliances; if the award was ultimately won, everyone shared in the sense of participation and recognition.

3.3.2 On-Site Defense Should Highlight Key Points The second hurdle in MAKE Award evaluation is the defense. Defense sessions are typically held in Shenzhen (e.g., at the Novotel Bauhinia Hotel). Each organization is usually allotted 40 minutes: 5 minutes for basic evaluation introduction, 20 minutes for the participating organization's presentation, 10 minutes for Q&A with judges, and the final 5 minutes for judges to discuss the defense after the participating organization leaves. A timer strictly controls the presentation time, so advance rehearsal is essential to clearly articulate practice features and highlights within the 20-minute limit. Avoid generalizations and superficial coverage.

In 2015, when representing COFCO Nutrition and Health Research Institute in the MAKE on-site defense, the presentation focused on three key highlights: First, in planning height, achieving knowledge-driven strategic positioning with an integrated trinity of technology, management, and culture, deploying the C3 platform to provide tailored knowledge services and products for R&D design. Second, in operational process, adhering to agile iteration and rapid small-step Internet thinking, using gamified point mechanisms throughout to motivate, and enhancing organizational innovation through cultural atmosphere cultivation. Third, in thinking methodology, managing people-oriented versus task-oriented approaches, integrating knowledge into work through contextualization, and using micro-processes to achieve knowledge-driven business process and application reconstruction.

Additionally, PPT presentation is crucial. Judges are sophisticated and must be engaged visually through images, animations, and numbers to avoid aesthetic fatigue. Besides the presenter, an assistant should be assigned for logistical tasks such as registration, communication, photography, and recording. Punctuality is critical, and advance site visits and thorough preparation are essential.

3.3.3 Value the Questions and Suggestions from Evaluation Experts Participating in the MAKE Award evaluation emphasizes the process. The Q&A interaction session deserves full attention. Evaluation experts' questions often hit the nail on the head; avoid evasion and answer truthfully. Responses should

be concise and to the point, avoiding lengthy explanations, striving to allow every expert to ask questions. Defense presenters should arrange for assistants to record questions for post-event review and analysis, incorporating feasible and effective suggestions into subsequent work.

In 2014, when representing COFCO Nutrition and Health Research Institute in the on-site defense, expert panel suggestions included accelerating the construction of the research institute's open innovation ecosystem platform to demonstrate COFCO's national team influence and benefit more users, while strengthening radiation and expansion to other group departments and keeping pace with the times. Further content enrichment and consideration of big data intelligent applications were also recommended. These feedback points were incorporated into the 2015 work deployment plan. By the 2015 defense, progress was evident. Although evaluation experts rotate annually, efforts are not wasted, and organizational sincerity can be felt by every expert present, earning favorable impression points.

4. Conclusion

Each year as the MAKE Award selection concludes, some celebrate while others reflect. An increasing number of organizations in mainland China are gradually recognizing the necessity of international benchmarking and will broaden their perspectives to a larger global scope. Though small and refined, the MAKE Award still touches the hearts of thousands. Every organization can recognize its incremental progress through annual MAKE Award evaluations. As the saying goes, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." The path of knowledge management requires persistent dedication.

In the future, more Chinese enterprises will undoubtedly join the MAKE Award competition. On one hand, competition will intensify, making organizational winning more challenging. On the other hand, this 预示着 that more Chinese enterprises will join the ranks of thinking about how to create value through knowledge, serving as a powerful catalyst and driving force in China's strategic transformation from "manufacturing" to "intelligent manufacturing/creation."

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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