



— KNOWLEDGE · INTELLIGENCE ERA 2026

The company with *memory*.

Every call, ticket and decision evaporates minutes after it happens. Companies do not have operational memory: they have amnesia governed by folders. A document repository is not memory.

LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Your organization forgets 90 % of what it lives through *every day.*

There is a scene that repeats in every company I know. Someone asks something the organization already knows: how that incident was resolved, why that supplier was ruled out, what was promised to that customer. No one finds the answer. Not because it does not exist: it exists in an email from two years ago, in minutes no one indexed, in the head of someone who is no longer there. The company knew it. The company forgot it.

We call this document management and give it ever-larger repositories, but the name is misleading. Storing is not remembering. A repository that no one can consult at the moment it matters is not memory; it is an orderly cemetery. Meanwhile, the knowledge that actually runs the business lives where it has always lived: in specific people, with calendars, holidays and resignation letters.

This paper argues that operational memory (accessible in the workflow, contextual, traceable and alive) can now be built, and that it is the most undervalued asset in transformation. It is not about tools; it is about what remembering means for an organization, why almost none do it, and how to design one that does.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organizations generate knowledge relentlessly and lose it almost as quickly. Calls, tickets, decisions and the reasons behind them evaporate minutes after they happen, or are buried in repositories no one consults at the moment they matter.

The thesis: companies do not have operational memory; they have amnesia governed by folders. A document repository is not memory. Memory is what is accessible in the workflow, with context, with a traceable source, and alive.

These pages diagnose corporate amnesia, distinguish storage from memory, define the three dimensions of organizational recall (episodic, semantic, procedural), outline the conceptual architecture of a company that remembers and show, through anonymized real cases, the order of magnitude of the return.

-80%

SEARCH TIME

in internal policy, at a professional sports club.

x3

DOCUMENT
PRODUCTIVITY

across a corpus of 200K
PDFs in a global
fund platform.

-70%

CROSS-REPOSITORY
SEARCH

at a logistics operator, with
less dependence on
key experts.

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Section 01

Corporate *amnesia*.

It is not that the organization does not know. It is that it does not remember what it knew, and pays to learn it again.

The most visible symptom is the repeated question: the same problem solved three times in a year by three teams that did not know about each other. The second symptom is a person's departure: when they leave, a piece of the business leaves with them because no system retained it. The third is endless onboarding: months before someone new can be useful, because what they need to know is not written anywhere consultable.

All three symptoms have the same root. The organization generates knowledge in every interaction (every support call, every incident, every decision with its discarded alternatives) and lacks a mechanism to capture it, organize it and return it when needed. What is not captured in the moment is lost; what is captured without structure is buried.

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The company knew it. The company *forgot* it.

The cost of this amnesia appears in no account because it disguises itself as normality: hours of searching that look like work, repeated errors that look like bad luck, dependence on veterans that looks like experience. Added up and priced, it is one of the largest hidden costs in any knowledge organization.

Section 02

Why a repository *is not memory.*

The objection comes quickly: "but we store everything." True, and that is precisely the problem. Corporate repositories (the document manager, the wiki, shared folders, inboxes) store with increasing efficiency and remember with none. The data exists; the act of recall does not happen.

The difference is functional. A repository answers if you know exactly what to search for, where it is and what the file was called. Memory answers the situation: it understands the question as it is asked, in the language and context of the person asking, and returns what matters even if it is split across minutes, three emails and a ticket from two years ago. The repository forces the user to do the work of remembering; memory does it for them.

That is why expanding the repository does not cure amnesia: it worsens it. Every added terabyte increases the distance between what the organization stores and what it can use. The relevant investment is not more space, but the layer that turns what is stored into something consultable: in the workflow, at the moment, with the source of each answer visible.

THE TEST

Repository or memory

One question decides it: can someone in the organization, in the middle of their task, obtain the correct answer with its source in seconds?

- If they need to know where to search: repository.
- If they need to ask a veteran: repository with legs.
- If the answer arrives with context and a traceable source: memory.

Section 03

What real *operational* memory is.

It is worth defining the standard before building it. Operational memory has four properties, and all four are required at once. It is **accessible in the workflow**: the answer arrives where the person already works, without switching tools or interrupting the task. It is **contextual**: it understands the question as it is asked, with its ambiguities and synonyms, and answers the situation, not the keyword.

It is **traceable**: every answer arrives with its source (which document, which fragment, with what confidence), because a memory that cannot cite its sources is not memory, it is rumor with an interface. And it is **alive**: it feeds on daily operations, so what the organization learns today is consultable tomorrow without anyone having to "document it" as a separate task.

These four properties explain why memory cannot be bought as an off-the-shelf product or delegated to a refreshed intranet. They require a layer of understanding over the content, not just indexing; a discipline of capture at the source; and data governance that decides what is remembered, who can consult it and for how long. Memory is both architecture and policy.

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A memory that cannot cite its sources is not memory. It is *rumor with an interface*.

Storing is not
remembering.

Section 04

The three dimensions of *recall*.

Psychology distinguishes types of human memory. Organizations have them too, and each is lost, and built, in a different way.

Epi

Episodic, what happened

Calls, incidents, decisions with their date and circumstances. This is the memory that evaporates fastest: it lives in conversations and inboxes, and no one considers it "documentation." Its capture must be automatic or it will not happen.

Sem

Semantic, what we know

Policies, products, procedures, contracts. This is the one that is stored, and the one that suffers most from repository syndrome: it exists but does not answer. Its challenge is not capture, but understanding and traceability.

Pro

Procedural, how it is done

Expert judgment: how a doubtful case is assessed, what is checked before approval, why this customer is treated differently. It is the most valuable and the least written down; it lives in specific heads. Capturing it requires observing practice, not asking for manuals.

SECTION 05 · CONCEPTUAL ARCHITECTURE

How to design a company that remembers.

LAYER	FUNCTION	WITHOUT IT...
Capture at source	<i>Continuous ingestion from the sources where knowledge is born: tickets, calls, minutes, contracts, email. Documentation stops being a separate task.</i>	Episodic memory evaporates and only what someone had time to write down remains.
Understanding	<i>Content organized by meaning: entities, relationships, facts. The system understands, not just indexes.</i>	The repository grows and the answer still depends on knowing where to search.
Contextual retrieval	<i>Answering the question as it is asked, in the workflow, in seconds.</i>	Knowledge exists but arrives late, which operationally means it does not arrive.
Traceability	<i>Every answer with its source: document, fragment, confidence. Auditable by design.</i>	Memory degenerates into rumor and no regulated organization can trust it.
Governance of recall	<i>What is retained, who has access, for how long. Source-inherited permissions and the right to be forgotten.</i>	Memory becomes a legal liability instead of an operational asset.

As in any organism, order matters: traceability and governance are not final layers added after success, but design conditions that decide whether memory can be used where it is most valuable: in regulated environments.

Section 06

The risk of the *key expert*.

In engineering it is called, with dark humor, the bus factor: how many people can be hit by a bus before the project stops. Every organization has its own version: the veteran who knows why the system behaves that way, the manager who remembers what was agreed with the major customer, the technician who is the plant's only living documentation. They are indispensable, and being indispensable is a design flaw in the organization, not a merit to celebrate.

The risk is not only departure. It is the daily bottleneck: questions that wait until the expert has an opening, decisions delayed until they return from vacation, knowledge aging in one head without contrast. The organization pays the expert toll every day, and only accounts for it on the day they leave.

Operational memory does not replace the expert; it frees them. When their judgment is captured, consultable and cited, the veteran stops being a bottleneck and becomes a multiplier: their knowledge handles a thousand questions at once while they focus on the cases that truly need their judgment. The goal is not to do without the people who know, but to stop making their knowledge depend on their calendar.

WARNING SIGNAL**Your bus factor**

Three questions for the committee:

- Which processes stop if one specific person is absent for two weeks?
- How many questions each day wait until "the one who knows" has time?
- What was truly lost with the last senior departure?

If the answers are uncomfortable, memory is not a project: it is urgent.

SECTION 07 · WHAT THE CASES SHOW

The order of magnitude of the return.

Three real organizations, anonymized under confidentiality policy, illustrate what happens when the repository becomes memory:

-80%

less time searching internal policy at a professional sports club with critical contracts and clauses.

THINKIA CASE,
ANONYMIZED

×3

document-management productivity across a corpus of 200K PDFs at a global fund distribution platform.

THINKIA CASE,
ANONYMIZED

-70%

less cross-repository search time across repositories, email and tickets at a national logistics operator; faster onboarding and lower dependence on key experts.

THINKIA CASE,
ANONYMIZED

The pattern repeats regardless of sector: the return does not come from a new tool, but from existing knowledge finally beginning to answer. Amnesia was the cost; memory is its payback.

TO REMEMBER

Four ideas worth taking away.

01

Amnesia is the largest hidden cost.

Repeated questions, re-learned errors, endless onboarding: the price disguises itself as normality.

02

Storing is not remembering.

The repository requires knowing where to search; memory responds to the situation, in the flow, with its source.

03

Three memories, three different losses.

The episodic evaporates, the semantic is buried, the procedural leaves with people. Each requires its own capture.

04

Being indispensable is a design flaw.

Memory frees the expert from the daily toll and turns their judgment into a multiplier, not a bottleneck.

Conclusion

The end of *amnesia*.

The scene we began with, someone asking what the organization already knew, is not a document-management anecdote. It is the summary of a model: companies that invest fortunes in generating knowledge and nothing in retaining it, and call it experience when certain veterans happen to remain on staff.

That is why the thesis deserves to be stated in full: **companies do not have operational memory; they have amnesia governed by folders. A document repository is not memory.** Memory is what answers in the workflow, with context, with a traceable source, and feeds itself from daily operations.

That memory can now be built, and the cases show the order of magnitude of its return. But the deeper argument is not efficiency, it is identity: an organization that remembers truly learns, because what has been learned does not die with the project or leave with the person. In the Intelligence Era, advantage will not belong to whoever accumulates more data, but to whoever turns lived experience into available judgment. To whoever, at last, remembers.

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**Advantage will belong to whoever turns
lived experience into *available judgment*.**

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY NOTE

Sources.

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- 01 Reduction in internal-policy search time (–80 %): real Thinkia case at a professional sports club, anonymized under confidentiality policy; detail available under NDA.
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- 02 Document-management productivity multiplied (×3) across a corpus of 200K PDFs: real Thinkia case at a global fund distribution platform, anonymized; detail under NDA.
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- 03 Reduction in cross-repository search time (–70 %) and lower dependence on key experts: real Thinkia case at a national logistics operator, anonymized; detail under NDA.
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- 04 Memory typology (episodic, semantic, procedural): cognitive psychology framework applied here as an organizational analogy.
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Note: case metrics correspond to specific projects and do not constitute a promise of results; each context produces its own range.

HOW TO CITE THIS PAPER

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