

Chapter 9

Enabling Knowledge Flow: The Knowledge Management Triangle Model

Dana Tessier

Independent Researcher, Canada

ABSTRACT

Organizations are facing many challenges to remain relevant in the face of new technology, emerging markets, and changing consumer behaviors. Many organizations look to become learning organizations with knowledge management strategies to leverage their knowledge assets and continuously innovate their strategies and products. However, organizations struggle to achieve success with knowledge management because their organizational culture does not support knowledge-sharing and must be adapted for this new behavior. Knowledge must flow through the organization, and so, therefore, these necessary behaviors must work within the existing corporate culture. Observations from a case study at a software company are discussed, and a new knowledge management model, the Knowledge Management Triangle, is introduced. The Knowledge Management Triangle is a simple model to explain and implement knowledge management within organizations and is customizable to work within the organization's culture to ensure the new knowledge management behaviors are appropriately adopted.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge, by its very definition, is based on experience and, therefore, activity. For knowledge management to be successful, knowledge cannot be treated as a static asset within an organization; it must flow through the organization and create action for it to create value. Demonstrating value with knowledge management activities can be a challenge. Academics and practitioners create knowledge management models to describe knowledge management activities, enable the implementation of knowledge management activities within organizations, and to assess the maturity of these implementations. Knowledge management activities can take many forms, but one of the most important activities that delivers value is how knowledge flows through the organization (O'Dell & Grayson, 1998). This flow of knowledge

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7422-5.ch009

is how an organization will learn from its knowledge assets, and it is how the organization will generate new learnings that it can leverage to create value; however, without the proper cultural reinforcements, the flow of knowledge can be trapped, and the knowledge management program can fail to make an impact (McDermott & O'Dell, 2001). Technology is often looked at to solve these problems, but organizational culture will make the most significant difference between success and failure (Zheng et al., 2010; Ruppel & Harrington, 2001). The organization's culture will impact employees' motivation to share knowledge, collaborate, and leverage others' lessons learned, not the information technology that the organization uses to facilitate these processes (Alvesson, 2002; Park et al., 2004; Ho, 2009). Furthermore, the best way to overcome cultural barriers to implementing knowledge management has been to work within the existing culture rather than changing it entirely (McDermott & O'Dell, 2001).

The objectives of this chapter are to discuss the importance of knowledge flowing through the organization, and how by doing this, organizations can become learning organizations. Organizational culture, how organizational culture impacts knowledge management, and the role leadership plays is discussed. The main section of the chapter explores existing knowledge management models that promote the flow of knowledge and how culture can enable or prohibit knowledge flows. A new knowledge management model, the Knowledge Management Triangle, is proposed and explored; this model leverages Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) as a mental model to facilitate greater understanding of the knowledge management model to employees who may not be familiar with knowledge management. Lastly, the chapter suggests how the knowledge activities can work with the culture to deliver results by leveraging observations from a case study at an organization in the software and technology industry where the Knowledge Management Triangle was implemented.

BACKGROUND

Learning Organizations

A learning organization has a systematic approach for adapting to the environment by leveraging new knowledge, insights, and ways of thinking (Wheelen et al., 2005). These organizations are adept at changing, experimenting, and using the knowledge they generate to improve the organization (Wheelen et al., 2005; Garvin, 1993). In a learning organization, knowledge management activities, continuous improvement initiatives, and other learning practices are prioritized and highly leveraged. Knowledge management activities specifically support the goals of organizational learning and enable the systematic growth required for the organization to be a learning organization (Gorelick et al., 2004). The term 'organizational learning' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'learning organization'; however, there are differences between these terms. Organizational learning is attempting to achieve the same outcomes as a learning organization; it is a process whereby an organization can leverage its knowledge to bring about better outcomes. Where organizational learning differs from a learning organization is that it is not as holistic or systematic. Organizational learning corrects errors and makes improvements (Argyris, 1977). To become a learning organization, an organization does need to engage in organizational learning. If the organization can do this successfully and maintain it over time, this is when the organization can become a proper 'learning organization.'

For an organization to generate value from its knowledge management activities and to be a proper 'learning organization,' the organization must apply the knowledge it has generated (Garvin, 1993;

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/enabling-knowledge-flow/286313

Related Content

Knowledge Management and Semantic Web Services

Izzat Alsmadi and Sascha Alda (2013). *Knowledge-Based Processes in Software Development* (pp. 35-48).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/knowledge-management-and-semantic-web-services/84376

The Evolutionary Model: Selection and Progress of Knowledge

Eliezer Geisler (2008). *Knowledge and Knowledge Systems: Learning from the Wonders of the Mind* (pp. 153-165).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/evolutionary-model-selection-progress-knowledge/24873

Integrating Knowledge Management with Programme Management

Jill Owen (2008). *Current Issues in Knowledge Management* (pp. 132-148).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/integrating-knowledge-management-programme-management/7370

Decolonization of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in South Africa: Impact of Policy and Protocols

Tlou Maggie Masenya (2022). *International Journal of Knowledge Management* (pp. 1-22).

www.irma-international.org/article/decolonization-of-indigenous-knowledge-systems-in-south-africa/310005

Measuring Knowledge Management Capabilities

Uday Kulkarni and Ronald Freeze (2008). *Knowledge Management: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 365-375).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/measuring-knowledge-management-capabilities/25104