

Chapter 13

Strengthening an Organizational Knowledge-Sharing Culture

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ABSTRACT

To improve knowledge sharing at the video game company Ubisoft, the knowledge management team investigated the key elements comprising a knowledge sharing culture. A knowledge sharing culture circle outlining both enablers and barriers to effective knowledge sharing is constructed. The five enablers—the nature of knowledge, opportunities to share, motivation to share, the culture and work environment, and trust—should be supported to strengthen knowledge sharing. At the same time, the barriers hindering efficient knowledge sharing at Ubisoft—confidentiality, knowledge hoarding, competition, and lack of prioritization—must be addressed to leverage the benefits of shared knowledge. The interconnected nature of both the enablers and the barriers must be taken into account when constructing initiatives intended to strengthen a culture of knowledge sharing. Five initiatives are described: a new content management paradigm, strengthened internal job communities, redefined internal security policies, objectives and key results on knowledge sharing, and targeted training.

INTRODUCTION

How many upper-level management platitudes and free coffee mugs does it take to improve knowledge sharing?

When asking the Knowledge Management (KM) team at Ubisoft, the answer is...well, there is no answer. In the case of the video game company Ubisoft, the very premise of the question is wrong.

The KM team's mission is to enable employees to leverage content and knowledge to perform at their best. To do so, the KM team delivers company-wide solutions and programs intended to facilitate internal collaboration and knowledge reuse. Nevertheless, multiple issues in terms of creating, sharing, and reusing knowledge are identified.

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Therefore, a more appropriate question is: With the many tools, processes, and platforms in place, why is knowledge sharing not happening more widely or successfully at Ubisoft?

Even with more perks for sharing, a revamped best-in-class internal social network, and an enterprise search engine to rival Google, barriers to knowledge sharing will still exist. The “right” work environment and a culture based on trust are essential to overcome these barriers. Culture affects everything in the organization and can, in many ways, have a more significant impact than tools, strategies, and executive visions. To create successful knowledge sharing and reuse conditions, conscious efforts to strengthen the company’s organizational culture need to be implemented.

This case study will outline how the KM team at Ubisoft identified specific enablers and barriers to knowledge sharing and then defined five initiatives intended to address them.

The initiatives are in the midst of being conceptualized, tested, and adjusted. While it is too early to conclude their success or failure, the goal of this chapter is to lay out the vision and details of the five proposed initiatives to boost enablers and remove barriers to knowledge sharing at Ubisoft.

All organizational cultures, enablers, and barriers to knowledge sharing are different, so rather than a prescriptive model, the initiatives described should be taken as examples.

BACKGROUND

Knowledge Sharing Issues at Ubisoft

The Ubisoft KM team’s mission is to enable employees to leverage content and knowledge so they can perform at their best. To do so, the KM team delivers company-wide solutions and programs intended to facilitate internal collaboration and knowledge reuse, for example, via internal social networks, documentation ecosystems, governance policies, enterprise search, and more.

More often than not, the KM team has witnessed that while the services and solutions delivered were of a high standard, they did not have the intended impact. In the past, the KM team has developed documentation ecosystems for new production teams. Six months later, when the KM team checked in, the ecosystem would be one big mess with duplicate content, no structure, essential knowledge missing, low user satisfaction, and a limited amount of sharing taking place.

Other relatively common examples of an inadequate knowledge sharing culture have been witnessed when teams decline to document or share their knowledge with other teams. Or when teams prefer starting from scratch by developing their own assets or knowledge, either because another team refused to share, because the team is more comfortable doing everything themselves, because it is too complicated, or just impossible to get access to the knowledge.

A global enterprise-wide survey is sent out every second year to all employees at Ubisoft. Some questions in the survey centers around collaboration, communication, and information sharing. Answers to these questions illustrate that employees highlight issues with lack of sharing, insufficient documentation, and silos between production teams as problematic. The same conclusions are drawn from user interviews and smaller KM surveys: Employees recognize the issues with knowledge sharing, but they either cannot or will not take the responsibility to improve it on their own.

Conclusions of a master thesis (Rose, 2012) on what influences knowledge sharing at Ubisoft showed that the identified barriers also existed almost ten years back. That indicates that some issues are deeply rooted in the Ubisoft culture and should be addressed if anything should change. In the “Main barri-

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