

Chapter IX

Will You Recall What You Knew?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses employee recall due to training presentations. Recall is an employee's ability to remember what they knew or have learned via a training activity. This recall is improved when one utilizes structured training material. This eliminates selective scanning and provides program control for the training material. This chapter is specifically concerned with the transition from the externalization phase to the combination phase of the SECI model where the authors turn organizational tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. They use these explicit knowledge materials to train employees for the purpose of organizational improvement. Research into employee recall is somewhat limited at this point, but the economic and personal impact for the employee and the organization are considerable when compared to the over US\$2 trillion dollars spent annually by organizations on employee training worldwide. The motivation then is to design our explicit training materials so that we receive maximum benefit from improved employee recall leading to overall improvement of our organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Today we live in a “knowledge society” characterized by “knowledge workers” (Heath, 2003) who use the knowledge they have of their organization to interact with each other and change organizational outcomes. Organizational outcomes might be profits, customer retention, customer service improvements or goodwill. Whatever the outcome there are employees in the organization that have the knowledge to make these outcomes success-

ful. Since the employee knowledge concept has become increasingly understood it has caused organizations to realize that knowledge is critical to their continued success (Wild, Griggs, & Downing, 2002). The critical part becomes the need to retain business knowledge within the organizations for future use and integration. The trend becomes one of movement by organizations from exclusive physical asset management to dual physical and knowledge asset management.

Evidence of the change from exclusively physical asset management to knowledge asset management becomes clear in that organizations worldwide are spending upwards of \$2 trillion dollars on employee training and education each year. The knowledge industry has become larger each year as organizations continue to leverage their knowledge assets to produce some type of positive organizational outcome. Training and education becomes integral for an organization to remain competitive. There has been a move to expand competitiveness and positive organizational outcomes by investing in human capital (knowledge) and technology (Paye, 1996).

Because knowledge management has become a real concern for organizations it has prompted much research about knowledge capture, storage, and training systems. The knowledge residing within the employee has become an important asset for the organization to manage, usually with some type of technology system. Not only has the capture and storage of employee knowledge become important, but also the training of other employees on this newly captured knowledge.

In addition to training, improving employee recall has become a concern for organizations wishing to maximize their knowledge assets because it is in employee recall of the trained knowledge where the organization benefits the most from their knowledge asset endeavors. Worth examining in this realm specifically is the relationship between training employees and the resultant recall of the employees of the knowledge they were trained upon.

The employee must recall the knowledge they were trained upon in order to develop cognitive, or brain function, processes that convert this knowledge into useful tacit knowledge (Herbig & Bussing, 2004). Tacit knowledge is know-how knowledge (Nonaka & Konno, The concept of “ba”: Building a foundation for knowledge creation., 1998) or knowledge that is intuitive, sometimes difficult to express, gained through experience, and shared through personal inter-

actions (Droege & Hoobler, 2003) and is tied up in the cognitive process of the employees mind. However, for tacit knowledge to become useful it has to be converted to explicit knowledge. This makes the converted knowledge (explicit knowledge) flexible or easy to use within the organization. When a business organization can successfully capture tacit knowledge explicitly they have then made it potentially available to everyone else in the organization. They have captured important knowledge from one or more employees with the intention then of distributing that captured knowledge, explicitly, to others who can benefit from it (Westfall, 2006).

Explicit knowledge is the result of some type of conversion process driven by the tacit knowledge captured from employees. Tacit knowledge is converted into some form that is readily accessible by other employees and can be used in training situations. Explicit knowledge is simply tacit knowledge put into some physical or electronic form that others may review, train upon, or access. The explicit knowledge material does not provide benefits in itself to the company other than dissemination, but it is the employees' later recall of the explicit knowledge material that drives positive organizational outcomes.

There is no benefit to the explicit material itself because it is simply the conduit through which employee training is formalized. Employees at all levels of an organization are in constant contact with other employees thereby spreading knowledge through these personal interactions. However, since every employee does not usually have access to every other employee the knowledge exchanges may be limited. Therefore the explicit knowledge material provides the means to disseminate knowledge to everyone in the organization.

The benefit is therefore derived from the use of the knowledge distributed throughout an organization but this is not possible if the employee does not recall what they have learned during an organizational training session. These sessions

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