How to Implement Knowledge Sharing in the Workplace

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Why Knowledge Sharing

Why could knowledge sharing make or break your business?

There has never been a greater need for businesses to put knowledge sharing strategies in place.

Organisations constantly face the challenges of getting knowledge sharing right, so you are not alone. What does the research tell us?

- Fortune 500 companies have been losing at least $31.5 billion dollars a year by failing to share knowledge across their business.\[7\]
- Up to 50% of the knowledge held by employees will vanish as they retire or move to new roles.\[8\]
- 60% of organisations do not have the skills to implement a technology-enabled learning strategy for knowledge sharing.\[9\]

3 key reasons for knowledge loss:\[10\]
- Millennials do not stay long with the same employer.
- Increase in ‘on-demand’ transient workforce.
- More baby boomers are retiring.
How to Implement Knowledge Sharing

So now that we know why knowledge sharing is necessary, let’s discuss how to implement it in your workplace.

Socialisation

On the surface, ‘socialisation’ may sound like something to do with having fun or slacking off—not very serious or business-like.

Socialisation is a legitimate scholarly term used in sociology, psychology and political science to refer to the process of acquiring and perpetuating the beliefs, values, accepted behaviour and skills required to participate successfully in a given society.[14]

At the workplace (a microcosm of society), socialisation can be used as a means for knowledge sharing, which shapes the development of a learning culture, which is a trending priority of leading business and human resource managers.[15]

There are, of course, more widely accepted ways of knowledge sharing than socialisation, like mentoring or coaching. However, one sits up and notices Socialisation as the unsung hero of business success when you realise that it increases knowledge sharing in the workplace by up to 80% as it allows tacit to tacit knowledge transfer.[16]

Let us explore tacit knowledge next.
Transfer tacit knowledge

Also known as implicit knowledge, tacit knowledge contains information not yet articulated or made explicit, so it is hard to share. It may be unspoken, unobservable, unconscious, or embedded in actions and thus hard to verbalise. The transfer of tacit knowledge is way more challenging than the transfer of explicit knowledge, by virtue of its intangible nature making it difficult to articulate.

From another perspective, while different experts quote different figures when comparing how much the unconscious mind can process versus the conscious mind, all agree that the unconscious mind (dealing with tacit knowledge) is said to be capable of processing millions of bits of information per second while the conscious mind (dealing with explicit knowledge) can only process one or two hundred bits of information per second.

By this token, you can appreciate how valuable it would be to be able to share more tacit knowledge with more people in your organisation.

When faced with the challenges of transferring tacit knowledge, you could find yourself in one or more of these situations:

- When you are an expert who finds it hard to teach and communicate what you know well enough for someone else to develop a similar level of competence.
- When you share something valuable, but do not know why some ‘get it’ and others ‘just do not get it’, and are not sure how to help more people ‘get it’.
- When you wish you could be like Neo in The Matrix when he instantly upskills his expertise in martial arts by uploaded training programs to his brain.
- When you are the novice, and ‘don’t know what you don’t know’ that is in the way of you improving your skills.
- When you are a newbie who is doing exactly what an expert recommends, yet still do not get the results you expect.
The kind of tacit knowledge we are most interested in at work is the unconscious competence that experts possess, the X factor which could potentially be your organisation’s competitive edge because it is harder for others to steal.

Such valuable knowledge may express themselves in the intuition, innovation, leadership, or sense of aesthetics that more discerning members of your team possess, that would be powerful if transferred to other members of your team.

How do we share tacit knowledge?

The easiest and most powerful ways to share tacit knowledge are sometimes not fully understood or taken seriously by leaders and managers.

- Watercooler talk may seem unimportant.
- Sharing a meal or socialising with workmates may seem frivolous.
- Activating emotion and having fun may seem to counter serious work accomplishments.

‘We can’t justify a budget for it’, some may say.
These are ‘nice to haves’, not ‘must haves’.
However, these, and other informal socialisation activities like them, are important for creating the space for relaxed interaction, bonding, trust and open communication among your team members.

All these, in turn, let vital information flow freely in the bloodstream of your corporate body—healthier and productive than the stress of ‘fight or flight’ adrenaline that many workers think are an inevitable part of working in a group.

Strong relationships also amplify mentoring and coaching results, and improve workplace satisfaction, employee engagement and staff retention—all which are major HR concerns.

The ways to successfully transfer explicit knowledge are well documented, and are largely based on understanding and applying learning psychology, styles, strategies, and systems.

The ways to successfully transfer tacit knowledge may lie in augmenting conscious, formal or analytical ways of learning with something else, and this could be conventional or radical.
While certain types of knowledge transfer may be tricky to achieve, this is not a static situation.

Your tacit knowledge can be converted to explicit knowledge in various ways.

**For example,**
- Consciously creating time and space for the expert and newbie to **interact informally** and/or frequently.
- Observing and **mimicking** experts, and actively seeking the Whys behind their Hows of doing things well.
- Examining underlying **biases**, beliefs, or attitudes that may get in the way of successful knowledge transfer.
- Exploring how to access unconscious part of the brain for **whole-brain** learning.
- Practising something well enough to shift it from conscious incompetence (‘know that you don’t know’) to **unconscious competence** (‘don’t know that you know’).
- Activating **emotions** and imagination to facilitate learning.
- Exploring and honing **non-traditional learning** facilitators like meditation and self-hypnosis.

How do you motivate your staff to learn?  
**One good way is to give them more autonomy in the way they work, by creating empowered teams.**
Empower teams

In Deloitte’s comprehensive report on Global Human Capital Trends in 2016, which surveyed more than 7,000 business leaders from more than 130 countries, more than nine out of 10 leaders realise that the very structure of their organisation needs to change if they want to enjoy sustainable ongoing success.

Metaphorically, it no longer works to put the new wine of today’s workforce demands into the old skins of hierarchical power distribution.

Empowering teams means doing away with old ways of controlling and managing people at work. Here are some ways to empower teams to maximise the sharing of collective expertise.
#1 Walk your talk

Share knowledge by example and mentoring, provide the resources to do so, encourage and welcome your team members to interact through formal and informal means, and build rapport with each other along the way.

For example, our managers have our leadership’s support to organise informal gatherings and ways of acknowledging each person as a valuable individual, which are regularly attended by both the leadership team and employees. We value the culture in Velpic where everyone is encouraged to share what they know, and we have a healthy exchange of knowledge among our national team members in the east and west coast through various cloud-based platforms, web conferences and meetings.

#2 Always a time to shine

Provide the time, space and resources for your team members to share knowledge regularly, and you will find that useful information is less likely to be siloed, problem solving and decision making will improve, support becomes more responsive, projects progress more efficiently, goals are met more effectively, and people feel more valued and enjoy their work more.

For example, creating time and space for innovation through a hackathon brings our team out of everyday work mode into a different brain state to focus on creating solutions to a real life problem faced by many training managers. We approached it from both technical and non-technical perspectives, with software development as well as User Experience / User Interface (UX/ UI) design, the latter which is what the human user experiences when interacting with our software. That is how we create smart and robust software that is intuitive and easy to use.
Think of good relationships and rapport among your team members as the engine oil that makes the engine of your enterprise run smoothly and powerfully.

‘Looking forward to going to work’ may seem like a frivolous KPI but it truly can serve as a powerful business driver.

Richard Branson famously said, “Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of your clients.”

IBM’s research reports that three times more employees are motivated to stay with an organisation when they are given ongoing training and development opportunities then when they are not, and knowledge sharing is a vital process for making this happen.

How would you empower your workforce to work hard and play hard, and enjoy the fruits of both equally well? You may like to explore some ideas that have worked for us.

#3 Little actions, big results

Do not underestimate how the little things you and your team say on a daily basis could build your corporate culture. Let each move reflect your core values aligning heart and mind with profits and purpose. In Velpic, we have a passion for empowering through educational technology, and it is heart-warming to witness how team members relate to each other with support, appreciation and respect as they work together on various projects in a fast-paced environment.

Here, nice guys (and ladies) finish first, together, with smooth flowing teamwork, and we exercise EQ to not let stress lead to negativity undercurrents that harm relationships. Keep putting your corporate values into action daily, and soon sharing knowledge does not feel like a chore, but becomes a natural part of your work day.

Taking care of your team communicates that you like and appreciate them, and encourages them to not just work together because they have to, but because they like to. Giving your people regular opportunities to build social ties in relaxed and fun ways could make a huge difference in how well and pleasantly work gets done, especially in a fast-paced work environment where everyone is under time pressure to deliver.
Create a culture of trust.
Mentor flexible small teams organised by projects (and not functional capacities) to plan and execute their work with more autonomy, support and accountability, and less micro-managing.

Encourage creative problem solving.
Empowerment opens up the possibilities for each individual to go beyond just doing what they are told, to contribute to creative problem solving and innovation, and enrich your organisation’s knowledge library.

Build a two-way information superhighway.
Not a top-down one-way street of directives or, horrors, micro-managing. In some ways, trusting others is a facet of trusting yourself, including your own intuition. Both are worth cultivating.

Provide leadership by example.
Let your actions speak loudly that every individual is respected and welcome to share what they know, and that openness to learning is prized as an ongoing asset. Walking your talk puts you in a better position to naturally cultivate open communication, nurture an innovative learning culture, and create an adaptable agile workforce that is innovative and responsive to an ever-changing economic environment.
Visit Velpic.com to find out how our online training software can help you implement knowledge sharing in your workplace.