Poster presentation

Knowledge management: The relevance of storytelling in the management of knowledge in organisations

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Knowledge management is fundamentally about valuing people and their knowledge. It is a "process in which knowledge is created, captured, stored, shared and applied" (Sydanmaanlakka, 2002, p. 139). Knowledge management contributes to valuing knowledge-owners and providing a work environment that will foster the sharing of knowledge in order to allow the organisation to more effectively achieve its goals. Although there has been a trend to valuing knowledge in organisations, there is also the paradox that the more people know about their own work the more difficult it is for them to share this knowledge, because of the nature of tacit knowledge and its transfer into a explicit form. Due to its elusive nature, tacit knowledge may require organisations to use different strategies to enable knowledge to be captured, shared and communicated.

Stories are a fundamental form of knowledge and communication and are particularly suited to knowledge management. Schank (1990) suggested that there are five basic types of stories: official, invented (adapted), firsthand experiential, secondhand, culturally common. Although storytelling is an old skill, organisations are still in the early days of understanding the use of stories for modern management. In most organisations, knowledge creation or generation is generally accomplished in a teamwork environment. Within the communities of practice, groups of individuals work regularly together and develop collective knowledge and 'sense-making' (Weick, 1995) about what the 'community' does and the relationship with other 'communities'.

We examine the major benefits to be achieved by using storytelling within organisations and its application in the Hong Kong setting. An example is quoted from a centre for integrating technology in education in Hong Kong. Ideas have been generated, through an in-depth interview with the Centre Head (second author), that leaders need to provide the necessary context for knowledge workers to share and create knowledge in order to manage knowledge in an innovative centre for educational technology.

We conclude that there is no single best way to manage people in knowledge-intensive work settings, because what is effective depends very much on the history and type of organisation, the employees involved and the form that is developed (Newell, 2002). As storytelling can be used as a tool for enhancing understanding and trust, it can serve effectively also as a change agent. This paper suggests also that stories are important cognitive events of particular pedagogical value because they encapsulate four crucial elements of human communication: information, knowledge, context and emotion (Norman, 1993). The power of new ideas can transform a learning organisation only when it is ready to leave the comfort zone for the sake of growth, exploration and even survival. This suggests that knowledge management leaders have to be aware and be prepared to engage in a long and slow transformation process. To capture the ever-changing knowledge no matter whether it is tacit or explicit, an ideal organisation of the future can be described as an intelligent organisation which means being capable of continuous renewal, of anticipating changes and of learning fast (Sydanmaanlakka, 2002).

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