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Promoting a sharing- oriented culture: mission possible

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Here we deal with the promotion of a sharing-oriented culture, which is an essential condition to achieve effective knowledge management in any organization. The pill intends to underline the importance of fostering a culture that supports sharing, and to provide some suggestion on how to create and maintain such a culture within the company.

Sharing-oriented culture



Source: Photo by Vanva Studio on Pexels

- Developing a culture where people:
 - freely create, share, and use information and knowledge;
 - collaborate toward a common purpose;
 - are supported and rewarded for doing so.
- A sharing culture promotes sharing, learning, solving problems together, and innovation
- Inducing a sharing-oriented behaviour mainly is a cultural issue
- Changing culture implies changing behaviours, working norms, unwritten rules, processes, ...

The promotion of a collaborative and sharing-oriented culture involves establishing an environment where employees freely create, share, and use information and knowledge; work together toward a common goal; and are supported and rewarded for doing so.

A culture that supports knowledge sharing is a culture which supports sharing, mutual learning, solving problems together, and pursuing innovations.

KIBS companies are aware that promoting knowledge sharing mainly is an issue of cultural nature.

The crucial point is that changing culture is hard and takes time since it implies changing behaviours, attitudes, working norms, unwritten rules, processes, etc.

Problems raised by lack of a knowledge sharing culture



Source: Photo by Keira Burton on [Pexels](#)

The missing of a knowledge sharing culture may lead to:

- being unaware of which knowledge the company possesses
- inability to fully exploit the company's cognitive resources
- creating knowledge silos
- lacking internal cooperation, thus hindering team's work
- losing key knowledge when employees leave the company
- spending a lot of time to make new hires productive



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The lack of a knowledge sharing culture may raise several problems.

First, employees may be totally unaware of which knowledge the company possesses, but also of who in the company can help them to find available knowledge.

Second, for the previous reason employees may be unable to fully exploit the company's cognitive resources, which has a negative impact on the company's competitiveness.

Third, knowledge organisational silos are created inside the company. Knowledge silos are organizational containers of specialized knowledge that are circumscribed and inaccessible from the outside.

Fourth, internal cooperation is hindered and team's work becomes ineffective when not useless or harmful.

Fifth, crucial knowledge can be lost when employees leave the company.

Sixth, a lot of time can be spent to train and make new hires productive.

Factors hindering the creation of a knowledge sharing culture



Source: Photo by Andrea Piacquadio on [Pexels](#)

- personal attitudes
- individual factors (as for instance, age, education, role)
- use of different languages
- hierarchical barriers
- organisational structure
- opportunism

The experience of many companies indicates that several factors can hinder the establishing of a knowledge sharing culture.

Personal attitudes represent a relevant and difficult to overcome barrier to the creation of a knowledge sharing culture. They concern the personal character traits of employees, as for instance loyalty, generosity, kindness, sincerity, mental openness, fairness, reservedness. Generally, an open-minded person is more inclined to share his/her knowledge than a person with a limited openness of mind.

Individual factors related to more objective aspects such as age, educational background, organizational role affects the knowledge sharing culture. In general, older employees seem to be less inclined to share.

The use of different languages hinders communication and create misunderstandings which contribute to hinder the creation of a sharing culture.

Hierarchical barriers may make the developing of a sharing culture difficult, in that they create not only power but also psychological and emotional distance.

Organisational structure may erect barriers especially when it ends with creating knowledge silos, and obstacles collaborative work.

Opportunistic behaviour can be viewed as missing reciprocity and occurs when employees seeking for knowledge take advantage of colleagues' knowledge to pursue their interests without returning anything. The presence of opportunism induce people to develop an anti-sharing culture.

Tips to create a knowledge sharing culture



Source: Photo by Mathias Jensen on [Unsplash](#)

Leading by examples. Top and middle managers have to:

- be at the forefront of sharing their knowledge
- promote communication and collaboration within their teams

Employees have to feel such an atmosphere of reciprocal support

A first factor that can help creating a knowledge sharing culture is leading by examples. This means that managers have to talk the talk of knowledge sharing and to walk the walk of knowledge sharing: share your knowledge first and let others see what you do.

In particular, middle managers must start working everyday toward encouraging communication, collaboration, and constructive feedback within their teams. In that way, employees will feel the shift in the atmosphere.

Tips to create a knowledge sharing culture



Source: Photo by Nathan Lemon on [Unsplash](#)

Encourage people to share by acting on both:

- extrinsic motivation
- Intrinsic motivation

Caution: rewards can lead to share a lot of useless knowledge, or to increase internal competition

Another way to create a knowledge sharing culture is motivating, encouraging, and stimulating employees to purposefully share existing and newly generated useful knowledge.

Motivation is a complex topic. Extrinsic motivation mechanisms, such as rewards and punishments, can work very well in the building phase of the knowledge-sharing culture. But, to sustain it, employees need intrinsic motivation. They need their actions to be valued, they need some degree of freedom and responsibility, they need availability of options, and they need their results acknowledged.

Rewards must be used carefully, since they can have negative effects. They can induce employees to share a lot of useless stuff, or to consider sharing as a competition to win, thus paying more attention to the quantity than to the quality.

Tips to create a knowledge sharing culture



Source: Photo by Ann H on [Pexel](#)

Establishing a flat organisational structure may:

- facilitate internal knowledge flows
- reduce hierarchical barriers
- make more use of working teams
- promote the development of a common language

Establishing flat and open organisational structures promotes the creation of a knowledge sharing culture. In particular, flat organisational structures facilitate transparent knowledge flows and clear communication, thus enabling continuous learning.

Furthermore, since they reduce the number of hierarchical level, flat organisations cut down hierarchical barriers and the related communication barriers.

A flat organization usually operates with a teamwork approach, where collaboration and knowledge sharing are the norm.

All the above contributes to promote the development of a common language, which is the basis of a sharing culture.

Tips to create a knowledge sharing culture



Source: Photo by Jaydeep on [Pixabay](#)

Adopting knowledge-based HRM practices:

- knowledge-based recruitment and selection
- knowledge-based training and development
- knowledge-based performance appraisal

Given that knowledge is dependent on people, HRM issues, such as recruitment and selection, education and development, performance management, pay and reward, as well as the creation of a learning culture are vital for managing knowledge.

This is why adopting knowledge-based HRM practices may help creating a knowledge sharing culture. This involves:

- Selecting and recruiting staff based on their orientation towards collaboration and knowledge sharing. The interview and selection processes must be revised so that they gather evidence about individuals' knowledge-building behaviours.
- Implementing training interventions that aimed encourage people towards knowledge sharing, learning, solving problems together, and developing innovation. Knowledge-based training should be continuous as well as long-term oriented.
- Adopting performance evaluation policies based on the contribution to knowledge creation and sharing. Incentives should encourage experimentation and based not only on individual performance but also on group performance.

Managerial actions to create a knowledge sharing culture



Source: Photo by Gerd Altmann on [Pixabay](#)

Managers should:

- give employees time for knowledge sharing
- create a climate of trust
- hinder knowledge hoarding
- set and communicate specific knowledge sharing goal
- include knowledge sharing among business priorities
- evaluate the achievement of knowledge sharing goals



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Managers are the primary responsible of the creation of a knowledge sharing culture. Hence, they should:

- give employees time for knowledge sharing, by embedding it into the basic work and processes of the organization so that it is not viewed as a separate task which can be avoided
- promote the creation of a climate of trust, by promoting team's work and rewarding collaborative results
- fight the idea that knowledge is power and hamper individual knowledge hoarding
- set specific knowledge-sharing goals for employees and communicate them repeatedly through many different channels
- position knowledge sharing as being a critical success factor for the organization and communicate this to employees
- ask middle managers to evaluate the achievement of knowledge-sharing goals with the same fervor as they evaluate other goals.

Summing up



Source: Photo by Wonderlane on [Unsplash](#)

- Effective knowledge sharing needs the development of a sharing culture
- It's about people, and especially involves
 - Managerial style and actions
 - Individual attitudes and motivations
 - Human resources management practices
 - Organisational structure
- The not neutral role of technology



Creating a knowledge sharing culture is about making knowledge sharing the norm. It mainly regards people since it consists in encouraging people to work together more effectively, to collaborate and to share.

Creating a knowledge sharing culture mainly involves:

- Managers' actions and behaviours, starting from their leadership style
- Individual attitudes and motivations. Sharing is not intrinsic to human nature
- HRM practices, since they may help in changing attitudes and creating motivation
- The organisational structure, that should favour overcoming hierarchical barriers

Technology does not play a neutral role, as it can create a favourable or hindering environment for the development of a sharing culture.

Sources and find out more!

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