Knowledge Sharing

"In today's environment, hoarding knowledge ultimately erodes your power. If you know something very important, the way to get power is by actually sharing it." – Joseph Badaracco

Knowledge management and knowledge-sharing practices bring together a range of behaviours and actions that can provide a common ground to the members of an organisation. Effectively managing and sharing knowledge requires that knowledge is captured and exchanged to those who may benefit from it. Organisations that do well in this area understand the importance of identifying information needs, adopting methods and styles appropriate to different people and situations, checking the validity and reliability of information, and creating dynamic systems to gather and manage information and knowledge successfully. Most importantly, an organisation's ability to use knowledge depends on how enthusiastic the people within that organisation are about sharing it and involving others in the process. In order for knowledge-sharing to thrive, it must be a core value that every member of the organisation encourages and emulates.

Quality in Practice

Ways to enhance knowledge sharing in your organisation:

- Build awareness amongst employees of the value of creating, sharing, and using knowledge. Demonstrate the importance of sharing knowledge, information and resources freely and amongst all stakeholder groups.
- Ask staff members and organisational stakeholders the following questions: "When did you feel connected to the knowledge at the centre of the organisation and how did that connection make your job/role easier?" And conversely, "Give examples of when a lack of knowledge made your job/role more difficult." Use the answers that emerge as a guide to determine knowledge-sharing strengths and areas of challenge.
- Use a wide range of knowledge-sharing methods (just don't solely rely on technology) Some effective knowledge-sharing practices are:
  - creating formal or informal human networks or "communities of interest" where ad hoc groups come together for a specific purpose or event (a facilitator can actively ensure group involvement and that feedback is provided to the overall system)
  - using "virtual collaboration tools" like Google Docs to create work projects or proposals
  - providing access to webinars and other web-based learning events
  - holding face-to-face round-table discussions where "hot topics" are disputed and solved
  - creating "virtual boards" for on-going discussion threads
  - establishing forums to address change efforts or new innovations
  - holding conference calls to gather people when assembling together in person is difficult
  - having plenty of opportunities to engage in teamwork and relationship building across the organisation as a whole (people who trust and care about each other share knowledge more freely).

Knowledge Sharing (continued)

- Understand that knowledge-sharing is daily work. It must be a routine and habitual part of the culture not a one-time campaign or promotion. Best-practice organisations integrate knowledge-sharing with work by having on-going knowledge-sharing opportunities and imbuing routine work with knowledge-sharing processes.
- Recognise that knowledge-sharing is NOT sending someone off to access a vast repository of stored information or data that is difficult to use, understand or adapt.
- Provide ample opportunities for staff members and organisational stakeholders to develop their unique skills and capabilities and share their learning with others both formally and informally.
- Ensure that the organisation values and promotes the individual contributions of others when it comes to sharing knowledge and resources.
- See knowledge as an asset — when hiring understand the importance of hiring "minds" vs. hiring "hands" or "bodies".
- Create opportunities for all organisational stakeholders to engage in generative thinking (a cognitive process for deciding what to pay attention to, what it means, and what to do about it).

Knowledge-sharing works best when people collaborate and build on each other's ideas. Organisations that are successful in this area regularly dedicate time to be creative and engage in imaginative brainstorming and developing new ideas and innovations.