



Just A Moment...
IT Commentary

A Learning Culture?

by Leon A. Enriquez

Knowledge is gained by learning. And the depth of learning from practical experience has a profound impact on innovative action that leads to tangible success.

One observation is clear. Much of the knowledge management landscape that we know of is focused on knowledge that is embedded in a company. A common and familiar experience is by disseminating lessons learned from projects and processes.

Consider also that complex technology systems are used to capture information from external sources through the company's virtual network. This virtual network includes people in the supply chain such as customers, suppliers, expert advisors, communities of interests, and so forth.

It is also worthwhile to highlight that the primary aim of knowledge is to inspire action. Knowledge determines action. And without the right focus and right action, right results are impossible.

While focus, visibility, and language are important enablers of knowledge management, developing a company culture that encourages knowledge sharing is truly the best way to optimise a company's intellectual capital.

What is culture? Culture is the collective term we give to the distinctive values, customs, aspirations, and achievements of a group or society. Take the example of a company for instance. Here, it is usually a set of shared knowledge, skills, and attitudes applied to any or every element of the business. This encompasses the whole ecosystem of the organisation comprising customers, employees, shareholders, products, service levels, and so forth. The basis of a business is profit.



It follows then, that corporate cultures impact growth and innovation. This is the primary means from which repeatable success is achieved. Yet, such a culture can be a stumbling block and become obsolete and counterproductive if it does not keep pace with change.

In such circumstances, management bears a great responsibility: firstly to recognise the demands that change inevitably brings, and lastly to constantly reshape the company culture to meet evolving corporate goals. This is a big challenge.

In practice, management can foster a learning culture by creating incentives and processes that stimulate and encourage both teams as well as individuals, to capitalise upon the organisation's intellectual assets, and share knowledge.

Using and sharing knowledge must be integrated into the fabric of the job if the culture and mindset is to precipitate. For instance, the mindset within the company must consistently focus on learning. At the same time, the action cycle – before, during, and after actions – can be most powerful. Action can be both informal as well as formal in nature.

One thing is certain. Recruiting and retaining people with the right attributes and mindset in the knowledge-based economy is vital, and it also requires new ways of developing and rewarding employees. The challenge is really in building a favourable climate that is both fun and rewarding with a culture that supports the various aspirations of the people who work with the organisation.

Fair compensation is a good yardstick to benchmark the results versus the motivations. Based on the performance of a group, or on the ability of the individual to create knowledge of value, the incentives should be clear-cut. Here, money is an excellent incentive, apart from a host of others.

What is truly needed is a culture and mindset that is open and collaborative – one that rewards the teams and individuals – who care about knowledge sharing as opposed to the old ways of knowledge hoarding. This requires a learning culture that embraces change with open arms. And a willingness to take risks, instead of sticking to the familiar ways of enforcing the status quo and playing it safe.



Once a knowledge management practice is set in motion, you should inspire and expect all parts of your organisation to gradually dramatise the company's commitment to knowledge sharing. And this takes time to evolve. On a positive note, researchers have discovered that behaviour that is rewarded – in this case, knowledge sharing – is more likely to be repeated. Why? Simply because people pay attention to personal gratification.

But like all creative endeavours, the knowledge sharing company does not happen overnight. Obviously, it requires consistent and persistent efforts to juggle and keep the project on the right track. Making knowledge sharing the company's hallmark is not easy. But the journey itself will be rewarding and satisfying.

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