

Week three assignment

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Knowledge Sharing

The organizational environment

This researcher is currently employed as a Guidance Counselor at a small, independent Christian school in a large city on the East Coast. This researcher also has other administrative responsibilities. There are approximately 275 students enrolled and about 65 employees. The organization can be divided into three main groups of employees. There are three Heads of School and four directors who oversee various areas and operate as the top administrators. They interface with both the Heads of School and the Board of Directors. There are about 45 faculty members. Finally, there are seven administrative staff members who manage offices tasks, like ordering and organizing supplies, answering phones and email, handling technology issues, managing the front door, overseeing and helping with special events, doing handyman work, interacting with students for health and other issues amongst other things. These three layers of employees must overlap with various articles of knowledge to get the job done.

Attitudes toward knowledge sharing among colleagues

Because there are several areas of the organization that must overlap and coordinate, yet work independently in their own areas, sharing knowledge is not always smooth or easy. Since it has a Christian staff and faculty, there is a certain level of openness and a desire to help one another in each of the work areas. In general, there is an intention to exchange knowledge toward the purpose of having a loving, successful, academically rigorous school to the glory of God. This is a major positive of working for this organization. Most want to encourage others in their work and there is a general feeling of good will between almost all of the employees.

Because of the relatively small size of the organization, information can be easily communicated amongst colleagues through a quick phone conversation, an informal chat in the hallway, or through emails sent out with quick bits of information. This type of tacit knowledge

is shared throughout the school year, and even in the planning time of the summer, to put into practice the explicit information. Formal explicit knowledge is circulated through the employee manual, schedule, curriculum, forms and other documents. Hislop (2018) points out that there are several types of knowledge sharing and learning that needs to be gained at the individual level, work group level, organizational level, and even at the inter-organizational level. “The dilemma for the worker is that there are potentially positive and negative consequences to either sharing knowledge and contributing to the public good, or hoarding knowledge and acting as a free rider” (Hislop, 2018). This institution’s intention is that staff share knowledge as a matter of organizational good, but it can easily be seen why someone might not share knowledge.

Therefore, while faculty and the administrative staff desire to share knowledge to encourage and support one another in their daily work, there is often a lack of knowledge sharing for various reasons. Some Director-level employees have an attitude of not wanting to share knowledge at times. It depends on what kinds of knowledge needs to be shared. But, there are a couple of Directors who have a tendency to hoard their knowledge to some extent. Colleagues aspire to help one another in theory, but sometimes in practice some participants do not share for a few reasons. When this happens communication breaks down and progress slows.

What are the most important factors that explain this behavior?

This organization launched almost 25 years ago. Knowledge is often shared in much the same way as it was in the very early years when the school was very small. Often, decisions are made on the fly day-to-day by the Heads of School and explicit information such as rules and procedures are not always followed. This informality leads to knowledge confusion. A second reason for lack of sharing is frequent staff/faculty turnover through the years under different Heads. This is often the cause of knowledge loss as well as reluctance to share. Colleagues may be afraid to share knowledge that might go out the door with someone who leaves. Third,

knowledge is withheld out of a fear based desire to control in some cases. The person may keep the knowledge close to themselves because they want to control the quality of that knowledge and how it is communicated outside of the organization.

In addition, it seems that the reason that a couple of Directors do not readily and openly share their knowledge is because of a desire to be the “expert” in their particular areas. This isn’t malicious, necessarily. One Director particularly refuses to share knowledge, which can be problematic for the other staff, due to a fear of being replaced. Withholding knowledge makes this Director seem as if they are not a “team player” to the organization’s detriment. This is on a trajectory of improving recently.

According to some knowledge research, when a staff person feels that they are the expert, they hold key information to themselves (Edmondson, 2008). This hoarding behavior is not necessarily self-recognized by those that hoard knowledge at this particular organization.

How has this behavior affected the overall efficiency of the department or work unit?

Much work can come to a halt because of this hoarding of “specialized” information. It can impede the work and success in tasks that other staff are managing. For instance, during a recent large project worked on by one of the Directors, there was knowledge that would have been useful to receive from this other Director. When it was consistently not given over a matter of months, it was a source of discouragement, overwork, and stress for the Director trying to pull off the huge project. The project was eventually executed successfully, but it was not without hurt feelings and unfortunate negative relational outcomes.

What would you recommend for knowledge sharing?

Edmondson (2008), proposed ways to combat a lack of knowledge sharing in her interview. Edmondson (2008) states that there must be a willingness to create a “safe environment” for people to share knowledge and to be a learning organization. Great questions

for a manager to ask regarding various inter-departmental projects that are happening is A) What did we set out to do? B) What happened? C) What caused the difference? D) What do we do next? And, E) What do we improve or change next time? Also, as a manager, one must be a model of how these behaviors of being a learning organization can be accomplished. When these attitudes are exemplified, people will feel more free and safe to both share their knowledge and be willing to grow in their own organizational learning (Garvin and Edmondson, 2008). This should bring about an amicable and productive group work environment.

Conclusion

When the previous actions are completed, and a safe environment to share knowledge and to learn is perpetuated, there will be a culture of knowledge safety. Once the two Directors, in this case, are more confident and willing to share what they know consistently, they will be more open to stop hoarding knowledge. An attitude of helping and supporting others by sharing more of their knowledge will ensue.

References

Hislop, D. Boshua, R. and Helms, R. (2018). *Knowledge management in organizations: A critical introduction (4th ed.)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Garvin, D, and A Edmondson. *The importance of learning in organizations*. Harvard Business Review, 15 Dec. 2008, www.youtube.com/watch?v=lUP4WcfNyAA.