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Employee Willingness to Share Knowledge

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It is no secret that with the rise in globalization efforts came an increase in mergers and acquisitions over the past decade, resulting in tremendous amount of employee knowledge to share, capture and manage.   One of the primary goals of a merger or acquisition is to identify synergies that result in value to the overall bottom line of the organizations (Junni, 2019). For this to happen, many activities must occur in terms of communication, specifically knowledge sharing between the merged organizations employees.   Unfortunately, in many cases organizations fail to capture the value-added benefits of mergers and acquisitions due to poor communication and lack of integration management involving knowledge sharing (Junni, 2019).

From 2009 through most of 2020, I worked for a multi-national company that acquired five companies. As a result, its employees, including myself dealt with continual change and knowledge sharing over a 10-year period. To say that such knowledge was efficiently captured or maintained is an understatement. In all honesty, the day-to-day life was chaotic dealing with continual changes related to reorganizations, turnover, and process improvements.

After each acquisitions came reorganization announcements outlining employee and department changes. In fact, most reorganizations resulted in new leaders, processes, and the retraining of employees. On top of that, system upgrades and new systems were continually being implemented. Undoubtedly, we as an organization were in a continual state of unlearning and learning (Hislop, 2013).

In terms of employee attitudes to share knowledge during the integration processes, I found most shared. However, many were reluctant to unlearn to integrate in the new corporate culture. This was probably one of the most stressful situations during each acquisition. In my opinion, people were afraid to let go and learn a new way. For instance, during one of many

integrations of my sales teams to one group, most shared how they felt their processes worked best, and that the new processes would not work because leaders failed to understand their business. To me, if leaders would have included the sales team during the new process development, the unlearn and learn piece would have been smoother and easier.

In hindsight, the organization was going through organizational learning in conjunction with business group and departmental unlearning and learning (Hislop, 2013). In addition, power and politics were in play amongst all levels of the organization (Hislop, 2013). As a result, it was causing process failures, lost business, high turnover, and a tremendous amount of stress.

As time went on each after acquisition, people eventually began to merge ideas and best practices. In fact, employees from both organizations began forming what Hislop (2013) called communities of practices.   Some were formal, while many were informal. For instance, the sales team began to communicate and share information amongst each other about products, prices, and the use of certain systems.   Likewise, the supply teams came together. However, in many cases, it was a result of management forces the teams to share knowledge.

In the end, we struggled on-going for many years due to the failure of leaders not integrating people effectively after an acquisition. Therefore, our customers struggled, turnover increased, stress levels were high, knowledge was lost, and overall people were just negative. In my opinion, people were not afraid to share knowledge, but rather more afraid of letting go of old and begin with a new. In any event, the overall acquisition and knowledge sharing would have been more successful if leaders encouraged people to share ideas. Most importantly, leaders should have included employees in the organizational changes prior to rolling out new processes that people were already reluctant to accept.

References

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