

The Power of a Knowledge Sharing Culture

As we navigate our way in the information age, the capacity for knowledge management within an organization is becoming a critical aspect of its success. Information and knowledge, when shared widely across the organization, become catalysts for innovation, productivity, and a dynamic work environment. The foundation of these benefits lies in fostering a robust knowledge-sharing culture.


Importance of a Knowledge Sharing Culture

A knowledge sharing culture refers to a work environment that promotes the free exchange of ideas, information, and experiences among its members. This can be viewed as an organizational ecology where shared knowledge nurtures growth, with every idea being a potential seed for innovation. Organizations that do knowledge sharing well, “have a culture of knowledge where employees are encouraged to share what they know with others instead of hoarding it.”¹

The benefits of a knowledge-sharing culture extend beyond the organization. The collective wisdom of an organization can be shared with customers and clients, creating stronger bonds, and driving business growth. It also ensures the continuity and preservation of knowledge, especially in a scenario where key employees leave the organization or retire. In essence, a knowledge-sharing culture fosters learning, facilitates decision-making, and promotes a sense of unity among its members.

Some examples of how we share knowledge here at TRADOC are the open forums used for TRADOC Campaign Plan (TCP) Live, Commanding General’s (CG) Plans update, and the Commander’s Update Brief (CUB). These forums create opportunities for the free exchange of ideas, information, and shared understanding focused on specific milestones and operational horizons. Additionally, these opportunities translate to a structured battle rhythm that ensures the flow of actionable knowledge from staffs, to working groups, to leadership boards and councils, and to decision makers. It is the shared understanding of a situation that enables this sense of unity.

Successful Knowledge-Sharing Organizations

 There are numerous organizations that have been successful in implementing and benefiting from a knowledge-sharing culture. In these organizations, knowledge sharing has become a day-to-day routine. For example, NASA has a robust knowledge-sharing platform called “NASA@WORK” that encourages employees across different centers to collaborate, exchange ideas, and solve complex problems.² The platform has accelerated innovation and problem-solving, highlighting the power of a shared knowledge culture.

Cooley is an international law firm employing 1,500 attorneys dealing with complex legal issues requiring highly skilled professionals. To ensure new hires are well prepared, they utilize a system of knowledge transfer, pairing newcomers with seasoned attorneys. The mentoring experience delivers valuable insights, enabling newer lawyers to learn their roles faster than they could

through job experience or traditional training methods. This strategy is a significant factor in why 95 percent of their staff stay with the firm.¹

The Army created SINET to advance the practice of Human Resource Management by linking Army Human Resource (HR) professionals within a community of effective practitioners and developing an environment conducive to the promotion and sharing of knowledge, and lifelong learning.³

Cultivating a Culture of Knowledge Sharing

Implementing a knowledge-sharing culture requires strategic planning and effort. It starts with setting the right tone at the top. Leaders should demonstrate commitment to transparency, learning, and collaboration, which establishes a precedent for the rest of the organization.

Carla O'Dell and Cindy Hubert with APQC explain strategies for creating an organizational culture that values knowledge sharing and collaboration. Their recommendations include:

- Lead by example and demonstrate a deep, consistent commitment to KM at the highest levels of the organization.
- Brand KM through thoughtful messaging, formal communications pushes, and rewards and recognition.
- Make KM fun by providing engaging tools and injecting humor and creativity into the KM marketing strategy.⁴



The next step is to create an infrastructure that supports knowledge sharing. This includes having the right tools, such as intranets, forums, and social networks, as well as spaces for face-to-face interactions. Such infrastructure should be designed to be easy to use and should encourage collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Finally, recognition and reward systems should be aligned with knowledge sharing. Employees who share their knowledge, collaborate, and help others should be acknowledged and rewarded. This could be done through public recognition, promotions, or other benefits. By doing so, you create a positive reinforcement loop that encourages further knowledge sharing.

Impact on Productivity and Innovation

When knowledge flows freely within an organization, it can significantly boost productivity. Employees spend less time searching for information or reinventing the wheel, and more time on value-adding activities. Moreover, it minimizes the risks associated with knowledge loss when employees leave. Knowledge sharing reduces repeated mistakes, helping employees make more informed decisions and increasing productivity by 10-40%.⁵ Conversely, a survey conducted by a team from Panopto found that employees, “spend an average of five hours every week waiting to get in touch with people that have the unique knowledge they need.”⁶

The sharing of diverse knowledge and perspectives also sparks innovation. It allows employees to build on each other's ideas, leading to creative problem-solving and innovative product or service

development. Knowledge sharing also contributes to employee engagement and satisfaction, as they feel valued and heard. According to Malik and Kanwal, “Organizational support for knowledge sharing fosters learning commitment and interpersonal adaptability among the workforce that ultimately grounds employees’ job satisfaction.”⁷

Conclusion

The power of a knowledge-sharing culture cannot be overstated. In an era characterized by rapid technological advances by potential adversaries and cultural shifts, the ability to learn, share, and apply knowledge swiftly and effectively can provide organizations with a competitive edge. By fostering a knowledge-sharing culture, organizations can harness the collective wisdom and creativity of their people, fueling productivity and driving innovation.

This TRADOC OCKO publication was written by Nathan Truckenbrod. Want to learn more? Respond to this article or access related articles, blogs, media presentations, and more at <https://www.milsuite.mil/book/groups/tradoc-km>.

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Notes:

1. Carruthers, Ryan, *What is 'knowledge sharing' and why is it important?*, December 22, 2021, togetherplatform.com, <https://www.togetherplatform.com/blog/knowledge-sharing>.
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5. *7 Ways to Improve Knowledge Sharing Across Your Organization*, StarMind, July 14, 2022, <https://www.starmind.ai/resources/ways-to-improve-knowledge-sharing-across-your-organization>.
6. Panopto, *Workplace Productivity Report: How Much Time is Lost to Knowledge Sharing Inefficiencies?*, October 16, 2019, <https://www.panopto.com/blog/how-much-time-is-lost-to-knowledge-sharing-inefficiencies-at-work/>.
7. Malik, Muhammad Shaukat, and Maria Kanwal, *Impacts of Organizational Knowledge Sharing Practices on Employees’ Job Satisfaction*, Journal of Workplace Learning, February 2018, <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JWL-05-2016-0044/full/html>.



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