Finding the best way to enhance collaboration through knowledge sharing:

An Indonesian Government Agency case study

by Rusnita Saleh and Niall Sinclair

1. Why is knowledge sharing so important?

Knowledge management (KM) is an important part of any organization's program management operation, as it leverages know-how across the organization to help improve decision making, innovation, partnership, and overall organizational results. Fundamentally, KM is all about making the right knowledge, or the right knowledge sources (including people), available to the right people at the right time. And knowledge sharing is one of the most important aspects of this process, since the vast majority of KM initiatives depend upon it. It is an enabler for the transfer and creation of knowledge, and its importance has been addressed directly by such authors as Bukowitz & Williams (1999)[1], Davenport and Prusak (2000)[2], and Gamble and Blackwell (2001)[3].

In order to make knowledge management initiatives work in practice, the workers within an organization must be willing to share their knowledge with others. Leaders must understand the culture both at an organisational and community level. While culture often exists on an organizational level, each community may have its own norms, perspectives, and collective understandings. Their willingness to share and to seek knowledge will be influenced by these collective views. Therefore, an organizational culture that encourages sharing and transferring of ideas, opinions and experiences among the staff is a key factor for knowledge

management success (Daneshfard, Shahabinia, 2010[4]).
One major influence on a culture's knowledge sharing willingness is the issue of reciprocity (Davenport & Prusak 2000). This refers to the individual's need to perceive a current or future return on the knowledge they chooses to share. This could be in the form of direct compensation of some kind or it could be something intangible like enhancing the individual's reputation; but it can also be the knowledge that the favour will be returned the next time that individual requires assistance.

An organizational culture of knowledge sharing doesn't happen overnight; it takes time for new ideas and new commitments to become embedded in any organization's work practices, and particularly so in the case of knowledge sharing which involves a practice which may seem counter-intuitive to some, that sharing your knowledge with others is a way to increase your own store of knowledge. Above all, a knowledge sharing culture cannot just be imposed on an organization, it has to grow organically and be driven by employee or client needs rather than by management design. The key to success is in creating a viable organizational support infrastructure that facilitates knowledge sharing, providing the mechanisms and incentives which will encourage and support employees in collaboration and sharing activities, both internally as well as externally. At the same time getting senior managers understanding and interest is a key to helping align knowledge sharing activity with the organization's vision, mission and business objectives.

Knowledge sharing in the organization is not only the internal sharing of individual and team experiences on project work, good practices and lessons learned, but also the external sharing of work outcomes with partners, peers and miscellaneous stakeholders and communities. This external sharing is a two-way process as it is also an opportunity to have a dialogue with subject experts and practitioners from around the world to learn from their expertise, experience and recommendations.

Overall, it is essential to any organization's well-being and ability to perform efficiently that individuals and teams are prepared to share knowledge of what they have done, what they have learned, and how they will use what they have learned to manage their work more effectively in the future.

2. What organizational problems stand in the way of knowledge sharing?

It is recognized that the sharing of tacit knowledge is more problematic than the sharing of explicit knowledge in most organizations. Trust (between individuals) is a key factor in enabling tacit knowledge sharing, but this trust can be difficult to build when teams are not co-located. To address this problem it is essential that KM (and management) practices offer the means for tacit sharing to take place by providing the right forums (primarily physical, but also virtual), supporting networks and communities (especially informal networks; the day to day interactions between people within the work environment), and by accepting unstructured work environments. In order to support the transfer of tacit knowledge, KM approaches must support the organization's socialization functions, while at the same time not enforcing strict managerial practices, routines, and hierarchies.

So, what are some of the typical barriers that stand in the way of the sharing of tacit knowledge in organizations? It could be lack of access to current information, lack of clear communications, difficulty in transferring knowledge and information, difficulty in maintaining the relevance and currency of knowledge and information, lack of initial support from senior managers, and limited resources – both in time and personnel.

3. Possible solutions to the problem

While there are no guaranteed solutions to such organizational problems, there are approaches which have been proven to be successful over time in many organizations, including the following:

Creating knowledge sharing networks; a key to enriching conversations and connecting various stakeholders—employees, managers, policy makers, practitioners, partners—and providing opportunities for them to interact and engage with each other. These types of knowledge hub play an important role where seekers and providers of working solutions come together with specific business issues to resolve.

Face-to-face communications are still the best, and highest quality way, to transfer knowledge between individuals.

Knowledge sharing events (storytelling) and communities of practice are the most effective tools to share the knowledge within a community and also cover the largest number of people at the same time.

Self-empowerment within teams and projects helps to promote learning and knowledge sharing, which in turn assists individuals and teams to perform more flexibly and effectively.

Management incentives will help bottom-up knowledge generation as they have a significant impact on the way that knowledge workers are perceived by organizations. In particular, management needs to assure workers that they value their knowledge contributions and are committed to allowing workers to spend time on their knowledge sharing activities.

Supporting knowledge sharing around specific solutions rather than simply providing technical assistance. Such work can be driven by comprehensive partnerships among different knowledge providers and stakeholders, e.g. governments, parliament, private sector, philanthropic organisations, civil

society and others.

Providing opportunities for knowledge sharing champions to work together towards key objectives, such as: specific principles for effective knowledge sharing; improved capacity for country-level information exchange; and, stronger support for exchange between local institutions.

Creating an organizational knowledge sharing platform, an intranet for example, based on known business needs, is a key enabler for organizational knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Acknowledge and leverage social media tools in the workplace, as these are what most young workers use in a 'peer to peer' fashion in order to share knowledge and to learn from others.

4. Brief Background of KM Practices in Indonesia

Knowledge Management in Indonesia was really only started in the 2000s and was pioneered mostly by private and state-owned companies who were recognized for their progressive works in helping performance improvement in their employees. These companies included PT Indosat, Unilever, and Astra, and were then followed by Bank Indonesia, The Army School, Police Academy and others. The involvement of universities in supporting the KM movement had a significant impact on its progress. For example, in 2004, the University of Indonesia established a special KM study under the Psychology Department which recognized KM as a behaviour change enforcer, while the Institute of Technology Bandung was focusing more on KM as an IT based infrastructure.

From the 1990s, Indonesia was already on the way towards developing into a knowledge society. The characteristics of this new stage of development were only vaguely circumscribed by

Indonesia's political leadership.[5] In attempting to create a knowledge society, Indonesia developed a number of national strategies and goals, such as the "Terwujudnya Masyarakat Telematika Nusantara Berbasis Pengetahuan di tahun 2020" (Creating a Nusantara Berbasis Pengetauan di tahun 2020) which is the vision statement of the KTIN (Kerangka Teknologi Informasi Nasional), the National Framework for Information Technology. The document is broad-based, extending from support for e-business to good governance and e-democracy. This vision and the appended action plan is, however, directed at information technology (IT) and not at knowledge per se, on which information technology has to be based. Academics, mostly with IT and library science backgrounds, have helped to support the momentum for the implementation of KM though the emphasizing of knowledge works, mostly focused around IT-based solutions, rather than seeing KM as a comprehensive strategy. Thus people tend to associate KM as part of IT instead of as a leaning tool. Despite this, the overlapping of the information society with the knowledge society is happening all the time.

Since 2005, the practice of including a KM strategy in development work has been supported by many INGOs, including the World Bank, the UNDP, and others, where KM has been seen as a tool for sharing and capturing knowledge for better decision making, including through the sharing of best practices and lesson learned. In 2014, Bappenas (National Development Planning Agency Republic of Indonesia) promoted organizational learning and knowledge sharing works among its stakeholders, and gave examples of the importance of knowledge sharing for development work[6], while the Indonesian National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction (TNP2K) has established its status as one of the main knowledge sharing centres for relevant issues, thus facilitating other similar institutions to follow its lead in the capture and sharing of important knowledge.

5. Knowledge sharing approaches, as used by an Indonesian Government Agency

Tasked with creating a knowledge sharing organization, and a working environment where KM practice was part of day-to-day business operations, the newly created KM Function in the organization focused on a number of key knowledge sharing activities over its first 12 months of operation, including the following:

Helping employees to create knowledge by publishing their works in working papers, policy briefs and so on, and using knowledge sharing sessions before publishing, and open external knowledge sharing sessions post publishing, as a promotional tool and to get more feedback from stakeholders.
Helping teams to promote and share the progress of their work, and in particular how they have actually done the work involved.
Sending workers to international conferences as speakers, and asking them to present before going, and then after returning, to let others have exposure to latest trends and useful information gathered from the conferences.
Facilitating organization-wide knowledge sharing events where Individuals, teams and subject experts can share their knowledge with both internal and external audiences. The main goal of these sessions is to leverage the group's intelligence and experience to speed up the identification of effective solutions and approaches to the issues presented. Additionally, stakeholders are invited to routine get-togethers on various topics – mostly sharing what other organization do and how they do it, what teams' have progressed with etc. Before each seminar delegates receive reading material to help them to start to think about the seminar theme, which makes the discussions at the event very focused and pertinent to the topic. The seminar is set up in a very interactive way, including world café settings, group discussions on fictional case studies etc. In addition, many organization representatives also contribute to discussion rounds as expert panellists, or give

presentations on their experiences. After the seminar, the individual case studies and presentations are made freely available to a broad audience on the institution website. Subsequently, a report is put together, including inputs from the various seminar participants. The participants share their team's experiences and lessons learned based on the overall discussions and exchange during the seminar, which adds additional analysis to the inputs by the participants. This publication is then made available to a broader audience in print and electronic form on our website.

Creating institutional practices and processes to ensure that knowledge is shared, captured and used in an optimal way.

Conclusion

Overall, organizational knowledge sharing efforts are not new in the Indonesian Government, and there are plenty of examples already that show that knowledge sharing is a crucial part of development co-operation. Indonesia's own experience highlights the importance of developing a knowledge sharing mechanism to foster such exchanges. For example, the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH, or Family Hope Programme) is based on Brazil's Bolsa Familia experience of conditional cash transfers to individual households. Learning best practices from other countries' similar programs, and then adjusting them to the Indonesian context has helped create this "best-fit" social protection program, first started by the World Bank. The PKH pilot, covering around 500,000 households in 2007, has now been scaled up to become a national programme funded by the national budget covering 3.2 million households in 2014.[7]

However, ensuring that knowledge sharing is a regular part of government learning processes, thus creating a habit that fosters the collaboration that can create knowledge, is still a relatively new thing in the Indonesian public sector. How to make it a reality is something that is still been worked on, but early-adopter experiences so far would seem to indicate that such efforts will probably need 12 to 18 months of trial and error before they will find the keys to success, i.e. what works best in an Indonesian context.

About the Authors

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Rusnita Saleh has been a KM practitioner for over 16 years, with a strong focus on institutional learning and development, and especially in the development of communication and technologies within organizations. She has initiated and managed numerous KM projects variety of working environments; private sector, government agencies, and international N Previously she was the Group Knowledge Management Leader at the National Team Accelerating Poverty Reduction. She is the author of numerous publications on KM, informa management and communication, and has lectured and presented on those topics.

Niall Sinclair is the author of the book Stealth KM, and has worked with many leading organizations including NASA, the GSA, the Pan-American Health Organization, Bank of Montre and Public Health Agency of Canada. Previously he was the Director of KM and Information Management at Public Works and Government Services Canada. He also served as the Informat Management lead for the Canadian Government as Director of IM at the Treasury Board Secretariat. He is the author of numerous publications on KM and Information Management, ar has lectured and presented across Europe, Asia and North America.

Footnote

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