THE MACRIS GROUP

From Dean's Desk:

Prologue

This article is a departure from previous themes. It's origins are interesting; several years ago I was working on a project in the UK. This engagement was with a large global engineering firm Ove Arup Partners. One of my long time colleagues and friends, Steve Clark, works for Arup and was in the UK working on a railway engineering problem. My role was to facilitate a group of international railway experts in a discussion about the control strategy to address the problem. That assignment inaugurated my relationship with Arup. Steve, continues to work on railway issues across the globe, possesses a unique insight into my work and routinely contacts me with thoughts and suggestions. A few years ago Steve introduced me to an Arup employee, Andrew Trickett, saying that Andrew was working on something very interesting from an organizational and human performance perspective, Knowledge Management. This issue of Update touches the surface of the concept, and hopefully piques your interest, as it did mine. I thank Andrew for his contribution, and look forward to follow-on articles from him.

Knowledge Reviews – Eating the Elephant

Andrew Trickett — Arup

My Grandfather came from the North of England a place where there is no lack of what we would politely call plain speaking. He'd seen a few things in his time before he passed away just short of his 102nd birthday.

I was one day discussing my work as a knowledge manager and he stated that he didn't envy today's generation and compared current managers to hard working hamsters constantly running on a wheel and getting nowhere. He then went on to say that managers didn't appear to have the time to reflect as his generation did.

Now granted my grandfather retired in 1968, so I went to chat with my father who retired in the mid 90's and he made the same observation on managers as my grandfather did .

McKinsey did a survey last year, which highlighted that not only do todays employees at all strata spend on average 39% on role specific tasks, but 28% answering e-mails and 20% actually gathering information. I suspect if the same survey is taken in a few years' time that the time we actually spend doing our roles may have decreased as new 'catchers of attention' come in as social media takes hold within our organisations.

Also the knowledge tsunami that is washing over organisations means that knowledge is quickly commoditized and that all organisations have access to that knowledge. But, there is a way to surf that tsunami and re-combine knowledge to help you deal with the challenges of not only today but the future.

In summary is this the state of your business as you look at of the window today

> Tired of re-work/wasted time

> Clients demanding more for less.

> Disengaged employees who want to make a contribution but can't find a path forward

> Capture new ideas & implement them whilst the project is still ongoing

> Do you want to attend a meeting that achieves something

> Get to the end of a project and wish you could remember the lessons that you learnt to make sure that you don't fall into the same snake pit

> An IT collaborative system that you installed and the usage isn't as good as that IT salesman promised.

> A simple system that doesn't need a regiment of consultants to implement and has a proven track record

I'm going to outline a simple system that at a maximum takes 30 minutes gets people engaged and can help drive a lot of improvements that you want to see and you can tailor it to your organisations needs and problems. For example you could use it on a project where you are working in a new area such as installing a new telecoms system in Kazakhstan, or on a major project which will last a few years and you know that the client is demanding that the next contract be delivered with a 5% cost saving.

Then looking at using a knowledge review system is one you should be considering. The system is what I call a MARTINI system in that it can be used as the advert says 'any time any place anywhere'. It is time limited, it can take no more than 20-30 minutes and can take place on the factory floor or the boardroom.
(My personal preference is the stand-up meeting around a table and only asks 4 key questions.

> What went well?

> What did we do differently?

> What was an area for improvement?

> What can we learn from that?

The key element, though is that the knowledge review is only 1 part of the process, you can have captured the knowledge, but there is a last question.

Who else needs to know – one of the problems with traditional knowledge management in some people's eyes is that the system tends to go on to a database and is forgotten. This system captures the experiential element of people working on a project what is going well what is an area for improvement at the point it is needed. At the end of the process, these can then be all reviewed as part of a more formal end of project review, where the effect of the changes can be quantified and then the key lessons circulated wider through the company.

So rather than having a very lengthy close out review at the end, you have a series of small reviews which make a whole – hence eating the elephant which is best achieved by eating a series of smaller portions rather than trying to eat the whole at one sitting.

This review process, not only captures the knowledge but also embeds it in people's minds for future use, but also the manager looking after the project gets an early warning of potential issues and can make the requisite course correction.

It also focuses on capturing what went right and it looks to avoid words like 'error' 'foul up' or some other less polite words, because one of the elements to a successful knowledge review is to instill confidence in attendees. If you go in to concentrate on catching people out or people think they are going to be hit on the head, then people will be exceptionally guarded in what they disclose and then the key issues are not discussed and bought out to the benefit of all.
I've found that people like to take part in these as it gives them the opportunity to feel more involved in the project and that they are helping in improving it.

This does mean an investment in time for yourself though, a knowledge review is not something that you make employees participate over their lunch break otherwise employees will see it as something extracurricular that they have to put time in that benefits the company but that the company has put no 'skin in the game'. It allows you to harness your employee's thoughts, and to use human beings innate ability to re-combine thoughts from other projects they have worked on to benefit the current one.

I've used these to drive process improvement but also to capture little innovation nuggets that have helped improve a project to the benefit of all. The feedback is that people really enjoy participating in these 20/30 minute meetings that can take place either on a bi- weekly basis or when a milestone is reached on a project, the system is highly adaptable.

If you are wondering where the original knowledge review came from – like a lot of good ideas it comes from good old Uncle Sam and the US Army who have used these reviews since 1993 after every action, so it isn't some new-fangled idea that has no relevance to the real world.

 In Arup we have been using knowledge reviews for some time but traditionally towards the end of the project, we are now using them for projects whilst they are ongoing and feedback from participants and management is generally positive as it gives people time out to reflect on their work and feel less like hamsters on a wheel. It may also have an effect on litigation if you can highlight that you have an extensive and ongoing knowledge management process that looks to capture lessons learnt quickly and use them to improve your projects, then it may help your chances.

Running a project successfully is hard work, but in Arup we know, that harnessing the collective brainpower of the team on our projects is just as much real work as the design of a bridge or a railroad track.

A final thought from my grandfather
"If you don't look up from the grindstone, you can't look up and see the stars".

At all levels of organisations as we engage in more and more knowledge work – if you can do your work 1% better than you're competitors you're in the ringside seats and not the bleachers.

If you'd like to find out more on how a knowledge review process can help your profitability and happier and engaged staff, with a free 45 minute presentation, then please contact either Dean Macris or myself;

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Andrew is Knowledge and Information Manager within Arup's global rail team. Recognised globally across Arup as a subject matter expert on Knowledge Management and Communities of Practice (COP), Andrew has designed and delivered numerous innovative and engaging workshops with employees from numerous disciplines up to executive level.

Andrew has significant knowledge on developing improved knowledge sharing within organisations based on the People, Process and Technology circles and has a high level of expertise on Enterprise 2.0 tools to assist with knowledge sharing and connectivity. Andrew is particularly interested in the use of COP and project reviews as a means of capturing tacit knowledge from people and delivering operational efficiencies within an organisation.

Andrew has a high level of experience training teams and individuals on how to utilise effectively current knowledge tools within Arup in order to access global knowledge as well as training managers in the tools and techniques to obtain key knowledge with minimal loss of time and cost to the firm. Andrew has also spoken at a number of KM conferences and has contributed articles to a number of KM publications.

Closing Thoughts

The concept of Knowledge Management has been around for a while. The University of North Carolina prepared a paper on the topic titled "Introduction to Knowledge Management." Excerpts from the paper provide a historical perspective as follows:

"Knowledge Management is one of the hottest topics today in both the industry world and information research world. In our daily life, we deal with huge amount of data and information. Data and information is not knowledge until we know how to dig the value out of of it. This is the reason we need knowledge management. Unfortunately, there's no universal definition of knowledge management, just as there's no agreement as to what constitutes knowledge in the first place. We chose the following definition for knowledge management for its simplicity and broad context.

Simple Definition: Knowledge Management (KM) refers to a multi-disciplined approach to achieving organizational objectives by making the best use of knowledge. KM focuses on processes such as acquiring, creating and sharing knowledge and the cultural and technical foundations that support them." The paper also provides an evolution of the concept as follows:

"70's
- Peter Drucker: information and knowledge as organizational resources.
- Peter Senge: "learning organization"
- Leonard-Barton: well-known case study of "Chaparral Steel ", a company having knowledge management strategy

80's
- Knowledge (and its expression in professional competence) as a competitive asset was apparent
- Managing knowledge that relied on work done in artificial intelligence and expert systems
- Knowledge management-related articles began appearing in journals and books

90's until now,
- A number of management consulting firms had begun in-house knowledge management programs
- Knowledge management was introduced in the popular press, the most widely read work to date is Ikujiro Nonaka's and Hirotaka Takeuchi's The Knowledge-Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation (1995)
- The International Knowledge Management Network(IKMN) went online in 1994
- Knowledge management has become big business for such major international consulting firms as Ernst & Young, Arthur Andersen, and Booz-Allen & Hamilton"

In 1996, we published an UPDATE article that discussed the effect of Lost Knowledge. That issue started with, "In a business environment where less is better, financial success is measured in head counts, quarterly reports and reduction in salaries and benefit packages. I submit that there is a different set of considerations not being incorporated in the measures of overall company health. When one examines these different considerations, longer term success and health may be in significant jeopardy. Some other measures include:
- Experience
- Knowledge/know how
- Motivation
- Integrated Planning

This is not to say that the traditional measures are wrong, what is wrong is the overall lack of balance in measures for long term success and health.

This brings us to the issue of leadership and knowledge management. Andrew's approach is broader than Lost Knowledge, and via Andrew's work there is a systematic and flexible way of dealing with managing knowledge, making it relevant, by utilizing and capturing a wide range of generational knowledge and crucially embedding that experience within the organization to help deal with the demographic time bomb within organizations.

What's needed at the leadership level is commitment to a formalized Knowledge Management System. The effects of not performing Knowledge Review is continually evident, but convincing the 'powers to be' that time and resources should be committed to these reviews typically is a challenge particularly with machines need to get built, power plants completed, bridges constructed or even software programs tested and launched.

Learning from Andrew about the benefits realized at Arup is eye opening and demonstrates a commitment by one of the world's largest Architect, Engineering and Construction companies.

Once again I thank Andrew and our next issue will address:
Knowledge management: a question of trust