From Dean's Desk:

Prologue

In our last Update issue, we introduced the topic of Knowledge Management and provided an overview of the benefits of a Knowledge Review, as well as a synopsis of the mechanics of conducting such a review. We also argued for the leadership component necessary to fully realize the benefits of a Knowledge Management System. Consistent with Andrew's work, he clearly understands this relationship. In subsequent writings and presentations, Andrew posits the idea that Knowledge Management is a question of trust. Considering the leadership component along with the importance of trust, this issue focuses on this relationship and the impact on organizational leadership.

Knowledge Management—A Question of Trust

Andrew Trickett – Arup

At a recent conference, one participant described knowledge management as 'the conscience of the organisation and that effective knowledge management depends on a sense and a synergy of moral obligation by employer and employee.'

For me there are two key moral concepts to be considered:

Reciprocal altruism, whereby people share knowledge in the expectation that the favour will be returned in a similar manner at some stage in the future. There is a delight that we as human beings receive from helping our fellow humans even though at the time we derive nothing from this save for the pleasure of seeing it.

Douglas Mc Gregor's Theory X & Y, where Y management take a positive approach towards people and that for them people want to come in and do the best job they can and that they look to seek out responsibility for themselves and their actions. (X sees people as needing to be coerced and tightly monitored)

The key element in these concepts is trust. From experience, knowledge management thrives in organisations where there are high levels of trust among people within the organisation.

If there is trust, then you don't need as many manuals, checkers and counter signatures that were in organisations when I first started work. People want to sign their work as craftsmen and to receive the credit as well as an acknowledgement of responsibility for that work.

People also desire to share knowledge of that success and, if they feel comfortable, then can also share their failures. I read recently that the World Bank has Failure Fairs highlighting why a project didn't go as well as expected, but also provide a way to help colleagues to not make the same mistakes.

At Arup we carry out knowledge reviews that try to capture what went well along with what didn't, and these findings are captured and forwarded to the skills networks. Crucially, people have confidence that highlighting an area for improvement is not going to be used to 'beat them around the head'

In a Japanese owned business I worked for in the UK, there were a number of Japanese managers who had relocated to the UK. Junior managers received knowledge transfer from their seniors who saw it as a moral duty to pass on their learning - to leave the organisation and the people in it better than they found it. Competition was at a reduced level between the participants and co-operation was the key to winning the respect of your peers in the group. This moral obligation meant that KM was not seen as a tick box compliant exercise, but a part of being an employee at whatever level in the organisation.

The group were quicker in sharing knowledge and learning from mistakes because individual participants had confidence in their group to treat their mistakes with respect and in confidence, which reduced the fear element or loss of face. The key element that also came out of these meetings was that because of this relative fearlessness, people talked and bought different experiences both positive and negative to the room, which led to more tacit/ experiential knowledge being discussed and absorbed by participants.

If, as a group, people are sharing and talking about knowledge through their experiences, then this dialogue can be the starting point for people to ask unorthodox questions, experiment with new ideas and ways of working in a safe setting before they expose a creative idea to the organisation.

People naturally want to share knowledge, it is organisations that tend to place barriers in their way, for example not providing a time allowance to reflect and review their work and to share and gather experiences from that work, to help improve the final product and to provide the ability for the organisation and its people to learn, adapt and evolve to meet the clients current & future challenges.

If the organisation does remove the barriers, then people have to invest time in their own personal knowledge management and to recognise that their success is derived from being a sharer, not a hoarder of knowledge throughout the myriad formal & informal networks that exist in today's organisation. This sharing of knowledge along with a high standard of work should form part of their appraisal both formally and informally by managers and their peers during their time in an organisation.

Organisations struggle with the legacy systems of command and control and need to recognise that today's knowledge worker is different from the old production line worker. Organisations shouldn't be looking to shrink people's autonomy when they arrive in the office, they should be looking to encourage them to circulate and re-configure their portable knowledge to investigate and provide solutions to the complex challenges that the world is going to provide.

Leadership and Trust

The above all sounds good, and in an ideal world this should work like clockwork. But we all know we do not live in an ideal world.

Knowledge is a powerful thing and in the any environment where there is any kind of power hierarchy, the tendency to use knowledge as a lever is tempting. When we start our leadership programs we point out that there are eight types of power. They are:

- Legitimate power = because of title
- Reward power = a person who controls things you want, and be as simple as a storeroom clerk
- Coercive power = ridicule or punishment
- Referent power = Consistent set of values, goals and ways of getting there even if they don't agree with you. Will follow you with a consistent set of values
- Charismatic = who you are as a person
- Expertise power = knowledge and skill
- Situation power = a person who holds a low position but can control people by their cooperation or lack of cooperation
- Information power = Share or holdback knowledge or information which affects power

In today's world a ninth form of power has come into existence, and we refer to it as Network Power. Network Power is where people are excluded from a network of influence where knowledge is shared – effectively distributed lateral power, in contrast to the old hierarchical power. In the context of KM, if you aren't in the right network(s), you lose out in accessing and utilising knowledge as well as being seen within the organisation as a key influencer. The network will find ways of bypassing the hoarders or non-sharers of knowledge within the organisation who cling to the knowledge-is-power para-

digm. The network achieves this over time by searching for and locating other sources of similar or good enough knowledge to help them in their day to day work. In the end the hoarders lose out as their knowledge power diminishes in usefulness as the network bypasses them.

From the above, it becomes evident that information and knowledge involve several sources of power. Sharing, withholding, and/or hoarding information and/or knowledge can be a lever in both the positive and the negative. The issue here is this: what good is the process of Knowledge Management if the people in the organization first don't 'buy-in' to the concept and then don't actually share their knowledge because they feel insecure or distrustful in the people around them or the organization itself? Perhaps the most important aspect of a successful Knowledge Management initiative is safety and trust. When we refer to safety we are referring to the notion that the people within an organization feel 'safe,' that the environment and culture of the organization is safe for them to express themselves without penalty, to openly share their knowledge and expertise without feeling that someone will 'steal' their ideas, that favouritism is not part of the culture, in addition to many other dynamics that tend to subvert the health of an organization. As Andrew states above, organisations tend to place barriers in the way of people sharing information and knowledge. The word 'organisations' is another way of saying leadership.

To explore leadership removing barriers and creating a safe environment we can be further refined the notion in the context of a rewards culture. Rewards for this discussion means both formal and informal rewards systems that live within an organization, and how those rewards are managed. For those of you who have followed our writings over the past many years, you may recall articles on Prudent Risk. Briefly, Prudent Risk is the opposite of Zero Risk. Zero Risk has many negative aspects--excessive costs, bogged down processes, and redundant and multiple approval iterations. Prudent Risk, however, has a band of prudency where decisions are made and business can move efficiently and effectively. But the concept of Prudent Risk also allows for a prudent risk to go wrong and without castigation. Rather, the misstep becomes a learning opportunity which can then be embedded by adjusting the process to re-

duce or eliminate the misstep repeating itself. The weak link here is when the concept of Prudent Risk is adopted but the underlying cultural aspects have not been embraced, and a prudent risk gone badly becomes a punitive event, the organisation reverts to Zero Risk. Much the same organisational behaviour comes into play with Knowledge Management.

Here's hypothetical but realistic scenario for KM. An organisation realizes the benefits of a KM system. Proclamations go out, along with teams to develop and implement such a program. All is set, protocols are established, teams begin the process and people start sharing information. The crux of the issue is when a person who has a unique skill, knowledge or component of information shares that information, another team picks it up and

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.

applies the learning and/or knowledge, and that team takes all the credit for that key component of knowledge provided by another person, the process is flawed from onset. If you shared your knowledge and expertise only to have another person or team take ownership with no acknowledgement of your contribution, how would you feel? Would you ever share again? The reality is that is takes a couple of instances for this to occur – people might forgive once or even twice but after then they would disengage. It also depends on how 'competitive' the organisation is. If there is pressure on short term wins at the expense of the medium to long term, then this pressure can reduce the critical questioning that needs to happen within the organisation to help it improve and innovate.

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We are confident that the majority of our readers can formulate their own scenario or case study of situations where one person willingly shares their expertise only to have someone else seemingly reap a reward.

The point here is in a safe environment, the leadership of the organisation is keenly aware of these dynamics and stimulates an environment that frowns on this behaviour, and rewards the person sharing. Where 'credit' for something is really a team situation, expectations are such that people within the organisation are not positioning themselves at the expense of others. That achievement is rewarded appropriately and properly, where there is a system that rewards those who strive to meet the expectation rather than those who are self-serving. The worst thing that can happen is if the one who is striving to meet expectations feels as though they are being penalized, albeit indirectly, when someone exploits the contribution for their own benefit.

Once again, the effective leadership position must be one that creates a sense of trust, openness, fairness and proper rewards. As we have stated repeatedly, this is not easy. To make this happen requires leadership skill and tenacity. I am sure some of our readers think we don't understand all the nuance of what is going on within

their organisations and it is easy for us as consultants to make these audacious claims; and we understand that. What we can say though is we see many different organisations and types of organisations. We see different cultures, different people and different businesses, and what we are saying in extremely realistic and achievable. There are positive examples and to Andrew's credit, we are fortunate to showcase Arup as a global organization that has instituted a successful Knowledge Management system.

In closing, the ultimate objective here is rooted in the business case. To fall back on the old 1980s jargon of "win-win," if a viable and robust KM process is designed developed and implemented, employees from the start are more effective and they become more productive quicker because they are in touch with the people and the tools that help them do their jobs better. Employees feel more ownership and belonging, the organisation moves forward rather than relearning over and over, litigation costs might well be reduced, competitive advantage increases, and ultimately outcomes in the form of business results improve.

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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