

Communication

Knowledge Hoarding: a Bottleneck to Organizational Success

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As an organization grows, vested interests assume predominance over organizational interest. This leads to predominance of hoarding of knowledge over its sharing; conflict over co-operation; 'group' over 'team'; fear over 'trust' and 'I' over 'you'. What was a single entity earlier now takes the shape of a segregated community. Organizational leaders should take a multi-pronged approach to counter this hoarding and simultaneously let knowledge flow freely benefitting everyone in the value-chain, argues the author.

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Elephant & the Blind Men

A story from our ancient Indian scriptures goes something like this: Six blind men tried figuring out how an elephant really looked. They have not felt one before. As they approached the elephant, each one could get hold of its different body parts. The blind man who felt a leg said that the elephant was like a pillar; the one who felt the tail said that the elephant was like a rope; the one who felt the trunk said that the elephant was like a tree branch; the one who felt the ear said the elephant was like a hand fan; the one who felt the belly said the elephant was like a wall; and the one who felt the tusk said the elephant was like a solid pipe. This led to a conflict situation. A sage passing by became a witness to this incident. Pacifying, he explained to them: "All of you are right. The reason every one of you is telling it differently is because each one of you touched the different part of the elephant. So, actually the elephant has all the features you mentioned."

Sharing of Knowledge

In a knowledge based society, the economic value comes by sharing of knowledge. This knowledge/belief/understanding is either created and/or embedded in the organizational system by the collaborative efforts of intellectual masses we often call as human resources. It is primarily for this reason that human as a resource is considered as the most critical of all the resources of production. Primarily for this knowledge component, organizational theorists have started considering human resource as the only resource difficult for competitors to emulate. They now also regard it as Human Capital (HC). Time is not far off when we will see a more seamless trade-off between Knowledge Management (KM) & Human Resource Management (HRM).

As we all know, greater than or equal to two individuals come together to realize a dream. They call this dream by varied names like objective; purpose; aim; intent; goal; mission; vision, etc.. In order to actualize this dream, they toil very hard. They go up even to the extent of becoming one. Not just among themselves but also with the dream they wove together.

As time passes, a repository of knowledge is created in the workplace. A common understanding prevails. Individuals add to this pool, draw from it and even then the pool becomes richer and richer. This is the magic of sharing. This knowledge repository (tacit/explicit) becomes the driving force behind the suc-

cess of an organization. It keeps the organization going; brings the best out of everyone; builds avenues for open communication; creates synergies; lets the innovative juices flow in the otherwise dry organizational veins; assists in professional and personal growth; gears an organization from 'Organizational Learning' to 'Learning Organization'; takes the organization forward in uncharted territories; helps us adapt to change; propels us to initiate change; assists to take the right decisions; facilitates timely actions; helps us socialize- create that much needed informal bonding; aids us in developing productive relationships; gives us a reason to trust others; makes the optimum use of scarce human resource a possibility, etc.. At times it also lets us wear serendipity. And soon the core members start believing that they are about to realize their dreams. They start dreaming big.

Hoarding of Knowledge

However as this organization grows, vested interests occupy predominance over organizational interest. This further leads to predominance of hoarding over sharing; conflict over co-operation; 'group' over 'team'; fear over 'trust' and 'I' over 'you'. What was a single entity earlier now takes the shape of a segregated community.

Why do we hoard knowledge? Why do we hesitate to share understanding? Why do we amass information? Why don't we share? Honestly speaking, we have been programmed this way. To hoard things is in our genes. For many of

us, hoarding is a part of our survival strategy; the basic necessity of keeping a job even in an uncertain environment (external/internal). The basic human desire to feel important comes with another calling. Historically, knowledge has been equated with power which in its wake commands social and organizational clout. Hence our inflated ego hinders the free flow of information. Directly or indirectly, we try to dominate others on the basis of knowledge/information. Our hyper competitive work culture acts as another thrust. Add to it our old fashioned bureaucratic organizational structures are still rampant across all kinds of boundaries. In a nutshell, we do all that is required to make us indispensable.

What Should Be Done?

So what should organizations do to do away with these traits? After all, they are integral to the human nature. To start with, organizational leaders should take a multi-pronged approach to counter this hoarding and simultaneously let knowledge flow freely benefitting everyone in the value-chain. This can be achieved by creating a collaborative work environment, adopting flat structures (as far as practicable), senior management acting as a role model, internalizing the new cycle for growth, learning-sharing-de-learning-new learning, keeping trust, transparency and values as the pillars of organizational success etc.

For as trust fills our heart fear, jealousy, self-seeking behaviour, sycophancy and other negativities vanish away like a mass of dust. And what remains is purity of knowledge-the one which is everlasting, the one which is eternal.

As a word of caution, we should however keep in mind that we need to be prudent while sharing. Our sharing or hoarding strategy should ideally go with the overall organizational set up. Or else we will become a misfit. Remember, the organizations are never regarded as misfit. In the initial days, it would be wise to use more of our factory senses and less of vocal cord; let smell of the place become our mentor; carry our master key with us - adaptability. These pebbles of wisdom have always given us wonderful results-both in situations of survival as well as excellence.

To conclude, we need to create an awareness of the fact that the more we share knowledge, more it remains and expands within us; taller we become and the more the organization procreates. However, in circumstances of noble intent/win-win conditions, we can hoard. It is a reality now that the more things we have in common by collaborative knowledge sharing, the more uncommon the organizations will become. People make places!!