Chapter XIII

Social Environment: Promoting Knowledge Sharing Through Personal Interaction

Abstract

This chapter addresses the role of social environment and knowledge sharing in decision performance. It reports the results of an empirical investigation of the effectiveness of knowledge sharing through socialisation in enhancing the accuracy of judgemental forecasting. The results obtained clearly show that people perform better when sharing knowledge with others, but they also indicate that there is still room for improvement. Hence, more research is needed in this area to investigate the effect of knowledge sharing on decision performance.
Introduction

Throughout this book, the idea has been promoted that the development of knowledge is the result of the dynamic knowledge processes whose effectiveness is impacted by a number of social and technological factors. The focus of this chapter is on one social influence, namely social environment, as an important enabler and facilitator of knowledge sharing.

Nonaka and Konno (1998) consider physical, face-to-face experiences as the key to conversion and transfer of tacit knowledge. They stress the importance of an open organisational design and customer interfaces as providers of strong ecological stimuli through direct encounter between individuals. They see social environment as “ba” (space), where individuals share feelings, emotions, experiences, and mental models. It is the environment where an individual sympathises or further empathises with others, removing the barrier between the self and others. They claim that from this world emerge care, love, trust, and commitment.

Recently, some KM practitioners have implemented the concept of ba in the form of the knowledge café. The term knowledge café is coined by Gurteen (2005) to denote the place where people gather for the purpose of learning in order that they may make a difference. Essentially, knowledge café is about networking, knowledge sharing, and learning from each other. The outcome for the participants is what they take away as individuals that they can act on and do differently. Gurteen knowledge cafes are regular miniworkshops opened worldwide. A full list of regional events is available at the URL http://www.gurteen.com/gurteen/gurteen.nsf/id/kcafes.

Some KM authors suggest that new knowledge always begins with the individual, but that making personal knowledge available to others is the central activity of the knowledge-creating company (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The spiral knowledge model assumes that the process of sharing will result in the organisational amplification and exponential growth of working knowledge. Others propose that in order to build a learning organisation, the first step should be to foster environment conducive to individual learning, that is, allow experimentation to gain experience, and second, to open up boundaries and stimulate exchange of ideas (Garvin, 1998). Handzic and Zhou (2005) also argue that organisations must nurture a supportive organisational environment in addition to technical infrastructure to facilitate knowledge sharing and transfer.

However, given the current infancy of knowledge management research, there is little empirical evidence regarding the ways in which tacit knowledge is actually shared, and the impact it has on performance. The purpose of this chapter is to address this issue in the context of decision making.
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