THREE METHODS OF INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE SHARING TO SUPPORT LEAN IMPLEMENTATION

*by **Cynthia J. Young**, founder of CJ Young Consulting, LLC, a knowledge management consulting firm, which, through a human-centric focus demonstrates that having a knowledge management mindset supports overall organization health.*

Why is knowledge sharing important to an organization?

Have you ever been frustrated because somebody knew something that would have helped you to complete a task? What about you? Have you held back something you knew because you're afraid somebody would get ahead of you?

Knowledge sharing is not just about the aspects of sharing a written process or procedure. It can be easy to e-mail the document or a link to a record, but will the workforce perceive these actions as supportive or directive? What's more effective is to share tacit knowledge or knowledge based on experience. Tacit knowledge shared as a short phone call, as part of an e-mail, or in conversation with someone over coffee becomes beneficial to all in the conversation.

Knowledge sharing is also about building trust between you and your coworkers or your team. There are many reasons not to share knowledge, but more so are reasons to share knowledge. One reason not to share knowledge may be because it's business-sensitive. You have a limited group of people that you can talk to; however, in most cases, hoarding knowledge does more damage than sharing knowledge.

Ensure prioritization of knowledge sharing within the workforce.

Prioritization of knowledge builds trust. Sharing what you learn on management calls may seem blah or just another work call. If you ask your workforce, they may tell you that hearing something you didn't think was significant helped them with something they had been struggling with rather than continuing to suffer in silence. You helped your team by prioritizing knowledge sharing.

Another way to show your team that you are prioritizing knowledge sharing after conducting a Gemba walk is by debriefing your experiences on the walk. Consider what you do during a Gemba walk. You walk through the process or the procedure, watching what is happening and listening to what people say. You might also ask questi

ons about a process or system. If you take what you've learned back to your team or share your observations with the people you're participating with throughout the Gemba walk, everybody will benefit from the knowledge you share.

Don't let knowledge be seen as a secret only shared with your inner circle.

Make setting time aside each month to talk to your team a priority. Let your personnel know what things are happening outside of their daily work. For instance, if you are participating in a management meeting, some of the knowledge shared may apply to them and affect what they are doing. By sharing what you are hearing, you show the workforce that you trust them and rely on them for feedback.

Purposely sharing knowledge builds inclusion and trust with your team. You are focused on building a team or teams to meet deadlines, support customer needs, improve communication, and improve culture. This is important when implementing new processes or policies such as when lean is implement in an organization where individuals may have limited experience in lean. Embracing a culture of knowledge sharing and rejecting knowledge hoarding supports inclusion and trust in the organization.

Eliminate the waste of non-utilized talent.

Eliminating the waste of non-utilized talent may sound easy, but it's actually a challenge. Organizations may

rely on an "A" team to get things done quickly rather than support the improvement of the workforce. One way to eliminate the waste of non-utilized talent can be by encouraging knowledge sharing and making it part of an organization's culture. By making knowledge sharing part of organizational culture, everybody understands that knowledge sharing is valued.

An organization can reveal talent within the organization by advocating knowledge-sharing activities such as lunch-and-learns, incorporating knowledge sharing as part of the

performance evaluations, or rewarding employees based on the level of knowledge they share. Through these knowledge-sharing activities, previously unrecognized employees will feel confident sharing their experiences and know-how. Leaders become aware of the expertise in the workforce and can support challenges with their current personnel.

Another benefit of eliminating non-utilized talent is opening the aperture for internal promotions. Organizations save money and time since they don't waste time and assets looking for a new person to join the team. The organizations also know they have someone who is a good fit for the organization and begin working in the position immediately while

retaining corporate knowledge.

Conclusion

Implementing lean may be the ideal solution to an organization's problems, but it may also come with many naysayers. Change can be hard on people who may not know how to implement lean in their part of the organization and may fear failing. Embracing knowledge sharing can support lean implementation by prioritizing knowledge sharing within your workforce. It's not about hoarding knowledge for your inner circle but making knowledge sharing

a continually utilized practice in the organization.

Integrating prioritizing knowledge sharing in your workforce, preventing knowledge hoarding, and eliminating the waste of non-utilized talent through a knowledge-sharing culture all support implementation or strengthening lean in an organization. Formalizing the knowledge sharing may start as a challenge as any other organizational change. However, if an organization takes on the challenge of lean implementation, sharing knowledge will be seen as beneficial and quickly adopted, with learning flourishing as the organization continues to support the lean implementation. ■