



Encourage tacit knowledge sharing in industrial organizations

By Cynthia J. Young

In today's rapidly evolving industrial landscape, the collective knowledge of an organization's workforce is a vital asset. While explicit knowledge, written and well-codified, is often easy to communicate, tacit knowledge created from experiences remains elusive. This form of knowledge, rooted in personal experience and often difficult to articulate, is invaluable. Encouraging tacit knowledge sharing can lead to innovation, improve productivity and fortify an organization's competitive edge. Sometimes, the best tacit knowledge is shared informally while talking about challenges, successes and failures on a work break.

It's essential to understand what tacit knowledge entails. This knowledge is often intuitive, hard to define and is based on an individual's experiences, insights and values. In an industrial setting, it might be an engineer's instinct about a particular machine's quirks or a production worker's insights into subtle changes in product quality.

Tacit knowledge sharing is beneficial in that it supports efficiency and innovation through employees sharing insights on what did and did not work, supporting faster problem resolution and innovative solutions. It also supports a competitive advantage, providing a unique asset that can be shared since it's easily replicated or known by the competition. Sharing tacit knowledge builds a culture of collaboration and mutual respect, reinforcing a sense of community among employees. Here are ways encourage tacit knowledge sharing:

Mentoring and coaching. Pairing seasoned professionals with newer employees can bridge the knowledge gap. The mentor provides insights derived from experience, while the mentee brings fresh perspectives, fostering mutual learning. You can also pair reverse mentoring relationships where early or younger professionals mentor senior colleagues. This can provide fresh outlooks on culture and technology to break down silos and open lines of communication.

Interactive workshops. Organize regular sessions where teams can discuss challenges, share experiences and collaborate on potential solutions. These sessions should be informal, fostering an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing without judgment. You may consider holding monthly lunch-and-learn sessions to offer a more comfortable and less scholastic environment.

Create communities of practice. These are groups

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formed around common interests or challenges.

Communities of practice (CoP) allow individuals from various departments to collaborate, share insights and brainstorm solutions. A CoP can be extremely useful in eliminating silos between departments while sharing successes and failures along with lessons learned that led to both.

Document storytelling. While tacit knowledge is challenging to document, efforts should be made to capture it when feasible. This can be in the form of video interviews, written anecdotes or graphical representations. Anecdotal experiences are often the carriers of tacit knowledge. By sharing stories, employees can communicate insights in a relatable and memorable way.

Challenges and considerations. While promoting tacit knowledge sharing offers substantial benefits, it isn't without challenges. Time constraints, hesitancy to share due to fear of redundancy or concerns about misinterpretation can be barriers. Addressing these concerns requires sustained effort, clear communication about the value of sharing and ensuring the culture supports and values these initiatives.

Leaders must actively promote open communication, celebrate different viewpoints and avoid penalizing mistakes when supporting tacit knowledge sharing. By creating an environment that encourages and rewards the sharing of tacit knowledge, industrial organizations can drive innovation, foster collaboration and secure a competitive advantage in the marketplace. The key to preventing knowledge loss and supporting knowledge sharing is in recognizing the value of tacit knowledge and implementing strategies to harness it effectively. ❖

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