



Chapter XI

Identifying and Managing the Enablers of Knowledge Sharing

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge sharing in public services has not yet received much attention in the research literature. This chapter investigates knowledge sharing in one public service context, the UK National Health Service (NHS), and identifies factors that influence the readiness of an organization to share knowledge effectively. Using participant observation, document analysis, interviews, and a survey of managers, data are presented to highlight enablers of effective knowledge sharing in health care service delivery. Through factor analysis and regression modeling, we have isolated six factors that are significant predictors of effective knowledge sharing. Our research is broadly consistent with previous findings that an innovative

culture, a capacity to learn from failure, and good information quality are strong predictors of successful knowledge sharing. However, we also identify factors associated with change management and a predisposition to confront performance indicators that significantly influence the knowledge sharing process. We suggest that the peculiar nature of the public sector environment poses unique challenges for health care managers who seek to develop a knowledge sharing capability.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contributes to our understanding of an increasingly important practical problem, namely, the effectiveness of adoption of knowledge management in organizations. As with many other managerial innovations, knowledge management (KM) appears to have been adopted firstly by manufacturing firms and is only now beginning to permeate the service sector, predominantly in professional services such as consulting (Hansen, Nohria, & Tierney, 1999; Sarvary, 1999). Public services, traditionally slower to embrace innovative management practices, are only beginning to recognize the importance of knowledge management. There is, as yet, little published research of its implementation in this context (Bate & Robert, 2002; Sharifuddin & Rowland, 2004; van Beveren, 2003).

This chapter examines knowledge sharing in the context of public services partnerships between organizations mandated by government policy to jointly improve the delivery of health care services. In particular, the chapter explores the central roles of knowledge sharing, learning, and information provision in the improvement of service delivery in the UK National Health Service (NHS). Our research question focused on the issue of how to make knowledge sharing more effective. In other words, are there broader organizational factors, beyond the dynamics of individual sharer-receiver interactions, that significantly influence knowledge sharing? To that end, the chapter firstly reviews what can be learned about knowledge management from previous research, which has predominantly been grounded in the private sector. We then discuss the public sector context of health care in general and the concept of partnership working in particular. We outline possible external influences that may uniquely affect knowledge sharing therein. Results are then presented from our empirical study of UK health and social care partnerships, highlighting some significant enablers of knowledge sharing practice. The findings support the small but growing body of evidence that motivational and reward factors are not the main influencers of knowledge sharing (Bock & Kim, 2002; Stonehouse, Buehring, & Pemberton, 2002; Szulanski, 1996).

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