Chapter 50
From Project's Information Management to Project-Based Organizational Learning:
The Role of Knowledge Sharing

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ABSTRACT

Project-based organizations have characteristics that raise additional barriers to information management, knowledge sharing, and to organizational learning. The main causes of this are inadequate information architectures and governance, poor collaborative culture, and lack of organization-wide information management strategies. This chapter presents a comprehensive basis to understand the information and knowledge-sharing practices in PBO, as well as the methods and tools that information professionals and project managers should have in mind when performing their tasks. For that, literatures are reviewed focusing on the explanation of the processes of knowledge creation and sharing leading to organizational learning. The main conclusion is that a knowledge-sharing strategy in a PBO should include a set of mechanisms that address a customized mix of the codification and personalization dimensions and that strategies for collaborative information management should be used as enablers for embedding knowledge sharing within the organizational practices and culture.

BACKGROUND

The large amount of information technologies used in current organizations are a big challenge to the organization and management of knowledge today. Information and communica- tion technologies (ICT) are responsible for the exchange of information and knowledge as well as work execution in the organizations of all forms by integrating information, documents and em- ployees, but advances in ICT may have imposed immense challenge for managers to handle the

existing overly loaded information (Karim & Hussein 2008). On the other hand, organizations themselves are also evolving towards new ways of working and to more flexible structures than they were a couple of decades ago. One of the most widespread manifestations of these structures are the so-called project-based organizations (PBO) (Blindenbach-Driessen & van den Ende 2006) or projectized contexts (Thiry & Deguire 2007). In PBO, the knowledge, capabilities and resources of the firm are built up through the execution of major projects, which are the normal mechanism for executing new business opportunities (Boh 2007). Projects are nowadays the most important delivery vehicle for products and services in a global economy, characterized by a strong competition and radically shrinking lifecycles (Jackson & Klobas 2008); organizing work by projects allow organizations to respond flexibly to changing organizational need (Boh 2007).

PBO face nowadays important problems related with information management and knowledge sharing. First, the information overload of a project's execution (Karim & Husseim, 2008) because of the creation of content in a highly rapid pace, produced by a large and diversified amount of information technologies. Also, a project is a time-delimited setting, and when the project is finished its context is disperse, the organization of contents loses its meaningfulness as the purpose of its construction was the purpose, objectives and deliverables of the project. When the project ends, there is no time to conveniently sediment and organize knowledge in the appropriate knowledge management structures or systems, in order to be reused for other people. The codified information is then "trapped" and hardly shared between projects (Bakker, Cambré, Korlaar & Raab, 2011), creating an informational limbo out of reach.

The previous mentioned aspects contribute for an immense challenge for current project managers and teams: to manage the information flows and the knowledge created in order to be sedimented in a way that will be available for other future projects and teams and, consequently, contributing for the organizational learning as a whole. This is as valuable as it relates directly with the main goal of a PBO: to capitalize what is learned in each project in order to continuously improve its organizational performance. In fact, recent Project Management literature is specifically pointing out the organizational learning as a key performance driver in project-based organizations: previous projects present valuable experiences that could be applied in similar future projects (Turner, 2010; Blindenbach-Driessen & Van den Ende, 2006). Organizational learning in such contexts is very dependent on knowledge creation and sharing: as knowledge is created and captured, learning takes place and the knowledge is hopefully applied and embedded within individual and organizational processes. Difficulties in learning from projects arise due to this unique and irregular nature of projects which creates barriers that hamper the knowledge transfer from projects to the organization as a whole, creating an informational limbo where explicit and codified knowledge remains "trapped" when a project ends.

Other interesting issue relates with the project's social system. Projects are typically multidisciplinary contexts and its members can be unknown one from each other, which can be a barrier to a faster information management, as typically, different professions have their own culture and ways of working which can be conflicting with the other participants or project culture (Ajmal, Takala, & Kekäle, 2008). The typical idiosyncrasies of project teams pose difficulties to the development of common understandings, which should be the basis of project's collective activities (Jackson & Klobas, 2008) and are very important for knowledge creation and sharing. The social linkages that are created during a project, and despite all such idiosyncrasies, are broken with its ending, which means that a considerable amount of tacit knowledge, stemming from the team social relationships, is not active anymore. The existent culture and the organizational relationships and

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