

Chapter 8.12

Transfer Knowledge Using Stories: A Malaysian University Case Study

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Storytelling is part of our daily life. Everybody tells stories everyday without even realizing it. Storytelling has always been used in knowledge transfer. This chapter attempts to explore the usage of knowledge-embedded stories in a Malaysian institute of higher learning and will consider the understanding of organization members concerning storytelling in knowledge management and the facilitators and barriers of implementing storytelling. The significant of this study is that it provides insights on the culture of storytelling as a method of knowledge transfer in a Malaysian institute of higher learning. This study examines how other organizations are establishing storytelling practices and the way knowledge-embedded stories are being used. This study explores the practice of storytelling as a knowledge transfer

medium and explores the practicality of using stories in the organization and the employees' perception of the usage of stories to transfer knowledge. This case reveals that storytelling is regarded as an acceptable approach in knowledge transfer. It is demonstrated through gathering sessions that stimulate storytelling. The case also presented context-specific factors that influence KM storytelling.

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is an ancient and traditional way of passing on complex and multidimensional information and ideas through narratives (Sole, 2002). It exists in many domains and in many forms. From an artistic point of view, storytelling is the art of using language, vocalization, and/or physical movement and gesture to reveal the elements

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and images of a story to a specific, live audience. A central, unique aspect of storytelling is its reliance on the audience to develop specific visual imagery and detail to complete and co-create the story (National Storytelling Association, 1997).

Organizational story is defined as a detailed narrative of past management actions, employee interactions, or other intra- or extra-organizational events (Swap, et al 2001). Organization storytelling is used for many purposes such as promoting values, communicating change and stimulating product innovation (Groff & Jones, 2003). Linde (2001) conducted a case study on the use of narratives in an insurance company. The insurance company used the stories to convey its organization values and identity, inducting new staffs and inspiring existing staffs. This is done by telling the stories of the company's founder, staffs telling stories about their early days, career and careers of exemplary staffs. Katzeff & Ware (2006) conducted a case study on the usage of storytelling to capture experience in a temporary but recurring organization. The organization in the study is a festival organization whereby it is established for a temporary period of time and got dissolved after the festival ends. In this type of organization, the employees are also temporary but recurring. The authors presented a storytelling application to capture the employees' personal accounts of their work in the organization in story form. The stories are usually personal stories derived from personal experiences.

From knowledge management (KM) perspective, storytelling is seen as a traditional way of passing on complex multi-dimensional information and ideas through narrative (Sole, 2002). Gabriel (2000) regards storytelling as 'an art of weaving, of constructing, the product of intimate knowledge'. Groce (2004) defines storytelling as orally communicating ideas, beliefs, personal stories and life-lessons which insinuate the element of tacit knowledge in stories. Stories can come in different forms and are labeled as cases,

anecdotes, examples, histories or simple experience (Sole, 2002).

Storytelling as a Knowledge Transfer Approach

A great deal of research and literature has been dedicated to the role that storytelling in effective knowledge transfer. This can be seen from the work on the role of stories among disparate project members (MacLeod & Davidson, 2007; Nielsen & Madsen, 2006), the role of stories in representing tacit knowledge (LeBlanc & Hogg, 2006) and also the tools used to create and construct organizational stories (Appan, Sundaram, & Birchfield, 1999; Bradner, Kellogg, & Erickson, 1999; Santoro & Brezillon, 2005). However, there is a lack of study that focus on the perception of knowledge users towards the usage of storytelling in knowledge management and the factors that influence the use of stories as a knowledge transfer medium.

The knowledge transfer factors yielded in existing knowledge transfer studies are broad factors. Joshi, Sarker & Sarker (2007) conducted a study that examines the factors associated with knowledge transfer in information system development project teams. The study focuses on the team member's absorptive capacity, motivation, communication among members, group culture and group cohesion on knowledge transfer. Zhihong & Tao (2009) investigated the factors that influence informal knowledge transfer. They proposed that knowledge transfer opportunities, motives and capacity are the decisive influential factors to informal knowledge transfer among individuals. Khamseh & Jolly (2008) identify and classify knowledge transfer factors in strategic alliances. They identified four categories of knowledge transfer factors which are the characteristics of knowledge, factors related to absorptive capacity, the reciprocal behavior of the partners and finally, the nature and form of alliance activity. Since one of the purposes of storytelling is to transfer

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