Chapter 14
Project Story Capturing System:
The Use of Storytelling to Capture Tacit Knowledge in Government Projects

Khairul Shafee Kalid
Universiti Teknologi Petronas, Malaysia

Mohd Syafiq Saifullah
Universiti Teknologi Petronas, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Studies have shown that one of the failures of government projects in Malaysia is the lack of necessary knowledge among project team members. Therefore, knowledge management in project environment is seen as important because it enables project team members to perform project activities and make informed decisions more effectively. While knowledge in government projects are made explicitly through project reports, standard operating procedures, guidelines, policies, and others, the capture of tacit knowledge such as project team members' experience, insights, and judgments are less emphasized. One of the tools to capture tacit knowledge is storytelling. This chapter presents a video-based storytelling system that enables project related tacit knowledge to be captured, stored, and circulated.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is widely recognized as a primary resource of organizations (Drucker, 1992). In today's society, people are rapidly moving into a direction where the survival is essentially determined by the ability of the organization to use knowledge wisely. In this new economy, knowledge and expertise of employees need to be seen as a critical strategic resource (Bender & Fish, 2000) and organizations need to explore ways in retaining them (Joe & Yoong, 2006). A project is regarded as a temporary organization in which it dissolves once the project work ends. In order for projects to have a chance of survival, it is important for the project team members to be equipped with the necessary explicit and tacit knowledge. In project environment, explicit knowledge resides in manuals, policies, standard operating procedures and existing project reports. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, resides in the mind of project team members. Examples of tacit knowledge in projects are experience in managing major projects or insights to prepare a good request for proposal. Tacit knowledge is an important asset to an organization solely because

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4434-2.ch014

tacit knowledge is difficult to imitate (Seidler-de Alwis & Hartmann, 2008) and competitors need to engage in similar experiences in order to acquire the same knowledge (Zack, 2002). Thus, despite being one of the challenges in knowledge management (Linde, 2001; Santoro & Brezillon, 2005), capturing tacit knowledge is important to ensure that it is not lost when the project ended. In project environment, tacit knowledge could have been circulated during project debriefing sessions but it is rarely captured. One of the tools to capture and share tacit knowledge in projects is through storytelling. These stories are shared in debriefing sessions or at any time during the implementation of the project but the knowledge might not be captured and stored in a repository. As such, this study concerns with the development of a knowledge management system that enables knowledge capturer to capture project-related stories, store the stories into a repository and disseminate the stories to members of future projects.

As such, this chapter presents the development of Project Story Capturing System that assists knowledge capturer to capture knowledge from experienced project members in the form of storytelling via interviews. Knowledge capturer captures the experts' stories concerning lessons learned, solutions to problems and insights on issues and conflict that might emerged during project implementation. The system is equipped with other features such as comments and tags to encourage interaction between members of the project team.

CHALLENGES IN PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAYSIA

Government implements projects to for the betterment of its people. These projects include building up physical assets such as public buildings, transport infrastructure and public spaces and services such as education, healthcare, agriculture and tourism. The Malaysian government has a vision to become a developed nation in the year 2020.

In the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010), the Malaysian government had awarded 25,974 projects (thestar.com.my, 2011) in which the government has allocated RM 200 billion to fund the projects (Lian & Mustafa, 2006). These projects include the construction of public infrastructure such as schools, roads, bridges, utilities and infrastructure for various ministries namely the Education Ministry, the Prime Minister's Department and Works ministry (thestar.com.my, 2006). Many government funded projects have also been tendered under the Government Transformation Plan (GTP) to support the 7 National Key Results Area (NKRA). For example, under the Rural Basic Infrastructure (RBI) key area, projects that have been planned and implemented includes the construction of roads, clean water supply, electricity supply and housings.

The contribution of these government projects is significant to the development of the country. Thus, it is absolutely crucial to ensure that the project does not fail. Studies in project implementation in Malaysia have indicated a number of factors that could influence the implementation of a project. Table 1 presents the factors that influence project implementation in Malaysia.

The studies shown in Table 1 has shown that one of the factors that influence the implementation of the projects in Malaysia is the lack of knowledge and experience among project team members. Managing knowledge in project settings is important. Takim and Adnan (2008) have concluded that one of the important elements in a project's measure of effectiveness is the ability of the project teams to learn and exploit particularly in the development of new knowledge and expertise.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN PROJECT SETTINGS

The implementation of a project involves the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques. However, the lack of knowledge, skills