

6 Cultural Elements of Knowledge Management

Learning objectives

- Define organisational identity, organisational vision and organisational culture.
- Understand the importance of creating an open, collaborative culture to support knowledge practices.
- Explore motivation and trust within event organisations as crucial factors underpinning the knowledge management process.
- Discuss the importance of collaboration and co-creation in work tasks as well as for effective knowledge practices.

Introduction

Organisational culture is, perhaps not surprisingly, by far the most researched topic in relation to knowledge management to date. It is widely argued that an open, collaborative culture enhances knowledge processes, activities and practices, and that this open culture will help organisations be successful in the long-run (see for example, Du Plessis, 2006; Kathiravelu et al., 2014; Intezari et al., 2017). Organisational values, assumptions, and the cultural context shape what employees believe in, their shared understanding of how things are done in the organisation, as well as their shared language. The process of meaning-making through different knowledge practices is therefore largely shaped by organisational culture and embedded in it (Hislop et al., 2018).

In the wider knowledge management literature, there are five characteristics of an organisational culture that have been identified as contributing to and facilitating knowledge activities and practices (Donate & Guadamillas, 2011; O'Dell & Hubert, 2011):

- ◆ Knowledge sharing is regarded as the norm within the organisation;
- ◆ Staff members have a strong sense of organisational identity;
- ◆ There is a high level of trust and respect between staff members;
- ◆ Organisational processes are regarded as fair and transparent; and
- ◆ Staff members have a high level of trust in management.

Based on these assumptions, this chapter builds on some of the structural elements of knowledge management highlighted in Chapter 5, but provides a more in-depth discussion of the cultural context within which they are performed and practised. For example, when recruiting and selecting employees, it is important to take their background, values and assumptions into account and to see whether these match the organisation's vision and values. If this is the case, then new employees will be more likely to positively contribute to the organisation's culture and identity, and they will be able to more effectively practise knowledge management (Hislop et al., 2018). The chapter starts with a discussion of organisational identity and critically explores how employees identify with an organisation. This will naturally lead into a section on organisational culture, where beliefs, values, and behaviours shared by all employees in an organisation can also positively contribute to their ways of working, their shared understanding, and shared processes of meaning-making. The second part of the chapter then more specifically highlights motivation and trust in event organisations, as well as collaboration and co-creation when engaging in knowledge practices, which all tend to be higher in open organisational cultures and therefore positively contribute to knowledge management (Du Plessis, 2006).

Organisational identity

Ashforth et al. (2008) maintained that identity is relational and is constituted through organisational members' ways of identifying with the organisation. By stating that 'I am a member of the organisation and it is important to me', people feel positively about their membership

and are emotionally invested in being part of the organisation. Identification with an organisation therefore helps employees articulate their values, goals, beliefs, as well as knowledge, skills and abilities that shape their behaviours and practices within the organisation (Ashforth et al., 2008). The concept of organisational identity is further useful for understanding knowledge practices that are central to *why* people join a certain organisation, *how* they approach their work and how and why they interact with each other when performing their work and tasks. It includes the way they *feel* about the organisation as a whole, and can therefore be quite a fuzzy concept to explain to others or to newcomers to the organisation.

In terms of knowledge management, the extent to which an employee identifies with the organisation as a whole, or at least with their team, pod, or community-of-practice, usually positively contributes to their willingness to share knowledge with others (Hislop et al., 2018). A strong organisational identity also helps create and enhance social relationships within the organisation and therefore the creation of mutual trust, which is crucial for effectively managing knowledge, as discussed further below. Addleson (2012: 8) argued that, “[p]eople ‘share knowledge’ best when they work at creating a context of shared meanings for one another in their conversations.” Hence, a shared understanding of identity (‘who we are’) provides the basis for effective collaboration. In event organisations, on the one hand, it can be difficult to create and maintain a shared identity due to their temporary, ‘pulsating’ nature. Without such a shared event identity there is no common ground for knowledge to be effectively practised. On the other hand, event organisations sometimes do have a history beyond each event season and therefore an established identity that exists over time. Creating a strong organisational identity over time can develop a sense of organisational loyalty among employees, which is crucial in events in terms of retaining permanent staff, and getting seasonal staff members and volunteers to come back each event season. A certain sense of pride in the event and hence loyalty to it thereby helps in retaining these employees.

There are three characteristics commonly identified that together construct an organisational identity (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Albert & Whetten, 2004) within which organisational knowledge can be practised and shared; (1) the essence of the organisation; (2) what distinguishes