Knowledge Management in Event Organisations Instructor's Manual

4: Relational and Practice-Based Knowledge Management

Chapter 4: Relational and Practice-Based Knowledge Management

Lecture 5

Learning objectives
☐ Understand the difference between the objectivist and the practice-based perspective on knowledge management
☐ Define 'knowing' and 'know how'
☐ Discuss relational, embedded and embodied knowledge and the role emotions play in practising knowledge management
☐ Understand the importance of both formal and informal organisational rituals for effectively practising knowledge management

Introduction and definitions

In Lectures 1-4 an emphasis has been put on the traditional, objectivist understanding of knowledge and knowledge management, whereby knowledge is seen as an object that can be possessed by people but can also exist completely independently of people and can, for example, be stored on a computer. However, over the last decade, this understanding of knowledge has been critiqued a lot, and a different approach to knowledge management, or even a different understanding of knowledge itself has emerged: knowledge, or as some prefer to say – 'knowing' or 'know-how', is now regarded as a 'practice' to engage in and it is therefore inseparable from human beings. It is suggested to start the lecture with an overview and summary of the two different perspectives:

Objectivist knowledge management: knowledge is seen as cognitive models which are based on the value of using and developing knowledge; objective facts; no room for individual subjectivity or interpretation; knowledge can therefore be separated from the individuals or groups who possess it. The main aim of knowledge management based on this understanding is the codification of knowledge through extracting it from individuals/groups, or in other words, the emphasis is on explicit knowledge and on turning tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge.

Practice-based knowledge management: here knowledge is not an object, but rather it is multi-faceted and complex, explicit and tacit at the same time, individual and distributed, situated and abstract, mental and physical, static and constantly developing and evolving; it requires human interaction in order to be made sense of and for meaning to be created. This understanding of knowledge management therefore aims to highlight effective ways people work together, such as collaboration and interpersonal communication, and focuses on the context in which knowledge is practised (the organisational culture, specific ways of doing things in the organisation). As knowledge practices are based on how people interact with each other, the question of which emotions enhance knowledge sharing behaviours and which ones inhibit such behaviour is also part of this. Emotions such as shame, guilt or sadness, for example, can build a negative context for sharing

knowledge and hence for learning. Knowing how to manage one's own as well as other people's emotions is therefore crucial when collaborating or communicating.

The difference between the two perspectives is, however, not always clear. Students can be asked to explore the literature on knowledge management in events and see which perspective currently dominates the field and why. Any of the additional readings already suggested in previous lectures can be used for this. It will be clear to see that many journal articles claim to mainly focus on one or the other, but then present findings stretching across both perspectives, and for example, covering practices of knowledge sharing between volunteers and staff members (i.e., practice-based understanding), but then also documents, databases and repositories produced by a computer (objectivist understanding).

Practice-based understanding of knowledge management

To develop students' understanding of the practice-based perspective on knowledge management further, the below summary of key features of knowledge provides a nice overview (Author's own, 2021):

Based on the practice-based understanding of knowledge, knowledge can therefore only develop when people conduct activities, engage in practices and therefore gain experiences. There is no point in trying to define and make knowledge itself explicit, but rather the focus is on trying to understand the context, relations and practices through which knowledge is produced, enacted, embodied and shared. The practice-based perspective

on knowledge management hence acknowledges both the historical and structural context in which actions take place. For a suggested additional reading, see:

♦ Orlikowski, W. J. (2002). Knowing in Practice: Enacting a Collective Capability in Distributed Organizing. *Organization Science, 13*(3), 249-273

Knowledge rituals

Lastly, a great example to help students understand knowledge practices and knowledge practice theory, is formal and informal rituals that we use for knowledge sharing. This is also explored in the book using a case study, as well as in the following additional reading:

♦ Stadler, R., & Fullagar, S. (2016). Appreciating formal and informal knowledge transfer practices within creative festival organizations. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *20*(1), 146-161.

When knowledge practices become more and more routinised within an organisation, they can over time develop into rituals for creating or sharing knowledge. Through engaging in organisational rituals, staff members learn 'how to' contribute to the organisation's goals and 'how to' collaborate. Rituals can thereby be formally constructed and regularly shared, such as staff and team meetings, or they can be informal, such as sharing a lunch or coffee ritual with a colleague. The following overview can be used to explore these two types of rituals a bit further;

Formal rituals	Informal rituals
frequently repeated; in a form largely laid down in advance	ritual-like activities
part of any organisation	provide opportunities for sharing knowledge on what employees are currently working on and how they are performing their tasks
convey shared meaning about what the organisation is and aims to achieve, and provide a platform for knowledge to be created and shared	help to make sense and interpret the 'how to' of the more formal information shared in meetings
share and reinforce the organisation's values and culture	help create and enhance social relationships and trust
can serve different purposes (e.g. internal staff meetings vs. meetings with external stakeholders)	emphasis on dialogue and meaning-making
Examples: staff meetings, team meetings, annual celebrations	Examples: having lunch or coffee together, catching up backstage, talking in the corridor

Different scenarios can be used here to get students to think about their own examples of formal rituals and informal, ritual-like activities. This does not necessarily have to be explored in an events context, but could also be built around experiences in the classroom, in the library, or in the canteen. For example, 'practising' group work rituals during a seminar session or when working on a presentation together enables them to engage in knowledge creation and sharing in both formal as well as informal ways. Some of it might be taken for granted and will be difficult to identify. It is important to remind students that both formal and informal rituals are crucial to have in any organisation in terms of effectively practising knowledge management and should be encouraged in mutually

reinforcing ways. For example, knowledge that has been shared in a formal team meeting can potentially be reinforced and developed further through informal rituals, such as two staff members having lunch together and informally continuing the discussion, applying important lessons learned to their day-to-day tasks, making sense of the newly acquired knowledge together.

Sample short-answer questions:

♦ Define the practice-based perspective on knowledge management and explain how it can be applied to event organisations.

♦ Why are emotions a key element of relational, practice-based knowledge management? Provide examples from an event you have organised.

Sample long-answer or essay question:

♦ Using examples from your own experience, critically assess whether formal or informal knowledge rituals are more valuable for an event organisation?

A critical assessment of the value of formal and informal rituals in event organisations should highlight the importance of both: emphasis is usually put on formal rituals and meetings rather than informal discussions and ritual-like activities. Especially in the high-pressure, intense and stressful event environment, there is not enough time to engage in informal rituals that might help people bond, create a sense of community, and together make sense of the knowledge shared in the more formal rituals. Formal rituals might be more important for certain types of knowledge to be shared, while informal rituals can help with the 'soft' factors of working together, and making new meaning together. An excellent answer will provide an example here of how knowledge that has been shared in a formal ritual (e.g. in a team meeting) can be enhanced even further when staff members then engage in informal rituals in order to make sense of it together, embody the new knowledge and embed it into their work practices.

Lecture 6

Learning objectives

☐ Explore communities-of-practice theory and apply it to event examples

Introduction

Lecture 6 is optional. If students are already familiar with communities-of-practice theory, this can be skipped and later referred to in Lectures 7 and 8; if not, then a brief overview and introduction to the concept should be provided. It goes nicely after Lecture 5 as it builds on some of the ideas of the practice-based knowledge management perspective. The lecture can be started with the following quote: "communities-of-practice are everywhere. […] They are so informal and so pervasive that they rarely come into explicit focus, but for the same reasons they are quite familiar (Wenger, 1998: 6-7)."

Communities-of-practice

Communities-of-practice occur when people have a common interest in a subject. Because of this shared interested, they can (informally and whenever needed) create the social conditions which enhance knowledge sharing, creation and utilisation. Through the sharing of ideas, they then develop some common knowledge, a sense of common identity, and some overlapping values. In order to further explore communities-of-practice in relation to knowledge management, it is first important to understand the difference between communities-of-practice and other work teams/groups. Table 4.1 can be used for this:

Table 4.1: Differences between formal work groups and communities-of-practice

Work group or team	Community-of-practice
Formally and externally defined	Informal, evolving and internally negotiated, membership is voluntary
Structured around a specific service and/or product	Members share a collective practice or knowledge
Formalised relations	Informal, inter-personal relations
Usually hierarchical structure	Non-hierarchical, fluid, self-managing
Permanent, or with pre-set timeframe/ objective	Indefinite, no set timeframe, forms and dissolves whenever needed

Communities-of-practice evolve over time through key elements such as participation, learning, bonding, and creativity and innovation. The element of participation has previously been applied to events and the following additional reading should be given to students to work through here:

♦   Abfalter, D., Stadler, R., & Mueller, J. (2012). The Organization of Knowledge Sharing at the Colorado Music Festival. *International Journal of Arts Management*, *14*(3), 4-15

Participation in communities-of-practice

Participation in the community-of-practice is key to the creation of a good learning environment for both newcomers and old-timers in the community. Through participation newcomers become part of the community-of-practice, they learn from old-timers, and hence become insiders themselves. It is an active process, and both newcomers and old-timers have their specific duties around the process, which help the community go through different stages over time. The 3 levels of where this participation can occur, are as follows (Wenger et al., 2002):

◆ The *core* group: this is the most important part of the community. Usually a small group of people, who meet and discuss important topics on a regular basis, sometimes the leaders of the community;

◆ The *active* group: a little further outside the core, but members of this group are still very much involved in the community. For example, they regularly attend meetings of the community-of-practice;

◆ *Peripheral* members: do not participate regularly and seem very passive. They still play a key role for the community-of-practice though, as they can provide an outsider perspective and a different view on certain things.

Furthermore, outside these three levels of community participation are the so-called *outsiders*. They do not belong to the community, but they have a certain interest in its activities and might occasionally be consulted on certain issues.

In terms of knowledge management, through participation at any of these levels and engaging in its activities, explicit, formal and systematic knowledge can be shared, and converted into tacit knowledge. Members of the community-of-practice are making sense, giving a name to something, interpreting, using, or making meaning together within the different levels of the group, but also across them. They can even move from one level to another over time (inwards or outwards), engage in new activities and practices, and hence develop their own knowledge as well as the knowledge of the community even further. It is therefore through 'doing' things together that 'knowing' comes about, and hence this idea of participation in communities-of-practice is in line with the practice-based understanding of knowledge management.

Case study 2 (Colorado Music Festival) in the book should be used as an example to explore this participation in a community-of-practice.

Sample short-answer questions:

◆ Define communities-of-practice and discuss how they are different to other work groups or teams.

◆ Explain the importance of *participation* in communities-of-practice and provide an example of how staff members can move from one level of participation to another from your own experience of organising an event.