Knowledge Management in Event Organisations Instructor's Manual

5: Structural Elements of Knowledge Management

Chapter 5: Structural Elements of Knowledge Management

Lecture 7

Learning objectives

☐ Discuss key human resource management strategies in relation to knowledge management

☐ Understand hierarchical and non-hierarchical structures for knowledge management

☐ Explore the value of inter-disciplinary teams for effective knowledge management

☐ Define different knowledge management roles and responsibilities within teams and organisations

Introduction

Lecture 7 can be taught in one of two ways: the first part of the lecture should either focus on the relationship between human resource management and knowledge management (see Figure 5.1 below), or on hierarchical structures and the difference between top-down, bottom-up, and middle-up-down knowledge management (see Table 5.1). Both can easily be applied to event examples and students' own experience. Either way this will provide students with an overview of some of the structural elements of knowledge management, and the rest of the lecture as well as a more specific focus on the value of interdisciplinary teams/pods and an understanding of knowledge management roles and responsibilities can be developed from there.

Option 1: human resource management and knowledge management
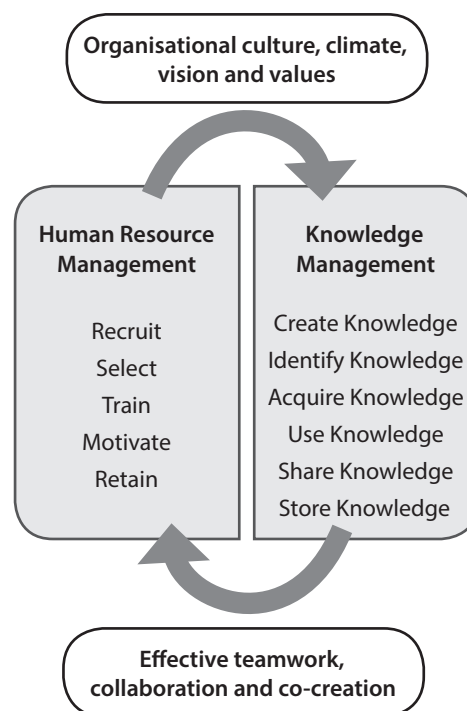

Figure 5.1: Human resource management and knowledge management

Research suggests that HRM and knowledge management are closely related, and effective knowledge management partly depends on: recruiting and selecting the 'right' people for the job (do they have enough previous knowledge and experience for doing the job?); ensuring they are trained according to their individual needs and specifics of the job (what additional knowledge do they need to gain/acquire/create in order to be able to do their job?); motivated to do their job (and also motivated to share their knowledge with others, communicate and collaborate effectively); and retained (so that knowledge does not get lost).

Option 2: hierarchical structures and the difference between top-down, bottom-up, and middle-up-down knowledge management

Top-down and bottom-up management have both been identified as structures that do not necessarily support effective knowledge management. In top-down organisations (very hierarchical), only top management are creating new knowledge, while middle managers create the operational conditions, which front-line employees implement in their day-to-day practices in mainly routine work. At the lower levels therefore, the emphasis is on information management, rather than knowledge management. In bottom-up management approaches, on the other hand, front-line employees tend to create a lot of new knowledge, but most of it is individual knowledge and does not get passed on to other members of the team/organisation. Top management do not provide much instruction or orders, they simply let front-line employees do their tasks. Whilst this creates a lot of autonomy, it is not an effective approach to knowledge management either.

Rather, the idea of middle-up-down management has been introduced as the most beneficial approach to knowledge management: here middle managers are at the centre of knowledge creation, and they then move this knowledge both up to the top, as well as down to the front-line, where in turn it is further adapted either in terms of strategic knowledge (top), or operational and task-oriented knowledge (bottom). Any problems encountered at the top (e.g. in terms of organisational vision or values) can be passed down again to the middle-managers and converted by them before moving it on to the front-line. At the same time, any issues at the lowest level can move up the pyramid through middle managers converting them into broader concepts or ideas for the organisation as a whole. Table 5.1 summarises the three different approaches and provides an event-related example for each.

Table 5.1: Comparison of top-down, bottom-up and middle-up-down approaches to knowledge management

	Top-down	Bottom-up	Middle-up-down
Knowledge creation through	Top management	Entrepreneurial individuals	Teams and middle managers (knowledge engineers)
Structure	Hierarchical	Project teams and/or informal networks	Combination of hierarchy and task force
Focus on	Explicit knowledge stored in databases, manuals or checklists	Tacit knowledge embodied by individuals	Combination of explicit and tacit knowledge within an organisational knowledge base
Event organisation example	Directors, managers, or permanent staff in charge of decision-making	Seasonal staff and volunteers largely autonomous	Team or project leaders as coordinators

Interdisciplinary teams and pods

Based on the HRM strategies and the structure of the organisation as a whole, different team structures can then be developed. In the broader management literature, it has been highlighted that interdisciplinary and diverse group/team structures can be beneficial in terms of the creation of new knowledge and hence innovation. This can be formal groups, such as interdisciplinary pods, or informal groups, such as communities-of-practice (as discussed in Chapter 4); and they can enhance the flow of knowledge both horizontally as well as vertically.

Students should be reminded that in event and festival organisations, seasonal staff members are usually put together in teams around functional areas, such as technical staff forming a team and marketing forming another team. This, however, makes it difficult to effectively transfer know-how across the teams, particularly when the tasks are complex. Interdisciplinary and diverse teams can therefore be more beneficial for sharing knowledge and for creating new knowledge. Figure 5.2 from the Queensland Music Festival case study in the book provides one such example of how teams could be created in interdisciplinrary pods with one producer, one project coordinator, and one technical manager each. The marketing team in this example is still central and works across the three different pods to see some connections and shared ideas that can then be implemented at the organisational level.
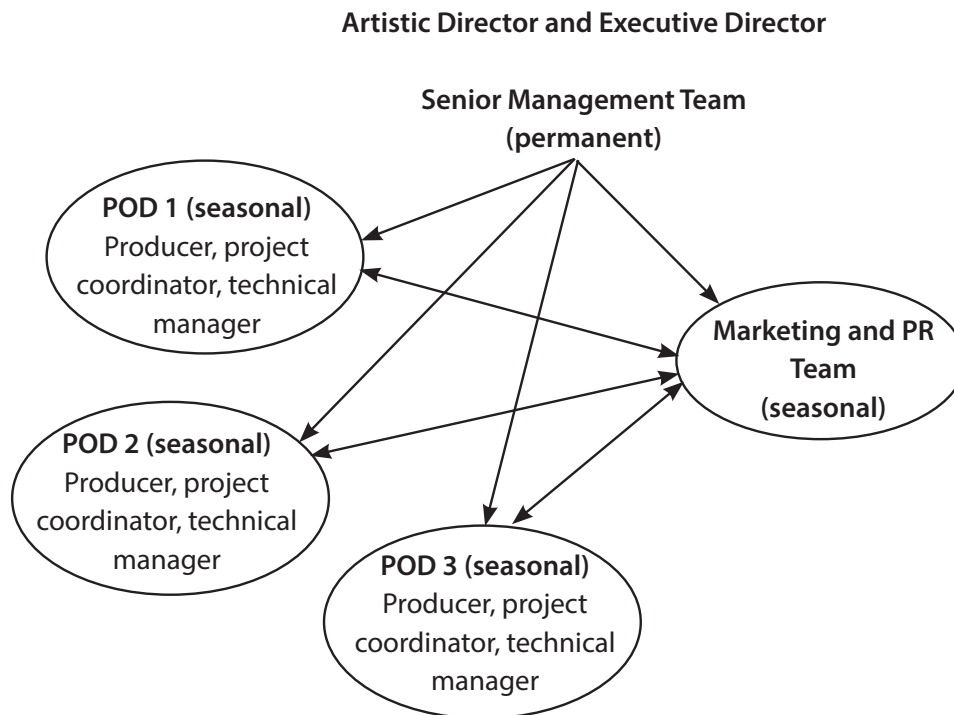
Artistic Director and Executive Director

Figure 5.2: Interdisciplinary pod structure at QMF

A task for students at this point could be to come up with their own interdisciplinary structure for an event of their choice. They should be encouraged to draw a visual representation (e.g. on a flip chart, whiteboard, or similar) of the interdisciplinary structure they have come up with and present it to the class.

Knowledge management roles and responsibilities

Lastly, from the different hierarchical and non-hierarchical, as well as formal and informal organisational structures, several knowledge management roles and responsibilities can be established. These are not usually explicitly stated as part of a work contract, but they are taken on by certain people in the organisation. The following additional reading is suggested here:

♦ Stadler, R., Fullagar, S., & Reid, S. (2014). The professionalization of festival organizations: A relational approach to knowledge management. *Event Management*, *18*(1), 39-52.

Typical knowledge management roles include:

♦ *Knowledge officers / chief knowledge officers:* usually top managers; responsible for managing the entire organisational knowledge management strategy and processes at the corporate level;

♦ *Knowledge engineers / knowledge brokers:* usually middle managers; serve as a bridge between the visionary ideals of the top and the day-to-day operational tasks of frontline workers; responsible for creating connections between different people (and between different levels) of the organisation;

♦ *Knowledge practitioners / knowledge workers:* all front-line workers, who engage in tasks that are primarily intellectual, creative, and/or non-routine; they create, share and use knowledge, and they engage in a range of knowledge practices as part of their job.

Sample short-answer questions:

♦ Explain and discuss the difference between top-down, bottom-up and middle-up-down knowledge management approaches.

♦ Can all employees in an event organisation be considered 'knowledge workers'? What about volunteers? Discuss and provide examples from your own experience.

Sample long-answer or essay questions:

♦ Critically discuss the difference between interdisciplinary work teams and communities-of-practice in terms of knowledge creation [or knowledge sharing for a slightly different answer].

This is a great question that tests students' understanding across two chapters of the book. They will need to define and discuss key elements of both interdisciplinary work teams (Chapter 5: formal teams, diverse, put together for a specific task, etc.), as well as communities-of-practice (Chapter 4: informal, ad hoc, self-selected, based on shared interests, and people participate for a common purpose). Based on these differences they can then debate which one is better for knowledge creation/sharing and provide positive and negative examples. It could be argued that having interdisciplinary teams set up within a non-hierarchical organisational structure definitely enhances knowledge management, but the formation of informal communities-of-practice should also be encouraged as and when the need arises. These can form around a specific challenge the organisation is dealing with, then dissolve again once the problem has been solved.