

The Mindset of “Job Security” Can Be Killing Your Best Resource

By Carole Nicolaides

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When it comes to managing knowledge, learning from past mistakes, and capitalizing on the hidden knowledge and the wisdom of people, organizations historically have not done that well. Instead of building human portals and mediums that connect and unite people, and creating safe environments that allow people to share freely what they know, more attention is given to building large database systems and other mediums that capture human knowledge. This difficult, yet important task of building a knowledge-sharing culture within companies is primarily given to the Information Technology departments, by far the least prone towards knowledge sharing. They are appointed as the primary players for this business initiative, and literally take over in creating the perfect knowledge sharing organization or at least a perfect system to facilitate knowledge capture.

One statistic states that 90% of knowledge management (KM) budgets are allocated to technology – even though these programs are people-oriented. The same technical experts also believe that by providing the right information to the right people at the right time, companies to thrive. Wouldn't that be nice? Yet, few years after the KM fever, a lot of companies realized that their KM expenses did not really pay off. KM programs, were in place, yet people did not use them. So what exactly went wrong? What is the result of spending millions of dollars to set up technology infrastructures and other fancy search engines? The primary downfall is that we've forgotten KM is about people...people...people.

Technology should be built around the needs of your people. Instead of spending millions of dollars in extrapolating knowledge from people's minds and building large systems that are able to store an enormous amount of data, it is more appropriate to create communities of people that want to work together.

Setting up technological systems does not guarantee that employees will use them. Currently, many businesses are realizing that they have allocated much of their money to databases and repositories but their people are not using these systems. Knowledge Management is about building the right culture and providing people the appropriate training, coaching and respect. Within this newly created atmosphere, employees and managers both learn to put their knowledge to work for the company as a whole.

Why Knowledge and Why Now?

Knowledge Management always existed in some form or another- it just didn't have a formal name. Officially, KM was born this past decade because of the need to manage the lost knowledge of workers who were terminated or resigned. It was also designed to organize the overwhelming amount information companies have and the increasing complexity of their products and services.

The need for knowledge is tremendous for companies today. They constantly require information about new emerging technologies, products, customers, suppliers, competitors, legal regulations, and global trends. More importantly, all this knowledge needs to be captured and organized in such a way that it will allow employees to connect with the right people at the right time and have the right information. If you don't have a good KM system in place, your best investment is walking out the door! Knowledge is not about having the brightest brains in your company; it's about leveraging them correctly. It is simply about getting employees to share what they know, and then putting that information to good use.

What Are the Reactions To KM?

Many people have criticized KM as a new management fad. Others associated it with the consultants' creed, the same old business model packaged in a new wrapper. It is easy to misunderstand this emerging business activity. Knowledge Management can – and will - easily fall into the same “management fad” category if it does not have a solid foundation and if it is not supported from top executives. However, KM is rooted in many disciplines, including business, sociology, psychology and information management systems. It represents a holistic approach of conducting business that indicates that this new approach is different and more beneficial than previous programs. The KM practitioners that attempt to shape this new area, and see it grow into a natural way of doing business in the new Information Economy, are the most challenged.

The biggest struggle of KM practitioners is the creation of cultural environment that encourages the sharing of information. Employees must overcome barrier of knowledge sharing. For hundreds of years employees were rewarded for what they knew and how well they knew it. Knowledge was associated with job security and not with cooperation. KM suggests a new way of doing business, a new working culture that cultivates collaboration and sharing of knowledge and ideas. Changing that culture is most difficult if top management does not measure results, and provide the new KM culture with tangible rewards. It takes much time and effort for a knowledge culture to grow, but companies that institute this now will be ahead of the game now and later.

What's the Solution?

How do you harness such an intangible commodity? How do you get your employees to warm up to the idea of knowledge sharing rather than viewing knowledge as “job security?” Enter coaching - another recently recognized management approach. Coaching can change the direction and future of a management initiative that started well but turned out ill in many ways. Coaches are able to transform a person or team's performance. Integrating coaching with Knowledge Management Initiatives can help organizations implement KM programs faster and with more tangible results. Coaches become the missing link in the organization, one that connects all departments; and acknowledges the uniqueness, strengths, and talents of each employee. Once employees understand KM programs are designed for them, they amazingly find ways of connecting with each other and exchanging valuable ideas. That's when innovation and creativity take flight!

The challenge is to evoke to a knowledge enabling organization where sharing knowledge is more important than focusing on building databases that store and replicate knowledge. Regardless of the company's size, every mind counts. Begin to find ways to educate employees, coach them on the job, and show them new ways of learning and interacting with each other. When you assign coaches to your teams, people will more likely focus on the tasks and goals that are truly important

for the organization as a whole.

It is a challenge to set up and lead a Knowledge Management program that integrates and leverages all your learning and best sharing practices. However, KM is the best way to achieve sustainable business results. By integrating coaching with your KM initiatives you will reap the benefits of a successful knowledge sharing organization almost immediately. Coaching is the best route for implementation when it comes to KM because it focuses on people and triggers behavioral change; it moves people from knowing something to actually doing it!

Carole Nicolaides is an internationally recognized Knowledge Management Coach and speaker. As President and Founder of Progressive Leadership, Inc., Carole coaches diverse teams & their executives to peak performance in both Europe and the U.S. Visit Carole's site at <http://www.progressiveleadership.com> for more info & to subscribe to her FREE Ezine.

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