

Work Environment and Knowledge Philosophy

Andrew J. Marsiglia, PhD, CCP

Work environments appear to support knowledge acquisition and dissemination relative to the organization's knowledge philosophy. Some organizations may take a cavalier approach while others have a well-defined knowledge-based mission statement. This paper provides perspective as to how organizations may create a knowledge-focused work environment.

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Work environments appear to support knowledge acquisition and dissemination relative to the organization's knowledge philosophy. Some organizations may take a cavalier approach while others have a well-defined knowledge-based mission statement. In the latter case, following general principles of knowledge are prevalent:

1. Reasoning does not make us know that something is true; it simply makes us believe it is.
2. Practical justification requires good evidence that a belief is true or likely to be true (Mattey, 2000).
3. Both knowledge and opinion require someone thinks that something is the case. The difference between them is strength of evidence (Mattey, 2000).
4. In a cognitively diverse environment, a message sent is not necessarily the message received (Leonard and Straus, 1997).
5. Leaders create values, beliefs, and ideas in order to maintain the soundness of the knowledge system within the organization (Drucker, 1999).

This writer served fourteen years as a large-computer systems sales representative for Unisys Corporation™ enabled him to observe the results of a firm that had a well-defined philosophy of knowledge. In fact, the organization's approach has been to make their sales representatives experts in certain specialty areas. Each year personnel are issued a formal training plan that outlines the classes and seminars they will attend. The goal is to assist the employee to ascend from a position of sales representative to a position of consultant. Unisys™ recognizes the importance of principle three in that evidence is the importance between knowledge and opinion and they want to insure that their personnel do, indeed, have strong evidence.

Unisys recognizes that knowledge creation and acquisition is important to improving their competitive edge and increasing market share. The company believes that their employee's knowledge is a value added resource for their prospects and customers. In line with principle five, the company believes they must foster and sustain an environment that creates value, beliefs, and ideas to maintain a sound knowledge system.

The leaders of Unisys are cognizant of the importance of focusing on the interpersonal relationships of their employees and customers. They are acutely aware that a message sent is not necessarily the one received. Consequently, they like to have sales teams of mixed gender in order to gain a clearer perspective of customer responses. Formal training is provided to help employees understand body language, age-dependent perspectives, and gender-specific communications. Furthermore, the company has a system of sharing knowledge with other Unisys employees via the company's intranet. This explicit knowledge is disseminated in the form of industry-specific tip sheets, white papers, line-of-business updates, and formal training sessions.

Another work environment worthy of consideration as having an effective philosophy of knowledge acquisition is the United States Third Army when commanded by General George S. Patton. He emphasized the importance of knowledge acquisition, based on good evidence, and insisted that everyone in his organization have the same attitude. Furthermore, General Patton demanded that his commanders have a wide range of battle tactic knowledge as well as logistics and personnel management knowledge. His men were required to document new tactics, procedures, and ideas one command level down and two levels up (Alexrod, 1999).

Recognizing that not everyone interprets events the same way, Patton required his battalion commanders to visit the front lines every other day to assess the situation then make a report to headquarters. Patton wanted good evidence that something was likely to be true rather than just somebody's opinion.

Another knowledge acquisition tactic of General Patton was to personally inspect post-battle damage. He would take several of his staff and instruct them as to how to closely examine damage to tanks and men in order to obtain information on entry and exit wounds as well as the type of weapon that inflicted the damage. He and his staff would plot from where the deadly ammunition was fired relative to the dead soldier or destroyed tank. A formal analysis was then performed in order to gain knowledge as to what exactly occurred so they could determine remedies (Short of ending the war itself.) to prevent further occurrences of such tragedy. Patton would review the formal reports and have them filed in a reference manual at headquarters as well as disseminated to lower-level commanders (Axelrod, 1999).

Conclusion

While each of the organizations discussed in this analysis are separated by time and primary mission, they are bound by the fact their leaders had a well defined philosophy of knowledge acquisition and dissemination from the executive level to the line level. The leaders “. . . created values, beliefs, and ideas in order to maintain the soundness of the knowledge system within the organization” (Drucker, 1999). In so doing, the organizations were able to achieve high levels of measurable success in the face of immense opposition.

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