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Lessons Learned in Cross-Cultural Knowledge Sharing

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http://www.imi.american.edu/conf2006.htm

In the fast-paced world of today, organizations must take full advantage of the collective knowledge of their people. This demands the creation of a new work environment in which communities of practice can share knowledge and work together to solve problems, to learn, to invent new methods, and overcome physical barriers of time and distance.

In this session, we first discuss our experiences with transnational organizations, where cultural diversity leads not only to more difficult knowledge-sharing challenges, but also to greater opportunities for success. This is followed by an interactive workshop where the participants consider how to apply the lessons learned to their own business, non-profit, multilateral institution, and government settings.

Culture: the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes a company or corporation; the attitudes and behavior that are characteristic of a particular social group or organization.
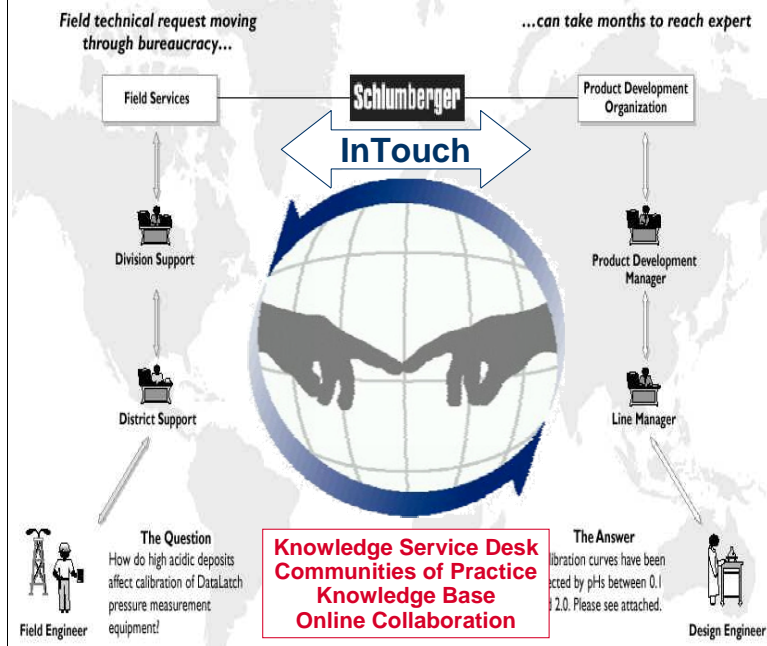
For purposes of this session, we will generalize the definition of "cross-cultural" to include many forms of diversity: nationality, language, education, gender, age, …
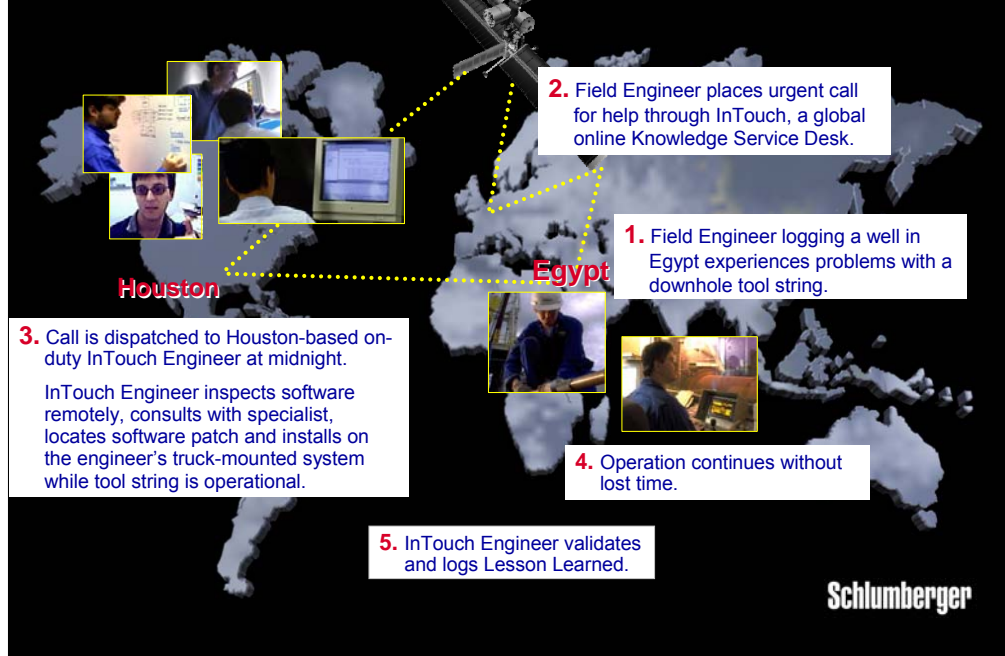
Sound Familiar?

- Someone must have done this before – but who?
- I haven't done a project like this before – how do I find what I need to know?
- We missed the promised delivery date – the development group in Bangalore didn't tell us there were problems.
- It was pure luck that I met him – he had just the answer I was looking for.
- We made that mistake in Indonesia too.
- Why must we re-learn this every time?
- The project went very well – how do we repeat the success?
- When she retired, the knowledge went with her – training someone new will take a long time.
- I don't know what to do – but I'm afraid to ask for help.

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Statements like these are evidence that knowledge is not being shared in your organization, and that value is being lost.
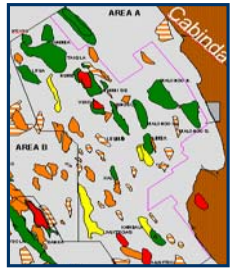
Business Problem: Operational Efficiency

Field technical request moving through bureaucracy...   ...can take months to reach expert

Field Services — **Schlumberger** — Product Development Organization

InTouch

Division Support

District Support

Product Development Manager

Line Manager

The Question
How do high acidic deposits affect calibration of DataLatch pressure measurement equipment?

Field Engineer

**Knowledge Service Desk
Communities of Practice
Knowledge Base
Online Collaboration**

The Answer
...libration curves have been ...cted by pHs between 0.1 ...2.0. Please see attached.

Design Engineer

Knowledge Sharing in Real Time

2. Field Engineer places urgent call for help through InTouch, a global online Knowledge Service Desk.

1. Field Engineer logging a well in Egypt experiences problems with a downhole tool string.

Houston

Egypt

3. Call is dispatched to Houston-based on-duty InTouch Engineer at midnight.

InTouch Engineer inspects software remotely, consults with specialist, locates software patch and installs on the engineer's truck-mounted system while tool string is operational.

4. Operation continues without lost time.

5. InTouch Engineer validates and logs Lesson Learned.

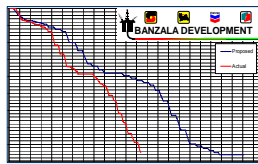Schlumberger

Apply Everywhere What You Learn Anywhere*

1. SITUATION
- Significant accumulation of oil at shallow depth, in shallow water, close to an existing structure
- Two abnormally pressured gas sands already claimed one rig
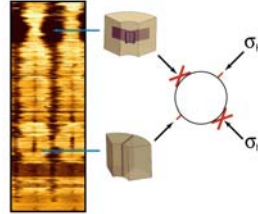
2. PROCESS
- Used Knowledge base for self-training on extended reach drilling issues, available technologies, and relevant projects
- Knowledge sharing applied in project operations

3. RESULTS
- Project completed 51 days ahead of schedule
- $5 million saved for client
- $10 million incremental revenue for client

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An example of successful knowledge sharing, where Schlumberger was able to leverage the knowledge of the entire organization.

WHAT IF: this happened always, that all of your people had access to the entire knowledge and experience of your whole organization – that you were able to … "apply everywhere what you learn anywhere."
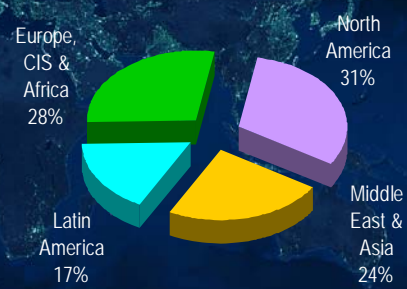
Expertise without Borders.

Connectivity
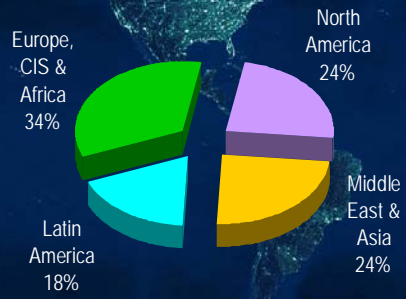
- E-mail worldwide in 1982. All IP network 1990. Global WWW in 1994.
- Standard secure infrastructure & support worldwide in 2000
- Today 60,000 people of more than 140 nationalities working in 80 countries

Practical knowledge sharing depends on connectivity. Schlumberger made the investment early; they have one of the world's most extensive intranets and many years of user experience.

However, it is important to continue upgrade to support the expanding use of audio and video.

This slide shows only the major switching hubs.

Tax policy and administration thematic group

October/November 1998
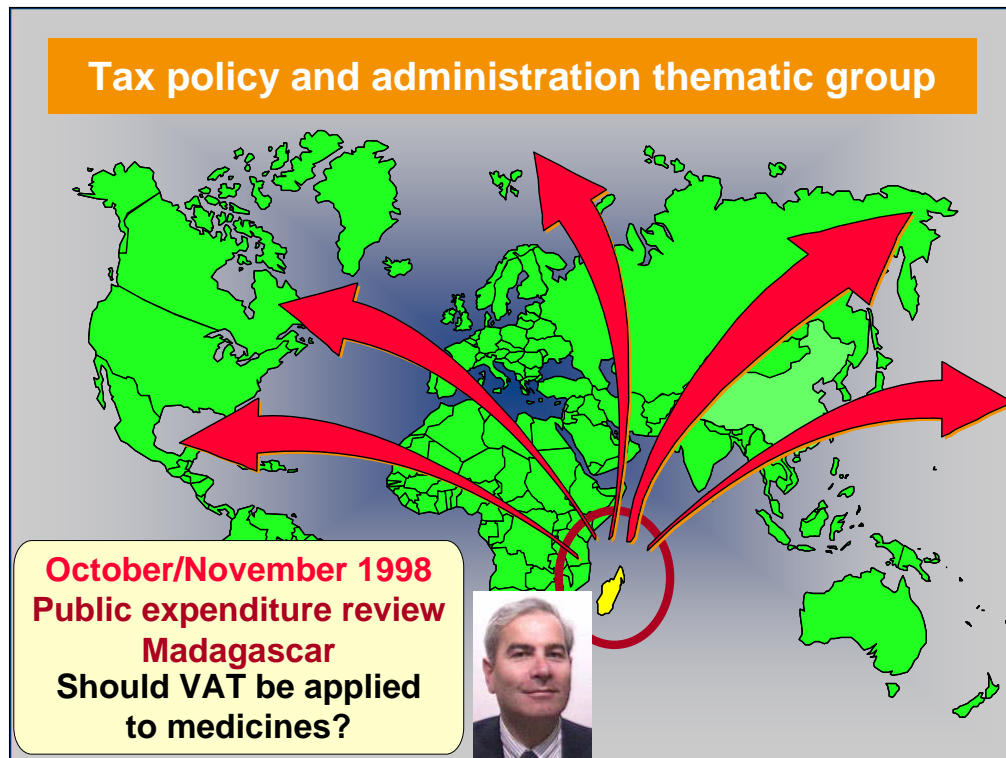**Public expenditure review**
Madagascar
Should VAT be applied to medicines?

Community of Practice / Thematic Group: A group of people who share a common area of expertise and/or who search for solutions to common problems. The fundamental organizational unit in knowledge sharing. Communities of practice are known by many names: communities of interest, knowledge communities, technical communities, knowledge ecologies, professional networks, best-practice networks, and so on.

See http://www.rgsmithassociates.com/Glossary.htm for other definitions.

Tax policy and administration thematic group

University of Toronto

DEC

MNA Region

ECA Region

Retired

Indonesia field office

October/November 1998
Public expenditure review
Madagascar
Should VAT be applied
to medicines?

Within 72 hours...

Tax policy and administration thematic group

The advice received shaped the Bank position as communicated to the Malagasy Govt

October/November 1998
Public expenditure review
Madagascar
Should VAT be applied to medicines?

In the new finance law, medicines are exempted from VAT

Knowledge Sharing

People
(culture)

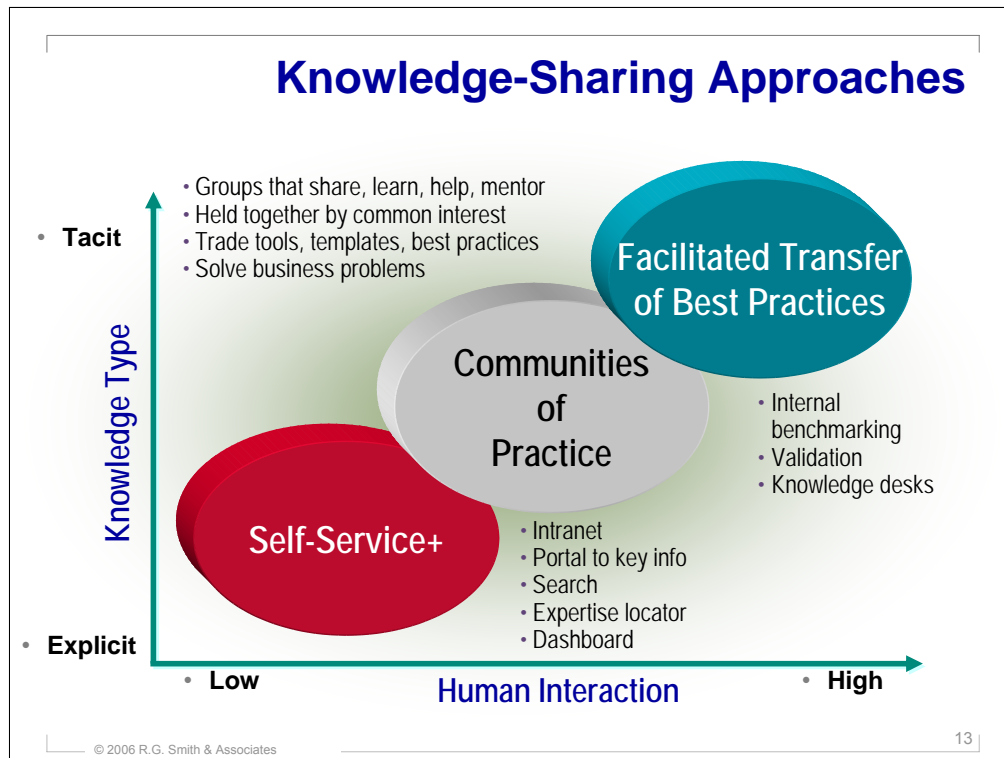Process   Technology

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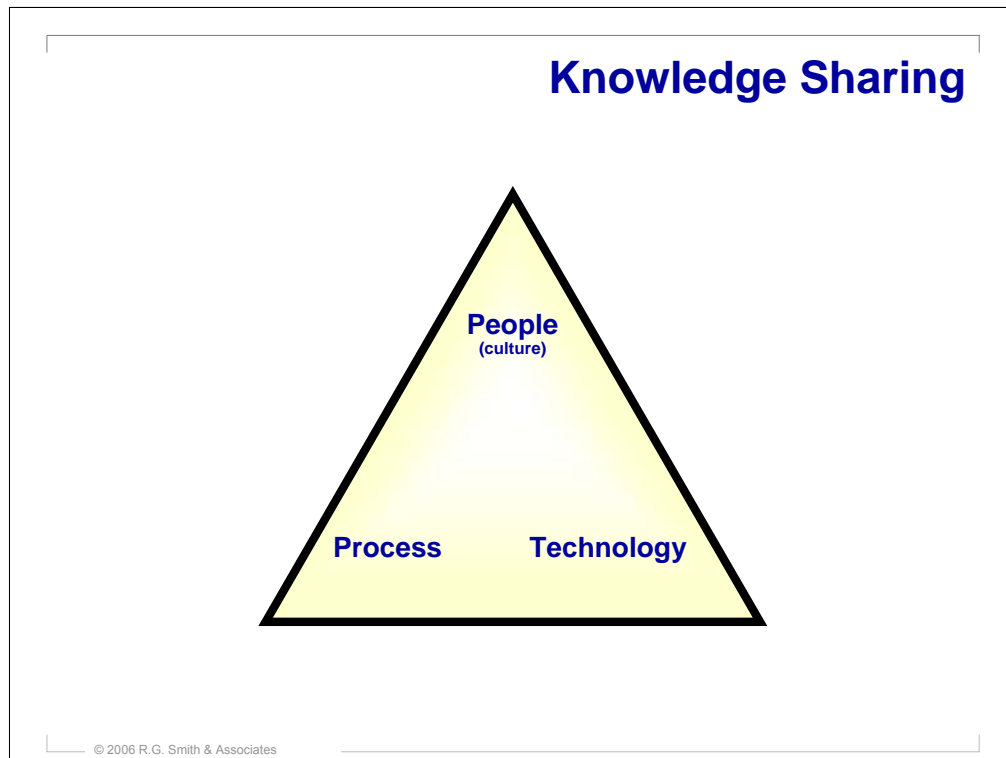
Knowledge sharing can be approached from three angles. Successful organizations are strong in all three.

Technology is often the easiest to implement – portals / search engines, expertise locators, collaboration systems.

Process is next hardest – integrating learning into the workflow – installing processes for knowledge seeking and sharing.

People issues are the most difficult to get right – alignment, incentives, language, change management. A diverse, multi-cultural organization raises more difficult challenges for knowledge sharing than does a single culture organization, but we will see that it also makes for a more robust knowledge-sharing solution. Diversity is the key.

Knowledge-Sharing Approaches

- Groups that share, learn, help, mentor
- Held together by common interest
- Trade tools, templates, best practices
- Solve business problems

Tacit

Knowledge Type

Facilitated Transfer of Best Practices

Communities of Practice

- Internal benchmarking
- Validation
- Knowledge desks

Self-Service+

- Intranet
- Portal to key info
- Search
- Expertise locator
- Dashboard

Explicit

Low   Human Interaction   **High**

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Explicit knowledge can be written down and captured in books, reports and databases. It is relatively easy to transfer from one person to another and does not necessarily require a face-to-face conversation.

Tacit knowledge is essentially impossible to write down. It resides mostly in people's heads. It is hard to transfer from one person to another. It must be gained by dialog and personal experience ... and it encompasses most of what people need to implement best practice.

Knowledge seeking and sharing must be supported.

Personal Barriers to Knowledge Sharing

Source:
- "I know a lot."
- "How do I find out what you need?"
- "Why should I transfer it?"
- "I don't have time to write it down."
- "I'm smarter than you."
- "I'm not an expert."

Recipient:
- "I don't know what you know."
- "I didn't know you had it."
- "Why should I use it?"
- "I don't know how to get it."
- "I'm smarter than you."
- "I'm not an expert."

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Consider personal and organizational barriers and facilitators. Start with the personal barriers.

There are many forms of "arrogance" barrier (e.g., I went to a better school than you). Many things follow from this. For example, you aren't worth my time. So I won't share what I know with you. You probably wouldn't understand anyway. Or, since I know I'm smarter than you are, I won't (can't!) ask a question of you. To do so could expose my ignorance. Or, I'll share with others like me, but not outside my "group."

I'm not an expert … so it should not be me who is writing "best practices" … or I don't dare to ask a "dumb" question. In either case, I may expose my ignorance.

People rarely hoard knowledge. However, they do hoard their time, and reserve it for high payoff activities. Some constraints on knowledge sharing are: Time, Access, Context (situation and consequences), Relative payoff, Absorptive capacity, Perceived value.
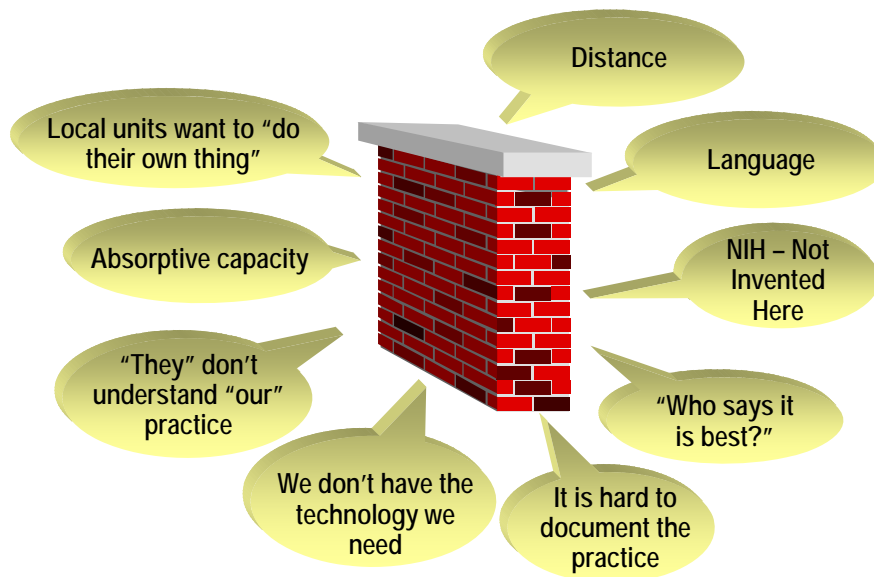
Discussion

What are the current barriers to knowledge sharing in your organization?

– People? Process? Technology?

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Form groups of 4-5 (whomever you can easily reach). Exchange views with the people next to you, then let's hear from you.

You could define "your organization" as the "extended enterprise" that includes customers, partners, suppliers – whatever is most useful for purposes of the discussion.

Discussion Group Ideas

Personal/Organizational Barriers

- Right to know … security
- I'm smarter than you … in different ways
- I should already know that
- Dividing rather than uniting
- I know a lot, but …
    - I have trouble articulating what I know
    - I'm shy, not very vocal

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These ideas were generated by the participants.

Discussion Group Ideas

Barriers in My Organization

- Inter-generational communication
  - Personal vs. Technological
  - Nuance and tone are problems in e-mail
- Groups communicate "past" each other
  - Misaligned goals?
- Lack of context
  - Due to security concerns
  - Territorialism (e.g., gatekeepers)
  - Lack of knowledge (We don't know the context you need.)

- Cultural diversity
- Lack of employee interaction (e.g., informal)
- Lack of time
- Hierarchical bureaucracy
- Trust

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These ideas were generated by the participants.

Discussion Group Ideas

Barriers in My Organization

- Some people talk a lot … but don't add a lot
- Turf battles
- Knowledge is power

- Lack of technology infrastructure
- No inclination to share between Local staff and expatriate staff (e.g., compensation differences)
- People used to an "individual" environment are being asked to work in a "team" environment
- Companies merged, but groups do not work together

- Information overload
- Not knowing the organizational channels (e.g., for resources)
- Inter-departmental competition
  - Sharing is not proactive

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These ideas were generated by the participants.

Lessons Learned

Business Focus

– Align with core business goals and strategies
  … begin with the end in mind

Schlumberger InTouch

– Value Proposition

  ▪ Operational efficiency, improved service delivery

– Results

  ▪ Changed the organization and the way service is delivered to customers

  ▪ >$200 million/yr new revenue & cost savings

  ▪ Queries resolved 20 times faster

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Two threads are common for sustainable programs: first, they have become part of "the way we work 'round here" – not an option; and second, very few programs are sustained by any organization, so choose your targets carefully.

Building a New Work Environment I

- Use an end-to-end approach
  - Recruiting to retirement and beyond
- Recruit where you work
  - Multi-cultural, multi-talented and diverse workforce
- Develop people via "Borderless Careers"
  - Moving across functions, technologies and geographies
- Treat people in a uniform way
- Adopt a common working language
- Align
  - Line Management, HR, Training & Development, IT, KM, Learning, …

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In the fast-paced world of today, organizations must take full advantage of the collective knowledge of their people. This demands the creation of a new work environment in which communities of practice can share knowledge and work together to solve problems, to learn, to invent new methods, and overcome physical barriers of time and distance.

Build Expertise without Borders

Building a New Work Environment II

- **WIIFM – What's In It For Me?**
  - for all stakeholders: individual contributors, managers, customers, suppliers, …
- **Line Management**
  - Communicate a consistent message *... recognize successes & ask questions*
  - Make knowledge sharing a normal part of daily work, performance appraisal, and career development
  - Dedicate resources *… CoPs, knowledge service desks, …*
  - Invest in change management & training
- **Communications**
  - Build and follow a coordinated communications plan
  - Use induction training programs
  - Organize serendipity
- **Communities of Practice**
  - Define terms of reference, charter, goals *… a reason to exist*
  - Define roles & responsibilities *… knowledge champions, business sponsors*
  - Build trust ("emotional bandwidth")
  - Develop people through organic learning

Nurture a knowledge-sharing culture

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Managers: Your line management responsibility may be local, but your KM responsibility is global.

CoP Functions

- Helping: Making person to person connections among peers to share ideas, insights, help
- Best-Practice Sharing: Managing flow of specific practices from individual insights to documented, verified, used best practices
- Knowledge Stewarding: Collecting, organizing, upgrading & disseminating materials people use day-to-day
- Innovation: Crossing organizational boundaries to generate new ideas

What works

- People see the connection between knowledge sharing and business purpose
- Knowledge sharing is linked to core cultural values in the organization
- There is strong management pressure and peer pressure for people to collaborate and share
- Knowledge sharing is integrated with day-to-day work
- Human networks have champions who promote participation
- Sharing is aligned with reward and recognition

What doesn't

- Demanding the culture change to support KM
- Expecting people to change the way they work without a reason to do so
- Providing IT without behavioral support

Everyone is a potential contributor, from new hires to retirees.

NIHBIDIA - Not Invented Here But I Did It Anyway

- Direction of communities … tipping point … draw on what already exists
- Communities permit a creative destruction (away from product lines towards customer-facing organizations)
- They also facilitate virtual teamwork, drawing on common language, honoring cultural sensitivities …

Motivation & Recognition

• **Personal Motivation**
- *Reduced time / effort to do the job*
- *Best performance → enhanced client relationship*
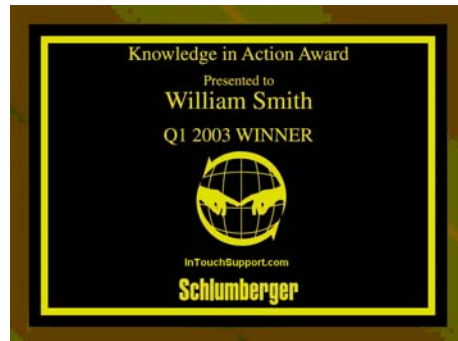- *Reduced stress through better planning & execution*
- *Being on the leading edge*

• **Community Recognition**
- *Visibility: Name in the News Leaving a Legacy*

• **Management Recognition**
- *Objectives, appraisal, career progression*

Knowledge Sharing - Shares own knowledge, learns from others and applies knowledge in daily work. Open to new ideas and continuous learning.

Knowledge in Action Award
Presented to
William Smith
Q1 2003 WINNER
InTouchSupport.com
Schlumberger

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Take personal responsibility … as well as company responsibility

Building a New Work Environment III

- **Process**
  - Help, Learning Before/During/After, Sharing, Reuse, Measurement

- **Technology**
  - Essential enabler: integrated, easy-to-use, secure
  - Communications infrastructure
  - Support for all types of "knowledge connections"
    - Portal, Expertise Locator, Discussion Forums, …
  - Enable people to educate themselves before talking to the worldwide expert

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Additional KM Lessons learned, from 19-May-01

- The biggest challenge is to create/nurture a Knowledge-Sharing Culture
- You need Line management support … to get it, your program must have a business impact
- Vital virtual communities are essential … Knowledge champions are helpful
- Technology isn't everything … but there is little progress without it. Get started. Don't wait for perfection. Refine as you go, based on experience.
- Build it and they won't come … What technology do the people actually use
- It's about the content … Seed the initial knowledge repository
- Everyone is a potential contributor … Light publishing …Retirees
- WIIFM: What's in it for me?…Now! … Solve problems today, not someday
- Stakeholders: community members & business managers
- Walk the talk: How do you manage your own team's knowledge? What tools do you use?

Discussion

For the knowledge-sharing barriers in your organization:

  – What "interventions" could be effective?

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Form groups of 4-5 (whomever you can easily reach). Exchange views, then let's hear from you.

You could define "your organization" as the "extended enterprise" that includes customers, partners, suppliers – whatever is most useful for purposes of the discussion.

Discussion Group Ideas

Interventions for My Organization

- Change to a results-oriented organizational structure

- Promote knowledge sharing
    - By executives and by groups

- Allow time for sharing

- Develop and promote standards and best practices

- Hold organizational functions during working hours (e.g., one Friday afternoon per month to get to know each other)

- Incentives for knowledge sharing

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These ideas were generated by the participants.

$$Power = Knowledge^{Shared}$$

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