Lecture 51: Understanding knowledge sharing

Hello students. Welcome back to the course on Organizational Behavior, Individual Dynamics in Organization. Today we start a new module, a module which is slightly different from the traditional organizational behavior management courses where we look into knowledge sharing and hiding.

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So let us today look into understanding knowledge sharing. So, we have to understand specifically what do you mean by knowledge sharing and we have to also get a clear idea about the importance or the relevance of knowledge sharing in an organizational context. So let us start with today's theme and today's theme is "knowledge sharing is considered as a process in which one unit is affected by knowledge and expertise of another unit." So, this is something which makes knowledge sharing important, knowledge sharing relevant because there is a certain dependence associated with knowledge sharing.

One unit is critically dependent on another or maybe couple of other units when it comes to knowledge sharing. So let us understand from the basics.

What is knowledge? Now we would have gained or we would have learned a lot of things about knowledge. We would have understood what knowledge is. We would have seen people talking about knowledge from traditional thought or you know historical viewpoint knowledge has been defined clearly.

So let us understand it more importantly. Let us try to understand the nitty-gritties of what constitutes knowledge or what is essentially knowledge. Knowledge refers to the understanding, information, skills and awareness acquired through learning, experience or education. So, if we look into knowledge definition as such, we see that it is not only understanding but understanding is certainly a part of it. Information is there, skills are

there, awareness is also there and how is this achieved? It is through learning, experience or education.

So when you look into knowledge, it is a highly valued state in which a person is in cognitive contact with the reality. So, this makes knowledge all the more important because it is a relation. It is a relation of awareness. It is a relation of understanding. It is a relation of knowing.

It is a relation of cognitive connect with the reality. So, there are some things that is happening in front of you in an organization. How you try to decipher that? How you try to understand that? How you try to absorb the learnings from that or something which you take it as a punishment towards you that you have to avoid? All this incrementally is compounded and it makes what is known as knowledge. So, knowledge is nothing but it is a relation, a cognitive contact with the reality and I certainly personally like this particular understanding about knowledge. It is a cognitive contact with reality.

When you look into knowledge specifically, there are certain key aspects. Let's understand it very quickly. There is something called as information and understanding. Now information could be that let's say the pin code of particular place is 60042 or 60042 or 689585 or 781039. So, when these are just numbers, let's say 7, 8, 1, 0, 3, 9, randomly these are just numbers. When it comes together, every single digit at a particular place has certain connotation, has certain reference, has certain meaning, it gives you a new meaning. It gives you a new understanding that this is the pin code of this particular place. This is the zip code of this particular place. This understanding is what converts basic information to knowledge. Useful information becomes knowledge.

So information is there at one place but understanding is the next level and this makes it more refined and what happens is the end product is nothing but knowledge. Now there is another important aspect which is learning or experience. Sometimes we tend to, even this sort of arrangement what you are doing, you are trying to hear this particular video or this particular session. We are looking or we are actually learning something. We are trying to go through certain aspects which we were not aware of or which we had partial knowledge of and based on this particular resource available at our disposal, we are trying to build on that.

It could be new learning, it could be relearning, it could be unlearning and again relearning. So please understand there are all possibilities of learning that can happen here and also we can have an experience. So many a time when students ask me, I will say that welcome to this new learning experience. So, learning also has been transformed literally to an experience rather than the classic traditional classroom teaching. Now you

have more senses of you coming into action when it comes to a particular class or a session or something because you have audio visual help, you have technological other supports which can create your learning more important, more interesting.

So learning has also transformed to an experience whereas you can also learn through your experience. Let us say when an organization goes for recruitment, one particular factor is always your experience and this experience is what makes you the person qualified for a particular post at times. There are certain situations where your qualifications can get you the job but it has certain limitations. Above that it is nothing but your experience that matters. In a crucial decision-making point your experience matters. In a critical problem analysis situation or scenario your experience matters. So learning and experience is yet another aspect when knowledge is being discussed.

Another thing is contextual and dynamic, the nature that knowledge is contextual and dynamic. Again, I would like to take the particular example of let us say in one particular context, let us say it could be any different course, it could be cultural context or it could be let us say in terms of your qualification wise it could be a different context. So, what you actually gain or what you actually want to say to one particular audience might be different.

If the same thing is stated you might try to paraphrase it or rephrase it or add certain example. Let us say if I want to teach organizational behavior to set of students who are just in their standard 5, grade 5 or something then I would take a different approach altogether. I would tend to make it more interesting with stories and examples and you know cases which are related to them. When I am looking into the same course to a more senior executive position maybe for an executive MBA or maybe for a MDP program, all these situations which I had discussed in that class might not be suitable rather I should look into those cases which are more related to them. So, the way in which you can have this knowledge is context based and when you are having such a wonderful example like COVID-19, we can see that knowledge is dynamic.

Knowledge can be considered in two dimensions in terms of COVID. Let us say the emergence of COVID actually gave new knowledge in the medical world altogether and the way it has evolved has been so dynamic because till then no awareness was there with respect to the medicines, vaccination, etc. to a certain extent but after that the dynamic evolution of certain medical practices has evolved and this is what makes knowledge dynamic. Another example, same situation, you have let us say COVID-19, it came into picture and people started working from home. People who are not so tech savvy, people who are not so aware about the technological aspects or how to make even a video call, they started taking online lectures.

So, this is something which can be critical in underscoring the fact that knowledge can be dynamic. Another important aspect is explicit and tacit nature of knowledge. We will discuss about this in detail. Explicit is when the knowledge is codified, knowledge is systematically written down. You can read, write, understand from the document, from the platform that is available whereas tacit knowledge is hidden knowledge.

 It is inherently hidden knowledge and it is there with the particular individual but it is not transcribed, it is not translated to the actual reality that is tacit knowledge. Now application and utilization of knowledge is also there. Sometimes we see that some technical know-how emerges out of some development and that essentially is end product of or a consequence of the knowledge that has been evolved or the research knowledge that has emerged out of some studies or some lab settings or something like that. Utilization of that particular, let us say use of optical fiber nets which can improve the speed of your internet connection, this is an application, this is more of a utilization of the available technological know-how, technological knowledge to that extent. There could be shared and transferred understanding of knowledge also.

This is where our aspect of knowledge sharing becomes critical because knowledge is not static, it is dynamic and how it is shared from one individual to another, one group to another, one organization to another that is more relevant and that is what we are more keen in discussing.

Now let us look into this dynamic nature of the knowledge very closely. Knowledge is an awareness of what one knows through study, reasoning, experience or association or through various other types of learning. So, when you look into knowledge as dynamic because it is constantly changing through experience and learning. So, this dynamic approach of knowledge or why knowledge is dynamic is because of this constant change that is happening through learning and experience.

It is a powerful force, knowledge is a powerful force that can be used to overcome barriers, influence decision making and generally enable and refresh individuals and organizations so that they can accomplish goals and complete work successfully. So, when you are in an organizational setup, sometimes you feel that you are not cut for the particular role, particular job or you are not aware of what you have to do or you sometimes feel that you are not competent to do. What is the next best step? The next best step is to get acquainted, get certain training in that particular domain or that particular role. You go for individualized training, a customized training or you request your manager to give some training or you ask towards the people or ask the people who have actually done the job or actually doing that particular job. This is what will equip you to the particular activity or the job role.

This is what will enable you to be competent person for that particular job role and this is essentially underscoring the dynamic nature of knowledge. So, what you have today might not be the same as tomorrow in terms of the knowledge and what can be achieved with today's knowledge might not be enough when it comes to tomorrow. So, this is what happens when you are looking into the dynamic nature of knowledge. Now let us look into the tacit knowledge approach. Tacit is something which is not codified, not documented, not available as such to the outside world.

The salient characteristic of tacit knowledge approach is the basic belief that knowledge is essentially personal in nature and is therefore difficult to extract from the heads of individuals. So, when you are looking into knowledge per se and tacit knowledge specifically, this is restricted to certain individual, it is personal in nature, it is not shared in a common platform, it is not available to the common public. So, this makes tacit knowledge all the more critical. In effect, this approach to knowledge management assumes often implicitly that the knowledge in and available to an organization will largely consist of tacit knowledge.

So let me make this thing clear. If you have let us say 100 units of knowledge, if I am taking a crude example, the general understanding is 80% of that knowledge would be tacit. Now things are changing. There are knowledge sharing platforms, there are technological softwares or there are platforms that are enabling you to share more knowledge, are forcing you to share knowledge or sometimes are actually mechanism to check whether you are hiding knowledge. So, all these things are emerging. That said, a lion's share of the entire knowledge available in the organization is actually tacit.

And I will also ascertain one thing that when this tacit knowledge is actually coming into a open platform or shared with common platform where it can be used for the other members of the organization that becomes what is known as institutional memory. I repeat institutional memory. So, when you are an individual, let us say you have excelled that particular job, you have done that job let us say for 30, 35 odd years you have been an expert, now it is a change of the person. There is another individual who is going to occupy your post and you are just retiring. Whatever you have learned, gained over this past 30, 35 years goes out with you.

But that will be a loss for the organization. Remember if you are heading some organizational or strategic business units, please remember that those essential information, the tacit knowledge should have been part of your institutional memory. Please try to codify all the tacit knowledge or please try to encourage or equip people to actually share the knowledge so that it becomes part of the institutional memory. And the

benefit of the institutional memory is the moment they go out there is another individual that can come and he or she can directly go through the entire set of data that is provided and through that he can or she can equip himself or herself to be ready for that particular job role. So that is tacit knowledge approach.

Now having seen the importance of tacit and how it is more importantly required to be in the explicit role or explicit phase, I will now look into explicit knowledge approach. Explicit knowledge is nothing but it holds that the knowledge is something that can be explained by individual. It can be codified, it could be understood, it can be explained by individual even though some effort and even some forms of assistance may sometimes be required to help individuals articulate what they know. So, this is critical when you are looking into the knowledge that is available with you that you have gained or that you have learned, sometimes your manager might tell that you know please try to make the tacit knowledge explicit.

Now this is not an easy task as it sounds. Sometimes you feel that you know the knowledge is there and you can just put it out, it might not happen like that. Rather it will be more difficult for you to actually put it in a regular platform. So you might need some assistance. Assistance need not be only human centric, it might be some technology enabled assistance as I mentioned some knowledge sharing portals or platforms that can actually do that or there might be often situations where you are requiring some effort because whatever you had you are actually channelizing it, collecting it, consolidating it and then transferring it or whatever you are learning through a training program you are consolidating it and transferring to the particular portal. So, it needs certain effort, it might need some assistance also.

So the explicit knowledge approach in general believes that formal organization processes can be used to help individuals articulate the knowledge. So that is the reason why organizations pitch in for knowledge sharing portals, knowledge sharing platforms etc. because that will enable the organization to have the competitive edge which otherwise they are missing out on. So, when you are looking into the explicit knowledge approach it usually accompanies the views that knowledge can be made explicit and managed explicitly. The belief that new knowledge can be created through a structured, managed, scientific learning process.

Now this will enable or this will ensure that more than the tacit knowledge, the explicit knowledge is the sought after knowledge when your organization is performing well. When your organization is not performing well there might be some elements of tacit knowledge that is missing and that is what you may have to address.

Now let us look into knowledge management and knowledge sharing capability. When you are coming into knowledge management as a discipline you have to understand that act or the activity of knowledge management is important. Knowledge management as doing what is needed to get the most out of knowledge resources is what makes knowledge management very beautiful.

So please understand a situation where you have very knowledgeable people in your workplace, you have very much qualified and expert individuals in your workplace. In those situations also if you are not able to consolidate the knowledge or take or gather whatever you can from the available pool of knowledge then you are a failure. So, this is what makes knowledge management critical.

Knowledge management performs several activities as conducting, discovering, capturing, sharing and applying knowledge. So when you look into the stream of knowledge or knowledge management as a discipline what you can understand is that there is an amalgamation of lot of activities, there is a collective effort of lot of activities like from creation to actual making of knowledge and sharing of knowledge becomes important, applying of the knowledge becomes important.

Sharing knowledge is defined as the process by which explicit or tacit knowledge can flow between individuals or utilize from others as groups, departments and organization. Now this is what knowledge sharing is all about and please do not make it a mistake when you are actually looking into knowledge sharing. There could be possibility, people tend to omit tacit knowledge also. But when you look into the larger scheme of things, tacit knowledge also needs to be included when it comes to knowledge sharing because again as I mentioned if you are not aware of or if you are not making use of the tacit knowledge available in the organization it is actually going to create a barrier towards the institutional memory of the organization. So please note that when you are looking into any knowledge sharing or if you are creating an intervention mechanism for increasing or improving the knowledge sharing within the organization please remember one thing that you should also look into the fact that how you can control or you can actually translate the tacit knowledge into the explicit knowledge.

Let us look into the knowledge management and knowledge sharing capability more closely. When you look into knowledge sharing it can be clarified by three points and one is knowledge sharing means effective transfer. It is not a gimmick, it is not to showcase to another organization or to the outside world that you are an organization which actually shares a lot of knowledge, you are taking collective efforts to actually discuss, deliberate on things and you are coming out with certain actual outputs. No, knowledge sharing should actually mean effective transfer. There should be somebody who is benefiting or should benefit from that.

What is shared is knowledge rather than recommendations based on knowledge. This is important. So many times what happens is in your organization there might be a person who may be claiming that he is close to the boss, you might have somebody like this in your organization and in your mind at that point when you are listening to this lecture. So, he or she will actually have an idea that whatever is coming from the boss or from the top, they might or they tend to filter out certain critical information, critical knowledge and they pass it on to others. So basically, they will add something from their own side and tend to make the knowledge little bit twisted.

They try to spin off the particular knowledge that is coming from otherwise from the top directly. So, what happens is you are supposed to share the knowledge, let us say now you have received that knowledge, you are sharing to your subordinate, it is diluted. Rather I will say that it is not the actual knowledge, what you are sharing is recommendation based on that particular knowledge and beware, this is one of the biggest flaw when it comes to knowledge sharing. Are you sharing the exact knowledge that is coming from, you know there might be some leakages, knowledge leakage is common, but it does not mean that you are not sharing the knowledge rather than you are sharing some recommendations associated or suggestions associated with that knowledge.

And third most important thing is knowledge sharing may take place across individuals as well as across groups, departments or organization. It is not that knowledge sharing is an individual oriented act, no. It happens across groups, there are teams with exchange knowledge, there are cross-functional teams are made for that purpose so that there is a proper exchange of knowledge, there are departments which inter departmental functionaries which actually facilitate the knowledge sharing. So please understand ladies and gentlemen that it is not that individuals are only the units that are active with respect to knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is considered as a process in which one unit is affected by the knowledge and expertise of another unit and classically that is what the theme of today's lecture is.

So knowledge flows include mainly five elements. One is the value of the source knowledge, another is willingness of the source to share knowledge. Now one thing is that what is the source that you are getting. Now whether that source is credible, that source is something which we can accept and we can propagate what is the value that we associate with that particular source. Another important thing is if we have identified the source also it might not be that the source is ready to share knowledge. So that readiness to share knowledge is another important thing.

Media richness of the communication channel because there might be more disturbance, more voice in terms of the communication. So, the media richness, how you actually tend to share knowledge, what is the channel you are taking, how rich it is that depends that also facilitates the knowledge sharing to a great extent.

Fourth point is that willingness of recipient to acquire knowledge. As it is important that the person, the source should be willing to share knowledge it is equally important if not more that the recipient also should be willing to acquire knowledge and finally the absorptive capacity of the recipient. It might be the case that the recipient is willing to accept the knowledge, willing to absorb the knowledge, but what is absorptive capacity? Is he or she a person or an entity who gets fatigue immediately or who is not able to process lot of incoming knowledge? In that particular case the absorptive capacity is low.

So that would even if all the other four factors are intact, all there is proper intent from the source, even from the recipient, but the recipient unfortunately is not able to have the required absorptive capacity, the whole knowledge sharing process fails. So, this is what makes knowledge sharing all the more important when we are actually looking it as a process. So, when we are trying to understand something on knowledge sharing, knowledge management and in coming modules, coming lectures we look into knowledge hiding also. What makes knowledge sharing important is that there is an inherent combination of different units involved in sharing knowledge.

You cannot share knowledge in isolation. This is the takeaway; this is the understanding you should have. One unit should depend on another unit for some knowledge and vice versa. So, in those situations where one unit is dependent on one or two units or more units, then the knowledge sharing becomes all the more critical. But if the knowledge sharing process is channelized, is going through a very rich channel, even if the source is willingly trying to share the knowledge, even the recipient is willingly taking the knowledge if the absorptive capacity of the person or the entity who is receiving the knowledge is not high, if there is no willingness of the particular entity or person to actually accept the knowledge and moreover if there is no willingness for the person or entity to share the knowledge, the knowledge sharing process fails. So please understand that it is a chain reaction, it is a chain process, it is a cyclical process and at any point in time if there is some barrier, some breakage, then it will not facilitate an efficient and effective knowledge sharing process.

On that note, we will end today's class. We will look more into knowledge sharing and interestingly knowledge hiding in this particular module. Till then take care. Thank you.