L3: Developing and Sustaining a Knowledge Culture
Learning Objectives

1. Outline the main influences on organisational cultures
2. Describe the features of effective knowledge cultures
3. Describe knowledge culture enablers
Today’s focus:

- What are some of the main features of effective knowledge cultures?
- What factors enable effective knowledge cultures?
- How can knowledge cultures be enhanced?
Introduction

- A major goal of knowledge management is to encourage a knowledge culture: where everyone recognises and accepts knowledge sharing as a desirable behavior.

- Knowledge management relies on a strong sense of community and collaboration.

- The development of a knowledge culture is essential to the effective implementation of knowledge management.
  - This entails building a widespread acceptance of knowledge sharing as a critical behaviour.

- Knowledge management does not operate within a vacuum.

- Knowledge management is strongly influenced by the culture which operates in an organisation.
Organisational Cultures

- Organisational cultures describe the collective perceptions, beliefs and values of employees in the workplace.

- Each individual may perceive a different organisational culture. He/she will be influenced from the initial and ongoing experiences in the workplace.

- There are many different sources of information about the organisational culture, including:
  - Stories,
  - Observed incidents
  - First hand experiences
  - Models
  - Organisational structure
  - Public recognition of what people do
  - Resource allocation practices
  - Leadership sponsorship of values
  - The individual’s own role and focus.
Organisational Cultures

- The type of culture within an organisation can strongly influence retention and productivity.

- Cultures which fail to value the individual employee and their contribution typically experience low retention and decreased productivity.

- These are known as negative organisational cultures.

- Learning about the culture is derived from stories, observations and experiences in the workplace.

- Strongly influence retention and productivity.
Organisational Cultures (cont'd)

There are many ways in which a culture is influenced. Some of these are listed on this slide, but there are also others which operate.

- Past patterns and history
- Teamwork
- Climate and morale
- Information flows across the community
- Supervision quality
- Leadership
- Workplace interactions
Organisational Cultures (cont'd)

- **Past patterns and history** reflect an individual and group’s experience of the culture – as it really operates.
  - People predict how they will be treated and judged, based on their knowledge of past events. If they have been discouraged from sharing their knowledge, they will anticipate that same pattern continuing into the future.
  - If the culture is competitively based, they will focus on building their small community into a strong unit, rather than the organisation.
  - Organisations with weak cultures will often experience a fragmentation of common values. They will interpret new events more closely in terms of past patterns and history which are personally derived. Strong cultures aim to build a greater awareness of the wider perspectives which need to be embraced and understood.

- **Teamwork** is a powerful cultural influence. When we work closely with people, we learn many things from them – including what is acceptable practice.
  - The team’s encouragement of specific practices provides strong guidance to individuals as to what behaviour is appropriate.

- Similarly, the **climate and morale** of the operational unit and organisation as a whole will promote a particular culture. The term climate describes the feelings people have about their workplace.
  - A positive climate makes people excited and buoyed up when they come to work.
  - A negative climate decreases the satisfaction and pleasure of coming to work. In turn, this affects the morale – the overall sense of well-being which is to be found in a work group.
  - Low morale generates negative responses to new ideas, a reluctance to put extra effort into work, and possibly, increased conflict across employees. These are clearly very critical issues for any organisation.

- A cohesive organisational culture relies on **strong information flows across the community**.
  - People who are kept isolated from events and practices within the wider organisation build their own ways of doing things, and their own value systems.
  - This greatly impacts on their capacity to adopt and maintain a wider sense of the community's culture.
Organisational Cultures (cont'd)

- **Supervision quality** similarly impacts on the culture. The values and messages a supervisor conveys to staff members is a strong and consistent message which is experienced almost every day.
  - Over time, people adapt their behaviours and expectations to match these messages. If they conflict with the broader patterns of the wider community, they will be the more powerful.
  - Effective organisations recognise the power of this influence and place considerable importance on developing effective supervisors who send the right messages.

- More broadly, the **leadership** of the organisation also contributes to the organisational culture.
  - A leader who encourages sharing and collaboration will provide strong messages to the community.
  - The values of the leader are noted and reflected into the activities and expectations of many staff members. It is important, then, to ensure the right messages are being sent.

- **Workplace interactions** are also strongly influential.
  - Most people seek to operate in an amicable setting. They also try to build similar values to those around them.
  - New members are often acculturated into their workgroup’s values quite quickly, as they are told “we don’t do it like that”, “this is how it works here...”.
  - In many cases, the values which are being demonstrated and encouraged can be quite different to the work values which are more widely promoted.
  - New members will see these local colleagues as their strongest models and influences – particularly in the formative stages.
Effective Knowledge Cultures

Knowledge intensive communities rely on service, knowledge sharing and strong collaboration across many members. They therefore seek to build a strong knowledge culture.

- There are a number of values which knowledge cultures are known to encourage. For example, they seek to build cultures which:
  - Open and communicative
  - Encourage sharing
  - Tolerant
  - Collaborative
  - Trusting
Effective Knowledge Cultures

- **open and collaborative** – encouraging high interaction and learning across many different members, and across the boundaries which organisational structures often create.

- **Encourage sharing** of practice, knowledge, resources and insights. This is particularly helpful for new and junior members of an organisation, where much can be learnt from others.

- **Tolerance** is important in knowledge cultures. Members need to be encouraged to continuously learn and develop new skills and capabilities. In the process, they may make mistakes. Tolerance during that learning process ensures people do not become fearful of trying new things.

- **Collaborative cultures** are the cornerstone of knowledge management. All members of the knowledge community need to be encouraged to collaborate. This implies that they should offer their own knowledge and seek support from others as part of their normal work roles.

- To operate in this manner, there needs to be a high degree of **trust** – that is, willingness to act on the basis of other’s knowledge.
Implicit values of a knowledge culture

Figure below outlines how these various principles all contribute to the creation of a collaborative knowledge culture.
Effective Knowledge Cultures (cont'd)

Knowledge culture principles

- The previous slide outlined the values which are important in a knowledge community. Four major messages need to be generated.

1. People are more important than systems.
2. Knowledge sharing should be publicly and widely encouraged.
3. Good knowledge practices need to be encouraged very actively by leaders and supervisors. This includes promoting desired practices and rewarding those who demonstrate a strong commitment to those practices.
4. The values outlined in the slide need to be adopted by all members of the community. In practice, this is a significant goal which may be almost impossible to attain. However, the greater the commitment to building a knowledge culture, the more likely it will be instilled into the community.
Knowledge culture enablers

- Knowledge culture enablers are those influences that contribute to the creation of an effective and positive knowledge community.

- In particular, they are the elements which align core values, organisational structures, systems and processes to ensure consistent messages and principles are perceived by all members of the community.
Knowledge culture enablers

- Core Values
- Structural Support
- Enacted Values
- Interaction with Colleagues

KNOWLEDGE CULTURE
Knowledge culture enablers (cont'd)

1. Core values

- those values which are believed to be essential to the organisations growth and achievement of its goals
- Knowledge based cultures need nurture innovation and creative thinkers
- Knowledge communities need to encourage flexible and adaptable behavior
- A strong learning orientation is also desirable is knowledge cultures
- Learning orientation emphasis learning through experimentation, ongoing improvement, testing and evaluation to support the long-term goals of the organisation
- Knowledge cultures must consistently affirm the value in knowledge workers
1. Core values

- Collaboration
- Communication
- Interaction
- Innovation
- Adaptation
- Learning orientation
- Trust
- Sharing and valuing of knowledge
2. Structural support

- Structural support describes the underlying processes and structures which are supported by the organisation.

  - Describes the organisational structure, systems and processes which organisation sponsors through resource allocation and public affirmation
  
  - Includes technological systems, human resources processes and other work related infrastructure
2. Structural support

- Organisational structure
- Transparent decision making
- Information access
- Problem solving
- Communication channels
- Human resource management
2. Structural support

- **Organisational structure** - The activities and processes of an organisation offer many important messages as to the value placed on an activity or outcome. If a process is embedded in critical organisational processes and expectations, or incorporated in the structures of the organisation, it is given more credibility and affirmation. For example, the creation of a knowledge management unit or position signals a major commitment to the knowledge management process.

- **Transparent decision making** is another way to facilitate the development of knowledge cultures. Community members benefit from having an insight into the critical issues facing an organisation, and from the opportunity to share their insights and wisdom as appropriate.

- Effective knowledge cultures rely on appropriate **access to information and sources of knowledge**. Organisations which reduce the access to these sources will find it difficult to promote ready sharing and collaboration. Hierarchical structures are well known for their limiting of knowledge exchange.

- **A problem-solving orientation** also provides greater opportunity to draw on and apply knowledge into work-related contexts.

- The provision of **effective communication channels** also enables knowledge cultures to operate effectively. Communication structures can include electronic processes and more traditional channels (meetings, organisational record keeping etc).

- **Human resource management processes**. - HRM describes the major systems and processes which operate in the organisation. They enable effective management of staff members from the time they are recruited for employment.
3. Enacted Values

- While the structures within the organisation and the espoused values are most important, the way in which these values are enacted strongly determines how effectively the culture will emerge.

- Enacted values describes the values which are demonstrated in everyday activities. They illustrate the degree to which knowledge cultures are allowed to thrive. There are various elements which can contribute to effectively enacted knowledge values.

- Thus, enacted values provides strong messages as to the importance of knowledge management, and provide the opportunity to participate in the various processes which occur.
Knowledge culture enablers (cont'd)

3. Enacted Values

- Models
- Leaders
- Opportunities to collaborate
- Encouragement to collaborate

- These four enabling emphases are all important in encouraging strong and durable knowledge cultures. While a culture may be found in organisations which have some gaps in these enabling factors, it is certainly easier to build effective processes with all four areas reflected.
3. Enacted Values

- How KM principles are **modelled** throughout the knowledge community is a influential factor. The cues and messages which staff members see reflected in the actual activities of the organisation are critical models as to what is valued. Leaders and supervisors cannot simply parrot knowledge management principles but must, instead, model those principles through their own practices.

- **Leaders** who have more senior roles are particularly critical sources of influence. They need to both demonstrate and espouse knowledge principles to members of the organisation, so that others feel assured that knowledge management is highly regarded and valued.

- Knowledge workers also need **opportunities to enact those values**. Collaboration requires time and opportunity. People need time to work collaboratively.

- Allied to this issue is the fact that employees need to be **encouraged to collaborate**. Collaboration is an investment in the future, but it takes considerable effort to build relationships and to connect with others in a fruitful and ongoing manner.
4. Interaction with colleagues

- A further way of building culture is through interaction with colleagues.

- Mentorship, team behaviours, co-worker interaction and the presence of communities of practice all play a part in developing the culture.

- The quality and focus of interaction with colleagues strongly influences cultural outcomes.

- 5 areas can be identified as being particularly important.
4. Interaction with colleagues

- Quality of interaction
- Focus of interaction
- Mentorship
- Team behaviour
Knowledge culture enablers (cont'd)

4. Interaction with colleagues
   - 5 areas can be identified as being particularly important.

   - **Quality of interaction** relates to the experiences a person has, particularly with respect to the capacity to share knowledge. Employees need to build trust and faith in their co-workers. They also need to be encouraged to share their knowledge.

   - The **focus of interaction** can also create some complex messages. People who are placed in settings where the focus of interaction is very much around the daily business of completing tasks will find it harder to interact at the higher knowledge levels. The focus of interaction needs to provide opportunity to explore knowledge issues and strategies.

   - The availability and suitability of **mentorship** can build a strong enabling strategy for knowledge intensive communities. Mentors offer guidance to less experienced people as to how knowledge management operates in the organisation, and how the individual can reflect the principles in their own behaviours.

   - **Team** behaviours enable knowledge management if they are collaborative, supportive, non-judgemental and constructive.
Maintaining the Knowledge Culture During Change

- Change needs to be handled appropriately and sensitively to ensure initiatives are accepted and integrated in the workplace.

- Change occurs in various forms –
  - as planned or unplanned interventions
  - As major revolutions
  - Sometimes through external forces such as new technologies or competition
  - More gradual process or regulated development which enables the organisation to evolve in a considered manner
Maintaining the Knowledge Culture During Change

Elements of knowledge culture during change

Dynamic change processes

- Systematic problem solving
- Experimentation
- Experiential learning
- Sharing of insights with others
- Early adoption of improved or new strategies
Maintaining the Knowledge Culture During Change

Elements of knowledge culture during change

- **Systematic problem solving** where new and innovative solutions may be identified.

- **Experimentation** with different options to find the optimal solution.

- **Experiential learning** where an individual learns through experience and builds new models of understanding from that learning process.

- **Sharing of insights with others** which enables other people to consider different ways of doing things, and

- **Early adoption of improved or new strategies** as they are identified and considered worthy of consideration.
Maintaining the Knowledge Culture during Change (cont'd)

- Building or strengthening a K-culture requires patience, good leadership and sustained commitment from many people.

- Cultural development operates from a number of principles:
  - Change can be slow – need to allow time for knowledge principles to permeate.
  - Cultural change relies on many agents to contribute.
  - Champions/leaders can greatly assist change.
  - Knowledge cultures need to be supported across the full spectrum of organisational activities and systems.
Implementing Knowledge Culture Enhancement Programs

- Implementation process needs to operate from a number of broad principles:

  - **Communicate the program intentions and ongoing progress** - Ensure all members of the relevant community are kept informed, and that they have the opportunity to feedback about issues or concerns. Encourage key members of the community to become champions and information conduits for others.

  - **Pilot test** - Where possible, pilot test the proposed change. It is important to make sure nothing has been missed in the planning, and that it will be successfully managed in practice. This may lead to further changes.

  - **Accommodate difference within the knowledge culture** - Any change process will be enacted differently in various communities. In knowledge intensive communities, these differences are often evidence of desired innovation and creativity. It is important to accommodate differences where appropriate and reasonable.
Implementing Knowledge Culture Enhancement Programs

- Implementation process needs to operate from a number of broad principles:

  - **Encourage knowledge champions** - Wherever possible, build up advocates to promote the change process. The more advocates within the local community, the better. Champions may be assisted by providing them with further development, information on the initiative and encouragement to undertake this role.

  - **Share user success stories** - Successful stories need to be disseminated widely. They act as models and encouragement for others.

  - **Promote awareness of the process and outcomes** - The ongoing encouragement of communal learning and engagement is critical to successful cultural change. Wherever possible, this should be encouraged.
Cultural enhancement is an ongoing process which needs constant monitoring and bolstering. Organisations need to maintain careful but sensitive management of their cultures. There are some important strategies that can be applied, including:

- **Socialisation of new members** to ensure they are fully cognizant with the core values and the expectations of the organisation.
- **Reward and performance management systems** which recognise and promote effective knowledge-compatible behaviour.
- **Development and support of leaders** so that they can be successful and vigorous knowledge champions.
- **Enhancement and integration of existing services** through ongoing monitoring, diagnosis and cultural enhancement strategies.
- **Ensure good communication** at all times with all stakeholders.
Maintaining the Knowledge Culture (cont'd)

Communities of practice

- A particularly important method of building an effective knowledge culture is through CoP. In building effective CoP, it can be useful to:
  - **Clarify the domain and contribution of members** so that the focus of the CoP is clearly understood. This will help to clarify the role and expectations of members.
  - **Identify potential members** to ensure all potential participants are aware of the group and its opportunities.
  - **Assist key members with workload support** so that leadership of the CoP is strong, particularly in the early foundational period.
  - **Enable opportunities to interact** by encouraging both online and interpersonal interactive opportunities.
  - **Consider appointing a broker to assist with CoP management** so that the community is maintained and stimulated through ongoing interaction and the provision of opportunities to communicate and get together.
This session has explored the nature of cultural change. It has emphasised that knowledge cultures need to evolve on an ongoing basis.

This necessitates a strong commitment and fostering of effective knowledge communities.

The development of an effective knowledge community requires dedicated and ongoing support, particularly through the process of change and the monitoring of the values and principles which are being enacted.

Knowledge culture development is complex, and links to many different organisational / work roles. This complexity needs to be recognized. Knowledge cultures need to be sponsored, promoted and strongly encouraged through individual, group and organisational processes.