

Battle captains in the tactical operations center (TOC) may discount the information coming in which can lead to knowledge corruption, because of their past experience which may cause them to make bad decisions. For example there have been cases where officers have been criticized and not received earned promotions or honors if they have pointed out corrupt knowledge in after-action reviews or other feedback sessions.

“Acceptable risk”: some officers will make poor decisions to avoid negative consequences for themselves. Good officers sometimes leave the military because of this corruption.

The problem with corruption of knowledge, no matter what the reason or cause, is that the corrupted knowledge gets shared with the rest of the organization and those on the receiving end believe that they have received accurate knowledge—and they have not. Acting on corrupted knowledge can lead to poor performance and crisis situations.

Finally, there are situations where knowledge is being developed so quickly, and communicated so rapidly, that the recipients of the knowledge are simply overloaded. This is a situation where knowledge can simply be lost—it can be transferred accurately or suffer from the conditions noted, but it gets lost in the sea of communications.

We now turn our attention to other challenges with knowledge transfer beyond the concerns of knowledge corruption.

Knowledge Transfer Challenges

Creating shared meaning to transfer tacit knowledge often requires clear communication (including a common language base and an understandable set of and use of symbols), shared experiences and common backgrounds and cultures. Examples include idioms and prior experiences as necessary conditions for people to both transmit and receive true shared meaning in knowledge transmission.

In addition, the idea of dense networks to share tacit knowledge involves this concept of shared meaning among people who have developed strong relationships, have many commonalities from time together and can share their tacit knowledge relatively easily (for example, through the use of mental models, see Cooke et al., 2000). In contrast, people who are very different, whether they come from different socio-economic or ethnic cultures or have different careers and backgrounds, have greatly increased challenges in sharing tacit knowledge since they lack a common frame of reference with different nuances, language idioms, and perceptions (see Drach-Zahavy and Somech, 2001). This layering of communications of tacit knowledge to include the use of idioms, metaphors, common frames of reference and the like all add to the potential for knowledge corruption. The use of email, for example, has allowed for rapid communications and dissemination of information and knowledge—but emails can be misunderstood and the lack of immediacy (in terms of feedback and ability for on the spot clarity of the communication) is lost.

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However, developing social processes that encourage a shift in identity where members see themselves as part of a team encourages cohesiveness and tacit knowledge sharing (Barrett and Snider, 2001; Durden, 2010.) Furthermore, creating social networks of people who can effectively transfer tacit knowledge requires socialization and time working together (Jackson, 2011). Simply put, the development and sharing of tacit knowledge in organizations is either improved by a flexible and constantly evolving culture or inhibited by a culture that is closed to knowledge sharing. However, it should be noted that there can be “too much” of a team orientation that can inhibit the development and sharing of knowledge (Cooke et al., 2000). The aspects of socialization and training that impact and interact with knowledge management and innovation will be explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Perhaps one of the strongest dense groups of networks can be found in the training and socialization of US Marines. During boot camp, recruits go through an intense socialization process that shapes their attitudes and instills a culture that supports the group. This society is rigorous and strict, indoctrinating members that self-discipline, toughness, teamwork, responsibility and accountability as well as a respect for authority are paramount. They learn that in their “warrior society” they must develop the trust and team cohesiveness that will accomplish their mission and get them and their “band of brothers” home alive (Polleck, 2000; Ambrose, 2001). Yet it is this same emphasis on the team or group that can lead to “group-think” and inhibit the recognition and development of tacit knowledge. Al-Alawi, Al-Marzooqi and Mohammed (2007) in their research found that highly bureaucratic or hierarchical organizations are time consuming and hinder the transfer of knowledge. This is an example of organizational structure encouraging group thinking as well as inhibiting the