



How to share experience in a learning organization

One of the characteristics that differentiate humans from other animals on earth is our tremendous ability to pass on knowledge. One of the keys to human progress comes from our tendency to record what we learn.

Today, with telecommunications and the Internet, we don't need to have direct contact with another person to share our information. Even when we do have direct contact, such as working in the same office, it is often more

There have been numerous occasions where a supervisor or a colleague has come to me and asked "Didn't you look into this two months ago? What were the results?"

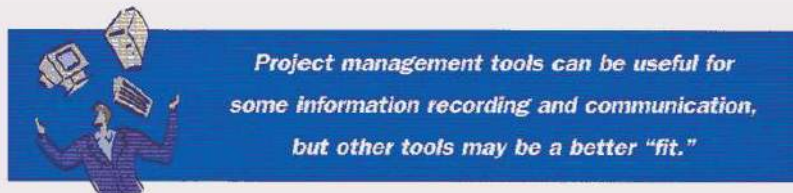
If I didn't write it down, chances are that the work I had done was almost useless later, because I couldn't recall the exact results, the exact conditions, etc.

Passing on knowledge in organizations requires some planning. Many techniques and tools are available to

management tools can be useful for some information recording and communication, but other tools may have a better "fit." One such tool is MindManager, a software program to create and exchange the visual Mind Maps invented by Tony Buzan. Mind Maps can be used to summarize meetings, plan projects, and generally organize information. However, you may also want to devise your own tools such as check lists, tables, and charts specific to your needs. Finally, personal contact between employees is a common way that organizations pass on experience. But do you have a plan for this type of exchange? Or does it only occur between "friends" at the water cooler? "Lunch and Learn" sessions can be a quick and easy way to pass on important experience from one employee to a group.

Organizing and passing on experience requires a willingness at the top of the organization to make the necessary investment in tools and time. To be effective, it requires interaction with employees to create systems which will be used for their recognized value, not just because they are mandatory. And it requires input from the everyone involved to find the fit. What's the benefit? All your organization's experience *won't* walk out the door every night.

Professional speaker and author Randy Park, B.Sc., M.Eng., helps people achieve their goals and save time, money, and aggravation by understanding and improving their own unique thinking processes. Randy has studied how we think, solve problems, and make decisions and his workshops assist people who want to improve their thinking effectiveness. Look for his book "Thinking for Results" late in 2002. Contact Randy regarding speaking at rp@ThinkingforResults.com.



convenient to have written records rather than communicating strictly orally.

In the 1990s "The Learning Organization" was a management fad. Although many companies did useful work in this area, for others the concept faded.

In this article, we are going to look at the most basic type of a Learning Organization - one where the knowledge does not reside only in each of its employees. That type of knowledge can be fleeting, either because employees depart, or because they forget.

Some years ago one of my clients had a sign in their research and development department that said, "If it's worth doing, it's worth writing down". Having worked in R&D, I certainly appreciated the point they were making. When we are trying something new, whether in R&D, or a new design, or a new procedure, or a new software implementation, many people don't record what they have tried and the results they obtained.

help with the process, but the starting point is not the tools but the attitudes. People must understand the value in the extra effort to organize and record the information, because if they don't see the purpose, they won't do it. For example, I'm not naturally a procedures oriented type of person - I find following procedures boring. I tried many different time management systems - paper ones, computer ones, hand held computers, back to paper ones - before I found one that I could live with. I was finally able to settle on one that had the features that I wanted while being compatible with my style. The point is that even though I recognized the value of the system, I didn't use it until it "fit," and that is the key in developing procedures. If you are supervising other people, the key is that the procedure is something they will use, not one that you like best. How do you determine what fits? Why not ask them?

Recognize that different people have different organization and communication styles. Project