

Our Edge in Knowledge Sharing

Dan Ranta, Director of Knowledge Sharing, ConocoPhillips

By: Noreen Kelly

ConocoPhillips' systematic approach to knowledge sharing and leveraging knowledge for continuous improvement has changed the company's culture and resulted in \$3 billion in savings. At APQC's 13th annual knowledge management conference, Director of Knowledge Sharing Dan Ranta gave an energetic presentation describing the company's KM challenges and successes.

In terms of KM, ConocoPhillips' primary challenge was connecting people through trusted relationships. Other concerns included handling generational differences within the work force and mitigating potential knowledge loss—the organization realized that, between baby boomer retirement and turnover, 70 percent to 90 percent of employees would not be with the company in 10 years.

According to Ranta, “A systematic approach to knowledge sharing helps overcome challenges while delivering additional measurable value.” ConocoPhillips' knowledge-sharing approach encompasses:

- consistent operations and business improvement—to drive standardization and promote functional excellence;
- size and complexity—to facilitate global functionality;
- asset maturity—to support buildup and/or renewal of operations, including strategic partnerships;
- knowledge access—to improve global availability of knowledge;
- demographics—to ease the work force renewal process; and
- competitive differentiation—knowledge access and reuse creates a sustainable advantage.

Having begun to revamp its knowledge-sharing structure in 2004, the company is on target to document more than \$4 billion in savings over a five-year period. “The results are astounding!” Ranta exclaimed.

“The company's executive sponsorship is strong for knowledge sharing,” Ranta explained. “Leadership sponsorship is key to a knowledge-sharing culture.”

As part of his presentation, Ranta walked through ConocoPhillips' knowledge-sharing timeline from 2004 to 2007. The journey began when the organization benchmarked its knowledge-sharing approach against those of other oil companies and realized that it needed to catch up. It then iterated through the following stages to improve knowledge sharing across the organization:

- collection of success stories;
- key linkages to begin cultural shift;
- global awards;
- network of excellence model;
- focus on connecting people;
- communication and training;
- semantic analysis approach (moving away from a traditional content management model); and
- enterprise-wide knowledge sharing.

“Don't call this KM,” Ranta said. “It's all KS [knowledge sharing]... it's a competency.”

Savings resulting from decreased capital and operating expenses and increased productivity were documented through a SharePoint-based success story process. Testimonials were submitted by employees who had gone the extra mile to create business improvement and add



value for the company.

“A key driver was convincing executives to link knowledge sharing with compensation,” Ranta said. “The cultural shift began after the company initiated a bonus system. Initially, 18 success stories were submitted over a period of six months; this then grew to 300 success stories.”

According to Ranta, a clear message from the top was, “Knowledge sharing is really important. We’re a global company, and we expect you to share knowledge.”

The company started an Archimedes Award based on “the four Gs”: “give” (i.e., share your knowledge with others), “gather” (i.e., collect knowledge from colleagues and available resources), “grab” (i.e., be willing to ask questions and look externally for knowledge), and “guts” (i.e., lessons learned).

“ConocoPhillips is moving toward improvements in efficiency through 120 networks,” Ranta said. “In addition, the most powerful way to increase the number of mature networks is to benchmark internally.” He continued, “You also have to tell people all the good you’re doing and utilize different channels to communicate the story.”

According to Ranta, ConocoPhillips' knowledge-sharing approach involves three primary steps: empower others, train the trainer, and build the network. He also described the organization's FAST model, which consists of Finding content, Asking colleagues, Sharing expertise, and Trust. Trusted relationships are key to knowledge sharing because they drive collaboration, learning, and value creation.

ConocoPhillips' KM vision involves establishing “a workplace where employees continuously deliver additional value through collaboration and expertise sharing.” The key is connecting people.

“In developing a network, make sure the core team can derive a business case,” Ranta asserted. “It makes a difference globally. It’s also essential to proactively identify positions where knowledge needs to be retained.”

In addition to the time and effort required to retain and transfer knowledge and prioritize functions, another challenge was answering the “What’s in it for me?” question. The organization made sure that it provided a tailored answer for each specific functional area (e.g., HR, learning, IT).

The way in which ConocoPhillips has changed employee behavior and improved the work force’s attitude toward knowledge sharing has spurred the success of various knowledge-retention tactics, including success story collection, benchmarking, training, communications, and best practice and lessons learned repositories.

In summary, retaining critical knowledge requires a systematic, integrated approach. The sweet spot of increased business value in a collaboration matrix is increasing connections and learning. By changing the way people work, instilling new behaviors, and integrating network structures across the enterprise, ConocoPhillips has created an effective knowledge-sharing culture.

Adapted from Dan Ranta's presentation, “Driving Business Excellence with Formal Global Networks,” delivered at APQC's 13th annual KM conference, “The New Edge in KM,” April 28–May 2, 2008.

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