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This Week's Topic - Ways To Promote Collaboration

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KnowBits

- a. Survey - Individual vs. Group Knowledge

What do you believe about the nature of knowledge? Take a moment and give your answers to the following questions. You can do this by emailing your answers to me at [rkaplan@accsys-corp.com](mailto:rkaplan@accsys-corp.com). Shortly the survey will be available online, so you can enter your responses there if you wish. Check out the home page at: [www.accsys-corp.com](http://www.accsys-corp.com).

1. For the most part do you believe knowledge originates through:
  - a. Individual action
  - b. Group action
  - c. both a&b
2. For knowledge to be of value, it can be created by:
  - a. Individuals
  - b. Groups
  - c. both a&b
3. Knowledge created and sanctioned by groups is more valuable than knowledge created by individuals.
  - a. I agree with this statement.
  - b. I disagree with this statement.
  - c. The value of knowledge is independent of who created or sanctioned it.
  - d. No opinion.



The HP ex-CEO's famous phrase , "if we only knew what we know" is at once an obvious and profound statement. Our known knowledge may fairly well cover such aspects as how we conduct our business but fail to cover how our behaviors influence how we conduct our business. Therefore, we may think we know quite a bit more about our business than we do. You could say that openness begets collaboration, which supports knowledge management leading me to observe:

Knowledge Management is a collaborative endeavor. To have collaboration you must have an environment that is conducive to collaboration. Consider the following aspects of a collaborative environment.

1. Establish an open community
2. Be inviting
3. Keep community conversations within the community
4. Live the behavior
5. Be inclusive
6. L-I-S-T-E-N to community members
7. Avoid (at all costs) private agendas
8. Establish trust
9. Live the behaviors
10. Make sure you take responsibility
11. Establish norms
12. Maintain high standards for respect

So-called Open vs. Open

Have you ever been in a situation where there has been a statement made about openness but you just KNOW that the environment is not an open one? Contrast this with the occasions where you have experienced truly open groups. What is the difference? Let's consider my list of some of the characteristics of open groups that support collaboration

1. Establish an open community

Set a goal to have your community be an open one or a closed one and establish the appropriate ground rules. A community that is closed to outside thinking or disrespectful of individual opinions is okay as long as you don't claim that the community is open. A community is open if everyone can be equally heard, respected, and included.

In such a situation everyone is acknowledged as adding value to the group.

## 2. Be inviting

Stated simply, a community is not open if it not inviting. If you participate in a community discussion and your opinion is constantly put down or ignored, the community is not an inviting one.

## 3. Keep Community Conversations within the Community

Consider this scenario. You participate in a group conversation. The community reaches consensus about an issue and makes an agreement. At the next meeting you are informed a different decision has been made. Side conversations occurred outside of the community that resulted in the new decision. The process by which this decision was made excluded members of the community. When side conversations occur that are relevant to community discussion they undercut the community, implement private agendas, and in general do not respect individuals. Side conversations represent a closed, rather than an open, community.

## 4. Live the Behaviors

Don't just say it, live it. If you believe in communities that are open then live the behavior that supports this belief. Think about whom in the community may be excluded if you have a side conversation. Consider avoiding side conversations by gently refusing to have them. It is very easy to fall into closed behaviors, but if you want the benefits of an open community for a knowledge management effort, you must live the behaviors.

## 5. Be inclusive

Look at your community. Who is in it? Are there many different kinds of people or are the people all very similar to one another? Is there uniformity in the kinds of conversations that develop in your community? When a conversation goes to a place where some members do not want it to go, do those members shut off the conversation or disappear into a corner to discuss what they want to discuss? If an individual feels shut out, that individual will not want to share knowledge in the community.

## 6. L-I-S-T-E-N

B.U.T is an acronym standing for "Behold the Underlying Truth." If you are thinking BUT while a person is speaking, you are not really listening. You have already formulated your response to whatever they are saying. You are ready to tell them the "correct" truth. If your community has a style of not listening, then your community cannot be an open one. If you hear a BUT in your head before a person has finished speaking, ask yourself if you have even heard what was said. Being able to repeat what a person has said is a good indication you were listening. A community that listens to all members is one that is well on its way to being an open community. (I can't take the credit for B.U.T. It comes from a book entitled, "Do IT!" by Peter McWilliams. There is also, "Y.E.S.-B.U.T." which means, "Your evaluation is superb, behold the underlying truth." "Y.E.S.-B.U.T." is used to ignore really great answers that you just don't care to listen to.)

## 7. Strive to Avoid Private Agendas

Suppose you want your community to reach a certain decision. Rather than bring this to the group, you decide to gain support for your outcome by discussing it with those members of the community you think would support your position. The outcome represents your private agenda for the community. The approach to gaining support is one of exclusion. Communities that support private agendas and "offline" discussions are not open and collaborative.

## 8. Establish a Community of Trust

When people don't trust a community, they will not readily share within that community. Supporting openness and respect, limiting private agendas, and encouraging inclusive attitudes all go a long way to promote an atmosphere of trust, as do maintaining clear and explicit boundaries and requirements.

## 9. Live the Behaviors

I cannot stress enough how important it is to model these behaviors in the group. All participants must understand this and act it. Anything less makes the community less open and less collaborative.

## 10. Taking Responsibility

If you say something you own it. If someone hears what you say in a certain way, take responsibility that you said it in that way. It is not the listener's fault that they heard something in a particular way. Nor is it the speaker's fault. The responsibility lies with both parties and if there is friction, this is probably because somewhere in the communication, what was sent was not received as expected. If the speaker and listener respect one another, there is a chance to achieve an open and collaborative interaction.

## 11. Setting Norms

One way to create a community that is open or otherwise is to establish norms for that community - what I think of as rules of the road. Participants should agree to the rules and the associated behaviors. In the case of more informal groups, norms may be needed as the group evolves. As group dynamics change so does the need for norms.

## 12. Maintain High Standards for Respect

Listening, inclusion, trust and limiting private agendas are all manifestations of respect for individuals in a group. If people speak behind my back, I will not feel respected. If I am not listened to, I will not feel respected. If every time I offer an opinion I receive a BUT, I will not feel respected. If you want me to share tacit knowledge, I had better know you will respect what I share - why bother otherwise?

Downplaying the role of individuals in collaborative communities discounts the individuals' importance thereby making openness less important. In my mind this lessens the value of individual contribution. It is true that the sum of the parts is usually greater than the individual parts but without the parts there would be no sum. There also can be no community without individuals who wish to participate. Participation is encouraged by creating an environment of openness and trust, which ultimately results in an environment that encourages collaboration - a necessary element of knowledge management activities.

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