Improve Performance Through Reflective Practice and Knowledge Sharing In Project Management

15356 Project Performance Improvement
Individual Assignment

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1. Abstract

It becomes increasingly crucial for organizations to make improvement in such a competitive environment. Being adaptive to the changing market can be acquired through enhancing competence of organization members and improving the collaboration of whole organization. Therefore, reflective practice can be perceived as an efficient and simple approach for either organization or individual to promote performance improvement and learning process while knowledge sharing can provide an easy access for members to exchange knowledge information and make improvement. This paper will focus on how reflective practice and knowledge sharing enable organization to improve performance and learning. Reflective practice can be applied through many tools and techniques, which need to be tailored within different organizational context. With respect to knowledge sharing, the most challenging aspect is the process of converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge, where can create a collaborative and dynamic environment for organization to make improvement. There will be a project case that author involved with during working experience to illustrate how the project was managed using reflective practice tools while advantages, problems, lessons learnt are identified through the application of reflective journals. An improved outcome will be demonstrated if the 'Gibbs reflective cycle' could have been applied into the project. Through the reflection analysis of the project case, it is found that reflection becomes effective when applying theory into practice and knowledge sharing can bring an improved outcome. In organization, learning to make improvement comes effectively from reflecting on experience.

Key words: Reflective Practice, Improvement, Knowledge sharing, Learning, Project

2. Introduction

This paper will discuss the reflection process of a project case which address that knowledge and reflective practice are the driver of enhancing project management performance. The first part of this article will identify some key aspects in terms of reflective practice, knowledge sharing. In the next part this paper will describe the project and the reflective journal approach used to manage that project, and the project case will be described using first person point of view. The next part will be the reflective analysis and discussion which including the reflection of the project practice, an improved outcome with applying 'Gibb's Reflective Cycle' tool, and lessons learnt from the project case. The last part of this paper will be the conclusion.

2.1 Reflective Practice

Reflective practice plays a critical role in organizations. It is simple to implement and can bring unexpected benefits for both the individuals and collectives. Reflection can help to clarify what outcome is going to be achieved and the barriers confront with. It is a purposeful activity helps to gain new insight and different perspectives. Reflective practice also promotes learning process and enables people to think innovatively to solve problems. Furthermore, reflective practice encourages performance improvement and learning process.

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, G., 1988) was developed base on Kolb's experimental cycle (Kolb, 1984). It has become a useful reflective model that encourages people to think through each step of activities and helps to structure the reflection of practice. Gibbs presents this reflective cycle as six phases:
 • Description: Describe the situation or the event.

- Feeling: Describe the feelings and reactions about the situation.
- Evaluation: Make evaluation about what is good or bad experience.
- Analysis: Consider the aspects that might solve the problems and compare theory with what has occurred in practice.
- Conclusion: Summarize what have learnt from experience.
- Action Plan: Make specific plan to improve.

2.2 Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing can be achieved through an open, collaborative and dynamic environment in organizations. The most significant process in sharing knowledge is the conversion between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. 'Specific distillation of knowledge, both tacit and explicit, is required to resolve an applied problem in context' (McKenzie, 2004, p. 127). Tacit knowledge is highly personal knowledge, which is difficult to standardize and not easy to pass to others; It mainly implicit in the personal experience, as well as the factors involved in personal beliefs, worldview, value system. Tacit knowledge is subjective perspective or experience, which is also not easy to apply knowledge of structural concepts to be described or performance. Explicit knowledge is objective that can be captured using the concept or knowledge presented. The tacit knowledge and its environment have been perceived as critical aspect for organizational knowledge creation and sharing, especially the importance of the transition from tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. According to Nonaka, I., Takeuchi, H. (1995) the conversion process can be concluded into four phases: Socialization, Externalization, Combination and Internalization, called SECI process.
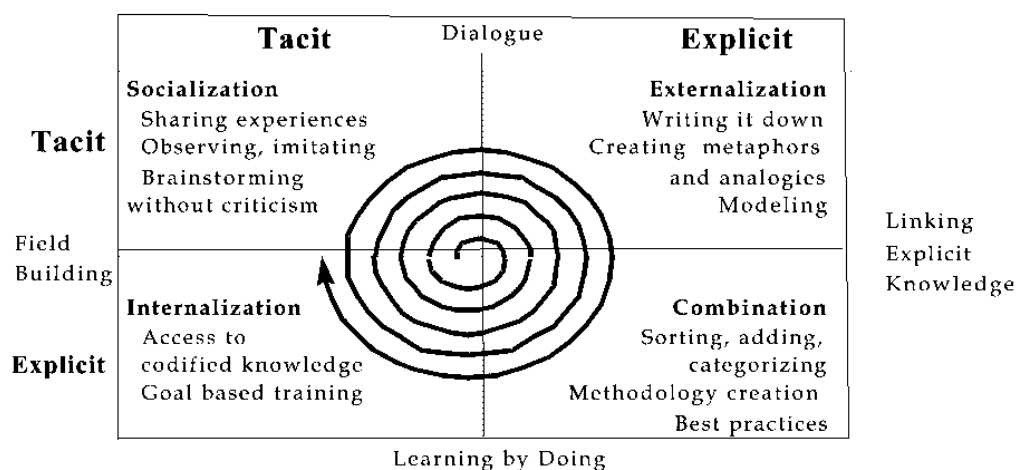
3. The project

3.1 Project Case Description

I was working in a subordinate tendering and bidding agency of State Grid Corporation of China and it is located in northwest part of China. We were introduced a new network bidding system to solidify standardized procurement processes through the deployment of e-commerce platform construction level centralized purchasing management platform. This system is structured as a basis for efficient bid management, contract management for unified visual and efficient supplier collaboration, and improve supplier performance management, comprehensive procurement process monitoring and complete procurement data analysis, enhance the State Grid Corporation of centralized procurement efficiency and effectiveness. This system was quite new for us and it requires us to learn everything about the system in a short time. In addition, we need to apply this system in 3 months.

I was responsible for the allocating and training the resource for this new system. The new roles and responsibilities differed from previous system and involved more stakeholders to manage. The head-office provided an opportunity for 4 staff to go to head-office to attend the training courses, and they also provide support through phone, e-mail. The only material we had was the power point slides from 4 trained staff. To grasp new positions took time and required continuous reflection during learning for the whole team. However, the knowledge sharing between not only these four trained staff but also technique people in head-office and other members had problems. The virtual learning environment gave us a lot of barriers. My working place has 2 hours time difference with the place where the head-office is. This different time zone led to difficulties in communication. When we met problems, we cannot get the feedback through phone and e-mail in time. The lack of effective communication and knowledge sharing platform led to the slow progress of learning.

The operation of the e-commerce platform involves many roles in procurement process. I need to re-allocate the responsibilities of each role, upload information while conducting external management with suppliers, clients and also internal management. The staff who were re-allocated in the new roles need to learn and use the new system in a short time. Our team member only had theory about new system while lack of practice.

3.2 Project Approach

During learning and conducting of the new system, the approach I took was to keep a reflective journal to record problems, progress, self and team evaluation. According to Gil-Garcia and Cintron (2002), 'a reflective journal involves learners in 'self-assessment, collaborative critique, self-reflection and goal setting''. At the same time, I asked team members to take notes about their problems so that I can collect information comprehensively and timely. Due to the fact that the executive did not pay much attention so that we lacked of executive support, we did not get much time to take training course and cooperation from head-office. Besides, we did not have many opportunities to acquire knowledge with technique people to ask for technical support. Through the reflective journal I found that the whole team was stay on the surface of theory and they can not link to practice while they can not find a way to transfer knowledge well. Then I realized if we only learn theories and methods from digital documents and learn individually, we couldn't put this system into practice successfully. Therefore I wrote a report to executive to present our problems recorded in my reflective journal to ask for more support and an opportunity of imitate learning from other province to experience the practical operation process. At last, the head-office sent us two technical personnel for a week to help and give feedback. Although we got the opportunity of visiting other agency in other province to learn how they operate in

practice, we had only very short time to reflect on our performance and make adaptation and improvement for the new system.

4. Reflection Analysis

4.1 Reflection of Project
This project case shows that reflective practice and knowledge sharing can be the major driver of performance improvement and learning in organization. Applying reflective tools and techniques within learning is essential and helpful for a team's improvement.

After learning the new system, it is found that the converting process of tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge has been limited due to virtual learning environment, time zone, the lack of technical expertise, executive support and participation. In addition, team members did not make analysis and reflection promptly when they were learning new system. The whole team lacked of collaboration to achieve final goal. Although reflective journal was kept, it did not engage all team members to participate to reflect on what they were experiencing. Reflective journal only recorded problems, but those problems were not resolved timely. Besides, members' reflections were not gathered to identify what needed to be improved during learning. An open and collaborative environment should be provided for team from the beginning phase to share their thoughts.

4.2 Improved outcome
Our team could have obtained a more comprehensive understanding of the new system and a profound reflection to current performance if we did reflective practice from beginning stage of learning this mew system. Performance could have been improved through using the more specific tool 'Gibbs' Reflective Cycle' and knowledge sharing cycling process.

Compared with Reflective Journals, Gibbs' Reflective Cycle is a more specific model which is a ongoing process that can engage every member to make reflection in relation to every stage of activity. Smith, K., Clegg, S., et al (2007) point out that reflective practice can be an effective process when learning from experience. To approach Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, the project team should follow each step of the model's process.

- Description: project team describe the situation based on what they see and experience. Team member could see the difference and similarities of new system from previous one.
- Feelings: consider and describe the thoughts, reactions and how they feel about the experience. When team members have been re-allocated in new roles to conduct new system, their personal feelings after experience could have been recorded.
- Evaluation: think about both positive and negative aspects for the activity. If team members met problems, they should take notes and reconsider whether there was a solution.
- Analysis: consider and analyze own contribution to the activity and assess reactions compared with others to see the difference. Although team members have different roles and responsibilities, the way others acquire and share knowledge can be learned. This is a process to let members ask 'why' to analyze the causes and consequences of their experience.
- Conclusion: team members should summarize what they have learnt during experience the new system in this stage. Make more specific about
- Action Plan: at this phase team member should make specific action plan according to conclusions to make improvement about knowledge, ability.

'Knowledge creation accelerated when there is continual cycling from one form of knowledge conversion to another—from tacit to explicit and from explicit to tacit' (Rynes, Bartunek, & Daft, 2001, p. 347). Knowledge sharing in organization has been a major consideration when making improvement. It is encouraged to create a collaborative and open environment to share knowledge with team members and technique people in terms of new system. Due to lack of communication and learning channels, the dynamic project team cannot exchange their knowledge during working on the new system. They could have improved team performance to achieve a more satisfied outcome through SECI process. The whole team could have enhanced communication between members and technique support people.

4.3 Lessons Learnt
The benefits for reflective practice:
- Learning improvement: Reflect on what have learnt and experience can accelerate learning process
- Examine theories: Theories should be applied into practice to critically examine the theories through ongoing reflection.
- Clarify goal: Reflective practice can make the goal clear to find out solution.
- Improve outcome: Outcome can be improved through reflective practice.

The advantage for converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge can be concluded as these aspects:
- Collaborative environment: Create a collaborative environment for team to share knowledge and solve problems creatively.
- Encourage reflective action: Encourage the team make reflection about work and themselves.
- Improve outcome: Knowledge sharing can resolve problems collaboratively to improve the outcome for team.
- Promote the competition: Promote the competition in organization to make the work more productive.

Kolb, D.A. (1984) highlights that 'Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience'. Knowledge is profoundly social so that it becomes more valuable when sharing. Reflecting on experience can drive organization or individual to improve and find solution for problems. Effective reflective practice can contribute to organizational performance improvement. It allows people to be organized in different roles to deliver a common goal while it requires participants to be self-aware to make reflection, apply reflection into practice from experience, and have effective communication to share knowledge with others. In the future project management, prioritizing reflective practice at early stage and establishing a knowledge-sharing environment should be considered as methods of performance improvement.

5. Conclusion

The perception through literature and author's project case shows that the integration of reflective practice and knowledge sharing can be significant factors that affect performance improvement. The utilization of reflective tools and techniques can have impact on the efficiency of members' reflection process in organization. Meanwhile, learning process is promoted by reflecting on experience and the conversion between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. The successful project management cannot adapt to the changing environment without reflective practice and knowledge sharing.

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