9 Sophisticated Information Technology to Promote Knowledge Sharing and Communication - Booz Allen & Hamilton

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Booz Allen & Hamilton (BA&H) is one of the leading international management and technology consulting firms that was founded in 1914. In 1999, it had sales of $1.8 billion.

Booz Allen & Hamilton is a private company that internationally employs more than 9,800 people in 100 offices. Its consulting services are divided into two key business areas: worldwide commercial business and worldwide technology business.

9.1 Chief Knowledge Officers in each practice

Consulting firms, such as BA&H, live both by spreading their knowledge and experience and reincorporating their experience with customers back into the company. The body of knowledge BA&H offers customers is immense. However, there are many staff members, particularly those who are new to the firm, whose knowledge gained through personal experience is comparatively small. Only the consistent use of the knowledge of all staff members creates the basis for a competitive organization.

During its strategic realignment “Vision 2000”, BA&H initiated a program of knowledge management in 1993/94 that included the development of an online knowledge database (KOL). Furthermore, “Vision 2000” focused on positioning BA&H on the market, doubling its growth rate, establishing multidimensional or interdisciplinary emphases, and directing the company towards larger international
corporations. The clear focus on target clients resulted in a situation in which 85% of all sales are made through former or present clients' follow-up orders.

To strengthen the knowledge management program organizationally, BA&H created the position of “Chief Knowledge Officer” (CKO). In each of its eight practices, BA&H set up an internationally responsible team of roughly four persons (one part-time project manager and two to three full-time staff persons) who were to enter existing knowledge (not older than two years) into the KOL database. In addition, BA&H set up so-called “Innovation Teams” or “Intellectual Capital Teams” for each practice. Their task was to develop new consulting products and methodologies. To gain the support of BA&H’s roughly 240 Partners, i.e., the owners, the company organized an “IC Fair” that enabled the Partners to learn about selected topics. The topics had been selected by the CKO and the managers of the various practices. In summary, the implementation of the knowledge management program depended heavily upon the personal commitment of the responsible partners.

9.2 Knowledge sharing barriers guide the way to new solutions

As part of knowledge management, BA&H identified five so-called “unnatural acts” that occur as barriers between the idea and the implementation of knowledge management.


2. Application: Admit that the thoughts of someone else might be better than one’s own thoughts.

3. Share: Share one’s best thoughts – often representing a personal competitive advantage – with others.

4. Invest: Provide the infrastructure that allows knowledge management to occur in the first place.

5. Improve: Continuously develop new ideas and pursue yesterday's ideas.

Although the culture of consulting firms makes it comparatively easy to establish a system of knowledge management, these five “unnatural acts” not only identify barriers, but also point to solutions.198

1. Collaboration:
   - Hire new staff members selectively
   - Assemble the project team according to skills and developmental objectives and wishes

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