Implementing Process Oriented Knowledge Management: Lessons learned from an application in the OPCW

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Knowledge Management

What is Knowledge Management (KM)?

The literature presents a host of definitions on knowledge management, as any definition needs to be adapted to the actual process or organization where the knowledge management initiative is going to be implemented.

KM is about making the right knowledge available to the right people at the right time and over all to ensure that the organization can learn and will be able to retrieve and use this knowledge when needed.

"KM is about creating value from your knowledge to improve performance at the individual, team and organization level to drive mission success".

Why manage knowledge?

- Staff and teams are continually 'reinventing the wheel'. Work is redone; staff are not aware of project and activities from the past.
- Mistakes are duplicated because earlier ones were not analyzed, corrected, and/or documented.
- Good ideas or good practices are not shared and not re-used.
- Small number of staff hold large portion of crucial knowledge.
- Speed of response is low because knowledge resources are not easily available, staff frustration increases.
- The organization does not learn.

Knowledge Management in the OPCW

Why KM in OPCW?

- OPCW is a global repository of chemical weapon knowledge and expertise (disarmament, verification of non-proliferation and non-use, and destruction).
- Specific areas of chemical weapons expertise are getting rare, while retention is needed. OPCW is the likely custodian for this knowledge.
- As Member States are finalizing the destruction of their chemical weapons, opportunities to learn on the job are reducing;
- The emerging threats of non-state actors increases the need to review knowledge profiles of staff;
- High job mobility and the application of the tenure policy makes knowledge retention a challenge.

OPCW Mandate for KM

- States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) expressed their "Commitment that the OPCW remains the global repository of knowledge and expertise on the implementation of the Convention" and provided the Technical Secretariat with a mandate to "present proposals for ensuring continuity in its knowledge base and expertise" (paragraph 9.14 of RC-3/3, dated 19 April 2013).
- Stressed that the OPCW should remain the global repository of knowledge and expertise with regard to Chemical Weapons (CW) disarmament, the verification of their non-proliferation and non-use, and their destruction, and requested the Secretariat to continue ensuring continuity in its knowledge base and expertise in these areas ( subparagraph 9.155/ii).

Opportunities and Achievements

Opportunities for improvement in knowledge products are identified where knowledge products are not easily available to perform specific actions effectively and efficiently. The reasons could vary from non-developed to low quality knowledge, or knowledge products which are difficult to retrieve or unknown to the user.

Examples of opportunities, interventions and achievements

- CWD Final Engineering Review has been identified as a critical knowledge task which requires the guidance of a formal SOP to ensure all steps are followed on the base of good practices and lessons learned. It is recommended to formally include this SOP as part of the quality management system.
- SOPs on the optimization for CW verification have not been implemented for several years and were unknown to new substantive officers. A project to review the optimization of the verification measures in the CW destruction operations is in progress.
- In some cases, discrepancies were found between what the substantive officers know tacitly about the agreed verification plan between a possessor State Party and the Secretariat and the explicitly documented information on the decision making process. A project to codify this information is in progress.
- The technical briefing process is under review to ensure its accuracy and accessibility, and that there is a constant feedback process to incorporate lesson learned for future verification missions.

Process Oriented Knowledge Management

Developing process-oriented knowledge management requires that each knowledge intervention is implemented around an organizational process. The organizational processes are reviewed to ensure the mission, mandate and objectives of the process define the scope of the knowledge project.

Why manage knowledge?

- Developing process-oriented knowledge management process define the scope of the knowledge project.

Identify organizational critical knowledge areas

- The destruction of declared stockpiled CW is entering in the final phase; almost 97% of chemical weapons have been destroyed, and all of the declared CW Production Facilities (CWPF) have been either destroyed or converted. Once the destruction of the declared CW is completed, the Organization will not have the capability to monitor destruction and therefore maintain this specific knowledge.

- Knowledge on verification of CW destruction is critical e.g. offering assistance to new States joining the CWC.

- Identification of areas requires that each knowledge intervention is implemented.

- The Organizing mission is critical for knowledge work.

- Staff are not aware of project and activities from the past.

- The global repository of chemical weapon knowledge and expertise is a global repository of chemical weapon knowledge and experience.

- Staff frustration increases because knowledge resources are not easily available.

- The organization does not learn.

- Small number of staff hold large portion of crucial knowledge.

- Staff are not aware of good ideas or good practices.

- Good ideas or good practices are not shared and not re-used.

- Speed of response is low because knowledge resources are not easily available.

- OPWC makes a suitable global repository of chemical weapon knowledge and expertise.

- Complex tasks or tasks with large number of interdependencies are identified within the processes.

- Each task requires specific "Knowledge Products" to be performed effectively and efficiently.

- Stakeholders rate the knowledge products, and through the analysis identify the opportunities for improvements of the knowledge products, such as; codify content, maintain it, make stakeholders aware of the products exist, specify where, train.

- Knowledge products, recommendations actions.

- Knowledge management requires that each knowledge intervention is implemented.

- The right knowledge is available to the right people at the right time.

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