
10 Formal and informal knowledge sharing rituals: Queensland Music Festival

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Abstract

Knowledge management is a particular issue in events and festivals due to the temporary, stressful and pulsating nature of these types of organisations, where knowledge needs to be created and shared quickly and efficiently, as well as documented and stored for the future. Using the Queensland Music Festival as a best practice example, the purpose of this case study is to help the learner identify and analyse formal and informal knowledge management rituals that enabled staff members to share not only what they know, but also the more tacit know-how and specific 'ways things are done' within the organisation.

Subjects: Knowledge management; knowledge sharing; rituals; festival organisation; best practices

Introduction

This case study will help you understand and identify effective knowledge sharing rituals within a festival organisation. It is based on research conducted with the Queensland Music Festival in Brisbane, Australia. The Queensland Music Festival (QMF) was established in 1990. It is a biennial music festival, taking place in Brisbane and regional communities all over the state of Queensland, Australia. The festival includes a variety of musical styles; local, national and international artists; and at the same time, encourages participation within the communities. Most events are free and accessible to all. The rich diversity of musical styles in Queensland is celebrated, creating identity for remote regions within the state. Many of the artistic projects run in the communities are long-term collaborations that tell local stories, define local culture and aim to give back to the community.

The following describes different formal and informal rituals performed within the organisation to create, share, use and document relevant knowledge. It has

been argued that effective knowledge management is particularly difficult for festival organisations to achieve for the following reasons: festival organisations follow a ‘pulsating’ type of pattern; many staff members only work for the festival for a short period of time; they do not have the necessary broader understanding of complex organisational issues; and while they create a lot of new knowledge along the way, they do not have the time to write it down, document and store it. A lot of valuable knowledge is hence being lost once the festival is over and the team move on to other jobs (Stadler, 2021). The QMF, however, is a best practice example where staff members are aware of these challenges and have learned over time to create, share and use knowledge in the most effective way possible.

One way of sharing knowledge with others is through organisational rituals, which not only reinforce certain organisational belief systems, but also help staff members understand some of the taken for granted and tacit elements of ‘how things are done’ within an organisation (Islam & Zyphur, 2009; Smith & Stewart, 2011). These can be formal rituals, such as staff or team meetings, as well as informal ones, such as having a coffee with a colleague, sharing lunch, or even getting together behind the stage for a bit of brainstorming (Stadler & Fullagar, 2016). Both formal and informal knowledge sharing rituals are important, as they allow staff members to not only share basic information with each other (explicit knowledge), but also discuss more complex issues, build necessary relationships, and most importantly learn the specific ‘ways things are done’ within the organisation (tacit knowledge, know-how). Over time, these practices can become internalised and taken for granted but they are highly effective in terms of knowledge management (Stadler, 2021).

In the example below, key members of the QMF staff were getting together for one of their staff meetings. These included the Executive Director, Artistic Director, Technical Manager, Marketing Manager, Development Manager, as well as several Producers and Logistics Coordinators. They regularly participated in this formal ritual in order to exchange important updates, discuss recent developments, and put together action plans for each team. Later on, two staff members engaged in a conversation about a specific challenge one of them faced; they had a chat while making coffee in the staff kitchen – an informal knowledge sharing ritual.

Formal and informal meetings at the Queensland Music Festival

Staff meeting: Agenda and seating order

The QMF full staff meetings were being held fortnightly on Tuesday mornings. The entire team knew the schedule of the meetings. Everybody present at the office on the day of the meeting was expected to attend. Most of them had a reminder in their calendars, and about 10 minutes before the meeting started one could hear a lot of alarms going off on their computers. Then, about five minutes before the meeting, the receptionist again reminded everyone to gather in the board room so that the meeting could start on time.