Knowledge Management in Event Organisations Instructor's Manual

7: Power and Knowledge

Chapter 7: Power and Knowledge

Lecture 9

Learning objectives
☐ Explore power, politics and conflict in event organisations and their impact upon knowledge management
☐ Learn to identify 'expert power' and 'legitimate power' within organisations and understand how they relate to knowledge management
☐ Define power as a positive resource for knowledge to be created and shared, and explore opportunities for 'empowerment' within organisations
☐ Understand the concept of power/knowledge and apply it to event organisations

Introduction

Lecture 9 can be started with a brainstorming activity, either individually or in small groups: get students to think about the following two questions;

1. Who has got power in your life; and

2. Where does this power come from?

They will most likely come up with lots of negative examples of power, or in other words, somebody having power 'over' them; such as parents, teachers, line managers, and bosses. They will identify money and hierarchical position as potential sources of that power, as well as – hopefully! – expertise, skills and knowledge. Some of these ideas can then be developed a little bit further, for example, how power between parents and children might change over time. Or a meeting with the team at work, where all of a sudden a quiet person speaks up and the power dynamic completely shifts. This will be a first step in getting them to understand that power is not necessarily 'static' and always the same. It can change, and it can be both a positive and a negative source. The role of knowledge in this is, of course, crucial.

Sources of power

Table 7.1 can be used to summarise some of the key sources of power in organisations.

It is clear to see that these examples are very much based on power at the individual or group level. But in an organisational context a further discussion should include the question of who actually 'owns' the knowledge that employees use to express their power? Some argue that individual knowledge workers may create, share, use, or develop knowledge in order to achieve organisational goals, but the knowledge is fundamentally theirs to use as, when and how they want. Whereas others say, it is actually the organisation that 'owns' the overall organisational knowledge created by all its employees, and therefore the organisation itself also has the power to manage this knowledge.

Table 7.1: Eight different power bases

Type of power	Description
Reward power	power based on the belief that in return for compliance a reward will be received
Coercive power	power based on the belief that someone can administer penalties or sanctions which would be unwelcome for the receiver
Referent power	power based on desirable abilities of personality traits which someone possesses and which can and should be copied by others
Legitimate power	power which is based on the belief that someone has authority to give directions within the boundaries of their position or rank
Expert power	power which is based on superior knowledge relevant to the situation and the task in hand
Information power	power through access to information which is not publicly available
Affiliation power	power through being associated with somebody who has authority, e.g. executive secretaries or personal assistants
Group power	power through problem-solving or conflict resolution in a group, where the group effort is greater than the contributions of individual group members

Stakeholder power in events

Based on this initial overview of different types of power and where knowledge might come into play, power can then be discussed more specifically in an events context. Here, most of the existing literature highlights stakeholder power, and similar to the examples above, one stakeholder exercising power 'over' another. For suggested readings, see:

♦ Batty, R. J. (2016). Understanding Stakeholder Status and Legitimate Power Exertion within Community Sport Events: A Case Study of the Christchurch (New Zealand) City to Surf. In A. Jepson & A. Clarke (Eds.), *Managing and Developing Communities, Festivals and Events* (pp. 103-119). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

♦ White, Z., & Stadler, R. (2018). "I don't think they give a monkey's about me" - Exploring stakeholder power and community alienation at Glastonbury Festival. In A. Jepson & A. Clarke (Eds.), *Power, Construction, and Meaning, in Communities, Festivals and Events* (pp. 21-34). Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Power/knowledge

More recent discussions in the literature point to the fact that power constantly changes, it is dynamic and we can therefore think of power not as a resource, but rather as a complex network of social relations. Power always circulates within this network and between the members of the network. Foucault's (1977, 1978, 1980, and 1982) power/knowledge concept is key to understanding this and students should be introduced to it at this stage: According to him, power can never be a property that can be possessed, but it can be exercised within an organisation. Power is not negative; it is creative in that it helps create new objects and therefore new knowledge. Power and knowledge are therefore inseparable (hence power/knowledge), but neither one is more important than the other. More knowledge does not necessarily mean more power, because managers and employees can both use power and knowledge, but they cannot ultimately possess either of them.

Suggested additional readings for this in relation to events:

♦   Jepson, A., & Clarke, A. (2014). The future power of decision making in community festivals. In I. Yeoman, M. Robertson, U. McMahon-Beattie, E. Backer, & K. A. Smith (Eds.), *The Future of Events and Festivals* (pp. 67-83). Abingdon: Routledge.

♦   Stadler, R. (2013). Power relations and the production of new knowledge within a Queensland Music Festival community cultural development project. *Annals of Leisure Research*, *16*(1), 87-102

Positive power and empowerment

Lastly, if knowledge can change, it can shape and reshape power relations over time, and vice versa. In other words, power can be used in a positive way to 'empower' employees, stakeholders, and others. Empowerment is all about granting employees authority to make decisions, usually within their area of responsibility or in relation to their specific job/role. Employees can, of course, only be granted authority, if they have the necessary knowledge to make these decisions. However, having authority also means that they are allowed to bend the rules, if necessary, because they have the knowledge and expertise to judge the circumstances and act accordingly. Benefits of empowered employees include: (1) it helps create a climate and culture of trust; (2) empowered employees feel a sense of commitment and ownership, a sense of responsibility, and (3) they become more knowledgeable about the job and its wider implications for the organisation as a whole.

In the wider management literature, there are two types of empowerment: socio-structural empowerment and psychological empowerment. Social-structural empowerment is implemented at the organisational level (routines, policies, structures, culture, which empower employees), such as participatory decision-making, skill and/or knowledge-based pay, open flow of information, flat organisational structure, and training. The links to knowledge management are evident here. Psychological empowerment, on the other hand, focuses on the individual employee and how they experience this sense of empowerment. It includes feelings of competence (employees have the knowledge and skills to do the job and feel competent about it); sense of self-determination (autonomy; sense of freedom to make the right decisions); feelings of impact (employees can impact the results of administrative, operational and/or other elements of the job); and sense of meaning (the job fits with employees' career goals, beliefs, values and behaviours). Again, in relation to knowledge management, an empowered employee will be confident to use their knowledge in a way to achieve the best possible outcome.

Figure 7.1 summarises these two types of empowerment. From here, links back to knowledge management can easily be made. For a task to finish this lecture, students can be asked to work through the interview quotes in Case Study 1 in the book and identify examples of the most important elements of empowerment as summarised in Figure 7.1
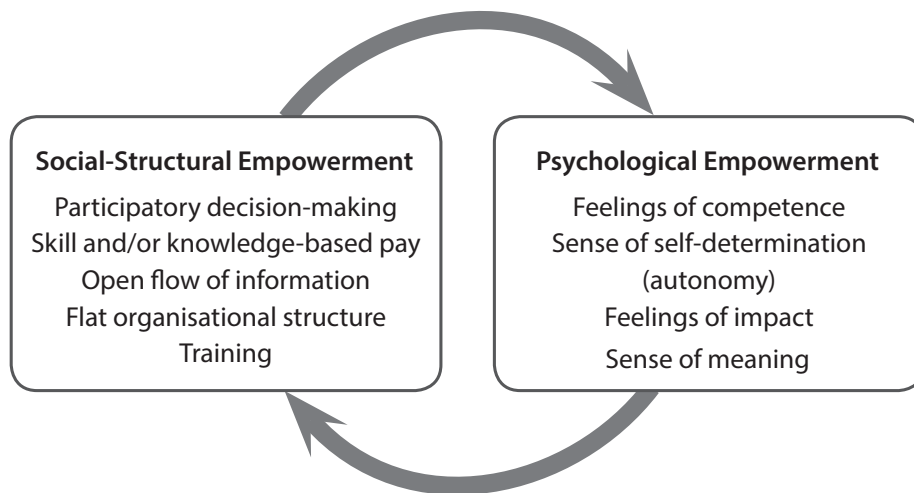
Figure 7.1: Types of empowerment

Sample short-answer questions:

♦ Why do you think questions of power, politics and conflict are largely ignored in the wider knowledge management literature?

♦ Review the 8 different power bases mentioned in this chapter/lecture and discuss examples of each in an event organisation.

♦ Based on your own experience of organising events, provide some practical examples of how volunteers can be 'empowered' when sharing their knowledge.

Sample long-answer or essay question:

♦ Critically discuss how 'power' can be both a positive and a negative resource for knowledge management.

Much like the structure of this lecture, a very good answer to this question will first discuss the negative use of power (power 'over' someone) and the misuse of power, for example by the event organiser 'over' other stakeholders, the community, etc. Examples should also include a brief discussion of where this power comes from (financial power, hierarchy, or similar), and links back to knowledge management should be made (e.g. the event manager having 'expert power' through knowledge and expertise). Then a counter-argument can be proposed whereby the positive side of power is discussed: power as a positive resource that can shape and reshape things, create new knowledge and help people innovate. Either the concept of power/knowledge or the theory of empowerment can be used for this (or both) to explain different examples. Again, relating this back to knowledge management through specific examples will round off the argument (e.g. empower employees through participatory decision-making based on their knowledge, skills and expertise; empower them through feelings of competence whereby they are granted authority because they have the knowledge and skills to do the job and feel competent about it).