

# **Knowledge Management in Event Organisations Instructor's Manual**

## **8: Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge**

This is the instructor's manual produced to accompany the book *Knowledge Management in Event Organisations*, by Raphaela Stadler, 2021, published by Goodfellow Publishers Ltd.

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## Chapter 8: Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge

### Lecture 10

#### Learning objectives

- Explore stories and storytelling as an effective knowledge practice in organisations
- Work through a case example of storytelling and identify key knowledge activities embedded in the story

#### Introduction

Lectures 10 and 11 should ideally go together. Just like discussed in the book chapter, storytelling forms an important practice as part of the Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge approach, as well as within the wider context for effective knowledge management. It is crucial to set up this idea of storytelling as a knowledge practice with students here, so it can then be referred back to in the next lecture.

#### Stories and storytelling

The main aim of telling stories is to share tacit knowledge and a common understanding of 'how things are done' in a specific organisation. Stories are therefore different in different organisations and require some sort of context in order for them to make sense to both the storyteller and the listener. The benefits of stories are that they are low cost, usually easy to understand and share, and they can be made interesting and therefore memorable. They can have a formal structure (with a clear beginning, middle and end), or they can simply be anecdotes of experiences, sometimes told with more details and context than at other times.

Through storytelling, concepts, principles, beliefs, traditions and many other things can be shared with others, both inside as well as outside the organisation. The process of storytelling can thereby be formal (e.g. as part of a meeting, where everybody is asked to share their latest success story), or it can happen informally, for example, during a coffee break. In event organisations, however, storytelling is usually taken for granted and not recognised as a specific knowledge practice. But if it becomes part of how employees work with each other, how they communicate, and engage in dialogue, then stories can be a very useful tool in creating a collaborative organisational culture and a culture of success that, in turn, is important for effective knowledge management.

The remainder of the lecture can then be run as an interactive session with students around the Case Study below. It is the same case study used in the book (Queensland Music Festival), but a brief introduction to the festival organisation is reprinted here for context. The story then provides an example of a 'story of success' that was shared and reshared within the festival team many, many times, and hence helped them make sense of 'how to' work together and 'how to' draw on each other's knowledge and expertise:

## Case Study 1: Storytelling as a knowledge practice at the Queensland Music Festival, Australia

(based on research by Stadler, 2013)

The Queensland Music Festival, originally named the Brisbane Biennial Festival of Music, 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. Furthermore, the rich diversity of musical styles in Queensland is celebrated, creating identity for remote regions within the state. A lot of the artistic projects run in the communities are long-term collaborations that tell local stories and define local culture and aim to give back to the community. In 2011, I joined the festival organisation as an ethnographic researcher. I first came across the story below during a staff meeting where one of the technical managers recounted the latest issue he faced, but also highlighted how he had resolved the problem in the end. The story was then told and retold many times within the technical team, as well as between other staff members and contractors. Sometimes more details were added, sometimes it was just a few snippets of the story being shared, depending who was involved in it. I later asked one of the technical managers to recount the story in a formal interview and this is what he told me (all names have been changed).

Ask students to read through the story and identify the following:

- Is it a formal story with a clear beginning, middle and end, or is it simply an anecdote of an experience?
- What kind of knowledge activities, practices, or other elements enabling the effective management of knowledge at QMF are embedded in the story and how are these talked about by the storyteller?
- Is there a 'lesson learned' coming out of this story?

### Technical manager:

The creativity necessary for running any of our projects cannot be underestimated. It's part of how we solve problems. And creativity is more than just what's going on on the stage, you know? It's actually... and this is a very, very mundane thing! So for example, I've got to take music stands to Thursday Island [a remote island off the North coast of Queensland], we're sending three containers up. And it's... because we're taking the Youth Orchestra, they have got to have music stands. Now, they have the ones they're normally taking on tour with them, and then they have some in the office; in their rehearsal venue. The rehearsal ones we won't take up. The ones we're taking up, are all broken down, they're in three or four flight cases. Really heavy flight cases. They come in three or four parts and you have to assemble them together when you get there and at the end of the gig, you have to unassemble them. Well, and I just know... it'll take three guys an hour to build twenty of the stands, pretty much... close to an hour.

But we could easily also take other stands that are already built. Takes up more room, rather than just three nice flight cases. But we'll go into a wheel trolley, and because we're taking the containers, we can just wheel them straight into the container. Strap them in. So at the other end, you pull

them out, and you stick them on the stage. Takes one guy five minutes to do that. Now... we can go either way! I know where to get those stands from, from a particular venue in town, and I know they won't be using them around that time. So I just needed to convince them to do it. And this is where the creativity part comes in: luckily, the person I'm sending out to look after Thursday Island works for that same venue. I phoned him up, said, "this is what's going to happen... please, I need you to..." And I said, "well, I'll tell you what, mate, if we don't get those... it's really in your interest, because I won't be there when you're unpacking those things, that's down to you and your team..." And he said, "yeah, okay...great, leave it with me, I'll make sure I'll get them!"

So... it's that sort of creativity you have to think about! [...] And that's part of our job, we've got to constantly think about that... technical is not just a reactive job! Well, it IS a reactive job and that's primarily what it is. You tell me what you want, I'll put on the stage there. But a good technical person will also say back to the other person and tell them what else is possible. "If you do it this way, you achieve this..." And that's what happened with these music stands! We worked together, and everyone could see how you can change simple things that make a massive difference for all parties involved. And so, for me, a good creative person will listen to the technical person. As opposed to just the technical person assisting the creative person...

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## Answers to the above questions

For the instructor to use when discussing this case study with the students):

*Is it a formal story with a clear beginning, middle and end, or is it simply an anecdote of an experience?*

It is a rather formal story: it starts with an introduction about the importance of creativity within this festival organisation. Then it goes into the specific example (with plenty of detail and context) of what the technical manager was struggling with at the time and how he resolved the issue. It finishes with a summary of the role a technical person plays within the wider organisation and it re-emphasises the importance of creativity in this.

*What kind of knowledge activities, practices, or other elements enabling the effective management of knowledge at QMF are embedded in the story and how are these talked about by the storyteller?*

The story very much emphasises the tacit knowledge needed to be able to do the job. It provides an example of problem-solving, but it is also a story of success. The message coming out of it is actually more about the positives, rather than the problem in the first place. This highlights some of what the organisational culture at QMF is like ('the way they do things' in this organisation): staff members initially draw on individual people's knowledge and expertise when facing a problem; but the story also emphasises teamwork and collaboration that is necessary to the success of the festival in the end, with other contractors being consulted and brought into the conversation at times; lastly, it highlights the importance of creativity and thinking outside the box. This shows that staff members had the authority and were empowered to make their own decisions, act in a way that they think is best for the organisation as a whole and for its long-term success. On a broader scale it shows trust in the team to make the right decisions, as well as motivation to come up with new ideas which could lead to creative solutions and innovation. These are all important cultural elements contributing to effective knowledge management.

*Is there a 'lesson learned' coming out of this story?*

Yes, the technical manager finishes by reinforcing the importance of teamwork between the creative team and the technical team and how they each play a role in the process of creative decision-making. The organisation as a whole can take this forward as a best practice example of collaboration, innovation and empowerment – again, these are key lessons for everyone to learn in terms of effectively managing knowledge (creating new knowledge, sharing it with others, using it, etc).

## Sample short-answer questions:

- ◆ Find a 'story' about an event of your choice online and discuss how this story creates a shared sense of meaning around the event, what the event is about, and how it is talked about by others (e.g. on social media, blogs or forums). Can the story help create new knowledge? Can this knowledge be shared with others through telling and retelling the story? Can it be documented and stored for the future?
- ◆ Referring back to the 'pulsating' nature of event organisations introduced in Chapter 2, provide an example of how storytelling can be used as a knowledge management tool at different stages of the event cycle.

## Lecture 11

### Learning objectives

- Define Appreciative Inquiry and discuss how the Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge approach is different to problem-solving approaches to knowledge management
- Understand the importance of stories and positive language in Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge
- Apply the 4 steps of Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge to event examples

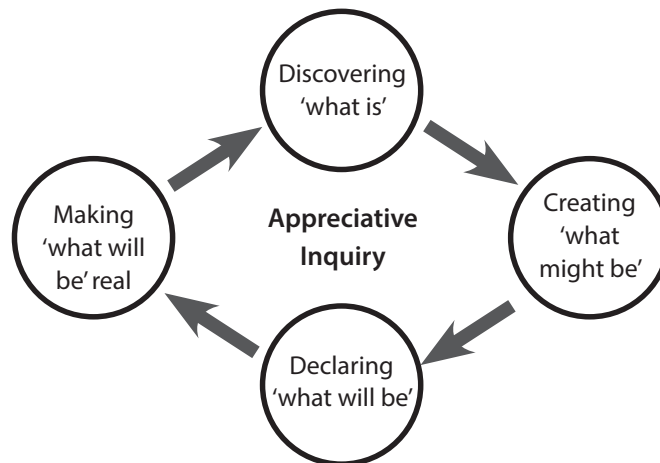
### Introduction

Lecture 11 is best taught as an interactive session where students go through the 4 steps of Appreciative Inquiry and/or Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge themselves and explore the content and process of each. The importance of positive stories and of storytelling covered in the previous lecture should briefly be revisited here. It is suggested to begin the lecture by telling students that in Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge, storytelling in itself is considered a knowledge practice for employees to engage in, whereby the use of positive stories is key. If they have no prior knowledge of Appreciative Inquiry, a brief introduction to the concept will then be necessary:

### Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a management approach whereby instead of focussing on problems and issues and trying to solve them, all this is turned upside down. Appreciative Inquiry aims to identify what already works well in an organisation, and all the strengths at an individual, group and organisational level, so that these strengths can then be built on to perform even better in the future. It is very much built around existing culture and values, and based on these, about asking employees to share stories of success and best practice. From there a vision for the future can be created through affirming, reaffirming and making explicit what already works well (in other words, appreciate 'what is' and envision what 'could be' possible in the future). Hence, the Appreciative Inquiry approach is very collaborative and encourages as many employees as possible to join in. Through focusing on the positives of a situation, thought patterns can be translated into even greater positivity in action.

The four steps of Appreciative Inquiry and some specific questions that could be asked, are as follows (see Figure 8.1 below). Students can be encouraged to ask each other the questions and work through the 4 steps together to identify, for example, best practice examples around group work or for a specific event/festival when working with a sponsor or other stakeholder. Ideally, if they also have a Live Event module or project as part of their study programme/course, then this can be used to reflect on their experience of organising the event. If done properly, the first two steps of the process will take significantly more time to go through than steps 3 and 4 and it is recommended to allocate enough time for this:



**Figure 8.1:** The four steps in Appreciative Inquiry

1. Discovering 'what is': collecting stories of current positive experiences, such as "share a story of when you felt particularly motivated". Make a note of all the things people say, and analyse the stories to get a picture of the factors that were responsible for successes in the past.
2. Creating 'what might be': members of the team should now brainstorm creative ideas in order to construct a mental picture of how the positive points that have been discovered can be converted into specific organisational strengths.
3. Declaring 'what will be': creating a practical plan of action for the organisation to implement, through e.g. deciding and finalising systems, devising processes and practices.
4. Making 'what will be' real: implementing and executing the plan across all departments and with all employees of the organisation.

It is important to note that these steps do not necessarily have to be taken sequentially. They might be happening at different points in time within different groups or departments of the organisation. Also, problems, issues and conflict within the Appreciative Inquiry approach are not simply ignored but rather by focusing on the organisation's strengths and successes, problems can be turned into opportunities for learning, collaboration and reflexive thinking.

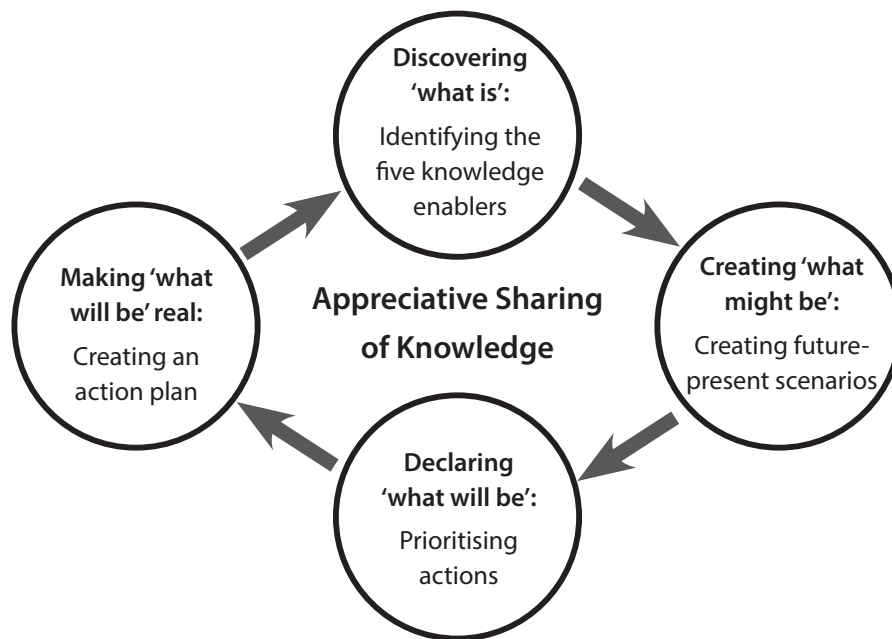
### Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge

Based on the ideas of Appreciative Inquiry, Thatchenkery and Chowdhry (2007) later applied the same principles to knowledge management (and knowledge sharing in particular) and developed the Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge approach. Knowledge management is thereby regarded as something to embrace and aspire to, and it is very much centred around the question, 'what makes people share knowledge?', aims to identify knowledge sharing practices that already work well within the organisation (such as successful practices of creating new knowledge in teams), and based on these develop best practices for sharing knowledge in the future. Through conversation, communication and social interaction, employees can therefore focus on learning from and with each other, break down hierarchies and silos, renegotiate power relations, and many other relational knowledge practices.

Additional reading:

- ◆ Thatchenkery, T., & Chowdhry, D. (2007). *Appreciative Inquiry and Knowledge Management - A Social Constructionist Perspective*. Cheltenham & Northampton: Edward Elgar

Similar to the Appreciative Inquiry approach above, students can be asked to work through the 4 steps of Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge (see Figure 8.2), ask each other the questions, collect success stories and best practice examples of knowledge sharing, and from there develop a plan for the future. Again, steps 1 and 2 will take more time and effort to work through than steps 3 and 4, and this should be factored into the lesson plan accordingly:



**Figure 8.2:** Cycle of Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge

1. Discovering 'what is' – Identifying the 5 knowledge enablers: Ask for example, "Think about a time when you shared something that you knew, which enabled you and your group to achieve success. Describe how this made you feel excited, valued, or appreciated"; from these stories specific knowledge enablers can be identified, such as collegiality, teamwork, valuing autonomy, opportunities for personal growth, empowerment, respect, trust, or ethical behaviour. Narrow these down to 4-5 and write them down.
2. Creating 'what might be' – Creating future-present scenarios: conduct further interviews to explore the knowledge enablers more in-depth. E.g. ask about occasions or events where they were experienced, and questions about factors or conditions that facilitated or promoted these knowledge enablers. From there, the knowledge infrastructure – the backbone of any knowledge enabler – can be identified, such as; decision-making, organisational practices and routines, incentives for knowledge sharing, leadership, and communication, to mention a few. Through combining the knowledge enablers and the knowledge infrastructure, bold statements of success can then be created, such as 'We trust all permanent, seasonal members and volunteers of our event organisation to make the right decisions with the organisation's best interest at heart at all times.'



3. Declaring 'what will be' – Prioritising actions: prioritising certain actions that have come out of steps 1 and 2. These should now be written down and shared with everyone.
4. Making 'what will be' real – Creating an action plan: a specific plan of action is the final step and should be shared with everyone in the organisation, as well as with other key stakeholders.

**Sample short-answer question:**

- ◆ Using an example from your own experience, work through the cycle of Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge for an event organisation.

**Sample long-answer or essay question:**

- ◆ Assess how a prospective approach like Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge could be a better approach to knowledge management in an event organisation than retrospective, problem-solving approaches.

The Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge process is based on the current culture and climate of the organisation and based on what already works well. This can be very empowering for employees as well as for the organisation as a whole. Rather than fighting fires, which can be detrimental in an event organisation where time is limited and staff members are under a lot of pressure and stress, focusing on what works and building on these successes is a much more positive approach to management. Events are 'celebrations' after all, and sharing the success of the event through positive examples and stories of 'what makes people share knowledge' can become part of this 'celebration'.

Furthermore, the Appreciative Sharing of Knowledge approach does not necessarily start or stop at a specific time, in some cases it might be worth going through the process more than once. In event organisations, for example, going through it during different times across the event cycle (pre/during/post) might be a good idea. Naturally more or less people will be involved during these different stages. Events are constantly changing, hence an approach to knowledge management that takes this ever-changing context and complex environment into account, can be very beneficial.