KM Programs from Creation to Maturity

EVENT SUMMARY

Where: 1129 20th St NW, Washington D.C.
When: Wednesday, April 3, 2019 | 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Speaker
Micha van Waesberghe | Head of Knowledge Management, Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)

To see event photos, please click here.
Event Description

During this event, the Millennium Challenge Corporation’s (MCC) Micha van Waesberghe shared his experience in establishing a knowledge management (KM) program at MCC and how this compared to his previous experience at the Inter-American Development Bank. Such a compare-and-contrast approach is useful in drawing out commonalities between KM programs within development institutions as well as highlighting the differences between young and more mature KM programs, including the importance of different organizational cultures, incentives, and systems.

A short presentation by Micha provided his observations and lessons learned a year into MCC’s nascent KM program. This introduction was followed by an interactive discussion delving into the attendees’ experiences, challenges, and solutions. Topics included leadership and culture, governance and systems, learning capture and application, knowledge sharing and dissemination, and the role of enabling technology, among many other potential areas of discussion.

Key Takeaways

1. **The first mistakes Knowledge Management (KM) Programs make**

   Micha van Waesberghe (Millennium Challenge Corporation) opened the presentation by mentioning the first mistake a knowledge manager (KM) makes: assuming the organization they are walking into is a blank canvas for the KM to work with. Micha elaborated by saying that organizations have their own techniques, styles, and technologies that they use. It is up to the KM to learn what these inner-functions are, and learn how to work with them. Micha concluded by stating that once this blank canvas assumption is eliminated, it is easier for the KM when they arrive.

2. **What do you do when you walk in as a KM?**

   Everyone watches and observes the KM when they first arrive, thinking “Why are they here? Why were they hired?” Micha stated that this has been a problem since 2011 when he first noticed it and he knows other KMs have noticed it as well. He believes that the best way to address the problem is to be transparent with the organization’s employees, so they are clear about the KM’s role, and why they are there.

3. **How to build trust with an organization**

   The most important thing that a KM can do is listen. Micha stated that he will never say “no” to any meeting, or to anyone who stops him in the hallway. Micha believes that a KM should get to the employees in the beginning in order to engage them, listen to them, and be realistic about what they can and cannot do. If a KM is lucky, they will work for an organization that will give them the time to do all of this when they first arrive.

4. **The ability to be effective**

   KMs have a lack of authority when they go to an organization because they are an outside entity. They are not allowed to manage large teams, decide who will work with who, and what technology will be used. Some ways to be effective in a new organization are to actively engage with employees, find allies, and have leadership support. Micha elaborated on the last point by showing the benefits of passing everything through leadership before sending it out to the workspace. By doing this, leaders are able to say things such as “this cannot work,” “we normally do this,” or “people will like this.” Having leaders who have privy to the organization’s working environment is helpful, as they filter out the KM’s ideas, and consequently, it increases the chance that these new ideas will be approved by other employees in the office.