

Knowledge Management Methods In Building A Culture Of Academic Integrity.

PETER KROČITÝ

Vysoká škola manažmentu v Trenčíne, Trenčín, Slovakia

Abstract: Academic integrity has been an issue in higher learning institutions not only in Slovakia but in all parts of the world in the last few decades. The two main approaches that institutions use to prevent it call for treating plagiarism either as morally wrong or as a crime. Although there have been introduced different ways of developing an efficient academic integrity programs in many schools, the common practice is focusing on punitive approach towards scholastic dishonesty rather than pedagogical. The punitive approach is based on designing a set of rules and penalties applied when rules are not followed. Education in this area works effectively when it is clearly worded and accessible. Knowledge management can provide the way how the pedagogical approach could be fostered. Storytelling is a method of knowledge transfer serving the purpose very well. The paper aims to discuss the possibilities of using this method as an integral part of building culture of academic integrity in a very specific environment of higher education institutions.

Keywords: knowledge, knowledge management, knowledge sharing, storytelling, scholastic honesty, academic integrity, cheating, plagiarism

1 Introduction

Successful knowledge management and transfer is considered as a key to the success of current organizations. When transferring knowledge to other units of an organization, the overall goal is to successfully implement the knowledge sent to the receiver. Story telling is one of the best ways to make the leap from information to knowledge. The quality of story telling and its conformity with desired corporate values is one measure of the overall health of an organisation. It can also provide an organic means of producing sustainable cultural change. This article is trying to present this old tool in a new context. The emerging discipline of knowledge management is arising in response to growing demand for intellectual capital as a basic asset for organizations and societies. It is important to remember that, like many aspects of our growing understanding of the role of knowledge in an organization, the use of stories is a rediscovery of an important natural skill that accompanied societies for centuries.

2 Storytelling as a knowledge sharing tool

Employees tell each other stories everyday and accept this process as a natural form of passing on knowledge, applying a method that they used from early childhood. The Christian religion also began with a storyteller, who used stories and metaphors to create understanding of a set of principles and values. The theologians arrived later in the cycle. Storytelling presents a powerful tool to capture knowledge. “Generating, sharing and discussing stories is an excellent way of converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge, and an effective method for quickly assimilating new learning” [4].

Research in cognitive science shows that memorable information is more likely to be acted on than information which remains unconscious and not retrieved from memory. Since stories are more engaging, entertaining, and related to personal experience than rules or directives, the research would predict they would be more memorable, be given more weight, and be more likely to guide behavior[11].

Many times can particular stories illustrate a specific point better than a set of rules or directions. Stories can help overcome mental barriers that people build against new knowledge. They can improve communication, help to find common values and solve conflicts. They can be a catalyzer of changes. For transfer of tacit knowledge the most important thing may not be the story itself, but an interaction between the teller and the listener. The story acts only as a help of the interaction. The story should simulate reality for the audience and enable them to look at the problem from the teller’s point of view [7].

Not only positive, success stories but also negative stories serve their purpose. Positive stories as defined by Denning [1] can actually have a discouraging effect, since they work only in an environment of high trust level. People can hardly identify themselves with such stories that describe future development and success they have not gone through. On the other hand, negative stories show people mistakes they should avoid. People simply learn more from their mistakes than from their successes.

Denning designed a storytelling catalogue (Figure 1) that provides a neat menu of options that can be used by managers when preparing presentation with different objectives since there is no single right way to tell a story. These can be comprised together in order to create a mosaic effective in reaching several objectives.

| If your objective is . . . | You will need a story that . . . | In telling it, you will need to . . . | Your story will inspire such phrases as . . . |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Sparkling action</i> | Describes how a successful change was implemented in the past, but allows listeners to imagine how it might work in their situation. | Avoid excessive detail that will take the audience's mind off its own challenge. | "Just imagine . . ." "What if . . ." |
| <i>Communicating who you are</i> | Provides audience-engaging drama and reveals some strength or vulnerability from your past. | Provide meaningful details but also make sure the audience has the time and inclination to hear your story. | "I didn't know that about him!" "Now I see what she's driving at!" |
| <i>Transmitting values</i> | Feels familiar to the audience and will prompt discussion about the issues raised by the value being promoted. | Use believable (though perhaps hypothetical) characters and situations, and never forget that the story must be consistent with your own actions. | "That's so right!" "Why don't we do that all the time!" |
| <i>Communicating who the firm is—branding</i> | Is usually told by the product or service itself, or by customer word of mouth or by a credible third party. | Be sure that the firm is actually delivering on the brand promise. | "Wow!" "I'm going to tell my friends about this!" |
| <i>Fostering collaboration</i> | Movingly recounts a situation that listeners have also experienced and that prompts them to share their own stories about the topic. | Ensure that a set agenda doesn't squelch this swapping of stories—and that you have an action plan ready to tap the energy unleashed by this narrative chain reaction. | "That reminds me of the time that I . . ." "Hey, I've got a story like that." |
| <i>Taming the grapevine</i> | Highlights, often through the use of gentle humor, some aspect of a rumor that reveals it to be untrue or unreasonable. | Avoid the temptation to be mean-spirited—and be sure that the rumor is indeed false! | "No kidding!" "I'd never thought about it like that before!" |
| <i>Sharing knowledge</i> | Focuses on problems and shows, in some detail, how they were corrected, with an explanation of why the solution worked. | Solicit alternative—and possibly better—solutions. | "There but for the grace of God . . ." "Gosh! We'd better watch out for that in future!" |
| <i>Leading people into the future</i> | Evokes the future you want to create without providing excessive detail that will only turn out to be wrong. | Be sure of your storytelling skills. (Otherwise, use a story in which the past can serve as a springboard to the future.) | "When do we start?" "Let's do it!" |

Figure 1; Storytelling catalogue [1]

The catalogue is a tool to avoid some common mistakes in organizational storytelling, such as negative tonality that can fail to spark action, using success stories which can also fail to spark action because of missing essence of reality, or using detailed scenarios to instill belief in future which become discredited because future unfolds in unexpected ways [1].

As Knowledge management is defined in different ways by different authors, Snowden provides one complex definition on his own: „Knowledge Management is the developing body of methods, tools, techniques and values, through which organisations can acquire, develop, measure, distribute and provide a return on their intellectual assets. It is fundamentally about creating self sustaining ecologies in which communities and their artefacts can organically respond to, and confidently proact with, an increasingly uncertain environment“ [10].

This rather elaborate definition has its meaning to many knowledge management practitioners but could be expressed in an alternative way to reach a better understanding by audience that is not so well experienced in the field. Storytelling techniques could be applied to present the differences between managing the knowledge and managing the information. Snowden uses a metaphor of divergence between using a London street map with using a taxi cab. Using a map to find a way to a destination takes time and requires some map-reading skills. On the other hand, taxi driver is able to find the way to the destination without reading a map, is able to cope with changes due to road repairs or accidents quickly. The story related to this metaphor is about how taxi drivers in London are trained. Each aspirant has to drive the streets of London on a motor scooter with a map until they know all the streets and possible ways. Once they have completed this training, they have the knowledge. The power of this approach is that it reflects in no need to discuss the academic definitions of knowledge and information, but instead addressing an issue with a need for a map or a taxi [10].

Stories can be used to provide warnings, to teach or reinforce rules in complex environment, or can be used to elicit new levels of understanding and allow innovation. Stories with a purpose can be very powerful. Conclusions that we can draw about purposeful stories are likely to contain some common elements:

- They will be able to capture and hold the attention of the audience, which does not mean they have to be entertaining; they can be painful or just excite curiosity.
- Good stories self propagate, they have a life of their own, they are not linked with an individual storyteller. In order to do this they need to be oral or tacit in nature, to allow each storyteller to invest their own authority around common structures and value themes.
- A good story can be told to all audiences regardless of educational background, role or experience and all members of the audience will gain meaning from it at different levels.
- Stories and the metaphors they contain can provide a new language for new forms of understanding. Their use can avoid sterile academic debate and overly explicit (and expensive) consultancy processes

An important developing skill in knowledge management work is creation of teaching stories from the common history and experience of an organization. Storytelling skills allow an organization effectively communicate values and share tacit knowledge [11].

3 Scholastic Honesty Program at VSM/CU

Scholastic honesty program at CU/VSM has been functioning for several years. The program is a part of school's efforts to ensure academic integrity, which is the basis of any school's reputation and the value of its degrees. Ideally, the students and academics will recognize the value of academic integrity to themselves and will be supporters of the SH Program. It is based on rules and procedures defined by the policy, sanctions and other documents aiming to create a culture free of fraud and deception.

Students as well as instructors are informed about the SH program right at the beginning of their study or employment through orientation sessions. Every syllabus includes information about SH with basic information and referal to documents available online on school's portal. Students receive instructions about citing guidelines in order to avoid plagiarism in their work by instructors in course designed and focusing on academic writing. There has been a brochure created to instruct students on plagiarism issues and the ways to avoid these. For plagiarism disclosure we use an automated detection system Turnitin. The system compares submitted papers with a large database of web pages (over 45 billion). Turnitin's content databases contain millions of pages of books and journals and over 130 milion pages of the current and archived internet, articles and book databases including ABI Inform, Periodical Abstracts, Business Dateline, ProQuest as well as papers of students from other universities using Turnitin(337 million). The service is being used by over 3,500 institutions of higher learning including 69 percent of the top 100 colleges and universities in the *U.S. News and World Report Best Colleges list* [12].

VSM/CU has defined a due process to prevent arbitrary actions applied against students. Case of suspected violation of the rules are being reviewed by a Scholastic honesty committee which consists of three people and its chair. Students are invited to provide a statement of defense at a hearing. After consideration of evidence and the students' defense, the committee delivers. The decision varies from case to case, but the sanctions applied in case violation is found are in range from 0 assignment grade to dismissal from the study. Results of these hearings are publicly announced through notice boards and web page announcements in order to provide feedback and serve the preventive purpose. The graph below in Figure 2 displays the number of cases that have gone through the formal process of hearings and following decisions by the scholastic honesty committee. The overall decreasing trend has been disrupted in years 2005 – 2006 when it was decided to lessen the penalties for violations because the data in the previous year showed that students seemed to be accepting the principles of scholastic honesty. What happened however, was that the number of cases amplified as the year progressed. These results showed that it was too soon to lower the penalties; strict penalties were necessary to maintain a level of credible deterrence, and therefore, we returned to the original penalties. Currently, the decreasing trend has stopped and the number of cases has leveled off. Although it may seem that the program is working well, there are still issues to effective information and knowledge dissemination among academics, staff as well as students.

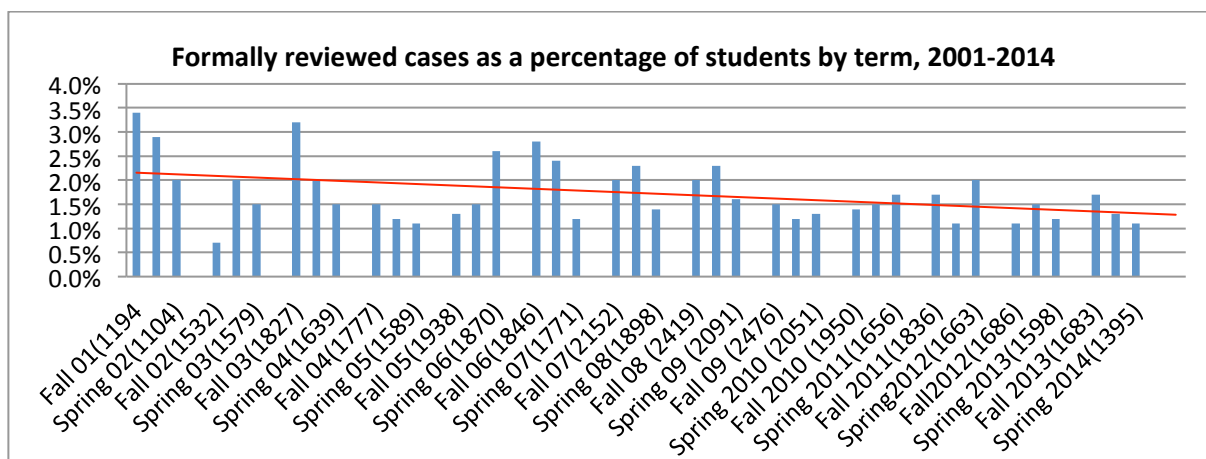


Figure 2; Number of cases reviewed by scholastic honesty committee

4 Punitive approach may not be effective

What would be the best approach to be taken in creating an environment supporting academic integrity and disapprove of scholastic dishonesty is still questionable. Miller, Stopaugh and Woolridge have investigated the reasons not to cheat among college students. Their investigation was based on prior studies that suggested three common areas of reasons not to cheat. These categories are:

- Learning goals
- Character moral codes
- Punishment

Motivation theories suggest that learning goals play a significant role in acts of scholastic dishonesty. Goal orientation theory speaks about two types of goals, which are mastery or learning goals and performance goals. Those students who are oriented towards the mastery goals will engage in learning process with high efforts avoiding activities like cheating. On the other hand, students who are oriented towards the performance goals will try to put the outcomes above the means of achieving them and thus are more likely to cheat. This suggests that learning goals can be considered as one of the reasons for not cheating as supported by research [8]. Moral reasoning theories are commonly used to represent connections between cheating and moral reasons. However, no study so far has shown that there would be a clear relationship between levels of moral development and level of cheating. In general, people may agree on what is wrong but they would give different reasons for why it is wrong. The most common way of teaching students that cheating is wrong is based on punitive actions. However, even though the moral and learning lessons are always related to less cheating, punishment can be a reason to cheat. When failure in an activity is considered as a punitive outcome, it may outweigh the threat of punishment resulting from cheating [6].

The study involving more than 1,000 respondents revealed that learning and moral standards were reasons for lower level of cheating while punishment was related to higher level of cheating. This result however does not mean that punishment will not prevent cheating. Strict sanctions for cheating give signal that this type of behaviour represents a serious concern. What works effectively though, is the perception that probability of being caught cheating is high. Thus, penalties themselves will not deter students from cheating no matter how strict they appear to be. The focus of scholastic honesty programs should be on moral standards, education goals and climate of academic integrity should be more likely to reduce cheating. Promoting student responsibility for maintaining academic integrity is a way how to reduce acts of scholastic dishonesty [6].

5 Storytelling and academic integrity

The effectiveness of the program depends on information dissemination and the awareness of students and academics about the SH program. It is better to prevent cases of violations of the policy rather than dealing with those through functioning of the Scholastic honesty committee. If rules are not followed, SH committee reviews cases which are then resolved by imposing sanctions on students who mostly learn the hard way, from their own mistakes. A better approach would be learning from mistakes of others. The sources of information on SH may

vary from the institution portal, through notice boards, syllabi to teachers. Based on the recent study conducted on a sample of 363 students from a population of 1440 students, as can be seen in Figure 3, the first most significant source of information on SH issues were considered the teachers [3].

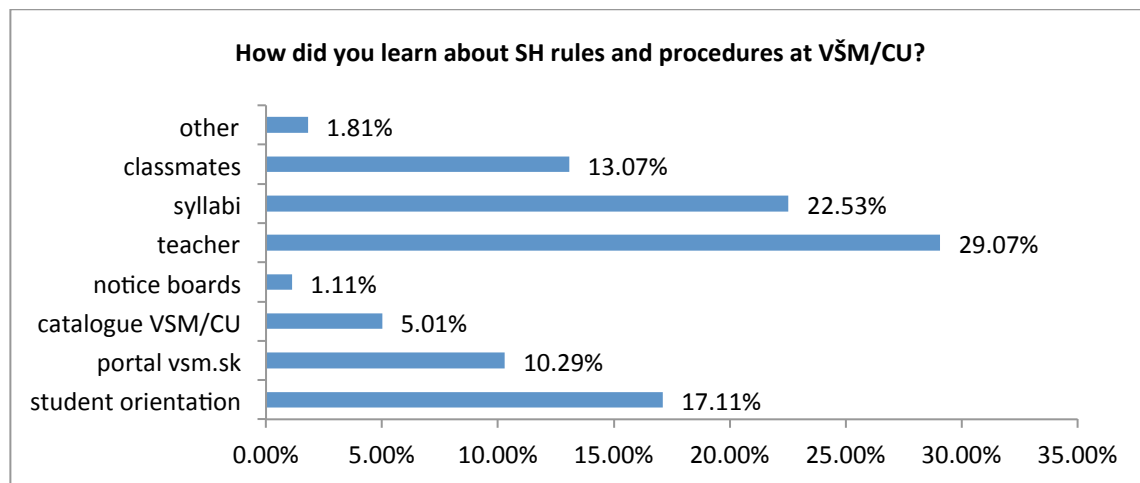


Figure 3; Survey on awareness of scholastic honesty

The explicit knowledge related to SH consists of the policies presented as a set of rules to be followed during exams and/or writing papers. Students should know they are supposed to cite their sources whenever they write a paper, not to use cheat sheets on exams or use other ways of deceptive behavior. All these rules have been codified and are available to students in print and/or electronic form on the school's web site in a set of documents. Still, you can lead a horse to the river, but you cannot make it drink. Although the information is readily available, most of the students pay increased attention to it only after they are caught breaking some of the rules. Usually afterwards comes the sanction which in some cases can have a reverse effect compared to the one desired.

What the program is missing is the explanation of the ethics of academic integrity, the tacit knowledge transfer. We cannot assume that students know and accept these ethics. They need to be presented the explanation of why cheating and plagiarism are harmful. Thomas Lickona defines five reasons why cheating is wrong:

- It will ultimately lower your self-respect, because you can never be proud of anything you got by cheating.
- Cheating is a lie, because it deceives other people into thinking you know more than you do.
- Cheating violates the teacher's trust that you will do your own work. Furthermore, it undermines the whole trust relationship between the teacher and his or her class.
- Cheating is unfair to all people who aren't cheating
- If you cheat in school now, you'll find it easier to cheat in other situations later in life - perhaps even in your closest personal relationships[5]

One way to make known to students the reality of academic integrity is to expose them to the consequences of violating this principle. That is where the storytelling comes in. There are many stories of people including those in important political positions who have cheated or plagiarized and had to face the consequences of their acts. When students have no idea why they are studying the things they are studying, or the topic is perceived as inapplicable to their lives, students will interpret the exercise as a waste of time. Consequently, they will look for shortcuts [9].

Storytelling as a part of information and knowledge dissemination on SH can be an effective tool of prevention as well as promotion of academic integrity. Throughout the history of our SH program, there have been many different cases resolved by the committee that consists of teachers meeting on regular basis. Many of our instructors have long term experience with situations involving cheating by their students and they know what strategies their students use as well as the ways how to respond to those or simply prevent them. Nonetheless, students have their own experience in dealing with cases of cheating and plagiarism too. All these experiences represent organizational knowledge that is not codified, stored and presented.

In application of storytelling for information and knowledge sharing, we should focus on the main source, i.e. teachers. So, how should the stories reach the audience? They are aiming not only at students from their

instructors, but they should also be stories told by students to students or instructors to instructors. One way is by organizing workshops for students with their teachers, or only for teachers, only for students. These could be organized on regular basis, in case of teachers they could be part of faculty meetings. Also, classroom discussions are possible setting for the storytelling to take place.

Not only the narrative mode of storytelling should be considered. Another way how stories could reach the audience is through discussion forums where stories could be presented in a written form or attractive digitalized form with the opportunity to interact with other viewers/readers in discussions. Social networks represent another possibility.

Although studies show that storytelling could be an effective knowledge sharing tool, it requires high knowledge management culture. If organization members are not aware of importance of knowledge sharing, storytelling and other knowledge sharing methods may not work. Most suitable platforms for storytelling are informal platforms, which however may fail to capture the knowledge. Formal platforms provide only limited space for storytelling. Successful implementation of storytelling requires leadership support presenting the benefits of knowledge sharing and providing informal platforms for story exchange[2].

6 Conclusion

Critical skills, which in the area of Scholastic Honesty mainly apply to the proper use of citations in order to avoid plagiarism, represent knowledge which is difficult to be transferred by stories. Here we can rely on formal education, mentoring, and self-studying. Academic integrity however, represents values that need to be shared by the entire community at the organizations, meaning both students and academics. Creating a culture free of fraud and deception works effectively through use of metaphors and stories. This way is demanding on time and intellect, but it is cheap in terms of external resources. It requires less energy to maintain and propagate. The stories it uses may convey more complex meaning than definition. Nevertheless, it requires greater trust since it is about guidance, not direction and about volunteers not conscripts.

Literature

- [1] DENNING, S. (2005). *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- [2] KHAIRUL S. K., AHMAD K. M., (March 2010). Using Stories To Share Knowledge: A Malaysian Organization Case Study. *Journal of Knowledge Management Practice, Vol. 11*(No. 1) [online]. Retrieved from <http://www.tlinc.com/articl222.htm>[cit. 2014-09-30].
- [3] KROČITÝ, P. (2013). Applying principles of scholastic honesty in higher education : are we on the right track? In: *Management Challenges in the 21st Century, Managing the Intangible: Ethics and Value Changes in Business, Education and Research* [CD-ROM]. Trenčín: Vysoká škola manažmentu v Trenčíne, 2013. - ISBN 9788089306206
- [4] LELIC, S. (2001), Fuel your imagination-KM and the art of storytelling. *Inside Knowledge, Vol. 5*, [online]. Retrieved from <http://www.ikmagazine.com/xq/asp/sid.0/articleid.07FC4A03-F54E-491F-ACE7-7D44DE201C33/> eTitle.Fuel_your_imagination_KM_and_the_art_of_storytelling/qx/display.htm[cit. 2014-96-30].
- [5] LICKONA, T. (1991). *Educating For Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, New York: Bantam Books
- [6] MILLER, A., SHOFTAUGH, C., WOOLRIDGE, J. (2011). Reasons not to cheat, academic integrity responsibility, and frequency of cheating. In *Journal of Experimental Education* [online]. 2011, s. 169 – 184. ISSN: 1940-0683 Dostupné na: Education Research Complete [cit. 2014-09-21].
- [7] MLÁDKOVÁ, L.(2005). *Management znalostí*, VŠE Praha
- [8] MURDOCK, T., ANDERMAN, E. (2006). Motivational perspectives on student cheating : Toward an integrated model of academic honesty. In *Educational psychologist* [online]. 2006, s. 129-145. Dostupné na <http://faculty.mwsu.edu/psychology/dave.carlston/Writing%20in%20Psychology/Academic%20Dishonesty/new/admod.pdf> [cit. 2013-09-25].

- [9] NIELS, G. (1995). *Academic Practices, School Culture and Cheating Behavior*. [online]. Retrieved from https://www.winchesterthurston.org/uploaded/About_Us/cheating.pdf [cit. 2014-09-29].
- [10] SNOWDEN, S. (2005). *Storytelling: an old skill in a new context*. [online]. Retrieved from http://cognitive-edge.com/uploads/articles/10_Storytelling1_-_Old_Skill_New_Context_.pdf [cit. 2014-09-29].
- [11] SWAP, W., LEONARD, D., SHIELDS, & M. ABRAMS, L. (2001). Using Mentoring and Storytelling to Transfer Knowledge in the Workplace. *Journal of Management Information Systems, Vol. 18*(No. 1) [online]. Retrieved from <http://www.bricker.com/Documents/Attachments/BL1.pdf> [cit. 2014-09-30].
- [12] Turnitin. (s.a.). *Get started with Turnitin training*. [online]. s.a. Retrieved from <http://www.turnitin.com/static/community/instructors.php> [cit. 2014-09-25].

Contact data:

Peter Kročitý, MBA

Vysoká škola manažmentu v Trenčíne, Bezručova 64, 91101 Trenčín, Slovakia

pkrocity@vsm.sk