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# The Organization of Knowledge Sharing at the Colorado Music Festival

Dagmar Abfalter, Raphaela Stadler, Julia Müller

## Introduction

**K**nowledge management and knowledge sharing have sparked interest in the field of management research (e.g., Matzler et al., 2005; Serenko and Bontis, 2004). It is acknowledged that organizations that develop a consistent process of knowledge creation and knowledge transfer have a competitive advantage over those that do not (e.g., Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996). They are able to manage their intra-organizational know-how more efficiently and more effectively and thereby enhance their competitive position (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). However, knowledge sharing is a difficult process, not least because of the properties of the organization (Argote et al., 2000). Since research has focused on stable organizational characteristics, such as geographic dispersion and company size, more dynamic settings with seasonal variations have received little attention. In the arts, seasonal organizations are a very common form of organization and their characteristics provide a delicate and challenging setting for knowledge management activities.

Festivals, for example, are characterized by a semi-permanent structure whereby a small number of permanent staff securing the year-round organization encounter an expanded organization during the festival period. Organizers, performers and the audience come together for an intensive experience and then dissolve following the event in a cyclical manner (Waterman, 1998). There is reason to believe that knowledge sharing

activities have to be adapted to this specific context. Consequently, much knowledge is stored exclusively in the heads of the organizers and has to be shared quickly and efficiently with all staff members during the performance season. So far, research has given little consideration to strategies that help organizations to manage their knowledge efficiently in the context of seasonality.

Following the call for more consideration of context (Johns, 2006) in organizational behaviour research, in this article we examine the influence of dynamic company characteristics on knowledge sharing and intend to demonstrate ways of overcoming the impediments to knowledge sharing that arise from seasonal instability. Festivals provide a complex setting that combines features of modern or contemporary forms of organization such as temporality, virtuality and a project focus. Thus, we specifically offer new insights into the knowledge sharing process in seasonal organizations. In the first sections, we delineate and interrelate the basic concepts of knowledge sharing and seasonal organizations. In order to provide empirical evidence for our research question, we conducted a range of interviews at the Colorado Music Festival (CMF) at Chautauqua in Boulder, Colorado. The CMF is a classical music festival offering six weeks of concerts from June to August. The data were content analyzed using GABEK®-WinRelan®, a software tool for examining textual qualitative data (Zelger et al., 2011). Our results show that the festival under study resembles a community

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of practice (CoP), with different levels of participation depending on employee tenure, commitment, responsibility, and involvement as well as seasonality of employment. Festival organizations benefit from a highly committed and intrinsically motivated workforce, but they face the challenge of intensive short-term collaboration and the dominance of one or a few individuals. We begin with an overview of the relationship between knowledge sharing and company characteristics.



## Knowledge Sharing and Company Characteristics

**K**nowledge sharing is a central process in knowledge management (e.g., Eisenhardt and Santos, 2002) and has received considerable attention as a prerequisite for innovation (e.g., Brown and Eisenhardt, 1995; Tushman and O'Reilly, 1997; Verona, Prandelli and Sawhney, 2006), for organizational learning, and for the development of capabilities and best practices (Argote et al., 2000; Hoopes and Postrel, 1999; von Krogh, 1998). We regard knowledge sharing as “the provision or receipt of task information, know-how, and feedback regarding a product or procedure” (Cummings, 2004, p. 352). Although indispensable, knowledge sharing is a delicate process. Recent knowledge management research draws attention to the tacit dimension of knowledge (Hazlett, McAdam and Gallagher, 2005; Polanyi, 1966: “we can know more than we can tell” (p. 4). The major part of our knowledge is

embedded in practice and routines and thus is non-codifiable (Nelson and Winter, 1982). As a result, knowledge becomes even more complex and ambiguous, a “sticky element” that is hard to share (Szulanski, 1996, p. 29). As knowledge is socially created and individuals are the main actors in knowledge-related activities, people-centric factors such as motivation and personality characteristics, as well as situational and organizational ones, have become the focus of research.

Company characteristics exert influence on knowledge sharing because they affect the situation in which knowledge processes take place. For example, it makes a difference whether a company is situated in one location or has geographically dispersed subsidiaries, as spatial and temporal gaps have to be overcome for successful knowledge sharing (Argote et al., 2000; Boisot, 1998; Nonaka, 1994). Furthermore, size matters. Unlike large enterprises, small business enterprises (SMEs) frequently lack formal approaches to knowledge transfer (McAdam and Reid, 2001; Nunes, Annansingh and Eaglesont, 2006) and adopt non-systematic initiatives for knowledge management (Hutchinson and Quintas, 2008; Kerste and Muizer, 2002). However, SMEs need knowledge and skills as much as other companies do in a globalized world – perhaps even more so, because they are characterized by a small staff, high staff turnover and a tendency for employees to retain knowledge (Nunes, Annansingh and Eaglesont, 2006). Finally, organizational architecture influences knowledge sharing processes. Matrix structures with functional departments and interdisciplinary teams

### ABSTRACT

Knowledge sharing is a challenging process, especially in seasonal organizational settings, which are characterized by periodic and repetitive patterns in terms of business activity. As the literature provides little insight into knowledge sharing strategies in recurrently changing situations, the authors studied this process in an archetypal seasonal organization, the Colorado Music Festival (CMF), a classical music event. Festivals are characterized by (a) a limited number of staff who work year round and who need to develop and store relevant knowledge, and (b) seasonal staff who join for the festival season and who need to obtain and use knowledge quickly and efficiently. The authors content analyzed interviews with members of different organizational groups at the CMF. The results show that informal and flexible structures, depending on the level of participation of staff members based on their commitment, involvement, responsibility and seniority, are a promising approach to the sharing of knowledge with new and seasonal members. Informal ways of disseminating knowledge are discussed in the literature on “communities of practice”; using these strategies in a systematic way might provide a means for organizing knowledge sharing in seasonal settings such as festivals.

### KEY WORDS

Seasonal organizations, music festivals, knowledge management, communities of practice, case study

(Galbraith, 1971) increase the possibilities for cross-boundary knowledge sharing, whereas information flow is frequently constrained by hierarchy (Müller, 2010).

Current research examines stable settings in which an organization's knowledge sharing practices, once established, need only to be refined occasionally. Consequently, a variety of knowledge management systems and initiatives have been developed (for an overview, see Lytras and Pouloudi, 2006). However, organizations such as festivals undergo more frequent and seasonal changes and require systems that are more adaptive.



## Festivals as Seasonal Organizations

Seasonality has long been an issue for optimizing production processes with respect to unstable demand in a wide range of industries, such as agriculture, tourism and hospitality, and construction – giving these industries a rather bad reputation for employment (e.g., Pizam, 1982). Seasonal dependency has created organizations that are challenged with high staff turnover and the need for contingent work, resulting in a reliance on project-based structures and employees with expertise.

Festivals are an extreme example of seasonal organizations, the main season being ephemeral, reduced to a period of days or weeks when all staff members come together, business activity takes place, and services and experiences are delivered. We therefore use this extreme example

(Pettigrew, 1990) to elucidate organizational challenges created through seasonality.

In the arts field, festivals have a special appeal due to the uniqueness of each performance and a celebratory ambiance (d'Astous, Colbert and d'Astous, 2006; Getz, 1991). The peculiarities of the cultural product in general and the performing arts in particular (Baumol and Bowen, 1965; Colbert, 2003; Frey, 2000) result in an intangible, heterogeneous and unpredictable experience for both consumers and producers. Most festival organizations share specific characteristics. First, they have a semi-permanent structure, whereby a small number of permanent staff securing the year-round organization encounter a fully occupied organization during the festival period (Waterman, 1998). This can resemble the transition in size from a micro or small business to a medium-size or large enterprise. Thus, one apparent difficulty in festival management is the transfer of knowledge between year-round and seasonal staff.

Second, as cyclical events, festivals take place during a fixed period – mostly in summer – and at a special location, very often renowned for that event. This creates both organizational advantages and dependencies. The seasonally fixed period allows for advance planning and timely access to necessary resources. A disadvantage is that people come together for a limited time, which diminishes possibilities for innovation.

Third, festivals tend to reject fixed structures such as ensembles, large buildings, and specific distribution or subscription modalities, adopting

### RÉSUMÉ

Le partage des connaissances est un processus difficile, surtout pour les organisations saisonnières, que caractérisent des modèles d'activités professionnelles périodiques et répétitifs. Comme la littérature s'est peu intéressée jusqu'à présent aux stratégies de partage des connaissances en situations de changement récurrent, les auteures étudient ce processus dans une organisation archétypale saisonnière, le Festival de musique (classique) du Colorado (CMF). Les festivals se caractérisent par a) un nombre limité d'employés qui travaillent à l'année et doivent créer et emmagasiner un savoir pertinent et b) du personnel saisonnier embauché pour la durée du festival qui doit obtenir de l'information et l'utiliser rapidement et efficacement. Les auteures analysent des entrevues menées avec des membres de différents groupes organisationnels du CMF. Les résultats révèlent que des structures informelles et souples, selon le niveau de participation des employés basé sur leur engagement, leur implication, leur responsabilité et leur ancienneté, s'avèrent une approche prometteuse du partage des connaissances avec des membres nouveaux et saisonniers. Des moyens informels de diffuser les connaissances sont abordés dans la littérature sur les communautés de pratique; utiliser ces stratégies systématiquement pourrait être un moyen d'organiser le partage des connaissances dans des contextes saisonniers comme celui d'un festival.

### MOTS CLÉS

Organisations saisonnières, festivals de musique, gestion du savoir, communautés de pratique, étude de cas

instead project- and production-oriented team structures (Willnauer, 2004) in order to celebrate singular and unique events. These efficiency gains through a lean organization are traded against the vulnerability and risk of seasonal offers (Guillet de Monthoux, 2004). It is a challenge to deal with spontaneous and unplanned situations effectively and efficiently while adopting a strategic approach, including the imperative to “do the right thing” (Rämö, 2002), while handling atypical and short-term employment, high employee fluctuation and budgetary constraints.

Fourth, despite the tenuous employment situation, high intrinsic motivation of organizational members (Speckbacher, 2003) and visionary, passionate, engaging leaders are features of festivals and other organizations built around creative experts (Hunt, Stelluto and Hooijberg, 2004). Both the organizational challenges and the specific product – the music experience – call for expertise in production, organization and delivery.

Our aim is to identify how knowledge sharing can be effective under seasonally changing company structures that are characterized by periodic and repetitive but nevertheless regular and predictable patterns. Therefore, we chose to conduct an exploratory qualitative study.



## Empirical Study

Knowledge is largely conditional on its context (Kauppila, Rajala and Jyrämä, 2011; Johns, 2006). In order to produce empirical evidence

for knowledge sharing under seasonally changing organizational settings, we studied in detail one seasonal organization, the Colorado Music Festival. We chose a festival because this type of organization combines seasonality with several of the company characteristics described above, has a semi-permanent structure, and is project-based and expert-based. Furthermore, an interview with a senior manager revealed that the CMF provides effective means of knowledge sharing and could serve as an example of best practice. We employed a qualitative research design because no insights were available on this specific topic (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003; Zelger, 1999) and we wished to gain deeper insights into the mechanisms of successful knowledge sharing in seasonal organizations, taking contextual features into consideration (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Studying known processes in new contexts can reveal surprising features of the research object (Elsbach and Bechky, 2009).

During the 2007 festival season, we conducted 22 semi-structured interviews at the CMF in order to identify more and less effective ways of sharing knowledge within seasonal organizations. We interviewed various members of the organization, including year-round staff, regular seasonal staff and newcomers, in order to produce evidence from a variety of perspectives (see Table 1). Using GABEK<sup>®</sup>-WinRelan<sup>®</sup> software, we content analyzed the transcribed interviews in order to translate the experiences, attitudes and understandings of each respondent concerning individual and collective actions with respect to knowledge sharing into a clear and holistic picture of the entire organization (Zelger and Oberprantacher, 2002; Zelger et al., 2011).

## RESUMEN

El intercambio de conocimientos es un proceso que acarrea dificultades, en particular cuando se trata de contextos organizacionales de carácter estacional, los cuales se distinguen por pautas de actividades periódicas y repetitivas. Ante la falta de información sobre la puesta en común de conocimientos en las publicaciones existentes, los autores estudiaron este proceso basándose en el caso de una organización estacional arquetípica, el Colorado Music Festival (CMF), un evento de música clásica. Los festivales se caracterizan por un número limitado de personal que trabaja todo el año y que debe crear y almacenar conocimientos relevantes y el personal estacional que debe obtener y utilizar tal información con rapidez y de manera eficaz. Los resultados que obtuvieron los autores al analizar el contenido de las entrevistas con los varios grupos organizativos muestran que las estructuras informales y flexibles constituyen un enfoque promisorio para el intercambio de información con el personal nuevo y temporario. Depende esto sin embargo del nivel de participación de los miembros del personal en cuanto a su compromiso, implicación, responsabilidad y antigüedad. En la documentación sobre las “Comunidades de Prácticas” se analizan las maneras informales de divulgar los conocimientos. El uso sistemático de dichas estrategias podría propiciar la organización del intercambio de conocimientos en contextos estacionales tales como los festivales.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Organizaciones estacionales, festivales de música, gestión de los conocimientos, comunidades de prácticas, estudio de caso.



TABLE 1

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS (N = 22)	
Characteristics	n
Male	9
Female	13
Permanent staff	6
Board of trustees	6
Seasonal/volunteers	10
Newcomers	5
Old-timers	17
Permanent staff/newcomer	1
Permanent staff/old-timer	5
Board of trustees/newcomer	1
Board of trustees/old-timer	5
Seasonal/volunteers/newcomer	3
Seasonal/volunteers/newcomer	7

### The Setting: The Colorado Music Festival

The CMF was founded by Giora Bernstein in 1976 as a classical music festival located in Boulder, Colorado. It was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization. At the time of the study, the CMF had generated an operating surplus for four years running. This financial stability distinguishes the CMF from a range of other arts festivals. Every summer, musicians from all over the world come together and perform at the Chautauqua Auditorium. The audience is composed mainly of local residents but also includes tourists, both domestic and international. The CMF features six weeks of concerts from June to August. The CMF Chamber Orchestra and the CMF Festival Orchestra perform four concerts every week during this period. In addition, there are the Young People's Concert at the beginning of the season and a variety of Educational and Outreach Programs throughout the six weeks. The organization consists of a year-round staff of six (executive director; assistant executive director; marketing director; development director; orchestra personnel manager; and ticketing and data manager), which during the festival inflates to include a four-person production crew, a sound engineer, a house manager, an intern and an 80-person orchestra. Employees are loyal and tend to return the following year, with most people having a tenure of two to four years. The organizing team is supported by the board of trustees (where 35 committed volunteers work

on different committees together with one of the staff directors), as well as the Friends of CMF (a group of volunteers who provide fundraising and service support throughout the year, but especially during the festival season). An overview of interviewee positions and characteristics can be found in Table 1. The interviewees included the six permanent employees, six members of the board of trustees, and ten people drawn from among the seasonal staff and volunteers. As a result, all groups – from the intern, to an incoming volunteer, to the executive director of the organization – are covered.

The recruitment of staff depends on the needs of each new project and is based mainly on the competencies of the applicants as well as their degree of self-motivation with respect to the highly challenging job requirements. Newly hired staff receive training, coaching and relevant information in terms of task descriptions and annual schedules. However, most of the learning takes place on the job, since tasks that arise during the festival season are difficult to anticipate and to describe to new staff members. Tasks have to be handled as they turn up, and on a daily basis. This situation can be challenging, demanding and exhausting for those newcomers who lack experience in festival organization.

We now present the results of our empirical study of the CMF. Where applicable, we provide quotes from the interviews, to elucidate the context in which the concept is being discussed.



## Results

The interview data reveal four distinct groups of employees (see Figure 1). The employees differ regarding their type of involvement with the CMF, responsibilities, commitment and seniority, and they therefore engage in CMF activities with different degrees of intensity (or at different levels of participation [Lave and Wenger, 1991]). In the inner circle, all dimensions and thus levels of participation are very high whereas in the outer circles they become lower. (1) The *core group* forms the heart of the festival. It comprises the year-round staff and the executive director. (2) Members of the *active group* are very much involved in the festival (e.g., they attend meetings regularly), although to a lesser degree than members of the core group, and include the board of trustees. (3) The *peripheral group* comprises the majority of participants (musicians, volunteers, seasonal staff,

donors and sponsors), who do not take part regularly. (4) Members of the *outsider group* are beyond these three levels of participation. These stakeholders do not belong to the CMF as an organization, but they have a specific interest in its activities and programs – for example, as concertgoers and workshop participants.

It is important to mention that members of the CMF can, over time, make a transition from one group to another. For example, the previous executive director now sits on the board of trustees; he moved from the core group out towards the periphery (into the active group).

This configuration has an impact on the knowledge sharing behaviour of the employees. The core and active groups hold most of the festival’s knowledge. Hence, it is their duty to share their knowledge and to find solutions to problems that can be expected to arise. Newcomers often listen to conversations between old-timers, thus learning how to act within the CMF and what is important for them to know in order to perform their tasks well. However, newcomers/outsiders are also valuable to the CMF, as they add another perspective to the festival and bring different insights to particular issues, drawing on their experience working with

other (festival) organizations. An outsider perspective can also be valuable for a more objective and critical evaluation of, for example, the festival’s program or its marketing materials. It should be noted that the temporal aspect of group membership impacts on knowledge sharing. Whether a new organizational member starts in January and has months to become familiar with the organization or starts in May just as the season is about to begin will make a big difference as concerns planning and opportunities for knowledge sharing.

### Knowledge Sharing Across and Within Groups

Knowledge sharing at the CMF takes place within the same group and across groups. The latter is one of the goals at the CMF. We now present the major findings of the content analysis, which are summarized in Figure 2.

Knowledge sharing across groups is enhanced through *meetings*, but also through *debriefing and evaluation* after the close of the season. As one peripheral newcomer stated: *Knowledge management: Oh, yes. I would say in the staff meetings . . . specifically they sit and every person says, “I’m doing this and this, this week. I’m working on an*

FIGURE 1

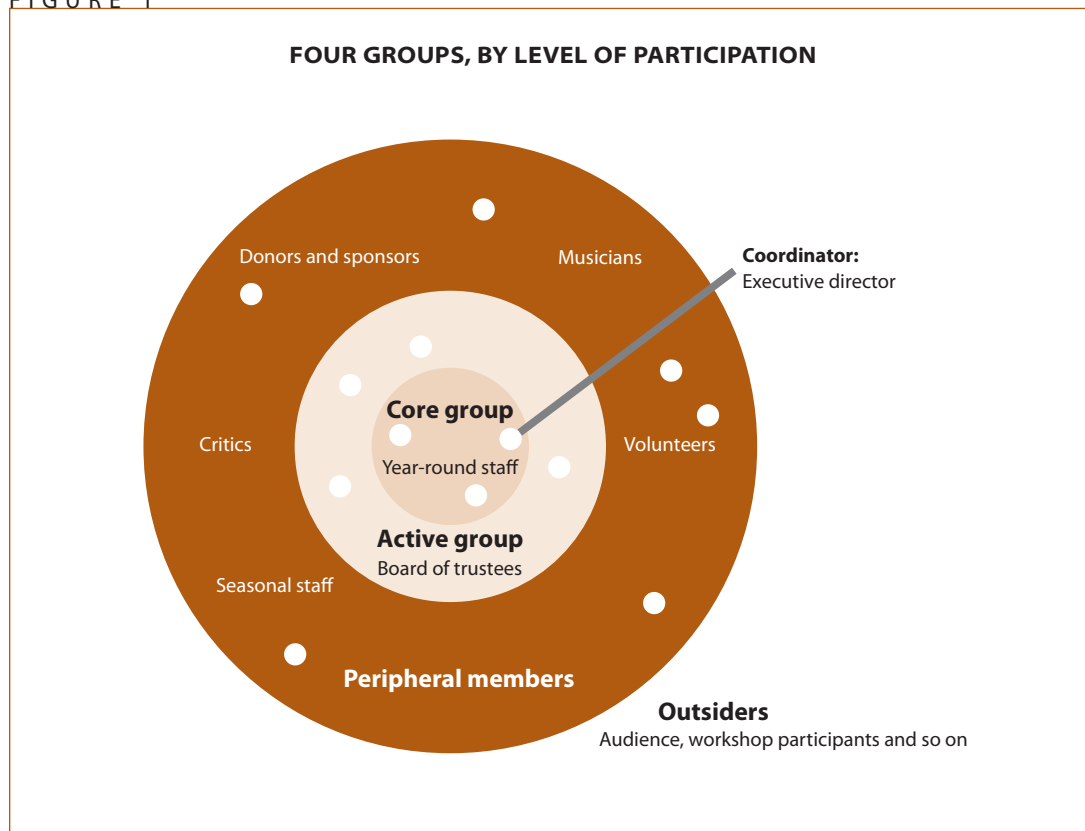
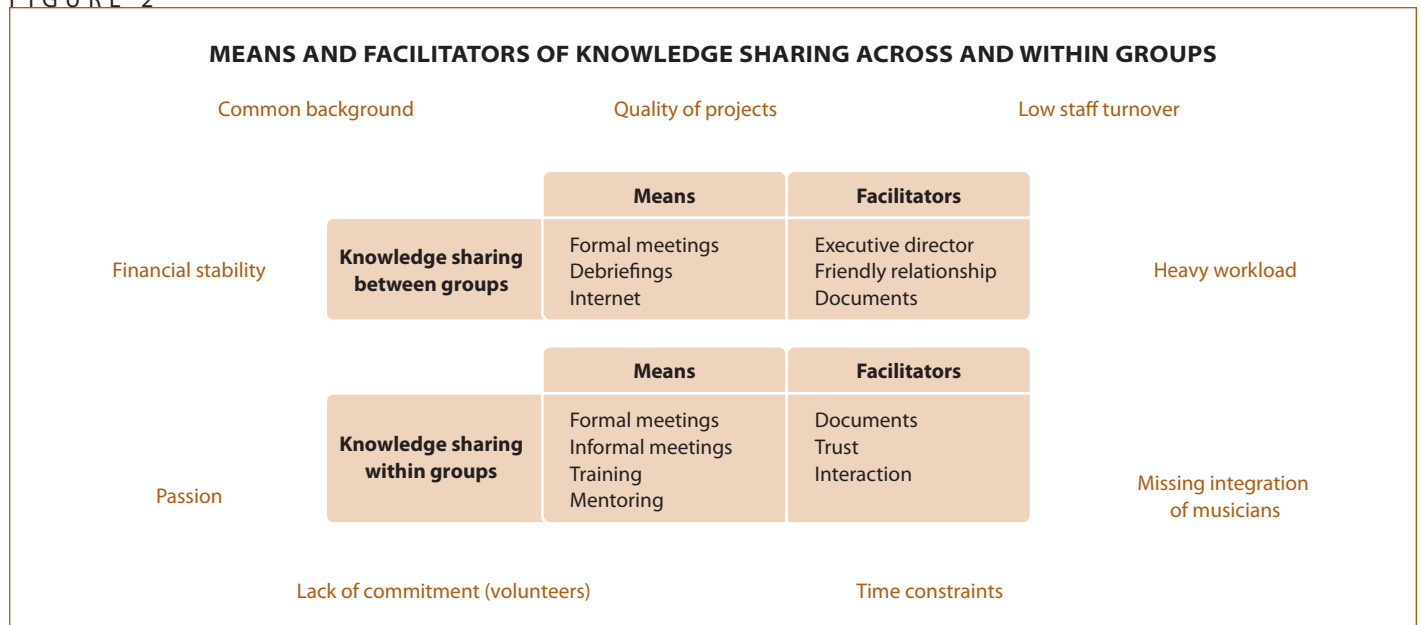


FIGURE 2



event, so I'm doing this, this and this and I need this kind of help." Returning employees and volunteers incorporate knowledge about processes as well as successes and failures that they can share.

Problems resulting from the spatial and temporal dispersion of organizational members are solved through the adoption of the *Internet* as a means of providing information to various community members – for example, in the form of documents, schedules and manuals. One core group newcomer said, *One . . . way [that] knowledge is managed for the organization is through our Web site. As long as it's updated and people are keeping information on there, it's a place [where] anyone in the organization can go to find information that customers might need to know or that we need to know for our own work. So, that's one key place.* Peripheral members also benefit from information packages: *Well, the people at the Colorado Music Festival were kind enough to provide myself and my staff with packets of information – little blurbs [such as] "This is the star or guest performer, this is the guest conductor . . . and these are the [musical] pieces." And it was kind of nice to learn about it that way.*

The core value of *integration* strongly influences knowledge sharing. Interestingly, there is a limited amount of integration, especially within the group of musicians. Most of the musicians are present only for rehearsals and concerts and do not wish to be more involved: *I think orchestras want to . . . have this integration with staff, but to be honest I think it's hard. . . . They want to show up, do the job, go on home.* (peripheral group)

The most important single factor in the process of knowledge sharing across groups is the *executive director*. Many interviewees mentioned her as being indispensable in bringing everyone together and encouraging knowledge sharing. *A key person? Well, certainly the executive director is a key person, because . . . they are required to wear so many different hats and there's so much backup. So, if she didn't know or couldn't figure out how to do all the things that need to get done, there isn't anybody that's going to pick it up.* (active group, old-timer)

It is interesting to observe that knowledge sharing across the groups is achieved mostly through formal *communication* rather than through participation in the community. For example, a musician may decide not to participate in the very first concert of the season because of other obligations and thus not be able to interact directly with other participants. Nevertheless, by using the information package and communication opportunities provided via the Internet, he/she will be able to gain knowledge about the organization and special characteristics or events of the season before joining the team. One core group old-timer stated, *The way I have to communicate with her is mostly [via] e-mail . . . whereas if they were sitting 10 feet away you could just go over and ask. . . . it's a little challenging. . . . but I think it's important for marketing and development in an organization like this to work really closely and [to] know what's going on.*

Knowledge sharing behaviour within each group follows the same patterns but includes



additional means of communication. The most important means of knowledge sharing is *meetings*, which are opportunities to ask questions, learn the organizational narratives and receive or provide feedback. One member of the active group stated, *Generally, there are ways to get information; you just have to keep asking.*

Furthermore, training and the mentoring process enhance within-group communication, involvement and knowledge sharing. *They've developed a mentoring program, where you have a specific board member who's supposed to answer your questions and make sure you get integrated into the organization. That didn't exist when I joined. You just kind of sat [it] out and learned over time.* (active group, old-timer) The *interaction* between group members further enhances their knowledge sharing behaviour.

In order to share explicit knowledge, respondents work with *documented knowledge* in the form of e-mails, the Web site, schedules and information packets. For the musicians, knowledge is disseminated mostly through these information packets, which are sent out in advance. The packets contain copious information about the upcoming season as well as the organization in general; they provide the musicians with whatever they need to know whenever and wherever they want. The festival's Web site has become an indispensable information tool. As one member of the core group said, *As long as it's updated and people are keeping information on there, it's a place [where] anyone in the organization can go to find information that customers might need to know or that we need to know for our own work.*

Concerning facilitating and hindering factors for knowledge sharing, the interviews reveal that the festival's management and the atmosphere are considered enablers, as friendly relationships lead to a high level of *trust*, which facilitates the asking of questions and the giving of feedback. In addition, the *financial stability* of the festival and the *high quality* of the projects positively influence the work situation. The *low staff turnover* relative to other festivals facilitates knowledge sharing because the employees know each other. Furthermore, the shared *passion* of most employees and their *shared background* help newcomers to make friends easily. Factors inhibiting the sharing of knowledge are the *heavy workload*, which does not leave much time to show newcomers what they need to know, and the *lack of commitment of some volunteers*. One member of the active group said, *We do have . . . coming together where there is shared information in the*

*cottage with the staff. It's just . . . there's too little time and too much to do*, indicating that *time constraints* are an inhibiting factor for sharing knowledge. The duration of the festival is only six weeks. Therefore, the time for sharing knowledge and information across different groups is perceived and experienced as extremely limited. Furthermore, the *formation of cliques* of longer-serving employees inhibits the sharing of knowledge with newcomers, because established groups have internalized much of their knowledge and do not wish to discuss every detail again.

When asked for recommended areas of improvement, the interviewees said that more knowledge should be documented so that it can be more easily shared, and that the documentation should include general knowledge regarding procedures and strategies as well as lessons learned. They stated that CMF procedures ought to be covered in the Employee Handbook, which was being developed at the time of the interviews – whereas the Bluebook of the board of trustees contained general information about the festival, including organizational structure and bylaws. The documented lessons learned could be expected to ensure preservation of present strengths and weaknesses for the following year. Although many employees return to the CMF year after year, an evaluation of each season was considered important. Furthermore, the interviews reveal a desire for more meetings at regular intervals, especially meetings that would include newcomers, for the purpose of both sharing knowledge and developing a commitment to the CMF.



## Discussion

The objective of this study was to achieve a better understanding of how seasonal company characteristics affect knowledge sharing processes and how seasonal organizations deal with knowledge sharing challenges. Therefore, we studied knowledge sharing activities in a festival organization, which is characterized by seasonal changes as well as high levels of expert- and project-based work. We found that the organization of knowledge sharing in such a setting does not resemble traditional knowledge management initiatives, although the means of knowledge sharing are the same. Traditional knowledge sharing systems comprise structured channels for knowledge flows, with clearly assigned responsibilities, timelines and communication tools. However, as the entire staff

of the festival we studied, the CMF, meets only once a year for a limited period, and as there is no time during the season to teach newcomers, newcomers have problems acquiring relevant knowledge. It is clear, therefore, that the CMF does not incorporate formal ways of knowledge sharing but relies instead on flexible and informal activities.

Informal ways of learning and knowledge sharing are described in the research literature on CoPs (Brown and Duguid, 1998; Elkjær, 2003; Gherardi, 2005; Swan, Scarbrough and Robertson, 2002; Wenger and Snyder, 2000). CoPs are defined as consisting “of a tightly knit group of members engaged in a shared practice who know each other and work together, typically meet face-to-face and continually negotiate, communicate and coordinate with each other directly” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 98). CoPs differ considerably from other organizational groups, as they define their own purpose, select their own members, are intrinsically motivated to work towards their self-selected aims and last as long as there is interest (Wenger and Snyder, 2000). Furthermore, they are informal by definition and are not easy to detect within organizations (Brown and Duguid, 2001; Lave and Wenger, 1991). While obviously not a CoP, the CMF has used its structure (“structured informality”; Pan and Leidner, 2003) to organize knowledge sharing in a seasonally changing setting. Unconsciously, the CMF could be taking advantage of the characteristics of CoPs: Its employees exhibit the same background (i.e., follow the same practices) and show a high level of passion and commitment. Thus, they share an identity and a sense of belonging to the group (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Müller, Kaar and Renzl, 2008; Storck and Hill, 2000; Wenger and Snyder, 2000). This facilitates the development of a shared language that all members understand and that enables them to communicate by means of shared narratives, codes and knowledge.

Another feature that the CMF has unconsciously taken from CoPs is the concept of participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In CoPs, different levels of participation can be found, which implies that CoPs do not necessarily consist of equal members: Usually the founding members of the group have a special interest in advancing the group and put a lot of effort into its activities. Others join later and devote a limited amount of time to the group, and therefore remain at the periphery. Thus CoPs are characterized by different groups, depending on their members’ level of participation (from core group

to peripheral group). The concept of legitimate peripheral participation, by which CoPs are further described (Lave and Wenger, 1991), acknowledges that this distinction in level of participation is not stable. It is through participation that newcomers become part of the community. They start from an outside perspective – from the periphery – and through the process of learning from old-timers become more and more aligned with the practices of the community (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The CMF was found to organize knowledge sharing according to different groups, based on their level of participation. Depending on the duration and frequency of their employment, as well as their level of responsibility, commitment and involvement, the CMF staff can be divided into four subgroups. The *core group*, comprising the year-round staff, responsible for daily operations, is the driving force of the festival, holding most of the knowledge. The board of trustees forms the *active group*, responsible for governing the entire organization, including the development of a vision and strategy. The majority of the employees are musicians, volunteers and other seasonal staff; they belong to the *peripheral group* due to their temporary engagement with the festival. The *outsider group* (e.g., concertgoers, local community) also provides valuable input for the CMF. Interestingly, in contrast with the concept of legitimate peripheral participation, which exhibits movement towards the core only, in the CMF some members have moved to the outside (e.g., from the position of executive director to the board of trustees) and thus decreased their level of participation.

In CoPs, the levels of participation are used for learning purposes: Newcomers receive knowledge from experienced members, whereas core members can benefit from new ideas expressed from the periphery (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Use of different groups for different knowledge sharing strategies has not been found. At the CMF, the differentiation between different levels of participation enables members to concentrate on the two types of knowledge sharing activity – within-group and across-group – separately. Knowledge sharing within a group with the same level of participation incorporates formal and informal means of communication, such as formal meetings and informal gatherings and ad hoc get-togethers. Members of the same group focus on personalized knowledge that is passed on via direct communication (“personalization strategy”; Hansen, Nohria and Tierney, 1999, p. 107). Furthermore, it is the responsibility of each group to educate newcomers, such as by organizing training and mentoring systems

whereby newcomers “shadow” experienced members. In contrast, knowledge flow across groups takes a codification approach (Hansen, Nohria and Tierney, 1999), in which explicit knowledge is stored in documents and files to be shared in formal meetings or via the Internet.

Aside from the finding that two different approaches to knowledge sharing are used within groups and across groups, and that each process warrants individual focus, our results suggest further areas for improvement. Knowledge sharing activities should not be limited to a particular period – that is, when staff members physically come together once a year. The interviews revealed that an adequate information technology infrastructure would enhance the sharing of knowledge outside the season, when the staff are dispersed. In order to be used successfully, information and communication technologies (ICT) must be adapted to how knowledge is shared in an organization (Swan and Galliers, 1996). At the CMF, employees might be supported by ICT solutions (e.g., databases, yellow pages, online forum, social Web applications) that are based on the specific need for knowledge sharing within groups and across groups with different levels of participation (Müller, Kaar and Renzl, 2008; Müller et al., 2011).



## Implications

In seasonally changing organizational settings, knowledge sharing cannot conform to restrictive structures, as suggested in the traditional knowledge management literature, which focuses on stable company characteristics that require a strategy of either personalization or codification (Hansen, Nohria and Tierney, 1999). Furthermore, distinguishing between formal and informal ways of disseminating knowledge, as the CoP literature does, might be too short-sighted for organizations that operate in seasonal settings, such as festivals.

We investigated one organization belonging to a single arts genre at one point in time. This example could shed light on knowledge sharing processes in the context of seasonality. The management of the CMF took the existence of different groups within their organization as the starting point for employing different knowledge sharing strategies. Across-group knowledge sharing followed a formalized system, with

regular meetings, protocols and documents. Within-group knowledge sharing was more personalized and informal, and was aimed at providing learning opportunities for newcomers to the group. Our results highlight the importance of regular and explicit structures such as institutionalized meetings and reporting procedures, in addition to the informal, casual information-exchange and knowledge sharing processes that seem to occur as natural phenomena. The formal structures enable organizations to share knowledge efficiently and to increase and accelerate the integration of newcomers and members of the peripheral group; this is particularly important during increases in staff turnover and shifts in the relation between keepers of knowledge and newcomers. In the end, management should adopt a long-term orientation rather than rely on short-term problem-solving, while maintaining the level of flexibility needed for the creation of exceptional and singular productions and events. The challenge for seasonal organizations is to create and sustain a “knowledge-enterprising culture and community” (Pan and Scarbrough, 1999, p. 66) through a culture of openness, focusing on members’ common background and their orientation towards a common goal.

The Colorado Music Festival has enjoyed successful long-term leadership, financial stability and 35 years of attracting musicians and audiences from all over the world. However, these characteristics are not unique, and the CMF faces challenges that are very similar to those confronting other festivals. Therefore, other festival organizations may learn from the experiences of the CMF as a role model. Furthermore, the organizational characteristics of arts festivals as project-based expert organizations involving a high degree of commitment and intrinsic motivation, as well as short-term collaboration and dominance by one or more leaders, indicate that the findings can be useful for a wide range of project-based and expert-based organizations. Project-based organizations feature clear time and budget frames and responsibilities and allow for spatially and temporally flexible work, frequently on a virtual basis. Expert-based organizations allow for flat hierarchies, as members are used to concentrating on their own tasks and working independently. Taking different levels of participation into consideration when designing an organization’s (combination of) knowledge sharing system(s) may be advantageous for the effective dissemination of knowledge within the organization.



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