# UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

**Breaking Down Silos: How Nonprofit Organizations Can Maximize Mission Impact Through Interdepartmental Collaboration**

by

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Capstone Research Report Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the

Master of Nonprofit Administration Degree

in the School of Management

directed by Dr. Marco Tavanti

San Francisco, California

Summer 2018

# Executive Summary

Knowledge sharing across organizational departments is recognized as a competitive advantage and strategic asset in for-profit and public institutions thanks to its ability to efficiently and effectively source institutional knowledge as needed, yet nonprofit organizations (NPOs) often struggle to apply their limited resources to researching and implementing new methods aimed at improving efficiencies. This report identifies storytelling as a critical practice with the potential for maximizing mission impact through effective and efficient collaboration. For the purposes of this paper, *collaboration* is defined as *knowledge sharing*, and the recommendations presented herein focus on knowledge sharing among staff within an organization (rather than external partnerships). Research has shown that leaders play a critical role in creating an environment in which trust, respect and inclusion prevail, which I argue are the cornerstones for establishing a knowledge sharing organization. Along with the adoption of simple practices to increase interactions among organizational members, I propose a communication model, the Interdepartmental Knowledge Sharing Pyramid (Figure 6), to visually demonstrate the ways in which organizational members may participate in an open communication system whereby knowledge is shared freely by and among teams.

**Keywords**: collaboration, knowledge sharing, Transactive Memory System (TMS), trust, storytelling, leadership, network mapping, silo.

# Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my cohort for their patience, kindness and collaborative spirit throughout this past year. I learned so much from each person, for which I am eternally grateful.

To Stephanie McNally, thank you for being my thought-partner throughout this project. Please know that I'm here for you when it's your turn to slay the capstone dragon.

Thank you to my professors for exposing me to resources, opportunities and alternative perspectives. You made my brain hurt in the best possible way.

To Dr. Tavanti, thank you for providing the space to allow me to think about what kind of leader I want to be, and for helping me recognize the kind of leader I already am.

To Louise Carroll, thank you for pushing me beyond what I thought I could handle. Your confidence in my ability to succeed has helped me to realize my potential. Thank you for that.

Thank you to my family for cheering me on along the way. I needed it.

And to my love, Dave: thank you for always believing in me and for supporting me throughout this journey. Tu as mon cœur toujours. Je t'aime mucko mucko.

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# Section 1. Introduction

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are notorious for lacking sufficient resources needed to achieve their missions and goals, yet organizations throughout the sector survive, and often thrive, by adopting creative practices designed to circumvent these challenges. Extensive literature exists focused on the importance of an employee's trust in leadership, and what steps leaders can take to encourage more effective and efficient teamwork through knowledge sharing; despite this, there is a paucity of literature aimed at answering *how* organizational leaders can build trust, develop mechanisms to efficiently retrieve institutional knowledge, or strategically foster knowledge sharing across teams. The recommendations featured in this paper aim to offer concrete suggestions for NPO executives and leaders to improve knowledge sharing through storytelling among individuals and across teams, with the ultimate goal of maximizing organizational mission impact with minimal resource allocation.

The data collected throughout this paper is derived from five expert interviews and available literature focused on trust, knowledge sharing and organizational networks, which have provided empirical insights and valuable contributions to the topic of interdepartmental collaboration. This paper's strength lies in its ability to offer concrete solutions for *how* nonprofit leaders can improve interdepartmental collaboration and *why* this form of knowledge sharing places organizations at a strategic advantage compared to their competition.

The literature review focuses on three main topics: trust, knowledge sharing and organizational networks. Structured interview questions were focused on interdepartmental knowledge sharing practices and the role of leadership, as well as the integrative management system of Lean Six Sigma. Additional data included non-academic resources, including podcast conversations, professional magazine articles and books focused on social and organizational psychology.

# Section 2: Literature Review

In discussing interdepartmental knowledge sharing, it is crucial to first focus on what factors are necessary for organizational staff to connect, share knowledge, and work together toward a common mission. Communication among staff is an obvious requirement, but what kinds of information are shared, how it is shared, and who it is shared by require further investigation. For my research, academic resources were divided into three main categories: Trust, Knowledge Sharing, and Organizational Networks.

# The Foundation of Trust

As evidenced throughout the literature, the most valuable asset for knowledge sharing and collaboration is trust. Levin and Cross (2004) referenced Mayer et al. (1995) to define trust as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable" (p.1478). In trusting relationships, there exists a level of vulnerability among all parties, including within professional environments. As a result, any offering of mutual assurance, such as that which is derived through trust, can help mitigate the effects of any perceived vulnerability among individuals (Kramer, 2010). For Kramer (2010), collective trust exists within organizations when enough elements are present to reassure members; these elements may include rules, roles, historical instances in which individuals have proven their trustworthiness, or third-party individuals who have previously established trust with others.

Within professional settings, multiple types of trust exist, including benevolence-based trust and competence-based trust, and each influences the type of information being shared, be it tacit or explicit (Cross, Ehrlich, Dawson & Helferich, 2008; Levin & Cross, 2004). Tacit knowledge includes beliefs, insights and personal intuitions; it is the type of information that usually cannot be easily articulated or researched. Explicit knowledge, by contrast, consists of information that can be codified, verified and researched. When benevolence-based trust exists among individuals, people feel comfortable admitting their lack of knowledge, thereby allowing themselves to become vulnerable without fearing damage to their self-esteem or reputation within the workplace (Cross et al., 2008). Knowledge seekers who trust the benevolence of an information source establish organizational environments that are beneficial for learning. In general, benevolence-based trust is more likely to exist among strong ties and is effective for sharing both tacit and explicit information (Cross et al., 2008; Levin & Cross, 2004). Competence-based trust exists when individuals are provided an opportunity to prove their knowledge capacity and accuracy, thereby resulting in confidence from others that they are trustworthy knowledge sources. Unlike benevolence-based trust, competence-based trust is not dependent on close relationships, yet it can more strongly influence the actions of knowledge recipients. Individuals who receive information from colleagues whose competence they trust "are more likely to listen to, absorb, and take action on that knowledge" (Levin & Cross, 2004, p. 1480). Although not as important for sharing explicit knowledge, competence-based trust is critical for sharing tacit knowledge.

In addition to benevolence-based and competence-based trust, there also exist various forms of collective trust specific to professional organizations, including *rule-based trust* and *role-based trust* (Kramer, 2010). *Rule-based trust* relies on a system of formal and informal understandings that determine how individuals interact within an organization in order to carry out the mission (Argote and Guo (2016) describe these "rules" as

"routines"). These learned behaviors encompass a set of normative or institutionalized expectations of one's own, or another's, range of acceptable or anticipated actions. According to Kramer (2010), one of the benefits of *rule-based trust* is that "by institutionalizing trust (and trustworthiness) through rule-based practices at the macro-organizational level, trust becomes internalized at the micro-organizational (individual) level. In this fashion, rule-based trust becomes a potent form of 'expectational asset' that facilitates more spontaneous cooperation among organizational members" (p. 89).

*Role-based trust* is a depersonalized form of trust that is attached to an organizational role rather than an individual. This form of trust relies on confidence in a system of expertise that dictates that (1) access to the role is exclusively held for the most qualified individual; (2) the training and socialization processes reserved for the role are adequate and effective; and (3) there exist accountability mechanisms that would prevent an ineffective individual from carrying out the assigned duties (Kramer, 2010). Directors or executive-level positions are examples of those typically valued through *role-based trust*.

Fortunately for NPO leaders, trust in others is not exclusively reserved for those who share close interpersonal relationships. Levin and Cross (2004) acknowledged that "strong ties lead to greater knowledge exchange" (p. 1479), yet there are instances when weak ties may be as effective for sharing organizational information. As trust between individuals naturally leads to increased knowledge sharing, weak ties help prevent the distribution of redundant information and may allow the information shared to remain professional in nature. Although strong ties between individuals are more advantageous for organizational effectiveness, NPO leaders should not feel discouraged if their organizational networks are weak so long as communication occurs and there are opportunities for trust to be established among individuals (Kramer, 2010; Levin & Cross, 2004). NPO leaders should, however, aspire to earn the trust of organizational employees, as Kramer (2010) explains:

> Trust in leaders had a significant relationship to a variety of important outcomes, including constituents' commitment to a leader's decisions, their commitment to the organization itself, reductions in reported intentions to turnover jobs, enhanced job performance and satisfaction, and increased levels of organizational citizenship behaviors. (p. 91)

When leaders signal that they trust others within the organization and they value, and themselves practice, knowledge sharing with others, organizational staff are more likely to imitate those behaviors. As George Lucas (who once ran eight companies simultaneously) has said, "trust starts at the top and trickles down" (Kramer, 2010, p. 91).

Trust within organizations has a cyclical relationship with knowledge sharing: the more trust that exists within an organizational community, the more likely organizational

members are to share knowledge, and the more they share knowledge, the more they trust one another (Kramer, 2010).

## Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is the process by which individuals communicate new or existing information to one another through various means. The goal of knowledge sharing is to benefit the organization's work and mission advancement, preferably through intradepartmental and interdepartmental collaborations. Organizational cultures that promote trust among members benefit from increased knowledge sharing and comprehension among staff, decreased costs related to knowledge exchange practices, more innovation through creative problem solving, fewer errors, and increased efficiency of time and other resources (Argote & Guo, 2016; Cockrell, Robinson & Stone 2013; Cross et al., 2008; Cross, Gray, Cunningham, Showers & Thomas, 2010). Organizational culture is defined as a pattern of shared values, assumptions, beliefs and social behaviors that help individuals navigate and understand the multilayered functions, social constructs and processes within an organization (Gyrd-Jones, Helm & Munk, 2013; Schneider, 1987). Innovation is described by Argote and Guo (2016) as the combination of new, or recombination of existing, knowledge in novel ways. In addition to the benefit of innovation, trust can lead to the establishment of *transactive memory systems* among various organizational members, which results from increased knowledge sharing among staff.

Originally introduced in 1986 by Daniel Wegner, *transactive memory systems* (TMS) are "a shared system for encoding, storing, and retrieving information" (Wegner, Erber & Raymond, 1991, p.923). Among organizational staff members, TMS is a mechanism for learning and storing information about who knows what, who is skilled at what, and who is passionate about what (Gladwell, 2000); this knowledge about others goes beyond an individual's role or professional title. In order to develop transactive memories between individuals, people must first communicate and find ways to update one another with new information. TMS are initially established using superficial stereotyping, followed by self-disclosure of the knowledge that each individual possesses, and they are finally further developed by an individual's knowledge of the other person's access to information (for example, when the other person initially accessed the information, where they accessed it from, how long they've had access to it, and how current the information is). When individuals know, for example, that another person has accessed new information first, has possessed the information for a longer period of time, or has received it more recently, individuals assume the other person knows more about the subject than they do themselves. This competence-based trust in another's knowledge bank allows individuals to become closer, thereby developing their TMS directories further; the more frequently individuals communicate, the more often they are able to update the information within their TMS directories

(Wegner et al., 1991). As TMS directories grow and develop, the individuals among whom the information has been shared begin to act as "external memory aids" (Wegner et al., 1991) for one another; within organizations, this allows more unique individuals to hold institutional knowledge, thereby reducing the reliance on a select few people to retain such information.

Among its benefits, TMS also allows leaders to better match tasks to individuals based on their skillset or interests, which has generally been found to result in better team performance (Argote & Guo, 2016). Several authors have contended that TMS and the knowledge sharing process afford organizations an advantage over their competition because shared knowledge acts to propel organizations to become more efficient, which leads to increased innovation when compared with organizations where knowledge is not often shared (Argote & Guo, 2016; Bloice & Burnett, 2016; Cockrell et al., 2013; Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013). As Argote and Guo (2016) explained, TMS have four properties that result in a competitive advantage for organizations: (1) TMS are derived from experiences among staff; (2) they depend on organizational members and as such are distinctive to the organization; (3) TMS is inherently derived from the individuals within an organization and thus have evolved to fit its unique context, which makes it hard to transfer to different contexts; and (4) TMS are hard for competitors to imitate because they consist of tacit and explicit knowledge specific to the organization within which they exist.

TMS is established through several means, including when individuals train or learn together; when certain affinities or social networks are identified (particularly uncommon commonalities, like a rare personality type); when interdependence among individuals exists; when people communicate in any form; or when individuals aspire to reach a common goal (Argote & Guo, 2016; Wegner et al., 1991). For NPO leaders, the common goal for all staff to aspire to could be the organizational mission. Fortunately for NPO leaders, research has shown that "internal motivation is the key factor driving knowledge-sharing willingness and behavior in NPO staff" (Liu & Fang, 2010, p.757). In fact, extrinsic motivators such as rewards (money, recognition, special treatment) had no direct influence on an individual's willingness to share knowledge; when organizational staff individually possess an altruistic character or mindset, they are more likely to engage in knowledge sharing behaviors with others (Liu & Fang, 2010).

**Knowledge Sharing Barriers**

There are several potential barriers to knowledge sharing, and subsequently the establishment of TMS, among organizational staff. It is important for NPO leaders to be aware of these barriers so that proper steps may be taken to improve internal knowledge sharing habits. A partial list of knowledge sharing barriers from Bloice and Burnett (2016) and Riege (2005 & 2007) appears below:

- Poor social interaction and a lack of social network among staff

- Poor organizational culture and structure (this includes ill-defined roles or policies)

- Technological issues, such as a reluctance to use new systems or a lack of investment in adequate knowledge-capturing systems

- Lack of commitment to the organization and generally poor citizenship

- Lack of trust among organizational members and/or leadership

- Priority conflicts among departments and individuals

- Staff turnover

- Lack of safe formal and/or informal spaces to share, reflect and generate new knowledge among organizational members

- Information and communication is one-sided (i.e., top-down)

- Insufficient investment in retaining high-value employees

- Failure of leadership to communicate the value and importance of knowledge sharing.

Despite the potential for knowledge sharing barriers to exist within organizations, NPO leaders who are able to identify high-performing individuals and teams are better positioned to accurately map internal network connections for maximum effectiveness and strategic efficiency. High-performing individuals tend to be those who regularly inspire highly skilled employees to bring their best every day; they tend to stay with their companies longer, thereby retaining institutional knowledge within the organization and keeping turnover costs down; and they are more likely to be trusted by their peers (Cross et al., 2010). NPO leaders are encouraged to identify these high-performing individuals to assist with establishing a TMS network. Once high-performing, strategically networked individuals are identified, leaders may consider recruiting them to act as network liaisons with the specific task of strengthening existing, and establishing new, connections among teams. This is particularly valuable when socializing new staff.

Organizational socialization is described as the ways in which newcomers are introduced to the attitudes, beliefs, values, knowledge and skills necessary to succeed as a member of an organization (Gruman, Saks & Zweig, 2006). If newcomers are introduced to a culture actively engaged in interdepartmental knowledge sharing, they will be more likely to participate in this practice during their tenure; if, in contrast, a knowledge sharing culture does not exist prior to their introduction to the organization, newcomers may be discouraged from proactively sharing information with colleagues. Newcomers will also benefit from the feeling of inclusivity with a particular group (either a specific team or the larger organization). Shore et al. (2011) argued that, "individuals attribute positive characteristics to other members of their in-groups and display in-group

favoritism. The loyalty, cooperation, and trustworthiness among group members function to enhance the security of individual members" (p. 1264). In order to positively influence newcomers, existing staff and leadership should strive to establish an organizational culture and a shared superordinate social identity that values and participates in active inclusion and knowledge sharing across departments (Argote & Guo, 2016; Gruman et al., 2006). Ultimately, the establishment of a functional knowledge sharing culture comes from the extent of trust and safety that employees feel toward one another, leadership and the larger organization (Cockrell et al., 2013; Kramer, 2010).

## Organizational Networks

Despite its various benefits, TMS is not established without effort: it requires trust, inclusion, and frequent communication between individuals so that regular updates to knowledge directories may occur. Within a professional setting, opportunities exist for NPO leaders to foster the establishment of and frequent updates to an organizational TMS. Cross et al. (2008 & 2010) put forth the recommendation for organizations to establish mapped networks to assist with identifying TMS connections. The intention behind mapping these networks is to help highlight where processes have stalled and where inefficiencies exist so that they may be remedied. In addition, network maps that are color-coded by staff competency can ensure established teams have sufficient expertise for an assigned project. For example, if a project requires financial report literacy, managers and organizational leaders will want to ensure that an individual with that skill has been selected to participate in the project. Organizational leaders may also use mapped TMS networks for the following purposes (Cross et al., 2008; Cross et al., 2010):

- To establish one's organization more competitively, using strong knowledge management practices as a strategic advantage

- To ensure that diversity of skills exist within the organization and on project teams

- To make sure collaborations and interdepartmental engagements are effective and efficient

- To identify those individuals most connected to and trusted by other staff

- To allow leaders to learn about and trust staff expertise and abilities

- To identify gaps and improve connectivity among staff in targeted ways

- To more easily detect peripherally connected or disengaged staff who are likely to leave or become less productive

- To similarly identify high-performing individuals and teams to learn more about how they successfully collaborate and connect.

Informally mapped TMS networks naturally exist within organizations with established employees, and research has shown that the loss or introduction of one staff member can impact the effectiveness of a TMS network (Argote & Guo, 2016; Bloice & Burnett, 2016; Cross et al., 2008). Organizations, however, are not static entities; individuals enter and leave organizations regularly, which thus causes the organizational culture to adjust (either slightly or significantly) with each addition and loss (Argote & Guo, 2016). While NPO leaders will need to proactively manage the culture among existing employees, they will also need to be cognizant of the socialization practices imparted upon incoming staff: how newcomers are selected and initiated into the existing culture can affect their overall socialization and adjustment to the organization's established environment.

NPO leaders should note that while TMS network mapping is strongly recommended for improving efficiencies and effectiveness by identifying individuals, their skills and strengths, this recommendation should not be mistaken for advice concerning how organizational structures or hierarchies should be designed or established. In fact, Schneider (1987) reminded his readers that there does not exist one "best structure" for all organizations: "we need to know much more about the kinds of people in whole organizations prior to reaching conclusions about a best structure" (p. 447). He further proposed that positive job attitudes should be anticipated when processes and structures are able to evolve with the organizational staff, based on their natural inclinations. In addition to Schneider's insights, Argote and Guo (2016) proposed that leaders should consider thinking of TMS network maps as "skeletal divisions of labor to which members could be assigned" (p. 75) in order to further foster TMS network mapping. In this case, tasks could be assigned to individuals based on their existing skill set and interests, which will have been communicated to others within the TMS network.

As with almost any system, mapped TMS networks are not without their risks. To start, TMS networks are strongly impacted by staff transitions into and out of organizations. With each addition or loss of a staff member, the network is required to reset, thereby disrupting the previously existing status quo among organizational members (Argote & Guo, 2016; Cross et al., 2008; Schneider, 1987). Along with attrition, "morale, overwork, internal competition, and other factors largely driven by leadership can also negatively impact people's ability or willingness to connect with others in the support of organizational objectives" (Cross et al., 2008, p. 82).

In order to foster an organizational culture dedicated to interdepartmental knowledge sharing, it is imperative that organizational leaders focus on the overall well-being of staff and the development of natural TMS networks that are derived from genuine relationship building and open communication between individuals. Ultimately, it is

through the establishment of trust, TMS and knowledge sharing practices that organizations can most efficiently and effectively achieve maximum mission impact.

## Section 3: Data Collection Methods and Approaches

The data were collected through standard participatory action research practices. Secondary data were collected through available literature (both peer-reviewed and non-academic publications), which focused on three main topic areas: trust, knowledge sharing, and organizational development practices aimed at fostering interdepartmental collaboration. Secondary data research through the literature was not exclusive to the nonprofit sector, though nonprofit hospitals and educational institutions were excluded due to their unique status within the sector. Primary data were collected through five semi-structured expert interviews featuring questions based on established theories of integrative management and a set of hypotheses structured from personal experience and research.

Expert interviews focused on two main topics: (1) interdepartmental knowledge sharing within NPOs, and (2) the integrative management approach of Lean Six Sigma. Appendix A lists the structured interview questions for each interview topic. The responses provided qualitative information concerning interdepartmental knowledge sharing throughout the various sectors, with special emphasis on those challenges and opportunities that exist for NPO executives to consider.

A total of five expert interviews were conducted over a period of four weeks. One of the individuals who was interviewed had previously collaborated with me on a project; one individual is a colleague in the USF MNA program (with the part-time cohort graduating in May 2019); one individual had been a presenter in the MNA Finance and Accountability course offered during the Spring semester; and two individuals had been introduced through a third party. Two interviews were conducted in person at the interviewee's place of business; two interviews were conducted over the phone; and one interview was conducted using Zoom video.

Appendix B contains a list of the interviewees' names, professional titles, organization affiliation, and professional sector. One interviewee requested complete anonymity, therefore this individual's name and organization have been anonymized, though the individual's professional title and sector affiliation have remained for reference purposes. Of the individuals interviewed for this research, four are current NPO employees and one works within the public sector; all five individuals have, at one point or another, worked in the nonprofit sector. The interviewees hold senior management or director-level positions within their organizations.

Interviewees were invited via email messages, which outlined the intentions of the research and the project's working title. Calendar invitations were used to secure the meeting dates and times, though there were several reschedules required for one interviewee. Interviewees were selected for their professional expertise across all three sectors, with particular emphasis on each individual's professional experience in the nonprofit sector.

All interviews were recorded using Voice Memos for iPhone, and all recordings were transcribed into Microsoft OneNote by the author. Where indicated, supporting text is comprised of direct quotes derived from the recorded interviews.

The interviews that focused solely on interdepartmental knowledge sharing consisted of a total of 13 structured interview questions; interviews focused on Lean Six Sigma consisted of 10 structured questions. The length of the recorded discussions varied from 30 minutes to 105 minutes, depending on the availability of the interviewee.

Any questions or misunderstandings were clarified with the interviewees verbally and/or through follow-up email communication.

Several hypotheses based on personal experience and initial research influenced the structured interview questions listed in Appendix A. The hypotheses are formally written as follows:

**Hypothesis 1.** For-profit and public sector institutions, significantly more so than nonprofit sector organizations, have invested more money and time researching how organizational staff may better collaborate and share knowledge.

**Hypothesis 2.** Without the commitment of NPO leaders, organizational cultures will never fully adopt the practice of interdepartmental knowledge sharing.

**Hypothesis 3.** For interdepartmental knowledge sharing to be established and grow, there must minimally exist equal parts trust, respect and inclusion among organizational staff.

## Section 4. Data Analysis

## The Tone from The Top: Organizational Culture and Leadership Responsibility

Within each interview, my hypotheses were shared with the following results: 100% of the interviewees agreed with hypotheses one and three; 80% of the interviewees agreed with hypothesis 2 without reservation. Although he did not reject the core

argument behind hypothesis 2, Bill Coy of Omidyar Fellows challenged the assertion that one individual inhabits the role of *leader*. Bill encouraged me to consider the *adaptive leadership* approach, which avers that leadership is an activity rather than a role held by an individual. With *adaptive leadership*, individuals assigned to any role have the power and capability to influence and engage NPO members. Thus, Bill affirmed his support (with reservation) of my original hypothesis by stating, "so, when you say, 'leadership has got to be on board,' yes; and, '*everyone leads*' (personal communication, June 14, 2018).

**Credibility, Vulnerability and Culture**

Organizational leaders have, undeniably, multiple obligations for which they are responsible, including budget adherence, maintaining mission focus, and ensuring incoming money, employee operations and partnerships each flow properly. In addition to each of these responsibilities, NPO executives are also responsible for establishing the tone for the culture and accepted behaviors within the organization. As stated by John Gardner (cited in Kouzes and Posner, 1990), "leadership is won when people believe that the leader is capable of meeting their needs." In *The Credibility Factor*, Kouzes and Posner (1990) reported their research findings which showed employees tend to admire four key traits in leaders: (1) honesty; (2) competence; (3) the ability to look ahead; and (4) the ability to inspire others. When leaders demonstrate their credibility, organizational members are more likely to trust them, thus setting the tone for the organization's culture. Kouzes and Posner (1990) wrote that, "the abilities to challenge, inspire, enable and encourage must be demonstrated if leaders are to be viewed as capable." In addition, trust expert Cecily Cooper (University of Miami) affirmed that "both character and competence are equally important in the workplace" in order to build trust (Work Life with Adam Grant podcast, March 28, 2018).

According to the author of *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups*, the leader should be the first person demonstrating vulnerability, and they should do so most often: "Group cooperation is created by small, frequently repeated moments of vulnerability. Of these, none is more powerful than the moment when a leader signals their vulnerability" (Coyle, 2018). When organizational leaders ask staff for help, they stimulate oxytocin production in others, which increases the levels of trust, generosity, compassion and cooperation among staff (Zak, 2017; Zak, 2013). For retired NASA astronaut Catherine "Cady" Coleman, vulnerability is necessary before people can truly work together: "In order for collaboration to really happen, somebody has to be brave. Somebody has to be open, and almost all of us have to be both" (Work Life with Adam Grant podcast, March 28, 2018). Through demonstrating one's vulnerability, leaders build credibility with their staff by being honest about where they struggle while trusting others to step in.

In her piece titled *How Leaders Can Strengthen Their Organizational Culture*, Cortes Culwell (2018) reminded readers of the following:

> Leaders and staff come to work in the social sector because they are motivated by our missions and want to help make the world a better place. Working in a culture that is toxic or anything short of high-functioning is simply misaligned with what motivates them, and it ultimately undermines high performance.

The author further asserted that cultures are strengthened when organizational staff, especially its leaders, are held accountable to not only accomplish their work, but to do so responsibly and in alignment with the organizational mission and values (Cortes Culwell, 2018). To that end, she proposed that staff and board members codify the organization's values and acceptable cultural behaviors, which echoed the recommendations of Schneider (1987) to engage staff in the creation and establishment of policies and procedures. When staff are asked to contribute to the formation of organizational policies and procedures, they are able to more formally interact with and influence the culture within which they work. In fact, "positive job attitudes for workers in an organization can be expected when the natural inclinations of the persons there are allowed to be reflected in their behaviors by the kinds of processes and structures that have evolved there" (Schneider, 1987, p. 450). When organizations are responsive to the evolving attitudes and behaviors of staff, they are more likely to retain dedicated employees, thus placing themselves at a strategic advantage as compared to peer organizations (Argote & Guo, 2016; Bloice & Burnett, 2016; Cockrell et al., 2013; Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013).

## Trust, Team Dysfunctions and Solutions from the Field

Since the establishment of teams is critical for creating a culture where knowledge sharing naturally occurs, it is important for leaders to be familiar with some of the barriers that may exist to establishing these connected networks within an organization. In *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, the following five symptoms were identified as barriers to healthy team structures: (1) absence of trust; (2) fear of conflict; (3) lack of commitment; (4) avoidance of accountability; and (5) inattention to results (Lencioni, 2002). For Bill Coy, a lack of trust impedes the ability of organizational members to be effective in their work. As my anonymous interview source recommended, organizations struggling with knowledge sharing may want to consider focusing more on programs that "aim to build trust, that deal with power dynamics, that help build a culture of innovation, and that help on a more collaborative basis" (personal communication, June 20, 2018).

When an organization's culture lacks trust, toxicity is free to breed, which wreaks havoc on innovation and effectiveness. Employees who distrust their leaders to hold others accountable, communicate strategic organizational plans, or effectively guide the organization are more likely to gossip, hoard knowledge, and create unnecessary drama

and distraction from the organizational mission and work (Brearley, 2017; Curnow-Chavez, 2018).

For some organizations, specific programs help steer members away from toxic behaviors by reaffirming trusting connections between employees and leaders. In my interview with Parin Shah of APEN, the practice of trusting one another to foster collaboration was extensively discussed. Working with an organization called Generative Somatics (http://www.generativesomatics.org), which teaches individuals to connect with one another and their organization more holistically, the staff at APEN collaborate by trusting one another and sharing a common practice:

> Generative Somatics works with organizations to help them find their full potential. To us, that means collaborating and having trust with each other. [Generative Somatics] is a common practice within the organization that we do together, and we do with our teams, and that language associated with it is something that we lean on together; it's like the common vernacular for the organization. (Parin Shah, personal communication, June 1, 2018)

Bill Coy, who trains leaders across all three sectors, advocates focusing on individual strengths, vulnerabilities and triggers. He pushes leaders to ask, "what are the triggers that get people actively and helpfully engaged, and what are the triggers that put people within an organization into the death spiral of territoriality and defensiveness?" (personal communication, June 14, 2018). Through learning more about one another's triggers and vulnerabilities, leaders are better able to understand the behaviors and motivations of members, which can help strengthen the focus on the organizational mission. Leaders are reminded that close relationships between individuals are not necessary for vulnerabilities and trust to be shared. For Cady Coleman, "when the mission is clearly so much more important than the way you feel about each other, then you make the team work" (Work Life with Adam Grant podcast, March 28, 2018).

### Trust, Respect & Inclusion: The Cornerstones of Knowledge Sharing

> "At the center of organizational culture must be a fundamental commitment to value and respect all people, inside and outside our organizations." - Alexa Cortes Culwell, 2018

Research has shown that trust is critical for creating and sustaining a culture where knowledge sharing between individuals and across departments occurs. There are a variety of benefits associated with the establishment of a trusting culture, including increased productivity, better collaboration among coworkers, longer tenure and more energy among staff (Zak, 2017). As a precursor to trust, individuals first make themselves vulnerable to the judgements of others. As Daniel Coyle shared on the Work Life with Adam Grant podcast, "you do not build trust in order to be vulnerable. When

you're vulnerable, it builds trust. Being vulnerable together builds closeness and creates it" (March 28, 2018).

Although not always the case, the establishment of trust between professionals often leads to the development of respect. Along with trust and communication, respect in its most basic form among organizational staff is critical for effective knowledge sharing within and among teams. For the purposes of this paper, respect is defined as *appreciation for, and value of, another's professional contributions*. This form of professional respect does not require intimacy or closeness among individuals, nor does it demand unequivocal trust in another; yet without respect for others, it is my presumption that effective knowledge sharing cannot occur.

Within a professional setting, a third element is critical for influencing participation in knowledge sharing practices: individuals must feel included in order to fully participate. As cited by Shore et al. (2011), Avery, McKay, Wilson and Volpone (2008) defined *inclusion* as "the extent to which employees believe their organizations engage in efforts to involve all employees in the mission and operation of the organization with respect to their individual talents;" Lirio, Lee, Williams, Hangen and Kossek described *inclusion* as "when individuals feel a sense of belonging, and inclusive behaviors such as eliciting and valuing contributions from all employees are part of the daily life in the organization" (2008, p. 443).

In her work implementing the long-term strategic plan for Canal Alliance, Stephanie McNally recognizes the value of inclusion in building a knowledge sharing culture:

> When you sit in a room with somebody you don't work with every day, but you're both working toward the same goal and you have a conversation, that adds a completely different frame of reference to what you're doing. It's almost more about...just looking through a different lens. (Personal communication, June 11, 2018)

Through trust, respect and inclusion, employees are more likely to report positive organizational support, which will likely result in less staff turnover. When staff feel trusted, respected and included, they are able to become more engaged with and connected to the organization. Hays-Thomas (2017) argued the following:

> Effective socialization leads not only to mastery of tasks, roles, and environmental knowledge, but also to *embeddedness* in a network of social relationships and a sense of *positive organizational support* (POS), that is, feeling that one's contributions and well-being are valued by the organization. Employees who are socially embedded and experience POS should feel more emotional commitment to the organization and be less likely to leave prematurely. (p. 98)

Leaders who view staff as strategic assets, and staff knowledge as a competitive advantage, are more likely to integrate trust, respect and inclusion into the

organizational culture. For Scottish Autism, a social service NPO in the UK, the importance of shared knowledge among organizational members was communicated in their publicly posted annual report: "Knowledge Management is integral to the success of this organisation [sic], and ranks high on our list of priorities. Our collective knowledge is a strategic asset of the business and the principle source of sustainable competitive advantage" (Scottish Autism, 2012, p. 7).

Individuals who feel trusted, respected and included by their colleagues will naturally participate in more thorough knowledge sharing when compared to their counterparts in organizations whose cultures lack these three elements. Figure 1 highlights the interconnectedness of trust, respect and inclusion insofar as they affect knowledge sharing behaviors within organizations. It should be noted that no one element is valued more than another, but rather without all three elements, true knowledge sharing cannot succeed within an organizational setting.

**Figure 1: Knowledge Sharing Requirements**
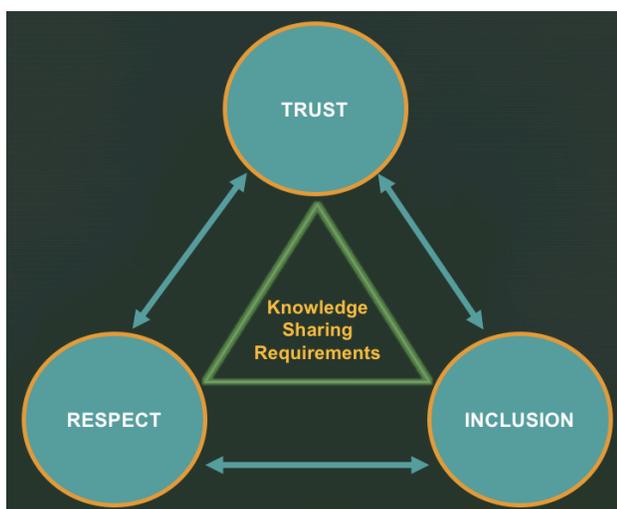


Source: Author's Creation, 2018

Leaders and staff who align with and feel connected to the people, mission and strategic goals of the organization contribute more to the establishment of a brand identity, which can also be leveraged as a strategic asset and competitive advantage when applying for funding, appealing to donors, or recruiting volunteers and staff (Gyrd-Jones et al., 2013). A shared identity and established TMS among organizational members have the potential to increase the feelings of trust, respect and inclusion that are so critical for knowledge sharing to occur.

## Storytelling and Its Role In Knowledge Sharing

Storytelling is the practice of sharing information using stories and narratives. It can be used to communicate tacit or explicit knowledge, as well as the mission, vision, values and history of an organization. NPOs often tell stories to connect to funders and prospective donors, with stories shared on websites, in donation appeal letters, and throughout funder impact reports. As tools for communicating with external audiences, stories have been immensely successful for NPOs in the areas of marketing and fund development; NPOs that implement storytelling practices among staff experience greater knowledge sharing, increased trust and deeper embeddedness, which leads to decreased staff turnover (Hays-Thomas, 2017).

Stories are used to cognitively and emotionally communicate information related to solving problems (Heath & Heath, 2007). They help people learn more about one another by relating experiences from personal and professional histories. Stories have the ability to elicit feelings and physical sensations in listeners, and they use verbal and nonverbal cues to influence feelings and illustrate causal relationships that may have been previously unseen (Heath & Heath, 2007). This helps explain why people wince when listening to stories of other people's accidents or become anxious when listening to a scary story.

When stories are told, they have the effect of stimulating mental activity through "the same modules of the brain that are evoked in real physical activity" (Heath & Heath, 2007, p. 212). This mental activity has the power to "change the way our brains work, and potentially change our brain chemistry" (Zak, 2013). Personal and emotionally engaging stories are better remembered by others because they engage the listener's brain more, making them easier to remember than a set of facts. When people share emotional stories, they engage empathetic neurons in others, thus establishing the foundation for empathy and interpersonal connection. According to Zak (2013), "by knowing someone's story – where they came from, what they do, and who you might know in common – relationships with strangers are formed." For Cady Coleman, storytelling offered her the opportunity to connect with colleagues prior to departing on a mission to the International Space Station in 2011:

> When you're sitting around a table and you're just getting to know each other, there's no question that everyone around that table has something to contribute. And you have to be brave and just say, 'hey, this is what I do; this is what I know.' (Work Life with Adam Grant podcast, March 28, 2018)

By learning about one another, particularly what another individual knows and is experienced in, we are better able to solicit guidance and assistance from them when situations related to their experience arise. Without storytelling, we may not learn about unique skills and passions if they are unrelated to a professional title or role.

The emphasis on connection and trust building is communicated from the leadership team where Parin Shah works at APEN. Prior to starting their work with Generative

Somatics, APEN's leadership team first began the holistic practice before suggesting it to other organizational members (which they offered as an option, not as a mandate). Through their Generative Somatics work, APEN staff connect with one another through brief storytelling practices during team meetings: Parin asks staff to briefly comment on what their "highlight, lowlight or insight" are for the day or week, which can focus on one's personal or professional life (an alternative to this practice is the "one rose, one thorn" approach whereby individuals briefly mention a positive experience – a rose – and a negative experience – a thorn – from the day or week; these can similarly be from personal or professional experiences). In addition, new staff are encouraged to spend at least one hour with each staff member outside of the office to better learn each other's history and interests. For Parin, this practice of sharing among staff members allows him and his staff to better serve their constituents and the organizational mission:

> If I'm fully present for you, then there's a trust that can be fully developed. If it's just about the work, then it's just transactional. If it's about the human relationship, like the professional-personal relationship with the folks that you're working with, *and* the work (the transactional part), then there's a stronger cord. Our values are about people. And if we don't value ourselves as people, then how the hell are we going to value our members and the neighborhoods that we work with or that we're located in? (Personal communication, June 1, 2018)

**Storytelling and Transactive Memory Systems**

Gathering information about others through stories assists in the creation of TMS within organizations. Organizational leaders who value staff as their most important asset recognize that the ability to create a comprehensive communication system is critical for connecting people and their work (Nandy, 2017). Stories offer several benefits for organizational staff: they can communicate tacit and explicit information; they help people remember explicit information more fully; they can provide context to situations that may otherwise be lost; and they can communicate passions and skills that may otherwise be hidden from the professional workplace. The more that staff members learn about the skills and passions their colleagues have, the more they are likely to store that knowledge, which allows both parties access to increased amounts of information (Argote & Guo, 2016; Wegner et al., 1991). Stories told in an organizational setting, especially those centered on professional experiences, allow colleagues to learn how a potential problem could be resolved, particularly when goals and barriers are incorporated into the story. TMS has been shown to result in increased productivity and efficiency among teams, reduced errors, and more creativity and innovation (Argote & Guo, 2016).

Leaders can begin the process of storytelling by sharing the organization's origin story and how they became associated with the organization and its mission. As Cortes

Culwell (2018) remarked, NPO employees are often attracted to an organization's mission and vision, yet individuals may have different reasons for having developed an affinity for the organization. Learning more about who knows what, who is passionate about what, and who is skilled at what contributes to an organization's TMS knowledge repository, thereby strengthening the organization's capacity to innovate and creatively problem solve (Argote & Guo, 2016; Gladwell, 2000; Nandy, 2017). Since storytelling is effective for communicating tacit and explicit information, it can serve to teach new hires about the organizational culture, policies or procedures; stories can also assist with communicating procedural changes with existing employees, who tend to respond more positively when they understand the motivations behind the changes (Schneider, 1987).

## From Storytelling to Network Mapping

As previously discussed, knowledge sharing among organizational members offers individuals the opportunities to be more innovative and to perform more efficiently, particularly when solving problems. Staff who are familiar with the skillsets, histories and interests of others are better able to solicit advice and recommendations from those individuals, thereby further educating themselves on how common problems may be resolved. When staff use storytelling to solicit information from one another, stronger TMS networks are developed and knowledge is better stored. There are several methods available for organizational leaders interested in mapping these internal networks, including the integrative management practice of Lean Six Sigma.

### Lean Six Sigma: A Brief History

Originally established in the 1920s as control charts to map progress at the Bell Telephone Company, a statistician further developed the original process charting to assist Japanese companies as they began rebuilding after World War II. In the 1980s and 1990s, Six Sigma became popularized by companies such as GE and Motorola, and it was further refined when incorporated with lean manufacturing processes. The goals for Lean Six Sigma are to reduce waste (or defects) and improve efficiencies. Six Sigma defines defects as any output not desired by the customer, be it improperly sized parts or excessive wait times to speak with a company associate. Lean practices define waste as any step within a process that does not create value for the customer; an example would be needing to speak with a receptionist prior to hearing phone extension options. Lean Six Sigma aims to both reduce waste and eliminate unnecessary steps in organizational procedures, which are mapped to better visualize each step in a given process (Boslaugh, 2013).

**Lean Six Sigma in Practice: A Tale of Two Perspectives**

Although originally designed for manufacturing companies, Lean Six Sigma has been adopted by large entities within the public sector and is now being introduced to larger NPOs. For Michael Mosby, Director of Business Process Redesign at Tides Foundation and Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt Practitioner, his exposure to Lean Six Sigma began through a former employer while working at a government-owned contractor-operated facility. Prior to earning his Lean Six Sigma practitioner status, Michael had been working in performance management and found an affinity for Lean Six Sigma: "Once I got into [Lean Six Sigma] and got my black belt certification, I knew that I kind of liked doing the work; but then I grew to loving doing that type of work" (personal communication, June 21, 2018).

Now as an employee at a NPO, Michael has found that while the organizational focus of a public or for-profit entity is on the financial bottom line, the NPO focus is on meeting the goals established by the mission statement. To that end, Michael recognized an opportunity to improve the processes within his organization, yet his first step was to break down silos because "processes don't work in silos."

> If you want to improve process performance with an eye on improving outcomes for clients, then you've got to do something about siloed cultures; you just have to. For my journey at Tides, it's been to get folks to (1) understand that concept, and (2) to have a rudimentary understanding of process management and process improvement methodology. They don't have to understand the concepts and tools, but they should understand the methodology and the advantage of having process improvement. The way we do business, it's not an add-on effort; it's just part of the culture and the way we look at what we do. (Michael Mosby, personal communication, June 21, 2018)
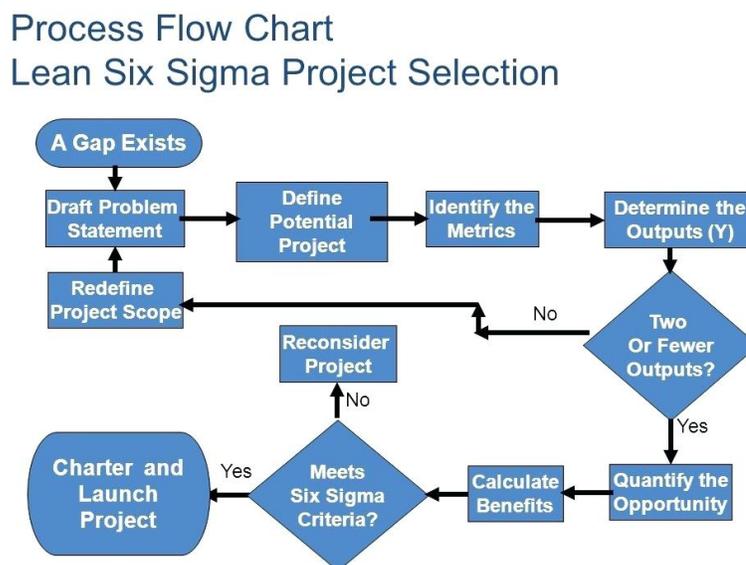
For an alternative perspective on Lean Six Sigma, I interviewed a director from a government entity who wishes to remain anonymous (hereon referred to as Interviewee X, who is not a Lean Six Sigma practitioner). For Interviewee X's organization, Lean Six Sigma was introduced shortly after a new CEO had arrived. Having witnessed the impact of Lean Six Sigma at her previous workplace, Interviewee X's new CEO determined that the program would be particularly helpful for improving processes and procedures that had previously stifled efficiencies and innovation among staff. While not a Lean Six Sigma practitioner herself, Interviewee X's new CEO determined that the best path for the organization would be to hire certified Lean Six Sigma experts to begin embarking on the path to improved efficiencies. Although only introduced to the organization less than two years ago, Interviewee X reported that the program has already improved procedures:

> [Lean Six Sigma] broke status quo, and so if the answer was 'we've always done it this way,' it helped elevate the process to needing to look for improvement. Or if someone said, 'this is an absolutely broken process,' we're fixing broken

processes. We're breaking status quo processes, and it's causing maybe some more cross-departmental conversations and questioning assumptions. It helps us to start thinking about where there are bottlenecks that are keeping things from moving forward quickly or efficiently. And it's also caused us to start putting things in writing. For some people who have been here for a long time, it's like, 'this is how it's done' because that's how they've always done it; if they left, we wouldn't know how to do it. So, it's been helpful to start putting things in writing. (Interviewee X, personal communication, June 20, 2018)

The first step associated with Lean Six Sigma is the process mapping, which identifies each step and the flow associated with a procedure. Similar to a flow chart, process maps visually break down organizational practices for review and analysis (see Figure 2 for a sample process flowchart).

**Figure 2: Process Flow Chart, Lean Six Sigma**



Source: http://freetruth.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/lean-six-sigma-project-selection-flowchart-shapes.jpg

In addition to process flowcharts, there are also deployment flowcharts to identify the unique individuals or departments responsible for the various process steps (see Figure 3 below). The intention behind these flowcharts is to identify where inefficiencies or logjams exist so they may be remedied quickly, regardless of where in the organization they are.

**Figure 3: Lean Six Sigma Sample Swimlane Deployment Chart**



Source:
https://i.pinimg.com/originals/4a/4f/54/4a4f54f2d51b9c1693df94cbded2ded2.png
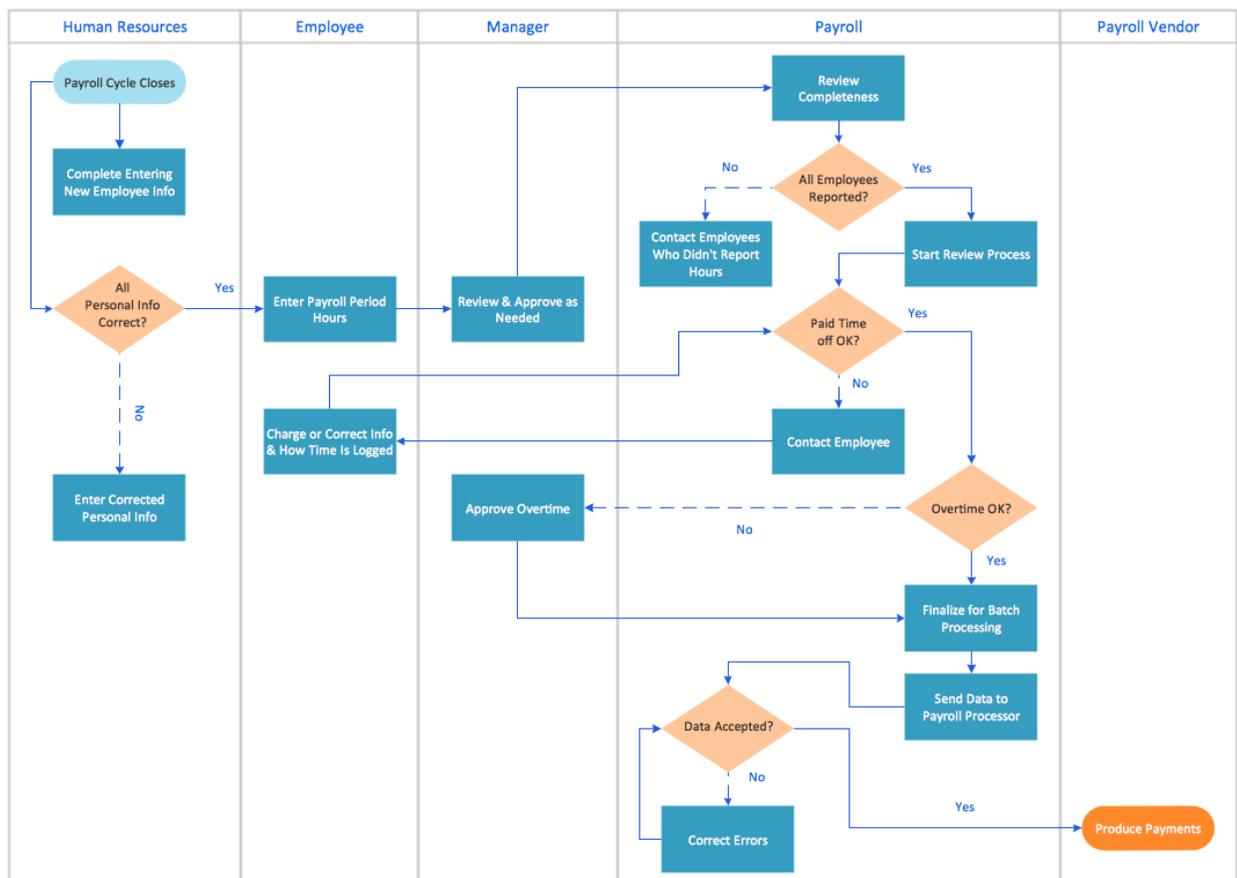
Lean Six Sigma is not without its limitations: for Interviewee X, staff within their organization have found it challenging to integrate the process improvement work into the normal workload; the rigidity of the system can stifle creativity and innovation; and the program itself is not suited for partial implementation (Interviewee X warned, "don't start it at all if you aren't committed to seeing something through to the end…it's hard to dip a toe into this to get a feel of what it's like").

Michael Mosby acknowledges that implementing Lean Six Sigma in the nonprofit sector is uniquely different from his experience with it in the public sector:

> In nonprofits, I've found that I have had to turn up my ability to be empathetic and to be inclusive. One of the things that we've learned is that in this space [nonprofit sector], you need a communications expert. We've had to partner with our communications folks to help us with delivering the message, whether it's training or whether it's some other communication or discovery that we made while working on something. How do we effectively craft that message and attach it to the right audience? *That space* – process folks are not good at, and probably shouldn't try to be. In my experience, we're good at figuring out how to do it, but the details of actually operationalizing it needs to probably interface with someone who has more expertise in that area. (Michael Mosby, personal communication, June 21, 2018)

Each interview subject was asked about the effects of Lean Six Sigma on interdepartmental collaboration; for Michael Mosby, he has found that "process folks" excel at team building, and Interviewee X noted that process mapping can "build empathy within an organization by showing how interconnected people may be in reality, but not recognize it on a day-to-day basis." As a result of the deployment and process flowcharts, organizational staff are better able to visualize the myriad individuals who rely on their steps of the process, thereby implementing a form of accountability for each individual's role.

**Storytelling and Network Mapping**

While integrative management practices such as Lean Six Sigma do not explicitly advocate the practice of storytelling for improved efficiencies, I propose that organizations that promote more storytelling among staff will be better positioned to identify the individuals who are not only responsible for a process step, but who are also best suited for a process role based on their competencies, knowledge and interests. Without storytelling, organizational staff and leaders are insufficiently equipped to properly map staff, thereby minimizing the effectiveness of a detailed network map. Storytelling allows individuals at all levels within an organization to share their passions and unique experiences.

Cross et al. (2008, 2010) detail the benefits of network mapping and its ability to offer organizational leaders the opportunity to quickly identify missing core competencies among team members. Among their intentions for developing mapped networks are to "attain benefits of scale through effective global collaboration; drive work force engagement and performance; align collaborations with business partners and external stakeholders; and, minimize network inefficiencies and costs" (Cross et al., 2010, p. 84). Cross et al. (2008) describe the process of collecting TMS data from staff using internal surveys; organizational leaders are encouraged to cull the received data to create

detailed network maps of all employees, their connections with others in the organization, and the extent to which others turn to them for information or advice.

The authors concluded their assessment of network mapping by asserting that "armed with new knowledge and insights about their teams, leaders can and do take a range of actions that better position their teams to deliver on key goals" (Cross et al., 2008, p. 92). In their 2010 work, Cross et al. recommend that leaders further improve on the network mapping process by identifying a *network liaison* to assist with connecting "high energy coworkers" to peripheral or moderate performers. The authors wrote that, "it benefits leaders to identify these energizers, as they are often the ones who inspire highly skilled knowledge workers to bring their best to the organization each day" (Cross et al., 2010, p. 87). Several models were presented in their 2010 work outlining how peripheral connections could be better connected within teams, and how high performers are connected to others within their teams, yet they failed to offer visual recommendations for connecting teams across departmental lines within an organization, despite their discussion focused on "reducing network silos."

Figure 4 below illustrates what Cross et al. (2010) found when comparing profiles of an original team structure to an improved team structure with peripheral members connected (the red dots represent individuals who are linked to two or three other team members).

**Figure 4: Targeted Efforts to Improve Team Connectivity**
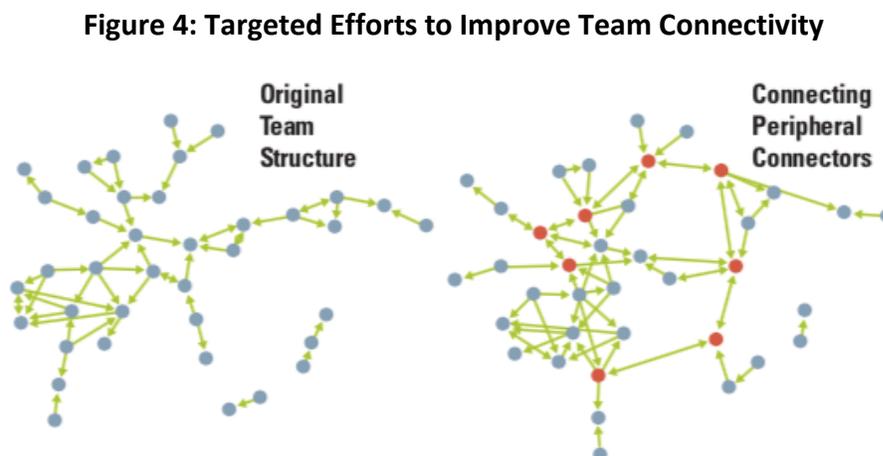


Source: Model from "The Collaborative Organization," by R. Cross, P. Gray, S. Cunningham, M. Showers & R. J. Thomas, 2010, *MIT Sloan Management Review, 51(1),* p. 86.

The authors theorized that the method of mapping shown in Figure 4 would clearly highlight network liaisons to help foster better connectivity between individuals within teams. Unfortunately, this model does not demonstrate how this particular team

connects with other organizational teams, nor do the authors indicate the strength of the assumed connections. An additional flaw of this mapping is that it fails to recognize the power dynamics, ideal network personality types, or external team connections needed to break down larger siloed teams. In addition, there remain several peripherally connected individuals and individuals who are several times removed from the highly linked members, suggesting that this mapping method is not as robust as is needed to truly reduce the existence of silos. Further identification of ideal network liaisons is recommended for maximum effectiveness.

One method for identifying the appropriate network liaisons is to recognize those who Gladwell (2000) refers to as *connectors, mavens* and *salesmen*. *Connectors* are individuals who know many people; they tend to be curious, self-confident, social and energetic. Their networks may not necessarily be strategically designed, but they often know the most number of people within an organization and thus tend to more fluidly interact across teams. *Mavens* have an affinity for collecting knowledge and sharing it with others. They often are socially motivated to share information with people, such as time-saving tips and tricks. *Mavens* enjoy conducting staff trainings, they believe that information should be accessible and available to others, and they take great joy in being able to share explicit and tacit knowledge. *Salesmen* possess the skills to persuade others, particularly when others are unconvinced by what they're hearing. *Salesmen* are critical for sharing "word-of-mouth epidemics" (Gladwell, 2000) and can be particularly beneficial to NPO leaders aspiring to embark on a major organizational culture change (e.g., when establishing a knowledge sharing network). As Bloice and Burnett (2016) note, "if any management model is to be successful, the model must be rooted in the language of the individuals who belong to the organization, and it must be communicated and 'buy-in' by individuals must be achieved at all levels of the organization" (p.129). NPO leaders would be wise to identify and engage their *connectors, mavens* and *salesmen* to assist with cultural change management efforts.

## Activating Network Liaisons

Organizational change is often slow and change management may require several iterations before achieving success or recognizing the need for new change. Once organizational leaders have used survey data to identify their *connectors, mavens* and *salesmen* to serve as network liaisons, it is important to recruit these liaisons to assist with further development of the network map and organizational TMS through storytelling. As has been previously explained, when individuals feel trust towards another, and respected and included by others, they are more likely to share their vulnerabilities; trusted liaisons are best suited to collaborate with organizational staff and leaders to codify the skills and interests of individuals across teams.

Figure 5 below offers a visual representation of how network liaisons may be initially activated within an organization. Within this model lies the assumption that individual

team members are bonded with one another but interdepartmental teams
are not yet bonded with one another, and therefore they reside in unique silos. Using a
hub-and-spoke model, Figure 5 highlights the centrality of network liaisons and their
interconnectedness with other departmental teams. Due to the delicacy of their work,
the network liaisons must operate in a more open communication system, whereby the
flow of information into and out of the central hub is more easily passed (illustrated
here with larger gaps around the hub boundary lines). In contrast, because the siloed
teams are not yet as forthcoming with information, their boundary lines are more
closed, indicating less fluid knowledge sharing into and out of the teams.

(Note: Figures 5 and 6 assume that the average NPO features at least four key
departmental teams: Programs, Operations/Administrative, Finance and Development.)

**Figure 5: Activating Network Liaisons**
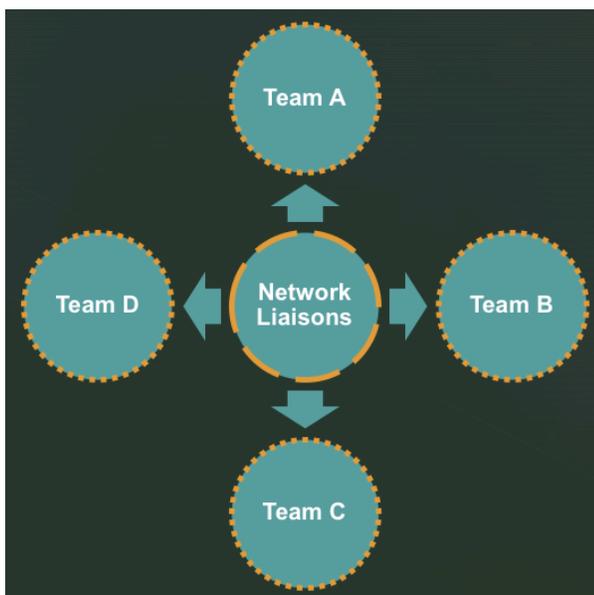


Source: Author's creation, 2018

It is important to note that network liaisons should not be identified by their
organizational role or title, but rather by how they interact with others throughout the
organization. For maximum effectiveness, it is not advised that Human Resource
managers or Executive Directors serve as network liaisons due to their unique roles and
the power dynamics associated with each, yet the support and guidance of Executive
Directors is crucial for the model's success. As such, Executive Directors are encouraged
to hold a ghost-like role in the central hub: they are not activated to serve as network
liaisons, yet they are integral in the network mapping process and thus work closely
with their network liaisons.

Since network liaisons are members of some or all of the siloed teams, they are able to continue to build trust among staff members by demonstrating their own vulnerabilities and sharing their own stories. Over time, it is theorized that team members will recognize the values associated with storytelling in a professional setting and they will begin to expand their team boundary lines while drawing connections with other teams. This model outlines the first step toward developing a more connected organization, which is to formally integrate network liaisons into each of the siloed teams in a concerted effort to break down silo barriers. As Gladwell (2000) learned when researching Gore, a for-profit entity that has effectively broken down departmental silos across multiple locations, "in order to create one contagious movement, you often have to create many small movements first" (p. 192). Integrating network liaisons into siloed groups is that first small movement.

## Section 5: Implications, Limitations and Recommendations

**Implications**

Further studies are needed to analyze the effectiveness of open network systems within NPOs and the long-term impacts of improved knowledge sharing. Future research would benefit from assessing various key performance indicators and culture metrics at a variety of NPOs, including those who self-identify as having open network communication practices and those who aspire to achieve that goal. Appendix C features a list of survey questions organizational leaders may ask staff to better understand how well individuals and teams know one another and how frequently they connect with one another.

Establishing better communication among organizational staff would be beneficial for the sector for a variety of reasons:

- Improved effectiveness and efficiency among NPOs can result in improved results for constituents and stakeholders, which will help community NPOs achieve their mission goals more efficiently.

- NPOs that recognize the value of sharing information internally will likely find value in sharing appropriate information externally. When organizations share their successful methods with partnering organizations, they help other NPOs become more effective and efficient.

- Organizations that establish strong interdepartmental network connections often see a reduction in the turnover of staff, which can result in reduced stress for program participants (particularly in direct service agencies). When program participants recognize stability in the staff to whom they are assigned, they are more likely to form stronger bonds and trust one another more.

- NPOs will be able to reduce employee turnover costs.

- NPOs will be able to more efficiently request funding through grant applications, respond to report requests and fulfill funder demands when they are more comfortably and frequently sharing information.

## Limitations

The most obvious limitations to the organizational modifications described throughout this paper include the following:

- Change management, particularly culture change, takes time. It is a slow process, and it will not be universally accepted among staff.

- Not all staff will want to participate in storytelling, which may create challenges when trying to implement the practice throughout the NPO. It is for this reason that NPO executives and leaders are strongly encouraged to be the first and most frequent to show vulnerability.

- Staff who are opposed to these cultural changes will likely leave. It will be imperative that the hiring managers assigned to fill those roles clearly express to prospective hires the intentions of the organization to embark on this cultural change. Prospective hires will need to be selected based on, among their skills and work history, their willingness to participate fully in a culture of knowledge sharing.

- Organization-wide culture change is required for these knowledge sharing efforts to take hold and to be successful. This must be led by the Executive Director and other leadership staff, with all staff engaged in the process.

## Recommendations

1. NPOs are encouraged to create safe spaces for storytelling within and among teams. The easiest stories to start with are origin stories: what attracted each individual to the organization, and how does the mission align with their personal values? From there, teams may consider encouraging regular storytelling at the start of team meetings through a brief activity such as "highlight, lowlight, insight" or "one rose, one thorn." Through storytelling, teams are better able to establish trust among organizational members, thereby creating a more robust TMS network. Organizational leaders are strongly encouraged to share their stories first and most frequently.

2. Identify network liaisons and build network maps to help illustrate the competencies, skills and interests of organizational members. Network liaisons will be critical for building trust among organizational staff across the various teams.

3. Establish an information repository available to staff that is able to capture explicit knowledge, such as organizational history, company policies, procedures and organizational charts that clearly illustrate roles and hierarchies. This information repository can reside on the organizational website through an employee login portal or on a networked server. It is important that staff have access to this information when they need it.

4. Strive to create a communication model that features open network communication lines between departments (see Figure 6 below). In this model, boundaries are more open, denoting a more fluid and open system for sharing tacit and explicit information within and outside of teams. Each team in the model is linked by double-ended arrows to illustrate the even distribution of knowledge sharing between teams, including with the Executive Director / Board of Directors team. One method for fostering communication between the Board of Directors and organizational staff is to require that board reports be distributed to staff following each board meeting. When staff know where the organization is going, why it is going in that direction, and how it will get there, they are more likely to trust the strategic plans determined by leadership.

**Figure 6: The Interdepartmental Knowledge Sharing Pyramid**
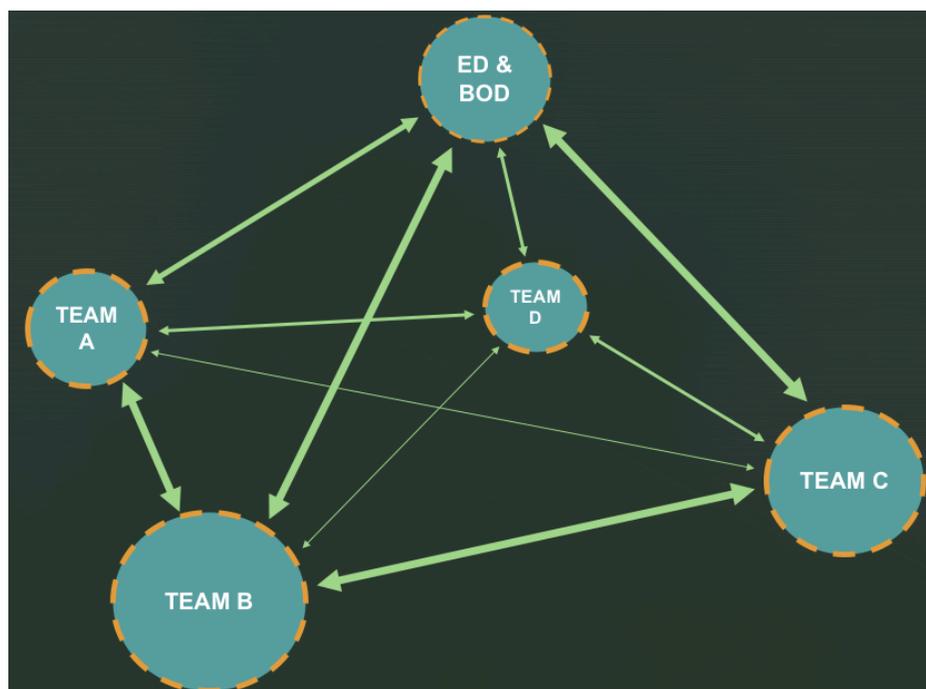
Source: Author's creation, 2018

## Section 6: Conclusions

Storytelling in organizations is not a new practice; in fact, organizations often rely on stories for attracting new donors and employees, and prospective hires begin telling their stories during the interview process, particularly when behavioral interview questions are asked. "Tell me about a time when…" is how most behavioral interview questions begin, and they aim to share information through stories about how individuals have handled challenges in their professional or educational history. Hiring managers have determined that these stories are critical for selecting individuals for professional roles, yet there is immense potential for these storytelling opportunities to proceed after departmental teams have been established.

Breaking down silos requires the integration of several practices: organizational members must feel trusted, respected and included by their colleagues and leadership, therefore leaders should prioritize establishing and growing cultures where these elements thrive; storytelling should be implemented among staff in order to build and develop an organizational TMS network map that aims to teach staff about one another's competencies, interests and skills; network liaisons who are identified as *connectors, mavens* or *salesmen* should be recruited to begin influencing their networked connections throughout the organization to share their knowledge with others; staff competencies, interests and skills may be highlighted to visually display strengths and gaps on project teams; and leaders need to be clearly and frequently

communicating the importance and value of establishing a culture focused on streamlining communication and maximizing mission impact through knowledge sharing. Together, these practices will result in improved effectiveness, increased efficiency, and greater mission impact for NPOs.

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**Appendices**


# Appendix A: Structured Expert Interview Questions


Interview Topic (1): Interdepartmental Knowledge Sharing Within NPOs

1. How does cross-departmental collaboration contribute to an organization's work and/or mission?

2. Who motivates teams to collaborate and share knowledge?

3. Why are staff encouraged to collaborate and work across departments?

4. How frequently do staff turnovers occur?

    a. What impact does that have on an individual team's bond?

    b. What impact does that have on the larger organization's ability to work across departments?

5. What do you think is the most important element or elements needed for collaborations to succeed?

    a. What is the least important?

6. When hiring, how are the values of cross-departmental collaboration communicated to prospective team members?

7. How do individuals contribute to the sharing culture?

8. Does the board of director's role affect the company culture? In what way(s)?

9. Where do you think your organization excels in cross-departmental collaboration? Where do you see opportunities for improvement?

10. How can leaders encourage continued or deepened connections among teams?


Interview Topic (2): Integrative Management with Lean Six Sigma

1. What attracted you and/or your organization to the practice of Lean Six Sigma?

2. What does Lean Six Sigma entail and require from employers?

3. Along with waste reduction, what are Lean Six Sigma's other strengths?

4. What are Lean Six Sigma's limitations?

5. Does Lean Six Sigma operate differently in different sectors? If so, how?

6. What is the time commitment required for starting or implementing Lean Six Sigma into an organization?

7. Are there certain types of people who adopt Lean Six Sigma more readily than others?

8. How does Lean Six Sigma affect knowledge sharing across teams?

9. Why do you think Lean Six Sigma works well, and where do you think it could work better?

10. How would you sell the Lean Six Sigma program to a nonprofit executive?

**Appendix B: Expert Interview Subjects**

| Name | Title | Organization | Current Sector Affiliation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Stephanie McNally | Manager Strategic Initiatives | Canal Alliance | Nonprofit |
| Parin Shah | Senior Strategist | Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) | Nonprofit |
| Bill Coy | Director | Omidyar Fellows | Nonprofit |
| Michael Mosby | Director of Business Process Redesign | Tides Foundation | Nonprofit |
| Anonymous | Director of Learning and Development | Anonymous | Public |

# Appendix C: Sample NPO Culture Survey

<u>Introduction:</u> As we continually look to learn and grow as an organization, we are interested in receiving your feedback about how you as an individual collaborate with others, and how others throughout the organization collaborate with you. Please answer each question; all responses will remain anonymous. This survey is estimated to take +/- 5 minutes. You will have an opportunity to share additional comments at the end of this survey. Your feedback is valuable to us - thank you in advance for your time!

1. I actively participate in meetings with people from my department.

    *Strongly Agree*
    *Agree*
    *Neutral*
    *Disagree*
    *Strongly Disagree*

2. How often does your department formally meet?

    *Once per week*
    *Once every 2 weeks*
    *Monthly*
    *Other (please specify) _____*

3. How many employees are in your department?

    *Please enter the number here: _____*

4. I am comfortable asking people in my department for help.

    *Strongly Agree*
    *Agree*
    *Neutral*
    *Disagree*
    *Strongly Disagree*

5. How many people within your department do you feel comfortable asking for help?

    *Please enter the number here: _____*

6. I actively participate in meetings with people from different departments.

   *Strongly Agree*
   *Agree*
   *Neutral*
   *Disagree*
   *Strongly Disagree*

7. How often does your department formally meet with other departments?

    *Once per week*
   *Once every 2 weeks*
   *Monthly*
   *Other (please specify)*

8. I feel comfortable asking people in other departments for help.

    *Strongly Agree*
   *Agree*
   *Neutral*
   *Disagree*
   *Strongly Disagree*

9. How many people throughout the organization do you feel comfortable asking for help?

   *Please enter the number here: _____*

10. How often do you work with people from other departments (via email, phone calls, meetings, etc.)?

    *0-5 times per week*
    *6-10 times per week*
    *11+ times per week*

11. I know what other people do within the organization (i.e., I know what their job entails).

    *Strongly Agree*
    *Agree*
    *Neutral*

*Disagree*
*Strongly Disagree*

12. The organization is curious about how well staff know each other throughout the organization. Do you what know your peer's skillsets, interests and passions are (skillsets, interests and passions do not need to be directly related to job functions)?

    *Yes*
    *No*
    *Maybe*
    *I Don't Know*

13. If you answered "yes" or "maybe" to the previous question, how many organizational staff member's skillsets, interests, and passions are you familiar with?

    *Please enter the number here: _____*

14. I would like to work with other departments in the organization more often.

    *Strongly Agree*
    *Agree*
    *Neutral*
    *Disagree*
    *Strongly Disagree*

15. Are you familiar with resources available to help you identify individuals and their roles in the organization (e.g., an org chart)?

    *Yes*
    *No*
    *Maybe*
    *I Don't Know*

16. What is your position in the organization? Please choose one.

    Executive Leadership
    Senior Management
    Managing Supervisor
    Associate
    Other (please specify) _____

17. Which department are you currently in? Please choose one.

    Management
    Administrative / Operations
    Finance
    Programs
    Marketing / Communications
    Development
    Other (please specify) _____

18. How long have you been employed with the organization? Please indicate weeks, months or years.

    _____

19. What gender do you identify with? Please choose one.

    Male
    Female
    Other
    Prefer not to answer

20. Do you have any additional comments, suggestions or concerns that you would like to share?

_____
_____
_____

Thank you for taking our survey! We look forward to sharing the organization-wide results shortly.

## Author's Bio

With almost a decade of professional experience in the nonprofit sector focused on special needs housing, Amanda Tompkins has served individuals with HIV/AIDS, cognitive impairments, debilitating injuries, and developmental disabilities. Her strengths include the ability to systematically organize chaos with an eye on long-term planning; empowering others to learn and grow; and maintaining professional integrity while focused on doing the most good. Amanda aspires to continue serving as a thought partner and leader in collaborative environments that are dedicated to improving the lives of others.