



# How to implement a knowledge sharing culture in your organization



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# Overview

For centuries, storytelling, proverbs, and coding of behavior in the form of religious texts enabled civilizations to pass on their knowledge, value systems, and wisdom from generation to generation. But how can you do the same with your organization's values and knowledge to influence employee behavior today?

Employees are an organization's greatest assets. They bring in knowledge and expertise. Encouraging them to share their knowledge, acquire new knowledge, and grow should be at the core of any successful organization. More importantly, when you foster a knowledge sharing culture everyone wins as every employee gets to learn and contribute at a much more rapid pace. However, knowledge sharing is only possible when two conditions are met:

- The company promotes a culture of creativity, collaboration, and open communication. This ensures employees feel encouraged and comfortable to share their knowledge with their peers. At Easygenerator, we call this Employee-generated Learning (EGL).
- The company facilitates a solid knowledge management process to capture and disseminate knowledge. This process allows organizations to create a knowledge base, giving employees direct access to quality learning content.

For companies, knowledge sharing means improved decision making, enhanced employee efficiency and faster upskilling because the organizational knowledge is readily available to all employees. This allows them to learn and practice on the job, without depending on Learning and Development (L&D) to conduct elaborate training sessions.

Generally speaking, knowledge sharing can be done in many ways. Experienced employees may want to organize workshops, deliver presentations, use online digital tools, etc. Additionally informal training content aka knowledge can be shared over email, a companywide intranet, or on e-learning platforms within the organization.

EGL is one of the best models to implement knowledge sharing on an organizational scale. In order for it to be successful, companies should select simple and intuitive e-learning tools. This will enable any employee to create learning content quickly and efficiently based on their experience and expertise – no instructional design background needed.

In this e-book, we'll help corporate managers and L&D professionals mobilize and leverage their internal knowledge with EGL. We'll begin by explaining the basic principles, best practices, challenges and advantages of knowledge sharing along with practical use cases. Later, we'll walk you through some of the proven measures to launch EGL in your own organization and cultivate a knowledge sharing culture.

# Knowledge capturing: Definition and Challenges

Before we dive deeper into the relevance of knowledge capturing for organizations, let’s define some key concepts that will guide our discussion:

**Knowledge:** In an organizational context, knowledge refers to the assimilation of facts, information, understanding, and awareness acquired by an employee through education and practical experience.

**Knowledge Capture:** This is the process of eliciting, codifying, and recording knowledge for later use. This process could include presentations, storytelling, checklists, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), cause-effect insights, correlations, etc. Organizational knowledge can also be captured and codified by extracting insights about essential facts and describing methodologies, advisories and rules, warnings, dangers and problem areas.

## Explicit vs Implicit vs Tacit Knowledge

To further understand the challenges of knowledge capturing and sharing, let’s zoom into the different types of knowledge that you encounter in any organization:

Type	Description
Explicit Knowledge	<p>Explicit knowledge is documented, stored, and shared information. It can act as a resource for others to tap into. This type of knowledge can be more easily codified and laid out as procedures to be followed for implementation.</p> <p>Examples can include company data sheets, white papers, research reports, etc.</p>
Implicit Knowledge	<p>Implicit knowledge arises from the practical application of the recorded/stored explicit knowledge. In other words, when implemented, explicit knowledge becomes implicit knowledge.</p> <p>For instance, the best practices gleaned by an employee from their own experience of applying a documented procedure.</p>
Tacit Knowledge	<p>Tacit knowledge is similar to implicit knowledge but is a lot more experiential know-how that employees gain through their own learnings and reflection. It is rooted in context and hard to express, communicate or transfer.</p> <p>Tacit knowledge can also be perceived as the application of implicit company-specific knowledge.</p> <p>A good example is riding a bike. How can you explain how to ride a bike? Since this knowledge is often in the head of the employee, it is difficult to codify.</p>



# The challenges of capturing tacit knowledge in organizations

Since tacit knowledge is hard to formulate, express, and describe to other people, it can be disseminated only through “learning by doing”. Tacit knowledge is often connected to different experiences acquired at different times and is quite dormant until it gets activated by an idea or a problem. Thus, it can sometimes even be difficult to identify in the first place.

However, just because it’s difficult to transfer tacit knowledge, it doesn’t mean it’s impossible. Indeed, there are many ways to capture and transfer tacit knowledge in organizations. For instance, “know-how” can be transferred through apprenticeship, traineeship, or internship programs. This is routinely done by medical students or cadets who do “rounds” or keep watches with senior staff members. In addition to learning by doing, junior employees can observe, ask questions, get corrected, or even be reprimanded if needed. However, it is not possible to transfer the senior employee’s entire tacit knowledge to others. In addition to the complexity of the process, successfully transferring tacit knowledge is also heavily dependent on the learner as they need to be more involved in the learning process for it to be successful.

Knowledge capture and knowledge sharing are two parts of the same knowledge puzzle with the former leading the way. In the “capture” stage, the knowledge is converted from tacit to explicit form before it is “shared” with the employees.

## Chapter 2

# Knowledge sharing: Definition, benefits, and main challenges

Now that we understand how to capture the different types of organizational, let's discuss the sharing part of knowledge management and understand how you can implement it in the workplace.

As the former CEO of Hewlett-Packard Lew Platt once said: "If HP knew what HP knows, we'd be three times more productive".

Knowledge can be a key competitive advantage for organizations and if applied effectively, can act as a key success factor in businesses.

## What is knowledge sharing?

Knowledge sharing is the exchange of information, expertise, or skills. With the proper tools and management, employees can effectively apply knowledge sharing and leverage each other's expertise. Organizations that transfer knowledge effectively are more productive and more likely to survive than those that don't.

## Case Study:

### How Sodexo implemented a knowledge sharing culture to tackle resource constraints

In fast-paced, competitive industries like food service and facilities management, training employees is a challenge. It's even more of a challenge for a company the size of Sodexo, with over 400,000 employees from more than 130 nationalities. Often, the sheer volume of regional requests left the global L&D team at a loss, and translating materials was an expensive, time-consuming process.

By adopting a knowledge sharing approach that allowed SMEs to capture "just-in-time" content at the regional level, Sodexo was able to address more local training requests. The company is now able to build learning modules 22 times faster than using instructional designers and 42 times cheaper, freeing up resources to add value elsewhere in the company. [Learn more about Sodexo's story.](#)

Knowledge management gives forward-looking organizations a competitive edge. The knowledge shared by employees is based on their own real working experiences, thus making it relevant to the business. Creating an agile and responsive knowledge base with continuous updates keeps the knowledge in tune with actual market conditions. However, the right tools need to be provided for employee-generated knowledge capturing and sharing to sustain itself.

# How to tackle the challenges of knowledge sharing in organizations

Although knowledge sharing can unlock and mobilize an otherwise siloed internal knowledge, it doesn't come without its challenges. These challenges are mostly intrinsic and require organizations to understand the importance of knowledge sharing and facilitate an open, encouraging, and collaborative culture to mitigate the issues early on.

- **Lack of Time**

Employees are experts in their own trade and handle busy schedules to stay on top of important deadlines. As a result, you may find them unwilling to spend their time participating in knowledge-sharing activities in addition to their mainstream work. Therefore, it's up to L&D teams to make it as easy as possible for employees by removing any barriers to knowledge sharing such as complex tools and tedious processes that complicate an otherwise simple process. At the same time, it's important that managers prioritize knowledge sharing and allocate time in their employees' schedules for it. For instance, by scheduling a weekly knowledge sharing session or allowing employees time to create and share their learning content.

- **Lack of Motivation**

Employees might lack the motivation to share their know-how because they may not understand what's in it for them. However, by showcasing the benefits of knowledge sharing (such as its cost-effectiveness, quick scalability, and improved employee relationships), L&D teams can enhance employee buy-in and cultivate a knowledge sharing culture in their organization.

- **Resistance to Change**

If your employees aren't used to taking an active role in your organization's L&D strategy, they may be hesitant to start sharing their knowledge. Additionally, if promoting a knowledge sharing culture means new tasks and responsibilities, employees may resist the impact this may have on their day-to-day routines. The best way for organizations to get everyone onboard is to choose very specific and targeted knowledge sharing goals. Identify important topics for knowledge sharing, encourage employees through recognition, and create a conducive environment for transparent and open communication.

- **Lack of Participation**

Another common issue many companies face when trying to implement a knowledge sharing culture is that their employees don't immediately volunteer to participate and share their knowledge. This generally happens because employees genuinely believe that they are not subject matter experts or feel too busy to contribute to knowledge sharing. In order to boost participation, L&D teams and managers can encourage employees by using internal communication tools to showcase employee-generated learning content and giving them their due recognition.

- **Complicated tools**

Overly complicated e-learning authoring tools with clunky software can put off many employees from creating training content. Fortunately, there are many e-learning tools to choose from nowadays making it easier for you to find one that best fits your organization's needs.

- **Job security anxiety**

In a highly competitive work environment, some experienced employees may hoard knowledge to keep their competitive edge. Making these employees feel valued and appreciated is a good way of getting them to share their knowledge while alleviating their insecurities.



# Why is knowledge sharing important for organizations?

By now, it seems obvious that having employees exchange what they know with each other allows them to work more efficiently. And when your employees have access to everything their colleagues know, there is a great deal of knowledge your entire organization benefits from:



## Save time and money

In the absence of knowledge sharing, both companies and employees can lose valuable opportunities. For instance, when employees aren't encouraged to share their knowledge with their peers, lessons learned won't be coded into SOPs. This means employees will need to constantly "re-invent" the knowledge wheel (i.e. the missing SOP), making them lose precious time and effort. But it's not just employees who miss out: organizations will also lose out on the benefit of having the expertise they had already paid for. More importantly, they could lose the competitive advantage they garnered over the years when employees leave and take their knowledge with them.

Additionally, creating learning content in-house saves companies a lot of time, effort, and money – especially when compared to other forms of training content creation such as third-party vendors or relying on a centralized L&D team.



## Increase employee productivity

The practical knowledge shared by employees is drawn from their own working experiences, making it easy for peers to put it into practice as well. As a result, knowledge sharing helps improve their performance, efficiency, skillset and business know-how, thereby having a direct impact on organizational performance.



## Support employee development and satisfaction

When knowledge is shared with new employees, they learn faster and start contributing to their organization at a more rapid pace. They also gain confidence in their performance at work, thereby improving their job satisfaction. Senior colleagues feel they are respected and looked up to for knowledge dissemination which also improves internal communication and cohesion.



## Reduce employee turnover and the effects of "brain drain"

When experienced employees are encouraged to share their knowledge internally, organizations get to keep the competitive advantage they acquired over the years. On the one hand, a knowledge sharing culture makes employees feel more valued at work, thus improving overall employee retention – meaning your skilled employees are less likely to leave. On the other hand, when organizations do lose experienced employees, they don't need to worry about losing their knowledge as this has continuously been shared within the organization.



## Chapter 3

# How can companies create a knowledge sharing culture?

To capture and share knowledge at an organizational level, companies first need to create a culture that encourages employees to identify knowledge gaps and record their know-how to address them. Companies can do this by fostering a growth mindset and encouraging leaders to facilitate knowledge transfer within their teams. Here are some practical ideas to foster a knowledge sharing culture in your organization:

### 1. Encourage social interaction

Water cooler chats can be an invaluable source of ideas and knowledge exchange. Additionally, employees are more likely to adapt, change, and learn when they interact with one another. So, fostering a company culture where employees are encouraged to interact with each other on a regular basis can help your team learn and acquire knowledge through informal meetings and conversations.

### 2. Lead by example

As a manager, you have a strong influence over your team. Your actions speak louder than your words. That is why it's important for you to not only "tell" your team to share their knowledge but also to "show" them that you are doing it yourself. Often you will be the first person within your team to receive new knowledge (about an upcoming product launch, updates to company policies, or other things). Be transparent about information like this. Share what you know and create an open exchange where your team feels free to approach you and ask questions. This sets the tone for the knowledge sharing culture you are trying to establish.

### 3. Capture employee stories

Stories are powerful ways of capturing cause and effect. They allow us to pass on personal experience that is otherwise difficult to document and standardize. These stories can be captured in one of two ways: informally when socializing at work or more formally by encouraging employees to create learning materials (such as an e-learning course) about their story.

### 4. Incentivize knowledge sharing with rewards

Many people perceive knowledge sharing as inherently rewarding and the prestige of being recognized as an expert is usually enough of a reward. Nonetheless, there is a significant chunk of employees who need tangible incentives to feel encouraged to contribute. Let employees know what's in it for them and make sure to give them credit for the knowledge they share.

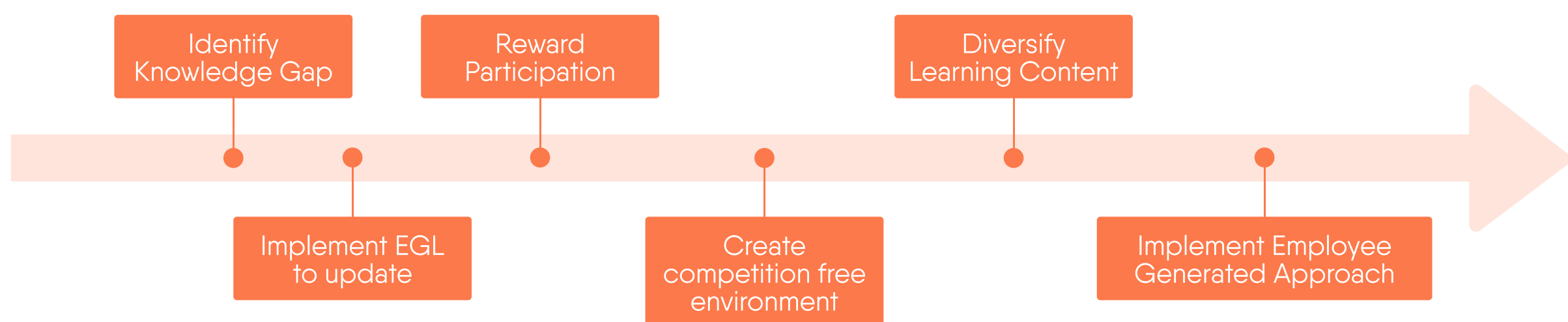
5.

## Lay down the process

Creating a knowledge sharing process starts with identifying the goals of the process, aligning them with the key stakeholders, and planning the supporting infrastructure. This includes selecting the necessary tools, systems, and platforms to facilitate the process as well as planning how knowledge will be captured, reviewed, and distributed.

## Knowledge sharing best practices

Sharing knowledge with learners can lower training costs and improve productivity and is vital for an organization's ability to sustain competitive advantage. In order to reap these benefits, however, you need to keep in mind some best practices when implementing a knowledge sharing culture in your organization:



### ● Share relevant and valuable knowledge by identifying learning gaps

A survey or an opinion poll may be a good starting point to identify knowledge gaps in your organization. And by inviting employees to be part of the gap analysis you'll be able to generate instant buy-in. Once knowledge gaps have been identified, training should be developed to address them. As these training gaps are filled, your L&D team can consider areas where it needs to stretch or expand into. This continuous process ensures that employees can contribute and perform more effectively and efficiently.

### ● Maintain shared knowledge up to date

There is a constant need to keep improving best practices and policies based on your employees' experience and expertise. Employees should have a clear understanding from the get-go of their role in incorporating, modifying and updating corporate operation manuals, policies, SOPs, and other training materials. Selecting a simple-to-use e-learning tool allows organizations to capture knowledge more efficiently, keeping the organizational knowledge up to date. More complex tools can turn employees off to updating the training content they developed.

### ● Reward participation and celebrate achievements

Seeing co-workers getting recognized for their knowledge sharing contributions can encourage many employees to contribute as well. When they are acknowledged in this

way, employees also feel proud of the recognition and a sense of purpose. This is a virtuous cycle and one that should be cultivated by corporate leadership and L&D teams. Nominating colleagues for additional responsibilities, informing others about their contributions, and openly acknowledging them in open forums goes a long way to motivate employees to share their knowledge.

- **Create a competition-free environment**

Competition within an organization can create obstacles for knowledge creation, accumulation, and dissemination. It's important for managers to be aware of these challenges and incorporate what is known as the Toyota Way: to have respect for others and to co-operate with all kinds of people. This type of company culture is essential for knowledge sharing to work effectively. And it can be done in many ways: by creating an environment where no one needs to worry about their shortcomings or future job prospects; implementing work processes that encourage dialogue and teamwork; setting group goals to encourage positive interdependence; and fostering the concept of teamwork to increase shared responsibilities and joint decision making.

- **Diversify the types of learning content**

Learning occurs when experienced individuals make their learnings available to others in an organization in informal meetings (such as the occasional watercooler chat) and formal learning moments facilitated by knowledge management processes. These can include pre-brief and de-brief meetings, knowledge cafes, storytelling circles, peer assists, communities of practice, and town-hall meetings. To support these processes, employees can use different types of training materials such as checklists, videos, podcasts, SOPs, and quizzes to share know-how.



# Implementing an Employee-generated Learning approach for better knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing is a self-reinforcing cycle with knowledge flowing from the employee to the organization and/or to the new employees and then back to the organization once the new employees gain the necessary learning and traction. The cycle repeats itself with new knowledge more aligned with the needs of the market. In this cycle, peer-to-peer sharing is common – we call this Employee-Generated Learning (EGL).

In a traditional setup, L&D drives the learning content creation process with the help of an instructional designer who interviews employees to glean their expertise. Together, they use employees' knowledge to design a course, and then return it to them for review. This process may be repeated a few times before the content is ready to be published, often leading to a significant cost in time and money.

In an EGL approach, employees are empowered and motivated to create their own training content, allowing L&D to speed up the creation process at a much lower cost. To create and maintain learning content with EGL, you will only need a few subject matter experts (SMEs) and iterations before a course is ready to be published.

Thus, the various phases of knowledge sharing such as content capture, transfer and update are seamlessly accommodated in the EGL approach because L&D partners with SMEs to manage the knowledge sharing process in the business.

## Benefits of an EGL approach

If you're looking to promote knowledge sharing in your organization, there are a few benefits to implementing an EGL approach:

1.

### Foster a learning culture

EGL encourages peer learning, cohesion, and cooperation among employees. The constant ying-yang of knowledge exchange between experts and new hires helps update organizational knowledge and promote a corporate learning culture. Additionally, each employee is now responsible for their own learning, growth, and progress. This can lead to a unique competitive advantage in terms of talent acquisition and development for organizations.

2.

### Handle regional requests

L&D teams can leverage EGL by giving regional departments the opportunity to create their own learning solutions and share region-specific knowledge. Instead of needing to turn down training requests, L&D teams can offer a well-supported solution to help fulfill these requests while maintaining their focus on global initiatives.

3.

### Decrease time-to-market

By putting content creation in the hands of employees (the SMEs) courses can be created faster and more effectively. There is no longer the need for extensive exchange with external partners for L&D to share information and knowledge. By limiting these dependencies, training content can be created and shared at a much faster rate. As a result, more content and knowledge is available within your organization.

4.

### Ease L&D budget

With EGL, everything is kept in-house and there is a significantly less dependency on commissioning external vendors, hiring additional L&D team members or buying expensive instructional design tools. EGL can unburden L&D, as the e-learning content can be created internally by SMEs, saving significant costs for the organization.

5.

### Do more with less

L&D can now accomplish more. Once employees are well trained in creating their own content, L&D can take on a more supportive role. Not only does this help to manage workloads more efficiently, but it can also allow for more time to focus on strategic training projects.

## How to implement an Employee-generated Learning approach

Launching any new learning intervention starts with a mindset shift for key stakeholders. As EGL is a bottom-up approach, it is a three-way handshake among business leaders, L&D and employees (the SMEs).

Let's explore the fundamental steps to consider while planning an EGL project within your organization:

1.

### Start small, but be strategic

Identify the training opportunities where employees already have the knowledge to step in and create training content themselves. The best examples often involve situations where employees have identified informal best practices, but these nuggets need to be shared among the wider group of peers. So, be strategic enough to identify the sweet spots that can be easily attainable by your best employees.



#### Pro tip

Start small and show the early success to stakeholders to continue getting their support.

2.

## Identify champions

Within your organization, look for employees who not only have expertise, but also a desire to share their knowledge. Assign them the business problem and motivate them to create training content with positive examples. Encourage them to be confident in their expertise and remind them of the value of sharing knowledge.



### Pro tip

Provide timely feedback and be available to listen to SMEs.

3.

## Equip them with tools and guidance

SMEs don't have time or knowledge to create a structured e-learning course. So be aware that when it comes to training materials, many SMEs may either create subpar content, resist creating anything at all due to complex authoring tools, or instinctively resort to a PowerPoint presentation. Hence, it is vital for L&D to:

- Provide brief guidance on didactic best practices without making it too complex for non-didactic SMEs
- Introduce a seamless knowledge sharing process that is dovetailed into their work
- Offer user-friendly tools.



### Pro tip

Equip your SMEs with zero-learning curve tools to enable easy adoption.

4.

## Be an ally

To support SMEs throughout this process, assign a dedicated L&D professional to develop the necessary educational resources and coach employees on creating meaningful content. For example, this person might provide best practices, use cases, webinars for onboarding, and Q&A sessions.



### Pro tip

Facilitate a light-weight knowledge base with all the help and guidance that takes the least amount of time for SMEs to grasp.

5.

## Publish and Share

Once you have cleared SME-generated content for publishing, it must be easy for them to share it with their colleagues. This is a critical factor for success with EGL. With the help of right tools, you can prevent SMEs from messing with your LMS.



### Pro tip

Create the easiest path to publication and sharing by removing technical and process barriers.



6.

## Recognize their work and make them accountable

By giving due credit and recognizing their work, SMEs will remain inspired to share their know-how and might as well champion the process.



### Pro tip

Appoint an SME to be accountable for maintenance of the training content (owner) and ensure a team of co-authors is available. This allows everyone in the group to share the responsibility—both for getting feedback and for making changes to the content.

# Case study: How Danone embraced a culture of knowledge sharing

## Challenge

Danone is a multinational with over 105,000 employees in 55 countries. The Head of Digital Learning encountered typical L&D challenges such as having a small group of L&D experts, and outsourcing to external vendors which resulted in not-so scalable or delayed solutions. Danone was unable to develop and maintain learning content at the right speed and with the desired flexibility.

## Solution

Danone introduced Employee-generated Learning, meaning that every employee, partner, and supplier can leverage their peers' knowledge wherever they are, whenever they want.

## Outcome

Today, 2 years after implementing Employee-generated Learning, Danone has over 500 authors in more than 30 countries. One of the biggest goals and results Danone has achieved is building a knowledge sharing culture. Now, local teams can produce and maintain content entirely independently.

# The future of knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing as a practice has always existed, but in recent years we've witnessed EdTech vendors accelerating the trend with various platforms and tools developed in the name of the "creator economy" and "user generated content".

When experienced employees are encouraged to share their knowledge internally, organizations are able to retain their competitive edge. This process allows the business knowledge to stay within the organization and ensures it is put to good use. Additionally, employee morale remains high as workers feel valued and can see their actionable contribution to the team and company.

Using a bottom-up, informal, transparent, and egalitarian approach to knowledge creation helps to train and develop your employees more quickly and save considerable angst, time, and cost. Nonetheless, business leaders must create a culture to nurture and facilitate knowledge sharing and focus on fostering the values of teamwork, mutual support, and respect for employees to sustain knowledge sharing over time.

By putting employees at the heart of the learning ecosystem, L&D teams can successfully drive knowledge management with an EGL approach. The benefits outweigh the costs, but L&D professionals must have an open mind and embrace the changing world of learning ecosystems within organizations.