

# **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE AND ACTUAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING IMPLEMENTATION IN FOOD INSPECTION PROGRAMS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to examine the differences between perceived importance and actual Knowledge Sharing implementation in Food Inspection Programs. The study population was food inspectors in all 58 counties of California and the total number of responses was 115. The degree of importance of Knowledge Sharing ranged from 3.89 to 4.73 ( $m = 4.28$ ) while the degree of implementation ranged from 2.72 to 3.75 ( $m = 3.20$ ). The perceived degree of importance was much higher than the degree of implementation ( $p = 0.01$ ) indicating the extent to which KS has actually been implemented in respondents' organizations.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study is to examine the differences between perceived importance and actual Knowledge Sharing [KS] implementation in Food Inspection Programs. Knowledge sharing practices are important in order to leverage knowledge to produce effective outcomes for food inspectors in California. This assumption has been the driving force behind the knowledge management movement in both the private and the public sectors [1]. As of July 1, 2007, the California Retail Food Law (CalCode) replaced the California Uniform Retail Food Facilities Law as the governing legislation for retail food facilities throughout the state of California [2]. With the enactment of CalCode, the County Food Protection Program (part of the Environmental Health Division) is responsible for the enforcement of state and local health codes at all retail food facilities. To enforce the Food Protection Program, it is very critical and essential for food inspectors to be updated with current local and state health codes, FDA recalled food, news of foodborne illness outbreak, new laws. In Wie and Choi's preliminary study [3], the majority of food inspectors agreed that "the knowledge sharing can improve their organizations' overall performance and sustainable competitiveness."

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study population was food inspectors in all 58 counties of California. Fifty-eight directors in the County Environmental Management Department were contacted and nine directors voluntarily agreed to distribute the online survey to their colleagues. Therefore, the exact number of samples invited was not able to be identified and the total number of responses was 115. Demographic information of the respondents was also obtained. Results were summarized using descriptive statistics and paired t-test with Statistical Package for Social Science (Version 21.0, SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL).

## RESULTS

The majority of respondents were women (61%) and an average years working in this field was 14.1 years. The degree of importance held by respondents for all 21 attributes of KS ranged from 3.89 to 4.73 with a group mean rating of 4.28 (5=Very Important, 1=Not Important). The degree of implementation of KS for all attributes ranged from 2.72 to 3.75 with a group mean rating of 3.20 (5 = Extensively Implemented, 1 = Not Implemented). The highest rated attribute in both perceived importance and actual implementation was “Sharing knowledge with a variety of personnel, such as new food safety regulations.”

The most differences in means between the degree of importance and the degree of actual implementation were shown in attributes most likely related to top management support: “Encouraging employees to benchmark other organizations’ best practices of KS ( $M_d = 1.28$ ),” “Top management leadership and commitment toward KS and its utilization ( $M_d = 1.25$ ),” “Current corporate hardware and operating systems rules and standards ( $M_d = 1.24$ ),” and “Top management encouragement toward formal/informal communication ( $M_d = 1.23$ ).” These attributes were not implemented to the extent of that they were perceived as important.

The attribute that showed the least difference between the degree of importance and the degree of implementation was “Supporting utilization of a knowledge-related measurement mechanism ( $M_d = 0.90$ ).” This attribute was implemented as much as it was perceived as the degree of importance, even significantly different at  $p = 0.01$ . There were significant differences between the degree of importance and the degree of implementation for all attributes ( $p < 0.01$ ). The perceived degree of importance was much higher than the degree of implementation indicating the extent to which KS has actually been implemented in respondents’ organizations.

## CONCLUSIONS

As numerous studies indicate, creation of a knowledge friendly culture based on strong top management commitment and leadership and appropriate human resource support are the key ingredients for successful KS program implementation. It is especially interesting to observe that respondents are deeply aware of importance of top management support for a successful knowledge sharing than any other factors including Information System capability, training, and performance measurement.

## REFERENCES

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