

Klever Knowledge Benchmark Report 2016

**THE STATE OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING 2016**  
Executive Summary

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Klever's Benchmark Report, *The State of Knowledge Sharing 2016*, aggregates data from 198 unique responses from industry leaders, executives, operational managers, and team members in organizations that either have an existing knowledge-sharing program or are contemplating one.

For knowledge sharing to succeed over time in an organization, there are four distinct areas that need to be addressed:

- People / Leadership
- Process
- Technology
- Culture



To gauge the perceptions of knowledge sharing across these four important dimensions, we asked 14 simple yet powerful questions. The findings are based on a statistical analysis of the responses, filtered through Klever's combined five decades of practical experience.

### Key Findings

Our analysis of the data revealed three important findings in organizations' perceptions of their knowledge-sharing programs.

*Leaders are embracing the need to relay the importance of knowledge-sharing practices **and** team members are hearing them.*

Sixty-seven and one half percent of team member respondents said that leadership always or often clearly communicates the importance of knowledge and learning. While leaders said that they perceive that they are driving their organization to be less command-and-control and more focused on sharing what team members know. This is a significant improvement from last year, where only 31.3% of respondents agreed that leadership always or often communicates the importance of knowledge-sharing practices.

*Alignment is critical for executives to see success in their business outcomes and for team members to understand how sharing knowledge drives those outcomes.*

*Teams are not gaining ground on firefighting, and just 4% believe they are sharing knowledge as effectively as they can.*

With the exception of those in middle-sized organizations (1,001-5,000 employees), all other respondents ranked their organization worst in proactive work. Only 31.96% of respondents said that their team often or always invests as much time in fixing the root causes of the fires as we do in fighting fires.

Old habits die hard, even in big organizations. Firefighting remains a deeply rooted organizational behavior for nearly 70% of respondents, even as support teams embrace knowledge management. This backsliding into older behaviors drives support costs up and reduces customer satisfaction, as team members go back to solving this one problem, albeit urgent, **on their own**. Even though they understand and embrace the importance of knowledge sharing, crisis situations turn team members into silos at the time when customers need—and expect—them to cooperate and find *patterns*, *workarounds* and eventual *root-cause fixes*.

Organizations are still struggling with this challenge, as 31.1% responded the same way last year, showing that organizations have only improved marginally (2.7%) in this area. The backslide into firefighting remains one of the critical challenges for getting the most out of your team's knowledge.

*Processes and communications are critical to successful knowledge management, but deeply ingrained behaviors can still slip through at times of stress.*

*Technology continues to fall short of the promise to enable best practices, but is starting to catch up.*

While leaders and front-line team members highlighted the importance of alignment, middle managers focused their attention on the continued challenges with knowledge-sharing technologies. Only 23% of managers said that the technology they have makes it easy to share information within the company, rating it the lowest of any of the groups. This speaks to the managers' perception of their role in the knowledge-sharing process and their lack of focus on driving alignment between leaders and front-line team members. This perception remained relatively constant since last year, with middle managers rating technology only slightly better this year (4.7% improvement in technology ranking, as compared to a 11.6% improvement in the same ranking for executives, with a very slight dip for team members, under 2%).

*Middle managers' most important task is to provide context for the team by aligning the team members' day-to-day work with the outcomes that executives care most about.*

### **Noteworthy changes from last year's benchmark**

*The technology blame game is softening.*

This year, respondents were more positive in their impressions of the fit of their technologies with their knowledge programs, an 8.3% increase. While technology as a group was rated lowest by the respondents, the two questions about technology did not receive the lowest individual scores (as they did last year): "The technology we have makes it easy to share information within the company," and "Most people would agree that we need to invest in knowledge-sharing processes before purchasing technology."

Last year, both technology benchmarks were lowest. While this improvement is noteworthy, it does not mean that technology is making knowledge-sharing practices a seamless part of the support process. It

does mean that organizations are recognizing that other areas are negatively impacting their knowledge programs as much or more than the tools. We could look to the decline of the culture benchmark on firefighting, the lowest benchmark overall and the only benchmark this year to rate below a 3 out of 5 on the Likert scale, as one clear example.

*Executives are promoting learning better, improving upon that disconnect by 18%*

A key disconnect in last year's benchmark survey was that executives actively promoted sharing knowledge in the team, but did not also promote individual team-member learning. The result was a message to the team that the organization wanted to make better use of the member's knowledge, but not invest in providing these same team members additional skills. This trend has turned around as there is a significant improvement in the perceptions of leader's promotion of learning over last year's benchmark. Promoting learning is a key element in a healthy knowledge-sharing culture, and respondents said that executives have taken this seriously. The respondents scored this benchmark .37 higher than the previous year (an 18% improvement).

### **The road ahead**

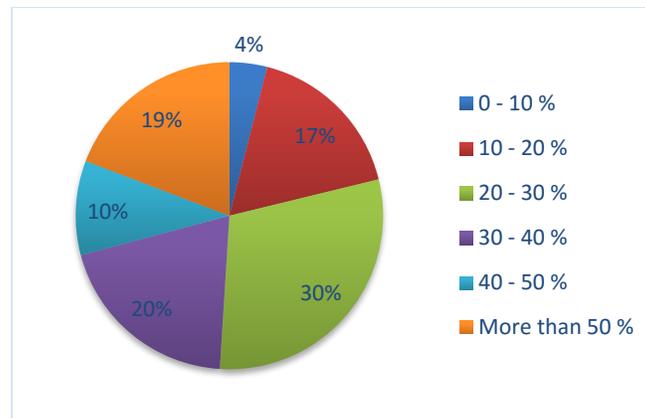
*Processes and communications are critical to successful knowledge management, but deeply ingrained behaviors can still slip through at times of stress.*

As the findings illustrated last year, the state of knowledge sharing in 2016 is not bleak. Not only have organizations embraced knowledge-sharing practices into their day-to-day work, executives are consistently emphasizing the importance of these practices to their organizations. The improved perception of the tools for knowledge sharing also demonstrates progress. Hopefully, this trend will continue as organizations stop scapegoating tools and embrace the leadership, culture, and processes required to sustain healthy knowledge sharing in a support organization.

Two points bear mentioned. First, the results of this benchmarking report reinforce the conclusions from last year, that organizations are increasingly embracing knowledge-sharing practices. This means that only lagging organizations are totally ignoring opportunities to share knowledge. Anecdotally, we are hearing that these organizations are starting to lose team members to support teams that do embrace knowledge sharing.

Respondents see that there is much more work to be done. One of the final questions in the survey was "If people in your workplace were sharing knowledge as well as they possibly could, it would improve productivity by:" Nearly 50% of respondents believe that their organization could be at least 30% more productive if they shared knowledge better.





Only 4% of respondents believe that they are effectively sharing knowledge (within 10%). There is much more to be done.

### How organizations must evolve

There are three specific courses of action that organizations can take to address some of the critical challenges identified in this benchmark report.

#### 1. **Attack the middle.**

Middle managers remain a gap in support organizations' implementation of knowledge sharing. Many of them are well-intentioned, but find themselves pulled into fighting the fires along with their team members. Executives need to help managers understand how the behaviors of the front line – particularly the effective sharing of knowledge – can drive organizational outcomes that the executive cares about. Managers also need to engage in knowledge sharing so they understand how these practices contribute to an exceptional support experience.

#### 2. **Root out old behaviors and the measures behind them.**

One of the greatest challenges to implementing or sustaining a knowledge-sharing program is bridging the gap between a team's culture and knowledge practices, particularly those behaviors that emerge in times of organizational stress. There are nearly always two roots of a culture/process mismatch. The first is "the way we have always done things here." If this is truly the only challenge, then attention by managers and repetition will resolve the issue. Many times, however, there are measures that (directly or indirectly) support the "old" culture and its behaviors. These must be identified and dropped in favor of measures that reinforce knowledge-sharing practices, not undermine them.

#### 3. **Be careful as you scale.**

Small organizations are often the most effective sharers of knowledge (they do not always **formalize** that knowledge transfer, but that is a different issue). As these small organizations grow, they find

the way they shared knowledge before less and less effective. Fast-growing organizations often have a very difficult road to travel, as they want to capture and reuse knowledge effectively, but do not want to compromise the open and informal culture that led to their initial success. Maintaining this balance is very difficult and often leads to several pendulum swings toward greater process and away from it. Effective knowledge sharing is becoming almost a precondition for effectively scaling a support team. Executives in these growing organizations should recommit time and resources to learning about and incorporating knowledge-sharing practices.

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Effectively sharing knowledge is no longer a competitive advantage,  
knowledge sharing is now a requirement.

