

Sharing Practices and Actions for Making Best Use of Organizational Knowledge in Libraries
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Langsam Library, University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, OH, USA

Experts Explain – Connecting Global Experts in Uncertain Times

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Abstract:

Since 2014, FMC Technologies has been conducting a series of internal webinars titled "Experts Explain". The purpose of the program is to capture the knowledge of our subject matter experts through a facilitated session where the SME delivers a 20 minute overview of their area expertise, providing insight into their role in the organization, and taking questions from the attendees. Each session is recorded and posted on the corporate wiki, where viewership increases 4-5 fold. Additionally, discussions are opened in our internal communities of practice where the experts can engage outside of the session and continue to answer questions.

While initially focusing on the engineering and technical fields (approximately 4,000 employees globally), speakers have been expanding to include other parts of the organization including talent management, intellectual property, and senior leadership. It has proved to be a fantastic avenue to highlight often "niche" experts in our company and connect individuals who would otherwise find it very difficult to connect.

The Experts Explain series has been a standout example in our knowledge management group. So much so, it has inspired a similar internal webinar series named "GradTalks" wherein new university graduates in the engineering rotational program get to hear from other program members from all over the world.

The program truly embraces all aspects of knowledge management and is making a true impact in the company.

Our best practices include:

- *How to structure a consistent, repeatable facilitated knowledge sharing event online*
- *Recruiting internal experts with knowledge of interest to the organization*
- *Capturing and sharing the content internally after event completion*
- *Encouraging continued discussion through communities of practice*

Keywords: webinar, knowledge management, facilitation

Imagine this: it is laundry day at your house and half-way through the rinse cycle, you notice a pool of water on the laundry room floor. While you hope that it isn't coming from the washing machine, your fears are realized upon further inspection. What do you do? You could call a repair service or a local handyman, but many of them charge fees to even just come and give a quote for a repair. However, with a short internet search, you're able to identify the offending part (a leaky valve), learn what part you need to replace it, and repair it yourself that afternoon to finish the laundry that evening. Do you need a mechanical engineering degree to do this? Not at all – just YouTube. Sites like YouTube are not just for funny, short videos any more. In fact, there is a growing emphasis on using YouTube for educational purposes: to watch a demo, hear from an expert, and re-watch it so you can use this information to accomplish something. From fixing a leaky washing machine, to changing brakes on a car, to plant and pet care, more people now rely on expert advice delivered virtually to learn and do their jobs. This principle is what feeds the FMC Technologies' webinar series, "Experts Explain": helping connect the best and the brightest from inside the organization to an audience dispersed globally.

The Need for Knowledge Sharing

Experts Explain came at a pivotal time in the organization. FMC Technologies is an oilfield services and equipment company with approximately 17,400 employees worldwide, encompassing 29 production facilities in 18 countries. Though headquartered in Houston, TX, only about 3,100 people are based there, and even this number is spread in various buildings throughout the city. After facing tremendous growth since spinning off from FMC Corporation in 2001, the organization saw several factors that played into the generation of this webinar series.

In 2001, when FMC Technologies was spun off of FMC Corporation, it was small and most of the employees – and engineering employees in particular – did multiple jobs. This experience led them to gather a large amount of knowledge and practice that others today don't have in their specialized jobs in a large company. Now, 15 years later, many of these experienced individuals are retiring or planning to retire soon; and as these employees leave, much of their knowledge and expertise go with them. This loss in explicit knowledge ends with many employees "reinventing the wheel" simply because they did not know about work or ideas that have already been done in the company. This means extra time researching what has already been researched or fixing what has already been fixed somewhere else.

In contrast to seeing older, more experienced employees leave the company, the organization saw an increase in the "millennial" population. In fact, as of December 2015, employees aged 35 and younger accounted for over 40% of the employees globally. The growing generational differences within the company presented a challenge to the traditional methods of training, learning, and sharing. Studies are showing more and more now that millennials are hungry for video content, and will prefer it to other mediums¹. This development has also been noted by FMC Technologies University (FMCTU), the central internal training provider for learning solutions globally. Formally starting in 2012, FMCTU worked to centralize and standardize training efforts worldwide – a daunting task for such a dispersed audience. Currently within FMCTU, there is a decreased emphasis on classroom-based learning, and a larger emphasis on virtual and asynchronous learning.

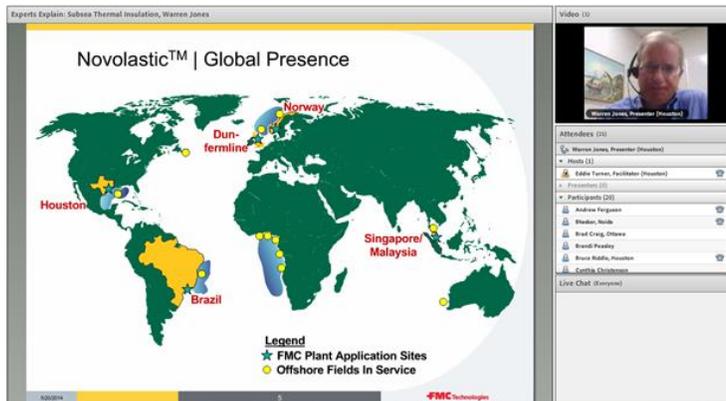
The final – and most critical - internal factor at play was the start of another group complementing FMCTU, which was a group centered on knowledge management. This group differed from FMCTU in that its focus was the documentation and sharing of knowledge through more informal means: online

¹Animoto Survey: Consumers Want More Video Marketing on Web, Social, and Email." PR Newswire, 7 May, 2016

communities, internal wiki pages, and facilitated knowledge sharing events. These factors (facilitated knowledge sharing, the growing emphasis on the use of virtual platforms, and the need to capture and share expert knowledge internally) created an internal environment that craved an innovative way to learn that was informative, engaging, and fresh.

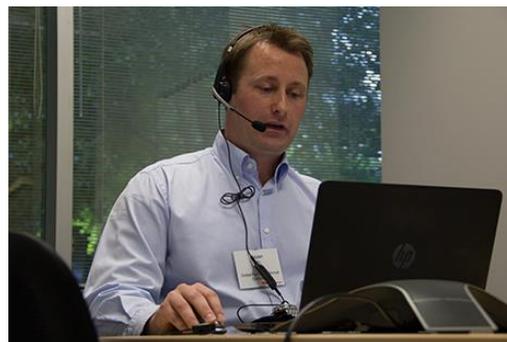
Creating a New Way to Share

The solution was an internal webinar series titled “Experts Explain” – a monthly facilitated webinar where technical experts from around the company delivered a 20-30-minute presentation and answered questions live from the audience. Each webinar was recorded, and then posted on the internal company wiki (The WELL), and follow-up discussions took place in the related community of practice (The EDGE). While simple enough on the surface, the process included the coordination and collaboration of numerous internal groups to ensure flawless execution. The idea caught on quickly and was endorsed by the Vice President of Technology, the Director of Learning Resources, and the Manager of Knowledge Management.



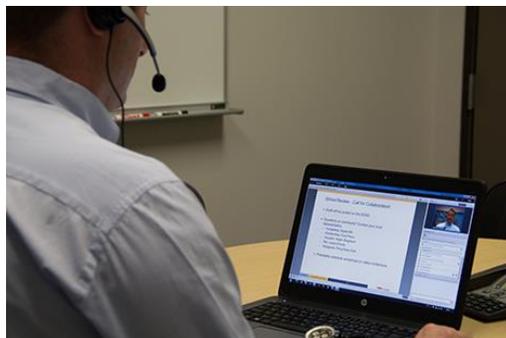
One of the first considerations was the audience for the initial rollout, which was easily identified: engineering. The engineering population at FMC Technologies makes up approximately 20% of the employee population – the largest single job family across the global organization. Additionally, engineering was going through a large period of growth and change – about half of all engineers had only been with the company for 5 years or less. This group *needed* to learn, and learn quickly.

Engineering also had the most number of experts to draw from. On the origin of the webinar, Adam Berg (Program Manager for FMCTU’s School of Engineering) said, “We had senior engineers sharing the same information over and over again. They were being helpful to younger engineers, but none of it was documented. To ‘sell’ the idea to potential speakers, it was really a time-saver for them.” By speaking on an Experts Explain webinar, the internal “expert” was able to reach many more times the audience than they typically interacted with. Berg noted, though, that initially it took more effort to recruit speakers for the webinar, and was only able to confirm 2 or 3 months at a time at first. He used his network of 20 years with the organization to recruit speakers to cover topics such as Hydraulic Systems, Subsea Control Systems, and Thermal Insulation. Since the initial launch, the speakers have come to include nearly all of the 12 FMC Technologies Engineering Fellows, Engineering Managers, and even FMC Technologies’ Assistant General Council. Now, the series has speakers scheduled for nearly a year in advance.



This being said, the combination of engineering and public speaking don’t often have a positive association. In fact, some would say that they go together like oil and water! This is where the facilitation aspect comes into play. Each session is facilitated by a member of Knowledge Management’s

Facilitation team, and their responsibility is to schedule the speakers, as well as coordinate practice sessions for the speakers to ensure a smooth presentation on the day of the event. Between 2 to 5 days from the day of the event, the facilitator will do a complete dry-run of the event with the speaker. The dry-run includes the use of webcams and a full run of the presentation to ensure it fits in the 20-30 minute window. The facilitator provides feedback where necessary, and helps to troubleshoot any technical issues. Facilitation is a key element in the success of the webinar. The facilitator ensures that the person presenting can focus on presenting content, rather than balancing the presentation of content with managing the technology of the virtual meeting. Additionally, the facilitator makes sure the session begins on time, is heavily interactive, and that everyone is engaged.



Another best practice discovered through the implementation of the webinar series was the development of a consistent, repeatable format. This facilitated format helped to align expectations of the parties (speakers can easily know what is expected of them), and it streamlines the planning and execution process. Experts Explain was designed with this structure: a welcome, a short ice breaker, the presentation by the expert, and ending with question and answer period. A few best practices worked well in this experience: using a moderator, using a webcam, and having a short presentation

time. Each expert was encouraged to have someone ready to help answer questions during the presentation, only the questions wouldn't be asked or answered verbally – they would be answered live via a chat window in the webinar. However, to keep the presenter from getting distracted, this “moderator” could answer what they could during the presentation and then include any questions they could not answer in the question and answer time at the conclusion of the webinar. This live chat with the moderator proved very effective and a way of keeping the brisk flow of the webinar while meeting the information needs of the participants. Additionally, the use of a webcam became standard with all of the presenters in Experts Explain. Being able to see a presenter helped with the engagement and attention level of the audience. Finally, the short presentation time ensured that often-complex topics were distilled to a level that was not overwhelming, but still effective – much like TED-style presentations. This consistent, repeatable structure has been key in ensuring smooth execution on the part of the delivery team, and audience members have a sense of what to expect each month.

The content shared in an Experts Explain webinar does not end when the virtual presentation closes. Each event is recorded, and the facilitator posts the recording on the internal wiki, and links to other relevant pages to support the expert's content. For example, in a session regarding Engineering Patents, the wiki page with the recording also linked to a related PowerPoint and specific forms that applicants should read before submitting a patent application. Another recording posted on the wiki linked to other related videos, an acronym reference guide, and a complete and detailed page of that particular topic on the wiki. In the end, this documentation of the expert knowledge becomes a “one stop shop” for those interested in the topic, and a permanent knowledge base.

Posting the recordings of the Experts Explain sessions has been one of the biggest successes of the program. The recordings have routinely seen 4 to 5 times the viewership as the live sessions. The most popular session to date has garnered viewership 8 times that of the live audience. The recordings have also helped to serve a global audience for FMC. “Historically, Norway has been a ‘tough nut to crack.’” said Adam Berg, “But Norway makes up large number of viewers of the Experts Explain videos.” Berg

noted the realization that employees in Norway would prefer on-demand knowledge sharing has helped shape the work he now does in FMCTU.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the FMC Technologies website. The page title is "The WELL > Video - Experts Explain, End-of-Year Special Edition". The main content area features a video player with a large red play button. To the left of the video player, there is a "Contents [Hide]" section with a list of items: "1 About the Video", "2 Additional Resources", and "3 Details". Below this is a section titled "About the Video [Edit]" which contains text about the video series and its purpose. To the right of the video player, there is a sidebar with the heading "Experts Explain: December recap". The left sidebar of the website contains various navigation links such as "Recently Modified", "Libraries", "Lists", "PRE Resources", "Wiki Pages", "Page Trackers", "Acronyms", and "Wiki Help".

In addition to the documenting the recording on The WELL, each presenter posts their topic in the corresponding community of practice in the collaboration network called The EDGE. This discussion allows those who watch the session on the recording to ask questions to the expert in a venue where those interested can view the answer and ask follow up questions. Occasionally, discussions will take on a life of their own and spur additional ideas and projects. In November of 2015, one of the FMC Engineering Fellows presented on “How to Overcome Barriers to Innovation”. After a lively presentation, the presenter posted a follow-up discussion on the network which quickly became one of the most active discussions on the network, with contributions from the Director of the North America Technology Center, the Manager of Knowledge Management, the Director of Quality, among other employee contributions. There was so much value in this continuing conversation, a separate project team was established to evaluate the identified barriers to innovation within engineering, which concluded with organizational recommendations presented to the Vice President of Technology in March 2016. This was a clear example of how an expert sharing knowledge and passion can inspire conversation after a webinar to drive change in the organization.

The Impact and Way Forward

Since first launching in 2014, the reaction to the Experts Explain webinars has been extremely positive. Below are some indicative employee comments from around the world:

- “Well organized and engaging. The activities were a new thing to presentations that I have seen and helped keep me focused and learning.” - Rotation Engineer I, Houston, Texas
- “The content was very interesting and I had the opportunity to learn more about RLWI [Riser-less Low Water Intervention]. I hope everyone enjoyed it as [much] as I had.” - Service Technician, Macae, Brazil
- “Love the Experts Explain – Great initiative and perfect tool to train employees.” – HR Business Partner, Arnhem, Netherlands.

It is clear that the facilitated knowledge sharing event has struck a chord with FMC Technologies’ employees.

The internal success of the Experts Explain webinar series has helped to launch other similar facilitated knowledge sharing webinars at FMC Technologies. Late 2015 saw the launch of two virtual programs inspired by the success of Experts Explain. The “GradTalks” series follows a similar format to Experts Explain, but focuses on connecting young engineers participating in the graduate rotational engineering program in the US, UK and Singapore. Also, “Engineering Career Connections” continues with the facilitated webinar idea, but alters the structure to include career presentations from senior engineers and managers. But just like Experts Explain, each session is recorded and posted on The WELL for viewing after the event.

Other disciplines outside of engineering have partnered with the Facilitation Team to produce their own version of Experts Explain, but focused on different audiences. Experts Explain has been delivered now on topics such as leadership, project management, planning, and professional development. Project leaders for organization-wide change utilize Experts Explain to distribute information on the initiatives that affect employees all over the world. For example, during a company-wide migration to a new human capital software system, an Experts Explain session was held to demonstrate the new performance appraisal system and take questions. The session was timed to coincide with the launch, and remains one of the most viewed recordings to date. Experts Explain is no longer viewed as a stand-alone webinar series, but is seen as an integrated communication and learning tool in the organization.

Experts Explain is an innovative program that connects employees from around the world to unite them in a shared experience.

The near future looks forward to more growth for the young webinar series that has now taken off within FMC Technologies. While continuing to expand to other topics of interest to the company population, engineering topics are still core to the delivery. The very first Experts Explain in 2014 had 34 attendees and sessions now average between 60-80 participants each month and will continue to rise through the year. While the Knowledge Management Facilitation team owns and operates these webinars, they are empowering the rest of the organization to conduct their own through the sharing of facilitation process documentation. And yes, there will be an Experts Explain session on that topic as well.

Even though engineers at FMC Technologies are not fixing a faulty valve on a washing machine, they are working to fix the knowledge leaks in the company. They are doing it by being active agents in watching demos, hearing from an experts, re-watching to absorb, and connecting with peers. Not on YouTube, but through a webinar series called “Experts Explain.”

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