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What is Knowledge Transfer?

Knowledge transfer refers to the process by which knowledge is transferred to people and organizations that can benefit from it. Knowledge transfer is not about producing information resources at the end of a project or making those resources available to be used. Rather, it is about reducing the gap between what is known and what is used. Knowledge transfer should be considered at the start of a project by identifying who will use the project's results and planning to obtain results that fit users' needs and experiences.

What Are the Key Elements of Effective Knowledge Transfer?

Research shows that there are five main elements in effective knowledge transfer. These elements can be explained in a project's knowledge transfer strategy.

Audience: Potential users of knowledge can differ widely in terms of their backgrounds and needs. They may include community leaders, media representatives, academics, government officials, nonprofit organizations, and volunteers. To share your knowledge effectively, it is important to know your target audience and focus on how they will receive and use the knowledge.

Message: The message should be clear, concise, and actionable. It should be based on a body of knowledge, and not merely reporting the results of an individual study. It should be consistent with, or refer to, other available messages.

Messenger: The credibility of the messenger (e.g., presenter, affiliated organization) should be explained in order to increase the effectiveness of the knowledge transfer.

Activities: Some knowledge transfer activities (e.g., face-to-face meetings) are more interactive than others (e.g., producing information resources). The more engaged the audience is, the more effective knowledge transfer is likely to be. Examples of knowledge transfer activities include:

- developing a new, or using an existing, web site,
- delivering workshops and presentations,
- producing information resources such as reports, fact sheets, and tip sheets,
- producing training materials such as manuals, tool kits, and "how to" documents,
- holding roundtables and discussion meetings,
- creating video or audio tapes,
- participating in seminars, conferences, and forums that are related to the knowledge,
- arranging field trips or on-site visits, and
- using local media for interviews, announcements, or publishing articles.

Effects: To understand the effectiveness of knowledge transfer, you should identify the effects you wish to have on the audience and decide how you will measure these effects.

Steps in Knowledge Transfer

Step One Develop a knowledge transfer strategy :

1. Set your knowledge transfer objectives → identify the key messages and evidence you want to share and the impact you wish those messages to have on your audience.
2. Determine your target audience → identify the groups of people and organizations that can benefit from your knowledge.
3. Understand your target audience → conduct focus groups, interviews, or conversations with representatives of your audience to identify what they need to know about the knowledge and in what format they would prefer to receive it
4. Plan various knowledge transfer activities → identify a range of activities based on the above information that are feasible within your timeline and budget.
5. Identify the messengers → select those people organizations with credibility and skills to present the knowledge.

6. Decide when the knowledge will be presented → identify the stages of your project during which the knowledge can be transferred. Also, determine the best times and occasions for your target audience to receive this knowledge.
 7. Plan a feedback system → decide how you will obtain feedback from your audience, and how you will use the feedback.
 8. Plan to develop promotional materials (or identify existing ones) that support the knowledge transfer activities.
3. Maintain your relationship with your target audience and potential users to :
 - observe changes that may occur in their attitudes, knowledge, or behaviours,
 - respond to their questions and concerns, and
 - inform them about other knowledge transfer activities of your project.

Step Two Implement the knowledge transfer strategy :

The details of this step will vary depending on the activities.

1. For each planned knowledge transfer activity, revisit your strategy and decide on:
 - the specific audience for this activity,
 - a credible messenger to present the knowledge to this audience,
 - the appropriate language level and method to present the knowledge, and
 - the appropriate method to obtain feedback.
2. Identify messages → include information (e.g., stories, facts) that will attract the attention of your audience.
3. Prepare knowledge transfer materials → test the materials and revise them accordingly.
4. Prepare promotional materials.
5. Create an interactive atmosphere.
6. Identify the implications of the knowledge → explain how the audience can use it.
7. Search for opportunities to get feedback from your audience.

Step Three Revise the knowledge transfer strategy :

1. Review the feedback you received in Step 2 → make a list of lessons learned. Identify lessons that can be applied to your knowledge transfer activities and those that can be used in other ways.
2. Revise your knowledge transfer materials, messages, and activities accordingly.

Checklist for Knowledge Transfer

- Have you developed a knowledge transfer strategy?
- Have you established a relationship with your target audience so that you can understand their needs?
- Have you planned a range of activities to transfer the knowledge in various ways based on the preferences of your audiences?
- Have you identified credible messengers to transfer the knowledge?
- Have you developed a method/system to receive feedback on how the audience received the knowledge and whether any changes appear in their behaviours?
- Are you prepared to use the feedback you receive to plan for the future?

For More Information

Canadian Population Health Initiative. (2001). An environmental scan of research transfer strategies. <http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/products/EnviroScan.pdf>

Starks, J., & Higgins, C. (2001). User-friendly materials and alternate formats. www.ncddr.org/du/products/ufm/user_friendly4.pdf

The National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR). www.ncddr.org/

The Canadian Health Service Research Foundation (CHSRF). www.chsrf.ca/



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Funded through the Community Participation Directorate of the Department of Canadian Heritage as part of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

