

The traditional methods of transferring and managing knowledge and maintaining organisational memory are becoming dated. Knowledge transfer and retention efforts need to be a more integral aspect of workforce planning and management activities.

Some possible strategies and actions include:

- Engaging strong commitment to oversee knowledge transfer and retention activities and in developing incentive structures that promote knowledge sharing within and across work teams.
- Opening up hierarchical frameworks and bureaucratic divisions and boundaries to promote horizontal knowledge and information sharing.
- Introducing programs where older workers are expected to regularly work with younger employers in a mentoring role or job shadowing capacity to facilitate the transfer of important tacit knowledge.
- Valuing and rewarding knowledge transfer in planned work outcomes and performance appraisals.
- Using job redesign to create “special skill and knowledge transfer” roles that call on particularly skilled employees to undertake special organisational knowledge, history and skill development projects or training, mentoring or coaching based activities.
- Creating specific opportunities for younger workers to enter into coaching, shadowing or on the job mentoring programs with experienced older employees and/or take on projects that are designed to stretch capabilities and transfer critical organisational knowledge.
- Using team based approaches to managing long term projects and good record keeping practices to ensure effective transfer of knowledge between existing and exiting employees.
- Implementing a people based knowledge transfer and retention strategy. For example, IBM Business Consulting Services 38 have identified a four step approach as follows:

Step 1 - Prioritising positions where knowledge needs to be preserved

This involves identifying positions where the knowledge held is of high strategic importance and the expected rate of attrition is high. A common gauge of importance is that a particular person or group’s absence from the workplace would be quickly noticed. Other factors that make a person or a group valuable include their understanding of organisation critical procedures and methods; the holding of expert knowledge of key equipment or key business tools; their relationships with key stakeholders; their role as a facilitator of knowledge exchange already within the organisation and their specific experience of local conditions and other variants.

Step 2 - Identifying critical at risk knowledge for each position

Once you have identified the positions, people or groups on which to focus knowledge retention efforts, you may need to consider the specific types of knowledge these individuals possess and what the impact will be if these are taken away e.g. ability to perform all tasks related to management of budget, relationships with major clients, knowledge of system shortcuts, expert ability to research new information and so on.

Step 3 - Prioritising techniques for transferring and managing knowledge

Knowledge management is essentially the ability of a business to create, share and use the collective knowledge of its products, processes and people to increase workplace productivity and reduce activities that “reinvent the wheel”.

A knowledge management strategy may encompass a range of specific activities such as the co-ordinated development of codification based systems such as databases, internets, intranets and expert software and process mapping. More importantly for workforce managers, the strategy could include people based activities such as mentoring, training, job shadowing, succession planning, inclusion of knowledge sharing commitments in performance agreements, establishing communities of practice, conducting social network analysis and developing knowledge maps.

Step 4 - Building a plan of action for each potential initiative

For each knowledge transfer and retention activity identified, it will be important to establish a business case or statement of organisational need, to examine the cost of doing nothing and to identify a means of measuring the results for those projects that are to proceed.

Source: Department of Employment and Industrial Relations 'A Guide for the Queensland Public Service: Managing an Ageing Workforce'