

Knowledge Transfer

There's no blame just learning...
There are no truer words when it comes to understanding the concept of knowledge transfer in the construction environment.

Once we start to associate blame to lessons learnt, all knowledge is lost, and individuals will seek to protect their own interests.

Transferring knowledge from one project to another

Knowledge transfer refers to sharing or disseminating of knowledge and providing inputs to problem solving.

Knowledge transfer is the structured approach to transferring knowledge from one part of the organisation to another or from one project to another. Like knowledge management, knowledge transfer seeks to organise, create, capture or distribute knowledge and ensure its availability for future users.

Don't wait for a project to end before sharing knowledge

In construction organisations, there are complex and dynamic interactions between clients, contractors and subcontractors often with intense time pressures, such as, last-minute design clashes, material and product lead times, operational legalities, safety considerations, red-tape, and the list goes on...

Often knowledge transfer is retrospective; an exercise that happens at the end of a project, called Lessons Learnt. The knowledge gathered by the team can get diluted though, as the team disbands and joins other projects as individuals.

The Proof of Concept approach

I recently had the privilege of working with a project team on a major infrastructure project, with the aim to develop a 'Proof of Concept' approach to identify and evidence the potential value of knowledge and learning transfer in order to gain a better understanding of potential benefits associated with effective knowledge sharing.

Below are some of the highlights:

It's important to capture the scenarios and outcomes as you go, as information can get lost in translation or lost due to selective memory when not captured in real-time.



We discovered actions are often taken to resolve only one of the many causes of an issue, which can lead to the perception of knowledge transfer failure. This is because there is a high level of interaction between multiple knowledge scenarios and outcomes. We should therefore look at it more systematically and address the multiple causes that can be masked by one overriding issue.

To further understand the benefits from knowledge transfer and in order to quantify the potential benefits, we converted the scenarios into a risk profile and used existing risk modelling to calculate a credible associated project risk value.

By applying Knowledge Transfer Mitigation Measures we drastically changed the risk profile. This leads to the conclusion that instigating knowledge transfer early in a project will drastically reduce the likelihood of problems occurring and therefore reduce the project risk profile.

Conclusion

Lessons learnt, and knowledge share cannot be a one-off exercise, it needs to be imbedded into the culture and processes of a business, with a continual improvement loop fed by every project. We should continually challenge and refresh learning and knowledge transfer as business activities adapt and modify to suit the ever-changing business environments.

If you have a question about something in this article, or if you're looking for support with another situation, feel free to get in touch on 01926 633333 alternatively you can