

# Succession planning is critical to any business's long-term success

I've recently been working with an organisation who have several key members of staff retiring from the business over the next few years.

Realising the risk to the business from a shortfall of valuable knowledge and experience needed for successful running of day to day operations; they have identified a need to plan for dealing with the immediate situation whilst also developing a longer term strategy for succession planning to ensure a more sustainable and ongoing approach to the transfer of skills and knowledge within the business.

## Effective knowledge transfer for your business

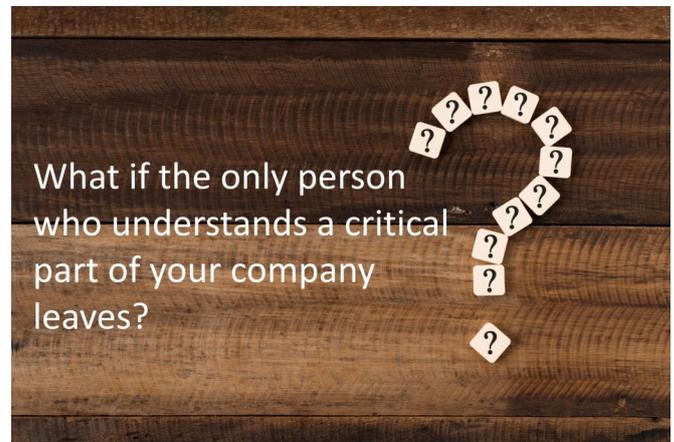
This article is intended to outline some of the actions an organisation can take to ensure effective knowledge transfer and information sharing to avoid losing the valuable skills and experience needed to continue to operate successfully when key people leave the business.

Before a passenger jet takes off an airline pilot must go through a lengthy written checklist to ensure that key features are in place and working correctly. Their staff receive regular updates, reviews, training and communications in order to operate a safe and effective business. You would not expect to rely on the crew's memory alone to carry out these crucial checks.

The best way to store and retrieve that information is with the effective sharing of knowledge and information through common understanding, training/coaching, documented procedures, standard processes and regularly updated check sheets.

While your organisation may not be responsible for passenger lives, the effective sharing of knowledge, information and skills to the right people at the right time is critical to any business's long-term success.

Knowing who knows what, who needs to know what, and how to transfer that knowledge is critical to any business' success. Investing in developing an effective way to transfer knowledge will at least, save you some of the grief when key people leave the business.



Here are some suggestions for processes, procedures, methods and tools your business can use for effective knowledge management and transfer within your company:

### 1. Multi skilling

It would not make any sense to train two people for every job, but we do need to plan for when a person who usually fills the role is not available. Cross-training can ensure that there are people who can step in when key people with much knowledge and experience leave the business.

Take a football team...



If the goalkeeper gets injured, they are usually replaced with another keeper from the bench maybe the replacement is not considered to be of the same skill level or competence but nevertheless they at least have some of the skills required.

*If no one has received any coaching or training in that role or even practiced in that position, the team is set up to fail and is unlikely to win the game.*

## 2. Formal process and procedure

While encouraging employees to communicate with each other especially between different departments and business functions is better than nothing, an organisation also needs an approach which provides operating procedures, tools and techniques to ensure an effective and sustainable process of sharing information and knowledge.



We need to have documents that clearly outline how a process works. Checklists and standard templates should be used to ensure that processes are easily and fully understood and not just in the process users head. This allows team members to know that they are not just expected to “figure it out” when the time comes.

## 3. Coaching and training

Simply telling people how to do stuff is not an effective way of transferring knowledge.

An organisation needs to provide team members with training and coaching opportunities to ensure effective transfer of knowledge and learning.



It is important that once employees have been through any training, they should receive support and guidance in the application of that learning.

Some potential approaches could be:

*Shadowing* – Spending a period with an experienced person doing their day to day job. The trainee will benefit from helping with tasks whilst also being exposed to day to day real life issues and experience how those issues are addressed with input and guidance from a process expert.

*Simulation Exercises* – Team exercises designed to simulate a process without having to be at the coalface. These exercises will embed the learning and enable the team to practice any new tools or techniques covered in the training

*One to One Coaching Sessions* – Informal question and answers sessions with a process expert. This enables the trainee to ask any questions they may have which were not covered in the training or have arisen since.

*Temporary Role Swap* - Removing a key person from the process temporarily so the team can see what happens. If things fall apart quickly, people will be eager to figure out how to prevent that failure from happening in the future.

## 4. Capturing and sharing lessons learnt

Once changes have been made to improve the business then those lessons need to be documented and shared with the rest of the business/organisation.



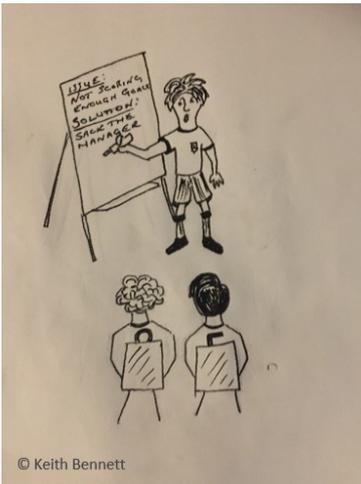
Most organisations will use standard Lessons Learnt templates which are required to be completed and filed in a data base after any business improvement has been implemented. Whilst this information is readily available to everybody in the business it relies on somebody identifying the need to view that information so is therefore a very reactive approach.

*An organisation needs to think how they might proactively share Lessons Learnt documents to the relevant parties.*

## 5. Identifying opportunities

Businesses should encourage employees to work together to find and share information by scheduling regular short meetings where team members can come together to discuss points such as:

- a. Performance
- b. Resolve day to day issues affecting performance
- c. Exchange information and knowledge with a view to developing solutions
- d. New working methods
- e. Ongoing controls and checks to ensure sustainable, effective, capable and fully understood processes



## 6. Using consultants

It is not unusual for an organisation to use consultants in the early days to help gain momentum and develop a longer-term plan whilst also giving coaching and support to staff members.



*But, remember while a consultant can be an asset, they will eventually leave after their work is complete.*

The business should ensure they have a plan to share the knowledge gained to internal personnel so as all the good work can continue when they have departed.

### In summary

For any of the above to make a real difference in your business, you must communicate the importance of knowledge transfer and sharing information, explain how it will be done and most importantly, how it will benefit the business.

If you can do that, knowledge transfer and the sharing of information will be a key factor for your organisation to gain an edge over competitors and be a successful player in the market.

By regularly reviewing that the right knowledge is being captured and shared, your organisation will be able to adopt a sustainable approach to the sharing of knowledge and skills throughout the organisation and will experience much less disruption during the departure of key personnel.

In addition, your employees will be more engaged in their work and have a more in-depth understanding of their processes and how they affect others around them.

When employees feel confident in their ability to step in and help, your business will be healthier and more competitive overall.

If you have a question related to Transferring Knowledge, or if you're looking for support with a specific situation – feel free to get in touch on 01926 633333 alternatively you can email us at [info@bourton.co.uk](mailto:info@bourton.co.uk).