

Insight and ACTION

A digest linking those who practice knowledge transfer and exchange with evidence-informed resources

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ACHIEVING BUY-IN: BUILDING NETWORKS TO FACILITATE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

KEY MESSAGES

- Face-to-face interaction builds trust and confidence between researchers and the people who use research.
- Using a knowledge broker to facilitate discussions makes knowledge transfer easier, as does developing strong ties to people and organizations.
- A network can help develop trusting relationships and be a catalyst for further collaborations and alliances.

This is a summary of an article by Desre M. Kramer and Richard P. Wells, published in Science Communications in 2005.

In the beginning, it seemed like an enormous challenge. There were dozens and dozens — if not hundreds — of workplaces across Ontario that could benefit from what Toronto's Institute for Work & Health and the Centre of Research Expertise for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders had to say about health and safety in its booklet, the Participative Ergonomic Blueprint. Staff at the research centres just needed to figure out how to spread the word and get the ideas implemented.

Instead of doing a mass mailing of the booklet, they went a step further — they developed a network of men and women who would help walk potential users through the research behind the booklet and facilitate discussions on how it might be put to use.

Knowledge brokers make the difference

Although its messages were valuable, the Participative Ergonomic Blueprint was complex. Essentially, it was a guide to putting an ergonomic program into place within an organization's health and safety program. Its content was based on a research review and a five-year research study in 12 locations.

Because of the blueprint's complexity, the centres saw the need for someone who would discuss the contents with key organizations, bring up relevant case studies, and talk about the research it was based on. As a result, the centres created a network of knowledge brokers who would bring the booklet to workplaces across Ontario. These knowledge brokers were already experts in the field — all were consultants and ergonomists within Ontario's health and safety associations.

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Discussing the research

The meetings to discuss the blueprint were designed to be as interactive as possible and generate discussion about how the recommendations could impact the organization, how its contents might be implemented, and how the organization and the researchers might collaborate in the future. To customize the presentation of the booklet and the level of discussion, the audience was asked to talk about their work and experience with ergonomics so that the presentation could be tailored to their circumstances and level of knowledge. The research findings were presented to the audience by a researcher, giving the findings increased credibility, and the broker facilitated discussion about how the research findings might be used.

The audience also gave the researchers real-world feedback on the blueprint and how it might be applied in different workplaces. Identifying what organizations were already doing and what they had in common with the blueprint became a key goal of the meetings. This tended to increase the feeling of receptivity and reciprocity between the researchers and the audiences.

The results

Strong relationships between the centres and the organizations were created through these networking efforts and continued beyond the blueprint initiative. Ergonomists at several of the organizations adopted at least part of the Participative Ergonomic Blueprint, and others engaged in additional meetings between the organization, the researcher and the knowledge broker to adapt the blueprint to their specific organizational needs.

The success of this network-building was illustrated by the fact that the organizations went on to provide the researchers with documentation, assessment tools, guidelines, policies and contacts with client workplaces. In turn, the researchers gave the organizations information, advice and help with analyzing data.

Lessons learned

At the end of this initiative, it was clear that face-to-face interaction in small group meetings built trust and confidence between researchers and the people who use research.

That trust and confidence played a significant role in getting the research put into practice. It allowed the organizations to talk at length about how they might use the research and made it easier to schedule further meetings to come up with custom research implementation strategies. Having knowledge brokers at these meetings was also beneficial, since they act as a bridge between the researchers and the organizations.

Some specific strategies were crucial to maintaining a successful network, according to the article. These included ongoing intensive interaction within a network; ensuring easy flow of information; creating strong links to "champion" network members who have strong ties to their own organizations or fields; doing network analysis to identify the network's gaps; and evaluating the network by looking at how many members, knowledge exchanges and shared projects it has.

All of these efforts led to continuing active, well-built ties between the Institute for Work & Health, the Centre of Research Expertise for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders and Ontario's health and safety associations. "There is now a constant flow of information and assistance between the researchers and members of the practitioner associations," according to this article's authors.

Reference

Kramer DM and Wells RP. 2005. "Achieving buy-in: Building networks to facilitate knowledge transfer." *Science Communications*; 26: 428-444.

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