Seven Principles of Knowledge Continuity

“Knowledge makes resources mobile. Knowledge workers, unlike manufacturing workers, own the means of production: they carry their knowledge in their heads and therefore can take it with them. At the same time, the knowledge needs of organisations are likely to change continually” Peter Drucker

Principle 1 Knowledge is socially created and socially transmitted

“I learnt from older experienced people who shared their goodwill, gave unstintingly of their time for me to develop.” “I learnt a lot from peer relationships in the industry.” Older worker

Knowledge shared is knowledge multiplied. This may require a shift from focusing on the mastering of yesterdays knowledge to becoming “entrepreneurial” learners, building on and creating new knowledge and insights for today’s and tomorrows world.

Implication: Create and nurture social environments in the workplace and in the wider industry where staff talk about real work problems and learn from each other.

Principle 2 Focus on knowledge generation and transfer, not knowledge capture

“I want to be remembered as someone who encouraged others and entered into relationships and built capability. I feel a burden to pass it on.” “I now see people in key positions due to my mentoring, this is my legacy”. Older worker

Organisational knowledge is most valuable when all employees possess it, share it and use it together to further the organisation’s business objectives. An organisation’s competitive advantage will not come from the specialist knowledge acquired and held by individuals but rather from a learning culture that is able to enquire, evaluate, embed, share and use knowledge in the context of social relationships. This may require a move away from “repository” thinking to a knowledge sharing/transfer culture.

Implication. Shift from repository thinking to knowledge creation and sharing.

Principle 3 Trust is fundamental to knowledge sharing

“I learnt in an atmosphere of support and forgiving, they gave me a chance, they gave me wisdom and they gave me confidence.” Older Worker

Trust is required at all levels in an organisation if effective knowledge continuity is to occur. People will not willingly share tacit knowledge if their workplace culture does not support learning, cooperation and openness. They will not share knowledge and skills if they think it may result in them being surplus to requirements. Reciprocity will drive the creation of a trusted network of learners/problem solvers forward. If you distribute problem solving authority rather than concentrate it in a few, companies will build the capability and capacity to think, apply information to vexing issues and create new knowledge.

Implication. Build trust and people will share and create new knowledge

Principle 4 Leverage knowledge through networks of people who collaborate

“Membership of the [professional body] has been important for me, the networks I can turn to when I face a tricky situation. I like introducing those with potential to my networks.” “Networking requires time and space.” Older Worker

While technology has its place, an organisation will not become knowledge driven solely through networks of technology that interconnect. John Seely Brown has suggested companies need to encourage two dispositions;

- Questing – always searching for new knowledge - how do I pull together the
resources (including people) to deal with the problem before me

- Connecting – ability to tap into the knowledge and experience of others to collectively solve the problem.

**Implication.** Build internal and external networks of collaboration and give people the time and space to “quest” and “connect”.

**Principle 5.** The need to solve problems will drive knowledge continuity

“I often say to people, can I show you this for a minute and talk them through a problem.” “We sometimes have structured learning where I give a set of questions for people to research and discuss in groups.” Older Worker

People networks leverage knowledge through organisational “pull” rather than centralised information “push”. The power will come from the demand side not the supply side. The “Pull not Push” principle is to be encouraged.

**Implication.** Everyday draw people into team based problem-solving approaches.

**Principle 6.** Focus on engagement and enablement

“I look back on people who inspired passion and put fuel in my tank.” Older worker

The relationship an employee has with his/her colleagues and the organisation will have a significant impact on knowledge continuity. A positive relationship will facilitate knowledge sharing during all phases of an employee’s life cycle; a negative relationship or lack of a relationship will impede knowledge sharing, especially at the point of exit. Employees also need to believe that what they are contributing to is important if they are going to go beyond what is expected.

**Implication.** Focus on the 3 pillars of an engaged workplace culture.

- Ensuring your leaders are worth following,
- Identifying and communicating why the work you do is worth doing,
- Creating a workplace culture that is worth belonging to

**Principle 7.** Take an employee life cycle approach

“I am very proud of my 35 years with [organisation name]. I take great joy out of people getting promoted and doing well, it gives me huge personal satisfaction” Older Worker

Knowledge continuity strategies are also made stronger when they are carried throughout the employee life cycle, not just towards the end or when someone is leaving. While experience and length of tenure may mean a person has specialist knowledge, the two should not be equated.

**Implication:** Engage all staff in knowledge sharing activities and problem solving not just those leaving, or those defined as single points of sensitivity.