Losing Your Minds: Capturing, Retaining and Leveraging Organizational Knowledge

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Executive summary

YOU ARE losing your minds... really... and you need to do something about it right now!

Rapidly-shifting operational and performance goals driven by change in an organization’s operating environment are part of the evolution of any present day public or private sector organization. This change presents you and your organization with multi-dimensional risks to your ability to adapt and to successfully operate ‘faster than the speed of that change.’

One of the risks organizations in both the public and private sectors face is the constant threat of knowledge loss due to the turnover in their workforce. The ability of your organization to successfully anticipate and to manage the risk of knowledge loss due to workforce turnover often will determine how successfully your organization can address the other multi-dimensional risks facing you.

To mitigate these challenges and risks, organizations need a consistent, disciplined, and sustainable framework for capturing, adapting, transferring, and reusing their relevant and critical knowledge. It is a fundamental part of a successful succession planning and continuity of operations strategy. It’s about creating a high performing and knowledge enabled organization that can effectively deal with and operate faster than the speed of change, drive superior and measurable performance, and deliver value to its customers, to its workforce, and to the organization itself.

This report shares and illustrates concepts, strategies, and practices that can create the attention necessary to shape and support knowledge and collaborative learning efforts in your organization, whether it be a public or private sector organization. In those cases where there are unique differences between the two sectors and how they perceive, understand, and address this challenge, the differences will be highlighted to provide a broader perspective. This book will share strategies that bridge knowledge gaps that can impede innovation and performance improvement while (1) enhancing the necessary behavior change in the short term and (2) building an effective foundation for sustainable implementation of effective practices for capturing, retaining, and reusing the critical and relevant knowledge of your organization.

This book is divided into three parts. Part One focuses on the challenge of workforce turnover and knowledge loss, introduces some basic concepts to better understand this knowledge management challenge, and then discusses how to approach this challenge using a successful performing and learning framework for introducing and then implementing context relevant knowledge management solutions within the organization. Part Two provides a practical guide to implementing this framework, outlining three key methodologies and explaining in detail how to plan and carry out the relevant activities. Part Three comprises two in-depth case studies of
organizations which have implemented knowledge retention and reuse initiatives, the success of which illustrates the need for careful planning, organizational buy-in and ongoing effort.

This report will help you to begin the discussion in your organization around the challenge of knowledge loss, one that will always face your organization and not only impact individual worker performance and success, but also the performance and longer term success of your organization.

This report is not the only answer to this growing challenge. It does, however, provide a practical approach to thinking about the challenge and then doing something about it. This combination of concept, strategy and implementing practices will provide success for those willing to seriously address the challenge over the longer term.
BILL KAPLAN is the founder of Working Knowledge\textsuperscript{CSP}, an independent knowledge management consulting company.

From June 2005 through October 2009, Bill was the chief knowledge officer at Acquisition Solutions, Inc., a government-only consulting company. He provided the knowledge leadership and practical expertise to move Acquisition Solutions from knowledge management concept to strategy to implementing practice through the creation of a corporate ability to connect, collect, and collaborate at all levels within the company. Through his leadership, Acquisition Solutions earned recognition as a North American Most Admired Knowledge Enterprise (MAKE) finalist in 2007 (18th), 2008 (16th), and 2009 (13th).

Prior to joining Acquisition Solutions, Bill served as the deputy knowledge management practice manager and a senior knowledge management and organization performance consultant at Science Application International Corporation (SAIC).

Bill is one of the original thought leaders, practitioners, and consultants applying knowledge management in the government sector, a long time practitioner in the private sector, and is published on many articles on knowledge management and federal acquisition. He also uniquely works at the intersection of KM and federal acquisition and program management, helping government organizations leverage their knowledge to ensure mission success.

He completed a distinguished career in federal acquisition and program management in the United States Air Force and the Department of Defense, retiring in the rank of Colonel. During his military career he earned numerous personal, unit awards and service medals including the Defense Superior Service Medal and the Legion of Merit Medal.
ORGANIZATIONS HAVE spent a lot of time talking about the impact of shifting demographics and the turnover in their workforces due to retirement, promotion, transition, and downsizing. Most of the conversations end with statements such as, “The sky is not falling, at least not when it comes to knowledge loss. People have always left the workforce and somehow we’ve managed to survive.”

It’s precisely this line of thinking that is keeping many leaders in business and government from seriously addressing the largest departure of knowledge their organizations will ever experience.

In many ways, it’s about remaining relevant in the face of change. But relevance alone isn’t good enough. Organizations, both in business and in government, have to do better than that just to stay relevant. More than ever, an organization’s products and services need to be distinctive and provide value to get and hold the attention of customers. For government, it’s about delivering products and services both expected and required by the people...

And knowledge is key to creating and maintaining relevance and delivering value.

Every day more and more organizations fail or thrive based on their knowledge and its flow across their value chain. Organizations that ‘get’ this invest heavily in processes and the right technology to continuously harvest and leverage the collective know-how and experience of their employees, partners, suppliers, and customers.

Smart organizations optimize their investment in knowledge by finding ways to retain the learning and experience from the people they have hired and developed. To them, letting the critical knowledge go that they have already paid for makes no sense. It’s the same as throwing money out the window.

These organizations have figured out it’s not an impossible task to hold onto the knowledge important to their current and future performance. They understand that not everything everyone knows is critical. This realization makes knowledge retention a manageable endeavor.

Organizations don’t have to lose their minds. The processes and practices in this book will help you and your organization retain the know-how and experience that make your products and services valuable and relevant. I encourage you put them to use and do better than survive!

Kent A. Greenes, Founder of Greenes Consulting, and previously head of Knowledge Management for British Petroleum and Science Applications International Corporation.