

Increasing Knowledge Transfer in the Veterinary Profession

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Introduction

Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experiences, values, contextual information and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information¹. In this information age which is characterized by sweeping technological advancements, we are now able to create and apply new knowledge at an unprecedented rate. Subsequently, the pace of innovation has increased particularly in the field of the Biomedical Sciences. However, while professional groups within the field continue to evolve, the loss of knowledge has become a significant threat to future innovation. How then do we maximize the impact of the valuable knowledge stock that resides in our experts? One way is to create new knowledge by transforming existing knowhow². In the field of Knowledge Management, this is known as Knowledge Transfer.

What is Knowledge Transfer

Knowledge Transfer is the process of conveying knowledge, experience and expertise from one place, person or ownership to another³. A review of the literature indicates that early use of the term began after Nonaka's 1991² seminal work on organizational knowledge creation. It was then that researchers began to use the terms 'Knowledge Transfer' and 'Knowledge Sharing' interchangeably⁴. At the heart of 'Knowledge Transfer' one finds collaboration, communication, sharing and mentorship. When people fail to engage one another in these ways, Knowledge Transfer is slow to take place and experience as well as know-how may be lost.

Why is Knowledge Transfer Important

Knowledge is often considered the most valuable resource and product of our age. What lends to its value is that it is often derived using great effort and resources over time. When knowledge is applied in the bid to discover and satisfy the needs of mankind, innovation is often the result and so each generation builds on 'inherited knowledge'. What is interesting about the knowledge creation process is that it may be

lengthier than one expects. Thus, it is unlikely that any one generation will be responsible for all of mankind's greatest innovations. Over time we will continue to build on previous knowledge to produce outcomes relevant to our age and this is why Knowledge Transfer is so important at the macro-level.

In the Biomedical Sciences, particularly in the field of Veterinary Medicine, knowledge transfer is an important process whereby practitioners engage one another to share practical and meaningful experiences, improve skills and procedures and to produce impactful research. Ideally, when a person demonstrates knowledge, the recipient interprets the knowledge within context and is then able to apply it to a new situation. When this occurs, know-how and expertise are not lost but preserved through knowledge transformation.

Methods that promote increased Knowledge Transfer

The following can be used to increase Knowledge Transfer in the Veterinary profession

- **Mentorship:** Mentorship is a powerful enabler of the Knowledge Transfer process because tacit knowledge in the form of experience is often difficult to codify. In this case, knowledge is more effectively transferred through demonstration, observation and eventually by doing. The profession would continue to develop through the transformation of vital knowledge where there is active mentorship between older and younger practitioners. I would encourage young professionals in particular to look for and to communicate with persons who have developed expertise in areas of interest.
- **Collaboration:** Now more than ever, knowledge cannot be created, contextualized or transformed in silos. In the words of Aristotle "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" and in our highly connected world, there is wisdom in the crowd. Through collaboration with our peers, we can bring together many aspects of a particular area of study in order to better understand the big picture. This is how we will continue to produce valuable knowledge and relevant innovation for the future.

- **Build Networks:** Technology and social media have truly made our world borderless because they enable us to connect with peers across many geographical boundaries in real time. Practitioners can leverage these tools to make and maintain contact with others based on mutual interests.

- **Communication:** Through conversation, publication, conferences and forums, researchers and practitioners can continue to communicate their thoughts and ideas with one another and with the world. This will not only build new generations of experts but a stronger more capable profession worldwide.

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