

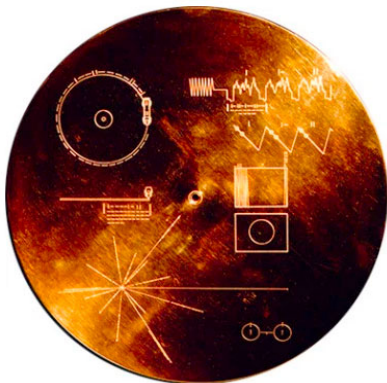


OCTOBER 16, 2019



Successful Knowledge Transfer: the Key to the Future

What do birds singing, Japanese flutes, the beating of a human heart, laughing voices, Beethoven's "Cavatina" and Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" all have in common? They are all part of a body of knowledge selected to be transferred to outer space.



Forty-two years and a month ago, a team of NASA scientists compiled an array of sounds and images intended to represent the entirety of Earth's knowledge, etched it all onto a gold-plated disk, and they fired it into the cosmos. Still communicating with us, the spacecraft known as Voyager is now over 22 billion kilometers from Earth and is on the outer edge of the Solar System. If any interstellar travelers come across Voyager, they will presumably get to know our world from the contents of that thin golden disk.

How did this team decide what to include; what to leave out? Like us, NASA's team had to decide which knowledge was valuable and which should be preserved at all costs. [Forbes contributor Benjamin Wolfe suggests we can learn to protect our own knowledge by considering NASA's approach.](#)

"As a leader, nothing is more important to your organization than protecting the legacy of your expertise —making sure that the deep knowledge you've acquired is successfully passed on to those who come after you.

"Knowledge transfer doesn't only happen when someone retires and another takes their place. It's just as critical when key people are moved into new positions or locations, and in the inevitable shuffle when companies merge. But regardless of the situation, it is a leader's responsibility to make sure that the transfer of information is as clear, concise and enduring as possible.

"What is the line between excessive information and leaving things out? Is the delivery person-to-person or in a manual? All at once or through an ongoing relationship? These are hard decisions because **knowledge transfer always involves a trade-off between too much and not enough. But it can be done, and it can be done well.**"

To protect your organization's knowledge, Wolfe suggests adopting the kind of systematic process that NASA used to help capture the most useful information. "Think about where you work. Bring to mind every aspect of your organization — its people, location, expertise, process, systems, relationships — and imagine distilling that information to its essence. How do you share that concentrated information with someone who has no history in your organization? Maybe they're from another industry, have a different background, come from a foreign country, or are a generation or two younger."

Although you probably won't have to compile a store of knowledge as vast as that of NASA, the following suggestions may help you preserve valuable knowledge and protect your organization's future.

1. Make it formal. Keep notes, share documents.
2. Duplicate coverage. Make sure at least two people are prepared to step into any position, just in case.
3. Have participants put their knowledge into practice.
4. Create opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Executive Forum can help you streamline this process. Our [Knowledge Transfer Workshop](#) delivers the tools and processes needed for effective knowledge transfer — to cross-train individuals or teams, get new hires up to speed quickly and efficiently, and meet succession needs as employees prepare for retirement. This two-day workshop will help keep your workforce prepared, productive, innovative, and competitive. Limited spaces are available. Contact us for more information— 503.206.8369.

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