KNOWLEDGE BROKERS: Who are they and what strategies do they rely on? Evidence from a survey

By Irving Gold, Réjean Landry, Nabil Amara and Julie Villeneuve

Notes prepared for presentation and discussion at the National Forum on Knowledge Transfer and Exchange, Hilton Hotel, Toronto, October 23, 2006

Key messages

• CHSRF has established a knowledge brokering network whose participants dedicate
  – 29% of their time to knowledge transformation activities and
  – 20% of their time to building bridges between decision-makers and researchers
• Knowledge transformation strategies and networking strategies vary significantly across organizations and professional status
Outline

1. Knowledge and knowledge brokering
2. The survey approach
3. Characteristics of the respondents
4. Time dedicated to knowledge brokering
5. Knowledge brokering strategies

1. Knowledge and knowledge brokering
Knowledge and knowledge transfer

1. Knowledge is the most significant asset for organizations
2. No organization has the internal resources required to create all the knowledge needed to achieve successfully its operations
3. All organizations are knowledge importers
4. The transfer of knowledge is necessary to improve efficiency, quality and to innovate
5. The successful transfer of knowledge requires a transformation process that involves turning applications of knowledge into new or improved products, services or practices
6. The transformation of knowledge into new or improved services and practices requires a number of complementary transfer activities
7. Knowledge brokering is part of this set of complementary transfer activities

Knowledge brokers are...

• Intermediaries between otherwise disconnected pools of knowledge and disconnected organizations
• They help the transfer of knowledge between parties that never or rarely interact
## Knowledge brokering roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KB roles</th>
<th>Knowledge generators</th>
<th>Knowledge users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K acquisition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K integration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K adaptation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K dissemination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K intermediation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The survey approach

2

The survey approach
Purpose of the survey

• To better understand
  – Who is doing knowledge brokering in Canada and
  – How knowledge brokering is done in Canada.

Population Surveyed

• The population of this study consists of the members of the knowledge brokering network established in 2003 under the initiative of the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation.
• This population was composed of 412 individuals in October 2005.
• The survey generated 301 usable questionnaires, for a net response rate of 74.69% (301/412).
The survey approach

• The questions used to survey the respondents never mentioned the expressions “knowledge brokers” and “knowledge brokering” in order to avoid suggesting that there were good or bad answers.
• Furthermore, the approach used in this study does not attempt to associate knowledge brokering activities to a particular definition of knowledge brokering.
• Instead, the research strategy used in this study relies on an empiricist approach which led us to ask respondents what they do, how they do it and why they do what they do regarding the acquisition, adaptation, and exchange of knowledge.
• Therefore, individual respondents cannot be considered as knowledge brokers or non-knowledge brokers.
• The research strategy developed for this study aims capturing the diversity of the practices of the respondents regarding their activities associated to knowledge brokering.

3

Characteristics of the respondents
Respondents surveyed are working in...

- 28.3% of the respondents are working in research organizations
- 18.9% in RHAs
- 18.6% in federal or provincial ministries
- 13.0% in hospitals, long-term care facilities or other service delivery organizations
- 10.6% in foundations and funding agencies
- 5.3% in community organizations and
- 5.3% in private firms

Socio demographic characteristics

- **Education:**
  - 56% have completed a master degree and
  - 27% have completed a doctoral degree

- **Professional status:**
  - 25% top managers
  - 30% middle managers
  - 37% professionals
  - 7% first line managers
4

Time dedicated to knowledge brokering

Average percentage of time dedicated to …

- **Knowledge transformation**: reading, understanding, facilitating and disseminating research information, studies and research reports to individuals in your organizational unit: 29.5%
- **Intermediation**: facilitating linkages and exchanges between researchers and decision makers: 20.9%
- **Other**: including administration, management duties and teaching: 49.5%
Average percentage of time dedicated to ... by types of organizations

- **Knowledge transformation:**
  - highest in universities: 33%
  - lowest in hospitals, long-term care facilities or other service delivery organizations: 24%

- **Intermediation:**
  - highest: in foundations and funding agencies: 27%
  - lowest: in private firms: 17%

- **Other activities:**
  - highest: in universities: 56%
  - Lowest: in foundations and funding agencies: 43%

Average percentage of time dedicated to ... by types of professional status

- **Knowledge transformation:**
  - highest for professionals: 34%
  - lowest for middle managers: 25%

- **Intermediation:**
  - highest: for top and middle managers: 23%
  - lowest: for first-line managers: 15%

- **Other activities:**
  - highest: for first-line managers: 56%
  - Lowest: for professionnals: 46%
Knowledge brokering strategies

Knowledge acquisition strategies

The most frequent sources of information:
- 71.5%: Internet (Web sites, electronic newsletter, available reports)
- 63.8%: Academic journals
- 51.5%: Electronic Database (PubMed, Science Direct, Proquest, etc.)
- 50.9%: University researchers
- 50.5%: Bulletins and newsletters

The least frequent sources of information:
- 52.5%: Consultants
- 37.2%: Front line staff in your organizational unit
- 35.9%: Management staff in your organizational unit
- 34.9%: Professional associations
- 34.9%: Medias (Newspapers, television, radio)
Knowledge integration strategies

• In your day to day professional activities, over the last 12 months, you have often or very often:
  – Read research information, studies and research reports: 86.1 %
  – Cited research information, studies and research reports to your colleagues: 77.0 %
  – Discussed information, studies and research reports to your colleagues: 78.1 %

Knowledge adaptation strategies

• In your day to day professional activities, over the last 12 months, you have often or very often:
  – Presented research findings into non-technical language for potential users in your organizational unit: 56.8 %
  – Prepared appealing reports for potential users in your organizational unit: 46.8 %
  – Prepared research synthesis and summaries on specific topic for potential users in your organizational unit: 45.8 %
  – Discussed with users in your organizational unit about implications of research results utilization: 56.5 %
  – Provided examples to people in your organizational unit on how to use research findings: 43.8 %
Knowledge brokering push strategies targeting external organizations

In your day to day professional activities, over the last 12 months, how frequently did you provide studies and research reports to people in…

The most frequent targets of external push strategies:
- 40.5% of respondents provide often or very often studies and research reports to people in universities
- 36.5% to people in hospitals, long term care facilities or other service delivery organizations
- 35.6% to people in provincial ministries
- 32.6% to people in RHAs

The least frequent targets of external push strategies:
- 69.1% of respondents never or rarely provide studies and research reports to people in private firms
- 56.2% to people in foundations
- 54.9% to people in federal ministries
- 45.9% to people in community organizations

Knowledge brokering strategies targeting internal organizations

- In their day to day professional activities, over the last 12 months, the respondents have often or very often:
  - 54% of respondents have often or very often sent research findings, studies and research reports to target users in their organizational unit
  - 45% have sent studies and research reports tailored to target user’s need in their organizational unit
  - 41% have organized meetings to discuss current research projects with target users in their organizational unit
  - 40% have discussed the implications of research results with target users in their organizational unit
  - 30% have organized meetings to discuss preliminary results with target users in their organizational unit
Knowledge brokering strategies targeting **internal** organizations: variations by types of organizations

- Sending research findings, studies and research reports to target users in their organizational unit:
  - Highest score for RHAs respondents: 68.4%
  - Lowest score for federal and provincial ministries: 33%
- Sending studies and research reports tailored to target user’s need in their organizational unit:
  - Highest score for RHAs respondents: 57%
  - Lowest score for federal and provincial ministries: 30%
- Organizing meetings to discuss current research projects with target users in their organizational unit:
  - Highest score for universities and research organizations respondents: 49%
  - Lowest score for private firms: 25%
- Discussing the implications of research results with target users in their organizational unit:
  - Highest score for universities and research organizations respondents: 41%
  - Lowest score for private firms: 18%
- Organizing meetings to discuss preliminary results with target users in their organizational unit:
  - Highest score for respondents in hospitals, long-term care facilities or other service delivery organizations: 51%
  - Lowest score for private firms: 25%

Dissemination tools supporting the push strategies

- Tools that are used **often and very often** to disseminate research findings, studies and research reports too people in your organizational unit and in other organizations:
  - Electronic mail: 87.7%
  - Face-to-face contacts: 58.8%
  - Internet: 57.7%
  - Phone: 38.8%
  - Newsletters: 38.5%
  - Intranet: 37%
- Tools that are never or rarely used:
  - Regular mail or internal mail: 43.9%
Intermediation strategies

- In their day to day professional activities, over the last 12 months, the respondents have often or very often...
  - facilitated person-to-person contact between people in your organizational unit and researchers: 50% have done it often or very often
  - facilitated the involvement of individuals from your organizational unit into research projects: 42%
  - organized seminars, meetings, conferences or other events to provide opportunities for exchanges between people in your organizational unit and researchers: 36%
  - facilitated the creation of research projects’ advisory committees: 34%

Intermediation strategies by types of organizations

- Facilitating person-to-person contact between people in your organizational unit and researchers:
  - Highest score: 62% for respondents in universities and research org.
  - Lowest score: 25% for private firms
- Facilitating the involvement of individuals from your organizational unit into research projects:
  - Highest score: 49% for respondents in universities and research org.
  - Lowest score: 28% for federal and provincial ministries
- Organizing seminars, meetings, conferences or other events to provide opportunities for exchanges between people in your organizational unit and researchers:
  - Highest score: 43% for universities and research org.
  - Lowest score: 28% for RHAs
- Facilitating the creation of research projects’ advisory committees:
  - Highest score: 50% for universities and research org.
  - Lowest score: 21% for federal and provincial ministries
Intermediation strategies by professional status

- Facilitating person-to-person contact between people in your organizational unit and researchers:
  - Highest score: 57.2% for Top or executive managers
- Facilitating the involvement of individuals from your organizational unit into research projects:
  - Highest score: 54.6% for Top or executive managers
- Organizing seminars, meetings, conferences or other events to provide opportunities for exchanges between people in your organizational unit and researchers:
  - Highest score: 48.1% for Top or executive managers
- Facilitating the creation of research projects’ advisory committees:
  - Highest score: 45.5% for Top or executive managers

Preliminary conclusions

- The respondents dedicate 50% of their time to knowledge brokering activities
- The knowledge brokering activities (knowledge transformation + networking) undertaken vary significantly across types of organizations and professional status
Thank you for your attention
Questions?
Comments?