

## Workforce Development Pathway 3 – Knowledge Management

*A recovery-oriented service requires open, shared knowledge management.*



### Knowledge Management

#### What will you get out of this chapter?

- ✓ An understanding of the stages of the knowledge management process
- ✓ An understanding of the ways to share information
- ✓ The importance of knowledge management
- ✓ The principles of a learning organisation in community mental health
- ✓ How to conduct a knowledge audit

### Why does knowledge need to be ‘managed’?

The workforce, in partnership with consumers and carers, is at the heart of achieving a recovery-oriented service system. Knowledge management is about enabling knowledge creation and sharing of knowledge. Knowledge management involves enhancing relationships with consumers and carers so as to learn from their lived experience knowledge base. This is the knowledge base that principally informs recovery-oriented service delivery<sup>72</sup>. Service providers need to recognise that the personal knowledge and expertise of consumers and carers is equal but different from their own service-provider knowledge base.<sup>73</sup> **Knowledge management in a recovery-oriented organisation is about synthesising ‘professional’ and ‘personal’ experience knowledge bases, ultimately fusing into a shared knowledge base.**<sup>74</sup> This involves a shift in attitudes as well as a shift in perspective of roles so that Mental Health Support Workers, Consumer Workers and Carer Workers become ‘partners’ with consumers, rather than the ‘experts’. It is about ‘going back to the basics’ and re-learning what we know and learning what we don’t know about recovery and recovery processes from consumers and carers. This will inform and guide the design and implementation of recovery-oriented services. It will also encourage individuals to become self-determining in their personal situation and journey and to know that their lived experience is valued.

Understanding that knowledge is a valuable resource is necessary, but not sufficient, for an organisation. **This knowledge base needs to be deliberately managed through cultivating a learning culture and culture of exchange.** This means staff at every level of the organisation systematically gather knowledge and share it with others in the organisation, consumers and carers, so as to achieve organisational goals and enhance service delivery.<sup>75</sup> Managers need to stress the need to share information with the right people. This will be promoted if there is a culture that is trusting and open within and between organisations.

The kinds of activities and practices that will support organisational learning include<sup>76</sup>:

- Forums in which conversations about purpose and practice can take place
- Strategic planning discussions/days
- Participation in policy-making
- Benchmarking and quality improvement
- Professional development
- Mentoring and action learning
- Innovation and evaluation
- Research practices
- Encouraging diversity in the workforce
- Reflective practice

**Action learning** takes place in a learning organisation. It is a workforce development technique through which individuals learn by doing. Through the process, “people increase their self-awareness and develop new knowledge, attitudes and behaviours as well as skills for making changes and redefining their roles and responsibilities within new or changing workplace contexts”.<sup>77</sup> Action learning principles can also be tied in with reflective practice and linked to discussions about evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence. Action learning enables staff to build their own knowledge - this is a continuous process.

There are several stages in the knowledge management process, each of which requires different techniques to assist in its development. These are:<sup>78</sup>

- Create
- Capture
- Share
- Revise

The knowledge milieu consists of four parts: people, process, content and technology.<sup>79</sup> Managers need to have a balanced view of knowledge management - an over emphasis on technology issues at the expense of considering people, process and cultural issues could adversely affect technological advances.<sup>80</sup> An example of this is the implementation of outcome monitoring without first engaging with staff and consumers about the benefits and context. This may result in poor uptake and decrease any potential value to the consumers and staff involved.

## How to share information

One of the greatest challenges facing managers is the explosion of information and knowledge and how to disseminate this information to staff, consumers and carers in a meaningful and sustainable way. Also, the quality of information varies considerably and managers need to encourage staff to analyse and critique available research. There are several ways that managers can share this information with staff, consumers and carers by selecting the most valuable or key information. These include:

- Staff meetings or COIN (community of interest) teams<sup>81</sup> that meet regularly
- Notice boards
- Emails
- Policy and Procedure updates
- Journal club
- Centralising research projects so that it is accessible to staff at all levels, and the validity, i.e. recency, of the work is checked
- Promote sharing of evidence-based practices across the community mental health sector and between sectors
- Story-telling or scenarios - this is one of the most powerful ways to convey knowledge
- Accessible file created where staff document interest pieces, case examples, examples of best practice, and other work related information

Managers need to be aware of the channels that exist to disseminate information so that the workforce is up-to-date with information. This will support decision making and improve services for consumers, carers and families. At the same time, managers should be mindful of information overload and select the most appropriate tools for sharing information for the organisation. These resources should match organisational goals and values.

With so much correspondence and information exchange happening electronically, managers need to have clear information management strategies. This will include policies that address management of emails, records-keeping policies, and responsible internet usage.

One of the most important goals of knowledge management is to identify accessible ways to manage information that staff bring to an organisation or develop during their employment. An example of this is maintaining files on a shared drive rather than on individual computers and reporting work progress during staff meetings. This ensures that when people leave the organisation the wealth of knowledge (both implicit and explicit) that they have is recorded and accessible. Succession planning involves a transfer of this knowledge base.

Managers need to develop a **culture of continuous quality improvement** in which information and knowledge is used to enhance recovery and service development.<sup>82</sup> This extends to ensuring that robust, relevant and uniformly defined data is collected across the organisation regarding service delivery and workforce practices as well as data from consumers and carers. This allows for better workforce development planning, service quality and forecast planning. Decision-making and knowledge management will be relevant to the following groups, each with their own different need for information and knowledge:

- Consumers
- Carers
- Service providers
- Managers/team leaders
- Stakeholders/funding bodies

## Conduct a knowledge audit for the organisation

Key questions that a knowledge audit could include:

- What knowledge does the staff/team need to acquire or develop?
- What are the 'blocks' to knowledge transfer and acquisition?
- How can knowledge be better shared and organised?
- What knowledge resources/tools are currently in use?
- What are the current and future benchmarks for knowledge use?

A knowledge audit can also assist managers to see what the most pressing needs are for research/ project grants, e.g. knowledge gaps could suggest an area for research and development.



### **Workplace example – The NEAMI Leadership Development Program**

The Neami Leadership Development Program (LDP) is an innovative program that structurally supports and guides the way in which Neami and its staff develop and grow in their capacity to manage information in an ever changing service environment.

Within the context of the LDP, knowledge management (KM) is defined as the systematic sharing of knowledge to achieve personal development and growth and organisational innovation and creativity. As such, KM at Neami is firmly embedded within principles of continuous improvement and the concept of Neami as a learning organisation. Both are ongoing tasks which require concerted staff effort and input across all organisation levels.

Learning organisations continuously adapt and change in response to both external and internal environments, with primary emphasis on directly improving outcomes for its service users. The LDP reflects the fact that a learning organisation needs to develop the capacity to create, acquire and transfer knowledge. Effective KM ensures those requiring information have ready access to it through people, information and other sources. When knowledge is managed effectively information is shared and good practices can be learnt and replicated.

As program participants, managers and senior practice staff work and study in a range of learning environments using a range of different formats including workshops, online learning, action learning sets and team learning. These opportunities enable participants to develop key leadership skills (e.g. creative problem solving, emotional intelligence, change management, sharing visions) while at the same time allowing staff to address important organisational questions through project work and action learning. Embedding these skills and a more inclusive and reflective leadership and learning style at management level has a positive ripple effect to all other levels of the organisation. In fact, it enables a better utilisation and incorporation of the diverse sets of skills, knowledge and capacities that exist at various levels throughout the whole organisation.