

Principle #3 Know who your key experts are

It is useful as part of your KM programme to have visibility of the key knowledge holders / experts in the organization whose leaving will cause problems. Ways of doing this include:

- A knowledge audit – this will identify core knowledge; if the audit is an in-depth one, it should also identify that knowledge which is tacit and who has it; where there is dependency on only one or two individuals, that knowledge is at risk
- Social network analysis – this is a technique for mapping communications and knowledge flows between individuals within your organization and beyond; it will typically identify heavily networked individuals (important nodes in the organizations informal networks) and isolated (unconnected) individuals. The former person has a lot of know-who (you need to capture his/her address book!); the latter may be a specialist whose knowledge may be unique or idiosyncratic and may need to special attention to bring it into the mainstream
- Expertise profiling – knowing who is the company's expert on a given topic can come out of various expertise directories and profiling techniques; it may be an explicit skills directory (or 'Yellow Pages'); it may be evident through their participation in communities of practice or online subject forums; also there is software that can infer this from a person's online behaviour, such as their contributions in the form of documents and emails and to which networks they belong. In many situations, other individuals in the organization will know who these people are.

It is important that these individuals are explicitly identified and plans put in place to minimize over-reliance on their tacit knowledge and reduce the risk of knowledge loss should they leave.

Principle #4 If you've left it too late, act quickly and decisively

Nevertheless, through reasons cited above, many organizations are faced with a potential unexpected loss of knowledge. Don't despair. It is possible to apply knowledge elicitation techniques at short notice (see the Georgia-Pacific Case Study). It helps, of course, if you are already prepared with people trained in the techniques of elicitation. You will also have to careful to judge how much time to spend on capturing knowledge alongside other activities you want the employee to undertake before they leave.