Knowledge Transfer Strategies

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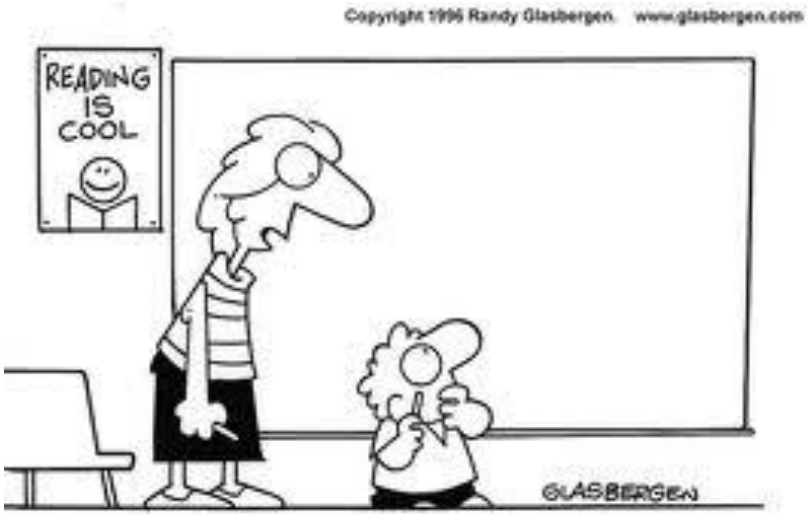
Introduction

Research must be translated and used in the real world to effectively manage social problems. It must be accessible, meaningful, understandable and relevant to practitioners, and usable according to their context, environment or system.

The science of knowledge transfer (KT), knowledge mobilization (KMb) and knowledge utilization (KU) are growing sources of interest. Research in this field spans at least 50 years and 14 disciplines.

Research to develop theoretical models and study the effectiveness of strategies is underway but the development of an evidence-base is still in its infancy.



"There aren't any icons to click. It's a chalk board."

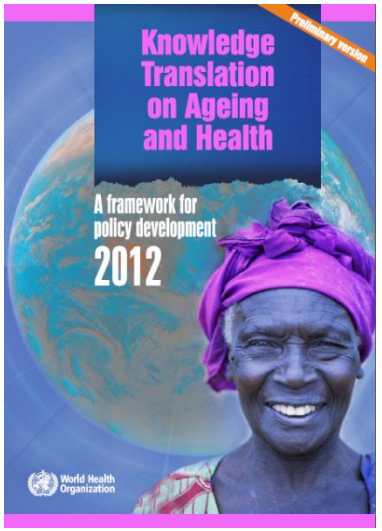
It remains a relatively new field of inquiry in road safety.
The complexity of the issue makes it more challenging to address.

KT definitions and key features

KT is the process of ensuring that rigorous and sound research results are effectively communicated to an appropriate audience to inspire and motivate them to alter their behaviour in the real world to produce better outcomes.

Knowledge transfer is "a dynamic and iterative process that includes the synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically sound application of knowledge".
- Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR).

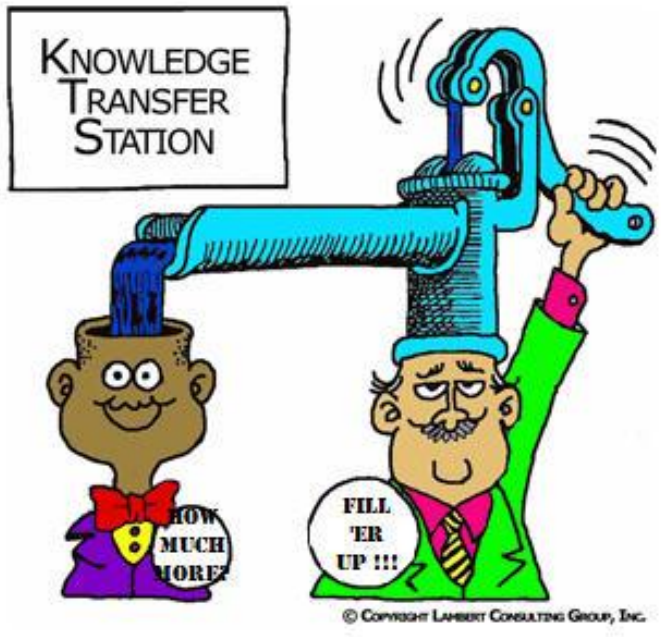
The WHO has adapted this definition with an emphasis on "accelerating the benefits of global and local innovation".



Key features of definitions:

- Individuals/organizations are inherently resistant to change.
- New knowledge is not spontaneously implemented or widely adopted.
- Knowledge must be filtered and distilled to be usable.

Key knowledge transfer models



Planned change or planned action model:

- Main objective is to deliberately engineer change.
- Focus is not to change individuals as much as to change how tasks are completed in social systems.

Social interaction model:

- Personal interactions between the knowledge source and the target audience are critical.
- Systematic and structured interactions vs. chaotic interactions that vary at different stages.

Knowledge utilization model:

- Explains the interaction and negotiation that occurs between fundamentally different systems and the factors that mediate this process.
- Factors pertaining to the behaviour of researchers and the context of end users rather than qualities/ characteristics of products have more influence on extent knowledge is utilized.

Key knowledge transfer models

Network model:

- Main objective is to examine how knowledge, resources, activities and learning move across entities to understand how the creation of information networks changes the behaviour of individuals and organizations.
- Relationships between individuals/organizations can vary.

Knowledge broker model:

- Knowledge transfer that utilizes a credible individual to identify and bring together interested persons to share ideas/collaborate.
- Brokers build and facilitate relationships and networks to enable sharing of research and ideas to inspire and motivate new work.

Barriers to knowledge transfer

- Technical jargon; gaps between concepts and their application in real world; breadth, volume, cost and accessibility of publications; slow pace of research; and, policy decision-making includes diverse forms of evidence aside from research.

Common gaps in existing models

Target audience rarely queried or consulted:

- KT undertaken without input from practitioners, or only at dissemination stage.
- This results in limited uptake on the part of practitioners.

Models are generally linear, cyclic or sequential:

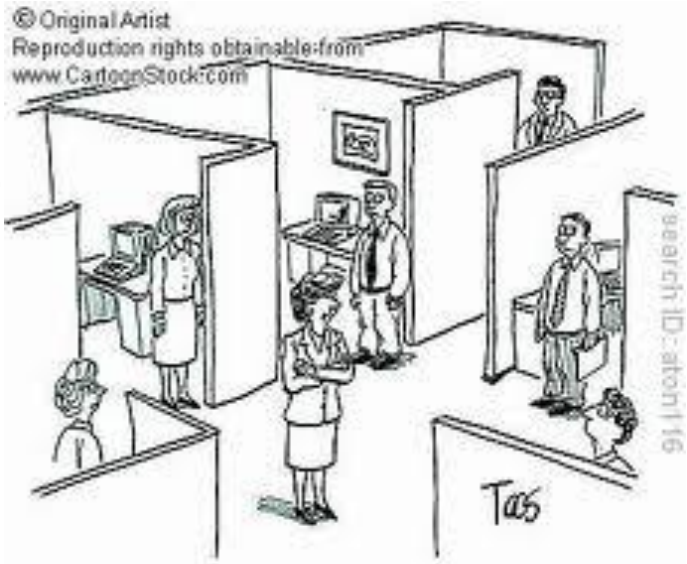
- Fail to account for ongoing, iterative nature of KT process.
- Negotiation is a critical element and few models explicitly acknowledge the importance of a dynamic process.

Models are discipline-specific:

- Inherent nature of researchers/practitioners to operate in silos and overlook the relevance of their work to others.
- Limited utility to address more complex social issues.

Models are analogous to a "black box":

- Explain what happens but not how.



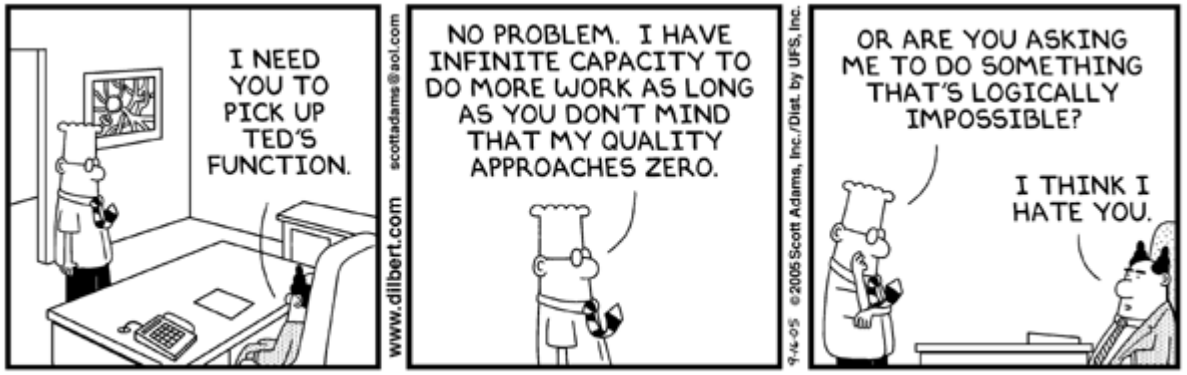
"I like to end these meetings with a group hug, if you'll step out of the cubicles."

TIRF's KT model

TIRF's KT model has been developed over the past decade. It involves four distinct and independent yet inter-connected streams of activity that are integral to its model.

Maintenance of a systems perspective:

- Active participant in practitioner activities and organizations across systems.
- Listen, learn, understand.
- Observe environment to anticipate changes and external influences that may stimulate change.



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Rigorous evidence review:

- Systematic and critical review of evidence with eye towards what aspects are amenable to KT. Assesses evidence from a variety of sources; consider context to apply it.

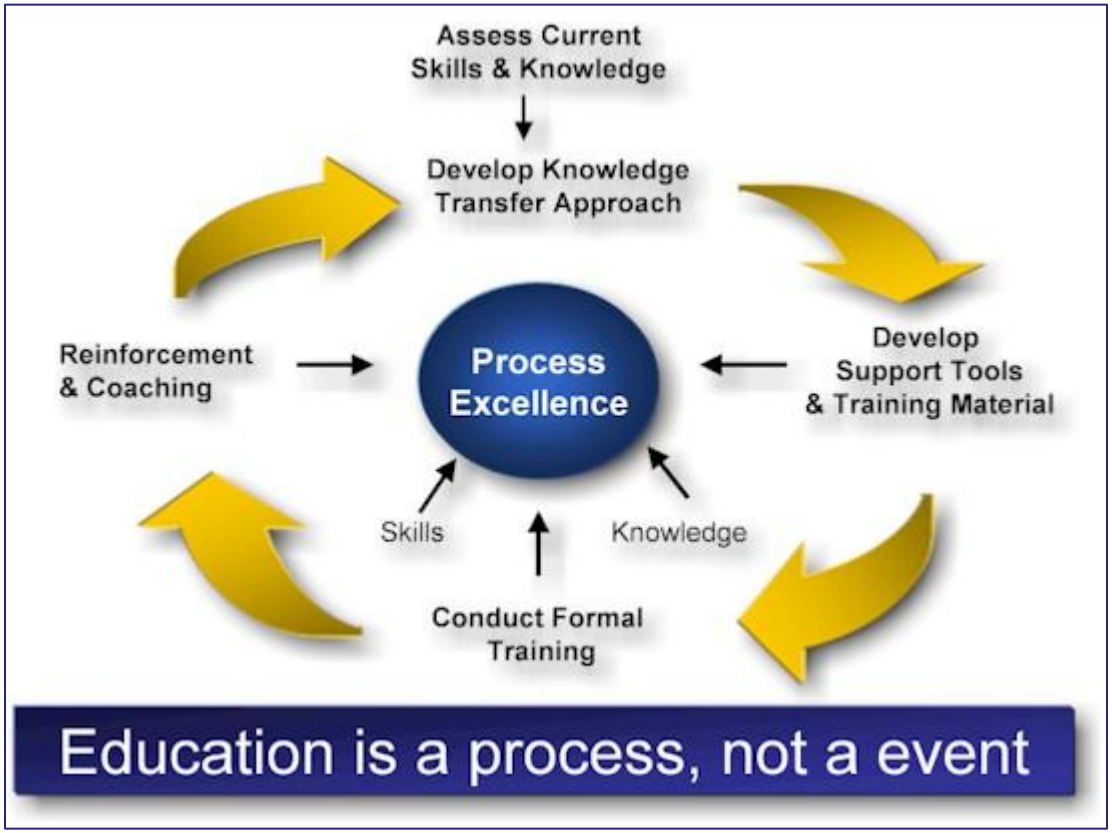
TIRF's KT model

Adapted implementation:

- Active engagement with diverse practitioners to add context, convert tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge, to understand and address barriers.

Regular and ongoing feedback:

- Actively sought from practitioners.
- Formal and informal.
- From multiple sources to guide and refine activities.



Unique features of TIRF's KT model

Selection of topics and activities:

- Determined in consultation with practitioners.
- Ability to understand issue from multiple perspectives to more precisely focus activities.

Consideration of context, environment, systems:

- Complex adaptive view of road safety; neither linear nor cyclic.

Multi-disciplinary approach:

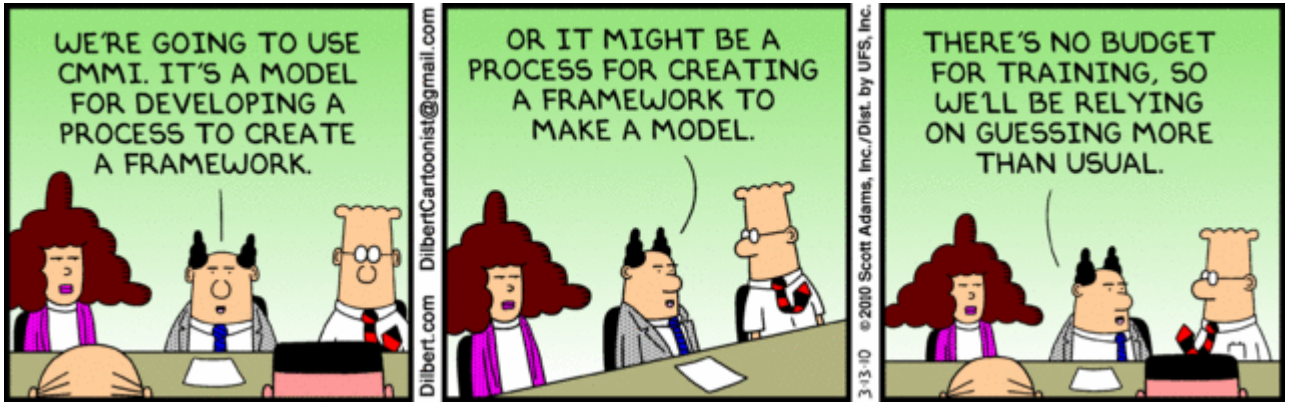
- Careful attention to diverse terminologies/practices, competing priorities, delivery strategies.
- More challenging but more rewarding.

Does not assume a pre-determined outcome:

- Emphasis on providing options and alternatives to be discussed and explored.
- Decision-making is not the purview of researchers and the application of findings is complex.
- Credibility of researchers is based on their understanding of context/environment and also their ability to separate their own perspectives and opinions from their knowledge.

Conclusions

Profound consequences of failing to pursue KT are evident throughout history.



The shortcomings associated with KT are more a result of a silo mentality that divides researchers and practitioners than the fact that research is unavailable or considered irrelevant to decision-making.

Conclusions

TIRF has learned several important lessons as a result of its experience.

Show up often and participate. Listen and seek to understand practitioner perspectives, experiences and concerns before drawing conclusions.

Avoid imposing your own experiences and frame of reference on the issue.

Identify specific goals and a clear focus for KT activities at the beginning and stick to them (KISS). Retain flexibility to adapt to changing conditions across systems.

Engage in continuous dialogue with target audiences and the thought leaders who influence them.

Ensure inclusive leadership throughout the entire process.

Conclusions

KT has added a new dimension to TIRF's research activities that has produced significant benefits for the organization.

It has facilitated the collection of data and access to it, it has shaped and underscored the relevance of road safety research to inform practice, and it has added much-needed context to inform decision-making in a policy environment.

This has contributed to the increasing visibility of TIRF's work and attracted new funding sources.

TIRF will continue to refine its model and pursue evaluation of it to further develop understanding of KT processes.

"In an economy where the only certainty is uncertainty, the one sure source of lasting competitive advantage is knowledge (Nonaka 2007; p.162).

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