

Healthy knowledge management and social networking

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Social network analysis could improve knowledge sharing in the healthcare sector, according to research results published in the *International Journal of Collaborative Enterprise*.

Elizabeth Cudney, Steven Corns and Suzanna Long in the department of Engineering Management and Systems Engineering at Missouri University of Science and Technology, in Rolla, Missouri, USA, explain how [knowledge](#) management systems (KMS) can be critical in capturing, retaining and communicating project results and staff knowledge. They can prevent knowledge drain and provide training as "lessons learned" following specific occurrences and the resolution of particular problems the staff face.

The team has focused on the development of a KMS using social network analysis (SNA) to see how this combination might improve methods for organizing and sharing knowledge within a large government healthcare organization. They identified the key people involved using a narrative approach to interview in focus groups formed from those who were early adopters of process improvement methods. This allowed them to understand how changes to the work environment and procedures were perceived. The results from this preliminary work then allowed the team to devise a Likert-style questionnaire, named for American administrator and organizational psychologist Rensis Likert who worked at the US Department of Agriculture in the 1940s. This questionnaire was then given to all users to help the team assimilate a broad perspective on how social networking affects knowledge sharing.

They performed a [social networking](#) mapping and analysis to characterize the relationships between the various players and the knowledge links between them. They found that improvements could be made if individuals identified by many members of staff were to form a tight, core, network of their own. This would rapidly increase the ability to disseminate information on projects because this core of individuals would all have many people in their own networks.

They also found that improvements in KMS abound if the "early adopters" also form a core network as they could disseminate new ideas much more rapidly too. An additional conclusion from the work is that if technical assistance is provided early this better facilitates the creation of connections for sharing information and networking opportunities. The team adds that as with education, a higher level of engagement and stimulation makes the system that much easier for the personnel involved to benefit from the information in the system.

"While these recommendations apply specifically to this healthcare organization, these recommendations are applicable for improving [knowledge sharing](#) in any large organization regardless of industry," the team concludes.

More information: Cudney, E.A., Corns, S.M. and Long, S.K. (2014) 'Improving knowledge sharing in healthcare through social network analysis', Int. J. Collaborative Enterprise, Vol. 4, Nos. 1/2, pp.17–33.

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