DYNAMIC KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER: A STRATEGY TO IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE FLOW AMONG WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY RESEARCHERS IN EASTERN CANADA

Actionable knowledge about workplace health and safety “best practices” contributes significantly to improve a company’s bottom line and the overall working conditions of employees. Unfortunately in Canada it is not evenly distributed across time, locations, and organizations. Furthermore, because health and safety knowledge flow is an inherently dynamic and complex concept, it’s manifestations in organizations are not well understood. For example, what are the factors that facilitate or impede health and safety knowledge flow in and between organizations? How do we transcend the purely scientific concerns of health and safety researchers and create knowledge that enables organizations to make informed choices about important health and safety issues? How does knowledge about health and safety prevention gained in one culture get transferred to another culture? How does such knowledge developed in an industrialized setting transfer to a semi-rural or rural setting? How do we make sure that the results of science-based health and safety research are relevant, responsible and make a valuable contribution to organizations and society? In other words, how do we make our health and safety knowledge actionable?

Health and safety researchers in Québec have done a credible job of creating knowledge that is scientifically sound and rigorous. Indeed, the Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et sécurité du travail (IRSST) has generated an impressive body of workplace health and safety findings. However, in spite of numerous efforts to transfer these findings into practical applications they consider that too few of them have effectively made their way into the practice arena. For a host of reasons the knowledge developed by workplace health and safety researchers fails to cross over into the research arena outside Québec as well as into the practice arena both inside and outside Québec. This application problem is often stated in terms of the researcher’s job being to create new scientific knowledge and the practitioner’s job is to apply it. In this view, some argue that it is not the responsibility of the researcher to consider practical applications. Still others contend that solutions lie in how new theories and findings about workplace health and safety are disseminated, requiring more practitioner friendly ways to communicate our research findings. Yet another view of the application problem lies in how knowledge is created. This view, which the authors of this article defend, calls for more collaborative, action-oriented approaches to generating knowledge that is relevant, timely, and actionable. These are some of the issues the Eastern Canada Consortium on Workplace Health and Safety has undertaken to address over the course of a five

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1 Sections of an earlier version of this communication have been accepted for publication in an upcoming issue (2004) of the Electronic Journal on Knowledge Management.
year research project funded by a capacity enhancement grant from the Canadian Institutes for Health Research.