

# Examining the risk of lost knowledge with personnel changes in small nonprofit organizations on Prince Edward Island

Project 2.20

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# Introduction

The intent of this project is to inquire into the risk of lost knowledge for small nonprofit organizations on Prince Edward Island when they experience losses in personnel. The purpose is to gain a greater understanding of knowledge management practices and barriers, so that tools and structures can be developed to mitigate the risk of lost organizational knowledge. The ultimate goal is to assist social economy organizations in preserving and transferring knowledge so that they can face future challenges armed with the experience and wisdom of their personnel, both past and present.

## *Research Questions:*

- How are small nonprofit organizations (NPOs) on Prince Edward Island managing the risk of lost knowledge associated with key personnel leaving the organizations?
- What types of knowledge are at the greatest risk with the loss of personnel?
- What are the barriers that prevent small NPOs from retaining and transferring the knowledge that is embedded in their people?



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# Background and Rationale

Theoretically, the study will examine:

- how explicit and tacit knowledge is retained and transferred in the organizations of the social economy.
- the impact social capital has on knowledge management practices.

From a pragmatic standpoint, the project strives to:

- build knowledge management capacity in small Atlantic Canadian nonprofit organizations.
- mitigate the risk of lost knowledge for these organizations.
- reduce the associated consequences on organizational sustainability.



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# Community/University Collaboration (partnership)

## Process of building research partnership

- The partnership of this collaborative project is extended to all community members of Sub-node 2.
- Research participants will be solicited through the Sub-node's network of social economy organizations.

## Partnership contribution to project and anticipated outcomes for partners

- Partners will contribute to the design and implementation of the study, and may act as research participants.
- This study intends to raise awareness for its partners of organizational knowledge management practices in the social economy.
- The product of the study will be a research report and toolkit that will empower social economy organizations to make effective choices about their knowledge management practices.

## Knowledge mobilization within and beyond the partnership

- The research findings will be disseminated to the research participants, interested organizations in the social economy, public policy makers and the general public.
- The project will contribute to the body of knowledge management and social economy research, by examining knowledge management practices in small nonprofit organizations, an area that has thus far been neglected.



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# Project Methodology

The project will be conducted in three phases:

- A sector survey will be administered for the purpose of assessing the overall risk of lost knowledge for small nonprofit organizations.
- Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to inquire into the experiences that organizations have had in retaining the knowledge of exiting employees.
- A customized knowledge management toolkit prototype will be developed and delivered in a workshop for small nonprofit organizations.

The project timeline is August 2008 - April 2009.



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# Anticipated Findings

Based on previous research in the social economy and the field of knowledge management, it is expected that this study will:

- Identify opportunities for improved knowledge management in small nonprofit organizations.
- Describe the impact of organizational priorities and resource constraints on knowledge management.
- Highlight how social capital can affect knowledge management in social economy organizations.



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# Deliverables

The anticipated products of this study include:

- A research report based on the findings of the survey and interviews.
- A customized knowledge management toolkit for small nonprofit organizations.
- A learning event which will include a presentation of the report findings and a knowledge management workshop for small non-profit organizations.

Opportunities to present the study's products to public, academic, and policy-making audiences will also be pursued.



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# How the Student Will Benefit From The Project

Upon successful completion of the project, it is expected that the student will have acquired marketable skills and experience in the field of public interest research, interview and survey design, data collection and analysis, report writing, and design and implementation of community presentations and workshops. This project will satisfy the final requirements of the student's degree program, obtaining a Master of Arts in Communications and Technology through the University of Alberta.



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# Next Steps

*The study is currently in progress.*



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