



CASE STUDY:

Basys Uses Knowledge Transfer to Maintain and Grow Human Capital During The “Brain Drain”

Introduction: Organizations today are faced with some of the greatest workforce challenges in history: demographic shifts, talent shortages and the resulting ‘brain drain’, as more than one third of the US workforce prepares to retire; taking with them talent and critical institutional knowledge. On average, this generation of workers has been in the workforce longer than previous generations, and has worked for their employer longer than those who follow.

Companies such as Basys, a software company founded in 1977 and specializing in health and retirement benefits administration, are proactively addressing the mounting risk of managing talent and preparing the next generation of employees by launching strategic Knowledge Transfer initiatives.

I. THE BUSINESS PROBLEM

Basys’ client base was growing, yet the amount of their subject matter experts (SME) available to serve their clients had remained the same. This created a bottleneck of organizational knowledge, as new hires relied on the SMEs to answer, advise, guide and trouble-shoot. Of course, Basys had a training program for new hires, but it was not fully integrated throughout the organization.

In recent years, Basys had built a strong pipeline of business and had hired a large number of new staff, with more planning to be hired in the coming years to meet the demand. Yet, Basys had no systematic methodology for bringing new hires up to speed effectively, efficiently and quickly to meet the company’s growing demand.

“Our SMEs were being overly burdened because they were knowledge silos, and our new people were frustrated. They wanted to do a good job, but lacked the resources to succeed.” – Jenny Morgan, CEO Basys

Key Challenges Basys Faced:

1. How to accelerate the speed of training new employees, or veteran employees new for roles or projects?
2. How to engage and retain the next generation of workers?
3. How to cross train employees to foster innovation, flexibility, and consistency to meet the demands of a changing organization and rapidly growing clientele?

II. STRATEGY

In 2014, Basys hired the leader in organizational Knowledge Transfer, Steve Trautman Co.(STC), to develop a plan to enable staff to reduce the time spent teaching their skills, create a repeatable, measureable process of Knowledge Transfer that could be used throughout the organization, build standards and measureable goals to increase consistency and customer and employee satisfaction, and



to provide the change management support needed to ensure that the Knowledge Transfer solution was successfully integrated into the Basys culture.

“We’re growing rapidly, so we needed to bring new people on. Most of our expertise was in the heads of our staff that had been here a long time. They needed help translating what was in their heads to actionable items for new employees.” – Jenny Morgan, CEO

Addressing these issues required expert assistance. By following the Steve Trautman Co.’s Knowledge Transfer Solution, Basys embraced a 3-step process where management:

- Inventoried Basys’ knowledge domains (called “silos” in Trautman jargon)
- Identified known experts for each silo, noted gaps revealed by the inventory, and
- Planned and trained employees to fill these gaps

III. APPLICATION: THE STC 3-STEP KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER SOLUTION

STEP 1: The first step of inventorying Basys’ knowledge domains was a way in which the organization assessed their workforce and the processes necessary to accomplish their tasks. By completing this step using the Knowledge Silo Matrix (KSM), the organization was able to identify the information needed to be a proficient worker in each knowledge domain, and the departmental silos where knowledge gaps existed. They were also able to take a fresh look at their processes to help improve workflow by reducing unnecessary steps.

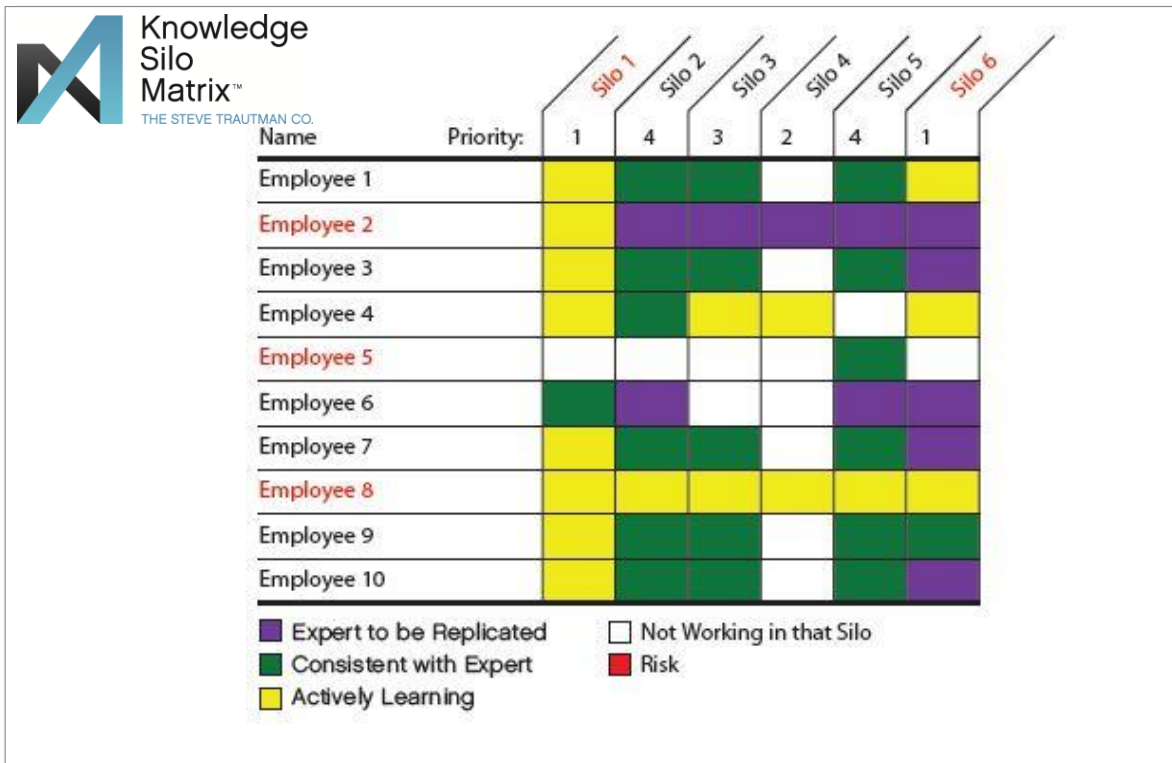


Figure 1. Example of a Knowledge Silo Matrix (KSM), a tool of STC 3-step knowledge transfer.



- Using a quick process of management discussion and employee peer interviews to complete the KSM, STC identified distinct knowledge “silos” within the new hires’ roles. [see Figure 1]
- With silos and ratings in place, the KSM immediately revealed to management that certain silos were at high risk, because the team lacked sufficient bench strength in those silos to implement and sustain the 1-3 year business strategy. [see red silos in Figure 1]
- The KSM also provided the basis to discuss associated workforce risks—using such criteria as the criticality of each silo, where each mentor was located, and retirement expectations.


With silos identified, individual employees with silo expertise were designated “Peer Mentors” to encourage methodical skill development with the Peer Mentor as a key training resource. In addition, each silo was analyzed to determine associated risks, using the following criteria: mission priority, current on-site expertise, retirement window (timeframe), difficulty in hiring expertise from outside, and overall skill complexity to allow time for ramp-up.

STEP 2: For each silo, a master Skill Development Plan (SDP) was written that delineated the individual skills required to perform the work of that silo. For each employee, a customized plan to learn these skills was created and linked to their professional development plan. [see Figure 2]

Basys now understands what silos and skills are important, who is most competent to teach those skills and who needs to learn them. Managers now have a measured process for holding individual employees accountable to act as mentors and for “apprentices” to take ownership of their own training.

“I’m more comfortable and confident doing my job, and know I am doing it right!” – Recent Hire & Apprentice

Basys also increased the number of SMEs, enabling the company to increase and standardize their level of service, and allow for new resources to be allocated to additional services and products for their clients. In addition to the benefits of increased client service, Basys’ employees are thrilled with this initiative because they have begun to unburden themselves from being the only person who knows how to fix widget X, and service client Y. As a result, new employees become productive team members more rapidly, which increases their motivation and engagement.



Skill	Sequence	Test (key below)	Date	Resources
Monitor fan performance in ventilation system	1	1,11,15	10/21/2009	site documentation, federal regulations, formal training,peer
Troubleshoot fan failures	2	1,11,15	11/10/2009	site documentation, federal regulations, peer
Review Design Basis Document	3	1,11,15	12/4/2009	site documentation,peer
Write a POD prompt operability determination	4	1,2,3,13,14,15	12/31/2009	site documentation, federal regulations, peer,formal training
Write reportability assessment	5	1,2,3,11,13,14,15	12/31/2009	site documentation, federal regulations,peer, licensing/compliance
Review trend data on generator	8	1,2,3,8,10,14,15	10/19/2009	
Write maintenance rule evaluation	10	1,2,3,7,10,13,14,15	12/31/2009	site documentation, federal regulations, peer,formal training
Write troubleshooting plans	12	1,2,5,6,14	1/15/2010	site documentation, peer

Figure 2. Example of a partial Skill Development Plan (SDP), a tool of STC 3-step knowledge transfer.



STEP 3: The Steve Trautman Co. then led a **Knowledge Transfer Workshop (KTW)** on site. This final step provides the tools needed so that SMEs can train their colleagues in the identified areas. Many of Basys’ SMEs have worked at Basys for 30+ years, so the amount of tacit and organizational knowledge they possessed was immense. (Basys clearly needed to reduce the risk held within these knowledge silos). This training program was written specifically to turn what is traditionally seen as a “soft” skill (mentoring) into a step-by-step process that is simple, and achievable.



Implementing such a robust plan takes an enormous amount of time and energy; some equate it to being “like a part time job.” Knowing this, Basys’ senior management has made this initiative a priority, with accountability measures built in at every step.

“I have watched some of our newest hires evolve from unsure to knowledgeable incredibly fast!” – Kim Campbell, HR Director

- Following the workshops, mentors and apprentices began knowledge transfer sessions, and project managers and the process owner then drove toward completion by requiring regular status updates and accountability to the plan.

IV. PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

To ensure the Knowledge Transfer initiative would be maintained after implementation, Basys has created a structure to incentivize and hold accountable everyone involved in the transfer of organizational knowledge.

Two senior members of the Basys team have been trained in the Trautman methodology. These Knowledge Transfer Process Owners (KTPOs) also have a Skill Development Plan and underwent the same structured 3-step Knowledge Transfer training that their employees underwent. These KTPOs are responsible for driving the Knowledge Transfer effort and ensuring the managers, mentors and apprentices are adhering to their learning plans by holding bi-monthly meetings.

Managers meet weekly with Mentors and Apprentices to review status reports, which outlines the skills Apprentices have gained, the ones they are working on, and ironing out issues that arise. A quick review of one of the Apprentice’s status reports demonstrates that the methodology is working and the Apprentices are incorporating the new knowledge.

Accountability is one way that Basys is making Knowledge Transfer an integral part of their culture; incentives are another pillar to ensure this initiative’s success. Basys has put in place steps to reward and celebrate behaviors that honor the commitment to the Knowledge Transfer methodology and those that are getting results, by giving bonuses to those who have overcome major Knowledge Transfer hurdles and recognizing and rewarding best Knowledge Transfer practices.

“What you incent is what you get, so we have added the Knowledge Transfer activities into our goals & bonus programs. We have always had a culture of accountability, and now we are shifting our incentives and bonus to rewarding those who exemplify our values as a learning organization.” – Jenny Morgan, CEO



V. RESULTS

By increasing Basys’ bench strength, they are better positioned to serve their growing client base, increase new employee productivity faster and improve their staff’s job satisfaction.

After just six months since Basys launched this Knowledge Transfer initiative, the results were evident. Basys now has a professional Knowledge Transfer program embedded in their culture that ensures knowledge is routinely transferred in a quick, methodical way.

Basys leadership says that more employees know more, quicker. A departmental workforce analysis shows dramatically improved on-boarding speed, and incorporates a long-term plan to manage Basys’ talent.

The bottom line is that Basys’ Knowledge Transfer initiative allows their customers to have confidence that Basys’ commitment to high quality customer service is just as serious as their commitment to high quality software. The brilliant part of Basys’ approach is that they have aligned their commitment to serving their clients with their long-term organizational and business strategy.