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Continuity Management:

WHEN ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE WALKS OUT THE DOOR

"If I get hit by a bus…" is a running joke in many offices. It's used for passing on information that it is important for someone else to know in the event that the owner of the knowledge becomes unavailable.

What would you do if a key person on your staff wasn't able to resume work tomorrow? There are various reasons that this could happen from sudden illness or accident to winning the lottery. How much organizational knowledge – not recorded or known by others - does that one person take with them?

When people talk about risk management or disaster planning, they often don't think of this situation. They think of hurricanes and floods and tornados. They think of data loss, not knowledge loss. Make sure your Business Continuity Plan includes provisions to minimize loss of knowledge due to employee turnover.

Some ideas to consider:

- Ask each employee to spend a week reviewing their job knowledge, policies and procedures with the lens of "If I never came back to work after today, would someone else have all the knowledge and or tools to do my job."

- Can that knowledge be put into a procedure? Where would you save procedures? How would you organize them?

- Consider an organizational "wiki" where people know they can go for answers.

- Ask employees to think about "exceptions to the rule." How do they know when to apply an exception? Under what circumstances? With what criteria? Who should be informed of exceptions? Document them.

- Even if you have a policy or a procedure that has a lot of "exceptions to the rule," document it. Add the criteria for those exceptions.

- If someone is coming to you repeatedly over a period of time asking the same question, document the answer.

- Think about relationship management – with vendors, funders, stakeholders, donors. Where is information about those relationships kept? Who has access to it?

- Are organizational passwords stored somewhere or only available to a single person?

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- Who knows where critical organizational documents are stored?
- Think about physical aspects. Who has keys to file cabinets and doors? Who knows the combination to the safe?

You may come up with a lot of things that need documentation. Prioritize the things that are essential for everyday operation of the organization and work down from there. You didn't establish all of your policies, procedures and knowledge overnight and the process of documenting it will be done over weeks and months, not days.

Asking yourself these kinds of questions can help decrease knowledge loss when the unexpected happens.

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