

Promoting Knowledge Exchange

Vogue words or mandatory for future success?

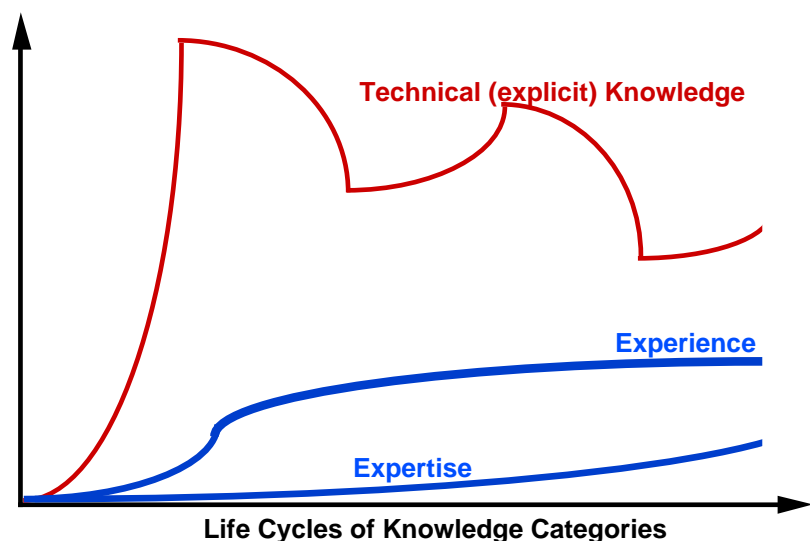
Management of data and information is part of enterprising acting. This led to the term *Knowledge Management*. But in fact: Is knowledge reducible to the exchange of information? Should this term not be renamed with *knowledge work*, since knowledge always has a context to gain of work? And which rule plays the human factor?

"Mr XY leaves us on his own decision, what we deeply regret". This closing remark in a testimonial confirms XY's one-sided determination to resign and indicates an existing social competence. But from an entrepreneur's point of view, the author of this sentence regrets that the organisation loses valuable tacit knowledge with XY's resignation.

Life cycles of knowledge

While XY'S technical knowledge can be replaced quickly with (sometime expensive) HRM initiatives, is the loss of his experience and expertise a serious challenge. The reason are the reciprocal life cycles of the knowledge categories (see graph 1).

The technical (explicit) knowledge grows with selective perceptions, mostly by formal and further education. This knowledge is direct accessible and can be articulated, but it has a continuously shrinking period of decay. Explicit knowledge can be identified, preserved and transferred. Since Gutenberg's epochal invention this can be done in huge quantities; the difference in these days are the variety and the communication speed of the instruments. But explicit knowledge has a major limiting factor: it reflects a status and thus, it is retrospective! Consequently it is not sufficient to rely on an information pool.

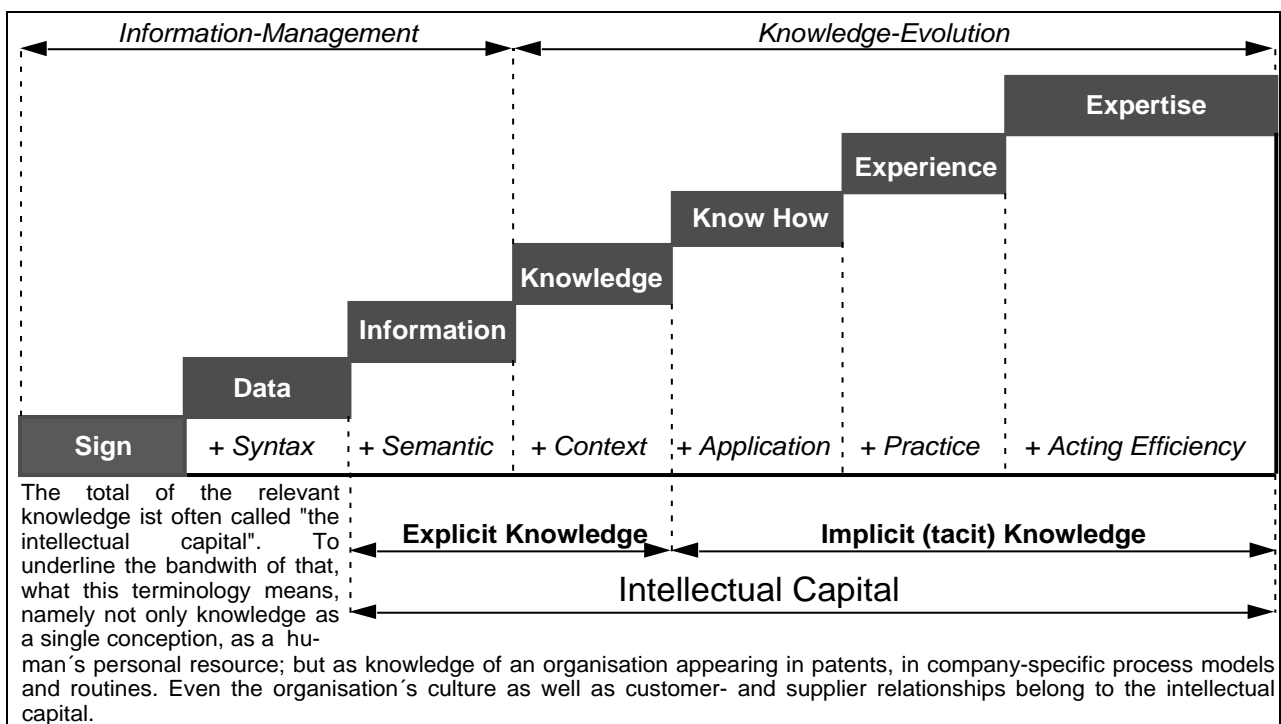


Opposite to explicit knowledge is the tacit (or implicit) knowledge. That is individual human capital, raising in a long-term process. Tacit knowledge is a product of selective perceptions too, but it is always in context with formerly acquired knowledge. It denotes on its highest level as expertise. Tacit knowledge consists in the ability to take decisions (mostly) by intuitions and to convert them to acting efficiency. Although it is known since 1966 (Polanyi), that tacit knowledge is the key driver for new knowledge creation, scientific research does still focus on (the easier to handle) explicit knowledge.

Information management versus knowledge creation

Information can be codified and converted in a systematic language, where ITC offers efficient tools: Popular "knowledge management systems" is based on specialised intranet applications. They allow with sophisticated search machines access to all released information within a local or decentralised organisation; project teams can act virtually and the work flow can be monitored constantly; data can be navigated and combined at necessity. On one hand those are suitable and efficient tools providing the undisputed advantage of high communication speed. On the other hand ITC tools are a source of confusion: They identify, document and transfer *information*, but those processes are called *knowledge management*!

A qualitative difference between information and knowledge is the fact, that information is punctual, while knowledge obligates the understanding of coherence. Knowledge creation requires embedded contexts. Even for this ICT offers solutions: Expert systems and other artificial intelligence technologies demonstrate amazing results, but they work for specific tasks only and are not (yet) available for polyvalent applications.



Graph 2 uncovers the pretended ICT dependence for knowledge creation:

Knowledge has its place between two ears and not between two modems! Quotation Fredmund Malik.

The goals to raise, renew or justify actual knowledge requires human capital, since only humans own the ability to develop information up to expertise. This development depends on human perception and skills: *Remember > Recognise > Understand > Combine > Conclude* are human activities of knowledge creation and thus, rather work than "managing": It is individual and organisational working with the *Intellectual Capital*, which is equal to the total of explicit and tacit knowledge.

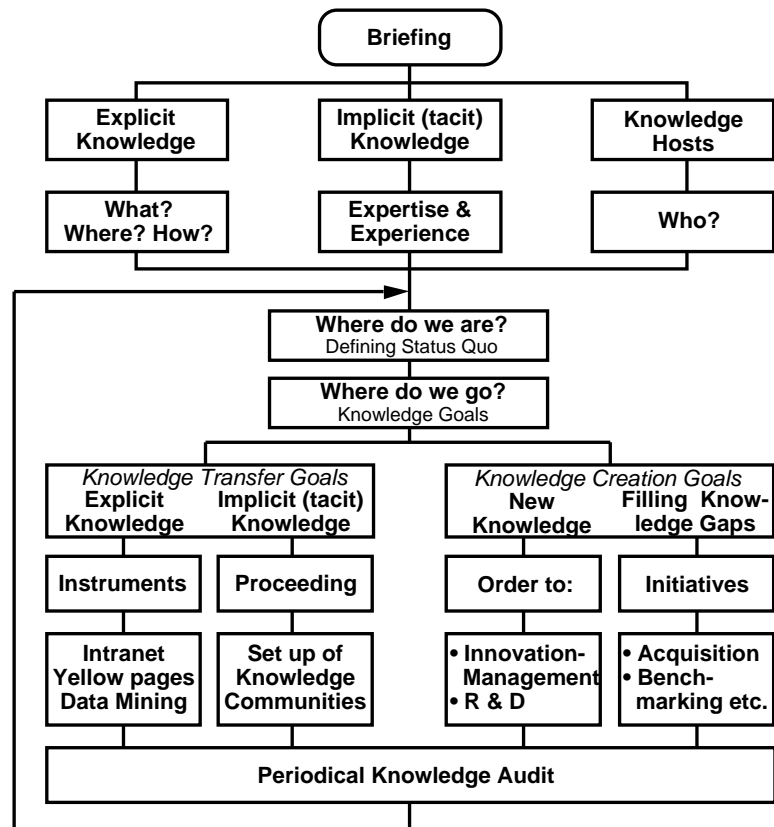
A superior goal of knowledge work is the consolidation and further development of the organisational core competencies, which are mostly based on the staff's experience and expertise. Consolidation means in this context to retain identified knowledge hosts and to steer the transfer of their tacit knowledge by using innovative organisational process models. Knowledge creation presupposes a "high-trust-culture" allowing freedom for acting and offering adequate incentives for knowledge sharing.

Management of knowledge work

A management task - here is consent - is the implementation and controlling of a knowledge system into an existing organisation:

- *Defining status quo*
 - Identification of the relevant knowledge, the knowledge hosts and knowledge gaps
- *Setting knowledge goals*
 - Which knowledge needs to be transferred to whom?
 - Definition of normative, strategic and operational knowledge goals
- *Initiatives*
 - Providing technical and organisational resources
 - Transparent and trust-creating project communication
 - Initiatives to retain identified knowledge hosts
 - Project-driven adaptation of operations
 - Set up of knowledge communities
 - Implementation of an incentive system
- *Evaluation*

Periodical knowledge audit. Since the resource knowledge is not quantifiable, it cannot be measured directly. Indicator systems allow getting in sight. A useful tool is a modified Balanced Scorecard (BSC).



Toolkit for information management

Data and information are the presuppositions for a future-tending knowledge work. A well functioning intranet is the optimal platform to identify, recall and distribute existing information; individually configurable software applications serve as catalyzers for a purposeful use of information:

- DATA WAREHOUSING registers, who was where engaged with which project. This avoids another wheel-inventions, when the wheel is running somewhere else already.
- YELLOW PAGES are established tools for knowledge transparency. Those are internal expert lists containing besides the expert's co-ordinates information about specific fields of activities and practical experience. Employees decide on their own, what information they disclose and put on the expert profiles. The yellow pages content is accessible by all authorised staff with a search machine.

- BLUE PAGES are internal reference lists about external institutions and individuals, which have proven their excellent services and can be recommended for future outsourcing projects.
- VIRTUAL PROJECT TEAMS can be composed and organised at once.
- DISCUSSION FORUMS allow informal exchange of ideas similar to Internet Newsgroups.

Instruments for knowledge creation

Experience and expertise are the outcomes of perception, thinking processes and learning by doing. To share or transfer such tacit knowledge, interactions are necessary. Coffee corners, sports-clubs, company-trips etc. serve as occasions for informal discussions.

For a systematic transfer of tacit knowledge specific process models like SET (Swissair Experience Transfer) and KEEP (Know how-, Experience- & Expertise-Preservation) have been developed. These models consist of knowledge networks, that combine identified knowledge hosts (Seniors) and trainees (Juniors). The goal is a controlled and mutual knowledge transfer: Company-related tacit knowledge goes from the senior to the junior; newest (state of the art-) technical knowledge goes from the junior to the senior. Such models have an impact on management-development too: The involved parties gain a new working quality.

The success of such or similar process models depends on the acceptance of a knowledge-based organisational culture. Strictly speaking the knowledge transfer targets towards externalisation of tacit knowledge from individuals. Thus, the real challenge is not the implementation of a purposeful process, but the elimination of existing barriers and goal conflicts. A knowledge transfer should be honoured and an according incentive system should be established.

Discussion:

Working with knowledge is full of facets! It requires the inclusion of the components technology, organisational culture, management development and incentive systems. If an organisation intends to use the resource information in a sustainable approach, an efficient IT system is mandatory. To reach the next higher level "knowledge creation and transfer", occasions for interactions are a necessity. The intention to control interactions requires adoptions to the organisational routines. For all that, the courage to proceed in an interdisciplinary approach can produce an outstanding outcome.



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