

Chapter 93

Ethos as Enablers of Organisational Knowledge Creation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter considers knowledge creation in relation to improvements on the production line in the manufacturing department of Nissan Motor Company and aims to clarify the substance that enables such knowledge creation. For that purpose, firstly, embodied knowledge observed in the actions of organisational members who enable knowledge creation will be clarified. By adopting an approach that adds a first, second, and third-person's viewpoint to the theory of knowledge creation, this research will attempt to define enablers of knowledge creation. Embodied knowledge, observed in the actions of organisational members who enable knowledge creation, is the continued practice of ethos (in Greek) founded in ethics and reasoning. Ethos is knowledge (intangible) assets for knowledge creating companies. Substantiated analysis classifies ethos into three categories: the individual, team and organisation. This indicates the precise actions of the organisational members in each category during the knowledge creation process and it is easier to commit further to knowledge creation activities.

INTRODUCTION

My chapter examines production improvement activities in the automobile manufacturing industry as a process of knowledge creation, and aims to clarify the factors that enable knowledge creation in a process of knowledge creation (the SECI process by Nonaka & Takeuchi).

For the sake of analysis, it adopts a knowledge creation theory (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) to which have been added first, second and third-person viewpoints (Matsudaira & Fujinami, 2008). In this study, the statements of the interviews are analysed and interpreted through the framework of categories of socialisation, externalisation, combination, internalisation, which constitute the knowledge-creating process of the theory of

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knowledge creation, to which first, second, and third-person's viewpoints were added. I apply the proposed framework to the case of Oppama plant of Nissan Motor Company. By newly introducing first, second, and third-person's viewpoints, it will be possible to achieve a much better way of utilising the theory of knowledge creation within the actual situations than was ever possible. The inclusion of these viewpoints make possible a grasp, not possible using a past theory of knowledge creation, of action and the subjective aspects of organisational members who create knowledge. And from that it will be possible to elucidate the factors, which enable knowledge creation.

This chapter consists of ten sections. It begins with a review of literature on knowledge-based management, centring on the conventional treatment of the enablers of knowledge creation. Sections 3 and 4 provide theoretical reviews of knowledge-creating process. Section 5 describes the standpoints, from which interviews of the people engaged in the knowledge-creating process were conducted in order to clarify the enablers of knowledge creation. Section 6 elucidates the background of the object of the study and explanations, and Section 7 describes the research methodology. Section 8 is the main part of this chapter, aiming to show ethos as the enabler of knowledge creation through analysis and interpretation of the interviews. The discussion of possibilities for future research in Section 9 leads to the conclusion, which is last section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will try to clarify the enablers of knowledge creation, which are involved in the process of production line improvement. The problem of enablers of knowledge creation has been discussed in knowledge-based management. I would like to start by surveying the research on the topic and by showing how the enablers of knowledge creation have been treated in research.

Through this I will demonstrate that this research views enablers of knowledge creation from a quite different viewpoint.

The theory of knowledge creation lists 'organisation's intention', 'autonomy', 'fluctuation and creative chaos', 'redundancy' and 'requisite variety' as enablers of knowledge creation. These are necessary when a manager is supervising the knowledge-creating process on the level of organisation.

Von Krogh et al. (2000) defines knowledge enabling as the whole set of organisational activities, which positively affect knowledge creation, stating that 'knowledge enabling includes facilitating relationships and conversations as well as sharing local knowledge across an organisation or beyond geographic and cultural borders' (p4). As the examples of knowledge enablers, they names the following: 'instilling a knowledge vision', 'managing conversations', 'mobilising knowledge activists', 'creating the right context' and 'globalising local knowledge'. These are also suggested from a viewpoint of a manager, who aids knowledge creation on organisational level.

Nonaka & Toyama (2005) present a dynamic model of a knowledge creating company and state the factors, which enable knowledge creation. Here they list 'knowledge vision', 'driving objectives', 'dialogue', 'practice', 'ba (shared context)', 'knowledge assets' and 'environment' as enablers. These enablers also animate knowledge creation on the organisational level

The enablers of knowledge creation mentioned above are suggested from the viewpoint of a manager who aids knowledge creation of organisational members on the organisational level. Moreover, these enablers are connected with how an organisation as a whole should motivate the organisational members, who create knowledge, as well as what kind of relationships members should build between themselves and with the outside environment.

This research does not try to view the enablers of knowledge creation on a macro organisational

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