Chapter 10
Can Tacit Knowledge be Shared on Cloud?
An Opportunity for Viability From PBL

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge manipulation is key for organizational innovation, to gain competitive advantage, enhancing the search for a caring and sharing environment between co-workers. How to foster such attitude? Many researchers have argued about the importance of tacit knowledge, highlighting how difficult - if not impossible - is to share that kind of knowledge. Giving a new definition of knowledge, the Author here presents a model of knowledge manipulation that highlights the fundamental role of education, both as knowledge enabler and recipient for a long-term change into the organization. Using education as common ground to instill a (tacit) knowledge sharing attitude, the Author argues on the importance of problem-based (PBL) training, to prepare lifelong learners to become better workers and to manipulate (tacit) knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Last century has seen a rapid, yet massive transition from an industrial society to a world characterised by complexity, globalisation and a race for information. In this so called "knowledge-based" (OECD, 1996) or "learning" (Lundvall and Johnson, 1994) economy, that finds its extreme form in "hypercompetition" (D'Aveni, 1994), knowledge is seen as key tool for innovation in business. Furthermore, seeming that knowledge have been fundamental in the functioning of our society (Drucker, 1993; Stehr, 1994; Thurow, 2000), it is important to stress that:

[…] what is distinctive about post-industrial society is the change in the character of knowledge itself (that is) the centrality of theoretical knowledge - the primacy of theory over empiricism and the codi-

fication of knowledge into abstract systems of symbols that, as in any axiomatic system, can be used to illustrate many different and varied areas of experience. (Bell, 1999, p. 20)

Different fields of research present knowledge as a central topic in organisational management (Dwivedi et al., 2011; Lee and Chen, 2012), trying to demonstrate its predominant role in terms of competitive advantage (Birchall and Tovstiga, 1999, 2005; Sousa and Hendriks, 2006), strategic asset (Johannessen, Olaisen and Olsen, 2001), and even in relation to learning and innovation (Lam, 2000, 2010, 2015). Hence in the last three decades, different disciplines have tried to understand how to manage, share, create, measure and transfer knowledge within the organization, in an attempt to use it as competitive advantage (Coff, Coff & Eastvold, 2006; Ambrosini, 2003; Nonaka, 1994). Using the work of Michael Polanyi as theoretical background, *The Knowledge-Creating Company* (Nonaka and Takeshi, 1995) has become a milestone in management studies. The majority of scholars agree on the opportunity to list knowledge among the more strategically important (intangible) assets of an organisation (Grant, 1996), making it a popular topic in different fields, such as industrial economy, KM, innovation management and so on. Generally starting from Polanyi's analysis of knowledge definition in a philosophical or even epistemological perspective, knowledge has been proved to have a massive impact on a business' success. Several case studies and empirical researches have shown the opportunities that arise from understanding how to strategically manage, transfer or create it. To do that, one of the central questions that need yet to be answered would be how to maximise its benefits in terms of management. Szulanski (2000) uses a similar approach to understand how different characteristics of the source of knowledge - he calls them the recipient, the context and the knowledge itself - may affect its transfer. People, and assets in general, that are part of an organisation, are several and various, they live in different contexts, they do not even necessarily share the same culture, or better yet, language. However, what the Author will stress out here is that at least the large majority of an organization's employees presents something in common, such as a higher education experience.

Answering to the popular general question about how to make good use of the company's own assets to efficiently generate viable and useful knowledge, this new perspective will propose a different approach to the matter. Supported by a consistent theoretical background, the Author, rather than focusing this work entirely on presenting new general definitions of knowledge, will concentrate on people that gravitate around the firm. Placing them in a central spot, it will be easier to demonstrate that, apart from other common similarities such as particular experiences they might have had, the country they come from or the kind of life they are pursuing, the common denominator between workers is their school learning experience, a journey that usually includes a degree from a higher education institution. Focusing on this characteristic to rethink how to effectively improve organisational management through knowledge, it will be almost automatic to reflect on tacit knowledge as the real deal, and because of that conclusion, it will have to be seen as a strategic asset to foster and share.

As Coombs and Elden highlighted in 2004, "organizations need people skilled in teamwork and leadership, communication, critical thinking, and dealing with unstructured problems" (p. 523). From this perspective, it is possible to encounter lots of competencies required for a job, and they all involve knowledge in different ways. Better yet, a kind of knowledge that highly seems to be expected to be taught at higher education level, where the future (not only the management) generation is formed. Looking at that context, a lot can be possibly done to facilitate the creation of spendable knowledge within the organisation. Thinking in terms of improving the opportunity to make knowledge into a viable and concrete

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