KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN ORGANISATIONS: TACIT KNOWLEDGE SEEKING BEHAVIOUR AND CREATIVITY

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What is Tacit Knowledge?

Very loosely, tacit knowledge collects all those things that we know how to do but perhaps do not know how to explain (at least symbolically).

Tacit knowledge (as opposed to formal, codified or explicit knowledge) is the kind of knowledge that is difficult to transfer to another person by means of writing it down or verbalizing it. Organisations are full of tacit knowledge that resides in the heads of employees. Many organisations try to codify this knowledge but with limited success.
What is Tacit Knowledge?

... unwritten, unspoken, hidden vast storehouse of knowledge held by practically every normal human being, based on his or her emotions, experiences, insights, intuition, observations and internalised information.

... knowledge that the actor knows he has (how to catch a ball, tie a knot, mark a line) but which he cannot, nonetheless, describe in terms other than its own (skilful) performance.

Tacit knowledge is very sticky. Employees like to hold onto their tacit knowledge and will share it only when conditions are right or where there are benefits to sharing.
What is Tacit Knowledge?

Tacit knowledge is a particular challenge for knowledge management. Firms would like to prevent knowledge loss due to employee turnover. However, tacit knowledge almost always goes with the employee.

Tacit knowledge is essential to competitive advantage because it's difficult for competitors to copy. It's the reason some firms pump out innovation after innovation while other firms struggle.
What is Tacit Knowledge Readiness?

• The challenge for organisations is to leverage tacit knowledge to plan organisational improvements, optimise talent and enhance organisational effectiveness leading to competitive advantage.
• Our focus is on individual and organisational factors that drive tacit knowledge readiness and looks at interventions that can drive efficiency and competitiveness.
• Readiness in this context focuses on how facilitative characteristics of the organisation and employees are to share, seek, capture and access tacit knowledge.
Tacit Knowledge  Sharing, Seeking, Capture and Access

• **SHARING**: the sharing of tacit knowledge among employees to help the development of solutions to work problems.

• **SEEKING**: the behaviour of employees to seek out tacit knowledge from experienced employees where they lacked the tacit knowledge to solve work problems.

• **ACCESSING**: the extent to which various characteristics of an organisation facilitate or hinder access to tacit knowledge.

• **CAPTURING**: the ability, behaviour and opportunity of employees to capture tacit knowledge and incorporate it into work routines.
A Model for Tacit Knowledge Readiness?

TKM Process

Social
- Trust
- Relationships
- Teamwork

Individual/Psychological
- Skills
- Meta-Abilities
- Personality
  - Motivation
  - Self-confidence
  - Indv. Absorptive capacity
  - Intentions
  - Attitudes

Organisational/Contextual
- Culture
- Absorptive capacity
- Norms
- Rewards
  - Support for use
    - Perceived Usefulness
    - Ease of use

Technology

Seeking

Sharing

Capture

Access

Articulation, Coding, Common Language
Explaining Tacit Knowledge Seeking and Creativity

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Key Findings from the Research

• **Role of Norms** – Organisational norms are very influential in explaining the extent of tacit knowledge seeking.

• **Organisational Trust** – Organisational trust has a direct impact on the extent to which employees will seek knowledge from other employees.

• **Team Climate** – Team climate does not directly impact tacit knowledge seeking but depends on the intentions of the employee to seek knowledge.

• **Internal Tacit Knowledge Seeking** - Internal tacit knowledge seeking help employees to be creative when solving complex problem solving.

• **External Tacit Knowledge Seeking** – External tacit knowledge seeking particularly important for team creativity.
Key Findings from the Research

• **Frequency of Tacit Knowledge Seeking** – Frequency of tacit knowledge seeking particularly important for both individual and team creative problem solving.

• **Organisational Support for Creativity** - Internal and external tacit knowledge seeking will count for little unless the organisation has a climate that supports creative behaviours.

• **Interaction of Factors** – Creativity is a complex individual and team process. It requires a number of organisational factors to be aligned. Tacit knowledge seeking is often considered a negative activity however our research suggests that it has value for creativity.
Tacit Knowledge Sharing, Seeking, Capture and Access – INDIVIDUAL DRIVERS

- **Intention and Attitude to Sharing** - Attitudes towards knowledge sharing include intention to share, belief in the value of sharing and willingness to share.

- **Rewards for Sharing** - Rewards for sharing include beliefs that it will enhance performance, increase personal credibility, enhance learning and make work more enjoyable.

- **Confidence to Share** - Confidence to share includes the ability, expertise and self-belief to share tacit knowledge.
Tacit Knowledge Sharing, Seeking, Capture and Access – INDIVIDUAL DRIVERS

- **Rewards for Seeking** - Rewards for seeking include beliefs that it will enhance performance, enhance learning and make work more enjoyable.

- **Confidence to Seek** - Confidence to seek includes confidence to seek out other work colleagues’ know how, experiences, insights, expertise and confidence to pose questions, maintain and continue a conversation and explain needs and requirements.

- **Intention and Attitude to Seeking** - Intention to seek includes intention to seek the expertise of others as much as possible, intention to seek out how and believe that seeking out new tacit knowledge is both valuable and beneficial.
Tacit Knowledge Sharing, Seeking, Capture and Access – ORGANISATIONAL DRIVERS

• **Learning Climate** - A supportive climate includes the freedom to access tacit knowledge, belief in the value of tacit knowledge to your organisation and the extent of collaboration within your organisation.

• **Absorptive Capacity** - Capacity to absorb tacit knowledge includes understanding of new knowledge; make connections between pieces of new tacit knowledge and the ease with which it is possible to adapt work processes to make use of new tacit knowledge.

• **Teamwork Behaviour** - Teamwork behaviour includes access to team members, knowledge of team members, extent of cooperation within a team, extent of relationships within a team and support of team members to gain access to tacit knowledge.
Tacit Knowledge Sharing, Seeking, Capture and Access – ORGANISATIONAL DRIVERS

• **Work Relationships** - Work relationships includes feelings of closeness and togetherness with colleagues, the amount of time interacting with colleagues, frequency of communications and the extent to which goals are shared.

• **Trust** - Trust in others includes trust in others to provide accurate information, to provide assistance when required and trust colleagues will do what they say they will do.

• **Time Availability** – time availability includes the accrual time to engage in sharing and seeking activities.

• **Organisational Norms** – The extent to which the organisation's senior managers, line managers and employees believe that the sharing and seeking of tacit knowledge is a good thing to do.
Take-Aways

• Tacit knowledge readiness is a complex interaction of individual and organisational factors

• Organisational factors are particularly important. They explain a good percentage of organisational readiness

• Tacit knowledge sharing and seeking behaviours are driven by similar factors

• Tacit knowledge capture and access are primarily influenced by the learning climate, the capacity to absorb knowledge and the quality of trust and organisational relationships

• We have developed a novel tool called the KNOWLEDGE INSIGHTS INVENTORY to help organisations assess tacit knowledge readiness
The End

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