



Facilitating future-oriented collaborative knowledge creation by using artistic organizational innovation methods: Experiences from a Finnish wood-processing company

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ABSTRACT

In this study, methods of artistic mediation are linked to organizational innovation via the concept of knowledge creation. An extended SECI (Socialization–Externalization–Combination–Internalization) model of knowledge creation is linked to methods of artistic mediation by including appropriate actions for the different *bas*. This results in a framework for processing innovation in organizational settings in a new way. In light of a company case we discuss how different modes of knowledge may be created and how that may be aided with artistic mediation. We use a specific artistic orientation of action research, research-based theatre (RBT); a research strategy that includes theatre as a way to conduct scholarly research methods. This novel framework is reflected on using empirical data collected during an organizational development process in a large Finnish company. Interest has been growing among researchers and developers to find new kinds of approaches to organizational innovation. Using different kinds of artistic methods has opened up interesting possibilities, but there is still a great need for concrete examples of how artistic methods are used in 'real life situations' to facilitate collaborative knowledge creation. This study demonstrates one concrete example from a very traditional industrial sector—mechanical wood-processing.

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1. Introduction and background

In this study, methods of artistic mediation are linked to innovation and organizational development via the concept of knowledge creation. We first discuss an extended SECI model of knowledge creation, and then link that model to methods of artistic mediation – i.e., research-based theatre (RBT). This results in a framework for processing innovation in organizational settings in a new way. In light of a practical company case we discuss how knowledge may be created, focusing particularly on different modes of knowledge, and how that may be aided in practice with artistic mediation.

1.1. Different forms of knowledge and evolution of knowledge creation thinking

Organizations' success and survival are widely seen to depend on their capability to create new knowledge and then innovations. Collective learning processes are also emphasized in generating innovations. In order to foster innovations and

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strengthen their effectiveness, it becomes important to integrate different types of knowledge, competences and experiences into a cooperative perspective [1]. All this stresses the importance of knowledge creation and management at the organizational level – and nowadays also at the network level [6,7].

Knowledge used in innovation processes can be categorized in several ways. Perhaps the most often used one is the categorization into explicit and tacit knowledge, the former relating to knowledge expressed as words or numbers, being thus codified and well defined, and the latter expressed as insights being thus highly personal and hard to formalize (and transfer) [5,6]. This kind of a dichotomization is also often criticized. For example, Howells [2], citing Polanyi, strongly criticized the much-used dichotomy between tacit and explicit knowledge. Knowledge, according to him, can be understood rather as a continuum between wholly explicit knowledge and wholly tacit knowledge, and that tacit knowledge, situation and locational context play a significant role in the use and diffusion of codified knowledge. Thus, according to Howells, although codified, explicit knowledge may be more ubiquitous and accessible, its interpretation and assimilation are still influenced by situational factors.

Scharmer [3] introduced the concept of “self-transcending knowledge”. It can be described as tacit knowledge prior to its embodiment. Such knowledge implies the ability to sense the presence of potential, to see what does not yet exist. Scharmer elaborated the concept with Michelangelo’s words about his famous sculpture: “David was already in the stone. I just took away everything that wasn’t David”. The ability to see a David where others just see rock is the essence of self-transcending knowledge [3]. Scharmer also used the iceberg metaphor (see Fig. 1) to illustrate the essence of the three types of knowledge. Above the waterline is explicit knowledge that is least difficult to disseminate and distribute. Below the waterline are the two types of tacit knowledge: first, below the waterline, but still visible is tacit embodied knowledge, and below that, somewhere in the darkness, without a seeable form is self-transcending knowledge. Both these forms of tacit knowledge are very difficult to disseminate and transfer from one part of the organization to another.

Once the importance of self-transcending and tacit knowledge is realized, one begins to think about innovation in a wholly new way. Unlike information, knowledge is about commitment and beliefs. It is a function of a particular stance, perspective or intention, and creation of new knowledge is as much about ideals as it is about ideas – and that fact fuels innovation [4].

Scharmer [3] also described the historical evolution of the discussion of knowledge creation and management. During phase I, the primary focus was on explicit knowledge. Knowledge management revolved around information technology solutions, and it was seen as the processing of information. During phase II, the process of knowledge creation took precedence. Knowledge was conceived of as tacit and as a process (not a thing). Finally, during phase III, attention is focused on the thought conditions that allow processes and tacit knowledge to evolve in the first place.

This phase III allows also for a wider view of innovation itself as well as novel methods of knowledge creation focused on people’s thought conditions. Different types of knowledge are often discussed in research, but the discussion mainly concentrates on explicit knowledge and (embodied) tacit knowledge. For example, Nonaka and Takeuchi’s SECI model of knowledge creation [5] did not include self-transcending knowledge (the concept was however introduced only later). Instead they focused on the creation of tacit and explicit knowledge as well as on the interaction between explicit and tacit knowledge in collective learning.

In their four-phase model, a collective learning process increases knowledge, and knowledge conversion takes place in certain forums or arenas (*ba* in Japanese) that may be concrete or virtual places. The model had the aim of causing a learning spiral where a collective learning process increases knowledge in the network. Different kinds of knowledge processes need different kinds of *bas*. Harmaakorpi and Melkas [6] and Uotila et al. [7] later on incorporated self-transcending knowledge into an extended SECI/*ba* model (the ‘rye-bread model’) (see Fig. 2). The model describes the process of how knowledge and understanding are produced and converted.

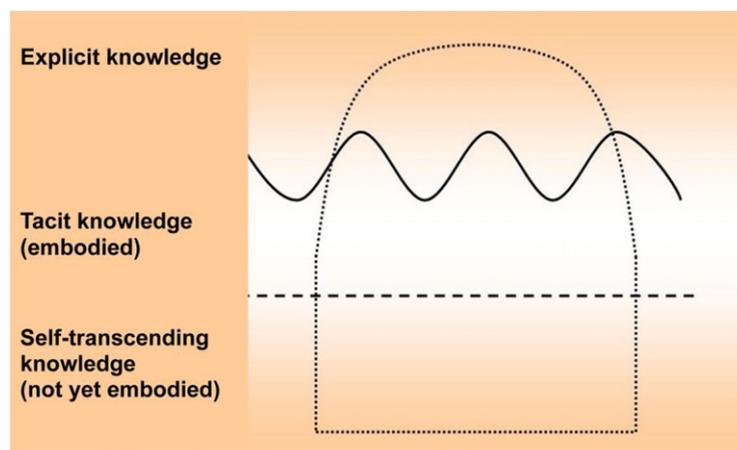


Fig. 1. The iceberg model of the three forms of knowledge ([3], p.70).

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