

Knowledge Transfer

What is it?

Knowledge transfer can be described as the ability to efficiently locate existing knowledge and get it to where it is needed.¹ O'Dell & Hubert suggest that in order for effective knowledge transfer to occur, collaboration must be supported across the organization. "In a knowledge-sharing collaborative culture, employees freely create, share and use information and knowledge; they work together toward a common purpose; and they are supported and rewarded for doing so."²

Influential knowledge management theorists, Nonaka & Takeuchi, identify knowledge in two basic forms, tacit and explicit, and note the tacit is the most difficult knowledge to transfer. For example, the ability to design and use complex equipment requires all sorts of knowledge that is not always known explicitly, even by expert practitioners, which makes it difficult to explicitly transfer. On the other hand, explicit knowledge is the knowledge that has been articulated, codified and stored in certain media. It can be readily transferred to others.³ Therefore, the goal of an organization's knowledge transfer strategy should provide approaches to capture and codify knowledge that is tacit, and make it collective.



The "Iceberg" metaphor describes the relationship between Explicit & Tacit Knowledge

Source: Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*

How do I start?⁴

Knowledge Transfer – From Tacit to Explicit:

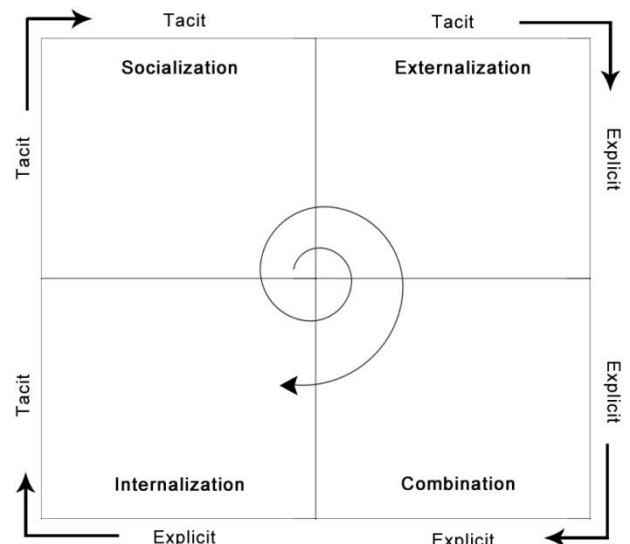
Tacit knowledge can be unleashed and shared by connecting people ubiquitously through social networks and its closely related partner, collaboration. Conversion between these two forms of information by the interaction of human beings creates new knowledge and the ability to take action.

There are four possible processes on the path to knowledge creation:

1. Tacit-to-tacit (socialization) – the direct exposure, testing and acquisition of information between individuals. Learning by observing, imitating and practicing, or become "socialized" into a specific way of doing things, like learning from mentors and peers. *E.g. watch someone.*

2. Tacit-to-explicit (externalization) – the articulation of personal information into defined, decision-producing form.

Record discussions, descriptions and innovations in a manual and then use the content to create a new product. The act of converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge means finding a way to express the inexpressible. *E.g. write something.*



Source: Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995

¹ Stewart, T. (1997). *Intellectual Capital*. New York: Doubleday.

² O'Dell, C., & Hubert, C. (2011). *The New Edge in Knowledge - How Knowledge Management is Changing the Way We Do Business*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

³ Nonaka, I. & Takeuchi, H. (1995). The Knowledge-Creating Company. *Harvard Business Review*.

⁴ Ibid

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3. Explicit-to-explicit (combination) – the combination of diverse pieces of information to produce new knowledge, like using numerous data sources to write a financial report. *E.g. analyze results.*

4. Explicit-to-tacit (internalization) – the subjective process of making codified knowledge another person's knowledge. Re-frame or interpret explicit knowledge using a person's frame of reference so that knowledge can be understood and then internalized or accepted by others. A person's unique tacit knowledge can be applied in creative ways to broaden, extend or re-frame a specific idea. Tacit knowledge does not become part of a person's knowledge base until it is articulated and internalized. *E.g. memorize something.*

Important Tips⁵

- The time to transfer knowledge is now, not when people are ready to walk out the door. Waiting too long limits the transfer techniques that can be used and can prevent the capture of critical knowledge.
- Integrating knowledge transfer into employees' daily routines greatly increases the chances that knowledge will be used. Otherwise, organizations run the risk of knowledge transfer being seen as additional work on top of everything else people have to do.
- Take the time to understand generational differences and use this awareness to facilitate knowledge transfer.
- Understanding what knowledge is needed is critical if you want it to be used.

How can I learn more?

- **Closing the Gap of Knowledge Walking Out the Door:**
<http://km.nasa.gov/closing-the-gap-of-knowledge-walking-out-the-door/>
- **Distilling Lessons Learned at Marshall**
<http://km.nasa.gov/distilling-and-infusing-lessons-at-marshall/>
- **Managing Tacit vs. Explicit Knowledge Brief Video**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1PSSxB4Lxs>
- **Bridging the Gaps – Knowledge Transfer in Multi-Generational Workplace (Report):**
<http://www.wpboard.ca/english/pdfs/Bridging%20the%20Gaps.pdf>

⁵ Adapted from The Conference Board Research. (2008). *Bridging the Gaps. How to Transfer Knowledge.*