

Super Users in Action: Knowledge Management

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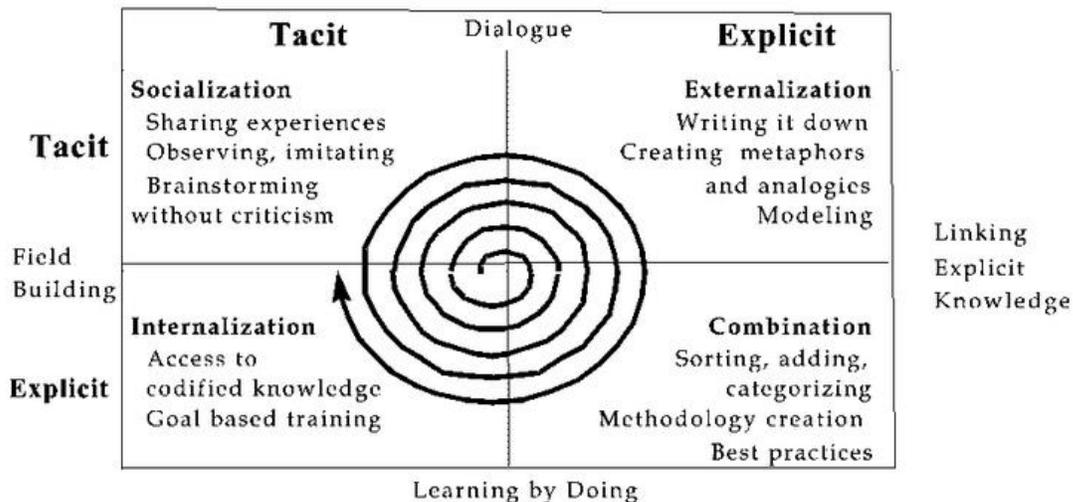
In previous Articles we defined the Super User role [1] and showed the impact it has on an organization using a case study to define it. Now we will explore in detail the different dimensions of this role:

- Knowledge Management
- Internal documentation
- Training
- Channel and filter for improvements

This Article details the first dimension.

The first question one would ask might be-- why would we need the Super Users to do that? To respond, let's first look at some basic Knowledge management concepts.

The two basic types of knowledge are the explicit (what is already formulated in words, documents or any kind of organized data) and the tacit knowledge (that which resides inside of peoples' heads). All knowledge is initially tacit before being translated into explicit knowledge. As per Nonaka's model, knowledge is created in four different ways in the organization:

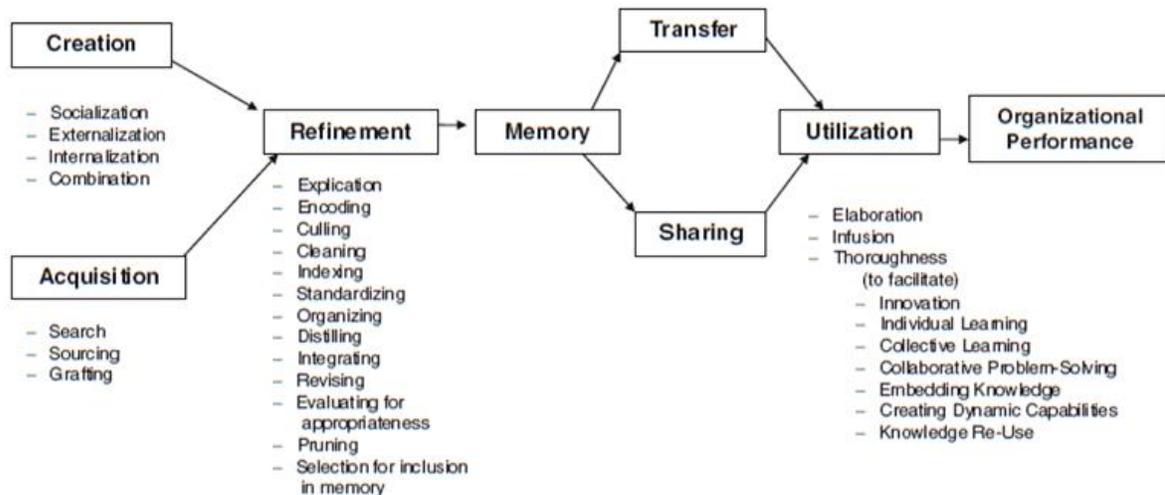


Nonakas's SECI model of Knowledge Creation (HILDRETH & KIMBLE, 2002) [3]

Process professionals are very good at "Externalization". Organize a workshop, draw a process, write a procedure, and there you have it: tacit knowledge transformed into explicit. Process specialists have a series of tools and techniques to understand what is happening in the company, to identify opportunities of improvement, and to track them down in flowcharts, procedures, policies, and descriptions. Also

“Combination” is not a problem, if you already have material from previous initiatives and you work on them. The issue is at the left side of the model.

This means that, in the knowledge management process (see below), the knowledge reaches the memory of the organization, but does not go forward. Both “Transfer” and “Sharing” of knowledge are typically defective, causing the “Utilization” step to be weak, consequently having much less impact on the Organizational Performance than we might otherwise expect.



Knowledge Management processes (KING, 2009) [4]

The Super User's impact

The big issue in this regard is in the “Internalization” step, because this is a personal process. It is not enough to deliver a training program and/or explain it just once: you need to present this knowledge in a way that the person can grasp it, by presenting precisely “what’s in it for you”, and go back later and check to make sure it was actually comprehended. It is also not enough to create a collection of explanatory documents with the idea that people will start referring to them. I would not say that it is impossible for the Business Process Office, or for an external trainer, to get people to use what was created. But a Super User has a greater possibility of success in achieving that goal. Here’s why:

- The Super User knows what knowledge his/her colleagues need, in which format, and at which step of the process. Therefore, he/she can structure the knowledge in a way that enables people to access it when they need it. He/she also knows what is required to access the information, so he can minimize that effort.

We can agree that an individual’s reaction is different if a message is delivered by an external player as opposed to someone closer. The fact that the Super User is a part of the team is more able to get team members to listen to what he/she says, when teaching how to use the system or how the process works.

- Particularly in large companies, where the same function may vary significantly, depending on the location, only someone inside the team will be able to tailor training and documentation perfectly adapted to the team. An external player could do that, but it would require significant customization and would be time consuming.

- To be able to be both “Knowledge guardian” and “Knowledge adapter” [5], the Super User needs to be aware of the knowledge that exists in his department. This is why Super Users should receive a basic training in Knowledge Management when assuming the role. They should get to know both of the models presented above, learn how to create a knowledge map, and distinguish different types of information to decide on the best way to store it. With this ability, the Super User will be able to guarantee that:
 - The knowledge existing in the department is relevant, up to date and available to all the team on the best format.
 - New knowledge generated during interactions and problem solving is also captured.
 - In case of replacement of the Super User, this knowledge remains and can be transmitted to the next Super-User.

Potentializing the impact

We did not discuss the “Socialization” step, but this is obviously a benefit of having a Super User as a result of the ongoing interaction he has with his colleagues. But the “Socialization” step receives even more reinforcement from the Super User Network (read “The Super User (R)evolution” for more information on Super User Networks) [6]. A Super User can do a great deal by himself at his department level, but being part of a network enhances the impact. Interactions in work are always opportunities to generate new knowledge. Now, if you create a network comprised of people who are experts in their process and the system, and who are cognizant of knowledge management, and you create the environment that enables cooperation, share and solve problems together, you have a great deal of knowledge that’s been captured and generated, because they know how to use it!

Knowledge always exists, but people and the organization only fully benefit from it if it is also properly managed. Let’s not forget the Super Users’ role in this.

References

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Laila Māra Rizoto-Vidala-Pesoa (Rizzotto Vidal Pessôa) is a Process and Knowledge Management expert. At present, she is working in the Business Process Excellence Global Team at Cabot Corporation, where she is participating in the upgrade of the company's ERP system and coordinating the review and migration of Global Standard Process documentation to a new platform.

Laila has worked previously in a fast consumer goods company as Supply Chain Process owner, and has participated in the implementation of the SCOR model in Supply Chain processes for all Baltic Countries.

Laila has developed the BPM 6x5 (BPM 6 by 5) model, a self-assessment model that aims to Measurement of the Maturity of an Enterprise in BPM and to guide the development of action plans to move the organization forward in maturity. Maturity in BPM became then Laila's main topic, especially from the People's perspective: how to create in people a process thinking mindset that enables continuous improvement?

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