

The Workplace Podcast: Expanding Intraorganizational Knowledge Capacity

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Abstract: The capturing and the sharing of people's experiences, reflections, and learning can create value within any firm where knowledge is regarded as a primary asset. Intraorganizational benefits of conversations captured via podcast-style recording and sharing have the potential to be a major facet of the modern art of knowledge management. Knowledge capture and sharing between members of an organization therefore may be able to create new capabilities for engagement that lead to useful knowledge resources. This paper will explore whether a designed conversation captured and shared through the podcast format and distribution method is more than just storytelling or experience sharing. It will then go on to assert that a designed method of creating this contextual knowledge artifact that is aligned to the organizational values and direction can contribute to an ingrained knowledge sharing disposition (i.e., a fundamental cultural shift). This designed conversation approach proves a dependable and scalable method to the elucidation of know how. Consider this structure being a tin-opener. It is a tool designed to open and get inside to the "canned" tacit knowledge. The resulting conversation could be knowledge of high value to the firm that is released from the minds of personnel. This paper will conclude by proposing a structure for a conversational podcast-like artifact designed to develop intraorganizational knowledge leading to organizational value.

Keywords: Knowledge management, Conversation theory, Intraorganizational knowledge, Organizational culture, Designing contextual knowledge, Podcast

1. Introduction

The problem is organizational knowledge loss caused by retirements, turnover, epidemics, lack of sharing, system errors, transfer, or forgetfulness. This loss can affect an organization's resilience (Zenk et al., 2021, Calnan et al., 2017, Dalkir, 2017). The central question of this paper is, "Can a designed contextual knowledge elicitation, via podcast format, help to address this concern?". An experiment leveraging qualitative research based on Conversation Theory will be conducted. This experiment will measure the value of elucidation and transference of codified, uncoded, and tacit knowledge intra-organizationally. This "work in progress" is an amalgamation of podcast conversation best practices conducted by Pioneer Knowledge Services which has conducted more than 300 podcasts.

The authors suggest organizations should consider nurturing a thriving work culture of knowledge exchange. This knowledge management approach can be aided by intentional conversations. According to the International Standards Organization, "A knowledge management culture acknowledges the value of individual and shared knowledge, as it benefits the organization" (Standardization, 2018). The problem of not having an effective knowledge sharing culture and a dearth of proven, modern methods to strengthen that culture. A 2021 survey of 39 organizations in 16 different countries concerning their use of social communications and collaboration technologies found, "... [an] average of 54% of communities do not use social technology to connect, share knowledge, and learn together" (Orangetrail, 2022). Opting out of social platforms seems implausible when such platforms are a part of our daily lives. This kind of mismatch between the sharing technologies that people use in their personal lives versus the ones they use at work has contributed to a lagging knowledge sharing disposition. The knowledge targeted in our approach is knowledge that is often not otherwise captured, created, tracked, or leveraged. This uncoded knowledge can be better leveraged toward organizational objectives by transforming it into codified knowledge (Standardization, 2018). The action of transforming this is the power behind intentional conversations. The process is to capture through the podcast method, then stored and shared using organizational procedures and information distribution channels.

An organizational example that directs the work culture to engage in knowledge development is the Asian Development Bank (ADB). ADB implemented a formal knowledge management attitude stating that, "...the importance of organizational culture and learning is recognized and is reflected in all process and systems in the organization" (2021). ADB sets the expectation that their culture is to conduct work under a learning ethos

that empowers good knowledge flow and development. The elicitation via conversation and capture and distribution via podcast fits that purpose.

2. Transdisciplinary Conversation

Transdisciplinary conversation is viewed as an active process that creates, "...participatory and stakeholder-based forms of knowledge production that are characterized by the inclusion of both multiple disciplines and practice-based knowledge and expertise in the knowledge production process" (Polk, 2015). The practicality and action orientation this definition presents is what cocreated conversations that are designed to elicit can be to members of the organization. This conversion of knowledge enables a journey to the deeper layer of knowing, that of the tacit (Nonaka et al., 2000). Tacit knowledge is considered what is harder to share, that being intuitions, insights, and hunches (Becerra-Fernandez and Sabherwal, 2014).

With a transdisciplinary framework in mind, we go back to 1727. U.S. founding father, statesman and inventor Benjamin Franklin created the Junto Club. This club convened tradesmen and artisans of diverse perspectives and political persuasions each week for the purpose of discussing morals, politics, and natural philosophy. The convenings followed a prescribed format. It structured focused questions with behavioural group agreements to guide conversations to advance opportunities for societal improvements (Society). The Junto Club is credited with fostering many innovations and novel approaches to American culture (Aliff, 1999). While this may not have been the first such effort to convene conversations with a purpose, it points to the longevity of the idea that conversation is a valuable form of discourse than can produce powerful outcomes.

2.1 Conversation is the Key

Perhaps Benjamin Franklin understood that human beings start their learning journey by listening to conversation; it's how we learn our native language and is considered "natural learning". According to Frank, "When we learn naturally, we have an intrinsic motivation to learn. The desire begins from inside of us rather than in someone else who is desiring us to learn" (2020). Senge proclaims that organizational learning is most effective when mirroring nature and human nature (2006). Conversation, then, is arguably the most natural way humans learn; yet in organizational settings, conversation as a formal tool for employee training, development and knowledge management may be under-utilized. According to Gallup, "...the world is closer to colonizing Mars than it is to fixing the world's broken workplaces"(2022). The "brokenness" they speak to refers to employee disengagement, which they say can be remedied, in part, through better listening. Conversation may not be able to fix the world's employee engagement crisis alone, but we suggest conversation is an under-utilized tool in the workplace, particularly to building the usefulness and integration of uncodified and tacit knowledge.

Podcast conversations are language based. Conversation is fundamental to human learning (Frank, 2020) and prioritizing knowledge sharing and exchange via conversation is a fundamental principle of the field of knowledge management (Milton, 2015). As a tool, conversation can elicit knowledge that may not otherwise be discovered, created, or accessed (Ueda, 1998, Pollitt and Overton, 2013). The podcast as a medium is uniquely suited for both the capture and delivery of conversation in the workplace (Pollitt & Overton 2013). The benefits of leveraging conversation via podcast as a knowledge management practice are multi-dimensional and yet to be fully identified. Conversation Theory supports this podcast conversation design as it provides participants a sharing learning paradigm with agreements (Pask, 1980).

2.2 Co-Created Conversation

Conversations are unfolded and created by the participants. Creativity is defined as, "An Application of imagination to finding solutions to problems and decision making" (Kurian, 2013). The spark of what is behind this paper is to the synergy in co-creativity. The conversation that is cocreated is in essence the Chinese view of co-creativity as a contextual interaction (Niu, 2020). Creating ways to embrace and modify according to and reacting from environment transformations can be attributed to the human imagination.

Pask, the originator of the Conversation Theory, claims that conversation is concept sharing and will, "...manifest in detailed transactions..."(Pask, 1976). Figure 1 depicts an adapted version of Pask's Conversation Theory flow and the environmental factors of conversation (Pangaro, 2017). The engagement is more than communicating messages or transacting. The conversation frame, like the Junto Club, has factors that are conveyed such as the participants agreement, shared language, and active (listening) participation. This conversation exchange targets the participants to be engaging, learning, and evaluating. From this exchange something has been created in each other by the conversation itself (Pask, 1980). The conversation sparks

experiential knowledge, a transdisciplinary encounter, and can be considered a new integrative shared knowledge asset (Nimkulrat et al., 2020).

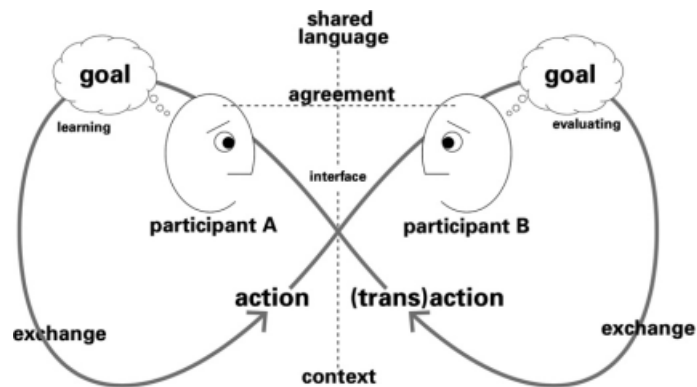


Figure 1: Simplified View of Pask's View of Conversation

3. A Disciplined Knowledge Sharing Workforce

An organization's workforce is the container in which much of an organization's knowledge is held, which may also compose much of an organization's culture. Organizational culture reflects what is and what is not important in the performance of business. A *culture* is composed of beliefs, values, norms, symbols, etc. (Northouse, 2018). Specifically, to *organizational culture*, it is defined by the American Management Association as, "...protocols by which an organization conducts business and the codes of communication and behaviour that govern interpersonal relations and individual responses to corporate values" (Kurian, 2013). Developing a practice of podcast elucidation of tacit knowledge with enterprise level endorsement/support can help organizations to better articulate and intentionally shape or re-shape culture. Further, the practice mitigates the risk of knowledge loss. According to Zenk et al. (2021), "Intraorganizational knowledge sharing is regarded as vital [and allows for] a supportive knowledge organization to be a powerful system that, through appropriate interventions and innovations, is able to respond to crisis-related system disruptions such as epidemics or massive knowledge loss" (p.28). The responsibility of culture can be viewed as, "...the values that manifest themselves in an organization in the form of action" (Selart & Schei, 2016). The consequence here is that the culture can and does effect knowledge handling action, creation, or exchange. The intentional conversation design via podcast may well increase the knowledge engagement that institutes effective knowledge flow. Behaviours that can foster a rich knowledge development environment best are guided by setting a positive environment, allowing individual empowerment, and having an integrated and shared vision (Selart & Schei, 2016).

4. Knowledge Characteristics and Flow

Knowledge and its management are the subject of many interpretations and definitions. For clarity we adopt Camille Mathieu's definition: "Knowledge management is a field which seeks to unite people, process, and technology to accomplish some specific measurable outcome for innovation and learning" (Services, 2022). Contextual knowledge building efforts in podcast style conversations provide a useful instrument to strengthen social avenues that unite the learning enterprise.

Two primary types of knowledge to consider are: explicit and uncoded (Becerra-Fernandez and Sabherwal, 2014). Similarly there are the terms of codified and uncoded knowledge (Standardization, 2018). Fundamental to both former identified types of knowledge categories is that of tacit knowledge. The authors posit tacit knowledge can support a cohesion and valuable resource for the work force. We suggest conversation is the best tool for capturing and elucidating tacit and uncoded knowledge. According to Dixon, "tacit knowledge is drawn from our experience as well as our years of study and is stored in bits and pieces in our brain, that is, it is not stored as answers or explanations but as fragments" (Dixon, 2011). The ability to convene those fragments to construct an intraorganizational knowledge asset is the role of intentional conversation design. It is the instrument, otherwise considered, the can opener tool that releases tacit and uncoded knowledge.

As powerful a tool as conversation may be, it may not always be the right tool for every knowledge management job. Process documentation, for example, may not be best captured and shared through

conversation; however, the lessons learned in creating a process may be the exact contextual knowledge your organization needs. In Figure 2, Shin depicts the flow of knowledge as; *Instrumental Knowledge* or automatic/uncodified, to *Social Knowledge* or group/collective, to *Codified Knowledge* or formally expressed to which the process starts over again, back to feed into *Instrumental Knowledge* (2004). In our proposed solution, the podcast host, (can opener), has the duty of bridging the perspectives and insights, taking the conversation from the *Instrumental* to the *Codified*.

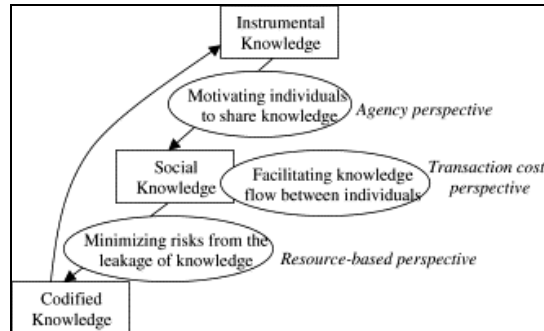


Figure 2: The Process of Knowing And Contributions of the Three Economic Perspectives

5. Generating Value via Podcast

Cases of podcast use in organizations are increasingly reflected in academic literature. Dare2Share, a podcast experiment deployed by BT, focused on outcomes to affect the culture, organizational structure, work practices and policies. They found, "... there were limitless subject categories and styles that could be covered in the podcasting method. Subject categories were diverse, including product overviews, leadership thoughts and strategies, hints and tips, lessons learned and project overviews" (Pollitt and Overton, 2013). The benefits of this format from the field of human resources observes a positive effect of podcasting to, "...capitalize on the medium's ability to communicate empathy and transparency..."(Zielinski, 2021).

The lead author of this paper is also the president and founder of the non-profit service organization Pioneer Knowledge Services, which has created, through practice, a method of elicitation and elucidation via podcast that captures and shares wisdom from and for the non-profit and knowledge management workforce. In addition to PKS's own field-specific podcast, it has established podcasting as a service which has helped hone the process, technique and value proposition of the conversation design method, and podcast capture and distribution channel proposed in this paper as an important facet of the modern art of knowledge management. The goal of PKS's podcasting service is to enhance client organizations' contextual knowledge sharing and knowledge exchange culture.

6. Conclusion

This paper aims to propose a scalable and easily replicated conversation schema that organizations can use to prevent knowledge loss. Further, we advocate use of the podcast capture and distribution method to invite and create conversations that can also build organizational contextual knowledge abilities and create social cohesion. We also seek to uncover the learning effectiveness in a work culture that shares knowledge via this design. Can new, social-oriented methods of exchange change an organization's knowledge management effectiveness or contribute to desired culture shifts?

We further propose a pilot or test to further hone the concept and approach. The test subject will be a participating organization that will provide access to their enterprise and work culture. Experimentation will be guided by the elicitor who is cognizant of the conversation structure, communications behavior, and learning importance. These efforts will be aligned to the organization's values, mission, and strategy. The pilot will seek to quantify and report on the knowledge transference effectiveness and organizational value created.

Through the pilot, we also expect to learn something about how the artifacts from the pilot endeavor can be best integrated and parsed throughout the enterprise to meet the need at the consumer point of use. Future research could focus on content access and retrieval. For example, is the typical podcast consumption model the best way for the knowledge captured via this method to be accessed in the workplace? What technology solutions exist or are needed to optimize the leveraging of workplace podcast knowledge? Would these alternatives negate the social and cultural advantages of the podcast medium and potentially mitigate the anticipated culture change potential? These and related questions are suggested for future consideration.

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