

Making Tacit Knowledge Explicit: Disseminating Knowledge in a World Record Attempt

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Abstract: The organizers of the world record attempt regarding gathering the largest number of singersongwriters in the world in a song writing camp (RENA SONG FEST 2024). From previous investigations, we know that there are certain steps in the development of a song, and that to develop a song that can be produced, they need to finish each step within a time frame. This has been a tacit knowledge. Hence, to organize for a vast number of groups they need to disseminate this knowledge to the ones that are to supervise and aid the groups towards a product that can be developed for production. In this paper we investigate how the managers at Woods developed a process for implementing and disseminating the knowledge needed to mentor the different groups taking part in the song writing camp. This two-tier mentorship will revisit the SECI-model and allow us to investigate if and how the organizers utilize this model to aid the supervisors in their work with the different songwriter groups.

Keywords: Tacit Knowledge, Explicit Knowledge, SECI-Model, Communities of Practice, Practical Knowledge, Ad-Hoc-Organization.

1. Introduction

Rena Song Fest 2024 was a world record attempt seeking to organize the largest songwriting camp. The theme of the camp was Eurovision Song Contest. As they managed to organize 153 participants, they are, for now, leading the competition. Rena Song Fest 2024 took place from the 27th to the 30th of June in Rena in Åmot municipality. This municipality holds approximately 5000 inhabitants in total of whom approximately 2000 lives in and around the centre called Rena.

Hosting such an event has required a lot of input from several stakeholders. The initiative was taken by the founder and managing director of The Woods, a music production company situated at Rena. The Woods have arranged approximately 90 music camps, but with less participants per camp. Hence, this world record attempt requires a different approach to organizing the camp and would be organized together with daWorks, BYRÅ and The Song Farm.

The goal of the music camp is to make as many songs as possible during the three days of the camp. This requires that as many groups as possible can develop as many songs as possible.

The Woods have long and substantial experience regarding developing and producing songs utilizing song camps. The Woods have developed these camps from merely gatherings of people interested in making music to their professional and renowned music camps with different themes. They have used every song camp to improve on their professionalism. After each day of every camp, the staff that acts as supervisors for the different groups have reflected and discussed how to improve for the next camp. The experiences and thus knowledge base has increased for each camp held.

However, the size of the world record attempt required more supervisors than The Woods had access to. Hence, they needed to train more supervisors for this job. The experiences the supervisors at The Woods have gained are, however, not always explicit knowledge. The supervisors at The Woods have generally discussed without being recorded much of their acquired knowledge and this knowledge may thus be characterized as tacit knowledge. Our research question is: How did the Rena Song Fest organizers manage the process of implementing and disseminating the knowledge needed to supervise the different groups taking part in the song writing camp?

This paper shows how knowledge, both tacit and explicit can be shared in different tiers of a larger ad hoc organization. Through qualitative research we have investigated how the SECI-model (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) developed by Nonaka and Takeuchi has been used to disseminate knowledge throughout the temporary organization for Rena Song Fest 2024.

2. Theoretical Foundation

Knowledge has been defined as: “the individual ability to draw distinctions within a collective domain of action, based on an appreciation of context or theory, or both” (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). This means that the individuals can make distinctions at the same time as they appreciate collective understandings and what is generally accepted as appropriate. Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) also claim that knowledge consists within a rule based context. The rules or the norms are determined within an organization by members of a Community of Practice (p. 980). This imply that the “individuals draw and act upon a corpus of generalizations in the form of generic rules produced by the organization” (p. 979). Further, the “community” must have a shared opinion and interpretation of these rules. They have to agree on what this means and how to apply it. Organizational rules allow for obtaining goals.

Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced the concept of a Community of Practice (CoP). They define CoP as a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. This concept emphasizes that learning is a social process and occurs through participation in a community.

Polanyi (1967) claim that practical knowledge is personal, and involves personal participation to be generated. He further explains that we can learn to use a tool so well that we do not think about how we use it to perform an action or task, meaning that the use becomes tacit knowledge.

It is also worth noticing the importance of heuristic knowledge developed by employees while performing their tasks. This type of knowledge cannot be managed in the same way as formally available information because it relies heavily on employees’ experiences, perceptual skills, social relationships, and motivation. Managing this aspect of organizational knowledge requires fostering a sense of community at work, encouraging employees to improvise and take initiatives, and actively maintaining a sense of corporate mission. In other words, managing heuristic knowledge involves more sensitive management of social relations rather than corporate digital information (Tsoukas, 1998). Additionally, effective management of organizational knowledge necessitates a reciprocal relationship between propositional and heuristic knowledge: while propositional knowledge is integrated into organizational members and becomes tacit through application, heuristic knowledge needs to be formalized (as much as possible) and made available within the organization.

The SECI-model is generally discussed and elaborated within the frames of organizational theory or learning organizations (Filstad and Blåka, 2007, Irgens, 2011, Jacobsen and Thorsvik, 2002). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) described how knowledge can be shared through socialization, externalization, combination and internalization. The model itself mainly focuses on how to make tacit knowledge explicit. Tacit knowledge is knowledge that is internalized and difficult to articulate (Polanyi, 1967) whilst explicit knowledge can be recorded and stored for sharing. The SECI-model show how tacit knowledge through socialization and externalization can become explicit and combined with the learners’ previous knowledge and through working with this knowledge can internalize it. The figure (Figure 1) shows an overview of this process. The socialization and externalization are about discussing with others sharing circumstances and other information that enables the tacit knowledge to become possible to obtain by others. By testing and utilizing this information it is possible to combine the new knowledge with previous knowledge and then internalize it.

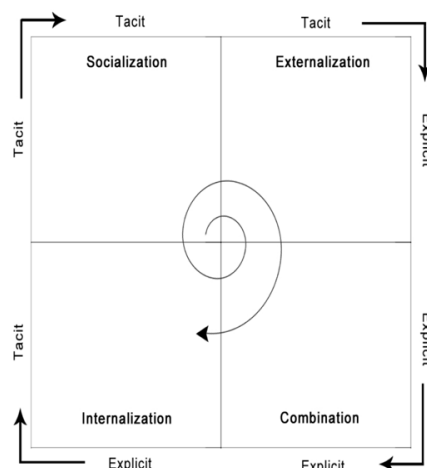


Figure 1: The SECI-model (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka&Takeuchi, 1995)

However, this is contested by Cook and Brown (1999) as they use the example of riding a bike. When one has learned to ride the bicycle, this is tacit knowledge. It is, however, difficult to explain *how* to ride the bicycle. The explicit knowledge can be used to help acquire the tacit knowledge, but tacit knowledge, they claim, can never become explicit (Cook and Brown, 1999).

Also, there is a distinction between what each individual can do and what a group as a whole can do. The collective knowledge in a group thus consists of the individual's knowledge. The group's collective knowledge guides its actions, just like an individual's knowledge guides their actions. The work done by the group, based on its shared knowledge, is different from the work done by an individual based on their own knowledge (Cook and Brown, 1999).

3. Method of Inquiry

In this study we have had a qualitative approach. Data has mainly been collected by using semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002, Dalen, 2011). This allows pursuing interesting statements that may enrich the data. We have interviewed the head of supervisors from The Woods and have also collected data from supervisors in the extended ad-hoc-organization. Since the interviews were registered on tape, we analysed the data by first listening to the recordings and sorting data into main categories and subcategories to identify patterns of the transition of knowledge in the ad-hoc organization. In order to secure validity and reliability, we have performed a checkback (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) presented the data to the interviewees.

4. Results and Discussion

The Woods and their partners have shown high ambitions in planning and going through with the Rena Song Fest. When planning Rena Song Fest, they were eager to avoid problems and "crises" as possible throughout the song camp. Due to the head managers insistence of preparing and planning rather than solving crises during the camp, they have been meticulous and detailed in their planning process. The head manager of Rena Song Fest insisted on establishing good relations with the stakeholders, the service providers and the staff. The staff, being a mixture of people hired by Rena Song Fest and "regular" employees at The Woods, thus needed to be as well trained as possible prior to the event.

We identified three stages in the process that supported the knowledge dissemination. The first was the importance of planning and being prepared by continuously asking themselves what could go wrong? They built an ad-hoc organization and delegated responsibility among the staff. In addition, they wanted to manage operate in a dynamic way to be prepared for unforeseen situations. This required communication and sharing of information. Both the participants of the Rena Song Fest and the members of the ad-hoc organization were very well informed about the "line of command" something they claim contributed to the management being closely updated on any undesired events. This in turn allowed the management to be "hands on" regarding solving the problems either by them selves or by delegating it to others.

Secondly, they arranged common meetings with the staff starting with a meeting ahead of camp start, "long and boring" according to the head supervisor. Here he presented all details regarding the camp. Thus, the whole group of supervisors were informed about "what, where, when and how". In this way all the mentors got the same information about what was going on. This gave them a basis for acting on possible problems arising during the event. These meetings, although "long and boring" contributed to the fact that all of the staff at the ad-hoc organization were informed as well as possible at all times. This allowed for the staff to feel included, as in a CoP (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and also a feeling of mastery (Senge, 1992) as they could answer questions from the participants of the camp.

Thirdly, The Woods head manager also shared with the group of new supervisors their knowledge about how to systematically run a song camp session, running the steps of the production processes, in a way that leads to a successful product. Daily evening evaluating meetings with the crew supported the group as a Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

The mentors from The Woods claim to have had quite substantial training during the previous camps. They each also claim to have developed their knowledge together with the others. An example they give is about timing and focus. Most artists want to make the perfect song with the perfect chorus and verses. However, the time limits do not always allow for finetuning of this. Hence, they must learn to settle for "the second best" in order to finish. They have also developed a model for what needs to be finished at approximately what time. This is they claim a result of reflection and being forced to explain what has become tacit knowledge.

This is an example of how they have utilized the SECI-model as described by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). By discussing and explaining amongst each other at the end of each day at the camp and after the camps they have been able to share this and make this a knowledge amongst the mentors.

The new mentors that have been trained has been taught about the timing but does not yet have this as their *internalized tacit knowledge*. This may be due to their lack of experiences regarding being mentors at several camps and thus have no other experiences to *combine* their new knowledge with other than having taken part in camps as participants. This thus supports the claim of Cook and Brown (1999) that tacit knowledge cannot become explicit.

The knowledge shared is decided by the group of mentors at The Woods. Hence, they may be viewed as a Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) who set the rules for what is to be the governing interpretations and actions to be taken with this as a point of departure regarding what the new mentors are to work by. This is in line with what Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) states.

Posterior to the camps, the new mentors claim to have learned a lot not only from what they have been taught by the mentors at The Woods, but also from working as mentors at Rena Song Fest 2024. This is thus their own individual practical knowledge according to Polanyi (1967). If one consider the knowledge shared by the mentors from The Woods to be “a tool”, this also means that if they are able to utilize this more than this time, they may develop tacit knowledge on the mentorship (Polanyi, 1967).

In the aftermath an evaluation show that the experiences from the song camp is vital to both the daily production practice of the firms, but also has great significance for doing similar projects in the future.

4.1 Importance to Other Fields and Organizations

These investigations have been important as the outcome can be used in different settings as well as in new world record attempts when writing songs for the Eurovision Song Contest. It may also have significance regarding organizing supervisors in large groups for example in education both physically and online. Bringing this knowledge into such a setting provide guidelines for how to organize for developing supervisors for the purpose of for example educating within the frames of massive open online courses (MOOCs). Training supervisors for work in this type of setting thus require that there is a CoP of trained supervisors that set rules for what should be within the scope of what supervision should be about, and which is based on a common understanding drawn from the individuals’ tacit knowledge about supervision. Allowing the new supervisors to utilize their learning as “a tool” this may, combined with the experiences they obtain, become the new supervisor’s tacit knowledge.

5. Conclusion

The world record attempt called Rena Song Fest 2024 was a huge success. Not only did they manage to organize for the most participants ever on a song camp, but The Woods as the main organizer (together with daWorks, BYRÅ and The Song Farm), has gained valuable experience on how to perform song camps with large numbers of participants. The aim of this paper was to investigate the two-tier mentorship and how the knowledge development amongst the experienced and the new mentors would unfold.

The experienced mentors shared their knowledge which was based on the individuals’ tacit knowledge but what had been negotiated within the frames of what can be called a Community of Practice. This provided some rules and guidelines based on the collective knowledge. The new mentors were thus provided with “a tool” that they could use when executing mentorship in the groups they were assigned.

The experienced mentors used the SECI-model, but the new mentors need more experience in order to internalize the use of their “tools” (knowledge from the experienced mentors) and make this their tacit knowledge.

The outcome of this project may be applicable in different settings, for example in the education of large numbers of students.

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