How can Interorganizational Dialogue Generate New Knowledge for Problem Solving?

Yayoi Hirose
Toyo University, Tokyo, Japan

yayoi.hirose@iniad.org

Abstract: The study aims to clarify how interorganisational dialogue can promote the generation of new knowledge. Additionally, it aims to propose the role of an organisational manager who need to generate new business knowledge through the dialogue. Nowadays, it is important for people, organisations, and countries in different positions to understand each other and collaboratively create new solutions. However, the success rate of such multidisciplinary collaborations is not necessarily high. One of the primary reasons for this is that differences in disciplinary backgrounds and professional positions often lead to misunderstandings or a lack of mutual comprehension regarding perspectives and ideas. Analysing these challenges and identifying the key factors that facilitate productive dialogue -- thereby increasing the likelihood of generating new knowledge -- has become essential in contemporary business environments. While much of the literature on knowledge creation focuses on the mechanisms by which knowledge is generated, relatively little attention has been paid to the diverse backgrounds of individuals involved in such creation processes and how these individuals engage with differences in perspectives and assumptions to co-create new knowledge. Similarly, although existing studies on knowledge creation and dialogue frequently highlight the potential of interdisciplinary dialogue to generate novel insights, they tend to lack detailed discussions on the specific steps, conditions, and considerations required to facilitate such processes effectively. This study seeks to shed light on the process of knowledge creation through interorganisational, interdisciplinary dialogue at the individual level, with an emphasis on cognitive aspects. Specifically, it explores what kind of preparatory understanding or mindset participants should cultivate prior to engaging in dialogue, how they should perceive and work with different perspectives and thought frameworks of other disciplinary experts, and how these interactions can lead to the generation of new knowledge. Furthermore, this study discusses the role of organisational managers in enabling and supporting productive interorganisational dialogue among specialists from different fields.

Keywords: Interorganizational dialogue, Knowledge creation, Exploration, Multi-disciplinary discussion,Cross functional team

1. Introduction

Knowledge is the most important resource to generate a competitive advantage. Knowledge workers are high-level workers who apply theoretical and analytical knowledge to develop products and services (Drucker, 1999). Nowadays, it is important for people, organisations, and countries in different positions to understand each other and create new solutions. As Chesbrough (2003) claims, in open innovation, competitive companies adopt external knowledge and combine it with their internal knowledge to create new business knowledge.

Companies have changed their management, moving from vertically divided organisations to cross-functional teams. However, 75% of cross-functional teams are unsuccessful, primarily due to difficulties in coordination and collaboration arising from insufficient shared understanding among team members with diverse backgrounds (Dussart, et al., 2021). It is highly challenging for specialists from different disciplines to collaborate effectively and create new knowledge.

The study aims to clarify how interorganisational dialogue can promote the generation of new knowledge. To overcome interorganisational barriers, companies have adopted a dialogue style of discussion to understand each other and create new business knowledge. For interorganisational dialogue to be productive, it is important to define the role of the organisational manager who must generate new business knowledge through this dialogue.

Previous discussions regarding knowledge creation and discussion assume that all participants have the same knowledge base; they do not consider differences between business and engineering, traditional and high-tech ventures, or developed and emerging countries (Nonaka, 1994; Tsoukas, 2009). Furthermore, they do not consider how to overcome the differences in background and context of the knowledge of each participant and how participants understand external knowledge from one another through dialogue. They focus exclusively on knowledge generation without discussing these gaps. This study aims to articulate the sequential steps through which knowledge is created via dialogue among interdisciplinary experts. It outlines what participants recognise and learn at each stage of the dialogue process and describes the role that organisational managers should play in facilitating effective knowledge creation among participants.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Dialogue and Knowledge

Dewey (1938) argued against the definition of knowledge as justified true belief, asserting instead that knowledge is acquired through the dynamic process of inquiry and serves as a practical tool for problem solving, gained through experience and action. Thus, for individuals from diverse fields to generate new knowledge, they must engage in a dynamic process of inquiry into one another's existing knowledge while continuously updating and refining it. Dialogue enabling exposure to others' experiences and values can facilitate the creation of new knowledge.

Dialogue consists of turn-taking and exchange of verbal messages to attain a collective goal (Gergen et al., 2004; Isaacs, 1999; Luckmann, 1990; Walton, 2006). During the dialogue process, participants alternate between being the speaker and the listener (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004; Walton, 2006). This study discusses deeper background factors that enable interlocutors to send messages. Previous discussions on dialogue assume that interlocutors have different opinions. There are three phases of dialogue: mutual understanding (Buber, 1958), offset difference of opinions, and creating new knowledge. Buber (1958) focuses on mutual understanding and acceptance and claims that through dialogue, people can recognise and accept their differences. Recent literature argues that dialogue is not merely a process for bridging differences in opinions stemming from participants' varying backgrounds and values; rather, it involves embracing these differences to collaboratively generate new understandings and perspectives (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs, 1999; Schein, 1993). Isaacs (1999) argues that dialogue facilitates mutual understanding and collaboration among individuals with different forms of expertise and backgrounds, thereby enabling the emergence of new ideas and innovation. He emphasises the importance of the *quality of the conversational space* and the *transformation of relationships*, suggesting that knowledge naturally emerges within dialogic relationships, where participants listen deeply to one another and express their thoughts authentically. However, the recent literature does not propose a clearly defined process model for knowledge creation.

2.2 Knowledge Creation

Knowledge has been defined in many ways, notably as justified true belief (JTB) and as the capacity to act. This paper adopts both definitions, focusing on knowledge that helps generate solutions or shared understanding in contexts where participants have different goals. In such settings, practitioners must navigate gaps in interpretation rooted in tacit knowledge. While this knowledge is often unspoken or implicit (Taylor, 1991; Ryle, 1949), understanding its background is critical. As Nonaka (1994) argues, new knowledge can emerge when individuals from diverse perspectives exchange tacit insights. This is particularly relevant in multidisciplinary collaboration, where shared knowledge creation relies not only on facts, but on dialogue and mutual understanding.

Previous literature on multidisciplinary knowledge generation often focuses on "knowledge integration" (Hong et al., 2012; Hutto et al., 2013; Lewis et al., 2005; Rai and Kang, 2009). These studies do not focus on creating new knowledge and mainly discuss how to assimilate and utilise external knowledge. The argument for knowledge integration emphasises building a shared vision but does not address how to build this shared vision among people with different backgrounds or why this shared vision is necessary. Srikanth et al. (2016) point out the risk for diverse teams to run into coordination problems due to a lack of common ground. As participants' interests can differ depending on their areas of specialisation, participants must first clarify these differences before integrating their knowledge. They claim that individuals must be able to see the larger picture beyond their areas of specialisation to share a common vision (Dussart et al., 2021; Prieto-Pastor et al., 2018). Past discussions claim that properly understanding the cognitive boundaries between one's own expertise and that of others—that is, the differences in knowledge and perspectives—makes it possible to select appropriate boundary-spanning mechanisms at various stages of a project (Carlile, 2004; Dussart et al. (2021). The authors refer to such mechanisms as "boundary objects," which have been previously defined as "concrete or abstract bridges that allow groups with different perspectives and goals to contribute to a more comprehensive objective" (Adenfelt & Maaninen-Olsson, 2007). However, they also point out that, in some cases, knowledge boundaries may collapse or even be deliberately ignored. In these studies, boundary objects such as whiteboards, mockups, and prototypes are tangible and visible, making them easier to share among experts from different disciplines. In contrast, new business knowledge or conceptual ideas, which lack physical form, are more difficult to share across disciplinary boundaries. In such cases, it becomes increasingly important to clarify the role of dialogue in the process of knowledge creation.

This gap is also visible in engineering research. Janjua et al. (2013) discusses integrating incomplete and conflicting information from various internal and external sources within enterprises by combining semantic web technologies and argumentative reasoning to enhance the accuracy of decision support systems. However, this study does not address how individuals from different specialties understand and utilise this integrated information. Furthermore, it does not explore how individuals from different fields engage in creating new knowledge in response to changes in competitive environments, such as shifts in market rules. Rai et al (2009) addresses knowledge integration between the digital and the physical domain. However, if both prototypes are developed by individuals from the same field—for example, experts in mechanical design—the underlying knowledge bases are likely to be similar. As a result, significant differences in perspectives, such as those typically observed in interdisciplinary dialogue, are less likely to arise.

3. A New Model Proposal for Interorganisational Knowledge Creation Through Dialogue

This section aims to propose a new model for the process of interorganisational knowledge creation utilising a dialogue discussion style. The previous section shows that past discussions on knowledge creation do not dig deeper into multidisciplinary dialogue where each participant has a different background. It also shows that previous literature on interdisciplinary discussion using engineering technologies does not consider that tacit knowledge dimension can differ widely depending on interlocuters' fields.

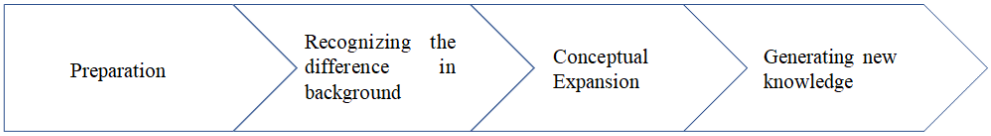
This study proposes a model showing how people can create new knowledge by collaborating with experts from different fields through dialogue that considers each person's tacit knowledge (Figure 1). The model also aims to propose the role of an organisational manager to promote the creation of new knowledge. To generate new knowledge through interdisciplinary dialogue, different factors must be considered at each stage of the process. The following sections will discuss each stage in detail.

3.1 Preparation Stage

In the initial stage, each organisation needs to prepare an environment for its members to develop literacy to understand and utilise external new knowledge. As Goldman (1986) argues that the acquisition of knowledge depends on cognitive abilities and the proper mechanisms of reasoning, an organisational manager must develop absorptive capacity, which is the organisational capacity to absorb and implement new external knowledge to be competitive (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Zara & George, 2003; Todorova & Durisin, 2007). In particular, a manager must prepare an effective environment for people to develop the cognitive ability to learn external knowledge (Dussart et al., 2021).

The first factor in building this literacy is recognising the value of external knowledge and shared vision. Previous literature stresses the importance of recognising the value of external knowledge in the process of understanding new knowledge (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). It also emphasises the importance of shared vision in collaboration among diversified experts (Dussart et al., 2021; Prieto-Pastor et al., 2018). They must see a larger picture than their areas of specialisation. Thus, an organisational manager must show the visionary goal that can be reached by multidisciplinary dialogue.

Second, participants in a dialogue need to recognise the difference between exploitation and exploration. Gupta et al. (2006) clarify this difference: exploitation refers solely to the use of their conventional knowledge, and exploration refers to the pursuit and acquisition of new knowledge (Gupta et al., 2006). Referring to previous discussions (Benner & Tushman, 2002; Vermeulen & Barkema, 2001), Gupta et al. (2006) argue that exploitative innovations involve improvements in existing components, knowledge, and technology, whereas exploratory innovation involves searching for new knowledge and shifting to a different technological trajectory. They claim that while it is hard for individuals to balance exploration and exploitation, organisations can achieve this balance by allocating responsibilities separately (Gupta et al., 2006). Multidisciplinary discussions mainly aim to generate exploratory innovation (O'Reilly & Tushman,2021). An organisational manager must illustrate the goal to be reached by exploratory dialogue among diversified experts and balance exploitation and exploration within their organisation and management practices.



Interlocuters	Acquire literacy: Recognize the value of external knowledge and the difference between exploitation and exploration	Recognize that their respective knowledge frameworks are socially constructed by social contexts and backgrounds.	Recognize the limitations of their own specialized knowledge within the context of the broader goal Expand their own disciplinary frameworks in order to engage meaningfully with knowledge from other fields	Construct a new conceptual frame for knowledge creation by engaging in dialogue and incorporating perspectives influenced by interlocutors from different disciplinary backgrounds.
Organizational manager	Prepare the environment for acquiring the two factor of literacy to learn external knowledge	Avoid interpreting external knowledge solely through the conventional values and practices. Emphasize that dialogue is essential for comprehending differences in values, intentions, and customary practices	Encourage to expand interlocutors' own perspectives and facilitate effective collaboration through the utilization of such external knowledge	Facilitate dialogue in which participants co-construct new perspectives influenced by interdisciplinary exchange.

Figure 1 Interorganizational knowledge creation through multidisciplinary dialogue

3.2 Recognizing Differences in Background

At this stage, managers must avoid interpreting external knowledge through established norms alone and instead foster awareness of its socially constructed nature, shaped by shared histories and contextual contingencies. When individuals initially encounter external knowledge, they interpret it through their pre-existing cognitive frameworks (Tsoukas, 2009). Such understanding is shaped by *path dependence*, whereby prior learning and organisational routines guide assimilation (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). This tendency is reinforced by self-sustaining mechanisms, such as past decisions and habits, which constrain the capacity to adopt alternative interpretations (Hanger-Copp et al., 2022). Tsoukas (2009) argues that metaphors facilitate initial comprehension by mapping unfamiliar knowledge onto familiar conceptual structures.

However, the assimilation of external knowledge requires more than cognitive alignment. According to Ryle (1949), knowledge includes not only "knowing that" (justified true belief) but also "knowing how"—a *capacity to act* embedded in practice. Human understanding, therefore, emerges not solely from mental representations but also from situated action within social contexts. Wittgenstein (1979) refers to this implicit awareness as the "inherited background," a tacit cultural and practical framework that informs how individuals participate in specific communities or professional domains.

For an organisation to successfully incorporate knowledge from different sources, it must not only discard its previous environment, habits, and established practices but also actively engage in learning and adapting to new contexts, routines, and operational conditions.

Tsoukas (2009) points out the importance of the background to conduct a certain social practice. He claims that the knowledge employed in a social practice cannot be adequately grasped through mere knowledge of explicit meanings. Rather, the socially situated meanings and nuances of knowledge are gradually acquired experientially through active participation and deep engagement with the actions, customs, perspectives, and values embedded within the particular environmental and contextual settings of the practice. Thus, to achieve mutual understanding of each other's knowledge through dialogue, it is essential for both parties to recognise that their respective knowledge frameworks are socially constructed, fundamentally shaped by their distinct social contexts and backgrounds. Participants in a dialogue must engage with an awareness that knowledge is shaped by different social contexts and backgrounds, as dialogue must explore the process of thought behind each interlocuter's basic assumptions, such as those regarding their interests and values (Bohm, 1996; Shadnam, 2021).

In this light, external knowledge cannot be understood through routines and instruction manuals (Grant, 1996). Organisational managers must thus cultivate environments in which members are encouraged to interpret external knowledge with sensitivity to context and to recognise the limitations of their own interpretive frameworks.

3.3 Conceptual Expansion

In the next stage, self-instantiation occurs; this is the awareness of the limitations inherent in one's own perspective (Dussart et al., 2021; Tsoukas, 2009). Organisational managers must emphasise to interlocutors that dialogue should not aim at fully understanding external expertise, including all background contexts, values, and terminologies, but rather should focus on expanding their perspectives and facilitating effective collaboration through the utilisation of external knowledge. People have their own "subjective worlds" constructed by their experiences, backgrounds, values, and cultures, and their opinions and ways of understanding can inevitably differ (Habermas, 1984).

In productive dialogue, each interlocutor potentially makes the other realise the limitations of his/her "focal awareness" and starts searching for broader awareness (Acti, et al., 2024; Tsoukas, 2009). Thus, dialogue must consider how a listener can understand a speaker's statement differently from how the speaker expects and how a listener can disagree with a speaker and aim to solve this problem for effective collaboration. In productive interorganizational dialogue, interlocutors must openly express their respective claims on an equal footing and rationally create new knowledge by embracing and coexisting with these differences based upon mutual understanding (Dussart et. al., 2021; Habermas, 1984; Majchrzak et al., 2012).).

Cogt and Zander (1992) emphasise the importance of an organisation's *combinative capability* -- its ability to integrate newly acquired external knowledge with existing internal knowledge. This capability enables organisations to generate new insights and foster innovation. However, as Gupta et al. (2006) point out, organisational members tend to rely heavily on familiar, existing knowledge, which can hinder the effective utilisation of external inputs. Therefore, managers play a crucial role in shaping an environment that balances both approaches, encouraging the assimilation and application of new knowledge alongside conventional practices.

To deepen this discussion, Goldman (1967) offers a valuable epistemological lens. Challenging the traditional notion of knowledge as *justified true belief*, Goldman (1967) argues that knowledge depends not on personal justification but on the existence of a proper causal connection between belief and truth. Applying this perspective to the organisational context, if members do not recognize causal relationships, and if there is no system in place for generating, retaining, and transmitting knowledge, then what is assumed to be "knowledge" may not truly exist within the organisation. This highlights the critical need to not only create knowledge but also ensure its structural integration and accessibility within organisational processes.

A more advanced form of knowledge boundary object is manifested in the practice of *knowledge traversal*, which entails metacognitive engagement, in-depth epistemic dialogue, and reflective processes. This process facilitates the identification of knowledge asymmetries among team members and supports the establishment of a shared epistemic foundation (Keestra, 2017; Majchrzak et al., 2012; Srikanth et al., 2016). In a related theoretical contribution, Tsoukas (2009) characterises this dynamic as *conceptual expansion*, wherein individuals interpret externally sourced knowledge not by fully internalising the epistemological perspective of others but rather by extending their own conceptual schemas rooted in disciplinary experience. Such a process underscores that effective interdisciplinary collaboration does not necessitate comprehensive mutual understanding but instead depends on individuals' capacity to selectively integrate relevant knowledge through the transformation of their existing cognitive frameworks.

This problem cannot be addressed solely through information technology (IT) solutions. Previous literature on knowledge integration with IT solutions focuses on the integration of heterogeneous information systems and data across organisations and does not assume any difference in interpretation caused by diverse backgrounds (Janjua et al., 2013). Building on social network theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), another study on IT solutions explores the process of tacit knowledge integration, discussing how interpersonal relationships and interactions within social networks influence the integration of tacit knowledge at the individual level (Hong et al., 2012). However, it does not address how individuals from different backgrounds interpret external knowledge in ways that differ from those of its original holders, nor how such interpretations influence the process of knowledge integration.

3.4 Generating New Knowledge

At this stage, knowledge creation involves more than the accumulation of explicit information. Drawing on Nonaka's (1994) SECI model, knowledge is generated through the externalisation of tacit knowledge, which is then aggregated and restructured into new explicit knowledge. This process spirals from the individual to group and organisational levels, enhancing collective learning and competitiveness. However, Nonaka's model assumes a relatively homogeneous organisational context and does not explicitly address the challenges posed by differences in values, cultures, and disciplinary backgrounds among participants.

To create knowledge that transcends individual cognitive boundaries, dialogue becomes indispensable. Tsoukas (2009) argues that through dialogic engagement, individuals engage in collective sensemaking, enabling the emergence of perspectives that would not arise in isolation. This is particularly relevant for radical or exploratory innovation, which, unlike incremental improvements, entails fundamental shifts in conceptual frameworks (Henderson & Clark, 1990; Tushman & Anderson, 1986). Such innovation often requires organisations to navigate divergent viewpoints and construct shared meaning through sustained interaction.

Organisational managers must therefore actively facilitate environments that support deep dialogue, encouraging the articulation of tacit insights and the co-construction of novel understanding across disciplinary and cultural boundaries.

Drawing on a case study involving eight software architects, Tsoukas (2009) illustrates how *conceptual reframing*—the process of viewing an object, action, or situation from a different perspective—can lead to new shared understandings. In another example, he demonstrates how analogical reasoning enables team members to articulate previously tacit similarities by mapping the relational structure of one domain onto another. These processes—conceptual reframing and analogy—can be further enriched through interdisciplinary dialogue. It can thus be argued that the use of metaphors and alternative framings, influenced by perspectives from different fields, facilitates the emergence of novel understandings and the generation of new knowledge. To promote this process, organisations may consider introducing a facilitator to help participants create new perspectives influenced by ideas from other disciplines. A facilitator can assist members who lack experience with conceptual reframing and collaborating with experts in different fields.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aims to propose a new model for interorganisational knowledge creation through multidisciplinary dialogue. While prior literature has examined factors essential for knowledge creation and the common tendencies in understanding new knowledge, comprehensive studies that adopt an organizational managerial perspective to systematically explore the processes and stage-specific considerations necessary for generating new knowledge after acquiring external insights remain scarce. A comprehensive examination of the process by which new knowledge is created through dialogue that integrates expertise from different domains can help organisations reduce the number of unconsidered factors when partially adopting such practices. By identifying and addressing these overlooked elements, this approach is expected to enhance the success rate of interdisciplinary alliances and cross-functional teams.

The first stage involves a preparatory phase, in which a clear goal—namely, the innovative creation of new knowledge—is defined. In this phase, participants must also develop an understanding of *why* interdisciplinary dialogue is necessary to achieve that goal. Building on this foundation, managers should facilitate an awareness that each participant's knowledge has been shaped by their respective social and disciplinary context. This helps participants appreciate the epistemic diversity within the team.

Next, it is crucial for individuals to recognise the limitations of their own specialised knowledge within the context of the broader goal, while also understanding how their expertise contributes to the collective objective. Rather than fully adopting the perspective of another discipline, individuals must learn to expand their own disciplinary frameworks to engage meaningfully with knowledge from other fields. At the same time, they must acknowledge differences in perspectives and approaches across disciplines and develop the ability to collaborate constructively toward shared knowledge creation.

Finally, in the process of generating new knowledge, it becomes increasingly important that participants engage in dialogue in a way that allows for mutual influence, enabling them to adopt alternative viewpoints and reframe their thinking through sustained interaction with experts from other fields.

This study has primarily focused on the cognitive aspects of new knowledge creation through interorganisational dialogue across disciplinary boundaries. Another study on interorganizational dialogue also

emphasises that such activities require the establishment of appropriate evaluation systems and the reduction of bureaucratic barriers (Newman, 2024). In addition, social capital—such as trust and social ties—constitutes a critical factor in enabling effective multidisciplinary dialogue (Dussart, 2021; Robert, et al., 2008). These organisational and structural issues warrant further investigation beyond the scope of this study.

Ethics declaration: Ethical approval was not required for this study, as it involved no human participants or sensitive data and utilized only publicly accessible sources and academic publications.

AI Declaration: The authors used OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-4) to assist in improving the clarity and fluency of English expressions in the manuscript. The AI-generated suggestions were critically reviewed, edited, proofread, and incorporated into the manuscript as deemed appropriate by the author. The author remains fully responsible for the content and accuracy of the paper.

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