

# The SECI Approach

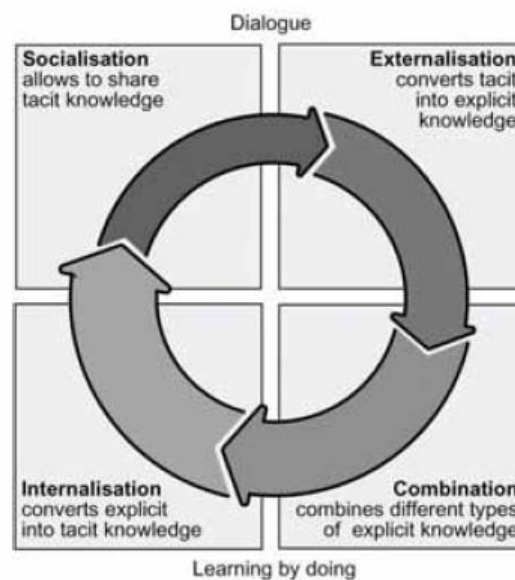
## Introduction

In their highly influential book, *The Knowledge Creating Company*, Japanese business academics Nonaka and Takeuchi examine the processes required for effective knowledge creation. They define knowledge creation as the result of the spiralling process of interaction between tacit knowledge (or know-how, which is hard to express but can be demonstrated) and explicit knowledge (which can be articulated in words).

There are four key processes through which tacit and explicit knowledge interact, namely, socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation. Together, these processes make up the **SECI** principles (see Figure 4 below), which provide a set of pointers that can be used by managers to ensure that they are facilitating effective knowledge and learning in their ongoing projects and programmes.

## Detailed description of the process

Figure 4: The SECI approach



**Socialisation** consists in sharing tacit knowledge with others by way of mentoring (sharing internal knowledge, skills and insights). Tacit knowledge can be socialised by mentoring, imitation, observation and practice, all of which result in ‘shared knowledge’.

**Externalisation** creates conceptual knowledge and is the process of converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is conceptualised through images or words; in this case, writing transforms tacit knowledge into an explicit form. This externalised mode of ‘knowledge conversion’ is produced as a result of a dialogue between people who transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge.

**Combination** is a mode of knowledge conversion which involves the combining of different types of explicit knowledge. This happens when people exchange knowledge, for instance via documents, telephone and meetings.

**Internalisation** converts explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge. It consists in ‘learning by doing’, which is a process that occurs when the previous modes of knowledge conversion (socialisation,

externalisation and combination), are internalised in people's minds as tacit knowledge, which is represented by mental images or models.

### Key points/practical tips

- The SECI approach explains in a clear way how knowledge has first to be generated and codified in order to get transferred. In other words, there is no way that knowledge can be transferred if it has not first been generated as well as put into a transferable format.
- The approach clearly explains how tacit and explicit knowledge have to be exchanged and transformed in order that new knowledge is generated.
- Not all tacit knowledge can be converted into explicit knowledge, and so the principles need to be guided by a clear sense of realism.

### Example: The learning partnership for Mindanao

In the Philippines, competition for scarce development funding and worsening social problems have intensified the need for civil society to learn from mistakes and generate new knowledge in a timely fashion. In the latter part of 2003, a learning partnership involving eight organisations was brought together by the lead institution's interest in testing and validating the notion that bridging sectors can lead to increased resources and commitment to reduce poverty and increase equity. Bridging was defined as a method of coordinating the energy, interests and resources of multiple and diverse actors/stakeholders in a way that builds trust and stimulates collaborative action. One key application was to bring together key actors to address the conflict issue on the island of Mindanao. Addressing the sources of conflict and decades of neglect for the welfare of the Muslim population in Mindanao requires a continued, comprehensive and integrated approach from all sectors. The collaborating organisations piloted an approach towards the development of a replicable methodology that could be applied in other municipalities and regions of the Philippines, and in other countries. A key element here was how to establish the connection between experience in the field and theory development. The system for managing knowledge creation was built on the SECI principle, which had the benefits of: i) ensuring that staff participating in the initiative had the opportunity to reflect on their experience and heighten their own learning; ii) ensuring that the new approach did not become an isolated process and that learning permeated within each institution as well as in the learning partnership; and iii) generating a robust methodology for replication elsewhere. See: [www.cpi.cam.ac.uk/pccp/PartnMatters3.pdf](http://www.cpi.cam.ac.uk/pccp/PartnMatters3.pdf).

### Sources and further reading

- A SECI tutorial: [www.thecore.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/thonglipfei/nonaka\\_seci.html](http://www.thecore.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/thonglipfei/nonaka_seci.html).
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- Improving Research Knowledge Technical Transfer, Final Report, downloaded from [www.westminster.ac.uk/builtenv/maxlock/KTweb/Report/Chap4.pdf](http://www.westminster.ac.uk/builtenv/maxlock/KTweb/Report/Chap4.pdf).
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