

## ‘COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE’ ELLIPSE

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

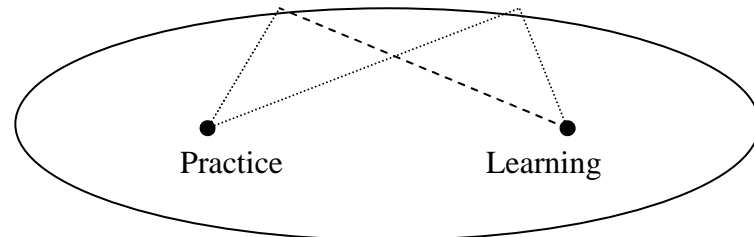
The literature on organizational learning and knowledge management seldom exhibits integrative features (see, for example, Ambrosini et al, 2001, Reinhardt, 2000, Pawlowsky, 1999 for the argument). In order to provide some convergence and coherence in our discussions, several dichotomies such as theory-practice, content-process, learning-knowledge, and individual-social must be addressed (for example, Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003). Interdisciplinary fields like management learning, meaning both the management of learning and the learning of management, can be helpful for bridging some of the gaps existing among these dichotomies (Burgoyne & Reynolds, 1997).

Burgoyne reviewed (1975) and updated (2003) various learning theories and their relevance to management learning, and in so doing, identified various schools of thought such as conditioning; cognitive and experiential. These schools are defined with respect to their differences, which originate in the different assumptions each makes about the nature of people. In fact, these various schools of thought are drawn from management development programs and differences among individuals are significant in all of them. However these ideas can be applied to the learning experiences of organizations. Furthering his discussion of the learning schools of thought, Burgoyne (2003) also suggests ‘situated learning’ within the ‘communities of practice’ as another learning theory.

Organizational activities related to learning and knowledge management can also be argued with regard to the SECI model of Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995). According to this tacit-explicit knowledge interaction model, “socialization” is the process of creating tacit knowledge from tacit knowledge, whereas “externalization” is that of articulating tacit knowledge into explicit concepts. “Combination” involves the process of systemizing concepts into an explicit knowledge system. “Internalization” is a process of embodying explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge. Nonaka et al (2003) suggests that at the foundation of SECI modeling lies ‘ba’, the context that knowledge needs to exist, in which it is shared, created, and utilized. Although the concept of ‘ba’ shows some similarities with that of ‘community of practice’, they can be differentiated according to the nature of the learning and participation that takes

place within them. For instance, a `community of practice` is a place where members learn knowledge embedded in the community; `ba` is a place where new knowledge is created. Here, we can suggest a new `community of practice` model that can also incorporate some of the benefits of the `ba` and SECI models:

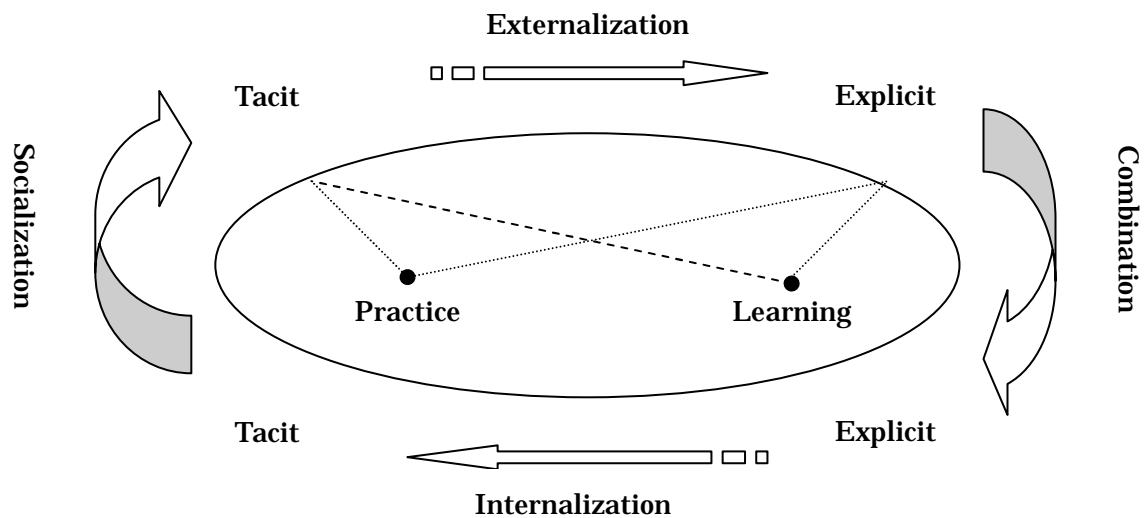
**FIGURE 1: COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ELLIPSE**



In this model we benefit from using the geometric characteristics of an ellipse to develop existing models about learning, learning by doing (or doing by learning) and communities of practice (Kolb, 1983; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mumford 1993). In our model, the ellipse has two fixed points, practice (or action) and learning (or knowing), thus suggesting that our Community of Practice forms around the concepts of both practice and learning. In the ellipse, the sum of the distances between any point on the plane curve and the fixed points is constant. In our community of practice ellipse this also means that whatever is done in the community of practice always consists of some action and some learning, although their ratio could be different.

We can also fit the SECI interactions onto this ellipse of community of practice, benefiting from the attachment of tacit knowledge with bodily experienced practice, and explicit knowledge with learned theory in mind (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). However, we by no means aim to propose a taxonomy, which could end up with yet another dichotomy; on the contrary, this modeling suggests that both tacit and explicit knowledge are bound to be together. Then, the conversion of knowledge can be enabled in the communities of practice ellipse, which can lead to the generation of knowledge and development of a community of practice. In this way, it can be useful as a new organization model for learning and knowledge management.

**FIGURE 2: SECI INTERACTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**



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