

## **Revisiting an Earlier Knowledge Creation Model**

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In the summer of 2006, the author presented a model of knowledge creation at the Society for Applied Learning Technology Conference (SALT) in Arlington, Virginia. After serious discussion with other participants in the conference and closer examination of the model, a new revision was needed. It was stated that in the process of creating knowledge within the organization, knowledge must lead to an action. Further, action must lead to a sustainable performance. To make this model more helpful, an additional probing is needed to show how an action is turned into a desired performance. This paper reexamines the existing model to discover what concepts and techniques are needed to guarantee that action taken in the process of a knowledge creation leads to the desired outcome, that is, the sustainable performance.

### **Quick Revisit**

Still the model (see appendix One) deals with the data as the basic input to create information. Information needs to be processed further to create knowledge. Knowledge is created as a result of combining two types of knowledge: tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. The greater part of existing knowledge in any origination is hidden in peoples' heads as tacit knowledge or as intellectual capital.

The process of creating knowledge must lead to action. The action must be evaluated and examined closely. As noted from the previous study, actions are influenced by multiple factors that can turn into a sustainable performance. These include:

1. Leadership. Leaders must lead themselves before they can lead others. Leaders should not fear failure, and should share some of their mistakes with employees.
2. Dealing with change. Just like taxes and death, change is going to happen regardless of our attitude toward it.
3. Dealing with politics. Politics is a critical part of any organization. The acknowledgement of politics and peoples' ability to balance between performance and the talent of applying the culture rules wisely can lead to many positive results.
4. Trust. Not many tasks can be completed without building a trusting, working environment first. Trust should be always mentioned as a prerequisite to any accomplishment. Teamwork is required to complete many projects. Without trust, very rarely can anything be achieved.
5. Learning as a lifelong endeavor. Not only do organizations need to create a learning environment, but also the concept of learning about learning must be established. Knowing what people need to complete a project is constantly changing. They need to build the ability of finding the solution on their own. Researching the Internet, databases and different knowledge bases is a must in order to survive the overwhelming increase in the amount of information.

### **Clear Emphasis on Action**

With all that in mind, we need to investigate the additional requirements that train an action into a sustainable one. It is not enough to plan and state what is to be done. Additional descriptions of the nature of the action must be discussed, examined and measured. As a result, only knowledge translated into action is useful knowledge. The time it takes a company to plan, analyze, and design knowledge management systems may be lengthy. Of course, we should not forget the cost in the investment. Just like many information system built in an earlier period could not produce the desired outcome, knowledge management systems can have the same fate if they were not geared toward a tangible action. Action is the heart and natural conclusion to a long and costly investment in any system.

What does it take to produce an action that will generate sustainable performance? There are many ways of creating an atmosphere that supports an actionable knowledge. These are some points that can be used as a check list during planning and implementation within a knowledge sharing environment. Remind the group through the different phases of building a knowledge-sharing environment that actions produce sustainable performance and therefore are the goal of the study.

1. Actions should be explicitly stated and discussed frequently.
2. Gain support from top management for actions.
3. Create a graph, chart, or pictorial element that reminds the team that knowledge management will not produce any outcome without action.
4. When thinking about outcomes becomes the norm instead of producing action, a corrective action must be taken to keep the involved team on the right track.
5. The team as a whole must work to reduce the risk of slowing down the process. They must face any challenge that can divert the team from obtaining the desired outcome.
6. Create a log of the errors committed during the implementation of the plan to insure that resources are not wasted over and over again.
7. Before or during an action, be aware when technology can be used as an effective communication tool. Further, we need to be aware when technology is not the right delivery method and that human interaction is the most beneficial method to produce the right action.

Knowledge management is directly related to any academic setting. In reality, any educational institution is considered an engine for producing knowledge. Producing knowledge in academic settings does not guarantee an action that produces positive change. Therefore, we need to continue to see effective learning through a sustainable action (Stähli, 2006). In his article "Effective learning for sustainable action," Stähli asked three great questions to elicit a response and incite thinking in regard to sustainable action. These are:

1. "What do we generally understand by 'sustainable action?'"
2. "What requirements must be fulfilled to enable sustainable action?"
3. "How can you train young or older persons to enable them to act in a sustainable manner?"

From the Internet Time Blog by Jay Cross, the author referred to the work of Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton and asked the question as to why our actions are not consistent with our knowledge of what needs to be done. The author stated five reasons why organizations know what to do but fail to do it. Members in the organization:

1. Use talk to replace action. A presentation is a replacement of a useful action.

2. Use their memories instead of acting. Constant thinking without finding the right tools to produce the right action. Most go back in their memories to find a solution to a recent problem where many variables have become obsolete and unable to provide a new action.
3. Allow fear to control their knowledge. As a result, no action is produced. Fear could include the fear of failure, the fear of facing unusual challenges, and just plain old fear from rejection.
4. Allow “measurement to obstruct [their] judgment.” Sometimes, the use of strict tools to measure the completion of a certain task makes it hard (if not impossible) to move to the next step.
5. Let internal rivalries exist. As a result associates become hostile toward each other. Jealously, for example, is a common feeling among employees. This negative feeling could produce a blinding approach in order to carry out tasks effectively.

Ironically, from another website with the title of “The Managing Leading Edge,” the author referred to Pfeffer and Sutton in order to find a solution to the above-mentioned problem. The author focused on eight points that must be looked at closely in order to turn knowledge into action. These include:

1. Focus on “why” before “how.” To know the reason behind doing anything is very important. The author called on management to explain why procedures are applied and the reason for the new knowledge. It should not be about a new learning method or “following order,” rather it should be about understanding the purpose behind the new knowledge.
2. Teaching others produces a learning atmosphere. Any new knowledge must create an action as quickly as possible. These actions should include practical approaches, e. g., learning how to transfer new knowledge into a new behavior. Lectures should not be considered the end of the learning cycle.
3. Elegant plans and concepts are not a substitute for actions. So much of an organization’s resources get wasted because a plan is evaluated to death and every sort of possible benefit becomes either untimely or ineffective.
4. Mistakes are part of taking an action. Acknowledging that making mistakes is part of any project allows employees to view taking risk as rewarding. “Smart companies” create an incentive mechanism for taking risks and learning from mistakes. On the other hand, “dumb companies” usually tend to punish people for making mistakes. Discouraging people from taking risks by not allowing room for mistakes in order to produce a totally safe environment will diminish growth.
5. Try to eliminate fear. Any action that takes place should be based on trust, and leaders should do their best to minimize fear.
6. Our energy should be spent to compete externally as opposed to internally. It is so easy to foster internal competition and lose track of our purpose within an organization. Management should do their best to work around creating a competing working environment by encouraging knowledge sharing and cooperation. People should be encouraged to cross boundaries within an organization to help each other.
7. Don’t measure everything. Measure only those tasks that produce action from knowledge. It is critical to measure a few core performances but we need to avoid measuring too much. Too many examined pages along with many numbers to crunch make it hard to generate value. “It is especially valuable to measure work-in-progress instead of past results.”

8. Leaders should lead by example. How leaders act and spend their time are important indications to how knowledge can be turned into actions. What leaders and managers practice and enforce can shape the corporate culture. The actions taken by leaders should be a blueprint to other employees in their daily actions throughout the organization. Maureen Crowley, Vice President of Instructions, emphasized that trust and understanding a role every leader must assume. Crowley stated that as leaders we must “strive to reflect a garden like atmosphere responsive to change and adaptive to new initiatives. It is this internal climate of a garden that provides for the respect and trust necessary to insure the personal and professional development of all employees. Leadership strives to foster understanding, respect, dignity, and a climate of cooperation and freedom to take risks.”

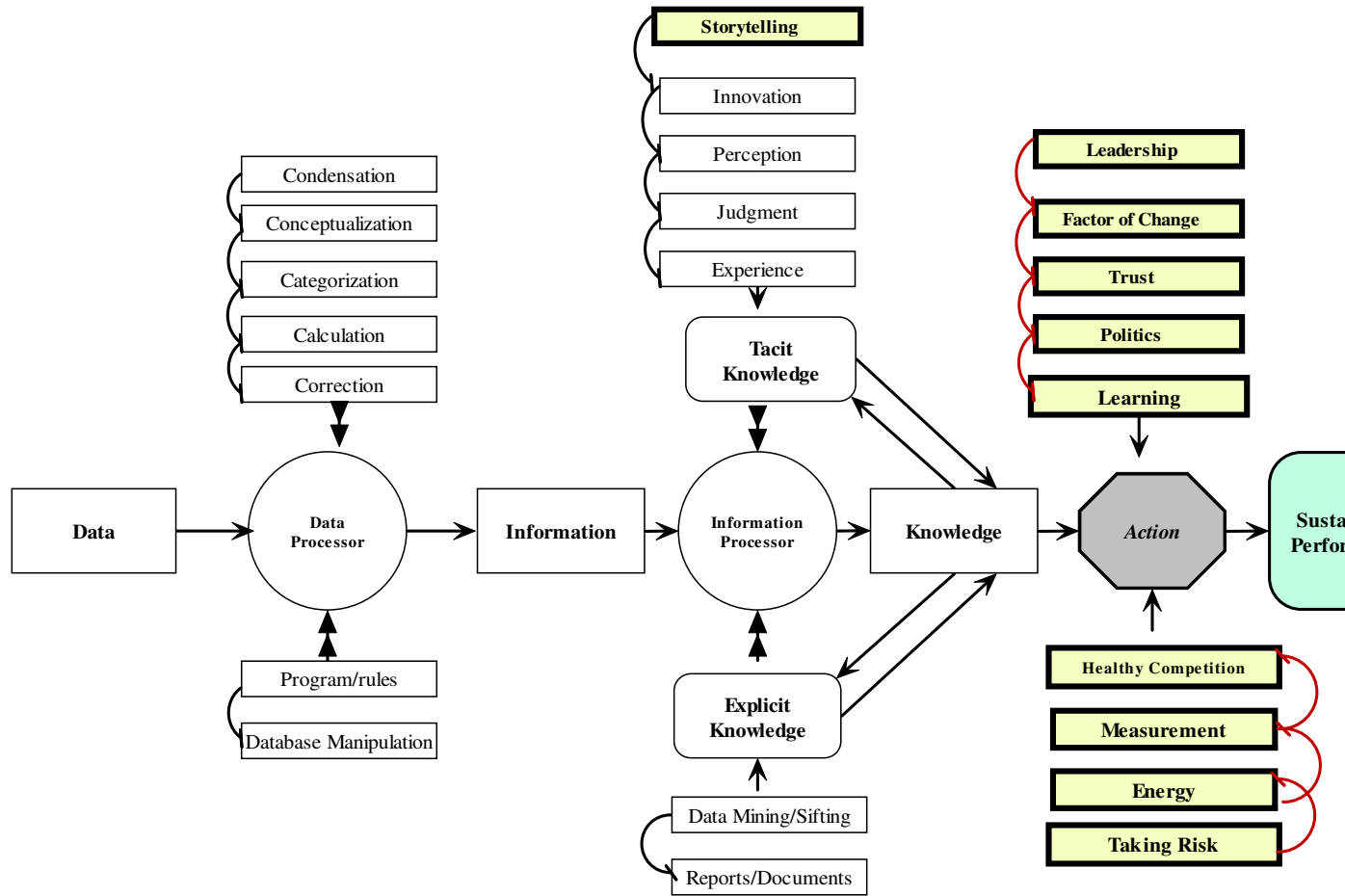
In a conversation with Professor Roland Fisch who teaches education and anthropology classes at Florida Keys Community College (FKCC), he referred to Benjamin Bloom Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Professor Fisch made it clear when he stated that knowledge must be followed by understanding and understanding itself should lead to an application. This proves that unless application is utilized, there will be no action. Professor Fisch supported the notion that our ability to transfer our knowledge to action is very much needed to create a knowledge creation environment which itself must lead to a sustainable performance.

In another conversation with Jean Mauk, Vice President, Financial and Administrative Services at FKCC, she stated that a follow-up is always needed to insure that an action is being sent in the right direction. Further, Mauk stated that we need to ask the question, “Is that what happened?” and “Why.” Questions are wonderful tools to assist us in the formulation of an action. Questions are helpful in reminding us that answers are there, and unless we seek them, our situation will continue to be vague. A conversation with Sharon Toppino, Vice President of Students Affairs at FKCC, resulted in similar support of the study. Toppino stated that we need to examine our present issues, and to remind ourselves of those guidelines. Who are the other people who are involved in the production of an action? Can we include more seasoned people to create a different perspective? These questions were asked by Toppino who supported different input in the knowledge creation process. She finished by saying the involvement of many people in the process certainly will produce an action that is sustainable.

## **Conclusion**

In our attempt to create a sustainable action, we need to look at many issues. These issues should produce an environment that assures a sustainable performance. We should start by asking “why” since why give us a higher level of understanding. We need to value ideas that emphasize actions since elegant plans by themselves will not solve business problems. Mistakes should be tolerated and taking risk should not be restricted. Fear can create a crippling factor and business should discourage employees to compete internally. Business should not create a suffocating working environment by trying to measure every process to precise list of standards. Finally, leaders should lead by example and their behaviors and stands should become a blueprint for good and productive business practices.

Appendix One



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### **References**

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