Implicit, Tacit, or Explicit: All Knowledge Is Valuable

When you start Googling "knowledge management," it's easy to fall down the rabbit hole of literature written since the practice was developed in the early 90s. With so many knowledge management experts, texts, and solutions available, as you get deeper into research, terms and jargon are often thrown around with the expectation that everyone knows what they mean.

In order to understand and develop a knowledge-sharing strategy for your company, you first need to understand the different types of knowledge: explicit, implicit, and tacit. Because no matter how you characterize your organization's knowledge, it all matters to the success and productivity of your team.

Explicit knowledge:

knowledge that is easy to articulate, write down, and share

Implicit knowledge:

the application of explicit knowledge

Tacit knowledge:

knowledge gained from personal experience

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Tacit, Explicit, and Implicit Knowledge: What's the Difference?

If you get into a conversation with a knowledge management expert, be prepared for exact definitions of characterizations of knowledge. So, while we truly believe it doesn't matter what kind of knowledge you're dealing with (it's all valuable), let's dive into the definitions of each:

Explicit Knowledge

Explicit knowledge is the most basic form of knowledge and is easy to pass along because it's written down and accessible. When data is processed, organized, structured, and interpreted, the result is explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is easily articulated, recorded, communicated, and most importantly in the world of knowledge management, stored. If you need an example of explicit knowledge, simply open your knowledge management platform and take a look around. Your company data sheets, white papers, research reports, etc. are all explicit company knowledge.

Implicit Knowledge

Implicit knowledge is the practical application of explicit knowledge. There are likely instances of implicit knowledge all around your organization. For example, consider asking a team member how to perform a task. This could spark a conversation about the range of options to perform the task, as well as the potential outcomes, leading to a

thoughtful process to determine the best course of action. It is that team member's implicit knowledge that educates the conversation of how to do something and what could happen. Additionally, best practices and skills that are transferable from job to job are examples of implicit knowledge.

Tacit Knowledge

Tacit knowledge is the knowledge that we possess that is garnered from personal experience and context. It's the information that, if asked, would be the most difficult to write down, articulate, or present in a tangible form. As an example, think of learning how to make your grandmother's famous recipes. Sure, she gave you the recipe card, but when you try it on your own you feel as if something is missing. After years of experience, she has learned the exact feel for the dough, or exactly how long something should be in the oven. It's not something she can write down; she can just feel it.in the workplace, tacit knowledge is the application of implicit knowledge that's specific to your company. As employees move from job to job, the application of their implicit knowledge will change based on what's unique about your business. An example of this is a sales rep who can not only give a great demo but has also learned specific buying signs while talking to prospects.

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	Explicit Knowledge	Implicit Knowledge	Tacit Knowledge
What is it?	Knowledge that is easily articulated, recorded, communicated and stored	Knowledge that is applied in a practical way and that doesn't depend on context	Knowledge gained from personal experience plus context; can be hard to articulate
What's an example?	A research report	Skills that can transfer from one job to another	A sales rep who can give a great demo and has learned specific buying signs while talking to prospects

Make Tacit, Implicit, and Explicit Knowledge Accessible

In the end, no matter how company knowledge is defined, it all plays a vital role in the day-to-day operations of running an organization. However, in order to develop a successful knowledge sharing strategy, you have to understand how different types of knowledge are communicated and most effectively stored.

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Most organizations misdiagnose a knowledge sharing problem at the implicit knowledge level and they build an intranet or deploy a file sharing solution in attempt to address their issues. However, these systems fall short when it comes to capturing the context and discussion around explicit knowledge because questions and discussion still have to take place in a siloed system. To ask questions and collaborate, teams still need to rely on chat, email, and shoulder taps – which are not recorded for everyone's benefit.

This creates a gap in your organization's ability to retain the tacit knowledge of your experts. As capturing tacit knowledge has become more important to organizations of all sizes, a new type of knowledge management technology has emerged, referred to as knowledge sharing platforms. Knowledge-sharing platforms like Bloomfire allow you to capture knowledge in whatever form it takes, whether it's a text document, video, data visualization, Q&A with input from a subject matter expert, or anything in between.

Bloomfire is the leader in knowledge engagement, delivering an experience that connects teams and individuals with the information they need to do their jobs. Our cloud-based knowledge engagement platform gives people one centralized, searchable place to engage with shared knowledge and grow their organization's collective intelligence. For more information or to schedule a demo, visit www.bloomfire.com.