

Types of Knowledge

In a discussion of knowledge management (KM) it is important to have, at least, a working definition of *knowledge* and to distinguish it conceptually from *information* and *data*. While the boundaries between the three are not clearly defined, *data* are generally considered to be structured, factual records of discrete transactions or events. *Information* is data that is structured or arranged to inform or influence by communicating a message, which means that the nature of information is to also be influenced, to varying degrees, by users' interpretations of the message. *Knowledge* implies that information is not only influenced but is combined with the users' own experiences to create the capacity for action.

Much of the current literature in the field of KM classifies knowledge as being either *explicit*, *implicit*, or *tacit* knowledge. *Explicit knowledge* implies declared knowledge (i.e., knowledge that is conscious to the knowledge bearer). Explicit knowledge is easily codified, which is why it is not a problem for the employee to tell about rules and obviously learned facts. Very often this knowledge is already written down in books, procedures, or training materials.

In contrast to such relatively accessible information, *implicit knowledge* is fact based but difficult to reveal, but it is still possible to be recorded. Usually knowledge bearers cannot recall this knowledge by themselves, because the information is too obvious to them. When people are asked what they are doing in the morning they might answer "getting up, taking a shower, having a coffee, going to work, checking their e-mail..." without first thinking about their having had to get undressed to take a shower; without thinking about the multiple steps involved in making coffee; and, without thinking about their having had to switch on the computer before being able to read their e-mail. It is generally feasible to convert implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge through documentation.

The third type of knowledge, *tacit knowledge*, is the most difficult to recall and, thus, to transfer. Tacit knowledge includes cognitive and experience-based knowledge about topics such as how to ride a bicycle or how to talk. These examples describe knowledge everybody just has. However, every individual possesses a large amount of tacit knowledge. Employees, for example, tacitly know how they persuade other people, how to behave in different situations, or how to organize a meeting. Such knowledge cannot be completely explained, since it is wholly embodied in the individual, rooted in practice and experience, expressed through skillful execution, and transmitted by apprenticeship and training through watching and doing forms of learning. Tacit knowledge can be observed; however, it is doubtful that all of this knowledge can be converted to explicit knowledge. This fact is why it is said, "We know more than we know that we know."