

# Researching and writing about tacit knowledge: brief observations on a case-based book on an elusive resource

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Professor Nigel Holden  
Lancashire Business School, UK  
IACCM Conference, Vienna, June 2009

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# Overview of presentation

The business context

Tacit knowledge: assumed properties, mighty claims and pertinent questions

Our starting point, methodology and cases

Propositions for insights

Demarcating tacit knowledge

Towards network knowledge creation

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# The business context

Every day in business worldwide millions of cross-cultural interactions involve buyers, suppliers and stakeholder in arrays of relationships and networks.

These actors are engaged in significant acts of knowledge co-creation and sharing, involving the cross-cultural blending and integration of information, perceptions and impressions.

Tacit knowledge is there in abundance.

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# Tacit knowledge: assumed properties

Embedded in systems, routines and practices

Context-specific

Difficult to articulate

Difficult to transmit

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# Tacit knowledge: the mighty claims

‘In the long run ... only *tacit* knowledge, whether alone or in conjunction with explicit knowledge, can give a firm a sustainable competitive advantage’  
(Burton-Jones, 1999)

‘A mystery’, which can ‘release the power of innovation’ (von Krogh et al, 2000)

‘At times perceived as some kind of Holy Grail that will enable magnificent things to happen as soon as the codes of tacit knowledge have been deciphered’  
(Styhre, 2003).

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## Some pertinent questions

But where *is* the tacit knowledge in these everyday cross-cultural business interactions? How is it created, captured, interpreted, converted into explicit knowledge?

How does one identify especially precious nuggets of tacit knowledge, unlock the code? Indeed, is the code unlockable at all?

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## Our starting point

Tacit knowledge is crossed-culturally created at all manner of interfaces

It acts as a subliminal influence on relationships and, by extension, knowledge management as a practice

Language and cultural factors add mood and tone to this knowledge

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## Some methodological and other issues

Professor-practitioner co-authorship for new approaches, insights, models

Tacit knowledge is 'unresearchable'

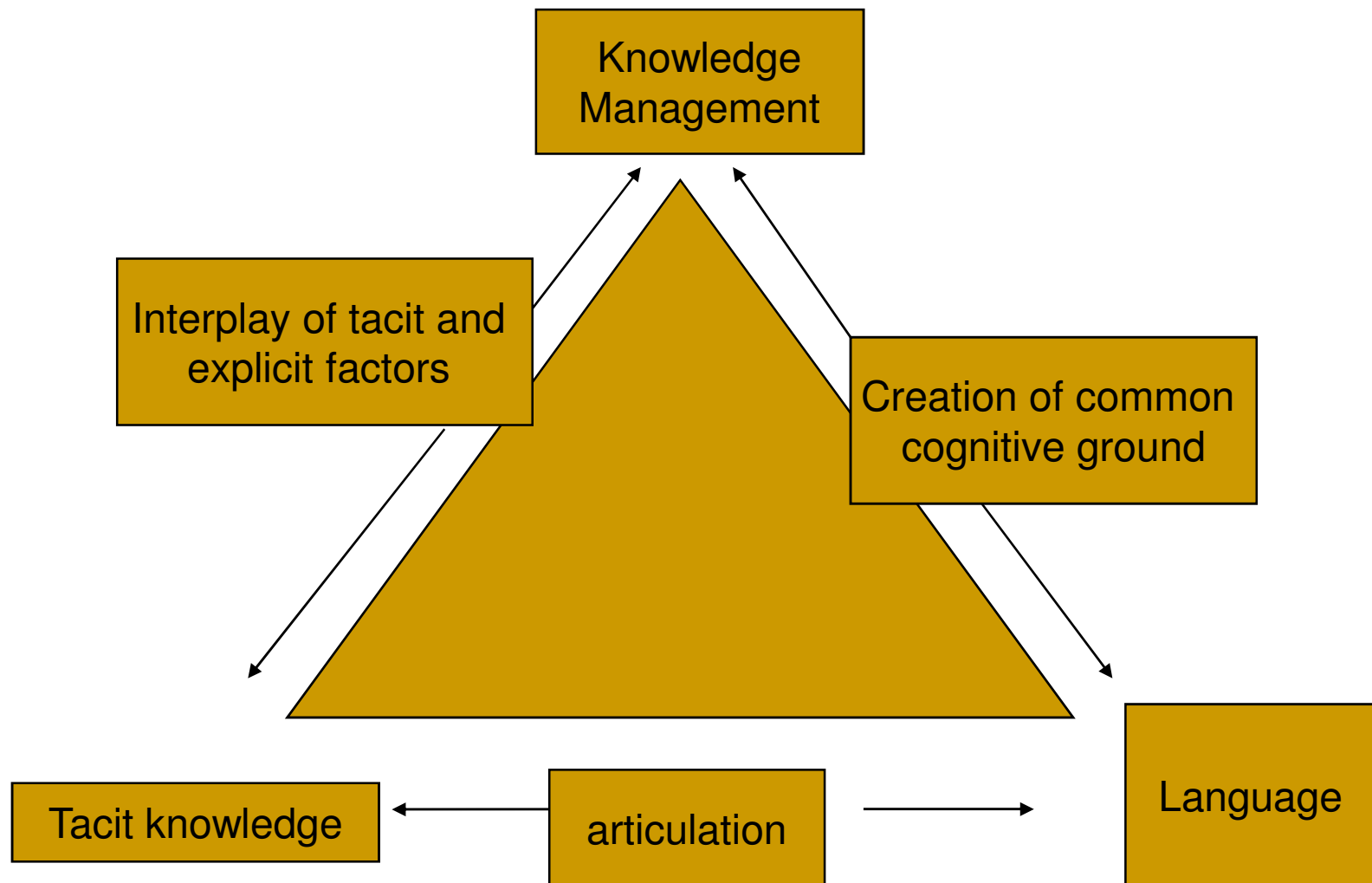
Interviews (always in tandem): guided and unguided conversation

Depth, richness, variety

Focus on *fertile* facts and (seemingly) small points

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## Propositions: not hypotheses and not axioms

*Tacit knowledge passes through firms' network like an invisible flux. In its own way it is as powerful and unnoticed as gravity. It creates its own particular field of forces around explicit knowledge.*

*Protagonists in cross-cultural business interactions consciously and unconsciously co-create a relationship-specific kind of tacit knowledge.*

*Language barriers are a major impedance in the cross-cultural generation, transfer and sharing of knowledge. They do not block knowledge, but filter it haphazardly*

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## Informant companies and interview locations, 2007-2009

Denso Corporation, Kariya (near Nagoya);  
automotive electronics: Japan, UK, China,  
Sweden

Novo Nordisk, Copenhagen; healthcare  
products: Denmark, Korea

Ole Lynggaard, Copenhagen; fine jewellery:  
Denmark, Tokyo.

Simply the Group, Shanghai; restaurants and  
life-style stores: Shanghai

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## Case study focus

DENSO: Cross-cultural sharing of knowledge for Europeanization

Novo Nordisk: Cross-cultural sharing of knowledge for organizational development

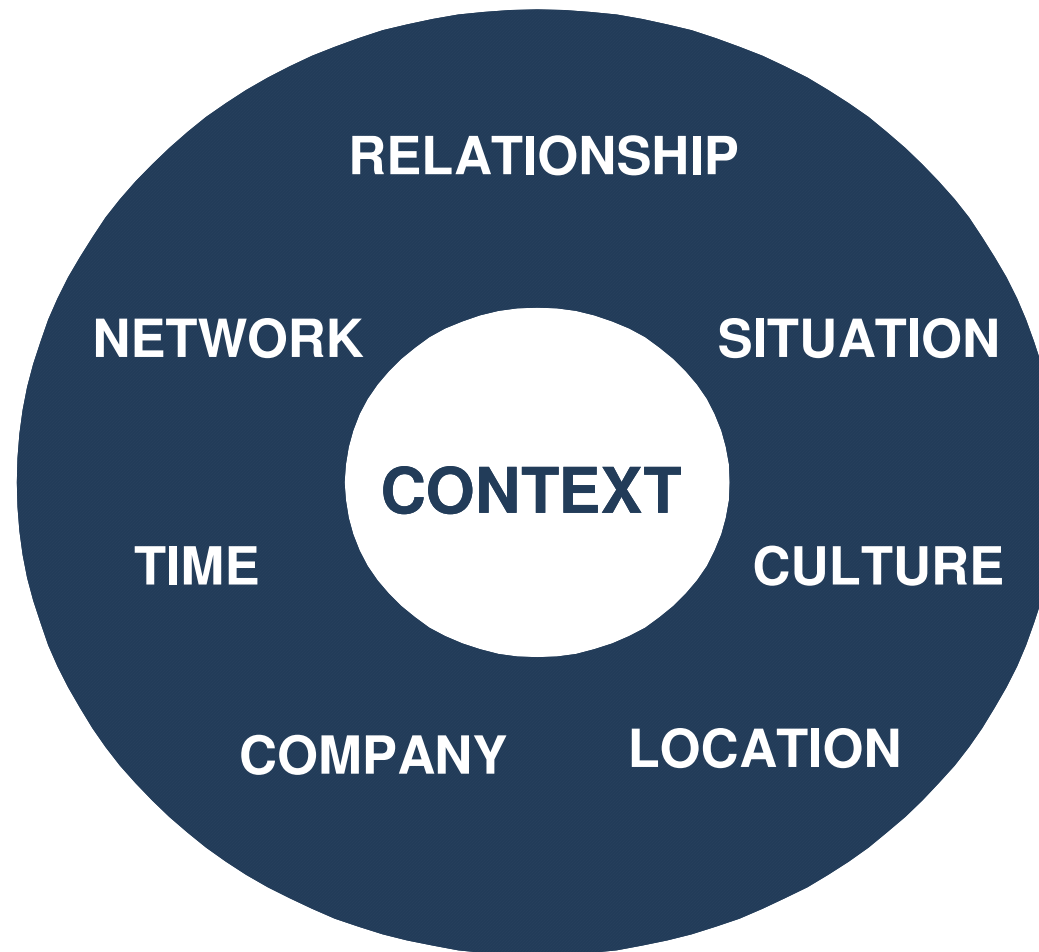
Ole Lynggaard: Market entry (Japan)

Simply the Group: Co-creation of knowledge for international brand building

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## Seven aspectual dimensions of context (Holden and Glisby©, 2010)



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## Tacit knowledge: a demarcation *not* a definition

*Tacit knowledge refers to: manifold and never constant forms and fusions of personal (and organizational) experience and insight, predominantly created in networks, that under appropriate stimuli can be converted into practical know-how in every compartment of business life.*

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# Undercurrents and codes (暗黙)

COMPANY	UNDERCURRENT	CODE
DENSO CORPORATION	Communication gap between Japanese and non-Japanese staff	DENSO Spirit
Novo Nordisk	Occasional resistance to compliance with assurance procedures	Novo Nordisk Way of Management
Ole Lynggaard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Japanese assumption that foreigners cannot understand Japan</li><li>Japanese expectations of foreigners' behaviour</li></ul>	The <i>real</i> way (i.e. <i>tenjikai</i> , <i>gaisho</i> , <i>sokyaku</i> etc) in which jewellery is bought and sold in Japan
Simply the Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Cultural Revolution</li><li>Bureaucratic face-saving</li></ul>	The aesthetic, gastronomic, visual and tactile elements in an integrated business format

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## Some findings

Cultural factors exercise considerable influence (networks, nationality of corporate HQ, possibilities for trust, etc)

Trustful atmosphere > (tacit) knowledge-sharing > motivation

Importance of how and when tacit knowledge is combined with explicit knowledge

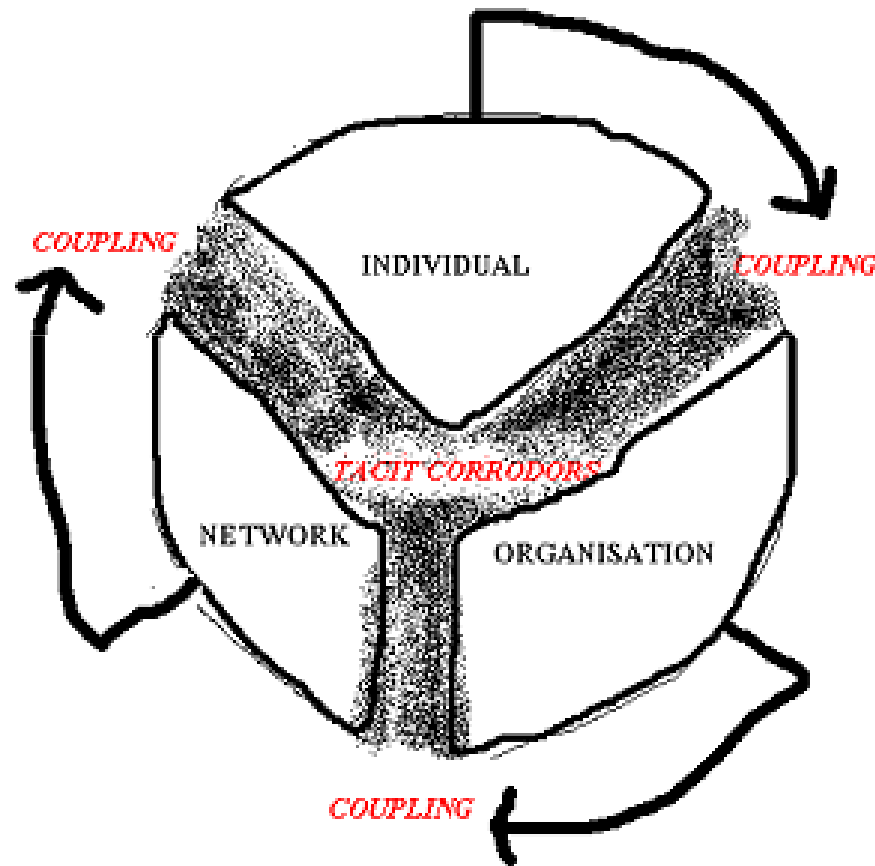
Usefulness of applying factors of translation theory to knowledge transfer (ambiguity, cultural interference, lack of equivalence)

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# Model of network knowledge creation (Holden and Glisby©, 2010)



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Thank you very much

To know more, read ...

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Nigel Holden & Martin Glisby

Creating Knowledge  
**Advantage**

The Tacit Dimensions  
of International Competition  
and Cooperation

COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL PRESS

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