

INVESTIGATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT AND MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE OF TACIT KNOWLEDGE WITH "READING THE ATMOSPHERE" IN THE WORKPLACE

Pei-Ling Lin^{1*}, Tai-Ho Yang²

^{1,2}Department of Business Administration, Kun Shan University, Tainan, Taiwan*
Email: adalin70@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

This research involved nine participants, including three mid-to-senior-level executives from the public and private sectors in central and southern Taiwan, two small and medium-sized enterprise owners, and one expert from an employment counselling center. Interpretative analysis of interview texts obtained through focus group interviews and in-depth interviews yielded the following propositions: (1) selecting employees with social sensitivity, guiding them in observing words and actions, and fostering reflective learning; (2) utilizing work record forms, notes, and implementing mentorship programs to share and pass on the knowledge and skills of reading the atmosphere; (3) using app-based games or book club platforms to simulate and practice reading the atmosphere to avoid instructional conflicts. These findings and discussions may help new employees assimilate into the organization more rapidly, reduce employee turnover, and enhance work efficiency and the organizational climate.

Keywords: *Reading the atmosphere, Tacit knowledge, Ethical climate.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern university education emphasizes individual creativity without providing adequate ethical guidance. Consequently, many young professionals entering the work force tend to express themselves boldly, exhibiting behaviours that are often perceived as "naive" by others. It is not surprising that their supervisors lament, "It's challenging to teach attitude," or "Each generation is not as good as the previous one." Among the most common criticisms directed at new employees is their lack of understanding of "reading the atmosphere." This term, originally from Japanese, is now widely used in Chinese-speaking societies as well. "Reading the atmosphere" refers to "observing the atmosphere in a given situation, understanding the unspoken meaning of speakers, and taking appropriate and suitable actions that lead to positive outcomes for the company or organization." This study aims to explore the experiences of mid-to-senior-level executives facing organizational challenges caused by new employees' inability to read the atmosphere and how to guide new employees through documenting and transmitting this tacit knowledge.

The purpose of this study is to draw attention to the importance of supervisors' role in guiding new employees. By collecting the experiences of mid-to-senior-level executives regarding the challenges they faced due to a lack of understanding of "reading the atmosphere" in the past, along with their observations during the process of guiding new employees, the aim is to analyse and synthesize these experiences. The goal is to identify common experiences and approaches that can facilitate the documentation and transmission of the tacit knowledge of "reading the atmosphere" among mid-to-senior-level executives. Therefore, specific research questions can be outlined as follows:

- (1) Understand the socialization issues that recent graduates face when entering the work place.
- (2) Explore how work place guide of supervisor newly hired individuals who lack socialization skills, helping them acquire the ability to "read the atmosphere".

- (3) Investigate how new employees can be guided to record and transmit their experiences during the socialization process in the workplace, making this tacit knowledge explicit and useful for organizational education, training, or guiding new employees.

Knowledge management in organizations is built upon both explicit and tacit knowledge. It involves not only the management of knowledge itself but also processes such as acquisition, storage, sharing, and innovation of knowledge. Special attention is given to the management of tacit knowledge, transferring knowledge, and fostering innovation [1].

Arthur Andersen business consulting [2] emphasizes that knowledge management encompasses various dimensions, including data, information, knowledge, and wisdom. Knowledge management is not just about managing knowledge but also about enabling individuals to apply wisdom in their work. Honeycutt [3] defines knowledge management as systematic management and application of organizational wisdom, treating knowledge capital as a manageable asset, and emphasizing knowledge work, a culture of mutual engagement, operational processes, and technologies that benefit both the organization and its employees.

Tacit knowledge, also known as implicit knowledge, is a concept introduced by Michael Polanyi in his 1958 book "Personal Knowledge." Polanyi discovered that belief plays a significant role in certain aspects of human knowledge, and this belief is an inherent part of tacit knowledge. He categorized human knowledge into two types: explicit knowledge, which is typically expressed through written texts, diagrams, and mathematical formulas, and tacit knowledge, which is unexpressed and encompasses the knowledge individuals possess during their actions. He referred to the former as explicit knowledge and the latter as tacit knowledge.

The perception that new employees in the workplace lack the ability to "read the atmosphere" is often attributed to their insufficient socialization. Moreover, when their personal interests conflict with the organization's interests, they tend to prioritize self-interest, neglecting the broader interests of the organization. This is a common issue among new employees and warrants research into the concepts of "ethical climate" and "organizational socialization".

Schneider [4] defines ethical climate as employees' subjective experiences and shared perceptions regarding ethical behaviour standards and policies within an organization, including their practical implementation. Ethical climate not only shapes trust, consensus, self-discipline, and ethical values among organizational members but also forms the foundation for building trust between organizations and external entities. Ethical climate formation is instrumental in establishing ethical guidelines within the organization, enabling members to understand what constitutes ethical behaviour and fostering a shared understanding of how to address ethical issues.

Organizational socialization is the primary process through which employees adapt to a new job or role within an organization. It transforms newcomers from outsiders to insiders [5]. Successful organizational socialization affects work behaviours and attitudes, current performance, and subsequently influences organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intentions to leave [6]. This underscores the high importance of this topic for organizations.

The primary objectives of socialization are twofold: first, it reduces members' ambiguity about the organization by making them aware of others' expectations, thereby creating a sense of security. Second, socialization fosters consistent behaviour among members, enhances mutual

understanding, reduces conflicts, and consequently reduces the need for direct supervision and management control [7].

The concept of "Reading the Atmosphere" originates from the Japanese phrase "空気をよむ" (Kūki o yomu), which refers to the ability to observe the atmosphere in a given situation, understand the unspoken meanings of speakers, and make appropriate and suitable actions that lead to positive outcomes for the company or organization. The skill of reading the atmosphere is considered a form of tacit knowledge, often referred to as social intelligence or "EQ" (Emotional Intelligence) in psychology. In the field of psychology, it is acknowledged that "reading the atmosphere" is a learnable skill, indicating that the ability to navigate interpersonal relationships is not inherent but can be developed [8]. Reading the atmosphere is closely tied to the art of knowing when to advance or retreat in social interactions, making it a crucial skill once acquired.

One of the most well-known methods for managing tacit knowledge in organizations is the SECI, as introduced by Nonaka and Takeuchi in their book "The Knowledge-Creating Company." SECI stands for Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization, representing the four phases of knowledge transformation:

This phase involves the sharing of tacit knowledge among individuals through direct interaction and socialization. It emphasizes the importance of personal experiences, observations, and informal communication in the transfer of tacit knowledge.

Externalization refers to the process of converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. During this phase, individuals attempt to articulate their tacit knowledge in a form that can be documented and shared with others. It often involves storytelling, metaphors, or other methods to make implicit knowledge explicit.

Combination focuses on the integration and organization of explicit knowledge. In this phase, the documented knowledge from various sources is combined, categorized, and structured in a way that facilitates easy access and retrieval by members of the organization. It involves creating repositories, databases, or knowledge management systems.

Internalization is the phase where explicit knowledge is absorbed and converted back into tacit knowledge through learning and practical application. Individuals within the organization take the explicit knowledge made available through combination and internalize it by applying it to their work, thus transforming it into their own tacit knowledge.

This study focuses on the competency of "Reading the Atmosphere" and examines how it can be transformed from tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge using the SECI model.

Table 1. The SECI model

From/To	Tacit Knowledge	Explicit Knowledge
Tacit Knowledge	Socialization	Externalization
Explicit Knowledge	Internalization	Combination

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Due to the fact that the ability of new employees to read Atmosphere" is part of the organization's tacit knowledge and varies in response to different situations, with no substantial shared

experiences that can be quantified for research, a qualitative research approach has been chosen for this study.

The objective of this research design is to find an appropriate method to address the research questions. The aim is to collect data related to the experiences of mid-to-senior-level executives in assisting the socialization process of new employees in the workplace, as well as observations of the behaviours of new employees. By synthesizing similarities and differences, valuable lessons can be identified. Because tacit knowledge in the workplace is not easily quantifiable, qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews and focus group interviews have been selected. In-depth interviews allow for a deep exploration of participants' thoughts, providing more authentic information. The purpose of in-depth interviews is to uncover the true insights, real meanings, impacts, future developments, and solutions within the interviews. Additionally, Pan [9] mentioned that focus group interviews, also known as focus groups, focus interviews, or group in-depth interviews, involve researchers applying interviews within a group context, with a moderator catalysing participant interaction and discussion to gather conversation content. The moderator only plays the role of a facilitator, catalysing participant interaction and discussion, and does not provide opinions on the questions to avoid influencing the participants' expressions.

This study involves mid-to-senior-level executives as research participants, with a total of 5 participants for the in-depth interviews and 4 participants for the focus group interviews.

The participants for the in-depth interviews in this study are mid-to-senior-level executives with over 5 years of experience, particularly in guiding new team members. The number of participants and interview questions will depend on data saturation. An interview outline will be prepared in advance and shared with the interviewees, and their willingness to participate will be sought. Interviews will then be scheduled at mutually agreed-upon times.

The participants in the focus group interviews are a group of co-learners who have been actively participating in a reading club since 2008. Over the years, the topics covered in the reading club have mostly been related to "self-development in the workplace." Due to their familiarity with each other, they are well-acquainted, making it easier to stimulate discussions and exchange experiences during the conversations.

In this study, an open-ended in-depth interview approach will be employed. The audio recordings of the interviews will be transcribed verbatim and supplemented with notes to create interview summaries, capturing the context and responses of the participants at that moment. Adhering to the principle of fidelity to the participants' original intent, the transcribed data will be organized according to the predetermined interview topics. Using a thematic analysis approach, the data will be categorized based on different themes, allowing for a comparison of each transcript within the same thematic category. This process involves sorting the data into conceptual categories and identifying similarities and differences among them. Continuous reflection on the logical relationships between categories will be conducted through an iterative comparison method to analyse the data. The goal is to extract the main themes presented in the data and meaningful insights from different thematic areas, ultimately deriving core themes from the analysis. This iterative process of revisiting older data aims to understand the development of the entire process and the connections within the data, while remaining open to revising perspectives, ensuring the clarity and saturation of the data.

Table 2. Basic information of the in-depth interview and focus group interview participants

No.	Organization/Position	Experience	Background category	
In-depth interview	A1	Fitness Club/ Owner	Over 25 years	Decades of experience in the fitness industry, from training as an intern in a university sports and leisure department to developing professional fitness trainers, with extensive experience.
	A2	Fitness Club/ Coach	Over 5 years	Currently a reserve manager, trained by A1 as a fitness coach.
	A3	District Office/ Accounting Supervisor	Over 10 years	Over 10 years of experience in the public sector as an accounting supervisor at the district office, with rich experience in leading new employees and temporary staff.
	A4	Employment Counseling/ Counselor	Over 20 years	Formerly in the military and currently work as a counselor at an employment counseling center, capable of providing diverse insights.
	A5	Traditional Industry/ Manager	Over 10 years	Considerable experience and insights into the apprenticeship system and the transmission of tacit knowledge in traditional industries.
Focus group interview	B1	County Government/ Division Chief	Over 10 years	Holds the position of division chief in the county government, well-versed in the culture of reading the atmosphere in the public sector, and has extensive experience in leading subordinates and contract employees.
	B2	Junior High School General Affairs Office/ Team Leader	Over 10 years	Formerly worked at Taiwan Railways Corporation, familiar with the culture of reading the atmosphere in the public sector. Also, has rich experience in managing government substitute servicemen and contracted service personnel.
	B3	Plastic Injection Company/ Plant management	Over 10 years	A family-owned enterprise, knowledgeable about the culture of reading the atmosphere in the context of family dynamics and rivalries.
	B4	Employment Counseling/ Counselor	Over 10 years	Previously held a managerial position in the county government and later started a private practice. Has years of experience mentoring architectural interns and possesses extensive management experience.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data gathered from interviews were consolidated and analysed in conjunction with relevant literature and arguments. Following the research path of interpretative phenomenology, this study identified three main propositions related to the development context and management experiences of reading the atmosphere in the work place: (1) Selecting employees with social sensitivity and guiding observation and reflective learning: participants highlighted the importance of choosing employees with social sensitivity and guiding them in observing and reflecting on their interactions in the work place. (2) Effective Use of Work Records and Note-Taking, Incorporating apprenticeship for sharing and passing on knowledge: participants emphasized the value of maintaining work records and taking notes as tools for sharing and passing on knowledge about reading the atmosphere. The concept of apprenticeship was also introduced as an effective method for knowledge transfer. (3) Utilizing App games or book club platforms for simulated practice to avoid conflicts in guidance: participants suggested that utilizing platforms such as app games or book club discussions could help new employees practice reading the atmosphere in a safe and simulated environment, reducing the chances of conflicts during guidance.

These findings and discussions have the potential to facilitate the faster integration of new employees into the ethical climate of the organization, reduce employee turnover, and enhance work efficiency and the organizational atmosphere.

The ancients said that "prevention is worse than cure." Rather than selecting an employee who needs a lot of time and energy to teach or correct attitudes and behaviours, it is better to find an employee who is easier to get started with. I will secretly look at resumes and explore the area near a new person's home, because I feel that I need to know more about his living environment, and it will be easier for me to enter his world later.

There are four types of employees: those who are capable and willing, those who are capable but not willing, those who are incapable and willing, and those who are incapable but not willing. Ability is explicit knowledge and is relatively easy to teach. However, work attitude is related to willingness and is tacit knowledge, which requires more time and energy to teach. In some cases, it is even more difficult to teach the concepts that have been ingrained since childhood. Most supervisors will choose to give up and dismiss them.

Participants stressed the importance of actively using and sharing knowledge rather than merely storing it. Knowledge should not remain stagnant; it gains value through sharing and creating new knowledge in the process. The value of knowledge lies in its transfer, sharing, and creation. When knowledge is shared and passed on, both parties involved experience linear growth in knowledge and expertise. If this process is extended to include further exchanges with others, along with feedback and extensions, it can lead to exponential growth in knowledge and experience. Therefore, acquiring the skill of reading the room or knowledge about guiding employees to learn this skill is of little use if it remains confined to an individual's mind without being shared and passed on. It cannot create a knowledge spiral and doesn't allow more people to benefit from learning, which is indeed a regrettable situation.

When I worked in the beauty industry, I used to have them fill out "incident reports" (with paper and pen). You see, I would draw four squares like this. In the leftmost square, the person who noticed the issue would write down what they saw or heard, something they found not okay. Then, this report would be passed on to the person involved. The person involved could then provide a response to the person who wrote the incident report. Let's say we call the person who wrote the report "A." The person involved, "B," could respond to A by listing things that A might have misunderstood or if the facts were different. Sometimes it was just a matter of miscommunication, and the situation might not have been as it seemed. Other times, the person involved would realize, "Hey, maybe what I said to the customer wasn't okay," and they could write that in this square

During the research process, the researcher came across the concept of "software zing the experiences taught by mentors" in the context of promoting Industry 4.0 by the Ministry of Economic Affairs. This made the researcher consider the idea that the experiences of mentors are a form of tacit knowledge within traditional industries, and how to pass on these experiences is an important issue. During interviews with research participants, the researcher explored their opinions on a game app called "Kuuki Yomi" (Reading the Atmosphere), which was developed by Embedded Arts in Japan in 2013 and had a Taiwanese version released in 2018. While this topic was not initially included in the interview outline, the responses from participants varied.

"I looked at the materials you sent me yesterday, and I was quite interested in what you mentioned about 'reading the atmosphere.' Especially that illustration you showed about taking the bus, I

could really relate to it. When you first talked about 'reading the atmosphere,' I didn't quite get it, but after seeing that illustration, I immediately understood it, and it made a lot of sense to me. I'm currently pursuing a Ph.D. in education, and I think this concept could be very useful in education".

"The situation here is different, and people react differently. For example, when it comes to catching a ball, I would catch it and then pass it to the child behind me. While the answer may be that we should sit down and let the child behind catch it, I feel that's too dangerous for the child. It's safer if I catch the ball and then give it to the child. I'm thinking from the perspective of the child's safety".

Based on the interview results, most of those who supported the idea believed that using an app for learning was fresh and that young people preferred playing mobile games over being lectured in a classroom. It was seen as a worthwhile approach to try. Conversely, those who opposed the idea believed that the app was too simplistic and that social situations were too diverse. They argued that teaching tacit knowledge couldn't be condensed into a few words and couldn't be adequately conveyed through a simple app. The researcher, based on the interview findings, believes that the concept of flipped learning, which is currently popular and has yielded positive results in various educational levels, has the potential to increase young people's willingness and motivation to learn. However, because this app was designed by a Japanese game developer, it may not perfectly align with Taiwan's cultural context, leading to disputes over the answers provided by the app. Therefore, if an app game tailored to Taiwanese culture were designed by someone familiar with local conditions, it might receive a better response.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In the initial stages of this research, when discussing the topic of reading the atmosphere, most people displayed a high level of curiosity regarding the term. Once they understood the significance of reading the atmosphere, they all agreed that it was essential, and many shared stories of encountering challenging individuals in the work place due to a lack of this skill. This highlights how the ability to read the atmosphere is deeply ingrained in people's perceptions of success and failure in the work place. During the literature review, the researcher reviewed numerous books and articles related to reading the atmosphere. However, much of the content approached the topic from psychological or sociological perspectives.

From a psychological standpoint, the content explored topics such as the psychology of those who do not understand reading the atmosphere, how to learn this skill, how individuals who lack this ability can avoid bullying, and more. From a sociological perspective, the discussions centered on how those who do not understand reading the atmosphere can influence the organizational atmosphere and impact an organization's future development. Given that this study primarily examines the topic from the perspective of organizational managers and provides an initial exploration of reading the atmosphere within the organizational context, there remains a wealth of areas within reading the atmosphere that warrant deeper research.

In conclusion, if you have specific questions or if there's more content you'd like assistance with in this section, please feel free to ask, and I'll be happy to help.

Through work place experiences, we have come to understand that training new employees takes time, and in the short term, employees' qualities and abilities may not become immediately productive. The care and concern shown by supervisors and colleagues can help employees

increase their work productivity and fulfill their responsibility to take care of employees. Retaining an existing employee is often more challenging than training a new one. To keep employees, you must first pay attention. Building a good relationship between the company and employees can encourage employees to continue working for the company, boost team cohesion, and enhance internal communication within the organization.

The purpose of this research is to fully integrate new members into the organization, helping them acquire the ability to read the atmosphere, and thereby improve the overall work atmosphere and efficiency of the company.

In conclusion, if you need further recommendations or additional content related to management practices, please let me know, and I'll be happy to provide more information.

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