

Topic and Research Question

The theoretical framework of my non-representative research is the SECI-Model by Nonaka Ikujiro and Takeuchi Hirotaka. Under the consideration of five conditions, which must be given in a company, new knowledge can be created through the interaction of implicit and explicit knowledge by passing through the four modes socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation.

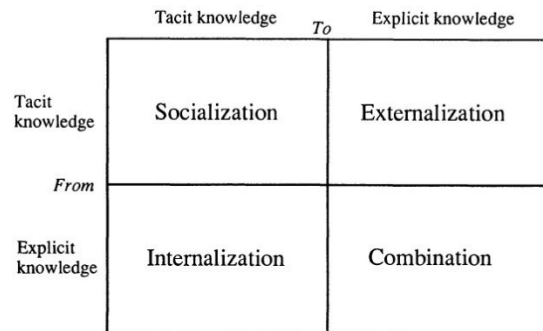


Figure one: Four modes of knowledge creation (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995: 62)

The goal of my research is it to examine the similarities and differences in knowledge creation between new ventures in Japan, South Korea and Austria.

The research questions are:

1. Which of the four modes of the SECI-Model are applied in Japanese, South Korean and Austrian new ventures?
2. Does the focus in Japanese, South Korean and Austrian New Ventures lay on tacit or on explicit knowledge?
3. Which of the five conditions of the SECI-Model exist in Japanese, South Korean and Austrian new ventures?

The research topic is of relevance due to the growing importance of knowledge for organizations. Knowledge creation can improve a company's performance and can therefore lead to a competitive advantage.

State of the Art

The SECI-model gained great reputation after it was first introduced in 1995. Different publications tested the SECI-model in various areas like in the product development of Japanese firms, new ventures in Taiwan and many more. In regard of those previous studies I see the positive effect of the SECI-model on organizational knowledge creation as confirmed.

Therefore, the goal of my study is it not to examine the effect of the SECI-model on knowledge creation, but to examine the differences and similarities in Japan, South Korea and Austria. Further, there already have been various studies on the application of the SECI-model in Japan. On the contrary, South Korea and Austria have scarcely been researched until now. A comparison between Japanese, South Korean and Austrian new ventures in terms of knowledge creation also hasn't been conducted yet.

Methodology and Approach

For my research I used quantitative and qualitative methods. Firstly, I designed a questionnaire consisting of 21 questions on knowledge creating activities in companies on basis of the SECI-model. Through an intensive literature review I identified altogether 16 activities to the four modes socialization, externalization, combination and internalization and five activities to the five conditions intention, requisite variety, autonomy, redundancy and creative chaos. Participants of my questionnaire are new ventures from Japan, South Korea and Austria. In my study, new ventures are defined as young companies no older than ten years since their establishment. Therefore the founding years of the surveyed companies are not earlier than 2003. The companies come from various lines of businesses, like consumer electronics, the services sector and so on. I sent the questionnaire to 843 new venture companies and received back valid and completed questionnaires from 154 new ventures: 57 from Japan, 45 from South Korea and 52 from Austria. The participants had to choose one of five different answers to each of the 21 questions: agree; rather agree; neutral; rather disagree; disagree. Secondly, I conducted 12 expert interviews with founders or employees of new ventures to get a better understanding of my questionnaire results.

To answer my first and third research questions, I added the percent numbers of the answers 'agree' and 'rather agree' together and compared them with the answers 'rather disagree' and 'disagree'. Whenever within one process affirmative answers outweighed the negative answers, I concluded that the process gets applied in the majority of the researched companies. However, if the difference between affirmation and negation was less than 20 percent, I concluded that the difference is too small to draw a conclusion. In such a case I also asked my interview partners in order to get a better understanding of my questionnaire results. The limit of 20 percent was defined by my own

discretion. Based on the results from my first research question, I answered research question two. In case that mainly activities from socialization and internalization are applied in a company I concluded, that the focus lies on tacit knowledge, since the goal of both processes is it to create tacit knowledge. If however mainly activities from externalization and combination are applied in the researched companies, I concluded that the focus lies on explicit knowledge, since the goal of both processes is it to create explicit knowledge.

Main Facts

My questionnaire and interview results showed that in the majority of the companies of all three countries the affirmative answers outweighed the negative answers in all four modes and all five conditions of the SECI-model. The only exception is the application of the fifth condition 'creative chaos' in the Austrian new ventures. In my questionnaire I asked the companies, if they think that ambitious goals of their management often lead to a sense of crisis/ stress condition for their employees. The majority of the Austrian companies disagreed (28.9 percent agree/ 42.3 percent disagree). Still the difference between agreement and disagreement was less than 20 percent.

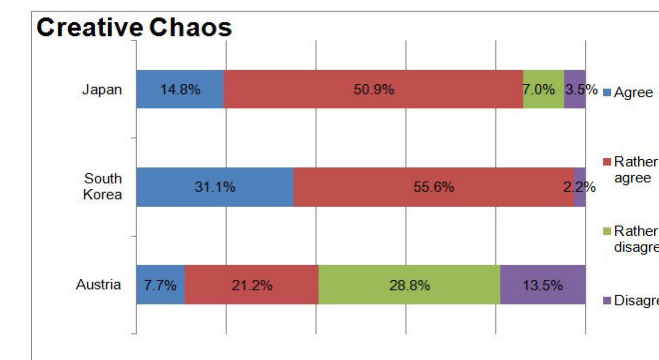


Figure two: Creative chaos in Japanese, South Korean and Austrian new ventures

In order to reach a conclusion I also asked my interview partners for their opinion. In contrast to my Japanese and South Korean interviewees, all of my questioned Austrian interview partners disagreed and they also emphasized that they don't think that crisis situations can be positive for an organization. Therefore I concluded that with the exception of creative chaos the other four conditions of the SECI-Model are given in the majority of the 54 Austrian new ventures.

Results

Results to the research questions:

1. All four modes of the SECI-Model are applied in the majority of the 154 surveyed Japanese, South Korean and Austrian new ventures.
2. In the majority of the 154 surveyed Japanese, South Korean and Austrian new ventures, the focus lies on both tacit and explicit knowledge.
3. All five conditions of the SECI-model are applied in the majority of the surveyed Japanese and South Korean new ventures. However, in the majority of the Austrian new ventures the fifth condition of the SECI-model 'creative chaos' is not given.

Lots of similarities can be found between the 154 surveyed new ventures. Nevertheless one important difference exists: the majority of the Japanese and South Korean new ventures stated that their management often intentionally causes senses of crisis/ stress conditions that can support the exchange of information and knowledge in a company. The majority of the Austrian companies however don't hold the opinion that ambitious goals of their management lead to stress conditions for the employees and furthermore they don't think that such crisis situations can be positive for a company.

References

Nonaka Ikujiro and Takeuchi Hirotaka. *The Knowledge-Creating Company – How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995

All references can be found in the full version of the MA thesis soon available at <http://othes.univie.ac.at/>

About the Author

Nadja Drexel holds an M.A. degree in East Asian Economy and Society and a B.A. degree in Japanese Studies from the University of Vienna. In the course of her studies she spent two years as an exchange student in Japan.

Contact information:
drexelnadja@gmail.com

