

BIRTH AND SURVIVAL OF A MICROCOMMUNITY OF KNOWLEDGE - A STUDY ON THE KNOWLEDGE CREATION PROCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ART PROJECT IN A BUSINESS SCHOOL

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Abstract

The paper describes and analyses a temporary microcommunity of knowledge from a knowledge creation perspective. The focus is on the entry of a newcomer from different world to the community. How does the interface between people from different backgrounds and worlds affect the working of a microcommunity of knowledge. The research method is action research. In the case of the Helsinki Business Campus art project, the entry of the artist seemed to create new understanding and knowledge on art and on the project itself. Also, the entry seemed to enhance rather than hamper the trust building and a sense of community within the Helsinki Business Campus art project's group. The results give interesting views to the project management discussions as well as some insights to the knowledge creation process.

Keywords: knowledge creation process, microcommunity of knowledge, entry of an outsider, worlds, art project.

Birth and survival of a microcommunity of knowledge A study on the knowledge creation process in the context of an art project in a business school

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The paper describes and analyses a temporary microcommunity of knowledge from a knowledge creation perspective. The focus is on the entry of a newcomer from different world to the community. How does the interface between people from different backgrounds and worlds affect the working of a microcommunity of knowledge. The research method is action research. In the case of the Helsinki Business Campus art project, the entry of the artist seemed to create new understanding and knowledge on art and on the project itself. Also, the entry seemed to enhance rather than hamper the trust building and a sense of community within the Helsinki Business Campus art project's group. The results give interesting views to the project management discussions as well as some insights to the knowledge creation process.

Keywords: 1; knowledge creation process, 2; microcommunity of knowledge, 3; entry of an outsider 4; worlds 5; art project .

1. Introduction

The aim of the study is to describe and analyse a temporary microcommunity of knowledge (von Krogh et al. 2000 b) that is engaged in a process of creating an artwork with an artist and through this participates in a dialogue on the identity of the Helsinki Business Campus (abbr. HBC). The process started in 2002 and will continue until 2004. The study builds on describing and analysing the process by its leader. The experiences of the leader are reflected upon by the theories and literature on the nature of knowledge and knowledge creation (e.g. von Krogh et al. 2000 a, von Krogh et al. 2000 b, Roos et al. 1996, Sveiby 1996, Seufert et al. 1999, March 1991).

The discussion about knowledge management or knowledge creation has been vivid recently. There are various frameworks and studies on knowledge management or

knowledge creation. Also, the workings of a community of practice (e.g. Wenger 2000) or a microcommunity of knowledge (von Krogh et al. 2000 b) as part of the knowledge creation process have been elaborated. It has often been suggested that combining different views and allowing new influences enter a group or a process will enhance knowledge creation (e.g. von Krogh 2000 b). Moreover, the interaction between people who do not share similar backgrounds or worldviews has been assumed to be beneficial for knowledge creation processes. Yet, there are few empirical studies on this interaction and its effect on a knowledge creation process

This paper will focus on the interaction between the artist and the group of new patrons from a business school. The research question can be defined as: *How does the interface between people from “different backgrounds and worlds” affect the working of a microcommunity and a knowledge creation process?* The art project gives us an ideal case to highlight and research this interaction. The artist, who has in her art a political and critical background and the group of researchers and administrators with business school backgrounds bring forth the differences in worldviews, language, and knowledge that these participants in a joint project have. Thus the interaction between them in a pursuit of a common goal, to create an artwork that participates in the dialogue of the Helsinki Business Campus’s identity, is a most interesting topic of the study. It might also give new light to the assumptions behind knowledge creation process.

In this paper the key theoretical concepts are presented next. Then the method of the study is described. Next, the paper will proceed to present the studied case in more detail and describe the activities of the group of “new patrons”. Then the paper moves on to present the analysis. Finally, the paper will conclude with questions for further research.

2. Key Theoretical Assumptions and Concepts

According to a dictionary (Swannell 1986) verb to know means; to be aware of, have learnt, have understanding of, to recognize, or to identify. Hence, it comprises of various types of activities. Knowledge –concept has been typified and categorized in several studies (see e.g. (Wikström et al. 1994, Blumentritt and Johnston 1999). Von Krogh (1998) presents two ways of seeing knowledge; the “cognitivist perspective” maintains knowledge to be representations of the world that consist of a number of objects or events. To the cognitivist, knowledge is universal: two learners should

achieve the same representations of the same object or event (von Krogh 1998). In other words: from the explicit pieces of knowledge, from the objectively defined concepts and facts that are easily transferred from one person to another, learners should be able to gather the very same jigsaw picture (Swan et al. 1999). The “constructionist perspective” is very different from the cognitivist perspective as it views cognition not as an act of representation, but an act of construction or creation (von Krogh, 1998).

In this paper it is assumed that knowledge is socially constructed and based on experience. Knowledge is not perceived as universal; on the contrary it is subjective, context-specific and relational. Knowledge is also dynamic, as it is created in social interactions. (see e.g. Nonaka et al. 2001, Swan et al. 1999, von Krogh 1998, Tsoukas 1996) All knowledge has two dimensions, explicit and tacit (Polanyi 1966: 20). These dimensions are not different types of knowledge; rather they are ends of the spectrum because tacit element is the necessary component in all knowledge (Brown and Duguid 2001, Leonard and Sensiper 1998, Tsoukas 1996, Polanyi 1966: 20). Tacit element of all knowledge is deeply rooted in an individual’s actions and experience, as well as in the ideals, values and emotions he or she embraces (Nonaka et al. 2001, Takeuchi 2001). Therefore knowledge always involves the knower, the individual who knows. “Knowing is a human act”, as McDermott (1999: 105) puts it.

Von Krogh et al. (1997, 2000b) present the concept of microcommunities of knowledge. A microcommunity is a small core group of participants that engage in sharing of tacit knowledge and knowledge creation. The group is characterised by its own rituals, languages, practices, norms, and values. The microcommunity concept may seem similar to the concept of communities of practice (e.g. Wenger and Snyder 2000, Brown and Duguid 2001, 1991), which means a freely created community that practices an activity together and then gradually forms a tight community that learns together through joint practices. However, von Krogh et al. (2000 b) point out that in communities of practice one can only learn “what is already there”. However, both concepts include more or less freely created communities of people who share some activity or practice, and have similar values, norms and language.

This paper emphasises the process nature of learning and co-constructing new knowledge rather than just transferring new knowledge from one stock to another. Von

Krogh et al. (2000 b) present a framework for companies to be used in the knowledge creation process. They present five enablers for knowledge creation process:

Enabler 1: Instill a Knowledge Vision

Enabler 2: Manage conversations

Enabler 3: Mobilize Knowledge Activists

Enabler 4: Create the right context

Enabler 5: Globalize Local Knowledge

The first enabler, the knowledge vision, includes not only the ideas on the future but also reflection and continuous reinvestigation on the current beliefs (von Krogh et al. 2000 b: 103-104). The best way of creating and sharing knowledge is through conversations. Good conversations are the cradle of social knowledge in any organisation. (von Krogh et al. 2000 b: 125). To ensure and catalyze social processes of knowledge creation an organization needs someone or some group (microcommunity of knowledge) which takes the responsibility for energizing and coordinating knowledge creation effort. The knowledge activist actively creates space and context for knowledge creation (von Krogh et al. 1997).

Von Krogh and al. (2000 b) emphasize that new knowledge creation begins with individual tacit knowledge. However, to achieve the sharing of individual knowledge one needs to establish the right context that allows it. The fourth enabler, the creation of the right context, involves organizational structures that foster solid relationships and effective collaboration. In fact, the whole process of knowledge creation depends on sensitive and aware managers who encourage a social setting in which knowledge continues to grow. Von Krogh and al. (2000 b: 178), discuss the enabling context through the concept of ba. The concept ba unifies the physical spaces, virtual spaces, and mental spaces in knowledge creation (Nonaka and Konno 1998, Nonaka et al. 2001, Von Krogh et al. 2000: 178). The fifth enabler refers to the company's ability to acquire and create knowledge on multinational level (von Krogh 2000 b: 207).

3. Research Method

The study is conducted as an action research process (see e.g. Coghlan 2001, Ayas 2001, Gronhaug et al. 1999, Rigano 1998). The material illuminating the process consists of field notes and remembrances, saved e-mails and the presentations and papers made for the project. Two stories were constructed based on the materials. The stories and the original data were used as a basis of analysis.

The understanding of the nature of knowledge and the theoretical discussion behind the analysis goes along the ideas of qualitative approach and of action research methodology (Gronhaug et al. 1999, Greenwood and Levin 2000). In this study, the process of analyzing is not a separate function but occurs throughout the study. (Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 6).

The action research traditionally occurs through cycles of action and reflection (e.g. Wadsworth 1998, Gronhaug et al. 1999). Different meetings, e-mails, and a seminar were these actions and resulted in an outcome. However, the actions were not consciously planned to create any specific outcome but to advance the project's main aim – coming up with a proposal and finding out what an artwork should tell. Thus, no conscious interventions with the research in mind were made, which can be perceived as a lack in the research process.

In action research, especially in action research done in one's own organisation, the difficulty of mixing different roles, researcher, project manager, organization's member, has aroused discussion among the researchers (e.g. Holian, 1999, Coghlan, 2001). In this process, the first interest lies within the role of realising the project – ending up with an artwork and the researcher's role is only secondary.

The role of self-reflection is crucial in action research, as one needs to be aware of one's own actions and choices both as a researcher and as a project manager (e.g. Holian, 1999, Marshall, 2001). As Marshall (2001) points out that there is no one way of reflecting, making the story. The process of doing action research is very personal and one needs to find a way of doing research that suits best one's own personality.

The five enablers of knowledge creation (vonKorh et al. 2000 b) can also be used as tools of analysis for the knowledge creation process and the ability of a group to create new knowledge. In this study these enablers and the ideas behind concepts of

microcommunity of knowledge and community of practice are used as the tools of analysis.

Now, the paper will move on to describe the process and the case and then to discuss the questions and findings that have arisen from the analysis.

4. The Helsinki Business campus art project – what it is¹

Fondation de France has a program called “Nouveaux Commanditaires” (New Patron’s of Art), where anyone, a person or an organisation, can become “a commanditaire” and apply for an artwork to be created by a world famous artist in the pursuit of solving “a problem” of any kind – except for one related to art. First of all, being a patron means taking an active part in the identification of the problem or need at hand. The problem is discussed in a small group of people representing the new patron, which is called “a group of new patrons”, with the aim of clarifying the desired message and content of the artwork. Then, the group will actively engage in discussions with the artist to find a solution to the need or problem by means of art. The new patron also agrees to co-finance and finds other financing to the planning as well as to the realisation of the final artwork.

The actors

Fondation de France is one of the largest foundations in France and, through this program of “Nouveaux Commanditaires”, aims to advance the discourse between people and art. *Fondation de France* provides part of the funding for the project and names an independent mediator to help in organising and running the project. *The mediator* is an expert in contemporary art and art funding as well as in the specifics of running a new patron program. Art producer Mari Linnman has become involved in this project as the mediator. Her main responsibility is finding an interesting *artist* for the project. The selection of the artist is based on artistic merits and the artist’s previous engagement in similar questions within his/her work – the new artwork ought to present a natural continuum for the artist’s career. In general, only world famous artists have been engaged in these art projects.

¹ Based on a previous paper, Jyrämä, Äyväri and Mehtälä 2003.

*Helsinki Business Campus*² is a loose network of different organisations in the town part of Töölö in Helsinki, Finland, that seeks to promote research and education in business and management. The Helsinki Business Campus is comprised of many units, each with their own identity and culture, but all united by their expertise in the field of business research and/or education. Helsinki School of Economics has been the main force in creating and running the Business Campus. The other main partner is the Swedish School of Economics (Hanken). The rest of the organisations are a culinary school, the local high school that is now having courses in economics due to the partnership, and the various institutions of the two business schools, and two smaller organizations.

A *group of new patrons* has been formed for the project. The group is a loose group of about ten persons and it mainly consists of researchers and students from the Helsinki School of Economics and the Swedish School of Economics. The group membership is voluntary, and thus, the group consists of people interested in the project and willing to engage in a dialogue with art. This group can be considered as the active party in the project, as it is engaged in clarifying the desired message and content of the artwork, as well as further developing these ideas in a dialogue with the artist. The *project manager*, Annukka Jyrämä, is responsible for the working of the group and the relationships with Fondation de France, the mediator, and the support group.

A *support group* has been established for the project, and it consists mainly of the key people from the Helsinki Business Campus main organisations. The support group is informed about the progress of the project mainly in personal meetings with the project manager (see picture 1 on the context of the project).³

² The Helsinki Business campus consists of the following institutions: *Helsinki School of Economics HSE*, with its units of CKIR (Center for Knowledge and Innovation Research), Helecon Information Center (Library), HSEEE (Helsinki School of Economics Executive Education), HSE International MBA Program, KY – Student Union of Helsinki School of Economics, LTT Research Ltd., New Business Center, and of *Hanken –Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration*, with its units of CEFIR (Center for Financial Research), CERS (Center for Relationship Marketing and Service Management), Hanken MBA, SHS –Student Union of Hanken, and of *Etu-Töölö High School, Perho* (Helsinki Culinary School), *Helsinki Business Development Unit* (City of Helsinki), *IPR University Center* (joint center for HSE and Hanken), and *Young Enterprise Finland*.

(See more on the web pages: <http://www.helsinkibusinesscampus.fi>)

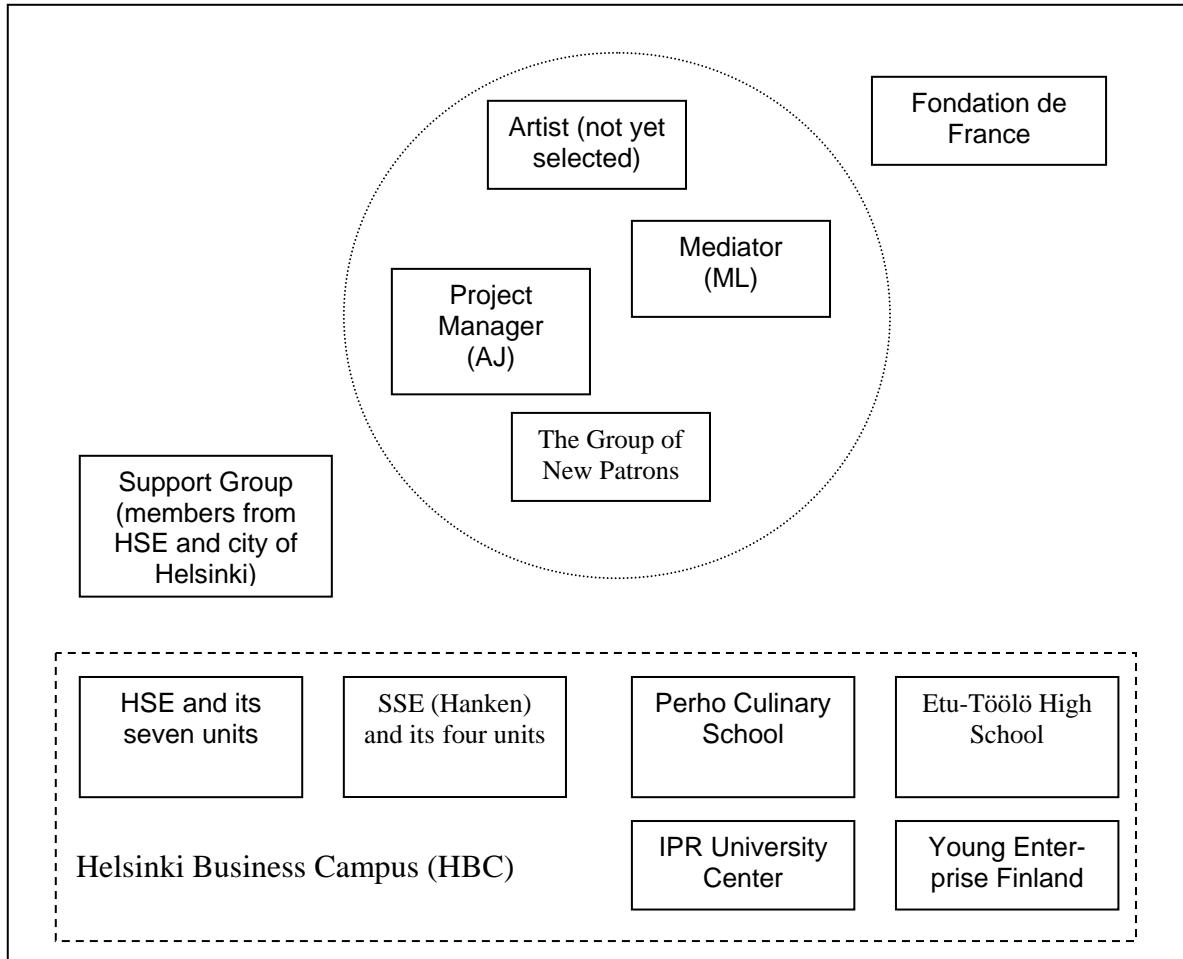
3

Group of patrons:

Annukka Jyrämä, PhD Senior research fellow, marketing, HSE, , **Eeva-Katri Ahola**, research fellow, HSE, **Kalevi Euro**, PhD research fellow, HSE, **Anna Falck**, student, Hanken (active in student union, SHS), **Pirjo-Liisa Johansson**, administrator for department of marketing, HSE, **Mirjami Lehikoinen**,

Picture 1.

The context of the art project



Helsinki Business Campus has engaged itself as a “new patron of art” in solving at least a part of its identity problem by means of art⁴. Currently, the Business Campus is

assistant, marketing, HSE, **Johanna Moisander**, PhD, acting professor, marketing, HSE, **Minna Mehtälä**, student, HSE, **Jussi Muurikainen**, student, HSE (active in student union, KY), **Pia Polsa**, Ph.D assistant, Hanken, **Eiren Tuusjärvi**, research fellow, HSE, **Elina Ylikoski-Oksanen**, research fellow, HSE, **Anne Äyväri**, research fellow, HSE,

Support group:

Olli Ahtola, professor, Vice Principal, HSE, **Esa Ahonen**, Administrative Director, HSE, **Matti Pulkkinen**, Managing Director, LTT research Institute (the person strategically responsible for HBC), **Nyrki Tuominen**, Director, Business Development, City of Helsinki **Annukka Jyrämä**, HSE

⁴ The art project is funded by Helsinki School of Economics and Fondation de France

a disparate collection of buildings, organisations and operations, which lacks a distinct identity and role in the minds of the students and employees of the different organisations, even less so in the minds of the citizens of Helsinki. The dispersion of buildings around the Töölö town part and the strong identities of individual organisations pose an even greater challenge for creating a common identity for the Business Campus. The artwork could be anything visual or virtual – anything that would help to identify the Helsinki Business Campus as a unit. The artwork would give HBC a sense of longevity and it could be used further in other ways to develop the image of HBC.

So far the activity of the art project has consisted of meetings and e-mailings. The project began with an open informative meeting. The group of patrons was formed soon after the initial meeting. Although the invitation to the meeting and to participate in the group was sent to all HBC organisations and published in the HSE weekly bulletin, in practice the group ended up consisting mainly of marketing researchers – colleagues of the project manager. The group has aimed to clarify the proposed need for the artwork and to discuss the aspects we wish the artwork to reflect. The group of patrons had no common group identity prior to this project, yet some of the group members have known each other and some are even friends. This new context of activities has put the relationships and the joint ways of working – and creating knowledge – in a new light. There has been approximately one meeting a month. During the visit of the artist the group met almost every day. Since then the activities have slowed down, and there has only been a few meetings, as the group waits for the contract and the proposition from the artist. The participation of the group members in the meetings has ranged from very active to almost non-existent. The mediator Mari Linnman has visited the group three times during the program, one of which was during the visit of the artist. The project manager Annukka Jyrämä has visited the foundation in Paris twice.

Mari Linnman has also helped in planning and running the process and she has been a reflection partner for the project leader Annukka Jyrämä by e-mail, phone and in person. Annukka Jyrämä has known Mari Linnman for about five years from previous research projects. As Mari Linnman is living in Paris and running similar projects there, she has not been able to participate in the group activities as much as in the projects in the Paris area.

At the time of the analysis the group had clarified the need and context for the artwork and formulated a proposal for the potential artist. Mediator Mari Linnman had found from the Biennale of Venice a candidate to be the project's artist. Artist, Martha Rosler, visited Helsinki Business Campus and discussed with the group in autumn 2003. The visit consisted of social occasions, meetings and more formal presentations of the campus and respectively Martha Rosler's work. All parties were pleased with the visit and it was decided to continue the process by asking a proposal for the artwork from the artist Martha Rosler, and to make a formal contract between the Fondation de France and the artist about the project.

Now the paper proceeds to analyze the activities of the HBC art project from knowledge creation perspective. First the creation of a microcommunity of knowledge is discussed, then the analysis moves to reflect upon the entry of the artist, the newcomer on the microcommunity of knowledge

5. Analyzing the Helsinki Business Campus art project

Thoughts on building a community of knowledge

It has been proposed that knowledge creation process can be enabled by creating microcommunities of knowledge (Von Krogh et al. 1997, 2000 b) or communities of practice (e.g. Wenger and Snyder 2000, Brown and Duguid 2001, 1991). However, it can also be assumed that new knowledge is created in any group, if it is assumed that new knowledge is always created when sharing experiences and that knowledge is socially constructed and based on experience. Knowledge can, thus, be seen as always occurring and dynamic, as it is continuously re-created and re-constituted in social interactions. (e.g. Nonaka et al. 2001, Swan et al. 1999, von Krogh 1998, Tsoukas 1996).

Thus the group of new patrons could be seen as a microcommunity of knowledge or a community of practice. Yet, it needs to be reflected more carefully whether any group can be a microcommunity of knowledge, what the key aspects in the creation and building up a microcommunity or community of practice, and what the key aspects in knowledge creation process are.

It has been proposed that people create and join in communities of practice due to similar types of background, e.g. similar education or profession and that they often share similar values (e.g. Wenger 2000). In this group, most of the members had a somewhat similar background, being researchers. Becoming engaged in an art project in a business school shows an interest and appreciation of art. Thus, the members of the group may also share somewhat similar values. However, even though the members did share the similar background and values, the sense of belonging and being “a community” did not evolve. The group was perceived as another activity rather than a unity or a group.

The group’s vision or aim was rather abstract – to create a proposal on the identity of Helsinki Business Campus. Von Krogh et al. (2000 b) propose that creating the vision also means creating a vision of the world we live in or want to live in. The group of patrons implicitly discussed this in their aim to find content for the artwork on Helsinki Business Campus’s identity and what the identity could be, however, there was never any formal way of defining the group’s own vision. The concentration on the task rather than the group itself may have made the group to perceive its identity more as an activity than a community.

Even though most of the group members knew each other beforehand and some of them were even friends, the necessary condition for sharing tacit knowledge, trust (e.g. von Krogh 1998, Nonaka and Konno, 1998), did not develop very fast. For example, the group members shared some of their ideas personally with the project manager rather than discussed them in the group. Furthermore, the informal meetings of talk and more talk created an atmosphere of inefficiency, as was complained by some. Yet, the seemingly inefficient discussions might have been a necessity in order to create at least some sense of community, trust, and shared values. It takes time to learn to know one another and build trust. Even though many knew each other previously, they needed to find their own and others’ roles and places in this new setting to feel comfortable.

The question of sharing a language or fostering good conversations, as enablers for knowledge creation (von Krogh et al. 2000 b, 125), did not seem as a problem area as most of the group members did share similar background. Yet the researchers’ abstract and very conceptual language was not that familiar to the student members and made them “feel ignorant” at times.

Kolb (1984) proposes that learning can only occur through reflection and reflecting and discussing the experiences with others – through conversation. Having a mediator and a project manager with whom to reflect on the events and discussions, enabled reflection and, hence knowledge creation. Furthermore, the group itself reflected on the previous discussions throughout the process, the aspects discovered from one meeting to another. Additionally, the members reflected on the process and the ideas developed in a more private setting. Yet, to emphasise, as previous research has pointed out, the mediator plays a crucial role by providing an “enlightened ear” to the discussion and learning process (Jyrämä and Äyväri 2002).

When discussing knowledge creation context, the concept of ba, which refers to the right context for knowledge creation, becomes important. Ba is essentially a shared place that serves as a foundation for knowledge creation, one that is often defined by a network of interactions. The concept of ba unifies the physical spaces, virtual spaces, and mental spaces in knowledge creation (Nonaka and Konno 1998, Nonaka et al. 2001, Von Krogh et al. 2000 b: 178). When analyzing the working of the group, it was realized that there was no common physical ba; the group met in various places, sometimes in classrooms that did not invite for informal or deep conversation. The best discussions were in fact at spaces like coffee rooms or meeting rooms. Nor did the group share any virtual space, as only the project manager sent e-mails to the group and when group members wanted to send something, they used the manager as a mailing post. Yet, gradually the group started to share a mental space as it agreed on the content of the artwork and the values it should reflect.

Entry of a new actor – art and business worlds meeting each other

It has often been suggested that combining different views and allowing new influences to enter a group or a process will enhance knowledge creation (e.g. von Krogh 2000 a). However, when it comes to creating a community, allowing new members might be problematic. They bring new ideas and input to the working of the group, but they also might at the same time hamper the possibility of trust building and creating group's shared values and norms (Jyrämä et al. 2003).

Prior to the visit of the artist, Martha Rosler, the group had engaged in developing knowledge of her works and career. The group had discussed and reflected upon the

works of Martha Rosler, her ideas and worldview. They had hence familiarised themselves with available explicit knowledge and internalised some of it through their own views and experiences. It is assumed that all knowledge contains both tacit and explicit knowledge. (e.g. Brown and Duguid 2001, Leonard and Sensiper 1998). Swan et al. (1999) suggest that it is sometimes hard to predict what kind of a world or worlds are produced in creative interactive processes between individuals, hence, the group members probably had very different views and understandings on the works of the artist. The artist had had very little information about the project prior to her visit. Thus, there probably was no joint vision even within the group or with the artist on the project.

The artist, Martha Rosler, had rather different views on politics and world and did not seem to share similar values with the business school environment— but rather some of the values that the group hoped the artwork would bring forth. The group of patrons had in their work questioned the business campus's perceived values, the values usually connected with business. Thus, it can be assumed that the artist entered the group with some similar values with the group, yet different from the "majority" values of the campus. However, it seems safe to state that the artist entered the group from a different world, with a different role than the other group members had. (see e.g. Becker, 1982, Bourdieu 1985, Jyrämä 1999 on discussion on worlds). Thus, the entry of the artist can be perceived as a new influence entering a microcommunity of knowledge that had by that time already set its norms, values, and beliefs.

However, trust (e.g. von Krogh 1998, Nonaka et al. 1998) which seemed to have evolved slowly in the group earlier, was created between the group and the artist during the short visit of less than a week. The trust could be seen in the way the group discussed about the artist during and after the visit. How they have been patient in waiting the proposal, not doubting the co-operation even without a formal contract. The trust enables also sharing tacit knowledge (e.g. von Krogh 1998, Nonaka et al. 1998) – yet it is impossible to pin point any particular examples of it. Sharing tacit knowledge can mainly occur in the face to face context (e.g. Nonaka et al. 1989). On the project management perspective, it was important that the artist visited the group at an early stage and the sense of trust was achieved.

Trust might have evolved so easily because the group and the artist unexpectedly did share a common world – the world of universities – as the artist was a professor and researcher herself. Thus, positions of us versus the other were not presented but rather

the identity of being one of “us” was created. The finding of joint language and values, and having the various ba present⁵, i.e. building the right context, enabled this development. (e.g. Nonaka et al. 2001, von Krogh et al. 2000 b)

The project manager acted as the knowledge activist (von Krogh et al 200 b) as she tried to ensure that different members of the group had possibilities to present their understanding and ideas to the artist. For example, lunches etc. were organized in various combinations of the group members, without the project manager as well. This may have made the group members to create a personal relation to the artist and the projects aims.

Knowledge creation can be viewed as learning. In the context of this project it is important to highlight that learning involves acquiring identities (Brown and Duguid 2001); it involves becoming an “insider” (Brown and Duguid 1991). Learning therefore involves acquiring identities that reflect both how a learner sees the world and how the world sees the learner. In the context of our project, the members became either insiders or outsiders of the process but also showed their “inside” knowledge of the art, showing whether they were somewhat inside “the art discourse” or not. Moreover, the entry of the artist showed that even in a short time one can acquire an identity of an insider even if one comes from totally different world.

The question of sharing a language or fostering good conversations, as enablers for knowledge creation (von Krogh et al. 2000 b, 125), became important due to the artist entry. Neither, the group, the mediator nor the artist shared same mother language. Moreover the languages used differed within the different worlds; art, business, and university. Thus, some problems arose from putting different emphasis and meanings into words. The project quickly adopted the language understood by most – English and the “university language”. However, the language used by the artist differed according to different situations. For example, when she presented her artworks to the group she communicated as in the art world context – then the group was slow to respond. The art discussion was avoided and the talk moved to “the project – language”. Also, when establishing their respective positions within the art world, the

⁵ For example, the were face to face talks (originating ba), social gatherigs and presentations (dialoguing ba), books etc. on artist available (externalizing ba) and having familiarized oneself with the artist works before the visit (internalizing ba)

mediator and the artist discussed uniquely in the art context – making the project manager an outsider.

The entry of the artist did not hamper the trust building and working of the group. On the contrary, it might have helped to build in more understanding on the aims of the project. Clearly the group members were more aware of the connections between the works of the artist and the projects aims after the visit. The artist works became more understandable and gained more meaning. This could be perceived in the discussions among the group members when the visit was reflected on. Hence, in a way, this new understanding can be seen as new knowledge – new knowledge of the art and the project itself. After the visit, the group felt it important to pass on their new ideas and knowledge to the HBC environment and various plans were made to achieve this. Thus there has been some effort to globalize the local knowledge (von Korgh et al. 2000 b).

6 Conclusions and questions for further research

The main research question of the study was *“How does the interface between people from “different backgrounds and worlds” affect the working of the microcommunity and the knowledge creation process?* It has been suggested that the entry of a newcomer may enhance the knowledge creation process and on the other hand, may hamper the creation of a sense of community and trust building.

In the case of the Helsinki Business Campus art project, the entry of the artist seemed to create new understanding on the art and on the aim of the project, thus new knowledge was created. Surprisingly, the entry seemed to enhance rather than hamper the trust building and the building of a sense of community. This might be due to finding a “common ground” – the fact that the group and the artist quite fast developed a sense of “us”, sharing the university world and language to build this sense of belonging. This might also be due to the ability of the artist to enter a project quite easily. She has participated in projects all over the world and entered “different worlds” also previously. Hence she might have developed specific skills and knowledge to manage the situation. This could be an interesting question to study: whether some people do acquire knowledge that enables them to become easily new members in communities.

From project management perspective the analysis of HBC art project with knowledge creation framework has pointed out key aspects in organizing an entry of a newcomer

to a microcommunity of knowledge. It will give new insights for anyone organizing and planning any similar project. The use of knowledge creation frame calls for reflection on different ways on learning and how to enable them. Therefore it in a way forces the project managers to reflect on how they see learning and knowledge creation and what could be all the various means to ensure that the knowledge creation process does take place.

The question of sharing talk or activity and how this reflects into the knowledge creation process in a microcommunity is interesting. The sharing of knowledge, especially socialization, requires “doing”, as Nonaka et al. (1998, 2001) propose. In the HBC art group, the “doing” was mainly talk, it only rarely arrived at a real dialogue of sharing and creating meanings. The key might be the creation of a context that enables developing a sense of community, trust, as well as joint creation of shared values and norms, hence allowing sharing of meanings. Perhaps sharing some other activity, “doing together”, may help the creation of a sense of community. The entry of an artist into the process may have made the project more concrete and thus perhaps easier for people to work with.

To conclude, we return to the question of the nature of knowledge. The need to somehow manage or control the knowledge creation process and the questions relating to the nature of knowledge – in short, the question: “Can we actually manage knowledge?” – is worthy of reinvestigation. Von Krogh et al. (2000 b: vii) point out that they do not believe in knowledge management and emphasize the building of a context. The results also point out that questions of building a microcommunity of knowledge or a community of practice may not be so self evident and may require time and conscious effort to create the joint values and language. If we return to the metaphor presented by Swan et al. (1999), no one jigsaw picture can be aimed at, as we will always end up in a completely new unimaginable view in a kaleidoscope. We need to put more focus on the creation of a context that enables a microcommunity of knowledge to develop and not only to concentrate on the expected outcomes.

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