Chapter 2.16
Developing a Global Perspective for Knowledge Management

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ABSTRACT

Localization of a document or other product requires tacit knowledge of the target language and culture. Although it is promoted by many activists, localization is becoming increasingly inadequate as a strategy for disseminating knowledge on the World Wide Web (WWW). The 21st century has already seen dramatic rises in the numbers of Internet users in nearly every country, making it unlikely if not impossible for any translation effort to accommodate all of the 347 languages that claim at least 1 million speakers. The best way to maximize the accessibility of Web content is to make it more explicit, not more tacit. This means developing a global perspective and writing English text clearly so that nonnative speakers can easily understand it. Global English is characterized by simpler sentence structure, less jargon, and no slang, thereby making it a viable global language for countless Web users whose native language is not considered important enough to merit a localization effort.

INTRODUCTION

A key issue in economic and regional development (ERD) is the applicability of one region's successful program of development to another region. Although general solutions to universal problems (literacy, environmental awareness, AIDS prevention, sanitation, roads, etc.) can be designed by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or other global entities, their actual implementation needs to be adapted to local culture and conditions, ideally with grassroots stakeholder participation.

In addition to the traditional top-down approach of applying general principles to local situations, there is increasing recognition of the importance of a bottom-up approach in which one region's developmental success is seen as a potential model for other regions. The generalization of a locally successful program into an exemplar that can then be adapted to other localities poses a major problem in communication, or rather two

problems: The local knowledge must be articulated, and then it must be disseminated.

The implementation of information and communication technologies (ICT) has made huge strides in the first five years of the 21st century, and the number of people who have access to the Internet is now over 1 billion. In order to optimize ICT as a means for knowledge dissemination, it is necessary to have something to disseminate—specifically, knowledge that has been articulated. Therefore, the development of ICT needs to be accompanied by the development of human infrastructure, especially the ability to express oneself clearly to audiences who do not share one's cultural background.

This chapter explains how English can be written more clearly so that it functions better as a global language, not only between native and nonnative speakers but more importantly between nonnative speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The explanation extends into a discussion of how to streamline Web content. Thus, the chapter addresses a point of intersection between the two issues of articulation and dissemination, which are essential to the sharing of any region's success so that it can benefit more of the world's people.

BACKGROUND CONCEPTS

It is often said that human beings learn in three general ways: by hearing or reading words, by seeing images, and by doing. Although students, teachers, and other people who engage in a lot of verbal communication tend to consider the first of these three methods to be the most important, learning by doing has primacy in the sense of developing earliest in an infant. As noted by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), "A child learns to eat, walk, and talk through trial and error" (p. 10).

Learning by doing involves empathy and intuition, as well as trial and error. When a child learns to tie shoelaces, for example, these processes enable him or her to acquire a skill that is rarely if ever learned through words, images, or a combination of both. Such *tacit knowledge* can be contrasted with *explicit knowledge* (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p. 8), *focal knowledge* (Sveiby, 1997), *codified knowledge* (Stiglitz, 1999, p. 11), or *formal knowledge* (Jarboe, 2001, p. 2). All four expressions of this fundamental dichotomy in human knowing are derived from the theories of Polanyi (1962, 1966).

Jarboe (2001) observes that learning by doing is facilitated by the "web of relationships and connections" that constitutes social capital (p. 3). This type of learning often involves imitating other people—not only family, friends, and coworkers, but also strangers within one's community (who may, for example, unintentionally teach a person how to get on an escalator without hesitating). Learning by doing can also happen without guidance, which is how most video games and computer simulations are played.

Tacit knowledge can be operationally defined as knowledge that is demonstrated but not explained; it tends to be absorbed rather than grasped. It is acquired through learning by images and words, as well as learning by doing. For example, while growing up, people learn how to tell which colors will match acceptably when selecting a blouse and skirt (or jacket and pants) combination. Another example: Most gold shops in southeast Asia do not sell any items that are less than 18 karat (75% pure); the lack of a market for such items is not because customers in this region crave greater value or purity than Europeans or Americans do, but because they have tacit knowledge that higher karat gold looks better on darker skin.

In *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Chomsky (1969) describes how native speakers tacitly understand their own language in ways that they often cannot explain:

Obviously, every speaker of a language has mastered and internalized a generative grammar that