# Chapter 9
# Knowledge Creation, Ba and CoP:
## The Experience at IADE–UAM

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter analyzes the knowledge-creating process that has been developed in the Institute for Research in Knowledge Management and Business Innovation (IADE) of the Universidad Autonoma de Madrid (UAM). IADE develops activities of technical and scientific investigation, makes projects of technical assistance to different kind of organizations and makes a labour of postgraduate education. This chapter proposes that professors and doctoral students, from different countries and organizations, who carry out their research projects in IADE, work as an investigation Community of Practice (CoP) both in purpose, character and functionality, and develop a knowledge-creating process in a Ba. This chapter studies this process, describes the Ba and the investigation CoP as an element of the Ba. In order to get a deep understanding of these elements, we have chosen a case study as empirical research methodology and we have based our findings and conclusions in a previous theoretical analysis of these concepts.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the current knowledge-based economy, knowledge has become a critical factor. Organizations

need to manage knowledge in order to take advantage of the opportunities brought by the quick changes of their environment and gain sustainable competitive advantages. This approach is specified in Nonaka's school, whose contributions will be quoted along this work, as a natural and logic

relation between knowledge and innovation. That is, knowledge creation drives to the generation of innovation it does not matter its category and field of application. In this context, the Institute for Research in Knowledge Management and Business Innovation (IADE) of the *Universidad Autonoma de Madrid* (UAM) develops activities of technical and scientific investigation, and makes projects of technical assistance to different kind of organizations, publics and privates. The results of these activities and projects have been published in scientific publications and international congresses. Also, IADE makes a labour of postgraduate education at master-level and doctoral-level. Consequently, processes of knowledge creation and innovation are developed within IADE through relations and collaborative models between people (researchers) who take part in its activities.

In this chapter, we analyze the dynamic process used by some members of IADE to share and create knowledge. We propose that this knowledge-creating process is developed in a context called *Ba* (Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Nonaka & Toyama, 2003; Nonaka, Toyama & Konno, 2000) and our objective is to identify and describe this *Ba* and its practical relation with a Community of Practice (CoP).The motivation of this study arose when some members of IADE realized they were sharing and creating knowledge in a context that was not exactly a CoP because this context did not have clear boundaries of participants or history and it changed quickly (Peltokorpi, Nonaka & Kodama, 2007). Moreover, the positive results they were obtained for their personal objectives and also for IADE's aims (scientific publications, projects and doctoral thesis) lead them to think it was interesting to study how they were creating knowledge in order to take advantages of this process in the future.

Past studies in the areas of CoPs an *Ba* have not explored in deep the practical relation between both concepts. This chapter analyzed this relation by proposing first of all a theoretical relation and latter testing it empirically in the context of the IADE. We though IADE was an interesting context to make the empirical study as their members develop a research work and wanted to study how they were creating knowledge in order to take advantages of this process for the future. The members of an organization share experience and knowledge in a *Ba* and using CoPs. This starts a knowledge creation process that leads organizations to obtain superior results through innovation. This is the reason why in the last decades it has been a growing interest in this two concepts in organizational literature.

Knowledge is created in social interactions amongst individuals and between individuals and their organizations so it is a dynamic human process. Also, it is contextually embedded because it depends on a particular time and space. Information becomes knowledge when it is contextualized and interpreted by individuals (Hayek, 1945; Maturana & Valera, 1984; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka & Toyama, 2002). *Ba* provides the context where people interact in order to interpret information and create meanings. It is a shared context in which people interact and knowledge is shared, created and utilised. The Japanese word *Ba* does not mean only a context as a physical space, this concept unifies physical, virtual and mental space. *Ba* is defined as "shared context in motion" because it is constantly evolving, that is, its boundaries are fluid (Nonaka, & Konno, 1998; Nonaka, Toyama & Konno, 2000). On the other hand, a CoP is an informal group of people who, according to Wenger (2001), "share a common interest and problems in a certain domain of human endeavour and engage in a process of collective learning that creates bonds between them".

Along the chapter we will state an experience by analyzing a situation and presence of research activities that are focused on people with the function of developing their doctoral theses. This situation gives rise to a *Ba* as a space of knowledge and a CoP that makes operative and settle down the *Ba*. In summary, this chapter proposal

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