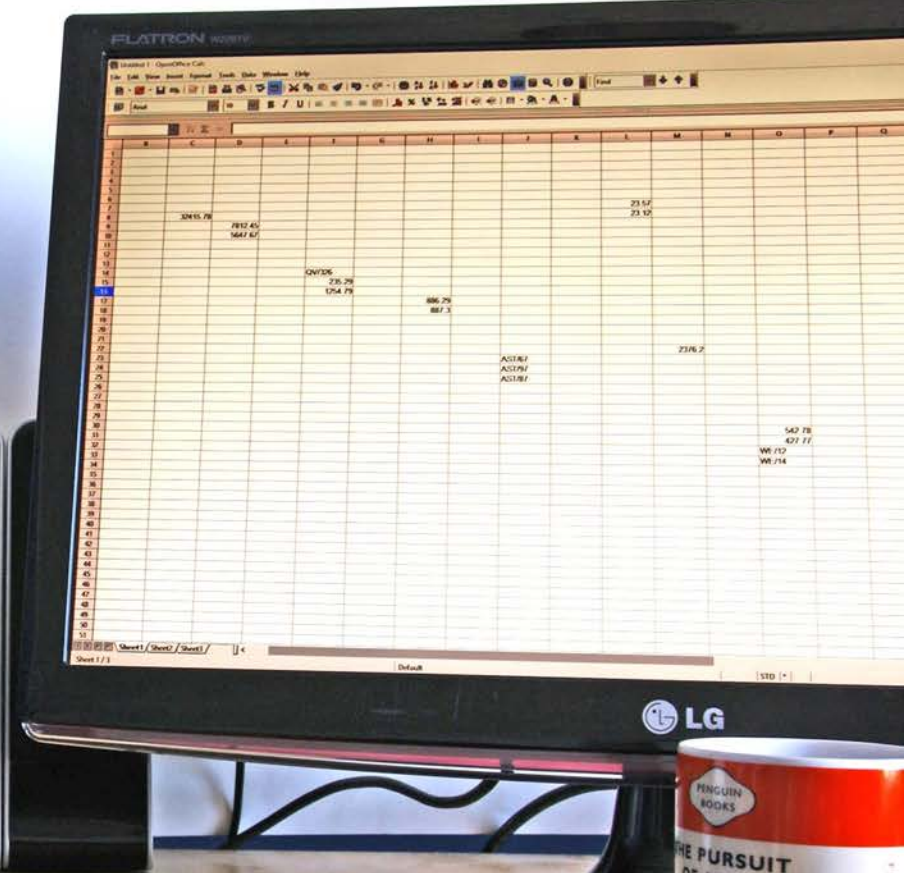It's about relationships really -How an LSCB Back Office improved its ability to share knowledge and information

Andy Bent   *CILIP Conference*   *13 July 2016*

Image courtesy of LMP photography

Plan for this session

- Place my study in context
- Identify some factors that can are set a climate of effective knowledge sharing
- Describe the challenging situation faced by a specific partnership
- Consider the ways the partnership addressed its challenges in light of the work of Nonaka and Polanyi
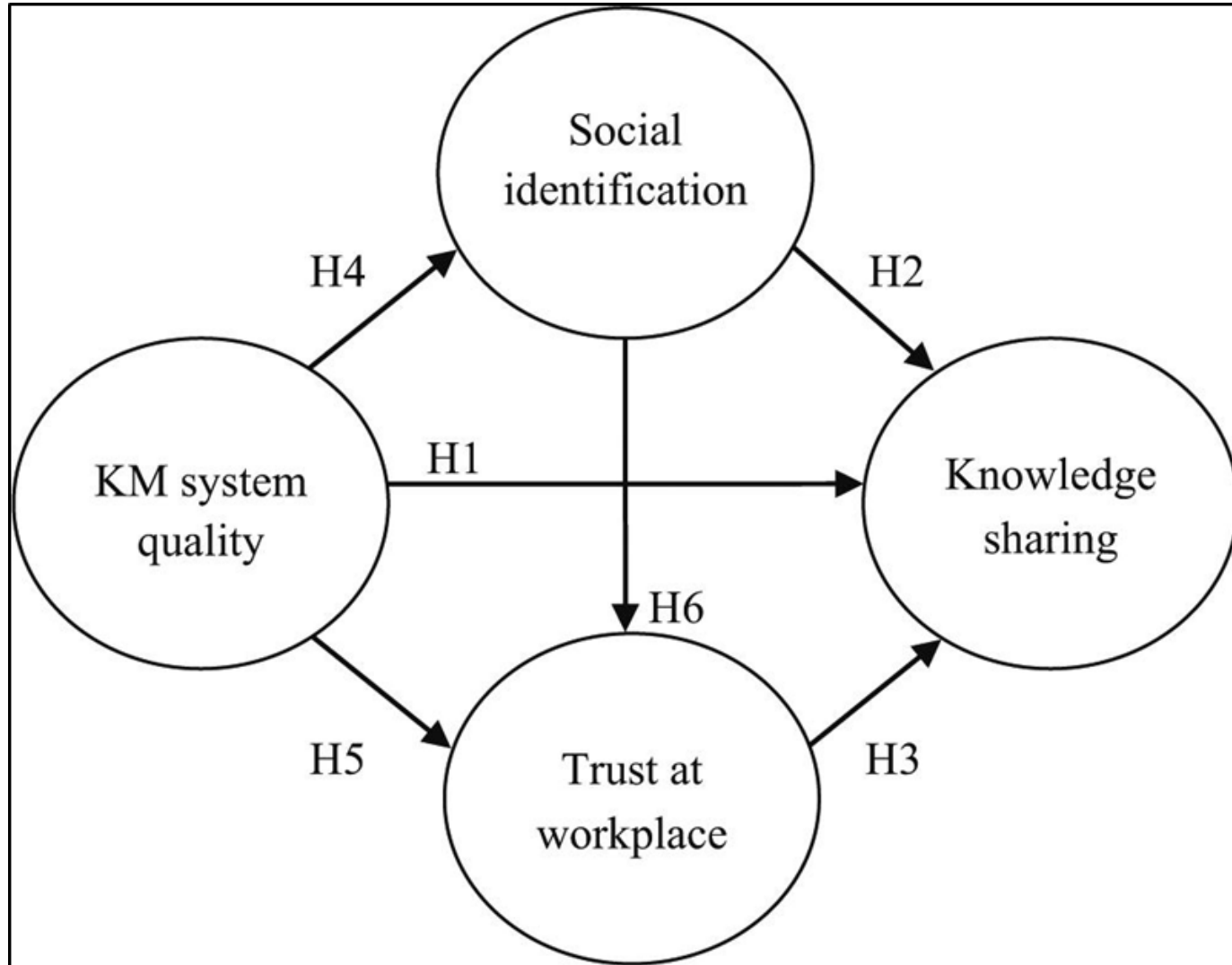
Why pick on an LSCB back office?

- What is an LSCB back office anyway?
- An important area of practice, yet comparatively little research compared to front line
- A complex environment, acting as an exemplar for wider consideration of KM in public sector
- A statutory body – partners placed under legal obligation to share knowledge… but does that always happen?
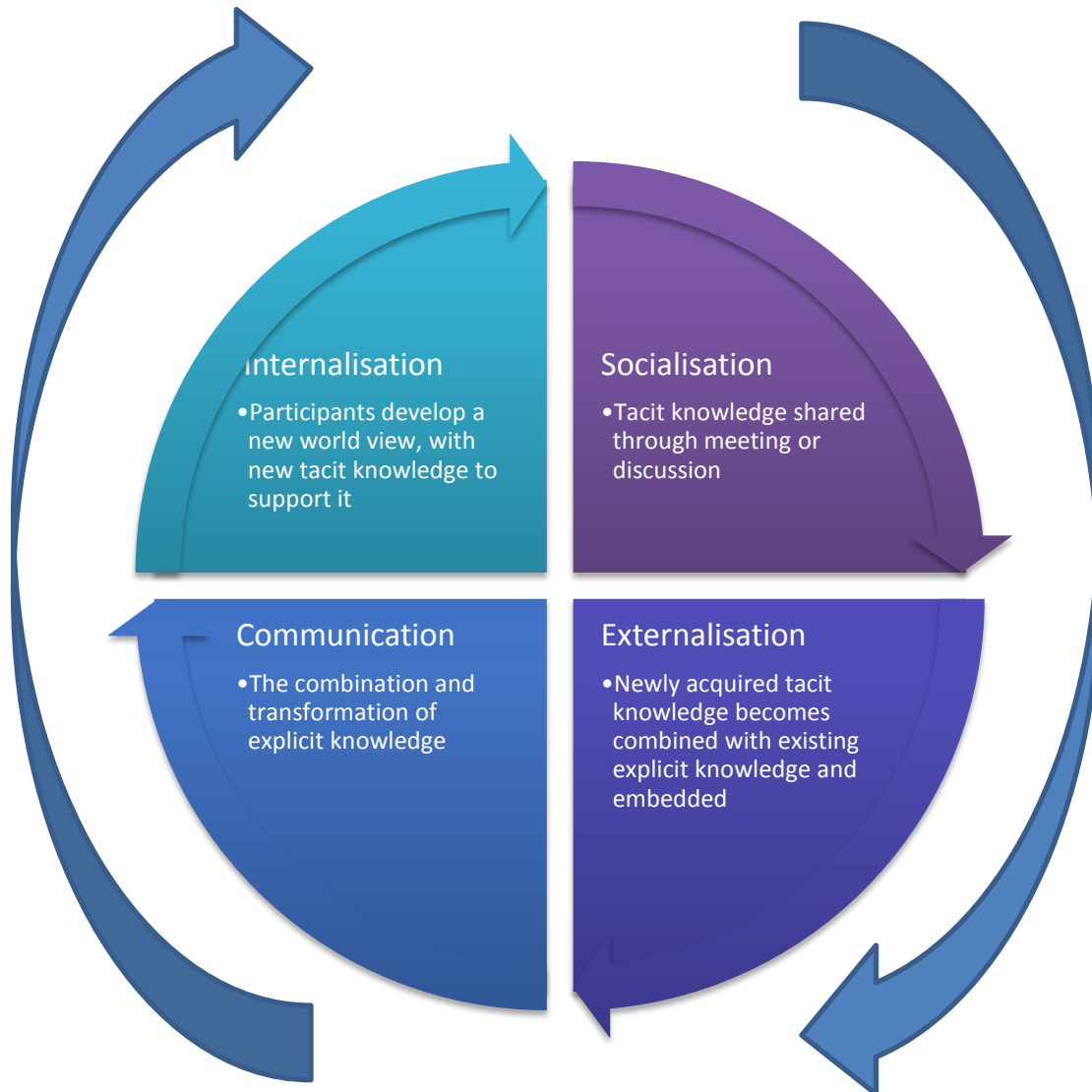
Research Design

- Mixed Methodology

- Quantitative study of Ofsted reports

- Qualitative study of how a single LSCB responded to the challenge of information and knowledge sharing

Setting a climate for effective knowledge sharing

Source: Ho. Kuo and Lin 2012

Explicit knowledge becomes tacit

Tacit knowledge becomes explicit

Internalisation
- Participants develop a new world view, with new tacit knowledge to support it

Socialisation
- Tacit knowledge shared through meeting or discussion

Communication
- The combination and transformation of explicit knowledge

Externalisation
- Newly acquired tacit knowledge becomes combined with existing explicit knowledge and embedded

Derived from Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)

Blanktown LSCB

- Ofsted inspection – the impact of a disappointing result

- Board set up multi-agency working group, specifically tasked with improving flow of knowledge to board

- Board members provide funding for staff to support the work of this working group

HOW DID BLANKTOWN LSCB GO ON TO MEET THE CHALLENGE IT FACED?

Dedicated resource

- Appointment of an officer with responsibility for designing and implementing a performance management system
- The officer is employed by, and therefore accountable to, _the partnership_ and not to any single member organisation
- Officer is responsible for ensuring that submission of information, and circulation of MI reports happen on time
- Officer is regarded as reliable and trustworthy

- Allows building and maintenance of high quality KM systems

- Facilitates places and occasions where transfer of tacit knowledge can occur

- Acts as a conduit between Board, individual LSCB members and partner organisations – major contribution to building sense of shared purpose

Conduct of Meetings

- Expectations of the behaviour of partners are set and modelled by the chair of the Board as a whole

- Management style of the Board avoids apportioning blame – problems are seen as joint problems requiring joint solutions.

- "No surprises" culture – officers are given advance warning of difficult or sensitive matters that will be brought up

- Management style builds trust
- A constant reminder that shared purpose is more significant than individual need
- "No surprises" approach allows people to consider knowledge in the round before sharing – tailor made for application of SECI model

Multi-agency working parties

- Set up on *ad hoc* basis to allow groups of officers to consider issues in greater depth
- Commissioned by, and report back to, wider officer group
- People who have been part of these groups describe them as important
- Language participants used to describe involvement with these groups often quite informal
- Seen as having benefits which extend beyond richer knowledge of the issue concerned

- Development of strong sense of shared purpose
- Space for building trusting relationships
- Process enables members to explore and share their tacit knowledge in safer environment
- Reporting back to group encourages externalisation

So when does it seem more likely people will share their knowledge?

When there is….

- Effective chairing, leadership and partnership management

- A sense that problems are jointly owned

- High quality knowledge management system, supported by an effective bureaucracy

- A high degree of trust and mutual respect between partners

Conclusion

- Knowledge sharing in LSCB back offices is something that many find difficult – but it can be done!

- What holds true for LSCB could very well hold true for other kinds of partnership

- The key challenge is the establishment of a knowledge sharing culture - to quote an interview participant, "it's about relationships, really"

Going forward

- Would be good to conduct larger study, involving more than one LSCB and/or seeing how front line staff view this work

- Findings of this study may help other LSCB's and should be disseminated

References

- **Ho L, Kuo T and Lin B (2012)** *How social identification and trust influence organisational online knowledge sharing* in *Internet Research Vol 22 Iss 1* pp 4-28

- **Nonaka I, and Takeuchi H (1995**) *The knowledge creating company—How Japanese companies create the dynamics of innovation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- **Polanyi M (1962)** *Tacit knowing: its bearing on some problems of philosophy.* In *Reviews of Modern Physics 34(4), pp 601–616*