

**Grand Valley State University**

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May, 2010

**Librarians, Knowledge Creation, and Scholarship:  
A Matter of 'Ba' 場**

Debbie Morrow, *Grand Valley State University*



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# While you're waiting: A very short assignment

- In 2-3 sentences briefly summarize:
  - something you did in the context of your employment in a library: small-scale and informal or large-scale and more formal
    - either alone, or with others,
  - that resulted in a beneficial learning or knowledge-creating experience
    - for you, a co-worker, a team, or your library as a whole.
  - Did you share it somehow?
    - Internally or externally? workshop, article, other?



# Librarians, Knowledge Creation, and Scholarship: A Matter of '*Ba*' 場

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# Learning objectives:

## Following this session, you ...

- ... will be able to identify components of organizational knowledge creation according to Ikujiro Nonaka's SECI model
- ... will be able to locate some of your own professional development activities within one or more parts of the SECI model
- ... will be able to express your own basic conception of '*ba*' in an organizational setting

# My initial question

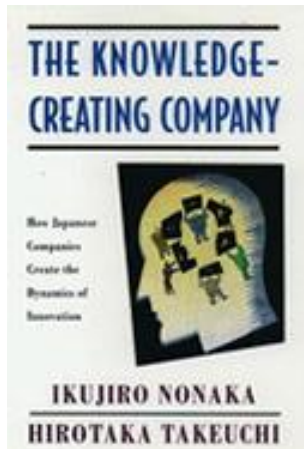
*“Is it reasonable and appropriate to place the same requirement for knowledge creation and dissemination on librarians as on academic scholars, simply because we are faculty?”*

# A Model, structuring inquiry

- o Ikujiro Nonaka's model of organizational knowledge creation

*The Knowledge-Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation*

Ikujiro Nonaka &  
Hirotaka Takeuchi  
(1995)



# Concepts considered

- Learning organization
- Types of knowledge
  - Tacit
  - Explicit
- Knowledge conversions in the 'SECI' model
  - Socialization
  - Externalization
  - Combination
  - Internalization
- *Ba* 場
- Types of *ba*
  - Originating
  - Dialoguing
  - Systematizing
  - Exercising

# Definitions

- A “learning organization” ...
  - ... is “skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights” (Garvin, 1993, p. 80).
  - Nonaka incorporates this into his analysis of a “knowledge-creating company”



# Definitions

## Two Types of Knowledge –

- Explicit knowledge

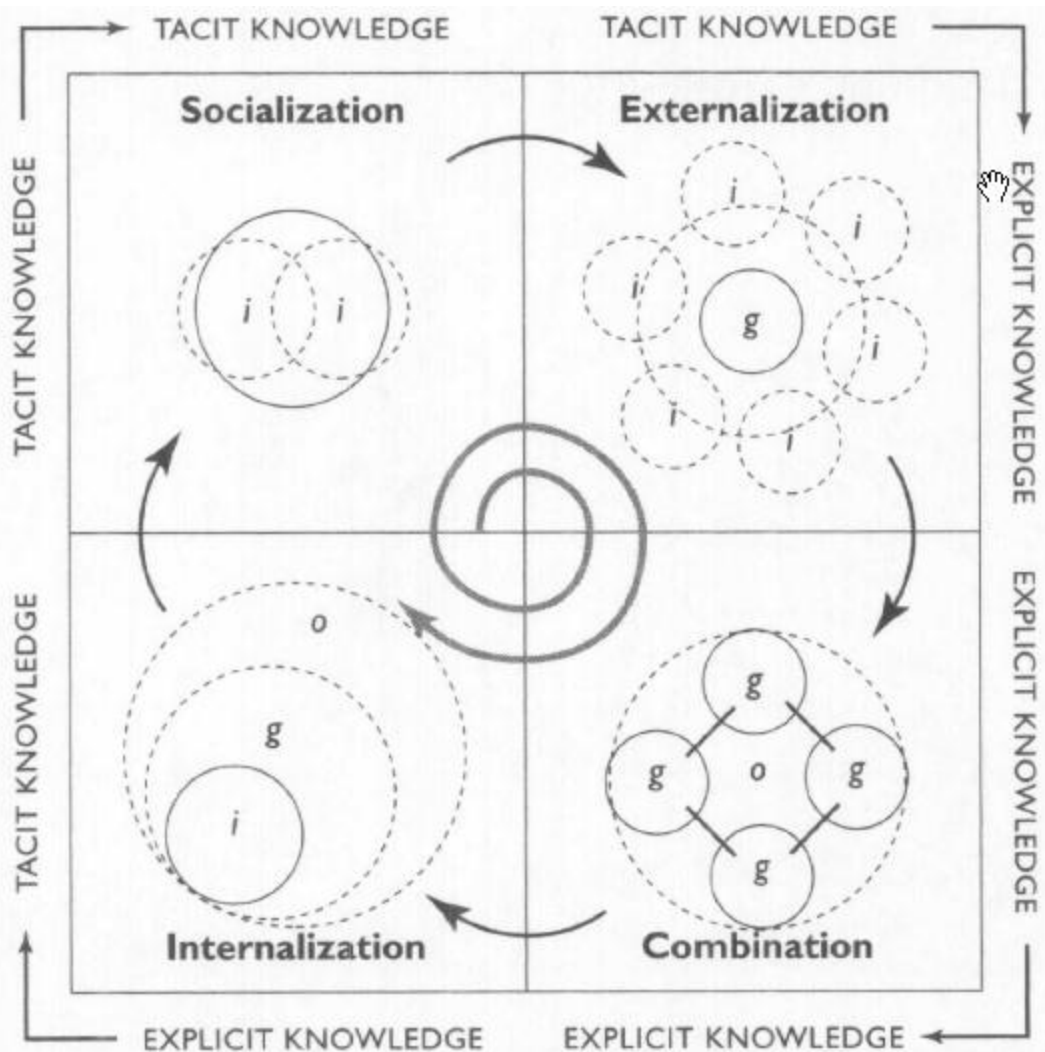
- “articulated in formal language including grammatical statements, mathematical expressions, specifications, manuals, and so forth...” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p. viii),

AND ...

# Definitions

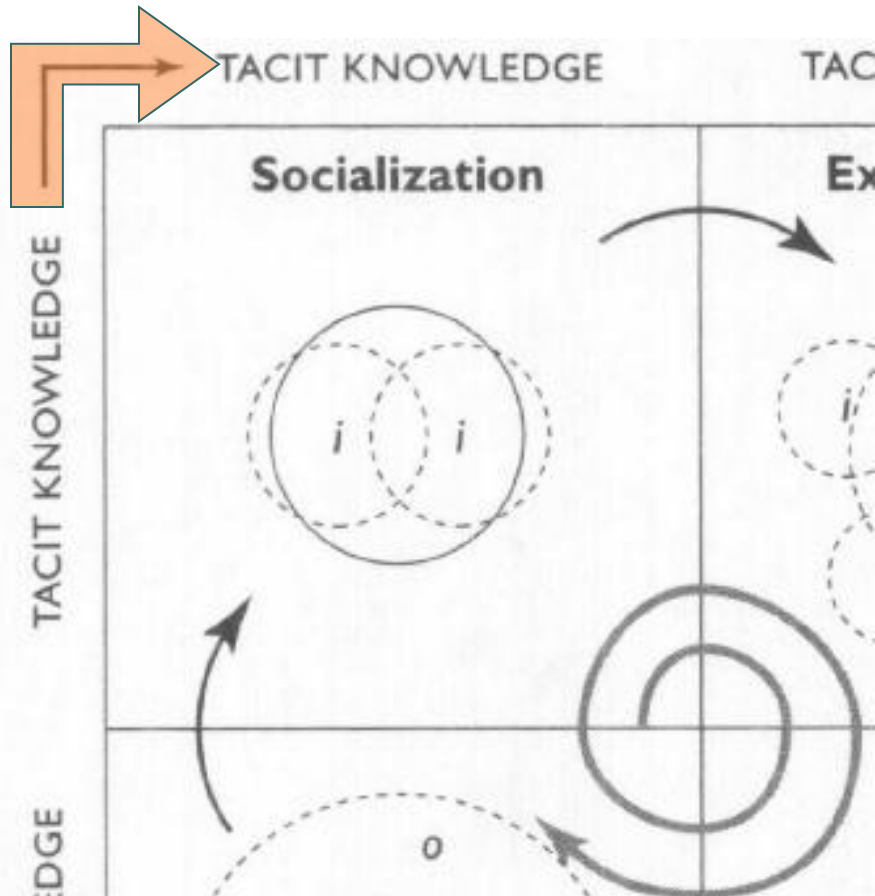
- Tacit knowledge
  - “is hard to articulate with formal language. It is personal knowledge embedded in individual experience and involves intangible factors such as personal belief, perspective, and the value system” (p. viii).

# The 'SECI' model: Spiral evolution of knowledge conversion & self-transcending process



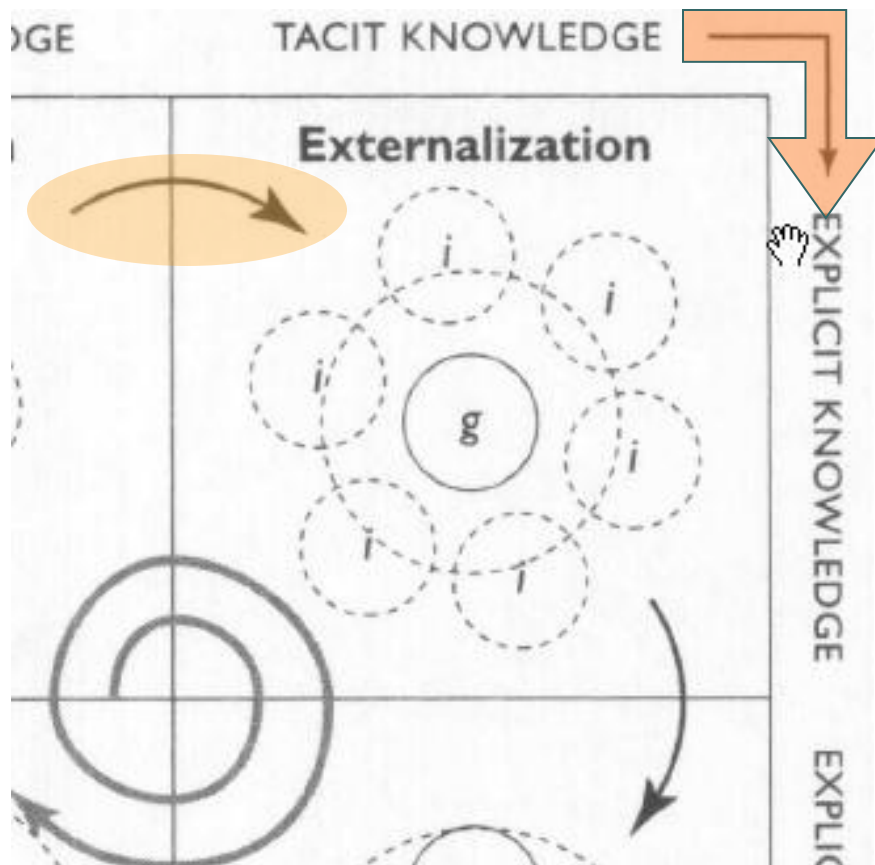
(Nonaka & Konno, 1998, Fig. 1)

# Conversions: Socialization



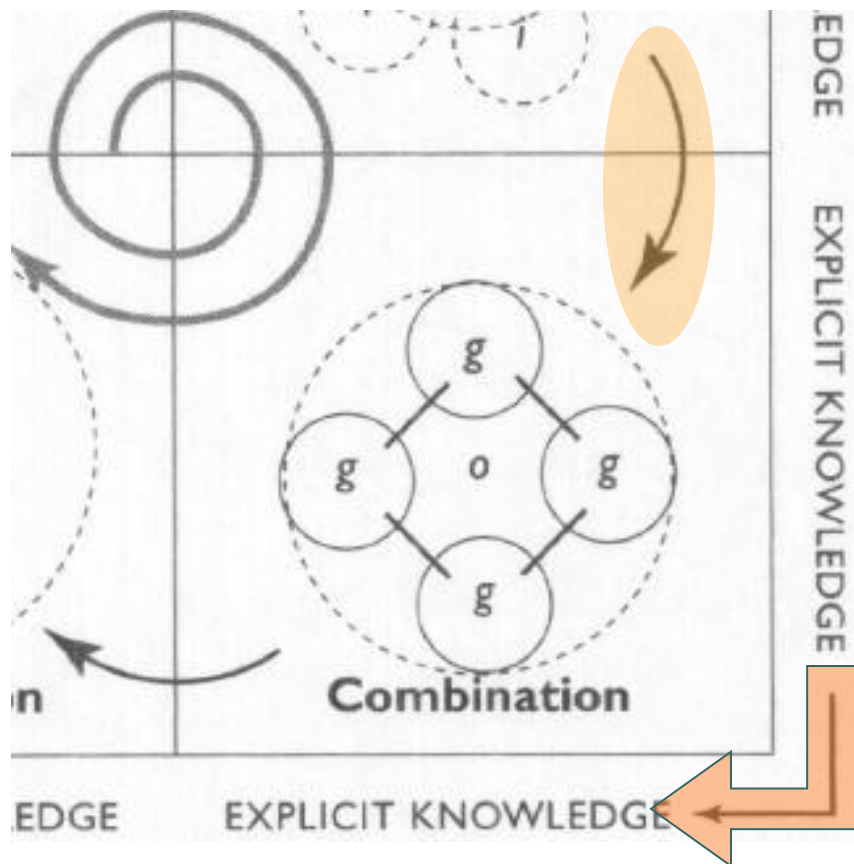
- One on one interaction:  $i \leftrightarrow i$
- Sharing of tacit knowledge between individuals through proximity and shared experience
- Observation, imitation, and practice, rather than written or verbal instruction
- Coming to empathize with both our colleagues and our customers/clients/patrons

# Conversions: Externalization



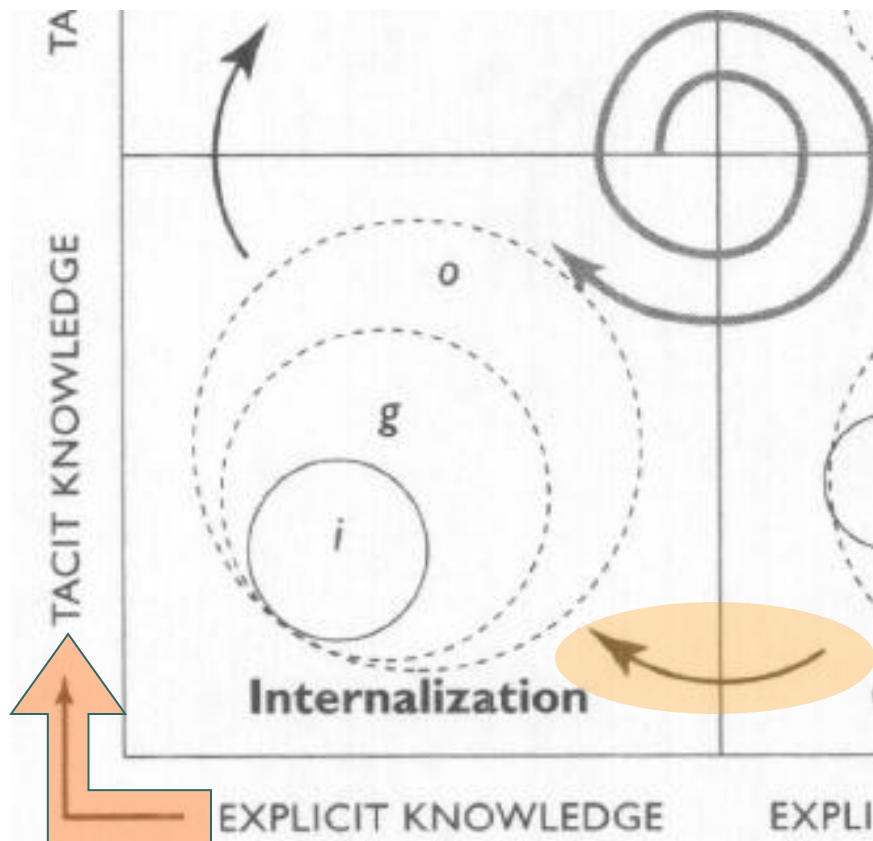
- Individuals selected to interact as a group:  $i + i + i \dots \rightarrow g$
- Expression and articulation of tacit knowledge, into words, concepts, hypotheses, models, metaphors, analogies, narratives, and visuals
- Highly personal knowledge (from customers) or professional knowledge (of experts) is translated into explicit forms that are easy to communicate
- This is where raw creation of new knowledge begins

# Conversions: Combination



- Communication & diffusion processes allow for systemization of organizational knowledge:  
 $g + g + g + \dots \rightarrow o$
- The processes take advantage of communication and data management technologies
- Conversion of explicit knowledge into more complex sets of explicit knowledge
- Positions the organization to take practical concrete steps

# Conversions: Internalization



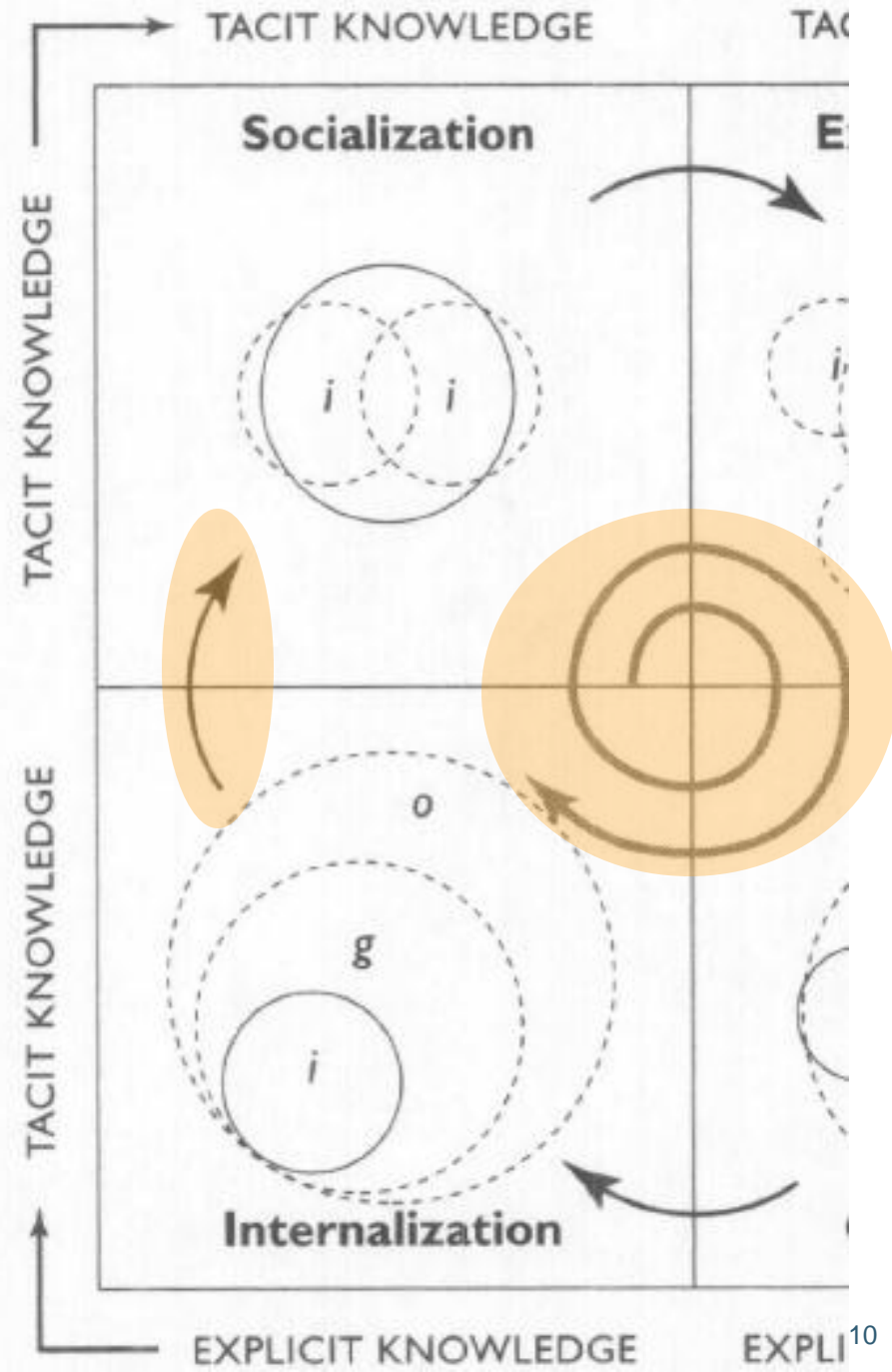
- Synthesis and sharing across levels:  $i \leftrightarrow g \leftrightarrow o$
- Explicit knowledge is embodied into practice
- Individuals able to identify knowledge directly relevant to themselves through learning-by-doing, training sessions, exercises, simulations
- Documenting the new knowledge created, or reading/hearing a re-telling of the new knowledge helps with internalizing and knowledge transfer

# Forming the spiral

The SECI model:

A cycle of converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge and then reconverting it into tacit knowledge.

But what makes it work?...





# Definitions

場 ...

# Definitions

- In Japanese, 場 is pronounced “Ba”.
- “field” or “space”
- “a dynamic, inhabited place; a place for doing something. Somewhere to hold a festival, or work on a project together. A collaborative place.”
- “What do we call a place where history is being created? A rich place full of interaction and possibility, a place for emerging relationships.” (Weiley, n.d.)

場

# Definitions

“One may talk about a good *ba* when relational situations energize people making them creative within positive and dynamic interactions”  
(Fayard, 2003, p. 25).

土 日  
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(<http://www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/cgi-bin/wwwjdic.cgi?1S>)

# Definitions

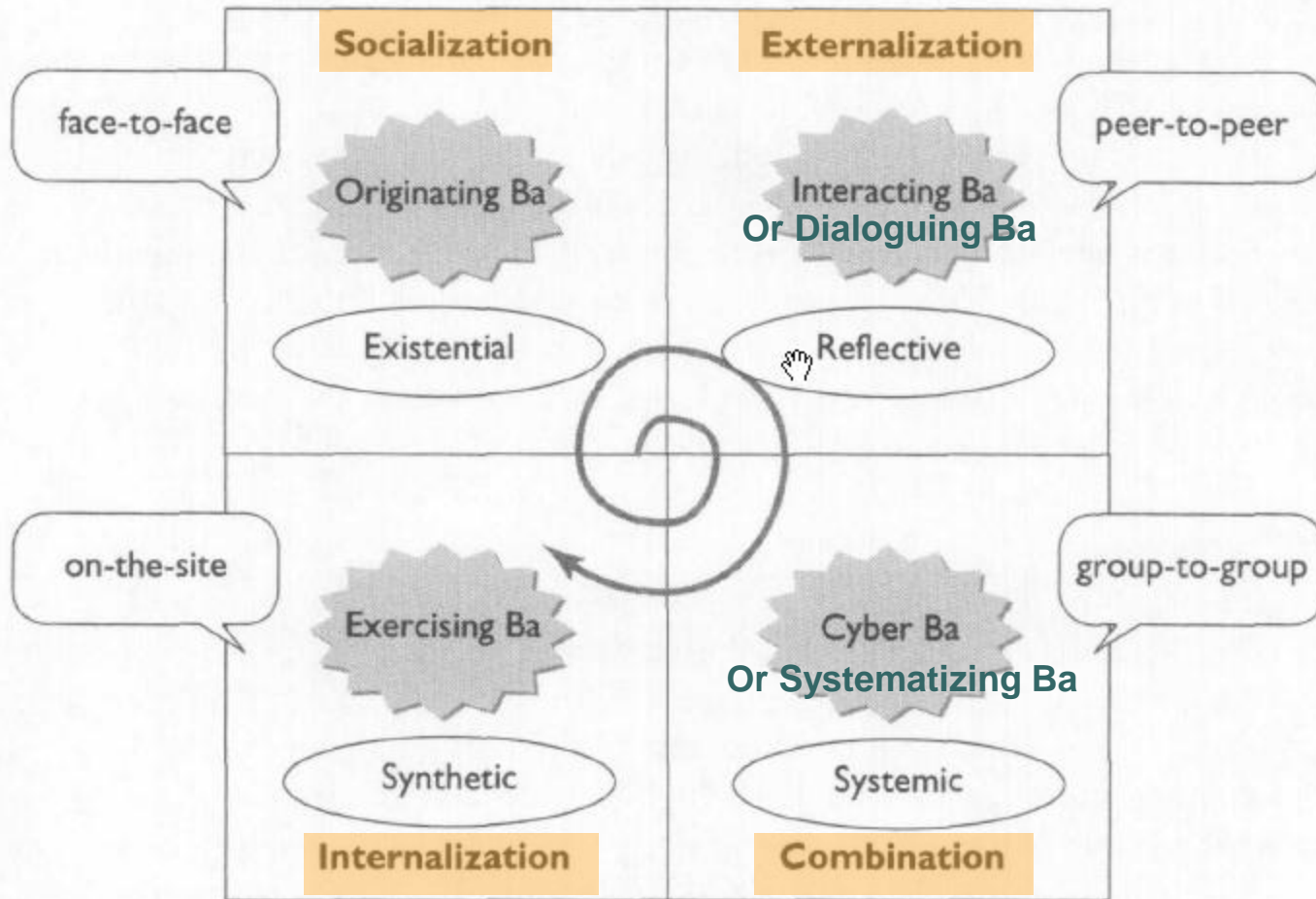
- *Ba*, as adapted by Ikujiro Nonaka:
  - “a Japanese term difficult to translate in English, [that] refers to a physical, virtual, and/or mental space shared by two or more individuals or organizations” (Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 2001, p. 4).
  - “ ... Shared space for emerging relationships. ... A platform for advancing individual and/or collective knowledge. ... A context which harbors meaning. Thus, ...a shared space that serves as a platform for knowledge creation” (Nonaka & Konno, 1998, p. 40).

# Definitions

- A *ba* by any other name?

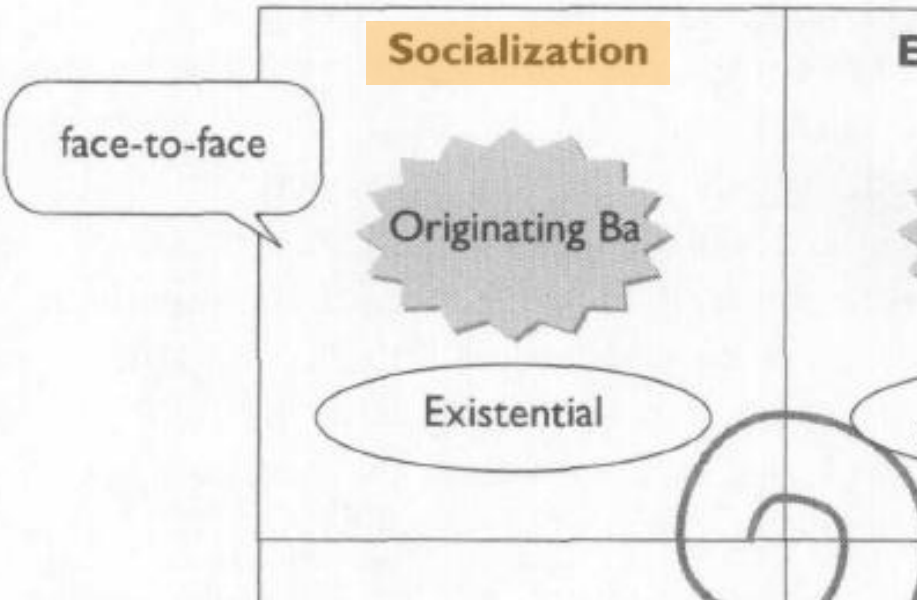
“By *space* I mean a complex of factors: the physical arrangement and feeling of the room, the conceptual framework that I build around the topic my students and I are exploring, the emotional ethos I hope to facilitate, and the ground rules that will guide our inquiry” (Palmer, 1998, p. 73).

# Ba and the SECI model



(Nonaka & Konno, 1998, Fig. 3)

# Originating *Ba*



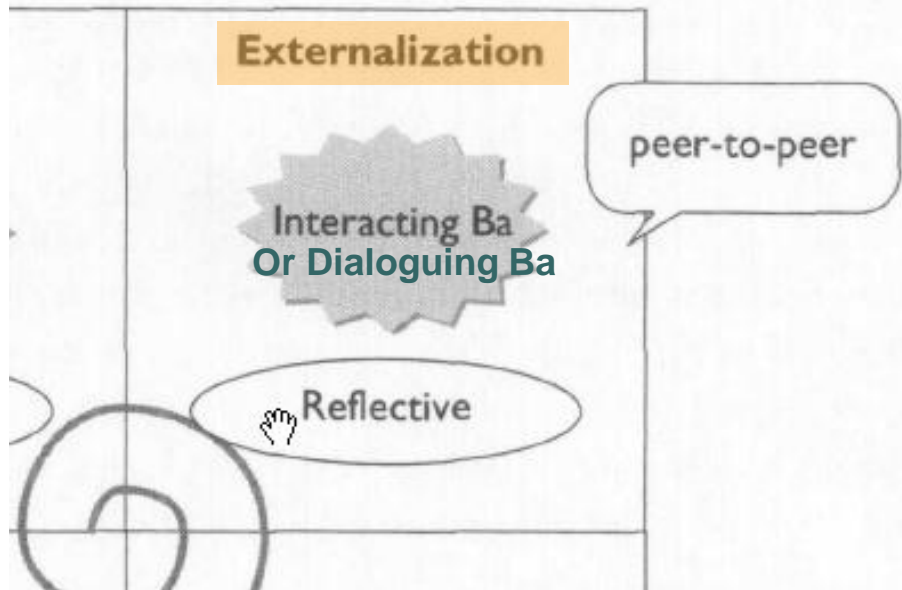
- Associated with the **socialization conversion & transfer of tacit knowledge**

- Openness in organizational design and customer interfaces allows for direct encounters between individuals, physical face-to-face experiences

- Empathy and trust are built between self and others – both co-workers and customers

- spending time together informally, acquiring a history of shared experiences and shared mental models

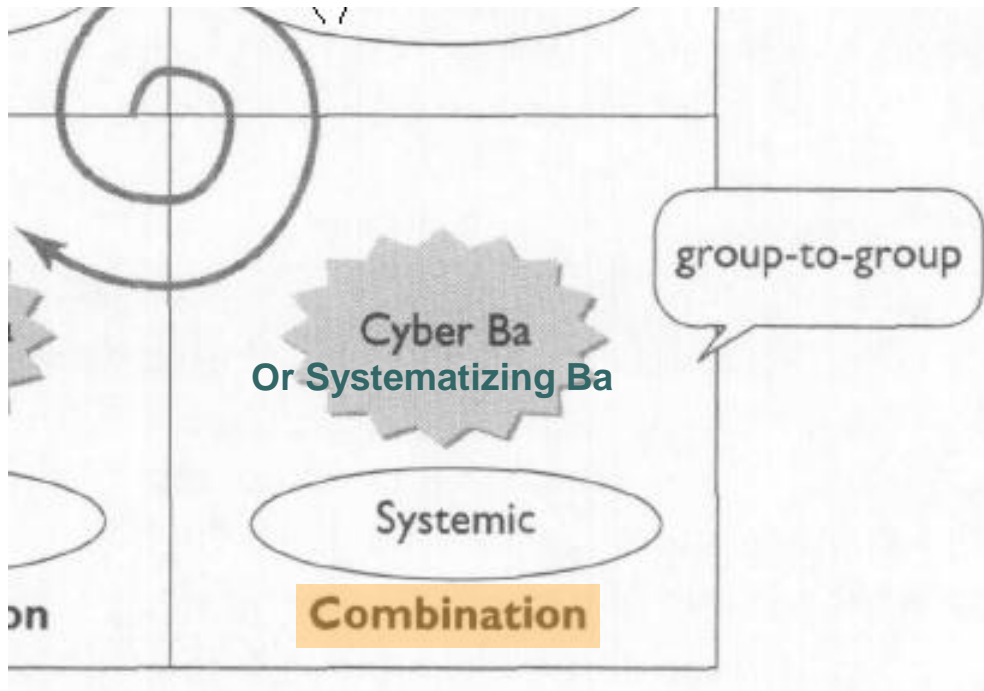
# Interacting or Dialoguing *Ba*



- Associated with the **Externalization** conversion, where **tacit knowledge is made explicit**
- This *ba* is more consciously constructed
- focus is group settings (project team, taskforce), where the groups are intentionally selected to include specific knowledge and capabilities
- Dialog is key, with extensive use of metaphors as a means of expressing ideas and concepts until a clear, simple meaning is successfully conveyed to others
- **Conversion of TK to EK through thought**

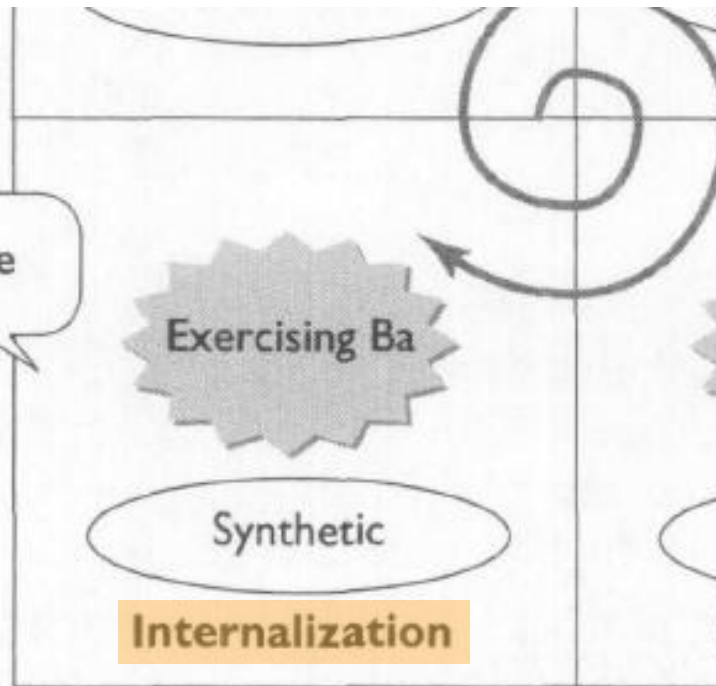


# Cyber or Systematizing *Ba*



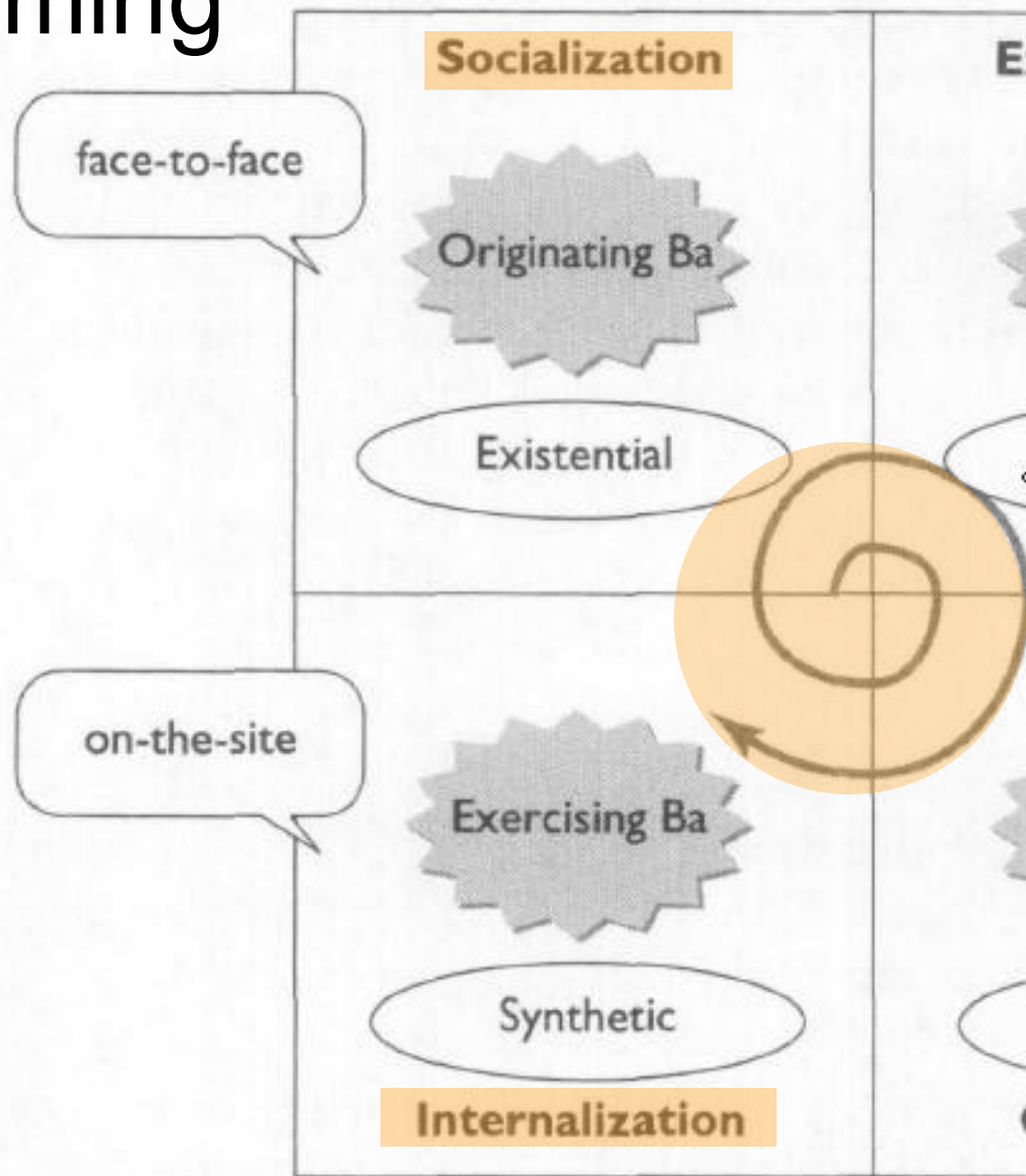
- Associated with the **Combination** conversion & **combining of new explicit knowledge with existing information and EK**
- Systematizing processes that are most efficiently supported in collaborative environments utilizing information technology
- Interactions in the virtual world, using networks, group-ware, shared databases, social software

# Exercising *Ba*



- Associated with the **Internalization** conversion, where **explicit knowledge is converted to tacit knowledge**
- Focused on-the-job training with senior mentors or other colleagues
- OJT and “peripheral participation” are the primary means of continuously applying and internalizing formal (explicit) knowledge in simulated or real life applications
- **conversion of EK to TK through action**

# Again, forming the spiral



# Discussion:

## Examples from participants

- Who has a story to share?
  - What kind of conversion took place?
    - who was involved? what kind of interaction was occurring?
      - was tacit knowledge converted to explicit? was explicit knowledge converted to tacit?
    - was there *ba* fostering the interactions?
      - how would you describe the characteristics of the *ba* associated with this knowledge conversion?

# Findings

- An academic library is, ideally, a learning organization – i.e., “skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights”

# Findings

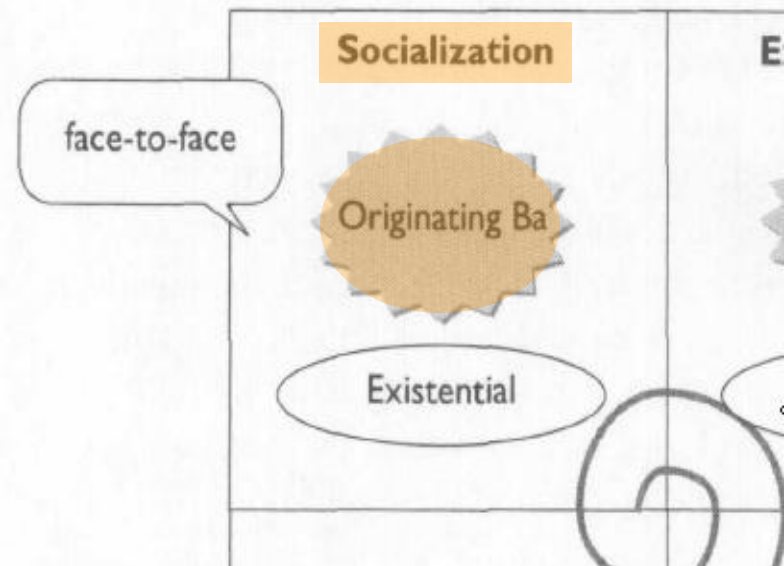
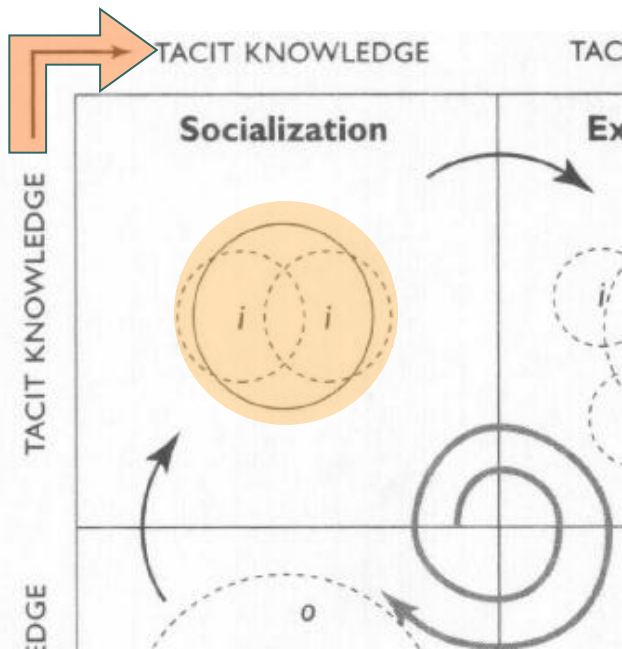
- All library staff, including librarians (whether faculty or professional staff), are, ideally, members of a **knowledge-creating crew** with roles to play in aspects of knowledge-creating processes

# Findings

- And ideally, management has a responsibility for creating and supporting the organizational structure and environments – *ba* – that facilitate all of the types of knowledge conversion processes throughout the organization, thus fostering knowledge creation.

# Recommendations

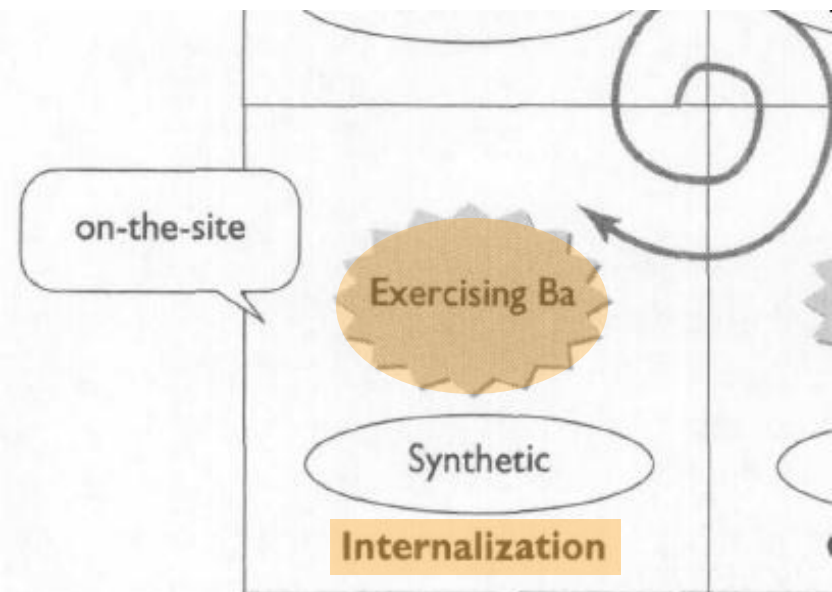
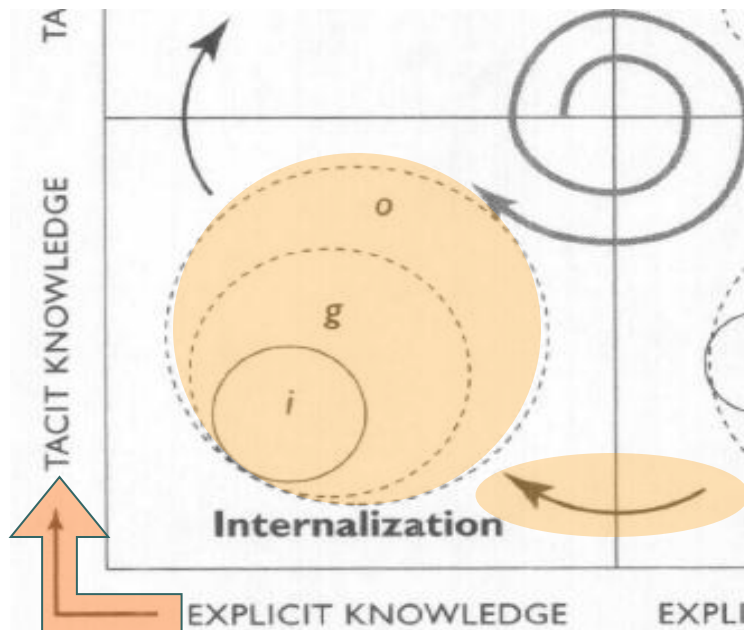
- Pay special attention to *socialization* conversions and originating *ba*: support mentoring opportunities





# Recommendations (cont.)

- Pay special attention to *internalization conversions* and *exercising ba*: support scholarship and dissemination opportunities



# Conclusion

So ...

- *“Is it reasonable and appropriate to place the same requirement for knowledge creation and dissemination on librarians as on academic scholars, simply because we are faculty?”*

○ **YES ...**

# Conclusion

- Though not “*simply because we are faculty*”:
- We are members of a knowledge-creating crew in a learning organization with a responsibility for keeping the unit fresh and vital by creating new knowledge, integrating it into our organizational knowledge base, and sharing it with the wider profession.



Thank you for your attention!

o Questions?



# References & Additional Resources

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