

Nugroho, Yanuar; Amalia, Mirta

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## Exploring knowledge management in civil society organisations: Sustaining commitment, advancing movement

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# Working Paper Series

## Exploring Knowledge Management in Civil Society Organisations: Sustaining commitment, advancing movement

Yanuar Nugroho  
Mirta Amalia

Manchester Business School Working Paper No. 600

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## **Author(s) and affiliation**

Yanuar Nugroho

Manchester Institute of Innovation Research and Centre for Development Informatics  
University of Manchester  
Oxford Road  
Manchester  
M13 9PL  
Email: [yanuar.nugroho@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:yanuar.nugroho@manchester.ac.uk)

Mirta Amalia

Manchester Institution of Innovation Research  
University of Manchester  
University of Manchester  
Oxford Road  
Manchester  
M13 9PL  
Email: [amalia.mirta@gmail.com](mailto:amalia.mirta@gmail.com)

## **Abstract**

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have recently attracted much research attention, as they have become more central in social as well as economic and political dynamics, challenging and shaping the work of the state/public organisations and of the private institutions. Despite the fact that they are actually knowledge-intensive organisations, CSOs –like any other organisations– are faced with new challenges due to the advent of knowledge economy. Knowledge-capital in CSOs is highly diverse and this affects both the organisational performance and the civil society movement within which they are part of. Most of the knowledge in CSOs that has been driving and characterising civil society activities and realms is tacit in nature and is largely unmanaged. Consequently, in the long run, the organisations and their movement often become unstable despite efforts to manage their activities. We use the works of Polanyi and Nonaka to help address this problem and conceptualise the corpus of knowledge in CSOs. To anchor this conceptualisation, we feature the case of Indonesia where CSOs in a latecomer economy have been significantly influencing the work of public and private sectors. We find that managing tacit knowledge has been crucial to sustain the engagements with beneficiaries and networks. We propose taxonomy to understand different types of knowledge in CSOs and suggest a guiding principle to strategically manage it

## **Keywords**

Knowledge management, third sector, civil society, development, advocacy, commitment

## **JEL Classification**

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# **EXPLORING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS**

*Sustaining commitment, advancing movement*

Yanuar Nugroho

*Manchester Institute of Innovation Research and Centre for Development Informatics, University of Manchester,  
Oxford Road, Manchester, United Kingdom*  
[yanuar.nugroho@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:yanuar.nugroho@manchester.ac.uk)

Mirta Amalia

*Manchester Institute of Innovation Research, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, United Kingdom*  
[amalia.mirta@gmail.com](mailto:amalia.mirta@gmail.com)

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## **1 CIVIL SOCIETY IN KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY**

Today, civil society (also known as the “third sector” and including the non-governmental non-profit sector) has been driving many aspects in the development of the knowledge economy. Civil society is taking a far more active role in the development of a people-centric, inclusive society (Edwards, 2004). In both Northern and Southern countries, civil society activism blooms across all spheres of society. Their agenda has been larger than it was conceptualised, i.e. to hold government and business accountable for their actions. Civil society activism has been much more than just about widening democracy and public participation in policy making, advocating the rights of the oppressed, or promoting and carrying out development programmes or forcing corporations to work in more ethical and sustainable ways (e.g. Edwards and Hulme, 1996; Hick and McNutt, 2002). They also have actively been addressing the current challenges of economic crisis, poverty and conflict, in addition to deteriorating environmental conditions (Rucht, 1989; Shiva, 1999; World Bank, 2005) – which the government and business cannot tackle on their own. With such wide spectrum of activities and concern, civil society organisations (CSOs) are considered as knowledge-intensive organisations, although often this fact is not generally realised and recognised. The advent of knowledge-based economy today, when wealth-creating works are mostly transformed from physically-based to ‘knowledge-based’ (Castells, 2000; Radding, 1998), brings about new realisation to CSOs (as it does to business and government organisations too): organisations can only be competitive (and relevant) by deriving value from information and knowledge (Newell et al., 2003). Intuitively, as knowledge is recognised to be the driver of modern economic growth, knowledge management (KM) has then been imperative if the organisations are to survive, let alone to reap the benefit of being within the knowledge economy.

Nevertheless, despite this importance, compared to studies in private and public sector, relatively little scholarly work has examined the ways in which civil society manage their knowledge. This is not surprising for at least two reasons. First, the knowledge in CSOs is highly diverse, extensive and yet unstable. Most of them are taken for granted and are often not treated as an important resource for the

organisation (Lettieri et al., 2004). Second, for CSOs it is not a priority to manage knowledge. This, in turn, has created a vicious circle, resulting in more and more knowledge in civil society left unmanaged – a condition that needs to be remedied. Managing knowledge has in fact become crucial as knowledge is the least easily replicable resource in organisations.

However, research into KM has mostly focused on the business sector as well as –more limited and more recently– the public sector (McAdam and Reid, 2000). With its body of theory growing, there have been many definitions of KM (e.g. Alavi and Leidner, 2001; Hislop, 2005; Quintas et al., 1997; Wiig, 1999, among many others). Yet, KM is probably best understood as “...[the] *systematic and explicit management of knowledge-related activities, practices, programs, and policies within the enterprise*” (Wiig, 1999:4). KM has indeed been understood to be not only important in its own right, but critical to advance activities in the private and the public sector –and hypothesised to be so in civil society sector. Civil society has indeed adopted and used advanced information and communication technologies (e.g. McConnell, 2000; Warkentin, 2001), including those in the developing countries (e.g. Nugroho, 2008a, 2010, forthcoming). As ICT is crucial in knowledge management systems (Alavi and Leidner, 1999, 2001), such engagement should hypothetically have brought the impetus for them to manage their knowledge more effectively. However, even if this is the case, it is not reflected in the current scholarly works, both in the KM domain as well as in civil society studies. This study therefore aims to examine this proposition and to garner lessons learned that will inform both KM studies as well as civil society research. Clearly, research into KM today can no longer afford to ignore civil society, and vice versa.

Since the 1990's interests in civil society studies have increased rapidly in the directions of both general-theoretical (like Anheier, 2003; Edwards, 2004; Hajnal, 2002; Hall, 1995; Kaldor, 2003; Keane, 1998; Wainwright, 2005) and more specific-empirical (such as, Anheier et al., 2002; Blumer, 1951; Edwards and Hulme, 1992, 1997; Hajnal, 2002). It is notable that research about organisations within civil society sector has been approached from different perspectives and frameworks related to several scientific disciplines and policy areas. While the importance and visibility of CSOs have rapidly grown, civil society sector itself has become a quite diverse and diffuse field for studies. Consequently, there is an increasing dispersion with cognitive gaps in the research area: neither are theoretical concepts and categories used in empirical studies, nor empirical dimensions that are connected to theoretical concepts (Anheier et al., 2002). At the same time, as the awareness of the heterogeneity and diversity of the civil society sector has also become widely known, the theoretical differentiation in understanding it also emerges. From traditional historical and political perspective (e.g. Hall, 1995), civil society has now been subject for other complementing perspectives such as sociology and management (Edwards, 2004; Hajnal, 2002). In fact, scholars argue that since CSOs obviously deals with the scale of the organisation and the sources they manage (Ebrahim, 2003; Edwards and Hulme, 1995a, b), management is central. Management is indeed critical for their survival which is often determined by factors such as staff development, budgeting and leadership (Aldrich, 1979; Clegg and Dunkerley, 1977; Collins, 1975; Hannan and Freeman, 1977; Pfeffer and Salanick, 1978),. However, it has been widely recognised that management may not be the major concern of CSOs as they tend to be guided by *commitment* and good intention rather than by rules or procedures (from Blumer, 1951; to McAdam, 1982; McAdam, 2003). This now may need serious revisit. Operating in knowledge economy and information society cannot but require CSOs to take into account their ways in managing knowledge; that it is not only to maintain their administrative capacity and accountability but also to remain relevant in society. This is not to say that ‘management aspects’ are more important than ‘commitment aspects’. Instead, both aspects complement each other in understanding the nature of CSOs.

We take this point further using knowledge perspective (Nonaka, 1994). What has been reckoned as *commitment* in CSOs is actually part of massive *tacit* knowledge that would need managing if CSOs are to sustain not only their activities but more fundamentally their *raison d'être*. Tacit knowledge in itself is personal. The central inquest here is: how can tacit knowledge, including commitment, in CSOs, be managed? This question is so central in CSOs as it brings together both the issues of management and commitment in a clear link to knowledge. We refer to Polanyi's work (1966) in order

to comprehend the conceptualisation of tacit knowledge. As he puts it, knowledge creation occurs when individuals involve themselves with the object, through self-involvement and commitment. It is therefore an important factor for creating knowledge. In Polanyi's perspective, commitment can be viewed as "the way in which we trust our environment to correspond to our expectation" (as reviewed in Jones and Miller, 2009:7). Sustained, relevant, and well-executed CSOs' activities assume high commitment; and this is continuously built through involvement (or 'indwelling' in Polanyi's term (1966:17-18)). We argue that it is in the management of involvement, or indwelling, lays the key to manage commitment and other tacit knowledge in CSOs and, in turn, to maintain civil society activism and movement.

It is no doubt that various types of activities in CSOs' realm require and assume numerous types of knowledge to manage, both tacit and explicit. For example, promoting fair trade or providing micro-credit for rural inhabitants requires tacit and explicit knowledge different to the ones needed for campaigning for human rights protection or widening political participation. However, there is an apparent danger and risk that these diverse knowledge in CSOs are left unmanaged, although mostly inadvertently. A more careful examination will reveal that the challenge here is not only about managing knowledge but more elemental than that, i.e. identifying these different knowledge. Although this may sound obvious, as a matter of fact, it is not easy to do. The nature of CSO's activism, which arches from developmentalist (Edwards and Hulme, 1992; Tvedt, 1998) to advocacy (Fung and Wright, 2001; Hick and McNutt, 2002; Warkentin, 2001), may have characterised these knowledge differences.

Therefore, we deal with these questions in this paper: What are the tacit and explicit knowledge in civil society? How can they be conceptually understood and categorised? What strategy can be devised to help CSOs manage these knowledge? By trying to answer those questions, this paper modestly aims to offer some conceptual understanding in identifying, categorising and managing knowledge in CSOs from knowledge management perspective. We also expect to be in the position to propose the ways CSO can strategically manage and share their knowledge.

After introducing the context and aim of this paper here, the next section reviews the two strands of literature –civil society and knowledge management– and offers a conceptual framework to understand the role of knowledge management in civil society. Section three, using some empirical observation, examines the working taxonomy of knowledge in CSOs and put it into the existing theoretical perspective. The following section reflects the taxonomy and attempts to offer a more generic classification of knowledge in civil society and its implication for knowledge sharing strategy and practice. The final section concludes and highlights some lessons learned.

## **2 ISSUES IN LINKING CIVIL SOCIETY AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

Scholars often perceive civil society, theoretically, as one of the cornerstones of vibrant societal sphere, providing voices for the disenfranchised and creating centres of influence outside the state and the economy (Anheier et al., 2002; Anheier et al., 2001; Deakin, 2001; Keane, 1998). The concept of CSOs traces back to the entity of the sphere of social life which organises itself autonomously, as opposed to the sphere that is established and/or directly controlled by the state (Deakin, 2001:4-8). Thus, we propose our definition of civil society organisation (CSOs) in this context as '*an autonomous, democratic civil society entity, as expressed in organisations independent of the state and of corporate structure*' (as also featured previously in Nugroho, 2007:61). As such, the spectrum of civil society activism is wide, ranging from purely charity activities at one end, to perhaps a massive political mobilisation at the other; from working with poor people in remote area, to lobbying parliament for a change in regulatory framework. In general, there are two main categories to help grasp the gamut of civil society activism. The first category groups CSOs whose endeavours are mainly to promote civic engagement, particularly at the grassroots level, which is inevitably political. This area –grassroots politics and mobilisation– is one main activism with organisations working here being commonly

labelled as 'social movement organisations', 'political' or 'advocacy' CSOs (Fung and Wright, 2001; Hick and McNutt, 2002; Warkentin, 2001). The second category concerns development agenda and is commonly orientated toward poverty reduction and protection of environment (Edwards and Hulme, 1992; Tvedt, 1998). Among many examples, these organisations not only assist the poor, but also help in empowerment through education and training, resettlement and health and other welfare matters. Some progressive CSOs also pursue gender issues, environmental issues, human rights, and transfer technology to communities. CSOs working in this area are often generally categorised as 'development' CSOs<sup>1</sup>.

This categorisation does not divide CSOs into two mutually exclusive groups. Rather, they are poles of a single spectrum of CSOs activism. For both developmentalist and advocacy CSOs, the modern economy in which they operate today imperatively requires the organisations to continuously improve their performance through effectively managing their resource. Internally, it is mainly aimed at improving organisational profile, increasing accountability and transparency, and maintaining its relevance. Externally, it is mostly addressed to provide services (or 'companionship') to beneficiaries, to network with partner organisations, and to be accountable to their supporters (including donors). From the management perspective there are two reasons. One, as CSO can arguably be seen as an institutionalisation of activities in civil society arena (Keane, 1998), institutional aspects hence become crucial (Edwards et al., 1999). Two, as CSOs make up networks of social movement (Anheier and Katz, 2005; Diani, 2003), management develops into vital part to ensure achievement not only in organisational performance (internal) but also in maintaining the organisation's function in relation to their beneficiaries for whom they work and other partner organisations (external) (Edwards et al., 1999), including global and transnational civil society (Anheier, 2003; Florini, 2000) they work with.

Knowledge, unquestionably, is one of the most important resources that has to be managed for it is a source of competitive advantage in the emerging knowledge economy (Bou-Llusar and Segarra-Cipres, 2006; Mudambi, 2002), which is characterised by Castells (2000) as being informational, global and networked. It is informational as the economic activities depend upon organisation's capacity to efficiently generate, process and apply knowledge-based information. Moreover, its core activities of production, consumption, distribution and components are globally organised in interactive organisational networks. Therefore, managing knowledge in organisations becomes imperative for organisations, including for CSOs.

Although sounds obvious, it is not always easy to define what knowledge is, let alone when it is convoluted with the term 'information'. However, there is a clear distinction between the two. Information can be defined as series of meanings or messages which might add to or change knowledge (Machlup, 1983) or an attribute of the receiver's knowledge, not the sender's (Fairthorne, 1954). As Dretske (1981) puts, "Information is that commodity capable of yielding knowledge, and what information a signal carries is what we can learn from it" (p. 44). He continues that "Knowledge is identified with information-produced (or sustained) belief, but the information a person receives is relative to what he or she already knows about the possibilities at the source" (p. 86). In CSOs, the workers (staff and volunteers) accumulate an invaluable reserve of knowledge built from various information that they deal with at daily basis. From 'below' (e.g. engagement with beneficiaries), from 'above' (e.g. communication with donor) and from collegial networking with partner organisations, CSOs receive and process a huge amount of information and create a massive body of knowledge. However, this is often digressed and mislaid in the obscurity of the day-to-day management, neglected over the length of field works, scattered due to the high level of staff turn-over, etc.

Understanding knowledge by analysing it through tacit and explicit dimensions (Nonaka, 1994; Polanyi, 1966), and then articulating the tacit into the explicit (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; following

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<sup>1</sup> This categorisation may seem simplistic and certainly does not cover all organisations within civil society sector. However, in most contexts both in developing and developed economies, this has been a working categorisation that assists us to understand the nature of CSOs for it reflects a factual condition where most of them are deeply involved in the promotion of participatory decision making and participation in development.

Polanyi, 1966) has been seen as probably a powerful approach in KM. This is because at its very fundamental level, all knowledge is tacit and only by codifying it into explicit knowledge –i.e. articulating it into words, numbers and symbols—can then it be transmitted (Polanyi, 1966). This is despite critics that come much later suggesting that knowledge can never be transferred (a thorough literature review is done by Bateira, 2006). Typical examples of explicit knowledge in CSOs are standard operation procedure (SOP), guides, or manuals which direct CSO workers in their activities. These include, for instance, hand-outs for conducting specific group meetings with various beneficiaries, or detailed instruction for a field-coordinator preparing a rally or demonstration, or step-by-step guide for campaigners organising lobby activities. This point is central as most of the knowledge embedded and embodied in CSOs are tacit in nature and therefore “is not easily available in articulated form but which nevertheless constitutes the difference between the individual being able to do something or not being able to do it” (Jones and Miller, 2009:13; referring to the work of Polanyi, 1966; 1975).

Indeed, the understanding of tacit knowledge at large owes to Michael Polanyi’s works (1966; 1975) which focus on human, personal knowledge. As he well knowingly postulates, “*we can know more than we can tell*” (Polanyi, 1966:4), one’s knowledge which can be expressed in words and numbers –or explicit—only accounts for a small percentage of their entire knowledge, which is drawn upon human awareness of the particulars of their surroundings. This tacit knowledge is actively shaped by experience and is created through self-involvement and commitment, or in Polanyi’s word, ‘indwelling’ which is “a utilisation of a framework for unfolding our understanding in accordance with the indications and standards imposed by the framework” (Polanyi, 1961:468).

This elucidation echoes what has long been an important subject in social movement studies<sup>2</sup>: the central role of commitment in civil society. Commitment continuously shapes and is shaped through involvement and this builds up the knowledge in the organisation at two levels, i.e. personal and collective (Chua, 2002; Nonaka, 1994). Personal knowledge derived from experience is embodied in each individual and is therefore unique. Tacit knowledge, arguably, is always personal for there are no two individuals sharing the exact same experience (Jones and Miller, 2009). Nonaka (1994) even argues that fundamentally organisational knowledge can only exist at the level of individual. However, several scholars suggest that knowledge also reside at the collectives or social groups (Skyrme, 2000; Spender, 1996; Zander and Kogut, 1995) and is classified as collective knowledge (Chua, 2002; Nonaka, 1994). Both arguments evenly, and also saliently, are observable in organisations within civil society. On the one hand, CSO’s works in much extent depend on and are identifiable by their staff undertakings. Personal activism of CSO workers often not only animates the organisation’s activities but also becomes the source of ideas and insights for many other workers. On the other, collectivism is the heart of civil society activism; CSOs ascribe central importance to the groups, joint activities, and shared ideas of their activists, volunteers and workers. From within the organisational perspective, therefore, both individual and collective knowledge make up the organisational knowledge – a view that Nonaka himself later agreed (Nonaka, 1994). Naturally, it is in the management of the organisational knowledge lies the key to advance CSO’s works.

Managing organisational knowledge, to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), is basically about converting knowledge that is derived from the fundamental opposite characteristics of tacit and explicit knowledge. There are four modes of knowledge conversion: socialisation (from tacit to tacit), externalisation (from tacit to explicit), combination (from explicit to tacit), and internalisation (from explicit to tacit). They argue further that

[Organisational] knowledge creation is a continuous and dynamic interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge. This interaction is shaped by shifts between different modes of knowledge conversion, which are in turn induced by several triggers (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995:70).

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<sup>2</sup> See the work since the collective behaviour/collective action theories in 1950s (Blumer, 1951) to relative deprivation theory (Runciman, 1966), value-added theory/strain theory (Smelser, 1962), resource mobilisation theory (McAdam, 1982; Tilly, 1978), frame analysis theory (Goffman, 1974) and finally new social movement theory (Kendall, 2005).



Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) model this interaction a spiral – *knowledge spiral* (p.71). It starts with *socialisation* which builds a “field” of interaction. The field facilitates the sharing of experience amongst the members of the organisation. Meaningful dialogue amassed in the field can trigger *externalisation* when one articulates the shared knowledge with the help of appropriate metaphor or analogy. Then *combination* is provoked by the “networking” of newly created knowledge and existing knowledge which reside in other parts of organisation. This process can produce the organisation’s new service, product or business practice. Lastly, *internalisation* occurs when one is learning new things “by doing”. This spiral, essentially at the epistemological dimension (i.e. tacit-explicit continuum), is moving upwards-downwards along the ontological dimension (i.e. individual-group-organisation-interorganisation continuum) (p.73).

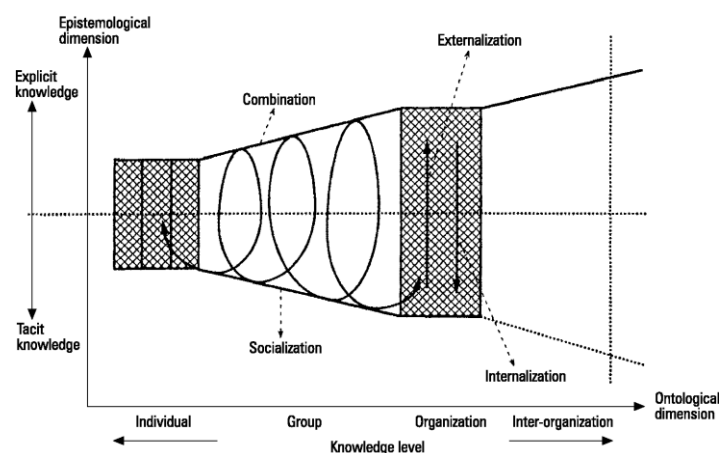


Figure 1: Knowledge creation spiral (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995:73)

Each line of activities in CSO is fundamentally a field of interaction which facilitates socialisation. Be they internally (activities conducted within the organisation) or externally (activities organised with beneficiaries and partners or support groups), this interaction enables workers to share with each other their experience in their works. Often, experience sharing becomes effective when meaningful dialogues among activists, who share their lessons learned, take place. Therefore, the boundary between socialisation and externalisation is somewhat blurred. The lessons learned and experiences from fieldwork create new knowledge, which update or complement the existing ones in the organisation. With this, CSO becomes more knowledgeable and is in the position to create new activities or services not only for their beneficiaries but also with partner organisations and supporters. These new activities are then internalised by the staff or workers through learning by doing.

Understanding this interaction helps CSOs formulate their strategies in managing their knowledge and central to this strategy is the activities of KM process. Consistent with earlier theories (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), Heisig (2001:28) suggests four processes in KM: knowledge creation, storage, distribution and application. First, knowledge is created when organisations develop new content or replace the existing ones (Heisig, 2001). As elaborated above, knowledge creation takes place when all four modes of knowledge conversion continuously happen in a cycle, spiralling upward from the individual level to the group level, the organisational level, and to the interorganisational level (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). In CSOs, there are at least two levels where knowledge creation happens, i.e. when they create and update content during engagement with their beneficiaries (‘in the field’) and during reflection and/or planning for new activities internally and/or with their supporters (‘in the office’). Secondly, the knowledge needs to be stored in order to prevent losing track of the newly created knowledge (Heisig, 2001). This perhaps is one of the most critical points in KM in CSO. At large, knowledge storage in CSOs is ‘conventional’, i.e. reliance on minutes of meetings, log-book, field records or fieldwork notes. CSOs store most of their (new) knowledge in its staff’s mind. Some CSOs, particularly in developed economy, have started to systematically document this knowledge electronically (with the assistance of ICT and media technology) with a view to be able to access it in the future. However this still needs much improvement. In developing countries, this practically is not

the case. Thirdly, knowledge needs to be distributed or shared across organisations (Heisig, 2001). The aim of this is to effectively transfer knowledge between individuals so they can understand the knowledge well enough to act upon it or to apply it –which embodies the final process of KM (Heisig, 2001). In CSO's universe, knowledge distribution or knowledge sharing happens mostly through direct, face-to-face engagement in meetings or conversations. Apparently this mode of sharing relates closely to the nature of the knowledge storage: as most of the knowledge is stored in individual's personal knowledge, the most appropriate way to share it is to directly engage with the concerned individuals. Despite the early adoption of ICT in CSOs (McConnell, 2000; Warkentin, 2001) it seems that not much of the knowledge is stored and distributed using the technology for specific KM purposes. Strategic use of ICT in many CSOs, whilst being action oriented at the organisational level, might suffer from an inadequacy for knowledge storage and sharing when viewed from KM perspective. This makes the first part that will be dealt with in this paper: *what knowledge and how it is stored and shared*.

The second part concerns the context in which the spiral of knowledge creation is shaped. As explained earlier the spiral is across two dimensions of knowledge: ontological and epistemological. It is in these two dimensions organisational knowledge is created, i.e. through continuous interaction between knowledge and the act of generating and internalising knowledge, or *knowing*. In Cook's and Brown's very words, it is the 'generative dance between organisational knowledge and organisational knowing' (Cook and Brown, 1999) that incessantly creates knowledge. Knowing is inherently part of action or practice, and interacts with both social and physical world, using knowledge as a tool. Adapting Giddens's structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), Orlikowski (2002) suggests that organisational knowing is constituted and reconstituted in practice. Knowledgeability is both the medium and result of people engaging in organisational practices. People reproduce organisational knowledge through knowing generated in organisational practices and reconstitute knowledgeability over time and across contexts.

We take Cook's and Brown's and Orlikowski's proposition to argue that organisational practice makes up an important dimension of knowledge. If the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge forms the epistemological dimension of knowledge as they fundamentally characterise the nature of knowledge; and if the peculiarity between personal, collective, organisational and interorganisational constructs the ontological dimension of knowledge as they present different levels where knowledge (and knowing) is created; we propose the third dimension, i.e. the *axiological dimension* of knowledge where the nature of organisational activities typifies the sphere where knowledge is exercised. As commonly understood axiology is about quality of value: what is considered important, and what values do an individual or group hold and why (Hart, 1971) Particular to the CSO's case, this is the dimension where we put developmentalist and advocacy organisations as poles of one spectrum. In other types of organisation, this axe might differ accordingly<sup>3</sup>. With this, we propose a modification of Nonaka's and Takeuchi's knowledge creation spiral, from two dimensional spiral (across epistemological-ontological axes), to three dimensional one (across epistemological-ontological-axiological).

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<sup>3</sup> We may intuitively then think about the distinction *internal* to a set of organisation (e.g. service vs. manufacturing firms), or even *external* to it (e.g. private vs. public sector organisation). This way, we argue that adding the axiological knowledge is in fact deepening the analysis of knowledge creation in organisations.

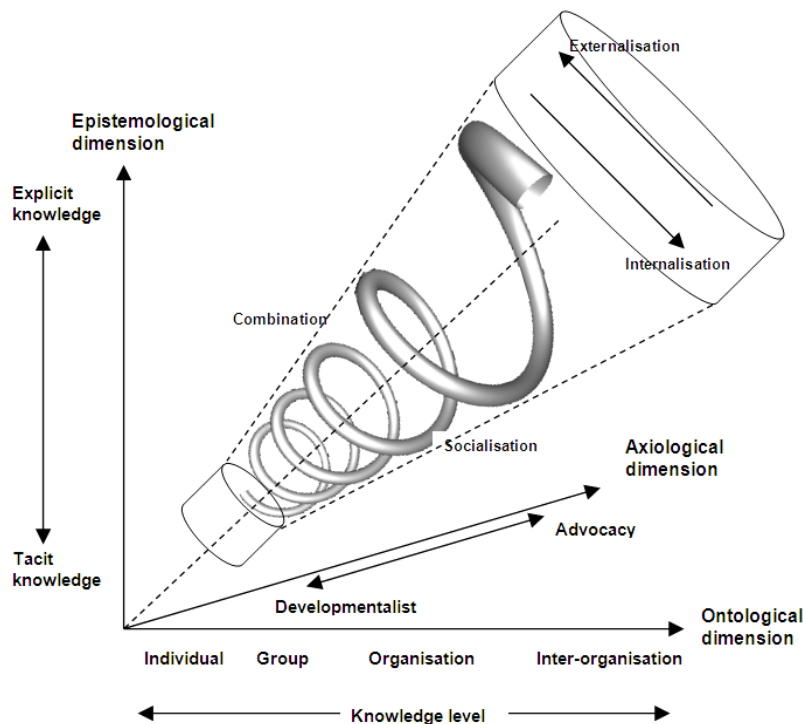


Figure 2: 3-D Knowledge creation spiral (expanding the idea of Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995:73)

In other words, knowledge creation (which inherently revolves around the conversion of tacit-explicit knowledge) not only traverses through different levels (along ontological dimension), but also through different practices (along axiological dimension).

At this point, summarising the literature we reviewed above, we offer some points to help conceptualise KM and its role in CSOs. *First*, managing knowledge, which essentially is codifying and transferring tacit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), should also take into account the fundamental difference that characterises CSOs, i.e. the spectrum of activities that spans from development agenda to advocacy programmes. *Second*, consequently, KM activities (creation, storage, distribution, and application) (Heisig, 2001) should also be made aware of this array of CSOs characteristics. One note of caution here: arguably there might be no differences between advocacy and developmentalist organisations when it comes to knowledge creation, storage and distribution; however this difference may become stark in knowledge application. *Lastly*, knowledge conversion (which also makes up knowledge creation spiral) indeed happens at the individual, group, organisation and inter-organisation levels, but this also has to be situated not only in the contexts where CSO engages with their stakeholders, i.e. *internally* among CSO's own workers and *externally* between CSO and its beneficiary groups, partner organisations, and supporting bodies (including donor), as well as in the range of activities that span from development to advocacy programmes.

### 3 TALES FROM THE FIELD: HOW CSOs MANAGE THEIR KNOWLEDGE

With this conceptual framework at hand, we turn into our case study. We feature Indonesian civil society organisations for two main reasons. First, that civil society in developing economies is known to have been significantly influencing the work of public and market sectors. Indonesia, due to its complexity, is a unique case where the range of civil society activism spans from truly advocacy activities (Ganie-Rochman, 2002) to fully-fledged developmentalist programmes (Hadiwinata, 2003). Not only does Indonesian civil society take the initiative to hold government and business accountable for their actions, at many fronts it also leads the endeavours for the betterment of livelihood. Of course, civil society in developed countries also shares similarities in terms of activities and grand ideas. However, due to different challenges inherent to the different contexts, featuring Indonesian CSOs may provide some richness in the understanding of the knowledge relevant to such activism.

Second, as a latecomer economy in Southeast Asia that strives to catch up, Indonesia has already been very much integrating, or trying to integrate, itself into the knowledge economy. Not only has technological advancement become the fuel for most aspects of growth and progress of society, but being part of knowledge economy, as signified by the technological uptake, has transformed the ways in which many organisations work, including CSOs. The adoption of ICTs, like the Internet, has been proven to help Indonesian CSOs devise and carry out more strategic activities in many frontiers from advocacy to development (Nugroho, 2008a, b, 2009, 2010, forthcoming). As ICT is also central in KM system, it is interesting to see if the use of ICTs for KM purpose is also considered to be strategic in Indonesian CSOs for there has been no previous study focusing on the issue. The closest one is a research examining at the role of the Internet in shaping the discourse (knowledge dynamics) of Indonesian NGOs and their beneficiaries in understanding globalisation issue (Nugroho, forthcoming).

Out of 298 Indonesian CSOs that are surveyed for their use of ICTs (Nugroho, 2007, 2008a, 2010, forthcoming; Nugroho and Tampubolon, 2008), we explore in detail 4 (four) CSOs to construct the case following the suggestion of some methodologists (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1995; Stark and Torrance, 2005) as this study is exploratory in nature. The data was collected from 2005 to 2010 through face-to-face and telephone in-depth, structured interviews.

Name	IGJ <sup>a</sup>	INFID <sup>a</sup>	Hivos <sup>b</sup>	Satudunia/Oneworld <sup>b</sup>
Year of establishment	2001	1985	1968	2006
Annual turnover	USD 125-250k	USD 'several hundred thousands' <sup>c</sup>	EUR 10mio <sup>c</sup>	USD 125-190k
Number of fulltime staff	6	25	184 <sup>f</sup> (25 <sup>g</sup> )	10
Political orientation*	Mixed	Advocacy	Mixed	Mixed
Organisation structure	Centralised	Networked	Networked	Networked
Main issues	Globalisation; WTO-related issues; international/ regional trade agreement	Bilateral and multilateral loans; development policies; structural poverty	Sustainability; human rights & democratisation; HIV&AIDS; gender, women & development; IT, media & knowledge sharing	Civil society empowerment; ICT; knowledge sharing; democratisation
Main activities	Research; publication; documentation; lobby; training	Campaign; research; publication; lobby; training; mobilisation	Campaign; lobby; financial assistance (funding); capacity building	Capacity building; facilitating exchanges
Adoption of KM	'Electronic library' to store knowledge, and internal knowledge distribution	Adoption of the Internet as a source of new knowledge creation	Implementation of KM system to store knowledge; lacking proper strategy to distribute knowledge	Websites used as knowledge storage and distribution; lacking strategy to capture 'field' knowledge as lessons learned
ICT adopter category**	Early adopter	Leader	Leader	Leader
ICT uptake expenditure	High	High	High	High/Medium

Table 1. Organisational profile of the observed CSOs

<sup>a</sup> data obtained 2006; <sup>b</sup> data obtained in 2010; <sup>c</sup> exact figure not disclosed; <sup>e</sup> Hivos Annual report 2008; <sup>f</sup> all Hivos fulltime employees; <sup>g</sup> Hivos Indonesia fulltime employees

\* See Nugroho (2007:125; forthcoming), modifying Fakhri (1996), Eldridge (1995) and Hope and Timmel (1988)

\*\* This refers to the Diffusion Theory (Rogers, 1995:263-266)

The organisational profiles of our observed CSOs are tabulated in Table 1 above. We use Heisig's model (2001) on the processes of managing knowledge as a rough guidance to present our empirical observation, before we offer some discussion. Firstly, we focus how CSOs create their knowledge. It seems to be a common practice that during their involvement in a CSO, a staff or an activist receives a number of trainings. Initially, when an individual (be they already an activist or a 'newcomer') first joins a CSO as a staff, s/he will likely to receive an 'induction' which mainly introduces the values of the organisation including its vision, mission as well as focus of activities (Laksmi, interview, 30/04/2010). Later on, during their work, they will also join some more training, mostly for capacity building purposes. Some CSOs organise their own staff training, while some others let third parties do it for their staff. Some organisations even set a specific day every week as a 'learning day'. During this

day, they allow their staff, or invite someone from outside the organisation (e.g. partner CSOs), to share their knowledge and experience (Laksmi, interview, 30/04/2010; Andarmosoko, interview, 11/05/2010; Nasution, interview, 11/05/2010). While some donor organisations may not be directly involved with their grantee's activities, others have organised some programmes with/for their grantees. For example, donor organisations like USAid and AUSAid provide training to their grantee CSOs for the purpose of capacity building (Nasution, interview, 11/05/2010). Meanwhile, other donor organisations are more involved in their grantee organisations' activities, for example, through defining trajectory planning (Andarmosoko, interview, 11/05/2010).

As knowledge in organisations is fundamentally individual (Nonaka, 1994), this observation suggests that knowledge creation in CSO seemingly relies on the *internalisation* process. It can be created in the 'office' or in the 'field'. When they are in the 'office', individual staff or CSO workers can use ICTs like the Internet to search and acquire new knowledge as the technology has been adopted widely by Indonesian CSOs (Nugroho, 2008a, 2010, forthcoming). As Wahyu Susilo –the National Programme Officer for INFID (International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development), an Indonesian advocacy CSO– puts it clearly:

[the use of the Internet] has enabled our organisation to access information from other institutions. ... The latest development news from our partner organisations such as the World Bank can be accessed immediately. Thus, we can monitor any recent updates in other organisations relevant to us, so long as they provide such information in the Internet. ... [Furthermore], the Internet has allowed us to shorten our time in preparing for our advocacy activities, as we are able to retrieve information online rather than searching those information in our manual or printed materials... [To this point], the Internet has provided us with accurate data, which in turn advanced the quality of our advocacy works. (Susilo, interview, 1/12/2005)

However, not all activists or CSO staff receive proper training. Often, they are expected to have the initiative to learn on their own. It is not uncommon that in their first working day a CSO worker is likely to get directly involved in an ongoing project. While some CSOs would categorise this as part of the *On-the-Job Training* activities, others would simply suggest that formal training is merely unnecessary because every project engagement is in fact the staff's very own training to handle a project. This is often the case with small-scale, local Indonesian CSOs which focus on a few numbers of small-scale projects. Thus, knowledge can also be acquired 'in the field' during project execution, usually with and for their beneficiary groups. Knowledge 'in the field' includes cultural interface (e.g. language, 'local wisdom'), 'social map', local contact persons, and technical knowledge (e.g. journey navigation, legal issues, liaison to the local people/group, community organising) (Andarmosoko, interview, 11/05/2010; Nasution, interview, 11/05/2010). Some of the knowledge, especially those of issue-related and activity-related (e.g. legal issues), are also transferred to the CSOs' beneficiaries.

Be it 'in the office' or 'in the field', body of knowledge in CSOs can be framed into two: methodological and project-specific (Andarmosoko, 11/05/2010). Methodological body of knowledge in CSOs refers to organisational planning and strategy such as organisational structure, infrastructure and management practices including information systems management as well as result-based management (e.g. defining visions, missions, outputs, impacts and indicators). Likewise, project-specific knowledge concerns project support, such as information and activities supporting advocacy or campaign, legal issues, as well as project management. Staff or activists are expected to document their lessons learned by the end of a project (or sometimes even during its execution) as it is deemed important, and that the documentation can be further developed into 'best practice' where necessary. However, despite the obvious importance, this is often neglected. As a result, many CSOs are lacking the ability to reflect (Nasution, interview, 11/05/2010).

The knowledge created by each activist should then be converted and further 'owned' by the organisation in order to prevent knowledge loss (and to make it possible to share). Often, issues arise when the knowledge of an individual is not easily transferred to (or within) the organisation. Laksmi (interview, 30/04/2010) points out that this often occurs in, but not limited to, small-scale local CSOs, whereby certain knowledge is kept by one person only. Consequently, if they leave the organisation,

the knowledge leaves with them, too. This however does not mean that the knowledge leaves the network organisations completely. According to Laksmi, usually the particular person who left the organisation remains within the network and thus makes the knowledge accessible for future activities. Nevertheless, as often is the case, the organisation must then try to create again the 'lost' knowledge. Further, the challenge is that organisations must find an effective way to capture the knowledge created by each individual.

This observation leads us to the second issue: *knowledge storage*. The individual learning process indicates that the members of a CSO are the most important knowledge reservoir (as argued by Becerra-Fernandez et al., 2004). In spite of that, there is an ample evidence of efforts to codify the individual (tacit) knowledge and store them in some media. The adoption of ICTs has enabled CSOs to store this codified knowledge in a way that is accessible for staff and activists for their activities. For example, Institute for Global Justice (IGJ) –a research-cum-advocacy organisation working particularly on the issues of globalisation– has developed an electronic library to store information and knowledge relevant to the organisations.

Our [electronic] library has its own database, developed by an Australian volunteer... The electronic library is the result of our own internal needs, I think. However, several other people [outside the organisation] have asked to access our electronic library... Our electronic library has over 1000 titles... We subscribe to an on-line magazine, ... about the recent issues in World Trade Organisation (WTO) [i.e. issues relevant to IGJ].. We have complete subscription dated back from 2003. In addition to the magazine, there are also journals, articles, briefing paper from Oxfam, etc., in total these are over 1000 titles. (Hanim, interview, 27/11/2005).

Another organisation which already adopts ICT to store its knowledge is HIVOS Indonesia, an international CSO with benefactor from HIVOS the Netherlands (*Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking*). HIVOS has deployed its own information systems which facilitate file storage, information sharing, communication, as well as website content management (Laksmi, interview, 30/04/2010). It stores both methodological- (such as document standardisation, contracts and legal issues) and project-related knowledge. In terms of storage, it applies a specific standardisation for documentation such as documentation format and folder management. This is found to be particularly useful for the members of the organisation as it allows them to search certain project or issues easily. This exemplifies best practice of knowledge storage in CSO.

We also find that in CSOs another means of knowledge storage is through producing bulletins with the contents particular and relevant to the organisation's activities and concerns. From KM perspective, the production of the bulletins is the result of *externalisation* and *combination* processes (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). While some CSOs print the bulletins, others provide the electronic version. IGJ, for instance, once circulated the printed copies of their bulletin before then emailing them as PDF files and later as MS-Word format. In so doing, not only has IGJ saved the printing cost, it also reaps the benefit of the Internet which helps it easily multiply the recipients by means of a number of mailing list distributions. Thus far, Internet technologies like emails (including mailing lists) and chat-rooms are deemed as important tools for distributing knowledge. As such, the circulation of the bulletins act as a means of *knowledge distribution* (Heisig, 2001), our third issue in KM process. Be it in print or electronic version, the bulletins spread the organisation's information and knowledge mainly to other parties (e.g. other CSO, donors, external libraries). The bulletin usually contains issue-related, context-specific, as well as methodology-related know-how. Knowledge can also obviously be distributed 'in the field'. This occurs often when problems persist during project execution. An activist may not have the sufficient knowledge to resolve the problem. Other activists will help by transferring their knowledge. There are also mentoring and apprenticeship programmes in order to transfer knowledge. For instance, a mentor is assigned to help an activist gain knowledge and experience during 'companionship' (Andarmosoko, interview, 11/05/2010).

However, although knowledge is seemingly well-distributed, Laksmi (interview, 30/04/2010) suggests that knowledge distribution is often an *ad hoc* activity. At times, knowledge is being transferred merely to resolve a problem in the field during project execution, e.g. technical knowledge

such as journey navigation, legal-related issues, liaison activity, and contact persons. Apart from the 'induction' session given to introduce the organisation to the newly-hired staffs, rarely an organisation organises other sessions for knowledge transfer purpose. The reason for this ranges from time unavailability due to staff's busy schedule, to the lack of resources. Even in an international CSO like HIVOS, for example, there is neither a strategy nor a specific division/department assigned to enforce knowledge transfer. This may jeopardise the sustainability of the organisation's effort in managing its knowledge.

Lastly, we observe how CSOs *apply their knowledge*. Mostly this is done through executing activities and obviously depends on the nature of the organisation. Advocacy CSOs apply their knowledge by formulating strategies to, for example, mobilise mass protest or push forward a political lobby. Meanwhile, developmentalist CSOs apply their knowledge in order to foster their specific development agenda such as devising programme for assisting some urban poor communities or farmers groups. However, when 'in action', there are no distinctions or differences between knowledge owned by advocacy and developmentalist CSOs (Nasution, interview, 11/05/2010; Andarmosoko, interview, 11/05/2010).

This case shows that KM has been implemented in Indonesian civil society sector. But this is not the general picture. Only few CSOs apply KM deliberately; and if this is the case, often it is not a result of the organisation's initiative, but rather a 'me too' effect of other CSOs applying KM, or imposition from donors. It is common that in order to receive funding, grantee organisations are asked by the donor to implement KM (Andarmosoko, interview, 11/05/2010). Consequently, due to the lack of fundamental knowledge in KM, the implementation does not last. Ideally, KM should be part of the staff's job description, and thus integrated within their daily activities. Indonesian CSOs have strong capability in issues-related knowledge (e.g. climate change, gender, HIV, among others), but rather lacking in the understanding and implementation of project/programmes methodology (Andarmosoko, interview, 11/05/2010).

## 4 TOWARDS CLASSIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN CSOs

To date, there is a very limited academic work which focuses on KM in civil society (among the few, notably deVasconcelos et al., 2006; Lettieri et al., 2004; Makararavy, 2007). Lettieri *et al.* (2004) attempt to propose a 'knowledge taxonomy' in non-profit organisations. However the taxonomy is affected by the variation of typical structure in different context (p.24) and is too general that it can apply to any types of organisations, not exclusively non-profit, let alone CSOs whose structure varies greatly. Our empirical data as presented here gives us opportunity to address this shortcoming and to provide foundation in our attempt to propose a KM strategy particular to CSOs.

As the case above shows, and in light of the literature review, we argue that knowledge taxonomy in CSOs is characterised by one or more of these following factors: (1) the *nature* of the organisations (advocacy v. developmentalist), (2) the *beneficiaries* they work with (e.g. rural community or urban poor), (3) the *type* of activities (e.g. organising, research, lobby, companionship), and (4) the *scope* of activities (e.g. local, national, regional, international). Further, this knowledge can be classified whether they are (a) *methodological* knowledge and (b) *project-specific* knowledge. Methodological knowledge in CSOs points out to the knowledge the organisations need to approach the challenge, as well as plan, devise, implement, and manage strategies in their activities (hence, the term 'methodology'). Project-specific knowledge revolves around knowledge essential to provide support necessary for the execution of activities. By no means are these factors complete but we are confident that for CSOs, those are the factors that determine the knowledge taxonomy.

Our case identifies three clusters of knowledge within CSOs. First, **general knowledge**, which consists of knowledge critical in ensuring the running of the organisation. This is further classified in these following sub-groups:

General – methodological knowledge:

1. *Internal administrative*: knowledge important for administering the organisation's routines and daily activities (e.g. accounting, office management, human-resource management, etc.)
2. *External engagement*: knowledge required to relate with public and third parties who are not beneficiaries or partner organisations (e.g. public relation, marketing, opinion building, media strategy, public fund raising, etc.)
3. *Research & Development*: knowledge essential to maintain the capacity of the organisation (e.g. skill-specific trainings, capacity building, developing activities, project road-mapping, etc.)

General – project-specific knowledge:

4. *Alliance-building and networking*: knowledge necessitated to seek and establish strategic cooperation with potential partners, supporters including donors (e.g. organisational mapping, networking, collaboration planning, etc.)
5. *Beneficiaries engagement*: knowledge needed to accompany and relate mutually with the beneficiary groups (e.g. communication, listening, organising skill, empowerment, etc.)

Second, **particular knowledge**, which in practice is also project-specific. This knowledge is crucial to ensure the success of project execution.

For advocacy-related projects/activities:

6. *Lobbying*: knowledge necessary to sway opinion of individuals or organisations that bear power in order to persuade them to agree with the organisation's stance (e.g. persuasion, discussion, negotiation, etc.)
7. *Mobilisation*: knowledge crucial to assemble group of people and beneficiaries for purposes like rally or gathering, usually in order to show a social pressure (e.g. communication, coordination, logistic management, etc.)

For development-related projects/activities

8. *Community development*: knowledge essential in building and sustaining particular communities with whom the organisation work (e.g. social mapping, organising, facilitating, listening, accompanying, etc.)
9. *Technical*: knowledge particular to certain project execution (e.g. project planning, identification of key success factors, identification of indicators, modelling of problems, measurements of results, etc.)

Lastly, other **miscellaneous knowledge** that are not covered in the above classification. This knowledge can be either methodological or project-specific.

10. *Miscellaneous*: other knowledge that is not obviously classifiable but important to the life of the organisation. Often this assorted knowledge is tacit in nature.

Thus far, the knowledge taxonomy within the context of CSOs has been elaborated. However, as Cook and Brown (1999) point out, knowledge is merely a tool used in a situated activity. What is rather important is how the members or activists of CSOs use these knowledge in their actions, or defined as *knowing*.

“knowing” does not focus on what we possess in our heads; it focuses on our interactions with the things of the social and physical world... “knowing” is about relation: it is about interaction between the knower(s) and the world. (Cook and Brown, 1999:388, original emphases)

Understanding the act of “knowing” may further assist CSOs to devise their strategy in managing knowledge. Scholars like Hansen et al. (1999) and Choi and Lee (2002) have categorised some possible strategies to manage knowledge, but how these strategies are implemented relies on the organisations as well as its individuals act upon their possessed knowledge. We discuss this below.

## **5 PROPOSING STRATEGY FOR MANAGING KNOWLEDGE IN CSOs**



Following pioneers in the field and building on their works (Choi and Lee, 2002; Cook and Brown, 1999; Hansen et al., 1999; Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), we map the ontology of the knowledge in CSOs and propose a strategy in managing it.

Like any other types of organisations, CSOs need to devise a strategy in order to manage their knowledge. CSOs can categorise their strategy to focus on the *individuals* as well as to the *groups* within the organisation. This is because of the dual spectacles that view knowledge in organisation fundamentally resides both in its individuals (Nonaka, 1994) and collectively in groups (Chua, 2002). Though perhaps it is self-evident that what can be represented as a group actually boils down to the individuals of that group (Cook, 1994), there is a 'body of knowledge' that is possessed by a group, rather than by each individuals in that group (Cook and Brown, 1999). This means that we do not expect each individual in a group to obtain everything that is in the group's 'body of knowledge'. This view of individual/group knowledge certainly applies in the context of CSOs.

As reviewed above, there are two kinds of knowledge possessed by each individual, i.e. tacit and explicit. In the context of CSOs, individuals' tacit knowledge concerns with their commitment as well as know-how of doing their particular works, for example, during their engagement with the beneficiaries. Evidently, the nature of managing the individuals' know-how is different from managing their commitment. CSOs can employ similar strategy to achieve their goals by understanding the process of internalisation (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), i.e. through learning by doing. CSO can employ human strategy (Choi and Lee, 2002) or personalisation (Hansen et al., 1999). CSO activists exercise internalisation through companionship activities, such as by maintaining personal relation with the beneficiaries and donors. Acquiring know-how can also be done through socialisation (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) whereby activists share their knowledge and experience among themselves and their peers. These may occur during internal meeting, training, or fieldwork.

Individuals' tacit component can be codified and thereby converted to explicit knowledge, referred to as externalisation (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Such can be in the form of reporting, or even more so, it can be transformed as part of the organisational explicit knowledge. CSO can utilise system strategy (Choi and Lee, 2002) or codification strategy (Hansen et al., 1999). These can be achieved through efforts, ranging from the use of 'conventional' storage medium such as paper-based documents, to the deployment of ICT. Individual civil society activists and staff use the 'conventional' storage to record their activities in, for instance, their log-books, field records or fieldwork notes. The adoption of ICT in CSOs makes it able for the staff or activists to store their personal records electronically in a personal computer (PC) or laptop. Many CSOs even use weblog, or 'blog', allowing members of the organisation to store their logs or fieldwork notes that are accessible throughout the organisation.

Likewise, organisational knowledge can also be categorised as tacit and explicit. As Cook and Brown (1999) have pointed out, organisations –viewed as a group– possess 'body of knowledge' which combines the knowledge of its individuals. In the context of CSOs, the organisational tacit component is the organisation's 'topical' know-how, i.e. the organisation's entire know-how which are relevant to their activities. Certainly, developmentalist and advocacy CSOs possess different kinds of know-how. Yet even the same type of CSOs may retain different knowledge, depending on their focus. For example, a developmentalist CSO which focuses on education obtain a specific set of knowledge that an environment developmentalist does not possess. Similar to the individual tacit knowledge, organisational tacit can be created through the processes of socialisation and internalisation. The first can be achieved through cross-organisational meeting with other CSOs as well as maintaining relations with the donors and collaborators; while the latter is exercised through teamwork during 'companionship' with beneficiary groups, devising work strategy, or raising funds.

Another type of organisational knowledge is the explicit component which is contained within the organisation's manual and/or statute/constitution. CSOs can then devise a codification (Hansen et al., 1999) or system strategy (Choi and Lee, 2002) by benefiting from the externalisation process (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). 'Conventional' storage, or paper-based documents, is usually used to store

organisational manuals and reports. Many CSOs produce printed bulletins which cover their activities and thoughts, distributed to their networks including donor organisations. Furthermore, several studies indicate that many CSOs (not only in Indonesia) have adopted ICT to support their daily works (Edwards et al., 1999; Edwards and Sen, 2000; McConnell, 2000; Nugroho, 2010, forthcoming), which may well include storing knowledge: (1) electronic bulletins are made available; (2) websites are created to communicate their activities to their networks, beneficiaries, donors, or simply the society. Some CSOs have implemented the so-called ‘electronic library’ which stores not only records of their activities, but also documents relevant to their activities such as articles concerning the organisation’s interests.

We summarise our strategy proposal in Figure 3 below.

Strategy for managing knowledge in CSO							
Individual				Group/Organisational			
Explicit		Tacit		Explicit		Tacit	
Reporting		Know-how	Commitment	Manual	Statute/ Constitution	Topical know-how	
System strategy				System strategy			
Externalisation	Codification	Socialisation	Internalisation	Externalisation	Codification	Socialisation	Internalisation
ICT use: document storage; blogs		Internal meeting; external meeting	Companionship: personal relationship with beneficiaries, benefactors	ICT use: electronic library; bulletin; document storage; websites		Inter- organisational meeting; maintaining links with donor & partner CSOs	Companionship; devising strategy for action; fundrasing; reporting

Figure 3. Strategy for managing knowledge in CSOs

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Two central ideas in KM are that individual knowledge is nothing but personal and tacit (Polanyi, 1966, 1975), and that fundamentally knowledge is created by individuals, not organisations (Nonaka, 1994). The instance of KM in CSOs is probably the best in substantiating these concepts. The level of reliance of CSOs on their individual staff or activists is probably the highest compared to similar reliance of private firms or public institutions. This makes KM in CSOs crucial. Yet, it is still widely neglected.

We mobilise both classic conceptualisations of knowledge and contemporary account of KM throughout this paper in order to understand KM in CSO, to offer taxonomy of knowledge in CSOs, and to propose a strategy in managing it. We come to these following results. Firstly, in understanding the creation of knowledge (which intrinsically about the conversion of tacit-explicit knowledge), we suggest an expansion of Nonaka’s and Takeuchi’s ‘knowledge creation spiral’, i.e. from only covering epistemological and ontological axes, to further including the axiological axe. This is because we suggest to taking into account the practical dimension which spans the continuum of advocacy-developmental poles –a characterisation of the nature of CSOs. Secondly, we propose a categorisation of types of knowledge in CSOs along the two lines: (1) general and particular knowledge; and (2) methodological and project-related knowledge. While general knowledge is about common and wide-ranging knowledge to run the organisations, the particular knowledge is specific to the types of activities carried out by the organisations which can be anywhere within the range of advocacy and developmentalist. Likewise, methodological knowledge in CSOs concerns to the body of knowledge needed to design and execute activities, while project-specific one provides knowledge essential for support. Lastly, we offer a possible strategy in managing knowledge in CSOs by combining knowledge conversion and through a combination of understanding Nonaka and Takeuchi’s knowledge conversion as well as KM strategy proposed by Hansen et al. and Choi and Lee.

We envisage a couple of practical and policy implications, which goes beyond KM application and traces back to the whole concept and rationale of the civil society. One, understanding the organisational knowledge creation and the entire KM process indeed helps CSOs formulate and carry out their strategies and that central to this idea is the nurturing of individuals' knowledge as it fosters the organisation's knowledge creation. Yet, what is actually much more critical here is that it is the individual tacit knowledge, particularly in the form of commitment, which drives the whole involvement in civil society activism. Hence, being able to manage knowledge in this direction, CSOs will sustain the commitment and advance their movement. Two, in contemporary account, KM is understood widely as converting tacit into codified knowledge, and that the success of KM implementation, consequently, is measured based on the rate of how much tacit knowledge that can be or has been codified. This obsession has no ground. Although organisations have attempted to make their organisational knowledge explicit, there are some, if not most, of the knowledge that remains tacit, and hence, personal. Our case shows this. This implies that CSOs –and their partner and supporter organisations— have to devise a strategy which focuses more on managing personal, tacit knowledge while keeping attention on managing organisational, codified knowledge. This implication is particularly for the promotion of KM in CSOs as a grand strategy or grand policy. Lastly, through this case we argue that despite the role of technology, CSOs should focus more on the development of their staff and activists as the human agent of KM rather than pursuing the use and implementation of the latest KM technologies.

We realise the limitations of this research, particularly in terms of data and methods being applied. We therefore do not aim to extrapolate the results to provide explanation, let alone conceptualisation, of KM in all CSOs. Instead we modestly offer a case where we feature in-depth the ways in which KM is understood and implemented in CSOs. Likewise, the taxonomy of knowledge that we propose is no more than a complement to the few existing categorisations. This also applies to the strategy for managing knowledge.

We learn through this case that at the heart of the case of KM in CSOs, lies the staff's and activists' development. Only by focusing on this, the potential value of KM can be reaped to progress civil society movement.

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