

What Is Tacit Knowledge? Definition, Examples and Importance | Indeed.com

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Skills like leadership, intuition and knowing other languages are valuable among many employers. These examples of tacit knowledge can take a while to develop and be challenging to share with others. Gaining this type of knowledge may help you differentiate yourself from other candidates in your industry.

In this article, we define tacit knowledge, provide examples, explain its importance in the workplace and discuss how it differs from other types of knowledge.

What is tacit knowledge?

Tacit knowledge is information that one gains through personal experience. This knowledge is subjective, informal and specific to each individual person and environment. Tacit knowledge also tends to be challenging to share with others. The type of information might be too expansive or complex to write down, verbalize, visualize or transfer.

Though you can develop tacit knowledge through traditional learning methods, such as studying, most individuals elevate their tacit knowledge through practical experience, context and training. Employees often develop tacit knowledge through sales strategies, management styles or presentations. These examples represent types of knowledge that can be challenging to convey to new hires. For example, you can teach them the individual elements to use when making a pitch and allow them to refine their skills under the supervision of a mentor.

Tacit knowledge examples

Here are some examples of tacit knowledge that might help to illustrate what it entails:

Languages

Learning a new language is one example of developing your tacit knowledge. Becoming proficient in a language often requires you to not only study for several years but also complete immersion training opportunities where you're able to surround yourself with the language. While you can write down some rules of a language, it often requires a whole textbook to be thorough and even this work likely won't cover everything about speaking the language.

Leadership

Leadership is another example of tacit knowledge because effective [leadership skills](#) can be challenging to teach. Good leaders tend to possess traits like communication, active listening and high emotional intelligence that don't come as naturally to those without experience. You can explain to someone what makes a good leader, but much of effective leading depends on exposure and personality. Even after years of training, studying and preparing, there are still opportunities for someone to improve their leadership skills.

Intuition

Another example of tacit knowledge is intuition. Intuition is an innate ability to understand situations and circumstances without using logic. It's a great skill for entrepreneurs to possess because it can enable them to identify when the best time is to launch a new product or understand when it's appropriate to use a riskier marketing strategy. They might have a challenging time explaining to someone from a different background or industry how they knew to make those choices.

Humor

The nuance of humor can make it challenging to explain why something is funny. Good humor often requires situational understanding, emotional intelligence and timing that people naturally possess. People from other cultures or backgrounds might find it challenging to understand why certain jokes get the reactions they do. Good humor is often innate, but if you want to develop your humor, you may spend a lot of time observing how others tell jokes. You can apply their cues to refine your own style. In the workplace, humor can help you alleviate tense situations and build trust among clients and employees.

Hard skills

Hard skills, like playing musical instruments, learning a new sport or developing natural talents, can also be examples of tacit knowledge. For example, gymnasts often do complex physical maneuvers like handstands and splits. While it's possible to explain how to do these things, learning the tacit knowledge necessary to inform things like muscle memory isn't as easy to share. Practice and time tend to be the only methods for learning hard skills.

Importance of tacit knowledge in the workplace

Tacit knowledge often helps individuals differentiate themselves from other candidates. Employers often value skills like leadership, intuition and knowing more than one language when filling empty positions. You can use these traits to demonstrate your ability to perform the job description. Additionally, employers typically appreciate that they can spend less time and money on your initial training.

Tacit knowledge is also useful for organizations looking to become industry leaders. When an organization has a wide scope of tacit knowledge, it can rely on its talented pool of employees to develop innovative solutions. An organization can also recognize its tacit knowledge and develop the appropriate resources to train new hires as effectively as possible. For instance, a company might create a standardized sales strategy and give employees opportunities to refine their pitches.

Tacit knowledge versus other types of knowledge

There are many types of knowledge that can aid you in your work, scholastic and personal life. Tacit knowledge is one of three main types: tacit, explicit and implicit. Here's how each of them differs:

Tacit knowledge versus explicit knowledge

While [explicit knowledge](#) often compliments tacit knowledge, they have important differences. Explicit knowledge tends to be easy to write down and share with others and generally occurs when data is structured, organized, interpreted and processed. Because it's easy to write, it's also easy to store. In business contexts, explicit knowledge applies to processes, expectations or vocabulary that organizations can easily transfer to new hires. Datasheets, employee handbooks, instruction manuals, research results and white papers are all examples of places where businesses might store their explicit knowledge.

Another difference between explicit and tacit knowledge is accessibility. Explicit knowledge is often readily available and easy to communicate. Tacit knowledge can require skill and in-depth explanations to communicate. People may learn explicit knowledge relatively quickly, whereas tacit knowledge often takes space, time and practical experience to develop.

Tacit knowledge versus implicit knowledge

Another type of knowledge is implicit knowledge, which is the application of explicit knowledge. It's often transferable from one job or industry to another, gives broader context to explicit knowledge and can usually provide a helpful platform for new teachings. For example, if you asked a [team member](#) how to complete a task, they might outline the various methods or techniques you could use. Their implicit knowledge could enable them to share the advantages and disadvantages of each approach, helping you to effectively decide the ideal way to accomplish a task.

Often, implicit knowledge happens by accident. As you become familiar with processes and routines, you can gain a lot of implicit knowledge of the workplace. Also known as [conceptual knowledge](#), implicit knowledge is often applicable to new contexts or jobs. Implicit knowledge differs from tacit knowledge because implicit knowledge is often easier to synthesize and apply quickly. You can learn something explicit and use implicit knowledge to improve. Tacit knowledge is often much more situationally specific.

