The SECI Model

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Information sharing and decision making in large organizations is often referred to as "steering an oil tanker."

Information flow is naturally hindered as the organization scales in size and complexity. As this friction compounds, it takes time for decisions concerning people, process and product to reach customer-facing reps. In the other direction, frontline lessons and insights about what's resonating with buyers fail to translate into organizational learning.

Fragmented knowledge sharing means each rep must eat the same metaphorical poisonous berries, learning the hard way individually before they can meaningfully and consistently contribute to team success. Robust knowledge flows between leadership, enablement, and reps separate high-performing teams from the rest. Many struggle with gaps in tacit knowledge sharing, codifying concepts, combining lessons across teams, and applying that knowledge through practice.

The SECI Model

The SECI model, developed by Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi, provides a framework for diagnosing gaps in knowledge flows within an organization. SECI represents **four modes** of knowledge conversion:

Socialization

Sharing personal experiences and observing others, such as through onboarding, shadowing, and team sessions. With increased remote work, traditional socialization has declined, requiring intentional effort to enable peer learning.

Externalization

Converting intuitions into explicit concepts, such as through win/loss analysis and the documentation of insights in emails, Slack, and call recordings. Frontline learning is often not captured consistently.

Combination

Integrating explicit knowledge from various sources, like compiling training materials, playbooks, and value propositions.

Internalization

Applying explicit knowledge through experimentation and reflection, taking the theory and putting it into practice - enabling ramp time reduction and continuous improvement.

Orla Pollard

`Head of Sales Enablement @ Paddle`

Orla Pollard, Enablement Lead at Paddle, emphasizes the need to apply external methodologies and frameworks to the specific context of one's business. She cautions against merely copying existing models without adaptation.

As Pollard explains, "In the past I've seen people fail to contextualize frameworks. They'll adopt a methodology without considering if or how it applies to their situation." She shares a common pitfall of bringing in external consultants who use irrelevant examples, demonstrating copied methodologies that ultimately fall apart.

For Pollard, the "combination" aspect of SECI often goes awry here. Extensive training on a sales methodology means little if reps cannot bridge the gap to day-to-day realities. As she explains, "You can take a sales process from the internet, but how does that work in your context?" Without answering this question, organizations waste time and money while seeing little change.

Reinforcing this viewpoint, Pollard advocates judging enablement programs by business outcomes rather than superficial adoption metrics. Frequency of use matters less than whether the training actually equips reps to succeed when selling.

Pollard also highlights deficiencies she often sees in the "socialization" aspect of SECI flows. She explains, "We actually start from codifying the behaviors we need to change or evolve." The process begins with explicit knowledge like new call frameworks that require adoption. From there, actual skill-building relies on role playing, reviews, and top-tier examples to turn the documented frameworks into natural selling conversations.

Chad Trabuco

Senior Director, Sales Enablement @ Go1

Chad Trabucco, Director of Sales Enablement at Go1, jumped straight on the immense value of socialization for sharing knowledge informally. As he explains, "Rep to rep learning is the most impactful. Some enablement efforts miss that peer to peer emphasis."

He advises creating a "common water cooler" as a central knowledge hub for reps to easily find and use information. For example at Go1, their "Closer Corner" Slack channel enables reps to share tips and insights without manager oversight.

Trabucco also highlights the need to facilitate socialization for managers, not just the reps. This allows cross-team feedback and connections. As he notes, managers are often doing their sales leadership role for the first time and need enablement support too.

He explains further, "There is often an impediment to managers even having the bandwidth to learn." But building consistent rituals and assets that can be consumed asynchronously removes friction for managers to absorb insights.

Deliberately enabling social connections is critical especially when teams are remote and asynchronous. As Trabucco explains, "How do you create that consistency across teams, whilst avoiding proximity bias?" A balanced focus is essential.

Trabucco sees AI and automation as a major opportunity to improve externalization of knowledge. He suggests that automating topic extraction from tools like Slack and call recordings could surface key questions and trends efficiently. This should accelerate the translation of insights into improved behaviors over time.

In summary, Trabucco emphasizes that mature enablement teams focus less on formal training completion rates. Instead, they prioritize socialization and using automation to understand how company knowledge translates into real-world behaviors. This facilitates continuous improvement by identifying the most valuable enablement activities with the highest business impact.

Claudia Nagel

Sales Enablement, Strategy & Commercial Training @ Unbabel

Claudia Nagel, Enablement Leader at Unbabel, calls attention to the internalization gap preventing sales teams from fully applying new methodologies long-term. As Nagel explains, "I've seen the most challenges with internalization - seeing people under-apply the structures or learnings from our trainings, even with reinforcement sessions." Sales professionals lean on engrained habits, struggling to break precedent despite extensive enablement.

Elaborating on tactics to combat this, Nagel comments, "When introducing a new framework like MEDDIC, we'll conduct full day training on its importance and application. A month later, after assessing customer calls, we run a group session addressing the ten most common gaps still seen in practice." This combination stage surfaces insights for further targeted enablement. Manager oversight then sustains accountability post-training.

As Nagel asserts, mature enablement blends "very clear expectations" with "group work so others can learn" too. This communal approach accelerates embedding methodologies operationally. Still, Nagel conservatively estimates four to six months before the majority of reps fully adopt sophisticated selling frameworks.

While technology like call recording aids capturing insights, the onus remains on enablement to decode signals and take action. Nagel emphasized regular check-ins with managers to uncover knowledge gaps: "Meeting with each manager monthly aims to catch issues from a lot of different angles." These feedback loops inform adaptive enablement to elevate rep performance.

Nagel concludes no single solution suffices. Holistic enablement covering socialization, externalization, combination and internalization is crucial. As she stated, "It's about finding the right balance, to apply lessons from the field to enablement efforts, and rep skills."

Jonas Taylor

Senior Manager, Corporate Sales Enablement @ Sigma Computing

Jonas Taylor, Sr. Manager of Corporate Sales Enablement at Sigma, emphasizes a major philosophical gap in the SECI knowledge flow model—the assumption people inherently care about receiving the content being pushed to them. As Taylor explains, "There's another model I talk about —push versus pull learning. No push learning is of effective significance. Pull learning is, by definition, something someone cares about." Most enablement takes an ineffective push approach (over-indexing on training for the sake of training) rather than connecting to your audience's intrinsic incentives.

Elaborating on this distinction, Taylor notes, "The immediate challenge for any enablement professional is understanding what people care about and mapping content to those motivators." Rather than focusing on technical completeness, programs must link tightly to performance and day-to-day workflows and challenges. Without addressing this motivation fit, good content or good training will still struggle to drive real adoption and outcomes.

Taylor further suggests that enablement leaders embrace curation to combat information overload, given the finite attention and bandwidth each rep possesses day-to-day. Even rich channels like Gong need guidance and structure to scale the sharing of quality examples, rather than passively expecting observational learning. Building and marketing processes for learning and best practice sharing will ensure that subject matter experts produce usable assets for all teams rather than in silos.

As Taylor asserts, "My role is to think—how do I make it matter to people? How do I make it digestible?" With this quote, he directly advocates for shifting the enablement mindset based on relevance and digestibility over a "technically complete" SECI flow.
By rethinking assumptions around information receptivity and taking an integrated approach focused on intrinsic motivation, enablement leaders can transform disjointed flows into a motivated knowledge ecosystem where high performance happens by design.

Key Takeaways

Bring Remote Teams Together Through "Water Cooler" Social Channels

- Replicate informal connecting from the office by creating a casual place like Go1's "Closer Corner" Slack channel for organic knowledge sharing without oversight.
- Facilitate relationship building and storytelling.

Target Manager Enablement to Multiply Impact

- Managers are key leverage points for influence. Provide dedicated training and asynchronous supporting assets so leaders can absorb insights and coach their teams without taking critical time away from core responsibilities.

Automate Externalization to Accelerate Learning Cycles

- Explore using AI to automatically surface insights, questions and trends from Slack messages and call recordings.
- Rapid externalization from customer interactions allows faster socialization, and the ability to pull out valuable insights that everyone can benefit from.

Fix the "Broken Role Play" with Creative Practice Scenarios

- Even unpopular peer role playing exercises value in cementing skills.
- Get creative with more authentic practice via chat, email or informal video exchanges to make application learning less tedious.

Incentivize Adoption with Accountability Embedded in Workflows

- Don't expect frameworks like MEDDIC to stick without accountability hooks.
- Track usage in call reviews, deal reviews and scorecards to ensure reps realize internalization.
- Make enablement insights actionable through specific examples in coaching conversations.

Curate, Curate, Curate: Cut Through the Noise

- From Gong call folders to internal wikis, an abundance of resources risks overloading rather than enabling.
- Lead practitioners emphasize aggressively simplifying and curating content over passively expecting self-service consumption. For example, call out specific examples rather than links to full recordings.

Bring it all together

- A disjointed tech stack across knowledge, coaching and content tech breeds process gaps as reps spend more time context switching.
- Consolidate platforms, and prioritise just-in-time, pull-based enablement to remove friction.

Things to Remember

Ultimately, the SECI framework provides a useful lens for diagnosing gaps and imbalances in organizational knowledge flows. However, enablement leaders must go beyond the theory in order to drive true adoption and impact. By shifting to a "pull" mindset focused on intrinsic motivation and relevance and being an integral part of that dialogue, enablement programs can transcend fragmented information overload.

The key is curating digestible content that maps tightly to rep and manager incentives and customer needs. Reinforcing through practice, accountability, and layered learning also boosts internalization translating insights into improved behaviors. With a targeted, integrated approach across socialization, externalization and combination channels, enablement can transform disjointed flows into a thriving knowledge ecosystem. The result is a continuous learning environment where sales teams can rapidly adapt to an ever-changing world.