

**The role of institutionalization mechanisms in
supporting individual knowing acquisition**

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ABSTRACT

Organizations have long been concerned with the creation and maintenance of competitive advantage to remain viable in the long term in a highly competitive global economy. However, having such an advantage requires organizations to have resources that are rare, non-imitable, non-substitutable and valuable. Of the various possible resources, firm-specific knowledge and *knowing* have been thought of as key resources for sustained competitive advantage. The creation of such key resources would require the presence of institutionalization, given the latter's emphasis in organizational learning, organizational knowledge creation and knowledge management studies. Yet studies on learning and knowledge in organizations have focused mostly on knowledge rather than *knowing*, which does not give us much clarity as to the effectiveness of institutionalization to support *knowing* acquisition.

To address the lack of clarity on the role of institutionalization in *knowing* acquisition, this study seeks to understand how individuals acquire *knowing* as compared to the institutionalization mechanisms put in place to support *knowing* acquisition. This research adopts a qualitative single-site case study research methodology with the utilization of in-depth semi-structured interviews, supported by document reviews, to understand individuals' interpretations of their experiences of how *knowing* has been acquired. The data analysis of the interviews was completed using a two-level coding approach, while the document reviews provide additional data to determine if *knowing* has been acquired.

The findings from the study shows that *knowing* can be either operational or strategic, and that different institutionalization mechanisms have different impacts on *knowing* acquisition. The study also surfaces institutionalization factors that affect the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition. Further, the study confirms

and extends the only study on *knowing* acquisition for organizational *knowing* creation, which is Cook and Brown's (1999) bridging epistemologies theoretical framework. The augmentation of their framework includes the additional components of on-the-job learning, and personal and institutionalization factors. Besides this theoretical contribution towards Cook and Brown's (1999) theory, the study also contributes towards a better understanding of institutionalization in relation to *knowing* acquisition. This addresses the gap in the extant literature by bringing together two concepts that were rarely discussed together.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The research purpose of this study stems from the prevalent assumption that human capital in the form of individual knowledge and *knowing* is a key resource for sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Campbell, Coff, & Kryscynski, 2012; Hatch & Dyer, 2004; Leonard-Barton, 1992; Todericiu & Stăniț, 2015). This thesis seeks to understand how individuals acquire *knowing* as compared to the institutionalization mechanisms put in place to support *knowing* acquisition. It explores *knowing* acquisition and the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms from the learners' and trainers' interpretations of their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms via a single-site qualitative case study research design. *Knowing*, which is demonstrated in the successful recursive actions of individuals within a specific context, is part of action and is distinct from knowledge (Cook & Brown, 1999). Knowledge is possessed and resides in the cognition of individuals, while *knowing* is expressed in the activities of individuals (Cook, 2014; McIver, Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, & Ramachandran, 2012; Swart, 2011). The above assumptions underpin much research that focused on leveraging organizational learning (Camisón & Villar-López, 2011; Dekoulou & Trivellas, 2014; Hatch & Dyer, 2004; Todericiu & Stăniț, 2015), organizational knowledge creation (Ahmad, Bosua, & Scheepers, 2014; Grant, 1996; Loureiro, Alonso, & Schiuma, 2015), knowledge management (Abdul-Jalal, Toulson, & Tweed, 2013; Andreu, Baiget, & Canals, 2008; Liao & Hu, 2007; Loureiro et al., 2015; Meihami & Meihami, 2014) and institutionalization (Brandt & Bresser, 2012; Fleck, 2007; Herrera, 2015; Reay et al., 2013; Wang, Tseng, & Yen, 2014) to transform individual knowledge and *knowing* into organizational knowledge and *knowing* for the purpose of creating and maintaining sustained competitive advantage. However, the effectiveness of these approaches to create and maintain sustained competitive advantage remains inconclusive due to the inherent difficulty of such knowledge transformation (Ahmad et al.,

2014; Blackman & Benson, 2012; Dzekashu & McCollum, 2014; Muñoz, Mosey, & Binks, 2015).

Individual knowledge and *knowing* become key resources for sustained competitive advantage when they become institutionalized knowledge and *knowing* (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Stinchcombe, 2000; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). Institutionalized knowledge and *knowing* refers to knowledge and *knowing* that become widely accepted in organizations and are embedded in systems, structures and processes (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Stinchcombe, 2000; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). In the fields of academia and practice, the function of institutionalization to transform individual learning and knowledge into organizational learning, knowledge and capability is common in organizational learning, organizational knowledge creation and knowledge management disciplines (Cook & Brown, 1999; Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999; Dalkir, 2013; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Wang et al., 2014). However, so far, most of the discussions on institutionalization have focused more on knowledge than on *knowing* (Herrera, 2015; Parker, 2011; Wang et al., 2014). The limited studies on *knowing* and institutionalization focus on *knowing* of institutionalized practices (Owen-Smith, 2011; Purvis & Purvis, 2012; Reay et al., 2013; Sieweke, 2014) rather than on how institutionalization can support individual acquisition of *knowing* that can ultimately build organizational *knowing* to create and maintain competitive advantage. This lack of understanding of whether institutionalization can support individual *knowing* acquisition and, in so doing, contribute to sustained competitive advantage is the pivotal issue for this research. The remaining sections of this chapter discuss this research problem in greater depth, the research purpose and objectives, the selected research site, the research question and the research methodology underpinning this research and an overview of this thesis.

1.1 Problematization

1.1.1 Competitive Advantage and Dynamic Capability

The key concern of organizations in institutionalizing knowledge is to create sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Competitive advantage is the organizational ability to implement value-adding strategies not currently implemented by current and potential competitors (Ahmad et al., 2014; Barney, 1991; Brandt & Bresser, 2012; Campbell et al., 2012; Su, Dhanorkar, & Linderman, 2015). Such strategies allow organizations to have an advantage over their competitors, thereby allowing organizations to achieve optimal performance and profitability in a volatile global economy (Barney, 1991). However, competitive advantage can be easily eroded in a hypercompetitive environment where competitors are actively implementing strategies to outperform one another (D'aveni, 2010). Sustained competitive advantage, on the other hand, represents a higher level of capability, where other organizations would require a greater effort and time to imitate these value-adding strategies or duplicate the benefits of these strategies (Barney, 1991; Campbell et al., 2012; Grant, 1991; Ordóñez de Pablos, 2006; Reed & DeFillippi, 1990). This translates to a prolonged period of competitive advantage for organizations (Barney, 1991; Campbell et al., 2012; Grant, 1991; Ordóñez de Pablos, 2006; Reed & DeFillippi, 1990).

Without competitive advantage, an active and financially viable organization today may be a dormant and bankrupted organization tomorrow (Prescott, 2016; Todericiu & Stăniț, 2015). Such drastic change is not uncommon and is often attributed to a lack of competitive advantage and inability of organizations to respond to the ever changing environment (Prescott, 2016; Todericiu & Stăniț, 2015). Increasingly, high-velocity environments with rapid and discontinuous change in competition, demand, technology and regulation (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois III, 1988; Jones & Mahon, 2012) have made it more difficult for

organizations to maintain sustained competitive advantage (Barreto, 2010; Su et al., 2015). Without sustained competitive advantage, organizations are likely to become obsolete in such an environment in the long run (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Barney, 1991; Campbell et al., 2012; Grant, 1991; Reed & DeFillippi, 1990; Walker, 2004).

To prevent such a plight, organizations that seek to create sustained competitive advantage in a hypercompetitive environment need to build dynamic capabilities (Garavan, Shanahan, Carbery, & Watson, 2016; Krzakiewicz, 2013; Li & Liu, 2014; Sune & Gibb, 2015; Teece & Leih, 2016; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). Dynamic capabilities are high-level and strategic activities that “enable the firm to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external resources to address and shape rapidly changing business environments” (Teece & Leih, 2016, p. 7). To carry out such activities, organizations need to be able to scan and accurately sense environmental changes (Pavlou & El Sawy, 2011; Teece et al., 1997); learn and create solutions through employees and from experience (Bingham, Heimeriks, Schijven, & Gates, 2015; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, 2007; Zollo & Winter, 2002); strategically integrate solutions into operations and processes which require organizational change (Easterby-Smith & Prieto, 2008; Felin & Powell, 2016; Sune & Gibb, 2015; Teece et al., 1997); disseminate learning throughout the organization (Easterby-Smith & Prieto, 2008); and eventually routinize the learning into organizational processes (Easterby-Smith & Prieto, 2008). The eventual change in organizational processes leads to changes in organizational capabilities and resources (Easterby-Smith & Prieto, 2008). However, dynamic capabilities alone and in themselves do not create sustained competitive advantage (Prescott, 2016). Dynamic capabilities can only create competitive advantage by having an impact on organizational capabilities and resources. Sustained competitive advantage can be achieved when the dynamic capabilities result in the creation of resources that are valuable, rare,

difficult to imitate, and not easily substitutable (Barney, 1991; Campbell et al., 2012; Grant, 1991; Ordóñez de Pablos, 2006; Reed & DeFillippi, 1990). The next section discusses how knowledge and *knowing* are such resources to build dynamic capabilities.

1.1.2 Knowledge and *Knowing* as Resources for Competitive Advantage

Numerous studies suggest that knowledge and *knowing* of individuals are organizational resources that can help organizations achieve sustained competitive advantage (Camisón & Villar-López, 2011; Campbell et al., 2012; Coff, 1997; Hatch & Dyer, 2004; Kor & Leblebici, 2005; Lee, Chen, & Chen, 2015; Leonard-Barton, 1992; Loureiro et al., 2015; Todericiu & Stăniț, 2015). Knowledge can be broadly understood as something that an individual possesses in his or her cognition (Cook & Brown, 1999). *Knowing*, on the other hand, can be described as “the coordinated activities of individuals and groups in doing their ‘real work’ as it is informed by a particular organizational or group context” (Cook & Brown, 1999, p. 386–387). Both knowledge and *knowing* are core to dynamic capabilities and key resources for sustained competitive advantage. The learning and transformation of knowledge and *knowing* into organizational capabilities is the core function of dynamic capabilities (Garavan et al., 2016; Helfat & Peteraf, 2015; Krzakiewicz, 2013). There are, however, some inherent challenges, to this transformation that the next section discusses.

1.1.3 Inherent Challenges of Knowledge and *Knowing*

The use of knowledge and *knowing* to build sustained competitive advantage faces two inherent challenges of knowledge leakiness and stickiness. Knowledge leakiness refers to the propensity for knowledge to be taken away from organizations when the individuals who possess the knowledge leave organizations (Aime, Johnson, Ridge, & Hill, 2010). Knowledge stickiness refers to the tendency for knowledge to reside and remain within individuals and

not with organizations (Brown & Duguid, 1998). The ensuing paragraphs discuss these two challenges in greater details.

For organizations to fully leverage knowledge and *knowing* as resources for competitive advantage, the first challenge of knowledge leakiness would need to be reduced or minimized (Ahmad et al., 2014; Barney, 1991; Coff, 1997; Rumelt, 1997). When individuals leave organizations, pertinent knowledge and *knowing* possessed by these individuals is leaked to competitors that hire these individuals, resulting in organizations losing their competitive advantage (Aime et al., 2010). To prevent knowledge leakiness, organizations have attempted to constrain employee mobility to prevent individuals from joining competitors (Campbell et al., 2012). However, such an intent to limit employee mobility has little impact on the prevention of knowledge leakiness, since employee mobility is an undeniable fact in a global economy (Campbell et al., 2012; Somaya & Williamson, 2011).

This challenge of knowledge leakiness has led to an increasing interest in building firm-specific organizational knowledge and *knowing* (Ahmad et al., 2014; Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Campbell et al., 2012; Conner, 1991; Leonard-Barton, 1992). When knowledge and *knowing* become institutionalized, such knowledge and *knowing* are retained by organizations even when individuals leave organizations (Ahmad et al., 2014; Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Campbell et al., 2012; Conner, 1991; Leonard-Barton, 1992). According to Campbell et al. (2012), knowledge and *knowing* can be either firm-specific or generic. Firm-specific knowledge and *knowing* are specific to individual organizations and are likely to have limited applicability outside the organization (Campbell et al., 2012). On the other hand, generic knowledge and *knowing* that leave the organization with the individuals can

remain useful and valuable in other organizations (Campbell et al., 2012; Wang, He, & Mahoney, 2009; Zhou, Siu, & Wang, 2010). Individuals may leave the organization and take firm-specific knowledge and *knowing* with them, but they may be unable to perfectly and completely deploy such knowledge and *knowing* in their new organizations (He & Wong, 2004; Wang et al., 2009). Hence, such knowledge and *knowing* may have less value in the new organizations as compared to their original organizations, where such knowledge and *knowing* are valuable (He & Wong, 2004; Wang et al., 2009). Recent research by Aime et al. (2010) illustrates that the institutionalization of complex firm-specific routines (which are similar to firm-specific *knowing*) are more stable and less leaky as compared to generic *knowing*.

While firm-specific knowledge and *knowing* has greater value to organizations as compared to generic knowledge and *knowing*, both types of knowledge and *knowing* are necessary for organizations to create sustained competitive advantage (Andreu et al., 2008; Campbell et al., 2012; He & Wong, 2004; Wang et al., 2009). Organizations need to encourage and support generic and firm-specific knowledge and *knowing* sharing across individuals via numerous platforms. These platforms could be information systems to capture, store and manage institutionalized knowledge; communities of practice to share best practices; and operating manuals to share standard practices (Andreu et al., 2008; Leonard-Barton, 1992). These, in turn, enable organizations to retain knowledge and *knowing* and create organizational knowledge and *knowing*, which enables organizations to retain or create sustained competitive advantage (Andreu et al., 2008; Campbell et al., 2012; He & Wong, 2004; Wang et al., 2009).

Despite the best intentions behind knowledge and *knowing* sharing, organizations face the second inherent challenge of stickiness in knowledge and *knowing* (Ahmad et al., 2014; Blackman & Benson, 2012; Dzekashu & McCollum, 2014; Muñoz et al., 2015). Both knowledge and *knowing* are personal (Polanyi, 1961) and sticky to individuals (Blackman & Benson, 2012; Schmidt, 2012; Szulanski, 1996, 2000). When individuals share knowledge and *knowing* with others, they nonetheless still retain the knowledge and *knowing*; but, when they leave organizations, they take their knowledge and *knowing* with them (Aime et al., 2010). When this happens, organizations can potentially lose their competitive advantage (Aime et al., 2010). On the other hand, when individuals learn new knowledge and *knowing*, the new knowledge and *knowing* are more likely to stick and remain with them and not with their organizations (Brown & Duguid, 1998; Szulanski, 2000). Unless organizations can transform individual knowledge and *knowing* into organizational knowledge and *knowing*, the aim of leveraging individual knowledge and *knowing* to support sustained competitive advantage may not be achieved (Campbell et al., 2012; Leonard-Barton, 1992).

This quality of stickiness in innate knowledge and *knowing* thus becomes a prevalent challenge that organizations seek to overcome to create and build organizational knowledge and *knowing* (Crane & Bontis, 2014; Dzekashu & McCollum, 2014; Mkhize, 2015). Organizations have attempted to adopt organizational learning approaches, to encourage and facilitate sharing and learning of knowledge and *knowing*, such as multi-disciplinary action teams, action learning projects, after-action reviews, communities of practice, internal knowledge sharing, mentorships, buddy systems, apprenticeships and organizational academies (Orhun & Hopple, 2008; Szulanski, Winter, & Cappetta, 2000). Organizations have also invested in knowledge management platforms to build and store organizational knowledge, such as information management systems and corporate wikis (Bhatt, Emdad,

Roberts, & Grover, 2010; Prescott, 2016; Sousa, Aparicio, & Costa, 2010; Yan, Pfaff, Hasan, Willis, & Meloche, 2009). All these approaches and methods are institutionalization mechanisms that organizations adopt to bring about learning and sharing of individual knowledge and *knowing* for the creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing*.

Despite these organizational efforts to create and build organizational knowledge and *knowing*, what remains inconclusive is the effectiveness of these institutionalization mechanisms in helping individuals to acquire new *knowing* and create organizational *knowing*. This is evidenced by the extant research studies that have been conducted over several decades on organizational learning (Argote, 2013; Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Berends & Lammers, 2010; Jenkin, 2013; Shahin & Zeinali, 2010), organizational knowledge creation (Brătianu & Orzea, 2010; Dzekashu & McCollum, 2014; Mkhize, 2015; Obrenovic & Qin, 2014; von Krogh, Nonaka, & Rechsteiner, 2012; Wang, Su, & Yang, 2011) and knowledge management tools such as Web 2.0 technologies (Levy, 2009; Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009; Rollett, Lux, Strohmaier, Dosinger, & Tochtermann, 2007; Yan et al., 2009), communities of practice (Duguid, 2005; Iaquinto, Ison, & Faggian, 2011; Kakavelakis, 2010; Orhun & Hopple, 2008; Zboralski, 2009) and knowledge management systems (Cassai, 2013; Evans, Dalkir, & Bidian, 2014; Grant, 2011; McIver, Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, & Ramachandran, 2013; Stanciu, Daniasa, Tomita, & Stuparu, 2011), and institutionalization (Brandt & Bresser, 2012; Fleck, 2007; Herrera, 2015; Reay et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2014). These research studies focus on the traditional notion of knowledge that is possessed, rather than *knowing* that is practiced by individuals (Herrera, 2015; Parker, 2011; Wang et al., 2014), which is equally critical for sustained competitive advantage (Leonard-Barton, 1992). Furthermore, the on-going interest in these areas illustrates that there are unaddressed gaps in these institutionalization mechanisms to help individuals acquire new *knowing*. If *knowing* is

to be considered as equally key for sustained competitive advantage, then more studies on *knowing* creation will be pertinent to understanding how *knowing* can be an effective resource for sustained competitive advantage.

Similar to the issue of limited research studies on individual *knowing*, few organizational learning and knowledge studies examine the management and harnessing of individual *knowing* into organizational *knowing* (Blackman & Sadler-Smith, 2009; Bouty & Gomez, 2010; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Gherardi, 2001; Voronov, 2008). Even recent research studies focus on knowledge capturing and sharing to create organizational knowledge (Dzekashu & McCollum, 2014; Mkhize, 2015; Obrenovic & Qin, 2014), rather than on *knowing* creation. Most studies on organizational learning, organizational knowledge creation and knowledge management generally assume the macro organizational perspective such as structure, culture and competitive advantage (Abdul-Jalal et al., 2013; Argote, 2013; Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Brătianu, 2013; Brătianu & Orzea, 2010; Donate & Guadamillas, 2011; Rai, 2011; Vera, Crossan, & Apaydin, 2011) but only tangential consideration has been given as to how organizations acquire *knowing*. As organizational *knowing* stems from individual *knowing*, understanding of how individuals learn and acquire *knowing*, which is the purpose of this thesis, is pertinent.

The following paragraphs discuss other current issues facing *knowing* acquisition that further compound the challenges of knowledge and *knowing* stickiness. Firstly, learning new knowledge does not necessarily lead to new *knowing* if the individual does not act on the knowledge (Cook, 2014; Rennstam & Ashcraft, 2014). Secondly, as discussed in earlier paragraphs, while organizations could put in place many institutionalization mechanisms to help individuals learn organizational knowledge and *knowing*, the effectiveness of these

mechanisms to support individual acquisition of *knowing* remains inconclusive. Hence, there is a need to understand how individuals acquire *knowing* as compared to institutionalization mechanisms. Thirdly, individual knowledge and *knowing* may not necessarily lead to organizational knowledge and *knowing*, since knowledge and *knowing* are sticky and personal (Blackman & Benson, 2012; Polanyi, 1983). Finally, as there are limited models that holistically address the creation of personal and organizational knowledge and *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999; Simeonova, 2014), there is a critical need for available theories in this area of *knowing* acquisition.

These problems lead to a need for more in-depth understanding of effective institutionalization mechanisms to support individual *knowing* acquisition. Greater clarity in this area is pertinent, as *knowing* is considered to be a key resource for sustained competitive advantage that organizations seek to create and retain (Campbell et al., 2012; Leonard-Barton, 1992). Furthermore, the limited discussion on the role of institutionalization in facilitating individual *knowing* acquisition (Owen-Smith, 2011; Purvis & Purvis, 2012; Reay et al., 2013; Sieweke, 2014) provides another impetus for this thesis to study institutionalization and *knowing*. The next section discusses the research purpose of this thesis in the study of the two concepts of institutionalization and *knowing*.

1.2 Research Purpose and Research Objectives

The main purpose of this single-site case study is to understand how individuals interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of individual *knowing*. The purpose is to address the lack of conclusive understanding of how individuals acquire *knowing* and whether institutionalization

mechanisms are effective to help individuals acquire *knowing*. The following paragraphs discuss how this research purpose is addressed.

Firstly, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms to support individual acquisition of *knowing*. Secondly, the study seeks to determine the factors affecting the ability of institutionalization mechanisms to support acquisition of *knowing*. Thirdly, this research study examines *knowing* acquisition through the theoretical lens of knowledge and *knowing* creation proposed by Cook and Brown (1999) and contributes to this theory. Fourthly, besides engendering better understanding of Cook and Brown's (1999) theory, this research also seeks to determine the factors, not articulated by Cook and Brown (1999), that influence the dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing* for *knowing* acquisition and organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation. The research purpose and four research objectives, when adequately addressed, will lead to greater understanding of *knowing* acquisition and the use of institutionalization mechanisms to facilitate *knowing* acquisition at the individual and organizational levels.

As earlier opined, most theories focus on knowledge rather than *knowing* acquisition in organizations (Cook, 2014; McIver et al., 2012; Rennstam & Ashcraft, 2014). While the researcher has considered other theories and models, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, Cook and Brown's (1999) theory has been selected to support this research study for two reasons. Firstly, Cook and Brown's (1999) theory is the only theory that articulates both knowledge and *knowing* acquisition at the individual and organizational levels (Simeonova, 2014). Secondly, Cook and Brown (1999) provide the only theory that gives equal emphasis to both knowledge and *knowing* (Simeonova, 2014) in terms of their relationship to one another and their impact on organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation. However,

despite it being widely discussed and theoretically applied (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Carlile, 2002; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Orlikowski, 2002; Simeonova, 2014), Cook and Brown's (1999) theory has not been empirically tested. For this precise reason, Cook and Brown's (1999) theory has been included in this research for the purpose of testing for empirical evidence.

1.3 Research Setting: Human Resources (HR) Department

To achieve the above research purpose and objectives, the researcher has selected an HR department of a large engineering organization with more than 5,000 staff, based in Singapore as the research site. The HR department has been selected as the research site as it has put in place three mechanisms designed to create institutionalization. Anecdotal evidence prior to the research indicated that the interventions had helped selected HR personnel learn and acquire specific HR *knowing*. More details of the research site are discussed below.

The HR department adopted a Human Resource Business Partners (HRBPs) model, where the department dedicated internal HRBPs to provide customized HR solutions to other business units outside of the HR department but in the organization. The HRBPs were supported by several Centres of Excellence (CoEs), which are the custodians of various HR policies and functions. To help every new HRBP acquire the knowledge and *knowing* needed to perform their HRBP role, the department implemented some institutionalization mechanisms. The institutionalization mechanisms were: the sharing of institutionalized knowledge through the development and distribution of a HRBP Training Manual, the implementation of a HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System with more senior HRBPs, and a HR Specialists Advisory Support team to help the HRBPs understand the deeper rationale of the HR policies. These mechanisms were decided by the HR Director and deputy directors to

help the HRBPs learn the standard procedures and institutionalized policies, and have easy access to help from other HR colleagues to address HR related issues and manage unique cases.

The HRBPs' ability to deliver HR services to the business units demonstrates that they have acquired the firm-specific knowledge and *knowing*. This suggests that the adoption of these institutionalization mechanisms was an apparent success to help these individuals acquired HRBP knowledge and *knowing*. Their success was ascertained through positive feedback from the employees in the business units via a HR Customer Satisfaction Survey in 2014. The Report on the HR Customer Satisfaction Survey illustrated that they had acquired the required knowledge and *knowing*. Thus, this organization and this HR department represents an appropriate case study site to investigate whether the institutionalization mechanisms had a role to play in the HRBPs' acquisition of knowledge and *knowing*.

1.4 Research Question and Sub-questions

With this research site in mind, the primary research question for this study is:

“How do individuals interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in the supporting of acquisition of individual *knowing*?”

The individuals included in this research are the HRBPs, who were the learners, and the HR Specialists, who were the trainers. The HRBPs, who were the learners, would be best placed to help the researcher understand their interpretation of their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms to support their acquisition of *knowing*. The HR Specialists, with their domain knowledge and *knowing* in specific HR areas, were deemed to be the most suitable to help the researcher understand their interpretations of their experiences with the

HRBPs who experienced the institutionalization mechanisms and acquired the required *knowing* with the support of the HR Specialists. Specifically, the researcher would like to understand their views on whether the HRBPs have acquired the relevant *knowing* in the former's domain areas. In addition, the HR Specialists were the trainers and developers of the HRBP Training Manual, and were also a part of the HR Specialists Advisory Support team. These were two of the institutionalization mechanisms put in place in the HR department to support the acquisition of HRBP *knowing* and so would be able to share their experiences on how the HRBPs have responded to the institutionalization mechanisms and if the HRBPs have gained the required *knowing*.

Having shed light on why the respondents were suitable to address the primary research question that was stated earlier, this study is designed to find the answers to five sub-questions:

- i. How did the learners interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?
- ii. How did the trainers view the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?
- iii. How did the learners interpret their experiences in their acquisition of *knowing*?
- iv. How did the trainers view the learners' acquisition of *knowing*?
- v. What factors affected the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition?

In addressing these five sub-questions, the researcher gained insights into how individuals interpreted their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms and the ways they acquired *knowing*. Clarity on the role and effectiveness of institutionalization

mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition were also obtained. Furthermore, these questions enabled the researcher to identify factors relevant to help individuals acquire *knowing* but which otherwise were not considered by practitioners and academia in organizational learning, organizational knowledge creation, and knowledge management fields.

1.5 Research Approach

To answer the research primary question and five sub-questions, this study adopts an exploratory qualitative single-site case study research method with in-depth interviews as a primary data collection method and document review as a secondary data collection method. The sample for the in-depth interviews data collection comprises three HR Specialists who conducted the training to share their expertise with the HRBPs, and 13 HRBPs (of which two were previously HR Specialists who also helped to train the first batch of HRBPs). Of the 16 total population at that time where the research data collection was to take place, 15 agreed to be interviewed, and their interviews were transcribed. Thereafter, first- and second-cycle coding was carried out to analyse the transcripts. In addition to the interviews, the Report on HR Customer Satisfaction Survey was reviewed and it provided evidence that knowledge and *knowing* were acquired by the HRBPs.

1.6 Thesis Overview

Having briefly covered the research problem, questions, setting and approach, the remaining chapters of this thesis cover the following areas:

- i. Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Following the research focus on institutionalization and acquisition of *knowing*, Chapter 2 reviews the literature relating to both topics. As institutionalization is a common component for transforming individual learning and knowledge into organizational learning

and organizational knowledge, these two concepts are also examined in the review. At the same time, since institutionalization is closely related to knowledge management, the review also examines the latter concept. The literature review on *knowing* is presented within a review of adult learning, since the acquisition of individual *knowing* suggests that learning has taken place. Finally, this chapter describes the theoretical framework advocated by Cook and Brown (1999), which this research uses to study the data, and explains the reasons for choosing this theory.

ii. Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design

This chapter presents the research methodology and methods adopted to study the research problem of this study. It discusses the premise for the research questions, the selection of a qualitative inquiry for the research paradigm, and the social constructivist philosophical worldview underpinning this research study. The chapter also discusses the basis for adopting a single-site case study and the choice of site. For the sampling method, all the HR Specialists, who were trainers, and all the HRBPs who were the learners, were invited to participate in the research. In addition, the chapter addresses the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews of the HRBPs and HR Specialists, triangulated with document reviews, for the data collection and corresponding procedures. Finally, this chapter explains the two-level coding analysis adopted for the data analysis of the in-depth interviews, and the various research considerations to ensure that issues around insider-research, reliability, consistency, ethics and researcher bias are adequately addressed.

iii. Chapter 4: Data Analysis

The context of the research study and a detailed description on the use of two levels of coding analysis for data analysis are discussed in this chapter. Through the coding analysis, a

total of 17 themes surfaced from the 20 deductive codes (derived from the theoretical framework) and 17 inductive codes (surfaced from the data). Out of these 17 themes, 11 themes relate to *knowing* acquisition through institutionalization mechanisms and six themes relate to how the individuals acquired new *knowing* using the lens of Cook and Brown's (1999) theory on knowledge and *knowing* creation. This chapter also discusses the evidence from the document reviews of the Report on Customer Satisfaction Survey and the HRBP Training Manual, which confirmed the acquisition of *knowing* by the HRPBs.

iv. Chapter 5: Findings

Chapter 5 discusses how the 17 themes have been distilled into nine findings and how these nine findings address the research question and objectives stated in Chapter 1. Findings 1 to 3 provide evidence that institutionalization mechanisms can support individual *knowing* acquisition, even though each mechanism has a different degree of effectiveness. The findings also show that there are different types of *knowing*, where each type has a different impact on competitive advantage. Findings 4 to 6 identify central maintenance and renewal of institutionalized knowledge, degree of institutionalization, and institutional norms as factors that affect the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition. Findings 7 and 8 provide support for Cook and Brown's (1999) theory on the role of the dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing* to create new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*. The two findings also extend Cook and Brown's (1999) theory by surfacing the role of on-the-job learning as an additional component for *knowing* acquisition. Finally, finding 9 identifies the degree of institutionalization, institutional norms, learners' motivations, learners' attitudes and personal attributes, and on-the-job learning as factors that affect the dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing* towards *knowing* acquisition.

v. Chapter 6: Conclusion

The final chapter discusses the contributions of the research. The key contribution of this research is the extension of Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework on the dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing* to create new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*. The augmentations are: a clearer understanding of the dynamic interactions, inclusion of on-the-job learning as a critical component, and personal and institutionalization factors for new *knowing* to occur. With regard to its contribution to understanding institutionalization, the research provides greater clarity on how individuals act and respond to institutionalized logics and the role of institutionalization to create organizational knowledge for sustained competitive advantage. Chapter 6 also discusses the implications for practice, and the limitations and recommendations for future research.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter identifies that *knowing*, as a key resource for sustained competitive advantage, should be studied in relation to its acquisition, particularly within the context of an organizational intent to create and share organizational *knowing* through institutionalization mechanisms. Sustained competitive advantage, while critical for organizations' long-term viability, is difficult to acquire or build. To build sustained competitive advantage, organizations need strong dynamic capabilities that allow them to sense, learn, integrate, coordinate and routinize processes into transformed organizational capabilities and resources. Only when organizations create resources with attributes that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and not easy to be substituted, will they create sustained competitive advantage. Both generic and firm-specific individual knowledge and *knowing* not only exemplify the above four attributes of this important organizational resource; they are also core to dynamic capabilities. However, both knowledge and *knowing* face the inherent challenges of

knowledge leakiness and stickiness. To overcome these challenges, organizations and researchers have looked into organizational learning, organizational knowledge creation, knowledge management and institutionalization, but with little success. Amongst these four approaches, institutionalization is a common element in the other three approaches, as it pertains to the institutionalization of individual knowledge and *knowing* so that it becomes organizational knowledge and *knowing*. However, there has been limited discussion as to the effectiveness of institutionalization to support individual *knowing* acquisition. Hence, this research seeks to study individuals' interpretations of their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms to facilitate their acquisition of *knowing*.

With the establishment of the research problem, this chapter has described the research purpose and objectives, research setting, research approach and thesis overview. The next chapter will discuss the literature review and introduce the theoretical framework of Cook and Brown (1999) that will be used to study *knowing* acquisition.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As discussed in the previous chapter, the research question is “How do individuals interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?” To address the research question, this chapter reviews the literature on institutionalization and *knowing*. ‘Institutionalization mechanisms’ refers to mechanisms put in place to institutionalize or support the institutionalization of knowledge in the organization towards mass acceptance and application (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996; Zucker, 1983). *Knowing*, a verbal noun, can be described as “the coordinated activities of individuals and groups in doing their ‘real work’ as it is informed by a particular organizational or group context” and it involves recursive actions or skilled practice exhibited by individuals (Cook & Brown, 1999, p. 386-387); that is, the display of their expertise and competence. To illustrate, *knowing* refers to the successful recursive actions carried out by individuals that demonstrate their expertise and competence in the activity. The discussion on institutionalization below will address the definitions and views of institutionalization, neoinstitutionalism and institutionalization, and characteristics and objectives of institutionalization.

As institutionalization is a common component of transforming individual learning and knowledge into organizational learning and organizational knowledge, these two concepts are also examined in the review. At the same time, since institutionalization is closely related to knowledge management, the review also examines the latter concept. The review on institutionalization hence will include a review of the concept in relation to organizational learning, organizational knowledge and knowledge management.

The review of *knowing* is presented within the review of learning since the acquisition of individual *knowing* suggests that learning has taken place. Furthermore, since this research

seeks to understand individual acquisition of *knowing*, it is appropriate to understand how individuals learn and what gives evidence that learning has taken place. Another concept, knowledge, is also discussed in this review of learning given its close connection with *knowing* and that knowledge acquisition is another evidence of learning. Knowledge can be understood as something that an individual possesses in his or her cognition (Cook & Brown, 1999). As individuals interact with the world, they experience new inputs that they absorb, reject or adapt into their cognition, thus learning new knowledge (Merriam et al., 2012). When individuals interact with their environment, they may modify their behaviours and actions (Cook & Brown, 1999), thus learning new *knowing* or new skilful actions. To further explain how individuals acquire *knowing*, this chapter describes Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework that underpins this research. This theoretical framework is adopted for three reasons: first, it is the only theory that studies *knowing* acquisition; second, it gives equal importance to both knowledge and *knowing*; and third, it examines how organizational knowledge and *knowing* are created (Simeonova, 2014). Hence, this theoretical framework is appropriate for addressing the research problem addressed by this thesis and study how individuals acquire *knowing*.

In this review, the search terms pertaining to 'institutionalization' include 'institutionalization', 'institutional', 'institution', 'institutionalism', 'organizational learning', 'knowledge management' and 'organizational knowledge'. The search terms for 'learning' include 'learning', 'knowledge', 'knowing' and 'practice'.

The literature review on institutionalization covers the definitions and views of institutionalization, the theoretical worldview of neoinstitutionalism that surrounds institutionalization, and the characteristics and objectives of institutionalization. The literature

review also covers organizational learning, organizational knowledge creation and knowledge management in relation to institutionalization. Each section includes the definitions of the avenues and the key models or frameworks to facilitate a better understanding of these approaches. The final component of the literature review focuses on learning, which includes the definitions of learning, assumptions of adult learning, and knowledge and *knowing* as evidences of learning. The chapter closes with the introduction of Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework, which addresses how individuals acquire *knowing* through the dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing*.

2.1 Institutionalization

Institutionalization involves having adequate support for processes and structures to bring about organizational-wide acceptance of social processes and practices (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996; Zucker, 1983). This section defines institutionalization, clarifies views of institutionalization, and discusses institutionalization in the light of neoinstitutionalism. It also presents the various characteristics of institutionalization and relates the objectives of institutionalization to helping organizations to create sustained competitive advantage.

2.1.1 Definitions of Institutionalization

Amongst the various definitions of institutionalization are those that focus on processes. Institutionalization has been generally understood as an occurrence where a process or practice is accepted beyond a few individuals to become a widely accepted organizational process or practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Stinchcombe, 2000; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). Institutionalization has been classically defined as “the processes by which social process, obligations or actualities come to take on a rule- like status in social thought and action” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341). Scott (1987) defines institutionalization as a

“social process by which individuals come to accept a shared definition of social reality” (p. 496). Similarly, Zucker (1977) defines it as “the process by which individual actors transmit what is socially defined as real” (p. 728). These definitions show that institutionalization enables social processes, obligations and practices to be shared and accepted by individuals to take on a collective, rule-like status within organizations (Moseley & Charnley, 2014; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996; Zucker, 1983).

Besides these process-centric definitions, there are other definitions that position institutionalization as a property where processes become routines within organizations (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). For instance, institutionalization has been defined as “reciprocal typifications of habitual actions of types of actors” (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 72). Similarly, Zucker (1987) defines institutionalization as “(a) a rule-like, social fact quality of an organized pattern of action, and (b) an embedding in formal structures, such as form aspects of organizations that are not tied to particular actors or situations” (Zucker, 1987, p. 444). This definition views institutionalization as a property that defines meaning and sets boundaries for actions (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983).

Whether it is process- or property-centric, institutionalization implies historicity, control and objectivity (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Institutionalization implies historicity, as that which has been institutionalized becomes part of the historical context of the organization (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Institutionalization also implies control, as that which has been institutionalized achieves a strong degree of control or requirement for consistency within the organization (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Institutionalization is experienced as an objective reality, albeit one constructed by human activity (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). The implied historicity, control and objectivity of institutionalization are

set within the organizational context, which suggests a close connection between institutionalization and organizations. This close connection is also noted by Selznick (2011), who argues that institutionalization is a key mechanism to form the character and social structure of organizations. The resulting creation and reproduction of the social structure of organizations is known as structuration theory (Giddens, 1984). According to Giddens (1984), social structure and agency are mutually constitutive and required for social organization. Structuration theory and institutionalization are closely related but are different concepts (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). While structuration theory focuses on the impact of structure in organizations both as a medium and an outcome of practice (Coad & Herbert, 2009; Giddens, 1984), institutionalization is a mechanism that forms the social structure of organizations (Selznick, 2011). Similar to *knowing*, the character and social structure of organizations are action- and actor-oriented (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Scott, 1987; Zucker, 1977). This suggests a possible relationship between institutionalization and *knowing*, which supports the intent of this research. The focus of this research is to study the actors and how they acquired the required *knowing* through institutionalization mechanisms.

2.1.2 Views on Institutionalization

The definitions above suggest that institutionalization can be viewed as either a process or as a property (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996; Zucker, 1977). As a process, institutionalization is a means that results in actions and processes achieving a rule-like status and acceptance in organizations (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996; Zucker, 1977). As a process, institutionalization occurs at both the macro and micro levels (Moseley & Charnley, 2014). At the macro level, institutionalization impacts on organizational structure and systems. At the micro level, institutionalization impacts on the agency or actions of individuals (Moseley

& Charnley, 2014). From the property perspective, institutionalization refers to an eventual consistency in habitual actions of individuals in organizations (Moseley & Charnley, 2014). Such consistency of habitual actions across individuals in organizations suggests the presence of “taken-for-grantedness” and “legitimacy” elements (Zucker, 1977). Since *knowing* is part of action and is expressed in the activities of the individuals (Cook, 2014; McIver et al., 2012; Swart, 2011), we can infer that a consistency in the habitual actions of an individual represents the acquisition of individual *knowing*. To extrapolate further, when multiple individuals demonstrate consistent habitual actions as a result of institutionalization, group or organizational *knowing* can be assumed to have occurred. Hence, since both views on institutionalization have a common emphasis on individuals and agency which is core to *knowing*, it can be inferred that both institutionalization and *knowing* impact each other and should be studied together.

2.1.3 Neoinstitutionalism and Institutionalization

Given that both views on institutionalization focus on actors and agency, which is sociological in nature, it is pertinent to discuss the relationship between neoinstitutionalism and institutionalization. Neoinstitutionalism is a theory that adopts a sociological view of institutions (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010) and emphasizes the role of actions and actors in forming the character and social structure of institutions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Scott, 1987; Zucker, 1977). According to neoinstitutionalism proponents, the institutionalization of a practice takes place because the practice has attained social legitimacy in the organization (Hall, 1996). This suggests that the practice has been shared and accepted collectively. In addition, this worldview asserts the emergence of institution as context- and action-specific (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hall, 1996), where individuals are knowledgeable and routinely act on their knowledge (Hay &

Wincott, 1998). The institutionalization of practice suggests that new organizational *knowing* has been created. From this inference, it appears that *knowing* and institutionalization are closely connected where the individual acquisition of *knowing* relating to a practice and the creation of organizational *knowing* can be supported by institutionalization.

Neoinstitutionalism, in its infancy stage of development, recognizes organizational behaviour as “merely the sum of individual actions” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 14). However, in recent decades, institutional studies began to develop a more macro perspective, with more measurables such as structure, organizational dynamics and forms of cognition (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). At the same time, micro aspects such as tacit elements of values, norms and attitudes have been gradually losing their value in institutionalism research. Addressing this trend, Greenwood, Hining and Whetten (2014) agree that neo-institutionalists’ studies generally focus on the act of adoption of particular structures or practices rather than how institutionalized processes affect actual behaviour, which was the original core of institutional studies. This trend is likely due to the notion that such micro aspects are less tangible and measurable, resulting in studies where the results were less clear (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), while macro aspects such as organizational structure provide interesting studies to understand complex organizations (Greenwood et al., 2014).

As the concept of neoinstitutionalism has developed in recent years, the shift towards macro aspects has met with some opposition. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) advocate for a move away from the purposeful segregation of old and new neoinstitutionalism. They argue that any macrosociology should be underpinned by microsociology, such as individual values, norms and actions, for a more complete understanding of institutions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Other neo-institutionalists also advocate for future institutional studies to

incorporate micro-elements, such as the essence of organizational change itself (Suddaby, 2010), how the individuals influence and act on institutionalized logics (Greenwood et al., 2014; Meyer, 2008; Suddaby, 2010; Wooten & Hoffman, 2008), and sources of agency (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). Institutionalized logics is defined as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space and provide meaning to their social reality” (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008, p. 101).

Despite the recent call for research that conducts institutional studies that emphasize both macro- and micro-elements, only a limited number of researchers have responded (Greenwood et al., 2014; Suddaby, 2010). One of these studies was conducted by Barley and Tolbert (1997), and it linked macro- and micro-elements of agency, context and institution. The authors posited that institutions are encoded in the actors’ stocks of practical knowledge and that “institutions are formed, reproduced, and modified through an interplay of action and structure” (Barley & Tolbert, 1997, p. 94). In another study, Smets, Morris and Greenwood (2012) developed a model of practice-driven institutional change that links institutional logics, organizations and practices. More recently, Wang, Tseng and Yen (2014) examined the relationship between institutional norms and knowledge sharing. Sieweke (2014), in a separate study, developed a framework to explain how actors’ imitations of actions support institutionalization of actions. These few institutional studies suggest a possible connection between institutionalization and *knowing* (which is similar to practical knowledge, practices and actions). Furthermore, this call to study both macro- and micro-elements can potentially be addressed by this study, which examines the role of institutionalization, a macro-element, on *knowing* acquisition, a micro-element.

2.1.4 Characteristics of Institutionalization

Since actors and agency influence institutionalization as advocated by neoinstitutionalists (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Sieweke, 2014), it is important to understand the characteristics of institutionalization through the lens of actors and agency. Institutionalization has four main characteristics: degree of institutionalization, legitimacy, taken-for-grantedness and non-permanence. The first characteristic of institutionalization is that there are different degrees of institutionalization (Owen-Smith, 2011; Zucker, 1977). Processes with a higher degree of institutionalization are more well entrenched and practiced in organizations, while processes with a lower degree of institutionalization are less consistently practiced in organizations (Owen-Smith, 2011; Zucker, 1977). According to Zucker (1977), the degree of institutionalization is dependent on exteriority and objectivity of the act. Exteriority refers to an act where subjective understanding of the act is transformed as intersubjective understanding, such that the act is similarly understood within a larger external context (Zucker, 1977). An objective act, on the other hand, refers to an act that is potentially repeatable by others while retaining a common understanding of the act (Zucker, 1977). For example, an act that can be understood within both a smaller and larger external context and repeated by others, while retaining the same understanding, would have a higher degree of institutionalization. The exteriority and objectivity of an act is in turn dependent on the context where the act is performed and the role played by the actor who is leading the institutionalization (Zucker, 1977). Extending Zucker's (1977) position, Moseley and Charnley (2014) argue that a mixture of large-scale institutional dynamics and the interpretation of these dynamics by the actors implementing the institutionalized changes within their operating contexts drive the degree of institutionalization. These large-scale institutional dynamics are (1) pressures from 'above' vis-à-vis the hierarchy of which these actors are a part, (2) the external socio-political, economic and other conditions and context

facing these actors and (3) the internal value system and priority of the actors (Moseley & Charnley, 2014). These factors influence the degree of institutionalization within organizations, which in turn may potentially impact on how individuals acquire *knowing* through institutionalization.

The second characteristic of institutionalization is legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Legitimacy has been classically viewed as a process where comprehension of ‘how things could be done’ deepens and crystallizes into ‘how things are done here’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Once comprehension has transformed into accepted norms, the practice assumes a higher moral force that is less vulnerable to social interventions (Colyvas & Powell, 2006). Suchman (1995) defines legitimacy clearly as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (p. 574). Legitimacy reflects persistence as legitimated actions that become almost self-replicating and perpetuated in organizations. Embedded in this persistence of institutionalization is both *knowing* and tacit knowledge, since the former is found in actions (Cook & Brown, 1999) and the latter is found in the socially constructed systems of tacit norms, values and beliefs. This further supports the notion that institutionalization and *knowing* are possibly connected.

The third characteristic of institutionalization is taken-for-grantedness (Colyvas & Powell, 2006). Taken-for-grantedness is viewed as having taken place when practices become objectified (Berger & Luckmann, 1991), standardized and followed as if they were written in a procedural manual (Jepperson, 1991), and an expected deliverable from individuals (March & Olsen, 2010). Once taken-for-grantedness has occurred, actions become institutionalized

practices via either documentation or an unspoken, agreed way of doing things (Colyvas & Powell, 2006). However, taken-for-grantedness does not necessarily equate with acceptance by individuals (Colyvas & Powell, 2006). Certain practices that are mandated by organizations for compliance may be followed laboriously but with great dissonance in organizations (Colyvas & Powell, 2006). Hence, taken-for-grantedness and legitimacy (acceptance) may not necessarily take place together or follow the same path (Colyvas & Powell, 2006). Notwithstanding this possible divergence from legitimacy, taken-for-grantedness can have a similar quality of persistence as the former. Practices that assume a taken-for-granted quality would be able to persist in organizations until they become obsolete and are replaced by alternative practices. This suggests that *knowing*, found in practices, can be institutionalized to become organizational *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999).

Finally, institutionalization is not permanent and can be replaced (Owen-Smith, 2011; Zucker, 1977). Since pressures from ‘above’, external conditions, internal value systems and priority of actors are subject to changes (Moseley & Charnley, 2014), it is also natural that institutionalization is largely not permanent. While the greater the degree of institutionalization leads to a greater cultural persistence of institutionalized practices (Zucker, 1977), any change in corporate direction can potentially lead to a deinstitutionalization of these practices (Lanzara & Patriotta, 2007; Sieweke, 2014). Deinstitutionalization refers to the abandonment of an established organizational practice or procedure (Oliver, 1992; Scott, 2001). Upon successful deinstitutionalization, organizations could embrace and institutionalize new practices to replace the obsolete practices. When this occurs, individuals and organizations learn and engage in newly institutionalized practices (Oliver, 1992; Scott, 2001). These newly institutionalized practices suggest that the collective individuals have acquired the *knowing* required to carry out these institutionalized practices.

This in turn suggests that new organizational *knowing* has been created (Cook & Brown, 1999).

These four characteristics of institutionalization suggest that, for institutionalization to occur and persist, individuals need to carry out the actions consistently (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Such consistency in actions across multiple individuals requires each individual to acquire and share similar *knowing*. When the collective individuals acquire similar *knowing*, new organizational *knowing* has been created. This connection between institutionalization and *knowing* suggests a possible relationship between these two concepts, which were rarely discussed together. This research, which studies both institutionalization and *knowing* acquisition, can serve to mitigate this gap.

2.1.5 Objectives of Institutionalization

The difficulty of achieving institutionalization can be expected in view of the many characteristics of institutionalization. Yet organizations continue to emphasize institutionalization due to the objectives that institutionalization can help them to achieve. Firstly, institutionalization enables organizations to create desired common behavioural patterns in actors belonging to similar organizations, or the same organization, by modifying individual behaviours (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Such common behavioural patterns contribute to the character formation of organizations, as advocated by Selznick (2011). According to Wang et al., (2014) institutional norms that encourage knowledge sharing between individuals can help organizations to achieve the goal of creating common behavioural patterns. This notion is not new, as Currie and Suhomlinova (2006) have earlier asserted that inappropriate institutional norms may potentially hinder knowledge sharing, and consequently knowledge and *knowing* creation. Wang et al. (2014) assert that, in order for

knowledge sharing to support institutionalization, it is necessary that a tangible institutional management system, intangible institutional norms, and a mediating role of trust are present. When both institutional management systems and norms are clearly defined, and trust exists between the parties, knowledge sharing will correspondingly increase, leading to the creation and stabilization of organizational knowledge (Wang et al., 2014). However, their study focuses only on knowledge sharing, which leads to knowledge acquisition, rather than *knowing* acquisition. This gap is where this study lies, that is, on the impact of institutionalization on *knowing* acquisition and the factors affecting the impact, which are two of the research objectives of this study.

Secondly, institutionalization allows organizations to foster stability and persistence of organizational practices for the long-term survival of organizations (Fleck, 2007). Institutionalization, with its emphasis on creating institutionalized norms, produces isomorphism and organization-wide compliance with well-established practices (Zucker, 1987). These practices, which are similar to *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999), in turn enable organizations to perform consistently under internal and external pressures, thereby leading to their long-term survival (Selznick, 2011).

Finally, institutionalization, by creating organizational knowledge and *knowing*, helps organizations create sustained competitive advantage. Selznick (2011) advocates that institutionalization supports organizational character formation, which includes values, character and competitive advantage development. According to Campbell et al. (2012), firm-specific knowledge and *knowing* that are more difficult for competitors to imitate are important resources of sustained competitive advantage. This assertion is aligned with an earlier work by Leonard-Barton (1992), which views competitive advantage as comprising

(1) individual knowledge and *knowing*, (2) institutionalized technical systems that are formed from codifying and structuring individual tacit knowledge, (3) institutionalized values and norms and (4) formal and informal managerial systems put in place to create and manage knowledge in organizations. Leonard-Barton's (1992) work suggests, firstly, that institutionalization exists within these technical systems, values and norms, and managerial systems; and, secondly, that these elements serve to create and manage organizational knowledge by harnessing individual knowledge and *knowing*. These suggestions indicate a clear connection between institutionalization and *knowing* acquisition, at both the individual and organization levels, which is the focus of this research.

2.1.6 Conclusion

The discussion shows that institutionalization, which involves collective individuals exhibiting common behaviours, is a purposeful intent and activity of organizations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1977). To ensure legitimacy and taken-for-grantedness, organizations need to ensure a strong degree of institutionalization for every occurrence of institutionalization (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1977). Successful institutionalization, in turn, helps individuals to acquire knowledge, and creates organizational learning and knowledge to bring about sustained competitive advantage (Campbell et al., 2012; Herrera, 2015; Todericiu & Stăniț, 2015). However, the literature is silent on the role of institutionalization to facilitate individual *knowing* acquisition, which is an important micro-element that needs further research (Greenwood et al., 2014; Suddaby, 2010). This silence provides an impetus for this thesis to study the effectiveness of institutionalization in the support of individual *knowing* acquisition, beyond knowledge acquisition. To study this topic, it is thus imperative to understand how individuals, from their experiences, interpret that *knowing* has been acquired, and their views on the effectiveness of the institutionalization

mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*. The individuals included in this research are the Human Resource Business Partners (HRBPs), who were the learners, and the Human Resources (HR) Specialists, who were the trainers in the research site. The HRBPs were best placed to share their experience with regard to the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms to support their acquisition of *knowing*. The HR Specialists, who were involved as trainers and developers of the HRBP Training Manual and were part of the HR Specialists Advisory Support team, were most suited to help the researcher understand whether the HRBPs have acquired the relevant *knowing*. Of the five research sub-questions, four were developed to understand these interpretations, as follows:

- i. How did the learners interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?
- ii. How did the trainers view the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?
- iii. How did the learners interpret their experiences on their acquisition of *knowing*?
- iv. How did the trainers view the learners' acquisition of *knowing*?

2.2 Organizational Learning and Institutionalization

Following the literature review on institutionalization, this section reviews the literature on organizational learning in relation to institutionalization. When individual learning becomes group learning and is perpetuated within the organization, organizational learning occurs (Senge, 2010), where the learning becomes embedded in institutionalized routines, systems and structures (Crossan et al., 1999; Vera et al., 2011). Once it is institutionalized as organizational knowledge, the learning is made available for other individuals in the organizations to learn it. This concept of organizational learning has evolved since the early nineties. Since then, organizational learning studies have changed

from viewing individuals as agents of learning for organization (Argyris & Schön, 1996), to viewing organizations as interpretive systems (Daft & Weick, 1984; Reus, Ranft, Lamont, & Adams, 2009). These studies have also delved into communities of practice as an approach for organizational learning (Brown & Duguid, 1991), organizational memory as the storage of organizational learning (Casey, 1997, 2005; Casey & Olivera, 2011) and organization transformation and renewal as the ultimate purpose for organizational learning (Crossan et al., 1999). For the purpose of this study, the researcher focuses on selected organizational learning models and theories that study how individuals learn from, and contribute to, organizational learning, which involves institutionalization. The key works covered and discussed below are single-, double- and triple-loop learning (Argyris, 2002; Argyris & Schön, 1996), communities of practice (Brown & Duguid, 1991), and the 4I organizational learning framework, which involves intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalizing (Crossan et al., 1999).

The term ‘organizational learning’ has diverse definitions (Crossan et al., 1999; Daft & Weick, 1984; Fiol & Lyles, 1985). Organizational learning can be defined as “the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding” (Fiol & Lyles, 1985, p. 803). Argyris and Schön (1996) prescribe that organizational learning happens when an organization “acquires information (knowledge, understanding, know-how, techniques, or practices) of any kind and by whatever means” (p. 3). On the other hand, Daft and Weick (1984) undertake an action-oriented approach of defining organizational learning as a process of enacting on theories. Organizational learning has also been defined as the act of “encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behaviour” (Levitt & March, 1988, p. 517). Crossan et al. (1999) define organizational learning more specifically as a “principal means of achieving the strategic renewal of an enterprise” (p. 522). This is similar to an earlier

definition by Huber (1991) that organizational learning occurs when any of the organizational units “acquires knowledge that it recognizes as potentially useful to the organization” (p. 89). Despite the differences, these seminal definitions view organizational learning as changes in organizational knowledge and *knowing* (Argote, 2013). The emphasis on knowledge is clearly articulated in these definitions. The emphasis on *knowing*, which is action-centric, can be inferred on the concepts of know-how, practices, routines, behaviours and actions embedded in these definitions.

The subsequent sections discuss a few key organizational learning models that are premised upon individual learning. These models are Argyris and Schön’s (1996) single-, double- and triple-loop learning, communities of practice and Crossan et al.’s (1999) 4I organizational learning framework. These models have been selected for their emphasis on the role of individuals in organizational learning. Such emphasis is also similar in institutionalization and *knowing* acquisition, which is the focus of this research study.

2.2.1 Argyris and Schön’s (1996) Learning Loops

Organizational learning can be broadly categorized as single-loop and double-loop learning (Argyris, 2002; Argyris & Schön, 1996). A third category of learning loop is triple-loop learning. Triple-loop learning, was created by Gregory Bateson but was wrongly attributed to Argyris and Schön (Tosey, Visser, & Saunders, 2012).

Single-loop learning involves error deduction and correction (Argyris & Schön, 1996). It does not look beyond the error or problem. Error is viewed as “any feature of knowledge or of knowing that makes action ineffective” (Argyris, 1976, p. 365). Double-loop learning involves a higher order of thinking (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Consideration is given

to variables and assumptions that would lead to a broader and systemic change, such as changing the organization's policies and norms (Argyris & Schön, 1996). For double-loop learning to take place, it is important that critical reflection of variables and assumptions occur in order to push boundaries (Greenwood, 1998). However, mistakes sometimes can occur during double-loop learning. This happens when the focus shifts to a new solution, but in the process there is failure to detect and address issues of the root problem (Blackman, Connelly, & Henderson, 2004). Triple-loop learning is about a shift in perspective where new commitments and ways of learning are acquired (Tosey et al., 2012). While triple-loop learning appears to be learning at a higher level, it remains unclear how it differs or relates to double-loop learning (Tosey et al., 2012).

Amongst the three learning loops, double-loop learning enjoys the greatest popularity. Despite its popularity, the concepts of double-loop learning suffer from a lack of fundamental clarity in terminology (Visser, 2007). This leads to differences in conceptualization (Visser, 2007) which hinder empirical research in learning processes (Tosey et al., 2012; Visser, 2007). Furthermore, the double-loop learning model focuses primarily on individual learning and its impact on the organization. There is neither clear description on how organizational learning will occur nor how organizational learning will in turn impact on individual learning. In addition, the model emphasizes the acquisition of tacit knowledge rather than *knowing*, which is the focus of this research study.

Even though the learning loops model is simple to understand, it is not easily achieved, especially double- and triple-loop learning. For example, double-loop learning adopts the view of organizations as complex learning systems (Morgan, 2006). As such, organizations would need to be sensitive to the environment, adopt a critical perspective of

norms, and have an enabling culture (Morgan, 2006). These conditions are not easily achievable so as to practicalize the model (Morgan, 2006).

Besides having challenging success factors, the learning loops model is potentially weak in creating organizational *knowing*. Despite the model's emphasis on creating new tacit knowledge, there is little discussion on its ability to create organization knowledge (Blackman et al., 2004). This is due to a lack of on-going testing, challenges and falsifications of both the initial problem and the proposed solutions (Blackman et al., 2004). If the model has little credibility to create organizational knowledge when its emphasis is on knowledge, it can be further surmised that the model may likely have a lesser potential to create organizational *knowing*, which is not even the model's focus.

Importantly, the focus of the learning loops model is on learning, rather than on institutionalization. Where there is any resultant institutionalization it is more an unexpected benefit rather than a purposeful intention. Hence, the model is inappropriate for this research study, which seeks to understand the effectiveness of institutionalization in the supporting of individual *knowing* acquisition. The next section discusses Communities of Practice (CoPs) and its relevance for this research study.

2.2.2 Communities of Practice (CoPs)

Communities of Practice (CoPs) is an alternative model to the learning loops model. CoPs refers to communities of individuals with common interests or skills who gather together to share knowledge and learn from one another (Wenger, 2000; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). The intent for forming CoPs in organizations is to create robust “repositories for the development, maintenance and reproduction of knowledge” for groups and organizations

(Brown & Duguid, 2001, p. 202). For it to remain active, a CoP requires the interplay of the three elements: enterprise, mutuality and repertoire (Wenger, 2000). With the interplay of these elements, individuals who join a CoP become natural recipients of the knowledge shared within the community. Through the gain in knowledge, the members who apply their new knowledge into their practice will acquire deeper and stronger *knowing*. This sharing within CoPs exhibits a dynamic relationship between tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge and *knowing* (Correia, Paulos, & Mesquita, 2010; Iaquinto et al., 2011; Orhun & Hopple, 2008). This dynamic relationship is not dissimilar from that proposed by Cook and Brown's (1999) theory on how different forms of knowledge and *knowing* interact dynamically with each other to bring forth new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*.

Notwithstanding the ability of CoPs to facilitate individual knowledge and *knowing* acquisition, CoPs may not necessarily lead to organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation. The very membership nature of a CoP causes it to be isolated from the broader organizational context (Kakavelakis, 2010). The resultant learning is typically restricted to within the CoPs rather than across the organization. Despite the intention to use CoPs to build *knowing*, members of the CoPs tend typically to share tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge (Kakavelakis, 2010). *Knowing* sharing is seldom carried out in CoPs forums and any *knowing* acquisition is purely due to individuals' application of new knowledge learnt (Kakavelakis, 2010). Hence, CoPs may not provide a robust approach for individuals to learn new *knowing* within the organizations, which is the focus of this research study. The emphasis of CoPs is to share knowledge that would support *knowing*. Basically a CoP is not designed to create taken-for-grantedness or legitimacy. This signals that institutionalization may not necessarily occur through CoPs. Therefore, this approach is not suitable to study the effectiveness of institutionalization to facilitate *knowing* acquisition.

2.2.3 4I Organizational Learning Framework

The third and final model, after the learning loops model and CoPs, is the 4I organizational learning framework. This framework describes how individuals learn from, and contribute to, organizational learning, leading to new knowledge and *knowing* (Crossan et al., 1999). The framework is included in this discussion as it involves institutionalization and *knowing*, which are the two key concepts in this thesis. The framework contains four sequential related sub-processes: intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalizing (Crossan et al., 1999). Intuiting relates to the individuals' instinctive response to the circumstances. Interpreting is a conscious effort by the individuals to understand and explain their intuitions (Crossan et al., 1999). Integrating refers to a coherent and collective action within the group, derived through collective meaning (Crossan et al., 1999). Institutionalizing is the process of fitting and formulating the learning into the structures, systems, strategies or routines of an organization (Crossan et al., 1999) as organizational knowledge and *knowing*. The movement from intuiting to eventual institutionalizing represents an assimilation of new learning for the individuals, groups and organization (Crossan et al., 1999). The changes in systems, structures and processes as a result of organizational learning are, in turn, learnt by the individuals in the organizations (Crossan et al., 1999). Crossan et al. (1999) argue that institutionalization has a role in facilitating organizational learning. Individual acquisition of knowledge and *knowing* can occur through organizational learning (Crossan et al., 1999). This implies that institutionalization can impact individual *knowing* acquisition.

Despite its clarity, the 4I framework is not without its critiques. Firstly, the framework does not address key factors that may impact on the sub-processes (Jenkin, 2013; Lawrence, Mauws, & Dyck, 2005). Lawrence et al. (2005) argue that four forms of power should be included as factors that would impact on the sub-processes. The four forms of power are

discipline, influencing, forcefulness and dominance (Lawrence et al., 2005). They advocate that discipline impacts on individual intuition, influencing impacts on interpretation within groups, forcefulness influences the extent of integration, and dominance influences the speed and stabilization of institutionalization (Lawrence et al., 2005; Lawrence, Winn, & Jennings, 2001). Jenkin (2013) observes that the framework is reticent about the triggers for the sub-process of intuiting. She proposes the inclusion of a first sub-process of information-foraging before the intuiting sub-process (Jenkin, 2013). The information-foraging sub-process serves to collect and attend to information from the environment (Jenkin, 2013).

The interplay of the power dynamics within organizations (Lawrence et al., 2005) and the environmental triggers for intuiting (Jenkin, 2013) are factors affecting individual and group learning of knowledge and *knowing*. Group knowledge and *knowing* lead to institutionalization and which, in turn, are impacted by institutionalization (Crossan et al., 1999). This intricate relationship between institutionalization and acquisition of *knowing* provides another reason to study how institutionalization could impact on individual acquisition of *knowing*, which is the focus of this research study.

2.2.4 Conclusion

Organizational learning requires institutionalization as a mechanism to bring about changes in organizational structures, systems and processes (Crossan et al., 1999). Without institutionalization, any form of single-, double- or triple-loop learning may not necessarily result in organizational learning (Argyris, 2002). Simultaneously, institutionalization can limit organizational learning (Bresser & Millonig, 2003; March, 1991). Institutionalization focuses on maintaining institutionalized routines and norms, and on resisting change (Selznick, 2011) to produce conformity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Thus,

institutionalization tends to result in poor individual reflexivity (Bresser & Millonig, 2003) and hinders single-, double- and triple-loop learning (Argyris, 2002). Conversely, organizational learning focuses on changing organizations through learning (Bresser & Millonig, 2003). The strength of institutionalization and organizational learning thus appear to have a delicate inverse relationship (Bresser & Millonig, 2003). To manage this delicate relationship to create organizational *knowing*, organizations need to balance exploitation of institutionalized practices and systems with exploration of learning new practices and knowledge (Kim & Rhee, 2009; Li, Vanhaverbeke, & Schoenmakers, 2008; Liu, 2006; March, 1991). Hence, it is important to understand the factors of institutionalization that can facilitate individual and organizational *knowing* creation. This provides the basis for the fifth sub-question of this research study, “What factors affected the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition?”. The next section discusses organizational knowledge creation and institutionalization.

2.3 Organizational Knowledge Creation and Institutionalization

When organizational learning occurs, organizational knowledge creation is likely to take place (Argote, 2013; Vera et al., 2011). Organizational knowledge definitions can be broadly categorized into those that are capability related and those that are performance related. Under the capability category, organizational knowledge has been defined as knowledge that is embedded in organizational practices and routines, where changes in these capabilities are reflective of changes in organizational knowledge (Gherardi, 2006; Levitt & March, 1988). Specifically, Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) define organizational knowledge as “the capability members of an organization have developed to drive distinctions in the process of carrying out their work, in particular concrete contexts, by enacting sets of generalizations whose application depends on historically evolved collective understandings”

(p. 973). In this sense, organizational knowledge creation is likely to involve organizational *knowing* creation. Hence, this section discusses organizational knowledge creation models in relation to the institutionalization of processes.

Organizational knowledge has also been defined with an organizational performance perspective. Definitions adopting this perspective view organizational knowledge as a collective knowledge and *knowing* harnessed from individual knowledge and *knowing* to bring about organizational performance (Brătianu, 2013; Brătianu & Orzea, 2010; Gherardi, 2006; Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009; Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). These definitions further show that changes in organizational knowledge should lead to changes in organizational performance (Argote, 2013; Argote & Epple, 1990; Dutton & Thomas, 1984). However, Huber (1991) has challenged such an emphasis by claiming that changes in organizational knowledge might not necessarily result in better organizational performance. Notwithstanding these diverse definitions, the accepted role of organizational knowledge as core in building competitive advantage remains unshaken (Ahmad et al., 2014; Loureiro et al., 2015; Walker, 2004). An organizational performance perspective of organizational knowledge creation, similar to a capability based perspective, also suggests that changes in organizational knowledge results in changes in *knowing* to impact organizational performance (Brătianu, 2013; Brătianu & Orzea, 2010; Gherardi, 2006; Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009; Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). Hence, regardless of the perspective adopted, organizational knowledge creation can lead to individual *knowing* acquisition, which is the focus of this research. This justifies a discussion on organizational knowledge creation in relation to institutionalization.

The subsequent sections discuss organizational knowledge creation models that focus on knowledge creation in individuals and groups. These models are von Krogh and Roos's

model of organizational epistemology (1995), Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) knowledge spiral model, and Wiig's (1993) model for building and using knowledge. These models have been selected for their emphasis on how knowledge is acquired by individuals and eventually becomes organizational knowledge.

2.3.1 Organizational Epistemology Model

Von Krogh and Roos's (1995) model of organizational epistemology clearly distinguishes how individual and social knowledge are acquired by individuals and organizations. The theory is underpinned by Varela's (1992) theory on cognitive system and Morgan's (2006) view of organizations as holographic brains. Varela (1992) views individuals as cognitive systems that learn as they self-organize their mental models after processing information received from the environment. Similarly, Morgan (2006) view organization as a system of parts that is able to self-organize and recreate as human cognitive systems would. Besides adopting these concepts of individuals and organizations as having self-organization capability, von Krogh and Roos (1995) also recognize that knowledge is sticky. They propose that these elements of self-organization and knowledge stickiness require knowledge enablers to facilitate organizational knowledge creation (von Krogh & Roos, 1995). Knowledge enablers are essentially factors that facilitate knowledge acquisition and creation. The enablers are comprised of: an open individual mindset towards knowledge sharing, open communication, a supportive organizational structure, trusting and open relationships amongst individuals, and appropriate rewards and recognition to encourage knowledge sharing (Ichijo, von Krogh, & Nonaka, 1998). Most of these enablers, except for individual mindset, are external to the individuals and can motivate individuals to learn and share knowledge within organizations.

One key limitation of this model is its sole emphasis on individual tacit knowledge, which is personal, hidden and difficult to study (Tsoukas, 2011). There is also no suggestion in the model that through knowledge acquisition, new *knowing* has been acquired, which is the focus of this research study. Besides, the model fails to discuss a process or a model to facilitate institutionalization or create organizational knowledge. Notwithstanding the role of enablers in organizational knowledge creation, the model has limited relevance to this research, which seeks to study the relationship between institutionalization and *knowing* acquisition.

2.3.2 SECI Model of Organizational Knowledge Creation

Organizational knowledge creation is an on-going process (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI (socialization, externalization, combination, internalization) model of organizational knowledge creation involves a spiral process of knowledge conversion from tacit to explicit, and from individual to group and to organization. The spiral SECI model begins with individual tacit knowledge and has four modes of knowledge conversion between and within individuals: socialization, externalization, combination and internalization (SECI) (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Socialization refers to the conversion of tacit knowledge into tacit knowledge between individuals through shared experiences (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Externalization refers to the articulation of tacit knowledge as explicit knowledge through crystallization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Combination refers to the conversion of explicit knowledge into more complex explicit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Internalization refers to the embodiment of explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The interactions between these four modes via multiple dialogues amongst individuals as they share their experiences are key to organizational knowledge creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi,

1995). These interactions also enable enlargement, amplification and justification of individual knowledge within and outside of organizations.

While this model has been widely discussed and adopted in research studies (Akbar & Tzokas, 2013; Brătianu & Orzea, 2010; Bryant, 2005; Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009; Nonaka, von Krogh, & Voelpel, 2006; Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005; von Krogh et al., 2012), there are some limitations. Firstly, the emphasis on tacit knowledge in the model appears to be more implicit rather than tacit (Li & Gao, 2003) and has been criticized for its omission of the ontological dimension of Polanyi's tacit knowledge (Dalkir, 2013; Gourlay, 2006). Secondly, the model does not have a process to integrate and institutionalize converted knowledge into knowledge management systems to create organizational knowledge (Nonaka et al., 2006). This argument suggests that institutionalization is a key process for organizational knowledge creation, which is missing from this model. Besides, the model adopts Plato's propositional definition of knowledge as justified true belief, which is a flawed definition (Blackman et al., 2004; Gettier, 1963). Gettier (1963) argued that it is flawed definition because guesswork, which may not be knowledge, but yet can fulfill the qualities of justified true belief. Another assumption is that the concept of knowledge conversion suggests that, when a form of knowledge has been transformed or converted to another form of knowledge, its original form ceases to exist (McIver et al., 2012). This assumption is flawed, as knowledge is personal and does not cease to exist even when explicated (Polanyi, 1983). As this research study focuses on *knowing* acquisition through institutionalization, the SECI model with its primary focus on knowledge is, therefore, of limited relevance to this research study.

2.3.3 Semantic Network Model

The Wiig model for knowledge creation is the third and final model in this section. It is founded on the principle that knowledge has to be organized to be useful (Wiig, 1993). According to Wiig (1993), knowledge is stored and internalized in the form of semantic networks in human cognitive systems and can be retrieved via multiple approaches (Wiig, 1993). For knowledge to be well stored, it should be complete, have well-connected relationships, and be congruent and consistent (Wiig, 1993). Besides, the storage should consider individuals' perspectives and purposes in accessing the knowledge to facilitate use and application of knowledge (Wiig, 1993). The author further proposes three forms and four types of knowledge that can be stored in different semantic networks (Wiig, 1993). The three forms of knowledge are public knowledge, shared expertise and personal knowledge (Wiig, 1993). The four types of knowledge are factual, conceptual, expectational and methodological (Wiig, 1993). Wiig (1993) also proposed five levels of knowledge internalization by individuals: novice, beginner, competent, expert and master.

Despite the clarity and structured approach to individual knowledge, the semantic network model does not specifically discuss acquisition of *knowing*. Additionally, while organization knowledge and *knowing* are embedded in the public knowledge and shared expertise concepts respectively, the model does not explicitly and fully explain how organizational knowledge can be created. Moreover, there are few empirical studies on this model (Dalkir, 2013). On top of everything, the model, with its focus on tacit knowledge rather than *knowing*, would be unsuitable for this research study, which seeks to study *knowing* acquisition.

2.3.4 Conclusion

The literature review shows how knowledge can be acquired, stored and internalized to become organizational knowledge, which would support sustained competitive advantage. The definitions of organizational knowledge also suggest that organizational knowledge can impact *knowing* at the individual and organizational level. While the three models for organizational knowledge creation are silent about the role of institutionalization, the descriptions of these models suggest that institutionalization has occurred to create organizational knowledge. Contrary, although these models discuss knowledge acquisition, they are silent on how individuals acquire *knowing*. The silence of these models on the role of institutionalization and individual *knowing* acquisition provides a gap for further study of the relationship between these two concepts, which were rarely discussed together. This gap is addressed through the first research objective of examining the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms to support individual *knowing* acquisition. The next section addresses the tool of knowledge management in relation to institutionalization to manage knowledge in organizations.

2.4 Knowledge Management and Institutionalization

Knowledge management, institutionalization and organizational knowledge are closely intertwined but different concepts (Vera et al., 2011). Knowledge management is commonly viewed as “the deliberate and systematic coordination of an organization’s people, technology, processes, and organizational structure in order to add value through reuse and innovation” (Dalkir, 2013, p. 4). Such large-scale coordination requires the support of institutionalization, which is to create common behaviours in organizations (Campbell et al., 2012; Meihami & Meihami, 2014; Su et al., 2015). Hence, for knowledge management to achieve its purpose of facilitating organizational knowledge management and application, it

requires institutionalization as a tool to institutionalize knowledge and *knowing* (Abdul-Jalal et al., 2013; Argote & Ingram, 2000; Lee et al., 2015; Meihami & Meihami, 2014; Wiig, 1993). The following sections discuss the definitions, components and purpose of knowledge management.

2.4.1 Definitions of Knowledge Management

The concept of knowledge management has been understood and interpreted differently in various disciplines, such as business, knowledge assets, knowledge science and process-technology studies (Stankosky, 2005). From the business angle, knowledge management is a systematic and systemic approach to create, capture, organize, retrieve and apply the intellectual assets of an organization (Grey, 2002). From the knowledge assets perspective, knowledge management is defined as organizational systems and processes established to leverage intellectual assets for stronger organizational performance (Stankosky, 2005) or to create unique competitive competencies (Brătianu & Orzea, 2010; Nonaka, 2007). Within the knowledge science studies, knowledge management has also been viewed as information management (Bhatt et al., 2010; Davenport & Cronin, 2000) to facilitate greater understanding and application of information flows in organizations (Bhatt et al., 2010; Broadbent, 1997). In the process-technology studies, knowledge management has been defined as tools, techniques and approaches to retain, study, organize, enhance and share business expertise (Groff & Jones, 2012).

The above diverse definitions feature institutionalization as both a process to manage knowledge and a property to create and manage organizational knowledge. However, these definitions focus on tacit and explicit knowledge management, rather than *knowing* management, to enhance organizational performance (Dalkir, 2013). Despite the absence of

the concept of *knowing* in these definitions, *knowing* is embedded in some of the components of knowledge management.

2.4.2 Components of Knowledge Management

According to Dalkir (2013), knowledge management has four broad components: process, people, technology and organization. Process in knowledge management is a key component of understanding how knowledge flows within organizations are managed. Regardless of the fields of discipline, a typical knowledge management process involves knowledge capture, creation, organization, application, sharing and renewal (Dalkir, 2013; Evans et al., 2014). Each process is important and necessary for knowledge to maintain its role as a resource for organizations to create and maintain their competitive advantage (Dalkir, 2013; Evans et al., 2014). Specifically, the process of knowledge application, which seeks to facilitate individuals' application of organizational knowledge (Dalkir, 2013; Evans et al., 2014), suggests that individuals have acquired *knowing* through their application of knowledge (Cook & Brown, 1999). This application of knowledge also suggests that knowledge management impacts individual and organizational *knowing*.

The second key component of knowledge management is people, as they possess the knowledge that knowledge management seeks to capture and manage. To facilitate this intent, organizations need to leverage both formal and informal platforms. Formal platforms, such as structure, technology and processes, can be established to draw tacit knowledge out of individuals (Byosiere, 2010; Chennamaneni & Teng, 2011; Chon, 2011; Jennex, 2008; Lilleoere & Hansen, 2011; Pun & Nathai-Balkissoon, 2011). On the contrary, informal platforms are casual knowledge sharing settings that occurs unofficially as individuals gather and have dialogues in organizations (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Dalkir, 2013). CoPs, mentioned

in the discussion on organizational learning (section 2.2.2), could be either formal or informal, depending on whether they are institutionalized by organizations or birthed through individual efforts. Regardless of the platforms (Barab, Warren, del Valle, & Fang, 2006; Iaquinto et al., 2011; White, 2010), CoPs are generally considered as robust knowledge management “repositories for the development, maintenance and reproduction of knowledge” for groups and organizations (Brown & Duguid, 2001, p. 202). However, members of CoPs typically share only tacit and explicit knowledge (Cassai, 2013; Kakavelakis, 2010; Zboralski, 2009) rather than *knowing*. Notwithstanding the shift in emphasis from knowledge to *knowing*, CoPs is considered one of the key informal avenues to share knowledge amongst individuals (Cassai, 2013; Kakavelakis, 2010). With the acquisition of knowledge shared by others, individuals would be better positioned to apply their new knowledge and, thereafter, acquire the *knowing* required for their practices (Brown & Duguid, 1991).

Another key component is technology, which seeks to capture personal knowledge and *knowing* into institutionalized knowledge and processes for corporate sharing and application (Crook, 2008; Rollett et al., 2007). For decades, organizations have leveraged physical shared drives to share knowledge, although in this decade the use of Web 2.0 technologies such as cloud storage, wikis, web-blogs and video-blogs to harness collective intelligence has become more pervasive (Klamma, Cao, & Spaniol, 2007; O'Reilly & Battelle, 2009). Most organizations leverage technologies to push down information to individuals, create central knowledge storage systems for individuals to access, and share information and knowledge between and across individuals (Bergek, Berggren, & Magnusson, 2011; Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009; Zhang & Baden-Fuller, 2010). Through these technologies, individuals and groups are able to gather required information, make informed decisions and act upon their knowledge (Schneckenberg, 2009; Yan et al., 2009). As

individuals become skilful in their actions, they demonstrate that they have acquired *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999). This suggests that the component of technology in knowledge management can support individual *knowing* acquisition.

The last component of knowledge management is organization. Organizations that strive for sustained competitive advantage value the role of knowledge management to harness and integrate individual knowledge into organizational capabilities (Abdul-Jalal et al., 2013; Argote & Ingram, 2000; Davenport & Prusak, 2000; Grant, 1996; Loureiro et al., 2015; Meihami & Meihami, 2014; Nonaka, 1994; Ordóñez de Pablos, 2006; Reed & DeFillippi, 1990; Walker, 2004). This component of organization is closely linked to organizational leadership (Mahdi & Almsafir, 2014; von Krogh et al., 2012; Williams, 2011) and culture (Ajmal, Kekäle, & Takala, 2009; Suppiah & Sandhu, 2011; Wang et al., 2011) to ensure optimal leverage of process, people and technology for effective knowledge management (Selznick, 2011; Singh, 2008; Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006; von Krogh et al., 2012). With effective knowledge management, organizations are better positioned to solidify and strengthen their organizational competitive advantage in this information age (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Davenport & Prusak, 2000; Grant, 1996; Nonaka, 1994; Ordóñez de Pablos, 2006; Reed & DeFillippi, 1990; Walker, 2004).

2.4.3 Purpose of Knowledge Management

As earlier articulated in its definitions and components, knowledge management seeks to reduce knowledge and *knowing* stickiness (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Cook & Brown, 1999; Corradi, Gherardi, & Verzelloni, 2010) through institutionalization to create organizational knowledge and *knowing* for competitive advantage (Evans et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Meihami & Meihami, 2014). Knowledge stickiness refers to the difficulty of sharing

knowledge between and across individuals (Blackman & Benson, 2012; Szulanski, 1996; Szulanski, Winter, Cappetta, & van den Bulte, 2002; von Hippel, 1994). Knowledge appears to be stickier in tacit knowledge than explicit knowledge, and is thus more difficult to manage and leverage to create new knowledge (Blackman & Benson, 2012; Blackman & Phillips, 2011; Brown & Duguid, 1991). While the literature does not compare the level of knowledge stickiness between tacit knowledge and *knowing*, the latter, due to its context- and action-orientation, can be more sticky than the former (Brown & Duguid, 2001). For instance, if individuals do not demonstrate their *knowing* through actions or practices for others to observe, their *knowing* would not have been shared with others. Hence, overcoming knowledge and *knowing* stickiness, and in so doing building organizational capabilities, is a key purpose of knowledge management (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Davenport & Prusak, 2000; Grant, 1996; Nonaka, 1994; Ordóñez de Pablos, 2006; Reed & DeFillippi, 1990; Walker, 2004).

To overcome knowledge and *knowing* stickiness and harness personal knowledge and *knowing*, organizations invest substantially in knowledge management systems (Levy, 2009; Meihami & Meihami, 2014; Sousa et al., 2010; Yan et al., 2009). However, having adequate and user-friendly knowledge management systems, which represents an organizational context factor, does not fully resolve knowledge and *knowing* stickiness. Other factors of stickiness also need to be considered. These factors are causal ambiguity of causes, unprovenness of the knowledge, motivation of the source of knowledge, perceived reliability of the source, motivation of the recipient of knowledge, lack of absorptive capacity in the recipient, and an arduous relationship between the source and the recipient (Elwyn, Taubert, & Kowalczyk, 2007; Szulanski, 1996; Szulanski et al., 2000). These factors are neither exhaustive nor conclusive (Walker & Maqsood, 2007). This suggests that knowledge

management needs a more holistic approach if it is to achieve its purpose of overcoming knowledge and *knowing* stickiness to create organizational knowledge and *knowing*.

2.4.4 Conclusion

Institutionalization is both a tool and an intended outcome of knowledge management. As a tool, represented in the form of institutionalization mechanisms, it can support the purpose of knowledge management. As the intended outcome of knowledge management, successful institutionalization demonstrates that knowledge has been managed and institutionalized to lead to consistent behaviours of individuals in organizations. Yet the effectiveness of knowledge management, through institutionalization, to create sustained competitive advantage remains inconclusive (Su et al., 2015). For example, Su et al. (2015) argue that an organization can gain early mover competitive advantage only if its implementation timing of ISO management standards is carried out ahead of its competitors. Organizations that are slow in their implementation will not gain much competitive advantage. This suggests that knowledge management and institutionalization need to be well managed in order for both to fulfil their roles.

Sections 2.1 to 2.4 have discussed the literature on institutionalization, as well as organizational learning, organization knowledge creation and knowledge management in relation to institutionalization. The discussions provide insights on research related to institutionalization and show limited discussion in the literature related to both concepts of institutionalization and knowing. The next section discusses the literature on *knowing* and how individuals learn. It also discusses learning definitions and assumptions, and how knowledge and *knowing* are evidence of learning.

2.5 Learning and Knowing

Since this research focuses on individual *knowing* acquisition, it is pertinent to study the literature on learning, especially in the area of *knowing*. Learning in individuals is central to human behaviour and knowledge, (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2012). As individuals interact with the world, they experience new inputs that they absorb, reject or adapt into their existing schemata of knowledge, thus acquiring new knowledge (Merriam et al., 2012). When individuals interact with their environment, they may modify their behaviours as a result of their experience or new knowledge (Cook & Brown, 1999). This leads to learning of *knowing*. *Knowing* is the actions of individuals as they engage in ‘real work’ in organizations (Cook & Brown, 1999). Learning, whether of knowledge, *knowing* or both, is a process and not a product – it is a process by which individuals acquire new knowledge and *knowing* as they interact with the world (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Cook & Brown, 1999). The product of learning is the expression and demonstration of knowledge and *knowing* (Merriam et al., 2012).

Learning can be unlearnt when new learning of knowledge and *knowing* supersedes prior learning, much like double-loop learning (Argyris, 2002; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Merriam et al., 2012; Visser, 2007). Learning can also be relearnt when individuals revisit prior learning to facilitate recollection of prior learning (Tabassum Azmi, 2008; Tsang, 2008). Individuals learn differently, even when they are learning in a group setting. This difference could be due to differences in their prior knowledge and *knowing*, and learning approaches (Merriam et al., 2012). Learning can also be both unintentional, where individuals acquire new knowledge and *knowing* due to social interactions with others, and purposeful, where individuals intentionally seek out new knowledge and *knowing* (Thorndike & Rock,

1934). The next sections provide greater clarity on the definitions and broad categorization of learning theories.

2.5.1 Definitions of Learning

There are many definitions of learning due to the differing assumptions underpinning the nature of learning. These differing assumptions can be broadly categorized into five learning orientations: behaviourist, cognitivist, humanistic, social learning and constructivist orientations (Merriam et al., 2012). The diverse definitions of learning based on these five learning orientations are listed below.

The behaviourists define learning as a change in behaviour due to external stimuli (Merriam et al., 2012; Skinner, 1965; Thorndike & Rock, 1934). This definition views changes in behaviour as evidence of learning and that learning is determined by the external environment and not individual learners (Merriam et al., 2012). This definition suggests that learning results in new *knowing* as individuals carry out new actions. The cognitivists, on the other hand, define learning as changes in mental perception, insight and meanings in individuals due to their cognitive structure (Ausubel, Novak, & Hanesian, 1978; Piaget, 1977). This definition focuses on internal mental processes of learners, or knowledge, rather than their behaviour, which is *knowing*. Moreover, the cognitivist theories view learning as determined by the learners rather than the environment (Merriam et al., 2012). On the other hand, the humanists view learning as individual self-directed desire for growth and development (Knowles, 1970; Maslow, 1943; Merriam et al., 2012). According to their definition, learning is intentional and driven by the individual's motivation for new knowledge and *knowing* (Merriam et al., 2012). Adopting a different stand, the social learning advocates define learning as the acquisition of new understanding through

observations within a social setting (Bandura, 1986; Merriam et al., 2012; Rotter, 1954). According to this definition, learning is vicarious as learners observe the surrounding, leading to changes in knowledge and *knowing* (Merriam et al., 2012). Finally, the constructivists define learning as a process of meaning construction where individuals make sense of their experiences (Merriam et al., 2012). This definition presupposes that learning is dependent on and constructed upon individual's prior knowledge and *knowing* (Merriam et al., 2012).

Embedded in these five orientations are focuses on behaviour, cognition, personal motivation to learn, social interaction, and existing personal knowledge and *knowing*. Each orientation has its limitations (Merriam et al., 2012) and hence its corresponding definitions are limited in its comprehensiveness. Cook and Brown (1999) offer a broader definition, where learning is the process of acquiring new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*, through the dynamic interactions between the different forms of knowledge and *knowing* situated in social and physical worlds. The focus on individual knowledge and *knowing*, and their interactions covers the dimension of behaviour, cognition and reliance on past knowledge and *knowing*. The focus on group knowledge and *knowing*, and the dynamic interactions situated in the social and physical worlds of individuals address the social interaction dimension. While motivation to learn may seemingly be absent from Cook and Brown's (1999) definition, such motivation is embedded in adult learning assumptions that underpin all adult learning, inclusive of Cook and Brown's (1999) definition. The section below discusses these assumptions in greater details.

2.5.2 Assumptions of Adult Learning

Knowles (Knowles, 1970; Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2014) puts forth a set of adult learning assumptions that illustrate the adult learner's motivation to learn new

knowledge and *knowing* as key to the creation of new knowledge and *knowing*. Within these assumptions include factors that could be leveraged to help adult learners acquire new knowledge and *knowing*.

Firstly, adult learners *need to know* (Knowles, 1970; Knowles et al., 2014). They need to understand why they should learn something before they would undertake to learn it (Knowles, 1970; Knowles et al., 2014). When adults undertake learning of their own accord, they invest energy to determine the benefits and potential pitfalls of learning and not learning to help them understand why they need to learn (Knowles et al., 2014). If they do not perceive a need to learn, they would have no desire to engage in the learning or expend energy for the learning (Knowles, 1970; Knowles et al., 2014). Hence, this need to know is intricately linked to their desire to learn knowledge and *knowing*.

Secondly, adult learners are governed by a *self-concept* that they take responsibility for their decisions (Knowles, 1970; Knowles et al., 2014). They do not like to feel the imposition of someone else's will upon themselves. Adult learners desire to be self-directed – to seek out learning of their own accord – and for others to treat them in the same manner (Knowles, 1970; Knowles et al., 2014). They prefer to decide the types and forms of learning to address their needs even though they may discuss with others their learning choice. This self-concept towards self-directed learning is similarly strongly linked to their desire to learn new knowledge and *knowing*.

Thirdly, adult learners have vast *experience* that can be leveraged to construct new knowledge and *knowing* (Knowles, 1970; Knowles et al., 2014). The greater the experience, the more the adult learners utilize the experience to create new knowledge and *knowing*.

However, the vast experience can potentially hamper the learning of new knowledge and *knowing*, as learners may have to unlearn before they learn something new (Knowles et al., 2014). The success of unlearning depends on how deeply rooted the prior experience has been; the more deeply rooted the experience, the more difficult it is to unlearn. Notwithstanding this potential challenge, prior experience can be relied upon to construct new knowledge and *knowing* (Knowles et al., 2014).

Fourthly, adult learners are often *ready to learn* new capabilities to help them manage their situations (Knowles, 1970; Knowles et al., 2014). Adult learners are often more prepared to learn new knowledge and *knowing* in order to develop capabilities to deal with the challenges that they face (Knowles et al., 2014). Hence, when placed in situations or challenges that they do not have the capability to deal with, they are more ready to learn new knowledge and *knowing*. Conversely, if they are placed in a learning situation that does not align with their life situations, they are less ready to learn (Knowles et al., 2014).

The fifth assumption is that the adult learners' *orientation towards learning* is life-centred (Knowles, 1970; Knowles et al., 2014). They are more motivated to learn new knowledge and *knowing* when they perceive the learning will enable them to deal with the problems they are facing or perform some required tasks (Knowles et al., 2014). If there are no triggers that require them to learn new knowledge and *knowing*, their motivation and engagement in the learning of new knowledge and *knowing* is limited. Such an orientation would also mean that adult learners desire to apply their learning into real-life situations (Knowles et al., 2014).

Finally, adult learners' motivation towards learning are more intrinsic than extrinsic (Knowles, 1970; Knowles et al., 2014). Intrinsic motivation would be stronger than extrinsic motivation for adult learners who are seeking self-actualization or have positive self-conception (Knowles et al., 2014). Learners who desire to grow in their capability are motivated to learn new knowledge and *knowing*. However, such motivation towards learning may be hampered by learners' lack of positive self-concept, insufficient learning opportunities or policy constraints (Knowles et al., 2014).

Despite criticisms of insufficient clarity on whether these six assumptions are descriptive or prescriptive (Hartree, 1984), a lack of consideration of organizational context (Grace, 1996) and overly idealistic learning (Grace, 1996), the assumptions can be considered as descriptive statements of adults' preferences in learning (Knowles et al., 2014). Most of these six assumptions lean towards factors of adults' motivation that affect the learning of new knowledge and *knowing*. These assumptions stem from the humanist theories that adults are self-directed learners who seek out new knowledge and *knowing* beyond what have been delivered to them. Hence, the extent of the interaction of individual and group knowledge and *knowing* with the environment would likely be largely hinged on the motivation of the learners to seek out new knowledge and *knowing*. The motivation of the learners to seek out new knowledge and *knowing* also point to both knowledge and *knowing* as evidence of learning.

2.5.3 Knowledge and *Knowing* as Evidences of Learning

The definitions of learning, supported by the assumptions of adult learning, suggest that the evidence of learning is the communication and demonstration of new knowledge and *knowing*. When individuals are able to express their new knowledge and *knowing* through

explanations or demonstrations, they have learnt new knowledge and *knowing*. As both knowledge and *knowing* are closely connected and crucial to this study, it is pertinent to further explain and distinguish both concepts clearly.

2.5.3.1 Knowledge

The concept of knowledge has been greatly discussed by academia for many decades, with many differing views. Early philosopher Plato defines knowledge as justified true belief (Steup, 2012). However, Gettier (1963) argues that guesswork would similarly meet the same conditions of justification of truth and belief as prescribed by Plato. Furthermore, Plato's definition focuses on propositional knowledge (Ichikawa & Steup, 2014). It neither explains the know-how and context of knowledge (Ichikawa & Steup, 2014), nor addresses the dynamic and humanist element of knowledge (Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2000). These arguments show that this philosophical understanding of knowledge has been largely unaccepted in the modern context.

Within the social science discipline in the modern context, knowledge is generally understood as something that an individual possesses in his cognition (Cook & Brown, 1999). Cook and Brown (1999) term this as "epistemology of possession". Knowledge is personal and possessed by individuals (Cook & Brown, 1999; Polanyi, 1998; Spender, 1996) in the form of cognitive structures (Piaget, 1977) and can be expressed verbally or in written form as explicit knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Cook & Brown, 1999; Polanyi, 1998). Because of its 'possessed' nature, knowledge, once learnt, resides within the individual, even when it has been shared with others as explicit knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 2001).

Knowledge possessed within individuals' cognition, when articulated by them, assumes the form of explicit knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Polanyi, 1998). Individuals can use verbal or physical forms to articulate knowledge that they have learnt. Within organization and management studies, explicit knowledge that is documented in physical forms – such as manuals, procedures, documents, patents and databases (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; von Krogh et al., 2012) – becomes organizational knowledge that can be learnt by other individuals. Once codified, knowledge can be easily shared between individuals (Nonaka et al., 2000; Rai, 2011), resulting in learning by the recipients of the knowledge. This ease of transferability can thus promote knowledge sharing, leading to the learning of new knowledge when shared with individuals who did not have this knowledge previously. However, this same attribute of explicit knowledge also results in knowledge being leaked outside of organizations when it is shared with individuals from other organizations (Rai, 2011).

Besides being explicit, knowledge can also be tacit in that it can be difficult to articulate (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Polanyi, 1998). Tacit knowledge is likened to the submerged portion of the iceberg, where explicit knowledge is the visible tip of the iceberg (Nonaka, Reinmoeller, & Senoo, 1998). Tacit knowledge represents how “we can know more than we can tell.” (Polanyi, 1983, p. 4). Tacit knowledge has also been defined as knowledge that is personal, that is difficult to formalize (Lam, 2000; Nonaka, 1994), that has a cognitive dimension comprising mental models, beliefs and perceptions (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), that is deeply rooted in action (Nonaka, 1994; Spender, 1996), that is situated within the individual's context (Lam, 2000; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Spender, 1996), and that is gained experientially (Spender, 1996). The more tacit the knowledge, the more difficult it is to share the knowledge with other individuals. This difficulty of sharing tacit knowledge or

learning someone else's tacit knowledge is described as knowledge stickiness (Brown & Duguid, 2001).

Tacit knowledge can be demonstrated and inferred through actions (Nonaka, 1994; Polanyi, 1998; Spender, 1996). Knowledge that has been demonstrated and expressed through inference from observation of actions is described as implicit knowledge (Anand & Singh, 2011; Hawk, Zheng, & Zmud, 2009). For instance, a skilled task analyst can observe a competent performer's actions and easily infer and identify the knowledge that has not been articulated by the latter. Once inferred and expressed, implicit knowledge has been created (Anand & Singh, 2011). Implicit knowledge is thus essentially knowledge that exists in tacit form but is possibly expressible through inference from observations of actions.

2.5.3.2 *Knowing*

Actions that demonstrate knowledge and that are differentiated from knowledge are commonly termed as *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999; Polanyi, 1962). In view of its relation to actions, *knowing* has received attention in recent decades within practice based studies (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; McIver, Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, & Ramachandran, 2012; Orlikowski, 2002) and knowledge work studies (Blackler, 1995; Cook & Brown, 1999; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012) for its role in building organizational capabilities. In recent decades, *knowing* has further infiltrated the strategy literature as 'strategy as practice' (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Whittington, 1996, 2006). Adopting Cook and Brown's (1999) concept of 'knowing as practice', 'strategy as practice' refers to the works of managerial actors in developing and implementing strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 1996). Unlike the economic result focus in typical strategy research, 'strategy as practice' emphasizes the actors and agency and their

interactions with strategies (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). The extant literature on ‘strategy as practice’ and its impact on organizational capabilities (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) exemplifies the importance of ‘strategy as practice’ or *knowing* as a resource for creating sustained competitive advantage (Grant, 1996; Li & Liu, 2014; Mahdi & Almsafir, 2014).

The philosophical views underpinning *knowing* are ‘tacit *knowing*’ and ‘know-how’ concepts created by Polanyi (1962) and Ryle (1949) respectively. Tacit *knowing* refers to how it is that a person who can learn to perform skilful actions but yet be unable to explain how these actions are done (Polanyi, 1962). For instance, a person who can ride a bicycle, and perhaps explain in words how one manages to maintain one’s balance while riding, is unlikely to be able to explain exactly how one’s muscles work collaboratively to do so (Polanyi, 1962). Similar to Polanyi’s definition of *knowing*, Ryle’s (1949) earlier concept of know-how emphasizes a person’s ability to demonstrate knowledge via skilful actions by applying rules of logic without consciously thinking about them.

Knowing can be understood as the application of knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 1998; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012). Brown and Duguid (1998) define *knowing* broadly as collective work practice which embeds know-how. They subsequently define it more clearly as “the way in which work gets done and *knowing* how to do it” (Brown & Duguid, 2001, p. 200). *Knowing* can be described as practice that is constituted by ‘know-how’ and ‘know-that’ (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012; Ryle, 1949). Cook and Wagenaar (2012) define *knowing* as any kind of activity where its meaning and purpose are derived from a given context, where individuals apply relevant knowledge to resolve a situation. Hence, *knowing* occurs when "knowledge is applied in practice" (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012, p. 4).

This concept of *knowing* as application of knowledge is, interestingly, similar to Maturana and Varela's (1987) description of *knowing* as "all doing is *knowing*, and all *knowing* is doing" and "everything said is said by someone" (p. 26). To them, action or *knowing* occurs primarily in the surrounding world and is context-specific. *Knowing* is also closely related to knowledge, as the former is acquired through reflecting on tacit knowledge from experience (Maturana & Varela, 1987). Another similar outlook describes *knowing* as having "a tacit component, embedded partly in individual skills and partly in collaborative social arrangements" (Szulanski, 1996, p. 28). Collins (1993) terms this as embodied knowledge. This perspective has also been accepted within organizational studies, where *knowing* is similarly defined as recursive action or routines that are continually enacted knowledge in organizations (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; McIver et al., 2012). Additionally, *knowing* can be coined as knowledge embedded in organizational systems and processes (Collins, 1993).

While the discussion above shows that some scholars have merged the two concepts together, Cook and Brown (1999) advocate for a clear distinction between knowledge and *knowing*. *Knowing*, according to them, is defined as "the coordinated activities of individuals and groups in doing their 'real work' as it is informed by a particular organizational or group context" (Cook & Brown, 1999, p. 386-387). 'Real work' comprises skilful actions done by skilled individuals rather than repeated practice in order to perfect a skill (Cook & Brown, 1999). Cook and Brown (1999) coin this understanding of *knowing* as the 'epistemology of practice'. They posit that *knowing* is part of action, rather than a tool for action, and requires present activity (Cook & Brown, 1999). Knowledge, on the other hand, is something possessed in the cognition of the individuals and termed as the 'epistemology of possession' (Cook and Brown, 1999). *Knowing* is perceived to perform the work that knowledge cannot

do, such that *knowing* is the deployment of knowledge in actions (Cook and Brown, 1999). Cook and Brown's (1999) clear distinction between knowledge and *knowing*. reflects Descartes concept of dualism. To Descartes, the mind is immaterial and the body is material; both are completely distinctive substances; and both interact with each other (Robinson, 2016). In this sense, knowledge resides in the immaterial mind while *knowing* resides in the material body.

Knowing requires some form of repeated practice or doing for it to be learnt (Polanyi, 1961; Roland, 1958). Roland (1958), expounding Ryle's (1949) concept, opines that know-how requires practice or repeated actions for the individual to be able to demonstrate the appropriate actions without conscious thoughts. According to Polanyi (1961), doing and *knowing* are inseparable; doing enhances *knowing* and *knowing* enhances doing. Over time, once a person acquires the ability, they are able to carry out the actions without even *knowing* how they do it (Polanyi, 1962; Ryle, 1949).

Knowing, because of its action-orientation can be both tacit and sticky (Blackler, 1995; Cook & Brown, 1999; Corradi et al., 2010). *Knowing* is "not directly accessible, observable, measurable or definable" but rather hidden, unless demonstrated, and thus can be sticky (Corradi et al., 2010, p. 267). Similar to knowledge stickiness, *knowing* stickiness refers to the difficulty of transferring *knowing* between individuals (Szulanski, 1996; Szulanski et al., 2002). *Knowing* can also have different degrees of tacitness depending on the complexity embedded in the actions (McIver et al., 2013). Less complex actions can be more easily learnt by others through observation and are thus less sticky. The greater the complexity of the actions, or the greater the knowledge required for the actions, the stickier is *knowing*.

Knowing, when made visible, can be transferable and learnable, and is therefore leaky (Corradi et al., 2010). *Knowing* leakiness is similar to knowledge leakiness in that it refers to the undesirable or unwanted flow of knowledge to others which may cause organizations to lose their competitive advantage (Brown & Duguid, 2001). *Knowing* that has been observed and expressed through ‘inference’ takes an additional form of implicit knowledge, as mentioned earlier. *Knowing*, similarly, can have different degrees of learnability (McIver et al., 2013). The simpler the actions, or the simpler the knowledge required for the actions, the greater the learnability.

In addition to being learnable, *knowing* is contextual and therefore dynamic (Blackler, 1995; Cook & Brown, 1999; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012; Gherardi, 2009; McIver et al., 2013; Spender, 2008). Interacting with the situated world of the individuals (Cook & Brown, 1999), *knowing* is both constrained by and contributes to context (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012). *Knowing* is constrained by the context of the situated worlds of the individuals, which sets the boundary for *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999). This is similar to an earlier point that *knowing* is action-oriented where its meaning and purpose are derived from organizational context to solve problems in organizations (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012). Similarly, *knowing* contributes to the context, as it is enacted within the context, thus changing the context (Cook & Brown, 1999; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012; Orlikowski, 2002). In this sense, *knowing* is dynamic, as it changes through its interaction with the context (Cook & Brown, 1999). When *knowing* changes, learning has taken place and context is changed. This also corresponds with earlier points that *knowing* is embedded in organizational systems and processes (Collins, 1993) or routines that are continually enacted in organizations (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; McIver et al., 2012).

2.5.3.3 Knowledge and *Knowing*

The unique distinctions of knowledge and *knowing* mentioned in the sections 2.5.3.1 and 2.5.3.2 demonstrate the possible interactions and relationships between both concepts. With their uniqueness, both knowledge and *knowing* complement and mutually enable each other to learn new knowledge and *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012). For example, *knowing* enables individuals to build on existing tacit knowledge to learn new knowledge (Cook & Brown, 1999; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012). Likewise, the nature and quality of tacit knowledge impacts on *knowing*, where new tacit knowledge learnt would likely lead to learning of new *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999; Cook, 2014). In this sense, both knowledge and *knowing* are mutually constitutive (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012), where *knowing* “confirms or modifies knowledge” and is informed by knowledge (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012, p. 15) for new knowledge and *knowing* to be learnt. Table 2.1 presents a comparison summary table to distinguish the two concepts:

Table 2.1: Comparison Summary Table of Knowledge and *Knowing*

| Knowledge (Noun) | Knowing (Verbal Noun) |
|---|---|
| Term as ‘epistemology of possession’ (Cook & Brown, 1999) | Term as ‘epistemology of practice’ (Cook & Brown, 1999) |
| is possessed and resides in the cognition of individuals (Cook & Brown, 1999) | Is “the coordinated activities of individuals and groups in doing their ‘real work’ ” (Cook & Brown, 1999, p. 386-387) |
| Is not necessarily context-specific (Cook & Brown, 1999) | Is context-specific, that is, it is “informed by a particular organizational or group context” (Cook & Brown, 1999, p. 386-387) |
| Does not require present activity (Cook & Brown, 1999) | Requires present activity (Cook & Brown, 1999) |
| Can be tacit and explicit (Polanyi, 1988; Cook & Brown, 1999) | Has a tacit component (Szulanski, 1996) as it involves recursive actions by individuals (Cook & Brown, 1999) that is embedded in individual’s skills (Szulanski, 1996). |
| Can be demonstrated and inferred through actions (Nonaka, 1994; Polanyi, 1998; Spender, 1996) | Is part of action and can be understood as the application of knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 1998; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012) |
| Becomes organizational knowledge when it is expressed in manuals, procedures, documents, patents and databases (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; von Krogh et al., 2012) | Becomes organizational knowing when it becomes part of institutionalized processes found in standard procedures and embedded into systems |

Despite the natural connections between knowledge and *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012), many of the learning theories across the five orientations focus on acquisition of knowledge rather than *knowing* (Merriam et al., 2012). The cognitive, humanistic, social learning and constructivist theorists focus on acquisition of tacit knowledge, while the behaviourist theorists focus on learning of new behaviours, much like *knowing* acquisition (Merriam et al., 2012). This gap suggests a need to study the *knowing* acquisition, while recognizing the complementary nature of knowledge and *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999). In addition, the subject of *knowing* at the individual, micro level is hardly discussed in institutional studies, which have been focusing on macro-elements (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Hence, there is value in studying the micro-element of how individuals learn as compared with the macro-elements of institutionalization mechanisms in the acquisition of individual *knowing*.

The discussion on the concepts of knowledge and *knowing* acts as preamble that introduces the theoretical framework proposed by Cook and Brown (1999). This thesis adopts distinctive definitions of both concepts from Cook and Brown's (1999) framework. Furthermore, this thesis shares Cook and Brown's (1999) argument that both concepts are equally important and mutually constitutive for generation of new knowledge and *knowing*. Hence, an introduction of the two concepts was important to establish clarity of the two closely connected concepts that will further facilitate the discussion on the theoretical framework in the next section.

2.6 Theoretical Framework of this Study: Bridging Epistemologies Framework

This research seeks to understand how individuals acquire *knowing* as compared to the institutionalization mechanisms put in place to support *knowing* acquisition. To facilitate this purpose, this research is underpinned by Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework. Cook and Brown's (1999) theory discusses how knowledge and *knowing* are acquired by individuals and eventually become organizational knowledge and *knowing*. The creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing* in their theory suggests that institutionalization has taken place. At the same time, the theory also discusses the learning of new knowledge and *knowing* from group tacit and explicit knowledge. If individuals can learn from group knowledge, it would suggest that institutionalization has a role in helping individuals to acquire new knowledge and *knowing*. Hence, Cook and Brown's (1999) theory is well suited to the study of *knowing* acquisition and whether institutionalization can facilitate *knowing* acquisition. Besides, according to Simeonova's (2014) review of the literature in 2014, Cook and Brown's (1999) study is the only study that gives equal importance to knowledge and *knowing* in the creation of new knowledge and *knowing*. By

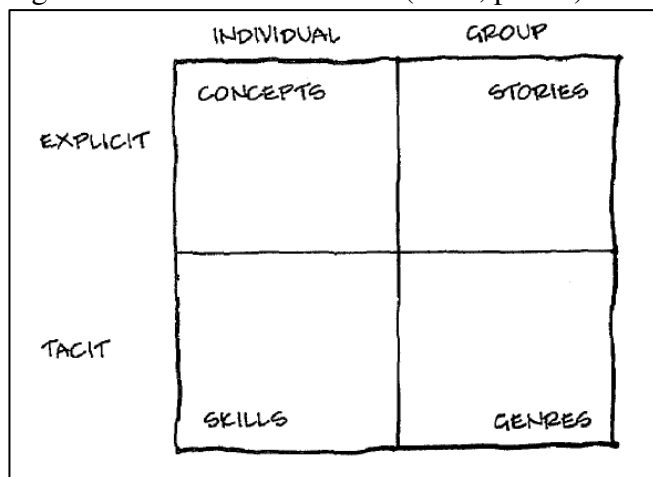
studying *knowing* acquisition through their lens, this research demonstrates the complementary and equally important roles that knowledge and *knowing* have.

Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework discusses the dynamic interactions between different forms of knowledge and ways of *knowing* within and between individuals in their situated world. Through the interactions, termed 'generative dance', new forms of knowledge and ways of *knowing* are created, which further leads to new organizational knowledge and *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999). This creation of new organizational knowledge and *knowing* demonstrates that institutionalization has taken place. The process of creation, involving individuals and groups learning knowledge from one another and acting on their new knowledge, demonstrates the micro-elements of actors and agency that institutional studies are presently lacking, as mentioned in section 2.1. Hence, the use of this theoretical framework for this study will address the literature gap in present institutional studies.

Cook and Brown (1999) consider the dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing* as bridging two epistemologies, that of possession and practice. The 'epistemology of possession' defines knowledge as that which is possessed by individuals and groups and categorized as tacit or explicit (Cook & Brown, 1999). 'Knowledge as possession' is similar to the traditional definition of propositional knowledge as that which "can be possessed, stored, and transferred, though its cognitive location can create challenges for its retrieval and use" (Kuhn & Jackson, 2008, p. 455). Knowledge can assume different forms, such as individual and group knowledge, and tacit and explicit knowledge. Both tacit and explicit knowledge have equal standing; they are two sides of the same coin, where explicit knowledge is underlain by tacit knowledge (Cook & Brown, 1999). Given their

distinctiveness, one does work that the other cannot do, and both are aids to acquire the other (Cook & Brown, 1999; Tsoukas, 2011). Similarly, group and individual knowledge have different but equally important roles for organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation (Cook & Brown, 1999). As knowledge can be both explicit/tacit and individual/group, Cook and Brown (1999) propose the following figure (see Figure 2.1) to illustrate their difference:

Figure 2.1: Cook and Brown's (1999, p. 391) Four Forms of Knowledge



Concepts: Individual explicit knowledge that individuals know and can express. This would include rules, concepts and equations.

Stories: Information or knowledge that are shared within groups, such as war stories of success and failures, common phrases and metaphors.

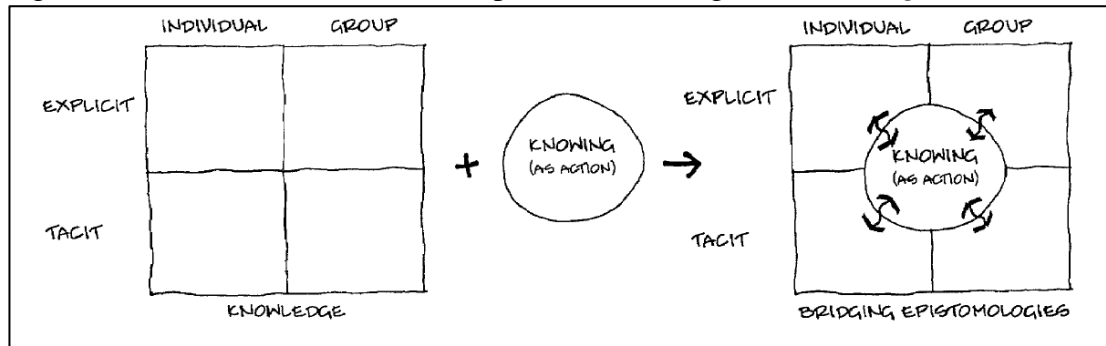
Skills: Individual tacit knowledge that allows the individuals to know how to make use of the concepts appropriately. This typically requires the presence of certain experience and capability.

Genre: Group tacit knowledge refers to common understanding of the various acceptable approaches of doing things in organizations, such as the use of different forms of communications for different purposes.

On the other hand, the ‘epistemology of practice’ focuses on ways of *knowing*, which is the “epistemic work that is done as part of action or practice”, inclusive of individual and group actions (Cook & Brown, 1999, p. 387). Practice is referred to as “the coordinated activities of individuals and groups in doing their ‘real work’ as it is informed by a particular organizational or group context” (Cook & Brown, 1999, pp. 386–387). This definition supports that *knowing* is part of action, requires present activity and is context-specific (Cook & Brown, 1999).

According to Cook & Brown (1999), knowledge and *knowing* are “complementary and mutually enabling” rather than competing (p. 383), and necessary for the creation of new knowledge and *knowing*. Knowledge by itself does not enable *knowing*. Knowledge can only restrain and place demands on *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999). Each form of knowledge is “brought into play by *knowing* when knowledge is used as a tool in interaction with the world” (Cook & Brown, 1999, p. 393). The interplay between knowledge and *knowing* thus becomes a potentially generative phenomenon to “generate new knowledge and new ways of *knowing*” (Cook & Brown, 1999, p. 381). The authors use the example of a car mechanic to illustrate this point. A car mechanic’s skill essentially comprises knowledge and *knowing*. As the mechanic practices the skills, *knowing* is acquired that feeds tacit and explicit knowledge. Without practice, one’s tacit and explicit knowledge have no opportunity to be developed. Contemporaneously, one’s possessed tacit and explicit knowledge can either restrain or promote one’s *knowing*. For example, the individual’s prior experience with a certain model of a car brand is useful for works on a newer model of the same car brand. The nature of the interactions between knowledge and *knowing* can be understood with the help of Figure 2.2 below:

Figure 2.2: Cook and Brown's (1999, p. 383) Knowledge and *Knowing*



Amongst the various models for organizational knowledge creation, Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework supports the key focuses within the five broad learning orientations: namely, behaviour, cognition, social interaction, and existing personal knowledge and *knowing*. It is the only organizational knowledge creation framework that specifically includes *knowing*, and it details the relationships and interactions between knowledge and *knowing* to create new knowledge and *knowing* (Simeonova, 2014). Hence, it is well suited to be adopted as the theoretical framework for this study, which seeks to compare how individuals acquire *knowing* as compared to the institutionalized mechanisms established to facilitate *knowing* acquisition. Furthermore, despite widespread discussion, there has been little empirical study supporting or developing this framework (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Carlile, 2002; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Orlikowski, 2002; Simeonova, 2014). According to Simeonova's (2014) research, she has not uncovered any empirical study that supports or develops this framework. As far as this researcher is aware, there has not been any research since then that can be considered as empirical study for this framework. Hence, this study will be a milestone research contributing to the completeness of the theoretical framework.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter examined the key literature on institutionalization and the acquisition of *knowing*. Since institutionalization is a common component in organizational learning, organizational knowledge creation and knowledge management, the literature also reviewed these three concepts in relation to institutionalization. As well, the review covered adult learning, as the acquisition of *knowing* is evidence that learning has taken place. Within the review of adult learning was the discussion on the distinctions of knowledge and *knowing* to differentiate the two closely related concepts. This was followed by a discussion of Cook and Brown's (1999) bridging epistemologies framework, which was the theoretical framework underpinning this research. The literature shows that the purposes of institutionalization to create institutional norms and knowledge creation for sustained competitive advantage may not be fully met by organizational learning, organizational knowledge creation and knowledge management. Yet strong interest in using institutionalization to enable knowledge and *knowing* acquisition and to create organizational knowledge and *knowing* still remains. The extant studies in this area illustrate a deep-seated belief that institutionalization can, or ought to, draw on and store individual knowledge and *knowing* into organizational knowledge and *knowing*. Notwithstanding that there has been much discussion on knowledge acquisition in organizational learning, organizational knowledge and knowledge management studies, there have been few studies that address individual *knowing* acquisition in these fields. This suggests that the creation of organizational *knowing* may still be largely unclear. Hence, to address the research problem of whether and how institutionalization is effective in the supporting of individual *knowing* acquisition, this study proposes the research question: "How do individuals interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in the supporting of acquisition of individual *knowing*?" The ensuing chapter will discuss the research methodology to answer this research question.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This chapter describes the research methodology and methods adopted to address the research problem. The research seeks to understand individuals' interpretations of their experiences on how *knowing* was acquired, as compared to the institutionalization mechanisms put in place to support their acquisition of *knowing*. The focus on institutionalization and *knowing* in this research serves to address the gap in the literature mentioned in Chapter 2; that is, these two concepts are rarely discussed together in the literature. In addition, this research serves as a unique case to examine Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework on how knowledge and *knowing* dynamically interact to create new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*. The remaining sections of Chapter 3 discuss the research questions, research paradigm and philosophical worldview, research design, research site, insider-research, sampling method, data collection method and procedures, data analysis, research considerations and researcher bias related to this research.

3.1 Research Questions

This research seeks to understand how learners acquire *knowing* in comparison with the institutionalization mechanisms put in place to support their acquisition of *knowing*. The primary research question is "How do individuals interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in the supporting of acquisition of individual *knowing*?" The sub-questions are:

- i. How did the learners interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?
- ii. How did the trainers view the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?
- iii. How did the learners interpret their experiences in their acquisition of *knowing*?

- iv. How did the trainers view the learners' acquisition of *knowing*?
- v. What factors affected the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition?

These questions hold the basic premise that individuals involved in the acquisition of *knowing* are suitably positioned to make sense of the experience in acquiring *knowing*. The individuals included in this research are the Human Resource Business Partners (HRBPs), who were the learners, and the Human Resources (HR) Specialists, who were the trainers. The HRBPs were best placed to share their experiences on how they acquired their *knowing*, while the HR Specialists who were part of the institutionalization mechanisms, would help the researcher understand whether the HRBPs have acquired the relevant *knowing*. Hence, answering these sub-questions will yield better understanding of how the individuals acquired *knowing* and the role that institutionalization mechanisms play in their *knowing* acquisition.

3.2 Research Paradigm: Qualitative Inquiry

This study adopts a qualitative research approach because the research problem seeks to understand the participants' interpretations of their experiences. Qualitative research is suitable to understand their interpretations as it studies how individuals create meanings and interpretations for a social and human problem (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is typically inductive in nature (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Labuschagne, 2003). It emphasizes understanding "naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings" where data is collected in a specific situation in which the events occurred (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 5). However, qualitative research can also have a deductive orientation if the study focuses on theory development and testing (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). Qualitative research emphasizes the rich descriptions of the individual

participant's interpretations of their experiences, seeking to understand the relationships rather than to prove the relationships between variables (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This research, with its aim of understanding the individuals' interpretations of their experiences of gaining *knowing*, fits Miles et al.'s (2014) description of qualitative research. According to the authors, qualitative research emphasizes people's lived experiences and is suitable to locate "the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 5).

A qualitative research design, with both deductive and inductive orientation, fits well with the aims of this research. This research aims to understand how individuals acquire *knowing* as compared to the institutionalization mechanisms put in place to support *knowing* acquisition. The focus is on making sense of the lived experiences through the interpretations of the individuals. Such a focus aligns with the nature of qualitative research that emphasizes understanding the interpretations of participants. By adopting an inductive orientation, the research allows the themes to naturally surface from the data. Concurrently, this study also adopts a deductive orientation to test Cook and Brown's (1999) theory, which has yet to be empirically tested (Simeonova, 2014). The use of both inductive and deductive orientations in qualitative research is not uncommon (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007; Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), deductive codes can help researchers integrate well-known concepts found in the literature into the research. For instance, Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) adopted a hybrid process of inductive and deductive thematic analysis to study the role of performance feedback in the self-assessment of nursing practice.

3.3 Philosophical Worldview: Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is the philosophical worldview underpinning this qualitative research, which studies how individuals make meaning and construct reality relating to how they acquire *knowing* (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Creswell, 2009). The social constructivism worldview, often adopted for qualitative research (Creswell, 2009), focuses on meaning and reality construction by individuals as they engage with the world (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Crotty, 1998). The primary assumption of the social constructivism worldview is that individuals desire to make sense of the world they exist in and develop better and clearer understanding of their experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Creswell, 2009). The social constructivism worldview focuses on individuals' understanding and interpretations of their realities, which differs from the other three worldviews: the post-positivism worldview is deterministic and focuses on cause and outcomes; the participatory worldview is concerned with change and collaboration with participants; and the pragmatism worldview emphasizes on resolving problems and consequences of actions (Creswell, 2009). The social constructivism worldview, with its emphasis on understanding how individuals make sense of their world, is thus appropriate for this research, which seeks to understand how individuals make meaning and construct reality relating to the acquisition of *knowing*.

Central to the social constructivism worldview are three key essences: subjective meaning emphasis, context-specificity and the researcher's self-awareness acknowledgement (Creswell, 2009). The emphasis on subjective meaning refers to gaining an understanding of the participants' experiences and their interpretations of their experiences (Creswell, 2009). Context-specificity refers to study undertaken within a specific historical and cultural context (Creswell, 2009). Researcher's self-awareness acknowledgement refers to the researcher's self-awareness of how one's assumptions and experiences affect one's interpretation of the

participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009). These essences of social constructivism necessitate any research using this worldview to be qualitative in nature and the researchers to be appreciative of the participants' experiences and interpretations, which are context-specific (Creswell, 2009).

The three essences of social constructivism are evident in this research. Firstly, the research demonstrates subjective meaning emphasis with its focus on understanding the participants' experiences and their interpretations of their experiences in acquiring *knowing*. Secondly, the research shows context-specificity as it is set in an organization where mechanisms are institutionalized to help the participants acquire *knowing*. Finally, the researcher exhibits self-awareness of her assumptions as insider-researcher of how *knowing* can be acquired by individuals.

3.4 Research Design: Single-Site Case Study

In line with the social constructivism worldview, this research adopts the embedded single-case case study design to examine individuals' interpretations of their experiences on how *knowing* has been acquired as compared to the institutionalization mechanisms for facilitating *knowing* acquisition. Miles and Huberman (1994) define a case study as a study of "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p. 25). Similarly, Merriam (2009) defines a case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit" (p. 203). According to Yin (2009), a case study is appropriate for research that seeks to understand the 'how' and 'why' of a contemporary phenomenon within an actual context, especially if there are no clear, distinctive boundaries between the phenomenon and the context. Yin's (2009) emphasis on the 'how' and 'why' of a case study approach to research can engender a rich and holistic qualitative 'thick description' data. Such 'thick

description' data has a potential to reveal complex issues for a specific context (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995). There are two main branches of case study research design: single-case design and multiple-case design (Yin, 2009). A single-case design is likened to a single experiment. Yin (2009) informs that there are five possible rationales that would support the use of single-case design. Specifically, a single-case design can be adopted when the single case represents a critical case to test a well-formulated theory, when it represents an extreme or unique case, when it is the representative or typical case, when it is a revelatory case or when it is a longitudinal case (Yin, 2009).

The case study approach is appropriate for this research because this research is set within a specific organization and involves the gathering of 'thick description' data (Yin, 2009). The data is gathered through deep reviews of the interpretations of experiences of the learners and trainers in the acquisition of *knowing* as compared to institutionalization mechanisms established to facilitate acquisition of *knowing*. The research, with its emphasis on 'how' individuals interpret their experiences, aligns with Yin's (2009) argument that case study design is appropriate for research that addresses the 'how' and 'why' in a study. Furthermore, the concepts of institutionalization and *knowing* acquisition in this research are context-specific and complex. This fulfils the justification that case study is appropriate for research where the data collected has a strong potential to review complex issues for a specific context (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995).

This paragraph provides rationale on why a single site case study method is adopted for this research. This research adopts Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework, which, according to Simeonova (2014) is a well-formulated but, to date, untested theory. Thus, this research satisfies Yin's (2009) rationale of a critical single case to test for theory.

And, as well, that this research is context-specific and not easily replicated in other organizations, makes this case unique to meet Yin's (2009) criterion. This research is exploratory and seeks to develop theory (Yin, 2009) rather than to generalize statistical findings (Miles et al., 2014). Therefore a single site case study method is well suited to address the research problem of this study.

Within a single site research design, researchers could adopt either single or multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2009). This research adopts the single site research design with multiple units of analysis. Such design studies multiple units of analysis to anchor the case study inquiry to prevent derailment (Yin, 2009). According to Yin (2009), these units can be the individuals or the groups of individuals within the organization. Fulfilling Yin's (2009) prescription, this research studies the case of groups of individuals, such as the learners and the trainers who were involved in the learners' acquisition of *knowing*, for greater insights into how *knowing* has been acquired.

Case study research, adopted for this qualitative research, is not without inherent limitations. The first commonly held limitation of case study is its lack of adequate basis for scientific generalization towards theory building (Denscombe, 2010; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1981; Yin, 2009) and that a small number of case studies cannot lead to confident generalizations (Denscombe, 2010; Patton, 2002). Furthermore, with its multiple data collection methods to study a case, case study is often perceived to have masses of complex and complicated data for analysis (Yin, 2009). These limitations of case study research are often causes for concern for researchers and these need to be addressed in studies that adopt this research design.

One counterargument to the lack of generalizability of the research design is that the real aim of case study is particularization (Stake, 1981). The emphasis of particularization is on learning about the case for itself rather than as a comparison and contrast with other cases (Stake, 1981). Concurring with this argument, Yin (2009) adds that a case study can provide analytic generalization, rather than statistical generalization, towards theory development. Analytic generalization is where “a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study” (Yin, 2009, pg. 38). This research provides an analytical generalization for theory testing and development (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009) and particularization (Stake, 1995) to examine the concepts of institutionalization and *knowing*, and the theoretical framework in greater details. The next section discusses the site selection for this qualitative, single site, case study research.

3.5 Sampling: Site Selection

Miles and Huberman (1994) inform that sampling involves the selection of research site, event, time and individuals. These factors would aid in providing findings to answer the research problem. These factors are discussed in the following paragraphs.

For the purpose of this research, the research site must be capable of helping the researcher to answer the research problem on how individuals interpret their experiences of acquiring *knowing* as compared to the institutionalization mechanisms put in place to support *knowing* acquisition. The researcher began conducting the literature review to understand the gap in 2010. In Feb 2011, the researcher learnt that the Human Resource (HR) department of her organization had obtained management approval to set in place, what appeared to the researcher, institutionalization mechanisms to develop *knowing* in the department. The terms institutionalization mechanisms and *knowing* are not part of the discussions then and now. By

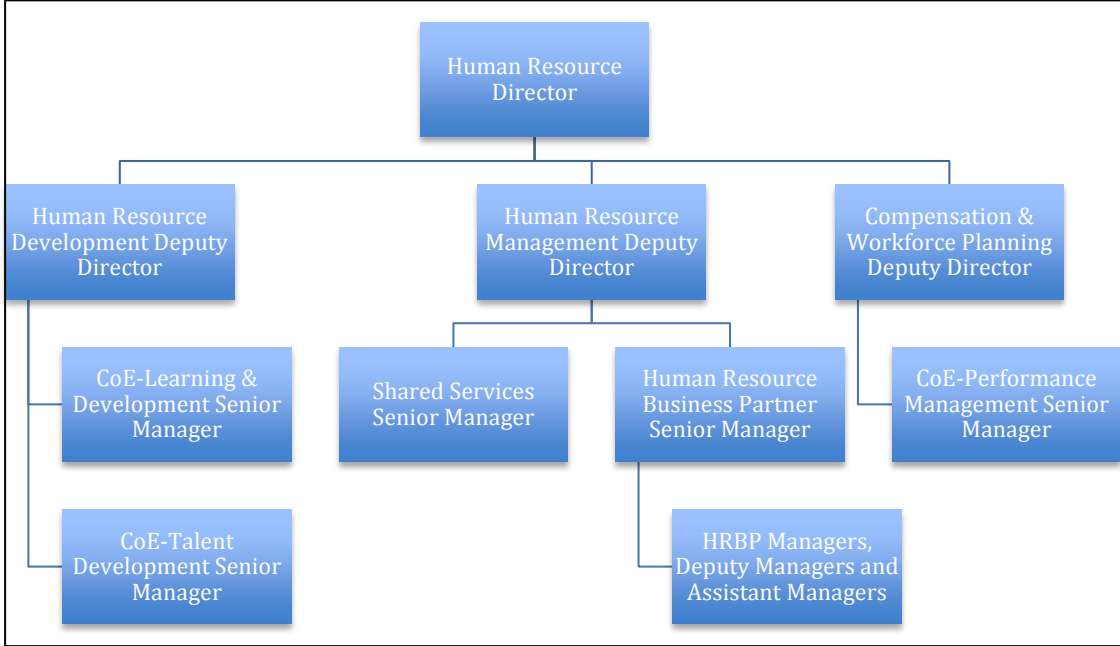
the end of 2012, the department has leveraged these mechanisms to support the *knowing* acquisition in the department. The researcher was a part of the team when the mechanisms were rolled out to the department. This development would suggest the suitability of the department to provide findings on how the team have acquired *knowing* as compared to the institutionalization mechanisms. More details on the department as a suitable research site are found in the following paragraphs.

The department selected as the research site for this study is a HR department of an engineering organization based in Singapore that the researcher works in. Formed in 1995, the organization has more than 5,000 staff, with over 60% of its workforce performing engineering related functions. It is a local organization with little international presence. The organization is structured into 13 business groups, with each group further organized into functional divisions. A group director manages each business group and is supported by directors and deputy directors, who head the divisions in the business group. The HR department in this large organization is staffed by slightly more than 60 HR personnel. The department performs the full spectrum of HR roles and functions in house – such as recruitment, learning and payroll.

The HR department underwent a structural transformation in May 2011 to adopt a HRBP model, which emphasizes the increasingly important role that HR needs to play to help the business units create value and solve human capital related problems (Barney & Wright, 1998; Storey, 2007). Under this new model, the department transformed from a multiple-specialized functional structure to a three-section structure: HRBPs, Shared Services and Centres of Excellence (CoEs). The HR Specialists reside within the Shared Services and CoE sections. Depending on their specializations, these HR Specialists have specific domain

knowledge of the HR policies, such as on compensation, benefits, learning and development, succession planning, and talent development. Figure 3.1 shows the department’s organizational structure.

Figure 3.1: HR Departmental Structure



The core functions of the new HRBPs section after the structural transformation include handling staff recruitment and exits, and annual implementation of various HR exercises such as performance ranking, succession planning, potential assessment, scholarship nominations et cetera. Besides, the HRBPs need to assist the business units to address any personnel issues and handle HR related queries from the business units and staff that they serve. The section has a total of 14 HRBPs, who are supported by eight administrative officers. Each HRBP is assigned to serve one to two business groups with regard to HR related matters. Of the various functions, the HRBPs expend the most effort on recruitment operations. The emphasis on recruitment can be evidenced by the massive hiring of more than 1,000 employees to reach more than 5,000 staff in less than two years, despite an average annual attrition rate of 8%.

To form the new HRBPs section, the HR management team transferred the HR Specialists who had previously been in the Recruitment section; transferred a few HR Specialists from other sections; and recruited a few experienced HRBPs. This decision was taken because recruitment was a large function of the HRBPs, where firm-specific recruitment experience and tacit knowledge was highly relevant to the HRBPs. At the same time, the HR management team held the assumptions that the tacit knowledge and *knowing* of other HR sections from the HR Specialists would also be useful to help the HRBPs section implement the HR policies related to these other sections. The HR management team also envisaged that the infusion of new HRBPs with prior HRBP experience would be useful for the other HRBPs to better understand the HRBP functions.

The HR management team put the first batch of HRBPs in the newly formed section through the following institutionalization mechanisms that were put in place:

- i. four half-day workshops to acquire the knowledge and *knowing* from the HR Specialists. The Training Manual for these workshops was developed by the HR Specialists with the intent to transfer their knowledge and *knowing* to the HRBPs. Subsequently, this Training Manual became institutionalized knowledge that was shared with all HRBPs;
- ii. buddy support of the HRBPs who were previously HR Specialists in the Recruitment section; and
- iii. on-going HR Specialists Advisory Support on matters regarding HR policies and practices.

Over time, new HRBPs with relevant HRBP experience were recruited to meet organizational growth, following the attrition of some HRBPs. The department put in place

the following institutionalization mechanisms to help them acquire the relevant knowledge and *knowing*:

- i. mentorship by a senior HRBP, who would use the original Training Manual developed by the HR Specialists, to guide and train these new HRBPs;
- ii. buddy support of a more experienced HRBP; and
- iii. on-going HR Specialists Advisory Support on matters of HR policies and practices.

The HR department no longer conducts HRBP training workshops because new HRBPs were recruited on an ad hoc basis. Instead, the department retained the institutionalization mechanisms of using the HRBP Training Manual to guide the new HRBPs, assigning buddies and mentors to the new HRBPs, and providing HR Specialists Advisory Support to advise the new HRBPs. The Training Manual, written in 2011, has been updated on an on-going basis to reflect new and revised policies and procedure. With the institutionalization mechanisms in place to support the new HRBPs acquire the required *knowing*, opportunity has been provided to study how the institutionalization mechanisms have been effective in facilitating the acquisition of *knowing* in the HRBPs. The next section discusses the role of the researcher as an insider-researcher in this HR department research site.

3.6 Insider-Research

This single-site case study is an important example of insider-research. Insider-research means that the research is conducted within a social group or organization of which the researcher is also a member (Greene, 2014). Insider-research provides several advantages. Firstly, insider-research promotes truth-telling due to an established intimacy between the participants and the insider-researcher (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Greene, 2014). Secondly,

relative to an outsider, the insider-researcher tends more to have a better understanding of the organization culture and politics (Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010; Unluer, 2012). This tacit knowledge can ease the collection of data (Costley et al., 2010; Unluer, 2012). Thirdly, the insider-researcher has an easy access to the participants to collect the relevant data (Costley et al., 2010; Unluer, 2012).

Insider-researcher may also face some inherent challenges. Firstly, one may suffer from a loss of objectivity due to being overly familiar with the organization and the participants (Greene, 2014; Taylor, 2011; Unluer, 2012). Secondly, one may be confronted with role duality (Unluer, 2012). This would involve balancing the insider and researcher roles concurrently (Unluer, 2012). Thirdly, ethical issues of “coercion, compliance and access to privileged information” may confront an insider-researcher (Unluer, 2012, p. 2). The manner in which these challenges are addressed in this research will be discussed after the following description of the researcher of this thesis as an insider-researcher.

The insider-researcher joined the HR department in 2010 as a HR Specialist in talent development. She was assigned a dual role of both a HRBP and a HR Specialist in talent development when the HR department underwent transformation in May 2011. The researcher was both a learner and trainer in this transformation. Together with the first batch of HRBPs, she learnt through the same institutionalization mechanisms. She was also involved as a trainer in the area of talent development. At the point of the data collection for this research, the insider-researcher has relinquished her HRBP role and her new portfolio in scholarship was quite distinct and distant from the operations of the HRBPs and HR Specialists.

In this research, the previously mentioned challenges of insider-researcher are adequately addressed. To minimize the first challenge of subjectivity, the insider-researcher adopted a successful tactic recommended by Greene (2014). Before she began each interview session, the insider-researcher advised the participant to pretend that she was neither a member of the organization nor knew detailed information. She also encouraged each participant to give examples as much as possible during the interview. Even though the insider-researcher may have insights into the identities of the mentors and buddies and their personalities, she did not use the information to ask questions that may influence the interviewees' responses. After the data collection, the insider-researcher engaged an external third party to transcribe the interview data and proofread her data analysis, together with the transcripts, to create a greater separation between the researcher and the research, thereby improving the levels of objectivity.

The second and third challenges of role duality and unethical influence and access were also minimized in this research. With regards to the second challenge, during the course of data collection, the researcher was neither involved in the work of HR Specialists Advisory Support nor that of a HRBP. Hence, she only assumed the singular role of a researcher during data collection. The third challenge of unethical influence on the participants and access to information was also minimized in this research. The insider-researcher, while a colleague of the HRBPs and HR Specialists, did not have any reporting lines with them. In fact, some of the HRPBs and HR Specialists had higher designations than the insider-researcher. Hence, there was no basis for the insider-researcher to influence or control the participants. Instead, the prior experience of the insider-researcher as both a HR Specialist and HRBP in the department helped the participants to trust the researcher during the data collection. For instance, some of the participants who were closer to the insider-researcher would share more

details of their experiences after the interviews. However, as such sharing was outside of the data collection, the insider-researcher intentionally omitted the data from the data analysis.

3.7 Population and Sampling Size Selection

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), purposive samples of individuals nested in the context are typical for case study research. Such purposive samples uncover insights into the case in question while ensuring the data collected is manageable for analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling, also known as selective or subjective sampling, is a widely used technique in quality research to identify and select the most relevant information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. Even within a single-site case study design, such sampling is necessary, as the data could be massive and too complex for analysis without the setting of sampling boundaries to effectively study the research problem (Miles et al., 2014). However, the sampling strategies adopted have to ensure that the individuals selected are representative of the population for meaningful data findings and recommendations (Weiss, 1995). Besides, purposive sampling must be consistent with the aims and assumptions of its research methodology (Patton, 2002). As qualitative research focuses on understanding the lived experiences and the respondents' interpretations of their experiences, purposive sampling should correspondingly identify suitable respondents who were involved in that particular lived experience (Patton, 2002). Hence, this research, with its focus on the experiences of specific HR respondents who were involved in the training of HRBPs, is suited to use purposive sampling to identify the relevant HR personnel to be involved in the data collection.

To address the primary research question of “How do individuals interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in the supporting of acquisition of

individual *knowing?*” and the sub-questions introduced in section 3.1, the appropriate population to be considered would be the HRBPs, who were the learners and on the receiving end of the institutionalization mechanisms, and the HR Specialists, who were the trainers and part of the institutionalization mechanisms. The HR department had a total of 14 HRBPs, of which only one was newly recruited and had not been involved in all the annual HR exercises. Hence, this HRBP was unlikely to have acquired the full *knowing* required of a HRBP, and therefore was excluded from the sampling size. A total of four HR Specialists were involved in training the HRBPs. Of these four HR Specialists, only one was excluded from the sample size, as she was also the researcher of this study. In all, the sampling size, which comprised 13 HRBPs and three HR Specialists, is manageable and, thus, not likely to generate data that is too massive for analysis (Yin, 2009). This addresses one of the challenges of case study mentioned earlier, namely that case study research could generate a massive data set. The HR Specialists and HRBPs represent two units of analysis within the single-site case study design (Yin, 2009), which enables examination of the case from different angles.

Of the 13 HRBPs, three were involved in the training of the first batch of HRBPs, as they were very experienced HR Specialists in the Recruitment section. Of these three HRBPs, two consented to be interviewed. The remaining 10 HRBPs and three HR Specialists also consented to be interviewed. In total, 15 of the 16 individuals (93%) agreed to be interviewed and were interviewed. While the number of interviewees was not large, they represent the majority of the selected population and were representative of the population for meaningful data findings (Weiss, 1995). Furthermore, as could be seen in the Chapter 4 Data Analysis, there were substantial agreements within the participant sample, thereby affirming the findings and suggesting that the sample size is sufficient (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

The general demographics of the 15 participants are summarized and tabulated in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Demographics of the 15 Participants

| Main Category | Sub-Category | HRBPs | HR Specialists |
|--|--------------|-------|----------------|
| Gender | Female | 10 | 2 |
| | Male | 2 | 1 |
| Years of experience as HRBP/HR Specialist (including HR experience outside the organization) | 1 – 2 years | 8 | 0 |
| | 3 – 5 years | 4 | 2 |
| | > 5 yrs | 0 | 1 |

For more details on the demographics of the 12 HRBPs, please refer to Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Additional Demographics of the 12 HRBPs

| Main Category | Sub-Category | HRBPs |
|---|------------------------------|-------|
| With prior HRBP experience | Yes | 6 |
| | No | 6 |
| Batch in HRBP role | First batch | 6 |
| | Subsequent batches | 6 |
| Role as HRBP | HRBP with no managerial role | 10 |
| | HRBP Manager | 2 |
| Involvement in training of first batch of HRBPs as trainers | Yes | 3 |
| | No | 9 |

As the thesis will be made available to the HR department, extra care has to be taken to minimise the chance of the department's personnel identifying the participants from the

quotes used in the thesis. For this reason, there will be no differentiation of HRBPs in the areas of supervisory role and gender. Every participant was given a pseudo female name, and every managerial role was hidden to protect the secrecy of the participant’s identity. Below are the specific demographics of the respondents based on their pseudonyms used in the Data Analysis chapter.

Table 3.3: Demographics of All Participants

| Pseudonyms | Role | Demographics |
|-------------------|----------------|---|
| Anna | HRBP | Subsequent batch of hired HRBP; has HRBP experience |
| Clare | HRBP | Subsequent batch of hired HRBP; has HRBP experience |
| Janice | HRBP | First batch of HRBP, was a HR Specialist in department prior to restructure |
| Dolly | HRBP | First batch of HRBP, was a HR Specialist in department prior to restructure |
| Isabel | HRBP | Subsequent batch of hired HRBP; has HRBP experience |
| Mitch | HRBP & Trainer | First batch of HRBP, was a HR Specialist in department prior to restructure |
| Wayni | HRBP & Trainer | First batch of HRBP, was a HR Specialist in department prior to restructure |
| Candice | HRBP | Subsequent batch of hired HRBP; has HRBP experience |
| Emmalyn | HRBP | Subsequent batch of hired HRBP; has HRBP experience |
| Priscilla | HRBP | Subsequent batch of hired HRBP; has HRBP experience |
| Corrine | HRBP | Subsequent batch of hired HRBP; has HRBP experience |
| Mandy | Trainer | |
| Jasper | Trainer | |
| Susan | Trainer | |

3.8 Data Collection Method

Within the qualitative research methodology, a researcher can select from a wide suite of research methods to address the research needs (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). These research methods may include in-depth interviews, focus groups, document reviews and participant observations (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) argues that qualitative research is an art and there is no rigid rule to dictate a specific data collection method to study a particular interest or problem. The choice of research methods depends on the purpose of the inquiry, the primary audience of the findings and the availability of resources to support the inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). For the purpose of this research, in-depth interview is the primary data collection method. It is supported by document reviews as a secondary data collection method. While other methods were considered, they were deemed inappropriate for this study. The rationale for the selection of methods is discussed below.

3.8.1 In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews elicit “quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 4) in order to find answers to questions. Through the recollection of narratives in response to the researcher’s questions, the in-depth interview method endeavours to understand how and why individuals interpret their experiences (Seidman, 2006). Depth, detail and meaning to understand their interpretations of their experiences become possible through this method (Patton, 2002). In-depth interviews, therefore, fit the purpose of this research, which is to study and understand the depths of participants’ interpretations and make sense of their experience on how *knowing* has been acquired.

There are three types of in-depth interviews: unstructured, semi-structured and structured (Patton, 2002). This research employs semi-structured individual interviews to collect the necessary data for analysis. Semi-structured interviews are guided by a list of low-structured open questions that allow the interviewer to probe into a topic and develop new questions during the course of the dialogue (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012). Semi-structured interviews also ensure that the researcher does not derail from the case under study during data collection, which is a common observation in unstructured interviews (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews minimizes the generation of massive unreadable documents emerging from unstructured data collection (Yin, 2009). Unlike structured interviews, that restrain participants' expressions of experiences and thus limit the richness of data that participants can provide (Patton, 2002), semi-structured interviews set the stage for participants to respond and share their stories in an unconstrained but guided way (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

For this research, semi-structured interviews have been undertaken for two data sources: the HRBPs, who are the learners, and the HR Specialists, who are the trainers. The selection of HRBPs as respondents for the research is premised on the fact that they were best placed to give insights of their experiences and on how they have acquired new *knowing*. The HR Specialists were selected because they would be able to share their perspectives on whether the HRBPs have acquired the required *knowing*. As compared to other individuals in the organization, the HR Specialists whom the HRBPs would consult to build their knowledge and *knowing* would be the most appropriate individuals to judge the HRBPs' depth and breadth of *knowing*.

The researcher devised a set of interview questions to address the five sub-research questions found in section 3.1. As the questions in the interviews are semi-structured, there is room to raise further questions to draw out the participants' interpretations (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Table 3.3 shows the questions for the semi-structured interviews.

Table 3.3: List of Interview Questions

| A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HRBPS | |
|--|--|
| Interview Questions | Purpose of Questions |
| 1. What is it like to be a HRBP in your organization? | To understand the HRBPs' perspectives on the HRBP role and functions |
| 2. What are your key roles and tasks as a HRBP? | |
| 3. How effective are you as a HRBP? | To understand the HRBPs' views on how they view a HRBP's knowing and their view of the other HRBPs' <i>knowing</i> |
| 4. How effective are the other HRBPs? | |
| 5. How have you been effective? | |
| 6. What contributed to your current competency as a HRBP? | To understand the HRBPs' views on their acquisition of <i>knowing</i> , the factors that contribute to their <i>knowing</i> , and the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms |
| 7. To what extent will you attribute your current competency to the learning material and workshop and help given by the organization? | |
| 8. What will you do if you have a chance to influence the development & implementation plan for the HRBP model in LTA? Why would you influence the plan in such a way? | To understand the HRBPs' views on the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms to develop the HRBPs and factors that affect the effectiveness |
| 9. Based on what would you regard a HRBP to be competent? | To understand the HRBPs' views on the required <i>knowing</i> of HRBPs |
| 10. How have you come to this realization? | |
| 11. What are some of the challenges you face as a HRBP? | To understand the HRBPs' views on whether there are other factors that have helped them acquired <i>knowing</i> to overcome HRBP challenges (besides the institutionalization mechanisms) |
| 12. How have you overcome them? | |
| 13. What resources have you relied on to overcome these challenges? | |
| 14. How effective do you think the HRBP model has been for the organization? | To understand the HRBPs' views on the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms and factors that affected the effectiveness |
| 15. What improvements can be made to the HRBP model implemented in the | |

| A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HRBPS | |
|---|----------------------|
| Interview Questions | Purpose of Questions |
| department? 16. How can these improvements be initiated and implemented? | |

| B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HR SPECIALISTS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THE TRAINING OF THE HRBPS (This includes 3 HRBPs who were involved in the training) | |
|---|---|
| Interview Questions | Purpose of Questions |
| 1. What did you hope to achieve when you developed and delivered the learning material? | To understand the motivation of the trainers in helping the HRBPs acquire their <i>knowing</i> |
| 2. What have you done to achieve your goals? | |
| 3. If you had a chance to prepare the learning material and conduct the workshops again, what would you have done differently? | To understand the trainers' views on the effectiveness of the institutionalized knowledge and training to help the HRBPs acquire their <i>knowing</i> |
| 4. Why would you have done these elements differently? | |
| 5. How effective are the HRBPs? Why? | To understand the trainers' views on the acquisition of <i>knowing</i> of the HRBPs and the factors that contribute to their <i>knowing</i> |

One limitation of in-depth interviews is that the participants can only share details that they remember (Patton, 2002; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Their memories of forgotten related events, which may enrich the research, are unlikely to be surfaced. While a focus group discussion could achieve this purpose, it is highly susceptible to dominance by individuals and lowering of openness to share, as compared with in-depth interviews (Patton, 2002; Reid et al., 2005). This research adopts in-depth interviews, as it seeks to understand the individuals' interpretations of their experiences as they are, without interference from dominating individuals or lack of trust in specific individuals during the focus group discussions. Participant observation would not be suitable for this research, as observations do not provide insights to the participants' views.

3.8.2 Document Reviews

The secondary data collection method for this research is document review. Documents in any written format, both hard and soft copy, and physical materials that are relevant to the study can be reviewed (Merriam, 2009). These documents could include public records and personal documents as well as video recordings and photos (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). For this study, the researcher has been granted access to the HRBP Training Manual, which has been updated to include new and revised institutionalized policies and processes that all HRBPs need to know and follow to fulfil their HRBP functions. The policies and procedures contained in this material are for compliance across the business units. Such widespread acceptance of policies and procedures as organization-wide processes or practices reflects that institutionalization has taken place (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Stinchcombe, 2000; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). A review of this document helps to establish the extent of the institutionalization of knowledge and *knowing* that was put in place to support the acquisition of *knowing*. This research also reviewed the Report on the HR Customer Satisfaction Survey conducted in 2014 on HR services. Responses regarding the HRBPs' quality of service and ability to meet the business units' needs would be relevant to ascertain if the HRBPs have acquired the required *knowing*. The clarity on whether the HRBPs have acquired the required *knowing* is an important pillar to be determined before the research could study how the HRBPs have acquired the *knowing* as compared to the institutionalization mechanisms.

3.9 Data Collection Procedures

With the identification of the data collection method in the preceding section, this section discusses the procedures adopted for the data collection. The first step of the data collection procedure involved inviting the 16 individuals in the sample to participate in this

research. The researcher sent an invitation email (see Appendix A) to introduce the purpose of the research and explain how the participants' anonymity will be safeguarded. The researcher also conducted one-to-one sessions with the participants to explain confidentiality and anonymity matters, secured their willingness to be interviewed and arranged an interview session. The email contained the Interview Guide on the questions that would be asked (see Appendix B) and the Participant's Consent Form to be involved in the research (see Appendix C). A week later, the researcher approached each participant to seek their consent to participate in this research and confirmed their availability. Of the 16 individuals who were approached, 15 consented to be interviewed. The interviews were held at either an open venue, such as a quiet restaurant, or a meeting room. The restaurants and seats selected were more secluded, and a relaxing ambience facilitated uninhibited sharing by the participants.

At the beginning of each interview before the audio recording took place, the researcher explained the Interview Guide and Participant Consent Form to confirm and obtain the participant's agreement to be part of the study and for the interview to be audio-recorded. The researcher also emphasized that the respondents should treat the researcher as an objective third party and give examples to illustrate their points. The participants were further told to minimize revealing of names during the interview. With these guidelines given to the participant, the researcher commenced and audio-recorded the interview. At every juncture of the audio-recorded interview, the researcher asked open-ended questions to elicit detailed stories, thoughts and feelings from the participants. Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed to facilitate data analysis, ensure the accuracy of the data collected from each respondent, and minimize any omission of important nuances (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The audio recording of interviews allowed the researcher to run each interview session smoothly and supported better rapport and interactivity between the participants and the interviewer,

compared with note-taking during the interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2015). After each interview has ended, the researcher did not ask further questions on the content of the interview to ensure that she remained objective and guided only by the data from the interview. The next section discusses the data analysis approach adopted for this research in greater details.

3.10 Data Analysis

Coding is an important data analysis method used to facilitate effective data analysis for qualitative research data (Creswell, 2009; Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2009). Coding refers to the process of assigning symbolic meaning, in the form of labels, to chunks of data perceived to have a particular attribute (Miles et al., 2014). Codes facilitate easy and quick retrieval of data chunks that belong to the same code or clusters of codes (Miles et al., 2014). Codes also provide logical and comprehensive analyses of an otherwise massive data set that would be difficult to analyse (Miles et al., 2014). According to Miles et al. (2014), there are two levels of coding: first- and second-cycle coding. First-cycle coding is a two-step process, which first involves applying a single code to chunks of data rather than line-by-line coding (Miles et al., 2014). This step allows the researcher to have a clearer broad overview of the overall contents and to identify possible categories to be developed (Miles et al., 2014). The second step involves adopting simultaneous coding to each chunk of data to identify multiple attributes (Miles et al., 2014). With this first-cycle completed, the second-cycle coding seeks to determine pattern codes by clustering the identified codes together based on relevance (Miles et al., 2014). These pattern codes, in turn help the researcher to identify emergent themes, causations, relationships and theoretical constructs (Miles et al., 2014).

To facilitate data analysis, raw data must be processed before analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Hence, the data collected from the in-depth interviews in this study were audio-transcribed by professional transcriptionists to ensure that every detail mentioned by the respondents was captured accurately and completely. Thereafter, the researcher compared the transcripts with the audio files at least three times to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions for data analysis. When reviewing the transcripts, the researcher removed any names mentioned by the respondents to protect the identity of the respondents. During the simultaneous coding step, the researcher adopted both deductive codes, which were related to the theoretical framework, and inductive codes, which surfaced from the data. The use of inductive codes discovered alternative themes and findings, which reduces researcher bias (Yin, 2009). These alternative findings, in turn, surfaced interesting insights that build the literature beyond just confirming, rejecting or extending the theoretical framework underpinning this research. More details on the data analysis implementation are discussed in Chapter 4. The next section discusses the research considerations that have been taken for this qualitative research.

3.11 Research Considerations

This section discusses the research considerations of ethics, quality and trustworthiness and the use of triangulation strategy to support these considerations. Considerations on ethics, quality and trustworthiness are pertinent to address the key limitations of subjectivity and poor generalization of findings found in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). When these issues are adequately addressed, a qualitative research study would be more valued for its contribution (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Yardley, 2008; Yin, 2009). At the same time, strategies to address these issues would also resolve the challenges of insider-research (Greene, 2014).

3.11.1 Ethical Consideration

Ethical consideration needs to be made throughout the entire research process, and particularly during data collection and analysis (Miles et al., 2014). According to Miles et al. (2014), a primary ethical consideration is to ensure that a participant's involvement in the project will not bring any social, emotional, physical and cognitive harm to the participant or another party in any manner. The participants would also need to be informed of the topics to be covered and interview questions to be asked, if necessary, to minimize any unnecessary psychological stress (Miles et al., 2014). In addition, a review of consent, assurance of confidentiality of response contents, and assurance of anonymity of identity would need to be carried out at the start of the interview (Miles et al., 2014). Furthermore, participants should be given an opportunity to withdraw from the research, as well as the right to review the transcripts of their interview to protect their interest when they decide to proceed with the research project (Miles et al., 2014).

With due consideration of all these preceding ethical issues, the researcher took steps to avoid any social, emotional, physical and cognitive harm to all the participants. Interviews were conducted in either safe, private rooms or quiet restaurants to avoid any physical harm and leakage of confidential information. To assure the participants psychologically, each of them received an email a week before the scheduled interview providing the context of the interview (please see Appendix A), the Interview Guide (please see Appendix B) and Participant's Consent Form (please see Appendix C). Every interview started by assuring the participant that the responses would be kept confidential and that an opportunity would be given for the participant to verify the transcript of their interview. This assured the participant of the safety of describing their experiences without the fear of negative responses or repercussions at work. Besides protecting the rights of the participants, the researcher also

ensured that the participants were not rewarded for their involvement in the research, which would otherwise compromise the integrity of this research (Creswell, 2009).

3.11.2 Quality Consideration

Another key research consideration is that of quality. Although qualitative research is well suited for this research due to its emphasis on how individuals make meanings of their experience, qualitative research is not without its critiques (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). To the quantitative researcher, qualitative research is the opponent of the well-held tradition of quantitative research where truth is hard fact and does not contain opinion and personal bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Yardley, 2008). Common accusations made about qualitative research is that it is unscientific and subjective, has poor reliability and validity, and provides only a weak link for generalization of findings, thus providing weak quality assurance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). However, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue that such issues could be dealt with through quality research with a robust research methodology that addresses quality. This point is similarly noted by Creswell (2013).

A robust qualitative research methodology should adhere to four quality principles: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigor; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance (Yardley, 2000, 2008). Sensitivity to context refers to sensitivity to the socio-cultural background of the research site, the existing literature of the topic, the choice of the research methods, and the material obtained from the respondents (Yardley, 2000, 2008). Being an ex-HRBP who was reassigned from the HR Specialist role to the HRBP role in 2011, this insider-researcher is sensitive to the participants' interpretations of their experiences and the socio-cultural context of the research site during the data collection and data analysis stages (Unluer, 2012). At the same time, as an insider-researcher, this researcher

has an established relationship with the participants, which promotes truth-telling in the participants (Unluer, 2012). However, the researcher is also aware that her familiarity and sensitivity to the participants' experiences and responses may also affect her interpretation of the participants' experience and skew the data collection and analysis in certain directions. Hence, the researcher conducted a dependability external audit (Merriam, 2009) where a third party reviewed the transcripts and analysis to provide objective inputs to these two areas.

The second principle to assess the quality of a qualitative research study is commitment and rigor (Yardley, 2000, 2008). Commitment refers to the degree of a researcher's attentiveness towards every participant during data collection and analysis (Yardley, 2000, 2008). Rigor refers to the appropriateness of the sample, the quality of the interview and the completeness of the analysis (Yardley, 2000, 2008). This principle aligns with Stake's (1995) argument that, besides accuracy in measurement, qualitative research needs to be "logical in interpreting the meaning of those measurements" (p. 108). Stake (1995) views that such logical interpretation of meaning goes "beyond simple repetition of data gathering to deliberate effort to find validity of data observed" during data analysis (p. 109). To satisfy this principle, the data analysis process of this research validated the data collected by having more than one data source (Guba, 1981). Details of these strategies are discussed in the subsequent section on trustworthiness of research. In addition, steps such as sending an informative email in advance, and ascertaining the participants' comfort level and willingness to participate in the research prior to the interviews were taken to ensure the participants' needs and concerns were addressed.

Yardley's third principle to assess the quality of qualitative research is transparency and coherence (Yardley, 2000, 2008). Transparency refers to the detailed clarity of the stages

of the research process in the write-up of the study (Yardley, 2000, 2008). This includes a clear write-up on the selection of the participants, the interviewing processes and the steps of analysis (Yardley, 2000, 2008). Coherence refers to the way the arguments are strung together to present a write-up that has been well thought out and that flows smoothly (Yardley, 2000, 2008). This research fulfils this third principle, as it has clearly articulated the selection of the participants, the interviewing processes and the steps of analysis. Furthermore, more details on the analysis in terms of the codes applied to the data, the 17 themes that were surfaced, and how the nine findings address the research question and objectives are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

The final principle is impact and importance (Yardley, 2000, 2008). This principle requires the research to be useful, relevant and interesting to readers and to contribute to the literature of the field of study (Yardley, 2000, 2008). As demonstrated in the literature review in Chapter 2, this research aims to address the gap in extant literature, where there is limited study on the relationship between institutionalization and *knowing*, and test Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework on the dynamic interactions of knowledge and *knowing* to create new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*. This research also provides answers on how individuals interpret their experiences of acquiring *knowing* as compared to the institutionalization mechanisms. The contributions of this research are clearly articulated in Chapter 6.

3.11.3 Trustworthiness Consideration

Another key issue that is relevant for any qualitative research is its trustworthiness. According to Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are four criteria to assess the trustworthiness of a naturalistic qualitative research. These four criteria are credibility,

transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The first criterion of credibility is concerned with the possibility of testing the “findings and interpretations with the various sources (from audiences or groups) from which data were drawn” (Guba, 1981, p. 80). To increase credibility, strategies such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, triangulation, referential adequacy materials and member checks can be used during data collection (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After data collection, strategies such as establishing structural corroboration, referential adequacy and member checks can also increase credibility (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam (2009) adds a new strategy, discrepant case analysis. This strategy requires researchers to proactively “look for data that support alternative explanations” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219) which would build the credibility of the research, increase confidence in the research and demonstrate the researcher’s intellectual integrity (Patton, 1999).

To increase the credibility of this research during data collection, the researcher has adopted prolonged engagement and accurate transcription of data. Prolonged engagement refers to a researcher spending substantial time at the research site to be able to “detect and take account of distortions that might otherwise creep into the data” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 302). The researcher has been in the HR department since 2010 and has sufficient experience with the HRBPs to detect any possible distortions in the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In lieu of member checks, which may not yield accurate information from participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher engaged a professional transcription company to transcribe the audio-recorded interviews. The researcher also verified the transcripts against the audio recordings at least three times to ensure accuracy.

To minimize researcher distortion and ensure credibility during data analysis (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the researcher presented the participants' perspectives in their own words to give clear and authentic accounts of their experiences. The researcher also triangulated the interviews with the document reviews to minimize the danger of data distortions via collaboration between the researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, the researcher engaged a third party to review the data and analysis carried out by the researcher to minimize data distortion. Finally, the researcher adopted a discrepant case analysis strategy by analysing the data to identify other factors that facilitated the individual acquisition of *knowing* beyond the institutionalization mechanisms.

Transferability, the second criterion for trustworthy research, refers to the possibility of duplicating the research in a similar context (Guba, 1981). Transferability for qualitative research forms "working hypotheses that may be transferred from one context to another depending on the degree of 'fit' between the contexts" rather than generalizations (Guba, 1981, p. 81). To increase the transferability of a qualitative research study, Guba (1981) posits the use of theoretical/purposive sampling, the collection of thick descriptive data during data collection and the development of thick description of the context during data analysis. Fulfilling this principle, this research has purposefully included all relevant parties who were involved as trainers of the HRBPs and the HRBPs who would have the required *knowing*. Thick descriptive data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. A thick description of the context is also provided in the section on the context for the research site. This allows future researchers to ascertain if the context of this research can be duplicated in their research contexts (Guba, 1981).

Dependability, the third criterion for building trustworthiness in a qualitative research study, focuses on “trackable variance – variance that can be ascribed to sources” rather than consistency in results (Guba, 1981, p. 81). Guba (1981) advises the use of overlapping methods, stepwise replication and audit trail during the data collection and dependability external audit after data collection to achieve dependability. Overlapping methods includes the use of multiple data collection methods to complement the strengths and mitigate the weaknesses in each method (Guba, 1981). Stepwise replication requires having multiple analysts study the same data source (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which is similar to the researcher triangulation strategy. Audit trails are used “to document the course of development of the completed analysis” (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002, p. 16) to demonstrate transparency, but they are seldom used for “identifying or justifying actual shortcomings that have impaired reliability and validity” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 16). Merriam (2009) asserts that audit trails act as a reference for future research to determine if the present research can be replicated in other contexts, thereby creating more similar case studies for generalization. A dependability external audit engages an external objective third party to audit the process of the research and determine the accuracy and strength of support (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For this research, an audit trail, multiple data collection methods and a dependability external audit were deployed to address the issue of dependability. The data analysis process mentioned in section 3.10 is elaborated in Chapter 4, which contains an audit trail to strengthen the research dependability. The research, with its use of in-depth interviews and document reviews, adopts more than one data collection method to increase its dependability. An external third party has also reviewed and audited the process of the research as a

dependability external audit. These three methods serve to ensure the dependability of the research.

Confirmability, the final criterion for trustworthy qualitative research, is concerned with the objectivity of the data instead of the objectivity of the methodology and the investigator, which is typically evident in quantitative research (Guba, 1981). Guba (1981) advocates the use of data triangulation and on-going reflectivity during data collection, and the use of confirmability audit during data analysis. The researcher has kept a journal in the spirit of reflectivity to record her introspections, assumptions and biases of the data collected to supplement the memo notes. This has allowed the researcher to be aware of her assumptions during the data collection and analysis.

3.11.4 Triangulation

As mentioned in the earlier section, the use of a triangulation strategy can address trustworthiness consideration in a qualitative research. Triangulation is essentially an attempt to build a robust understanding of the case under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the origin of triangulation stems from “the metaphor of radio triangulation, that is, determining the point of origin of a radio broadcast by using directional antennas set up at the two ends of a known baseline” (p. 305). According to this metaphor, “by measuring the angle at which each of the antennas receives the most powerful signal, a triangle can be erected and solved, using simple geometry, to pinpoint the source at the vertex of the triangle opposite the baseline” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305). In this sense, triangulation is the interception of the direction of two antennas. Patton (1999) holds a similar view of triangulation as a process that takes a bearing from an intersection of two directions. Patton (1999) uses the analogy of land surveying, where one can take a bearing in two

directions and locate oneself at the intersection of these two directions. Stake (1995) further defines triangulation as “a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Stake, 1995, p. 241). Miles and Huberman (1994), on the other hand, view triangulation as a form of validating findings from three angles. Hence, triangulation is a form of validating the findings from two or more angles.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) identify four primary types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. Of these four triangulation approaches, this research adopts the data and methodological triangulations to verify and validate qualitative analysis. The data triangulation strategy uses multiple data sources in a single study to examine the data (Patton, 2002). Multiple data sources can imply “multiple copies of one type of source (such as respondents’ interviews) or different sources of the same information (for example, verifying an interview respondent’s recollections... by consulting the official minutes of that meeting)” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305). Alternatively, multiple data sources can also be “interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people” (Merriam, 2009, p. 216). This research triangulated the data by examining and analysing the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) from the multiple perspectives of HRBPs and HR Specialists. The sharing by both groups of participants on how they have interacted to help the HRBPs acquire *knowing* in the course of work provided triangulation of data. The two sources of data meet the requirement of data triangulation to validate findings from at least two angles.

The methodological triangulation strategy, that this research adopts, uses multiple methods to study the research problem (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that such triangulation can take the form of either different data collection modes or different designs. They advocate that a naturalistic researcher can leverage the former, since different design is more suitable for conventional research than for naturalistic research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To demonstrate methodological triangulation, this researcher used different data collection modes, such as in-depth interviews and document reviews of the HRBP Training Manual and Report on the Customer Satisfaction Survey Results. The document review of the Training Manual provided insights on the nature of the knowledge institutionalized to facilitate *knowing* acquisition. The Report on the Customer Satisfaction Survey Results indirectly validated the HRBPs' *knowing*.

3.12 Researcher Bias

Having addressed the various important qualitative research considerations, this section discusses how the research design was set up to address researcher bias. In qualitative research, researcher bias must be minimized to ensure research reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This researcher is especially mindful of reducing researcher bias, as she is an insider-researcher who works in the same HR department as the participants. Besides addressing the challenges of insider-research, found in section 3.6, the researcher also engaged in reflectivity to minimize researcher bias. Heidegger in Finlay (2009) and Laverly (2003) asserts that self-reflection is necessary and should be undertaken constantly. This kind of understanding is core to humanness and cannot be bracketed or suspended during the process of examining a lived experience (Finlay, 2009; Laverly, 2003). Rather than attempting to bracket one's assumptions, the researcher should constantly engage in a process of self-reflection during data collection, interpretation and analysis (Laverly, 2003). Laverly

(2003) asserts that the quality and depth of self-reflection of the researcher in this process enhances the richness of the data collected and the findings.

While adopting Heidegger's stance to engage in constant reflection, the researcher of this study was mindful that her reflection should not influence the respondents' responses to minimize researcher bias. To achieve this, the researcher requested that the respondents assume that she was not involved in this experience and that they be as candid, uninhibited and descriptive in their responses as possible, prior to the commencement of each interview. The researcher was also mindful during the interviews that she would not discuss areas that she knew of but had not yet been mentioned by the respondents. In addition, during the data analysis, she was careful to ensure that the analysis conducted was purely anchored and supported by participants' experiences. Furthermore, the researcher purposefully did not seek to know or guess the identity of the people mentioned by the respondents during the interviews. While the researcher may have known the identity of the people mentioned by the respondents, she intentionally did not let this knowledge affect her interpretations of the transcriptions. Furthermore, she engaged a third party to review the transcripts and analysis to ensure objectivity. At the same time, she removed from the transcripts any names mentioned by the interviewees. She was also careful to paraphrase for proper understanding, without adding subjective perspectives to influence the respondents.

Another aspect to mitigate researcher bias is openness towards contrarian findings (Yin, 2009). An open mind is essential to ensure that possible alternative explanations are not omitted as a result of unwillingness to consider any other views outside of a preconceived position (Yin, 2009). The researcher achieved this aim by asking the respondents to talk about other mechanisms that facilitated their acquisition of *knowing* beyond the institutionalization

mechanisms. Such questions drew responses that enabled the researcher to explore and learn alternative findings beyond the originally held view.

3.13 Conclusion

This research adopts a qualitative single-site case study design with a social constructivism worldview to understand how individuals interpret their experiences on the acquisition of *knowing* as compared to the institutionalization mechanisms put in place to support its acquisition. The research methods employed to achieve the research aim include in-depth interviews and document reviews. For data analysis, the researcher used first- and second-cycle coding levels. The researcher also examined the issues of ethics, quality and trustworthiness of research and how the research has addressed these issues holistically. These measures include prolonged engagement, an audit trail, a dependability audit trail, a discrepant case analysis and triangulation. The researcher further took steps to address researcher bias, especially since the researcher is an insider-researcher. The next chapter describes the data analysis approach and the resulting 17 themes that relate to the research problem.

4 DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter describes the analytical approach and discusses the themes of this study on how the learners have acquired *knowing* in comparison with the institutionalized mechanisms put in place to support *knowing* acquisition. The study, a qualitative single-site case study research, employed in-depth interviews as a primary data collection tool and documentation reviews as a secondary data collection tool. Out of the sample size of 16 possible participants in the Human Resource (HR) department, 15 participants, with the exception of one Human Resource Business Partner (HRBP), agreed to be interviewed. These 15 participants comprised 12 HRBPs and three HR Specialists. All 15 participants participated in in-depth interviews with semi-structured questions, conducted by the researcher. The data collection for this research was also supplemented by document reviews of the HRBP Training Manual and the Report on the Customer Satisfaction Survey to enable data triangulation. This chapter includes a summary of the organizational context of the research site and an in-depth discussion on the research themes surfaced from the data analysis.

4.1 Context of the Research Study

This section provides key information on the research site selected for this study. The research study was conducted in the HR department of an engineering organization with more than 5,000 staff in Singapore. This HR department underwent a structural transformation in May 2011 to adopt a HRBP model. Under this new model, the department transformed from a multiple-specialized functional structure to a three-section structure comprising HRBPs, Shared Services and Centres of Excellence (CoEs). The newly formed HRBPs section comprises newly hired HRBPs with prior HR or HRBP experience, and HR Specialists in recruitment and other HR functions. The department established some institutionalization

mechanisms to share the required knowledge of the HR policies and procedures. This was done with the intent that all the new HRBPs, despite having different expertise and background, would have the minimal required knowledge and *knowing*.

The institutionalization mechanisms comprise the HRBP training workshops, HRBP Training Manual, HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System, and HR Specialists Advisory Support. The first batch of the HRBPs benefited from a series of four HRBP training workshops specially designed and conducted by the HR Specialists to share the relevant HR policies and procedures. The topics covered during the workshops included recruitment and selection, compensation, learning and development, staff welfare and benefits, disciplinary policies, performance management, succession planning, potential assessment, and schemes of service. As part of this training conducted by the Specialists, a HRBP Training Manual was developed, institutionalized and given to all the HRBPs. This Training Manual documented all the topics that were taught by the HR Specialists during the workshops. Subsequently, with every introduction or revision of HR policies, the institutionalized Training Manual was updated and revised, with the intention that it would be shared with all future newly hired HRBPs. In addition, the HR department introduced a HR Buddy and Mentorship System, where each new HRBP would be partnered with a more senior HRBP to receive on-the-job guidance, and mentored by a HRBP who was also their supervisor. The final institutionalization mechanism is an on-going HR Specialists Advisory Support group that the HRBPs could leverage as a resource. The primary role of the HR Specialists is to develop robust HR policies that the HRBPs implement in the business units and that assist the HRBPs to solve business units' personnel challenges when implementing the HR policies.

Since its inception in 2011, some HRBPs resigned and were replaced by newly hired HRBPs as and when needed. Due to this ad hoc nature of HRBP recruitment, there was insufficient mass to conduct the class-setting types of training workshops that the original batch of HRBPs went through. Instead, these new HRBPs were guided by the more senior HRBPs through a thorough verbal walk-through of the institutionalized HRBP Training Manual. They also underwent the remaining institutionalization mechanisms of the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System and HR Specialists Advisory Support to help them acquire the required knowledge and *knowing* as HRBPs. As each of these institutionalization mechanisms is different, it is important to analyse the data to understand how effective each institutionalization mechanism is in supporting individual *knowing* acquisition.

4.2 Data Analysis Approach

The data sources for this research come from the in-depth interviews of the HRBPs and the HR Specialists, and document reviews of the HRBP Training Manual and the Report on the HR Customer Satisfaction Survey. The ensuing paragraphs provide greater details of each data analysis approach and relevance to the research. Table 4.1 below provides a summary of the data source and the data analysis approach adopted for each data source.

Table 4.1: Summary Table on Data Source

| Data Source | Data Analysis Approach and Purpose |
|---|--|
| 1. In-depth interviews of HRBPs and HR Specialists | First- and second-cycle coding method to identify themes to support the study |
| 2. Document review of HR Training Manual | Content analysis to identify the content of the institutionalized knowledge captured in the Training Manual that the HRBPs were required to acquire and use to demonstrate the relevant <i>knowing</i> |
| 3. Document review of Report on the HR Customer Satisfaction Survey | Content analysis to understand the business units' views towards the effectiveness of the HRBPs, thereby providing greater clarity on the <i>knowing</i> of the HRBPs |

4.2.1 Analysis of In-Depth Interviews

The data analysis of the in-depth interviews adopted for this research was the first- and second-cycle coding method prescribed by Miles et al. (2014) to generate logical and comprehensive analysis of massive data. The researcher engaged the first-cycle coding level, which involves a two-step process. This process requires applying single holistic codes to large chunks of data, followed by applying simultaneous codes to each large chunk of data to identify multiple attributes. For the second step, the researcher engaged in deductive coding based on the concepts relating to the theoretical framework underpinning this research. Thereafter, the researcher engaged in inductive coding to allow alternative and new codes to surface from the data. In the second-cycle coding level, the researcher identified the pattern codes that would help to identify emergent themes, causations, relationships and theoretical constructs (Miles et al., 2014) that would lead to the contributions made by this research.

The researcher extracted the quotes of the interviewees into a table and carried out first- and second-level codes to each chunk of data. Table 4.2 below is a sample of the coding done using holistic, deductive, inductive and pattern codes on one quote of one of the HRBP respondents, HRBP Anna. (Every participant was given a pseudo female name, and every

managerial role was hidden to protect the secrecy of the participant’s identity. Please refer to Appendix D for a copy of the coding carried out for the transcripts.) Using the sample table below, a quote such as “learning the policies” was given the “knowledge acquisition” holistic code since it described acquisition of policy knowledge. A quote such as “implementing these or when the staffs have queries, sharing with them our rationale behind the policies as well as the policy” was given the “*knowing* acquisition” holistic code and “*knowing*” deductive codes as it illustrated how the respondent acted on their knowledge in their work, thus demonstrating that she has acquired *knowing*. The same quote was also given the “personal explicit knowledge: HRBP” deductive code as it illustrated the respondent’s personal explicit knowledge in explaining the policies to others. Quotes pertaining to “policies” or “policy” were given “institutionalized knowledge” deductive codes because such knowledge has been institutionalized in the manual and in the organization. Finally, quotes that mentioned “on the job” were given “on the job learning” inductive codes.

Table 4.2: Sample of Coding Cycle

| QUOTES FROM INTERVIEWEE | ANALYSIS: CODES | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| | First-Level Codes | | |
| | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes |
| <i>Okay, so when I first started it was more of learning the policies first because you need to know the background, you need to know your own policies before you can help others, guide others through. So how I gained the competence was firstly I learned about the policies within the organization and then it's really on the job, because regardless of whichever group I was handed, our HR policies don't change. So it's nearly a matter of implementing these or when the staffs have queries, sharing with them our rationale behind the policies as well as the policy.</i> | Knowledge acquisition, <i>Knowing</i> acquisition | Institutionalized knowledge, Personal tacit knowledge: HRBP, Personal explicit knowledge: HRPB, <i>Knowing</i> , Dynamic interactions | Motivation to learn, On-the-job learning |
| | Second-Level Pattern Codes: Themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported <i>knowing</i> acquisition • Institutionalized knowledge was the initial point of reference for learners to acquire <i>knowing</i> • Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with <i>knowing</i> to create new <i>knowledge and knowing</i> • On-the-job learning was required for <i>knowing</i> acquisition | | |

During the data analysis process, a total of three holistic codes (namely, Knowledge sharing, Knowledge acquisition and *Knowing* acquisition) were created to code sections of data. Thereafter, 20 deductive codes derived from the theoretical framework, and 17 inductive codes surfaced from the data were created and overlaid upon the holistic codes. These deductive and inductive codes are listed in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3: List of Deductive and Inductive Codes

| Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes |
|--|---|
| 1. Institutionalized knowledge | 1. Institutional norms |
| 2. Other explicit knowledge | 2. Degree of institutionalization |
| 3. Personal tacit knowledge: HRBP | 3. Institutionalized practice |
| 4. Personal explicit knowledge: HRBP | 4. Motivation to share |
| 5. Personal tacit knowledge: HRBP buddies & mentors | 5. Motivation to learn |
| 6. Personal explicit knowledge: HRBP buddies & mentors | 6. Learning styles |
| 7. Personal tacit knowledge: other HRBPs | 7. Personality |
| 8. Personal explicit knowledge: other HRBPs | 8. Learner's attitudes |
| 9. Personal tacit knowledge: HR Specialists | 9. On-the-job learning |
| 10. Personal explicit knowledge: HR Specialists | 10. Unique cases |
| 11. Personal tacit knowledge: HR colleagues | 11. Mutual learning |
| 12. Personal explicit knowledge: HR colleagues | 12. Relevant experience |
| 13. Group tacit knowledge: HR Specialists | 13. Institutionalized knowledge currency |
| 14. Group-explicit knowledge: HR Specialists | 14. Institutionalized knowledge relevance |
| 15. Group tacit knowledge: HRBPs | 15. Personal attributes |
| 16. Group-explicit knowledge: HRBPs | 16. Job fit |
| 17. Organizational knowledge | 17. Training |
| 18. Organizational <i>knowing</i> | |
| 19. Dynamic interactions | |
| 20. <i>Knowing</i> | |

17 themes were distilled from the codes to address two of the objectives of this research, which are to examine the effectiveness of institutionalization in supporting knowing acquisition and to determine the factors affecting these mechanisms. At the same time, six themes were distilled from the codes to attend to the remaining two research objectives of creating a better understanding of how *knowing* is acquired through the lens of Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework and the factors that affect *knowing* acquisition. The next section details the analysis of the document reviews.

4.2.2 Analysis of the Document Reviews

The analysis of the document review of the HRBP Training Manual focuses on identifying the content of the Training Manual. The analysis shows that the content of the manual was purely procedural and operational in nature. The manual provided topical descriptions of the various HR policies and procedures. The topics covered were recruitment and selection, salary computation, continuing education, performance ranking, potential assessment, re-designation, leave, disciplinary actions and staff exit interviews. The analysis of this manual confirmed the HRBPs and HR Specialists' comments that the manual was developed to share procedural knowledge of HR policies and procedures. The focus of the manual on procedural knowledge also corresponds with the HRBPs' responses on its relevance in helping the HRBPs acquire their *knowing* of procedural knowledge.

The Report on the Customer Satisfaction Survey comprised the following:

- i. five questions on the HR department as a whole;
- ii. one question on how well each of the eight functions (e.g., manpower planning and budgeting, recruitment and selection, annual promotion and ranking process, performance management, benefits, learning and development, employee

communications and employee relations) had done to support the respondents or the business units;

- iii. one question on the importance of the eight HR functions to the respondents; and
- iv. one open text field for general feedback from respondents on each of the functions and any other comments.

The first five questions that were related to the HR department as a whole could not be used for this research, since the feedback was not specifically meant for the HRBPs. For the one question that applied to each of the eight functions, only the recruitment and selection function is clearly and specifically related to the HRBPs. Hence, the statistics relating to this question on the recruitment and selection function would be relevant to the research. The next question, on the importance of the functions, was excluded from this data analysis, as it did not relate to the *knowing* of the HRBPs. The responses to the last question, seeking general feedback for the recruitment and selection function and any other comments, were analysed for their relevance to the *knowing* of the HRBPs.

The analysis of the document reviews is included in the next section on the *knowing* of the HRBPs rather than the themes from the in-depth interviews. The decision for this placement is due to the fact that the survey report purely studied the business units' responses to the HR functions but did not provide insights as to how did the HRBPs acquire *knowing*, which is the purpose of this study. The inputs from the business units' feedback to HR in the survey report could only provide an additional data point on whether the HRBPs had acquired the *knowing* required for HRBPs.

Before discussing the themes that relate to the research problem, it is pertinent to address whether the HRBPs acquired the required *knowing*. A discussion on HRBPs' *knowing* is found in the next section.

4.3 *Knowing* of HRBPs

Since the inception of the HRBP model in May 2011, the HRBPs had been fully involved in the full spectrum of HRBP functions. The 12 HRBPs who were interviewed shared about their acquisition of *knowing*, and how they would help, or have helped, newer HRBPs to acquire the required *knowing*. When interviewed about their level of competence, most of the HRBPs expressed that they had been fairly competent and able to demonstrate their *knowing*. However, they had different views towards the components constituting required *knowing* of a HRBP. HRBP Candice evaluated her *knowing* in terms of recruitment activities, interviewing skills and project management skills. With a minor difference, HRBP Dolly evaluated herself in terms of recruitment skills and partnering with the business units pertaining to all HR related policies. Similarly focused on partnership with the business units, HRBP Mitch recognized that the ability to build trust with the business units is a key aspect of her competence. HRBP Corrine's terminology that the HRBPs were "administration experts" suggests that HR administration skills is one of the main components of HRBP *knowing*. HRBP Clare, on the other hand, evaluated her *knowing* of serving the business units with the support from her understanding of the work nature and people of her business units, which is less related to HRBP's operational *knowing*.

Despite the differences in how they define *knowing*, most of the HRBPs evaluated themselves as "quite effective". For instance, HRBPs Candice and Mitch scored themselves as achieving 60–70 points out of 100 points, and HRBP Clare scored herself as achieving 8

out of 10 points. HRBP Wayni, who was one of the trainers of the first batch of HRBPs, assessed that the first batch of HRBPs had been effective and gave them a score of 6–7 out of 10 points. As for the subsequent batches of HRBPs, they were assessed to be “pretty effective” by HRBP Dolly in how they had been assisting the business units to solve HR problems. The support from HRBPs Wayni and Dolly further suggests that the HRBPs had acquired the HRBP’s *knowing*. Some of their comments are found below.

- Candice *“In terms of building rapport in the business, I would rate myself as a 4, given a scale of 5 ... In terms of interviewing, recruitment activities wise, I will rate myself as between 3–4, and other project management skills will be around 4 as well.”*
- Clare *“[On] a scale [to] 10, I will probably say 8 because right now I am able to understand what are the people doing in my group, the kind of work that they do.”*
- Corrine *“Well, we did sufficiently well for the first year. I think that we can take it to a higher level, as I explained earlier, to rise above being just an administration expert”*
- Mitch *“I wouldn’t say that I am very effective at this moment, because I believe I have still a lot to learn, but so far I will give myself about 60 [out of] 100 as I’ve already gotten the Group Director’s trust, and in some of the confidential issues he has slowly, gradually [started] coming to me to get more information and advice.”*
- Wayni *“I would say that ... on a scale of 1–10 we are probably not doing too badly, probably on 6–7.”*

Besides self- and peer-recognition, there was also recognition from the HR Specialists who trained and provided advisory support to the HRBPs. Two of the HR Specialists recognized that, with experience and over time, the HRBPs grew less reliant on the HR Specialists when dealing with unique cases. In fact, according to HR Specialist Mandy, by the second cycle of some of the HR annual exercises, the HRBPs were able to value-add more to the cycle, thus demonstrating their acquisition of *knowing*.

- Jasper *“We could see that after the third month the reliance on the ... team [was] weaning off.”*

Mandy *“I have to say, when we first started, the BPs [business partners] were very new to the process, so they may not value-add as much, but for this year, this being not the first time they are doing it, I can definitely see the standard of work going up. So within the group, yes, we do see consistency and some kind of benchmark ...”*

In addition, there was recognition by the business units of the *knowing* of the HRBPs. Two HRBPs mentioned that the management of the business units had commended the HRBPs that they had not simply adopting a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead the HRBPs had “helped them tremendously” (commented by HRBP Corrine) and that they had been “very effective” (commented by HRBP Mitch) in helping the business units to solve their problems. This recognition from the business unit suggests that the HRBPs had acquired and demonstrated the *knowing* of a HRBP.

Corrine *“The management staff of the groups that [we] were supporting ... provided feedback that they felt that this was an excellent support from HR. After having served that for the one-and-a-half years that I was there, they did unanimously say that it had helped them tremendously, especially as ... HR did try to address specific issues or problems that were within the groups and tried to customize a solution for the particular good, rather than having to look at the ... organization as a whole and ... try to standardize the response.”*

“Generally, I did hear that all of us rose to the task in terms of meeting the basic needs of the groups, and I felt that the groups appreciated the fact that they now only needed one point of contact to approach for all their HR issues.”

Mitch *“In fact ... one of our group directors ... conducted focus groups with some of our management staff, and feedback was very positive that [the] HR Business Partner model was a very effective model in terms of contact point because they ... know who to approach ... whenever they [have] HR issues.”*

At the same time, the Report on the Customer Satisfaction Survey conducted by the HR department of all their internal customers in 2014 further supported that the HRBPs had acquired the required *knowing*. The customer satisfaction survey was e-mailed to all internal customers, and responses were analysed and collated into a report. With regard to the

question on how well the recruitment and selection function had supported the individuals or the business units, only 2% indicated the support had been “poor”, while 81% indicated it had been “satisfactory” and above. The remaining 17% indicated that it was “not applicable”. The report also showed that the general feedback from staff on the HRBPs was quite positive, with no specific complaints made against them. Some of the compliments, relating to customer service, understanding of business needs, answering queries, management of cases, and effectiveness of recruitment, are featured below.

“Dolly is very service-oriented. She provides fast and efficient consultancy and supports. We are grateful to have her with us.”

“Clare has been always responsive and committed in dealing with my request/enquiries.”

“Compliments to Mitch who has been a good HR partner to [the Group]. She's proactive, quick in her responses and most importantly she understands [the Group's] work and often go the extra mile to look for solution and support us.”

“Thanks to Janice for their prompt response to my HR related queries all the time. Good job!”

“Both Wayni and Isabel have provided good and responsive support to [the Group]. Thanks!”

“BP Emmalyn is a caring person. She has followed through during staff grievance process and supported all involved well.”

“HR staff Clare, ... have been very supportive and forward looking in my office's recruitment needs and have done very well in helping my division achieve 90% recruitment. Thank you very much.”

The HRBPs were cognizant that there were areas for development in terms of their *knowing* as HRBPs despite receiving recognition from peers, HRBP managers and business units. HRBPs Corrine, Dolly and Wayni pointed out that the current HRBPs were performing “operational” work at a “basic level” competence. To move towards a higher level of competence, they would need to have a better knowledge of the business units and organization, as asserted by HRBPs Isabel, Corrine, Mitch and Wayni. Such knowledge

would need to be complemented by strategic thinking skills to anticipate and solve future problems, as highlighted by HRBPs Dolly, Mitch and Corrine. HRBP Wayni's assertion that HRBPs would need to provide pre-emptive solutions rather than reactive solutions to problems also demonstrates that strategic thinking skills is a required *knowing* that is presently lacking in the HRBPs.

Wayni *"I feel that there will probably still be some room for improvement in terms of involvement, a lot more involvement with our management stakeholders, doing some pre-emptive sort of HR measures for our staff et cetera, for our respective business group staff."*

Corrine *"To understand even more of the business that the groups were involved in, to be able to anticipate likely issues and perhaps even foresee things that management might not even have realized."*

"If you have to take it to the next level, I think you will need to understand the culture of the organization, their business goals and ... specific business needs of the specific groups of the divisions that you are taking care of."

Mitch *"It would be very beneficial if there [were] a professional HRBP who [came] in more from the consultancy firm, to teach us ... how to manage clients and advise them, more as a professional HR person."*

"Strategic thinking I think is a key area that all HRBPs should have, because for the group that you serve you need to understand them."

Similarly, one of the HR Specialists noted that the HRBPs would need to demonstrate a higher level and more strategic *knowing* than their present operational *knowing*.

Jasper *"We have equipped them with knowledge on the rationale and the workings of the current policies and processes, but [we] may not necessarily equip them with the understanding of the needs of the organization at large, as well as the needs of the group specifically. So this, I would say ... is the real gap."*

"I would say, then, as we mature as an organization and as the concept of HRBP gains traction, the next stage would be how HRBPs can be seen as ... equal partners and not just ... order takers. Someone who can challenge and even join the management teams of [these] respective groups to make decisions on a jointly basis, rather than being in a position to carry out decisions that have been made without their involvement."

The data collected from the HRBPs, the HR Specialists and the Report on the HR Customer Service Survey illustrated that the HRBPs had generally acquired the *knowing* required for the operational role of HRBPs. However, going forward, there is an expectation for the HRBPs to expand their role and assume a more strategic role. This shift would require a different kind of *knowing* to be acquired and demonstrated. This suggests that it was easier to acquire *knowing* in terms of implementation of procedural knowledge as compared to *knowing* related to more strategic *knowing*, which translates to providing higher level and more strategic solutions to the business units. This further suggests a need to study whether and how the institutionalization mechanisms have helped the individuals to acquire the level of *knowing* needed for their jobs.

4.4 Themes

During the analysis, 17 themes were identified from of the 20 deductive codes and 17 inductive codes. The themes listed shall be discussed in the subsequent sections, with quotes taken from the transcripts to support these themes:

1. Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported *knowing* acquisition
2. Institutionalized knowledge was the initial point of reference for learners to acquire *knowing*
3. Institutionalized knowledge was difficult to be maintained by individuals' effort alone
4. Perceived usefulness of institutionalized knowledge impacted on learners' willingness to learn from it
5. Institutionalization of procedural knowledge alone was insufficient for *knowing* acquisition
6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of *knowing*
7. Weak institutionalization of HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System led to inconsistent quality of sharing
8. Institutionalized HR Specialists Advisory Support enhanced learners' acquisition of *knowing*
9. Strong institutionalization of HR Specialists Advisory Support led to HR Specialists' willingness to share knowledge and *knowing*
10. Institutional norms of HR Specialists sharing led to the creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing*

11. Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and *knowing* created group knowledge and *knowing* but might not lead to organizational knowledge and *knowing*
12. Tacit knowledge in the form of relevant experience was useful for learners to acquire *knowing*
13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with *knowing* to create new knowledge and *knowing*
14. Individual and group tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with *knowing* to create new individual and group knowledge and *knowing*
15. Learners' motivation to solve real work problems encouraged them to acquire *knowing*
16. Learners' attitude towards learning and personal attributes affected their acquisition of *knowing*
17. On-the-job learning was required for *knowing* acquisition.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Institutionalization of Firm-specific Procedural Knowledge Supported *Knowing* Acquisition

The Training Manual was developed and institutionalized to help HRBPs to acquire the required *knowing*. The manual emphasizes firm-specific procedures and policies that all HRBPs would need to know sufficiently well to advise business units and implement these procedures and policies in the business units. All the first batch of HRBPs (Mitch, Janice, Jane, Dolly, Janice, Corrine, Wayni) agreed that the training workshops and the HRBP Training Manual were relevant and useful to them. Specifically, the workshops and manual helped them learnt the HRBP roles and responsibilities and the firm-specific HR policies and processes when they first assumed the HRBP role. For instance, HRBPs Wayni, Mitch and Janice, who were transferred from different HR Specialist roles to the HRBP role, recognized that the training gave them a very good overview of the work of the newly formed HRBP section. HRBP Corrine, who was recruited externally to be part of the first batch of HRBPs, shared the same notion that the training gave the new HRBPs “a very good overview of all the various roles and responsibilities that the HR Business Partner was expected to provide”. HRBPs Janice and Anna also articulated this point separately. In addition, HRBP Dolly acknowledged that the programme covered the basic things that HRBPs would need to know and even rated it an ‘above average’ score of 3.5 out of 5 for programme effectiveness.

These comments suggest that the procedure-centric institutionalized knowledge was perceived as effective in helping the HRBPs learn the core procedural knowledge, covering firm-specific HR policies and procedures that they could subsequently apply or explain to the business units and staff. HRBPs Mitch, Candice and Janice similarly confirmed that the institutionalized knowledge allowed them to learn the processes, protocols and policies that were necessary for them to carry out their HRBP role.

Mitch *“Those programmes were quite effective because I was new in the HR Business Partner and I [was] not very clear of what [were] the recruitment processes...”*

Candice *“Because material, compulsory materials that you have to read out, especially on what is HRBP role, what are the processes that you must know ... So, the new employee will know what are the processes, what are the protocols to follow.”*

Janice *“There was a learning session that we had, where we learned the more common HR policies that people would definitely ask.”*

The subsequent batches of HRBPs, who did not benefit from the structured training, were given the same set of “compulsory reading” institutionalized materials. Similar to the first batch of HRBPs, all subsequent batches of HRBPs, except HRBP Emmalyn, acknowledged that the institutionalized knowledge was useful to help them learn and implement the policies. HRBPs Isabel, Clare, Candice and Priscilla agreed that the manual provided firm-specific “guidelines” and “standards operating procedures” of the HR policies that enabled them to acquire the relevant *knowing* as HRBPs. HRBP Priscilla further added that she spent her first few days just reading the institutionalized knowledge before she started her HRBP role. This suggests that the institutionalized knowledge was helpful for her *knowing* acquisition. Below are some of their comments.

Candice *“The material itself serves as a guideline, so you will know what are the major steps.”*

Clare *“In the set of notes there are some generic policies and ways that they do certain exercises ... So that’s the basic ... process that is in the organization itself.”*

Priscilla *“Actually I got two files from a fellow colleague to photocopy and read up. So it contains, like, the SOPs [standard operating procedures] for the various functions. So, basically, the first few days were just reading up on everything. Then thereafter it's just seeking out from fellow colleagues, whenever I encounter any peculiar cases.”*

Separately, HRBP Anna articulated clearly that she acquired her competency firstly by learning and understanding the policies. She added that this learning helped her to guide others on the HR policies, which was a demonstration of her *knowing*. HRBP Isabel similarly mentioned this.

Anna *“So how I gained the competency was, firstly, I learned about the policies within the organization.”*

Isabel *“When I just joined they had a file, a manual ... so I actually learned most of the knowledge from there.”*

However, it is important to note that, of all the HRBPs interviewed, only HRBP Emmalyn disagreed that the institutionalized knowledge was of value to her *knowing* acquisition. She commented instead that the institutionalized knowledge was “very out-dated” and, hence, she did not rely on it for her learning of the HRBP portfolio. More details of this theme are discussed in theme 4 (Perceived usefulness of institutionalized knowledge impacted on learners’ willingness to learn from it).

4.4.2 Theme 2: Institutionalized Knowledge was the Initial Point of Reference for Learners to Acquire *Knowing*

The institutionalized firm-specific knowledge, with its emphasis on the HR processes that are required for HRBP daily operations, was the initial point of reference for most of the HRBPs. All of them, with the exception of HRBP Emmalyn, referred to the institutionalized

material when they first assumed the HRBP role to help them know the processes for the HR policies. HRBP Clare spoke of referring to the institutionalized knowledge to check on the processes and tasks to do when she first commenced as a HRBP and when she had to handle new and unique cases. Similarly, HRBP Priscilla spoke of referring to the institutionalized knowledge to know the “standard operating procedures” during her first few days as a HRBP. She highlighted that her reference to the institutionalized knowledge was more frequent at the initial period as compared to the present. The change in frequency was because she had become more familiar with the processes.

Isabel *“So it’s more like the first few months I needed to look at it.”*

Dolly *“Actually, to be honest, probably for the first three months to six months you do refer back to the materials every now and then.”*

Priscilla *“So, basically, the first few days were just reading up on everything.”*
“Because the materials are just basic guidelines that I actually referred to more in the beginning than now.”

Similarly for some of the first batch of HRBPs who went through the structured training, the institutionalized knowledge was also an initial point of reference for them to gain greater clarity in their understanding of the training. HRBPs Wayni and Mitch, who were involved in the training as trainers, responded that the institutionalized material was relevant for them to clarify their understanding of the topics that were covered during the training. HRBP Mitch even added that the institutionalized knowledge was very useful to help her recollect the massive amount of information that was shared during the structured workshops. She noted specifically that the workshops covered too many topics and that she could not remember everything that was taught. Instead, she referred to the institutionalized knowledge given to the HRBPs to help her recollect the learning.

Wayni *“So if we face a situation we know as a basic [situation], ... we could actually just refer back to the material and then understand or rather revisit the topics.”*

Mitch *“The training material was very useful. It helps me when I want to find out information about the processes. As I mentioned earlier, I may not be able to recall all the processes during the training, so with the training materials, I could refer back and clarify certain areas which are not clear.”*

HRBP Janice, who belonged to the first batch and was familiar with most of the processes, would still refer to the institutionalized knowledge whenever she had to apply any knowledge for the first time. This application of knowledge, which is *knowing*, is perceived to be different from gaining a cognitive understanding of the topic. This suggests that *knowing* acquisition could be incremental, where the individual acquires *knowing* in parts.

Janice *"But of course dealing with it and applying it is a different thing. So when a particular case comes, of course we do flip back to the slides that we had."*

“But of course ... there are certain cases where, you know, the supervisors call and say, ‘Can I know what’s the criteria?’ Then that is where I fall back to this training material.”

HRBP Janice’s approach towards learning from the institutionalized knowledge is also reflected in one of the HRBPs belonging to the subsequent batches. HRBP Anna, who belonged to the subsequent batches, would refer to the institutionalized knowledge to aid her first application of any specific knowledge.

Anna *“So my first point of reference will always be my folder ... So I always refer to my folder first if the information can be found there, because I usually [have a] tag [on] them ... already.”*

The above responses of these HRBPs suggested that firm-specific institutionalized knowledge was useful as a first point of reference for HRBPs. Notwithstanding the silence from the rest of the HRBPs on referring to the institutionalized knowledge as a first point of reference, the data shows that the institutionalized knowledge was useful to help HRBPs’ initial attempts at applying the knowledge learnt from the manual.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Institutionalized Knowledge was Difficult to be Maintained by Individuals' Effort Alone

In the organization, HR policies would typically be reviewed and changed periodically to ensure relevance and currency to changing organizational and environmental needs. The HR department would usually review existing policies every two to three years. In the review, existing processes would be revised and new processes created. All HRBPs would have to learn the changes and comply with the revised policies and processes. According to HRBP Wayni, the revised policies and procedures would be updated into the institutionalized knowledge and used to brief new HRBPs as “if they were to join our [training] session”. While HRBP Candice also confirmed that such enhancements to the institutionalized knowledge were carried out, HRBP Emmalyn did not seem to perceive a difference. Instead, HRBP Emmalyn insisted twice that the institutionalized knowledge was “out-dated” and that “no one has updated the materials”.

Wayni *“For these new BPs who actually joined us on the ad hoc basis, we will actually use the same set of material, the same sequence, and then after which we update them as per the policies, we actually update them and then we will brief them accordingly as per how we would ... brief them if they were to join our session, and all these materials were actually compiled into one manual per se.”*

Candice *“In the current organization, they have materials provided, and it’s getting better in the sense that they are improving. But previously, when I was recruited early last year, I would say that the materials [were] not as comprehensive.”*

However, these conflicting comments could be due to the existing institutionalized norms. Presently, the HRBPs institutionalized the practice of sharing their copies of the institutionalized knowledge with the new HRBPs that they would be buddying with. However, all HRBPs have different approaches and ways of maintaining their copies of the institutionalized knowledge. For example, HRBPs Janice and Anna would update their copies of the institutionalized manual of their own accord based on their preference. Thereafter, they

would share these updated copies with the new HRBPs that they were assigned as buddies to. HRBP Isabel, on the other hand, did not have the “personal habit” of maintaining her hard copy institutionalized knowledge.

Janice *“I have a file containing all the information, so if there is any refinement to that particular policy I will supersede it.”*

Isabel *“I think this probably is a personal habit. Now if everything is e-mailed, I will probably keep it in soft copy, and so I don’t actually add it onto my manual, which is hard copy.”*

Anna *“You are learning on the job and you add your own stuff to the folder so your own personal folder sort of grows with the things that you need to know... So when a newbie ... comes along, we actually lend our folder to the newbie for him or her to photocopy.”*

The above comments suggest that, while there was centralized institutionalized knowledge, not everyone would rely on it or have access to it. This could explain why HRBP Emmalyn believed that the institutionalized knowledge was not updated and therefore did not rely on it. This is further compounded by the fact that some individuals apparently adopted personal efforts to update their versions of institutionalized knowledge, rather than rely on the centralized institutionalized knowledge. Given that it is an institutionalized norm for HRBPs to lend personal versions of institutionalized knowledge to the new HRBPs, there would be a high possibility of new HRBPs having different versions of the institutionalized knowledge. This might eventually lead to de-institutionalization of the institutionalized knowledge, as everyone would be adhering to different versions of the institutionalized material. This also begged the question of whether institutionalized knowledge has been truly institutionalized if individuals are not aware of it or use it.

4.4.4 Theme 4: Perceived Usefulness of Institutionalized Knowledge Impacted on Learners' Willingness to Learn from It

Individuals' perception of the usefulness of institutionalized knowledge determines their willingness to use institutionalized knowledge. As mentioned in the discussion of themes 1 and 2, the HRBPs would actively learn from the institutionalized knowledge to help them acquire the required *knowing* during the initial months. As they were unfamiliar with the processes then, institutionalized knowledge was perceived to be useful for them to learn organizational HRBP processes. However, as mentioned earlier, HRBP Emmalyn did not find the institutionalized knowledge useful and instead termed it as "very out-dated". Other HRBPs like Candice, Priscilla and Isabel also seldom referred to the institutionalized knowledge as a source of learning over time after they became familiar with the HR processes. HRBP Isabel added that she would approach the HR Specialists instead to learn how to deal with the special cases that she came across. Conversely, HRBPs Janice, Dolly, Clare, and Mitch would learn the less familiar policies or "more complicated stuff" (commented by HRBP Mitch) through the institutionalized knowledge.

Candice *"No, I don't refer to the materials anymore. Because all those materials are actually more of how the processes go, and as you work with the organization longer, you will have known the processes quite thoroughly."*

Priscilla (As she can run her function as HRBP now) *"Because the materials are just basic guidelines that I actually referred to more in the beginning than now."*

Isabel *"I referred more often to the centres of expertise, because the manual didn't have documentation of deviation cases. So mostly those are the situations where I need to have some direction on how to handle it and how to perform it."*

Janice *"But if there are certain cases where you don't deal on a day-to-day basis, then I would have to refer to it."*

Clare *"Now, actually, not very frequent[ly], only once in a while if there are certain policies that I am not very familiar, then I would then refer back [to the manual] ... because I am more familiar with the processes now that I have come across before, so the note is not necessary at this stage."*

Their comments suggest that, if they perceived the institutionalized knowledge as not useful for meeting their needs, they were unlikely to seek to learn from it. While the intent of the institutionalized knowledge was to “provide materials for them to refer back” (commented by HRBP Wayni), if the HRBPs do not believe that the material is useful, this purpose would not be achieved. This further leads to the next theme, that institutionalization of procedural knowledge alone is unlikely to be sufficient for *knowing* acquisition.

4.4.5 Theme 5: Institutionalization of Procedural Knowledge Alone was Insufficient for *Knowing* Acquisition

Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge alone appears to be insufficient for *knowing* acquisition. Firm-specific procedural knowledge usually focuses on institutionalized standard operating procedures (SOPs) that organizations establish for individuals to comply with. According to HR Specialist Mandy, the institutionalized procedural knowledge and training was “just a starting point”. As every business unit is unique and has different challenges, the HRBPs would need to use their knowledge and skills to help the business units “navigate the challenges together”. This suggests a more strategic type of *knowing*. Such strategic *knowing* in HRBP work involves engaging the business units and helping them solve their challenges through customized human capital solutions. However, knowledge institutionalization that emphasizes procedural knowledge appears to be inadequate to help the HRBPs engage with the business units and understand their needs sufficiently to create customized human capital solutions. Adopting a similar stand, HR Specialist Jasper agreed that the institutionalized training and material had helped the HRBPs to achieve the basic “first level” of operational efficiency. However, to progress towards the next stage, she emphasized that the HRBPs would require a more strategic *knowing* than the present operational *knowing*.

Mandy *“So I would say the training is just a starting point. Even after the session we have to be available to be tapped on, you know, for advice, for discussion. As every group has different challenges, ... we need to help them navigate the challenges together with group directors.”*

Jasper *“So I would say that we are at the stage whereby the HRBPs are generally very much measured on the basis of efficiency. But I would say ... as we mature as an organization and as the concept of HRBP gains traction, then [the] next stage would be how HRBPs can be seen as an equal partners and not just ... order takers. So this is where I see the next stage of how HRBPs should evolve ... whereby performances of HRBPs are not measured so much by efficiency but really by effectiveness.”*

“We have equipped them with knowledge on the rationale and the workings of the current policies and processes, but [we] may not necessarily equip them with the understanding of the needs of the organization at large, as well as the needs of the group specifically. So this, I would say, ... is the real gap.”

The work of a HRBP involves a lot of “grey” areas where the HRBPs have to rely on personal judgment to deal with unique cases, even at the basic operating level. According to HRBP Wayni, such work requires the HRBPs to give sufficient consideration before implementation. However, there is insufficient documentation on the treatments of unique cases in the institutionalized procedural knowledge and structured training to guide the HRBPs to better carry out their work in managing similar unique cases, as noted by HRBP Dolly. This supports that the institutionalized procedural knowledge alone is insufficient for *knowing* acquisition.

Wayni *“To be a BP, you know, when you actually have a piece of information provided to you, whether by a staff [or employee] or by a stakeholder, you can’t actually just take it and run – and then just reply and just give them an immediate solution, because, [although] sometimes the situation may just be skin deep, the real cause may be something else.”*

“Honestly, in HR there isn’t any black and white [in terms] of SOP, so there [are] a lot of situation[s] where you have to put down your judgment after assessing the whole environment and landscape. So there was still a lot of, like, on-the-job sort of, like, discussion.”

Dolly *“So such cases are not what the training materials and workshops can actually provide you with.”*

HRBP Mitch similarly articulated the inadequacy of the institutionalized procedural knowledge for *knowing* acquisition. She recollected her initial hesitation and lack of confidence in carrying out the HRBP role, despite having undergone through the training. The inadequacy of the material to support her *knowing* was also demonstrated by her self-assessment that, to date, she had not been able to “go to the ground of the staff” in the business units. HRBP Corrine similarly articulated the need to provide customized solutions for the business units beyond the policies and pre-set manuals in the organization. She also mentioned the need to rely on tacit experience to be able to provide such customized solutions. This corresponds with theme 12, that suggests that tacit knowledge and experience would be useful for learners to acquire *knowing*.

Mitch *“First, at the start, I wasn’t very comfortable handling the management staff, as I was new to this role ... I will feel a bit, like, sceptical of whether to approach the Group Director, because I don’t really understand their job function well and their personality.”*

“[The] other 40% I think I should improve on would be getting to know more about their functions and going to the ground of the staff.”

Corrine *“If you have to take it to the next level, I think you will need to understand the culture of the organization, their business goals and [the] specific business needs of the specific groups of the divisions that you are taking care of ... I believe that there is no better alternative to experience, simply because there will be situations or scenarios ... you will come across [where], if you have prior experience, you would have [an] idea of how to handle that particular situation, which may not come up in any pre-set manuals or training that you could receive. Rather, it takes good judgment, a good understanding of the business goals of the people within the group of the division they are supporting, in order to provide a customized solution which should create a win-win situation and meet the needs of the stakeholders.”*

The acknowledgement by the HRBPs for the inclusion of additional areas into the institutionalized knowledge also suggests that the present institutionalized procedural knowledge was inadequate. HRBP Corrine, while acknowledging that there was sufficient training, suggested there was a need for more training to understand unique cases and how to handle them in their course of work. HRBPs Dolly and Clare similarly articulated this point.

HRBP Dolly even supplemented that the institutionalized knowledge was not solely responsible in helping her to arrive at her current competence.

Corrine *“As HRBPs we are considered generalists, but it would be very helpful for us as HRBPs to have a greater in-depth knowledge of all the various Specialist functions as well.”*

“Hence, I felt that there was sufficient training given in terms of the processes that they had to learn, in terms of the new Specialist functions they had to learn. Although I did feel that it could be further enhanced if more case studies or examples on perhaps difficult situations arose, and what were the solutions that the Specialist branch came up with to tackle the issue. And I felt that, by sharing such stories or examples, the HRBPs who were new to the job could have had a better foothold on which to start ... their new roles.”

Dolly *“I think including more case studies might help better. Like, pull out certain past cases and tell us how it was managed, how it was resolved eventually, what was the result. I think that will help a lot, like the application of certain policies et cetera. Because for HR it's not black and white; there could be some grey areas all the time. So I think case studies will definitely help a lot. Yeah, and maybe if there is a possibility of sending us for certain courses, yeah, that might help as well.”*

Clare *“I think in the materials we can include exception cases that [have] happened before and then – what are the scenarios that we may consider a deviation because right now in the materials it's more of what you are supposed to do. But it doesn't tell you in the event [of] this thing [happening], are we open to consider[ing] the deviation or not, and in what cases [is it] a strict no, no, in what cases yes, we can then consider that.”*

Dolly *“I think I cannot say that the workshop and learning materials [are] actually ... fully effective in making me into what I am today. I think, like I mentioned earlier, ... besides the training itself, a lot depends on yourself.”*

Analysing the above comments with the gap in strategic *knowing* that HRBPs are required to have, as mentioned in section 4.3 on *knowing* of the HRBPs, this theme suggests that procedural knowledge institutionalization alone does not contribute to *knowing* acquisition. While institutionalization of procedural knowledge supports *knowing* acquisition of procedures, such *knowing* is not the entirety or core of the *knowing* required of HRBPs. According to section 4.3 on *knowing* of the HRBPs, strategic *knowing* has a stronger role in impacting organizational performance and creating sustained competitive advantage. Hence,

even when the HRBPs had acquired operational *knowing*, such *knowing* may not have a substantial impact on competitive advantage, except to maintain efficiency. The next theme looks the second institutionalization mechanism of HRBP buddy and mentorship system and its impact on the learners' acquisition of *knowing*.

4.4.6 Theme 6: Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System Enhanced Learners' Acquisition of *Knowing*

The institutionalization of HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System required time to be stabilized before it could help the acquisition of similar *knowing* across the HRBPs. This could be illustrated by the first batch of HRBPs not mentioning the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System and its role in their *knowing* acquisition in their interviews. Out of the first batch of HRBPs, only HRBP Jane mentioned the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System. She mentioned that she received only one incident of guidance from her buddy on some of the recruitment processes. Such singular incident of guidance shows the lack of presence of the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System for the first batch of HRBPs.

Jane *“Okay, I went for one interview session with my buddy and then I was shown the salary proposal format and the salary ranges and that's it”.*

Instead, HRBP Jane relied more on sharing of “best practices” amongst the HRBPs. She remembered that there were initial frustrations by the HRBPs due to the lack of HRBP expertise, “I think it's a bit tedious because everybody gets very frustrated, and they don't know what they are supposed to do.” This apparently lack of understanding likely impacted on the confidence of the first batch of HRBP buddies and mentors to advise others. The lack of confidence, in turn, translated to a weak reliance on the HRBP buddies and mentors by the first batch of HRBPs.

However, the institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System appeared to have stabilized and eventually became exceptionally useful to subsequent batches of HRBPs. These HRBPs were buddied by the more senior HRBPs who were assessed as being able to guide them on key HRBP processes. HRBP Isabel shared that she had learnt a lot of the processes from her HRBP buddy, especially in the area of recruitment where she was less familiar. HRBP Emmalyn, who did not rely on institutionalized knowledge, commended her buddy and her support staff for being her primary source of learning. HRBP Clare also added that her senior HRBP buddy would guide her “in terms of where to find certain information, who[m] to look for”.

Isabel *“She has been with the organization for quite a while. So she could actually share with me a lot about the practices here, the details in terms of processes, because she has handled a lot of processes before. So she would know better how to go about handling each case.”*

Emmalyn *“We have a buddy system here for all the newbies, so a lot of time I rely on my buddy for information.”*

HRBPs Wayni and Janice similarly had the same perspectives as the above HRBPs on the important role of the stabilized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System. HRBP Wayni pointed out that the new HRBPs would be “coached very closely on the procedures of certain situation”. HRBP Janice shared that she would have more separate and detailed sharing during the actual annual HR exercises to help the HRBPs learn well. The sharing was in addition to the initial sharing when she would brief the new HRBP on the firm-specific procedures and policies from the institutionalized knowledge. She opined that such well-timed sharing would be more beneficial to help the new HRBPs appreciate and implement the policies that are to be carried out annually.

Janice *“For example, if you have a ranking exercise annually [we can cover the issues] which we didn’t really cover in-depth in the first sharing session, where we tell them [about their] role. So, when such [an] exercise comes up – for example, the ranking exercise – then I will be going down in deeper detail on exactly what is your role, what you are expected to do, and, you know, if*

you get a certain document how do you check for, let's say, promotions eligibility, [and] what are the things you ought to look out for."

HRBP Emmalyn assessed that the HRBP buddy system was "a very effective method" for new HRBP training. HRBP Anna shared that she would continue to adopt the buddy system for future HRBP training, especially for those without prior HRBP experience.

Anna *"I think, first and foremost, I would add the buddy first to bring them through the systems and processes and policies that we have in place first, because without that, if we were to immediately hit the ground running, it may be a bit difficult, especially if the person has [had] no BP experience previously."*

Besides commenting on the institutionalized buddy system, some of the HRBPs also recognized that the institutionalized mentorship system, as represented by the bosses' guidance, was helpful towards their acquisition of *knowing*. HRBP Jane pointed that the bosses' support and sharing of their experiences was "very important" to help them learn how to handle specific issues. HRBP Clare shared that she would seek her HRBP manager's guidance when her buddy was unable to advise her. HRBP Emmalyn also shared this same point.

Jane *"I think bosses are very important. They are there when we need help, ... like, 'Well I got this issue, how do I resolve it?' So, with their support, they can share their experiences on how to handle a person."*

Clare *"I have a manager and if I encounter problems that my buddy is not able to guide me [on] then I will go to her for advice and, like, 'What should we do next?' and so on."*

Emmalyn *"When I have a problem I would approach the supervisor. The supervisor will actually give her advice based on what she has gone through."*

The above comments suggest that the institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System, when stabilized, was useful to help them acquire the required *knowing*. It would appear that the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System had a greater relevance and use as

compared to the institutionalized knowledge, which was perceived to have limited usefulness to the HRBPs, as mentioned in theme 4.

4.4.7 Theme 7: Weak Institutionalization of HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System Led to Inconsistent Quality of Sharing

It seemed that there was some inconsistent quality of sharing by buddies. While HRBP Anna shared that her buddy went through the “nitty-gritty” details with her, HRBP Candice shared that her buddy did not sufficiently guide her. HRBP Candice shared that she had to take initiative to ask questions, which did not always lead to answers from her buddy.

Candice *“Certain information is actually being left out by the person who is supposed to guide you.”*

“Actually, the person who is supposed to guide me ... just provided me with the materials ... and I was left to read on my own. If there is anything I am unsure of, I will get clarification from her. Sometimes my clarifications are answered, sometimes not, and other than that there isn’t anyone who actually guides me on what are supposed to be the processes, on what are the systems ... in place.”

Anna *“She literally brought me through the nitty-gritty, so it’s, like, literally the system, what system we use, how do we use the system, how do we generate reports from the system, how do we analyse the data, when you need to complete certain spread sheets that we have.”*

HRBP Candice further added that her mentor-cum-manager provided inconsistent mentorship to her. HRBP Priscilla, similar to HRBP Candice, did not receive much guidance from her buddy who was also her mentor. Instead, she had to take the initiative to ask others. Both their experiences were different from how HRBP Janice had guided her new mentee. HRBP Janice would teach her mentee about the ways she could value-add to the business units, and would share more detailed information during specific HR exercises with her mentee.

- Janice *“I had a session with one of my staff that just came in. So I was sharing with her, ‘Okay, these are the policies that you ought to know.’ But at the same time, [I was] sharing with her what sort of things we ought to do to value-add...”*
- Candice *“In the initial few months I would say that the manager provided a little bit of advice, as well as [being a] mentor – being a mentor on and off.”*
- Priscilla *“My buddy is supposed to be my RO [reporting officer]. So, in a way, actually, I was quite fortunate because I had a very good neighbour, who happened to be a member of our team. So, most of the time it's easier to refer to my neighbour for assistance because she is just sitting next to me. It's only for ... unique cases that I would actually go to my RO. So I didn't, unfortunately, ... really have a buddy mentor kind of thing. For me, it's more of I had to ask around various people, yeah.”*

The lack of consistency in the HRBPs' sharing could be attributed to a weak institutionalization of the HRBP buddy and mentorship system. HR Specialist Mandy confirmed the inconsistency in the quality of training provided by senior HRBPs. She noted that some new HRBPs appeared to receive better guidance than others. Extending this opinion, HRBP Candice commented that the buddy system would need to be more structured, with certain standard operating procedures to guide the buddies and minimize the inconsistent quality.

- Mandy *“I have to say the quality of the training of the new BPs, which is done probably by their more senior, more experienced business partner, ... can vary in terms of quality. I have seen BPs who are very in tune with what we are doing; they understand the thing better. I have also seen BPs, equally new, who are a little bit more lost in that sense. They may not have the benefit of having ... a more experienced business partner guide them as closely. So I would say it's not very even in terms of the quality of training of subsequent batches.”*
- Candice *“I will say that the buddy system is good, but it depends on whether the new employee gets a good buddy.”*
- “Besides providing the materials, the buddy can also show the new employee ... how [a] certain system is being used. So, in terms of SOP ..., maybe we can develop a SOP on what are the duties of the buddies. Because, when the SOP is not there, different buddies may have their own practice, and some may do the bare minimum, some would go the extra mile. Yeah, so you will have new employees, some may know very little, some who are more knowledgeable.”*

While HRBP Jane did not attribute much of her *knowing* to the buddy system, her comment suggests that the differentiated guidance could be due to the perception about the new HRBP's existing state of *knowing*. As she had prior HRBP experience, she did not receive much guidance, "maybe it's me, because they know I have worked for quite some time so they didn't say much about it." Separately, HRBP Isabel also agreed on the existence of the inconsistency and suggested having more formal sharing sessions to standardize the answers or guidance given to the HRBPs to ensure consistency in advice and guidance to the business units.

Isabel *"I tend to feel that it is better for a bigger session because common knowledge needs to be known across all the business partners, so that when you are addressing issues, you have standard consistent answers to the line. Rather than one business partner gives the line one answer and the other one gives the different leader a different answer."*

Hence, it would suggest that while the institutionalization of the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System could support the acquisition of *knowing*, their weak institutionalization would lead to an inconsistent quality of sharing. Such inconsistent quality of sharing may not lead to new organizational knowledge and *knowing*, since everyone have different knowledge and *knowing*. This theme raises an issue around the effectiveness of an institutionalization mechanism to create organizational knowledge and *knowing* if it is largely dependent on individual efforts to habitualize the institutionalized processes. It also suggests that some forms of organizational change interventions might be required for institutionalization mechanisms to be institutionalized and effective.

4.4.8 Theme 8: Institutionalized HR Specialists Advisory Support Enhanced Learners' Acquisition of *Knowing*

The HR Specialists Advisory Support was institutionalized to "bring them [HRBPs] up to speed" on the policies so that they could "front the activity with the Group Directors

[senior management of the organization]”, as articulated by HR Specialist Mandy. To achieve this, the HRBPs recognized that the HR Specialists played “very important roles” in the support given towards the HRBPs. HRBPs Mitch and Dolly acknowledged that, without the HR Specialists’ expertise, the HRBPs would be unable to answer all the queries of the business units. HRBP Corrine recognized the HR Specialists as resource persons for more in-depth knowledge of the respective HR policies and procedures that would help the HRBPs better implement the policies and procedures. HRBP Candice similarly saw the HR Specialists as the “domain knowledge person” whom the HRBPs would “always have to go back to” to learn how to deal with certain queries. HRBPs Jane and Isabel highlighted the HR Specialists as the “champions” for the policies or “would know best”.

Mitch *“The specialists are very important roles to support the HRBPs, because without them you are unable to get advice to revert back to the management staff that I am serving. So, the specialists are those who are able to give me the right information, so they supported me greatly as a HRBP.”*

Dolly *“Whenever we have questions we will bounce it off to them, we will go back to them, discuss on solutions et cetera, and probably during meetings we can actually get their help to come in and front the management with us.”*

Candice *“They are the domain knowledge person that you can go to when you are facing ... certain queries or you yourself may have certain issues about certain functions... we may not be the domain knowledge expertise, so we always have to go back to them to ask them what is the rationale, where [does] the task come from, why [is] the recommendation ... in this context et cetera.”*

Jane *“I will ask the one who actually shared during that workshop, because they are the champions.”*

Isabel *“In terms of picking up process and protocol, I had to go to the respective Centres of Excellence because they would know best.”*

Corrine *“There are many times where we felt that a query was raised [and] we did not have the necessary specialist knowledge ... and we had to refer to the specialist branches for an answer.”*

HRBP Wayni pointed that the HR Specialists’ guidance allowed the HRBPs to gain experience and acquire the tacit knowledge that would enable the HRBPs to arrive at a certain

judgment for the HR cases that they were dealing with. In fact, HRBP Janice accorded the learning from the HR Specialists as more important than the learning from the institutionalized knowledge to help them better explain the policies to the business units.

Wayni *“So through these processes [of seeking guidance from HR Specialists] the BPs actually gain their own experience and then learn how to take in certain factors for consideration before making the judgment.”*

Janice *“But it’s also making sense of whether that information fits the situation and also learning on the job, working very closely with the CoE people... if we go into more specific details, then we have to work very closely with the CoE people. It’s more on the considerations, policies governing that. It also helps to better explain to the line.”*

While HRBPs Anna and Emmalyn did not mention the role of the HR Specialists, the remaining HRBPs recognized that the institutionalized HR Specialists Advisory Support had a role in helping them to acquire *knowing*. The deep tacit knowledge and *knowing* that the HR Specialists Advisory Support had were the main motivation for the HRBPs to learn new knowledge from the former to support their *knowing* acquisition. While the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System might suffer from weak institutionalization (as discussed in Theme 7), it would be interesting to learn in the next theme on whether the HR Specialists Advisory Support managed to achieve strong institutionalization results.

4.4.9 Theme 9: Strong Institutionalization of HR Specialists Advisory Support Led to HR Specialists’ Willingness to Share Knowledge and *Knowing*

The HR Specialists Advisory Support enjoyed strong institutionalization, which encouraged the HR Specialists to share their knowledge and *knowing* with the HRBPs. The strong institutionalization was likely due to three reasons. Firstly, the HR Specialists, as custodians of the HR policies, had to rely on inputs from the HRBPs. The HRBPs’ inputs serve to help the HR Specialists develop more robust and comprehensive policies that would address the common challenges faced by the business units. Both HR Specialist Jasper and

HRBP Clare attested to how the HR Specialists would approach and learn from the knowledge and *knowing* of the HRBPs.

Jasper *“We would actually internally come out with new policies ourselves first, and it is really the first draft. After which, at the appropriate forum, such as the Monday HR meeting, we would share this with HR Business Partners to gain their inputs on what are some of the nuances that we do need to look out for, knowing that each group would have their own unique needs.”*

“So the challenge for us is really how can we craft out a policy that is generally applied but has certain sufficient degree of flexibility to address the specific needs of respective groups.”

Clare *“Those specialists ... come out with policies. For example, the compensation and manpower planning team ... will review compensation policies and, for example, salary range and so on. Then, when they have come out with a new set of guidelines or new initiatives that they would like to launch, they will usually seek HRBPs’ advice and share with us the plans that they have and then let the BPs give them feedback on whether we think [there will] be potential issues in certain areas, so that they can go back and refine their policy and also take into consideration other aspects that they have not thought [of] before.”*

Secondly, the strong institutionalization was supported by the implementation role played solely by the HRBPs. The successful implementation of the HR Specialists’ policies was largely dependent on the HRBPs. Hence, the HR Specialists were motivated to ensure that the HRBPs would have similar knowledge and *knowing* to implement the policies consistently across the different business units, as commented by HR Specialist Mandy. HR Specialist Mandy even called the HRBPs their partners. According to HRBP Wayni, the HR Specialists would provide the required briefings to train the HRBPs whenever there was a new policy to be implemented. This practice served to help the HRBPs implement the policies successfully with their business units.

Mandy *“Of course we want to equip the business partners with the knowledge to run some of the things for us. If we look at things like Group PDC [Personnel Development Committee], they must understand when we do Group PDC, what’s the objective, what are things we look out for in terms of evaluating the group’s proposals, so that there is some consistency in terms of what the BPs look for within their group and therefore across the entire organization.”*

“So when we did that, we basically want them to be on the same page, so that although we pass the activity out to the individual partners, we still have some form of consistency.”

“The workshop is just one delivery. It’s an invitation to engage them, really, also to partner them to do this activity.”

Wayni *“A lot of what we actually picked up since we set up [the] BP model ... they actually picked up when new initiatives and exercises [were] launched by the respective CoEs. So when that happens, the CoEs usually will give us a briefing on what the exercise is all about, what the rationale [is and] what are the principles, and from there everyone learns about their respective areas.”*

“If we have, like, new initiatives, they would actually be briefed as and when the initiatives happen.”

Thirdly, the HR Specialists realized the valuable feedback that the HRBPs could provide to mitigate blind spots of the former. For instance, HRBP Mitch recognized the structured training as a useful mechanism for her to receive feedback from the HRBPs. Through the feedback, HRBP Mitch was able to mitigate any blind spots that she might have and improve the HR processes for better implementation.

Mitch *“I would hope that they would be able to understand what I am trying to teach, of course, and also perhaps give me some feedback on the processes of the work that I am briefing, because sometimes when you are doing that portfolio for too long you are so used to the processes.”*

“So, from giving the presentations and training sessions to those who have not gone through these processes before ... they may have new ideas and feedback. So it is also a good opportunity for them to share with me how they find things that they could improve the work processes.”

These comments imply that the institutionalization of HR Specialists Advisory Support had been quite strong and successful, leading to the HR Specialists’ willingness to share their knowledge and *knowing* with the HRBPs. The sharing, in turn, enhanced the learners’ acquisition of *knowing*, as described in the preceding theme 8. The next theme discusses how the institutional norms of the HR Specialists’ sharing led to the creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing*.

4.4.10 Theme 10: Institutional Norms of HR Specialists' Sharing Led to the Creation of Organizational Knowledge and Knowing

As mentioned by HR Specialists Mandy and Jasper in the discussion of theme 9, the close partnership between the HR Specialists and HRBPs led to the development of new or revamped HR policies. The regular exchanges between the HR Specialists and HRBPs had become institutional norms. Such norms helped the HR Specialists and HRBPs learnt new group tacit and explicit knowledge. The HR Specialists and HRBPs learnt common war stories, and built more common terminologies and understanding of the policies and implementation challenges during such exchanges. Subsequently, the HRBPs would be briefed on the policy rationale, processes and other details to aid their implementation. When this occurred, policies were institutionalized for implementation across the business units and new organizational knowledge was developed. Consequently, when the HRBPs successfully implemented these policies consistently, new organizational *knowing* was created. HRBP Clare, who shared how the HRBPs would implement these institutionalized policies after the exchanges took place between the HR Specialists and HRBPs, mentioned the following example.

Clare *“Those specialists ... come out with policies. For example, the compensation and manpower planning team ... will review compensation policies and, for example, salary range and so on. Then when they have come out with a new set of guidelines or new initiatives that they would like to launch, they will usually seek HRBPs' advice and share with us the plans that they have and then let the BPs give them feedback on whether we think will there be potential issues in certain areas, so that they can go back and refine their policy and also take into consideration other aspects that they have not thought [of] before.”*

“Then from there, once they have refined it already and gotten the approval, they will then come back to us on the finalized policies and initiatives ... our role is that we would then implement the policies to our groups and then manage it at a ground level. We will share with the management on the revised policies; for example, there is a market adjustment component payout. So at the ground level we will manage and handle the inquiries from our

management staff and, if their staff queries ... them and they are not able to handle [it], they will then come back to us for advice on how [we should] then explain to the staff and manage their expectations.”

The above sharing by HRBP Clare demonstrates that the HRBPs were able to acquire new *knowing* pertaining to the new policies via their implementation. When the policies were consistently implemented throughout the organization, it implied that organizational *knowing* was created. Hence, the institutionalized norms of sharing between the HRBPs and HR Specialists would appear to support the creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing*. The next theme contrasts from this theme in that the institutional norms of HRBPs' sharing via the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System did not necessarily lead to organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation.

4.4.11 Theme 11: Institutional Norms of HRBPs' Sharing of Knowledge and *Knowing* Created Group Knowledge and *Knowing* but Might Not Lead to Organizational Knowledge and *Knowing*

As mentioned in the discussion of theme 7, the institutionalization mechanism of the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System was weak and led to inconsistent quality of sharing amongst the HRBPs. In spite of the inconsistency, many of the HRBPs, such as Jane, Anna, Clare, Emmalyn, Isabel and Dolly, mentioned that there was learning of new knowledge from one another. HRBP Jane, from the first batch of HRBPs, spoke of how the HRBPs would share different ways to “make things easier” with one another during the implementation of the HR policies. HRBP Anna articulated that she learnt about the needs of the business units and managing the management staff through her manager-mentor. HRBP Emmalyn shared that she learnt largely from her buddy and support staff. HRBP Dolly mentioned specific examples of learning from other HRBPs who had gone through certain processes. HRBP Isabel cited the importance of informal sessions amongst the HRBPs to share and learn

knowledge. Similarly, HRBP Clare expressed how the HRBPs would bring up certain cases for discussion in meetings and how the sharing had facilitated her learning.

- Jane *“I share this with my colleagues and they find [it] very useful because it is very easy to understand when you open up the Excel file ... one glance to be able to see the title. So it’s easier for them to review ... and then it has been used by two of my colleagues as well. So it makes things easier for the group to understand. So we do a lot of sharing within ourselves.”*
- Anna *“So sharing basically similar things like how to tactically handle the senior management, what are the key concerns of the group, the demographics of the group, [how] certain divisions ... work in a certain way.”*
- Emmalyn *“She was here for quite some time, so I guess she had all these processes in her mind. Then she would just [tell me] and then I would just take down notes.”*
- Isabel *“We do have such informal-like sharing stuff.”*
- Dolly *“You really have to seek your supervisor’s help and probably colleagues who have ... dealt with such cases in the past. How do they go about doing? How do they find the facts? And how to even document the minutes properly so that, in case there are any issues after that, you have to something to rely [on] and fall back on.”*
- Clare *“When I come across a case and it doesn’t fall within the materials then I ask around and I ask my buddy or my manager or other colleagues ... they will say, ‘For this case we may bring [it] up for discussion.’ Then I’ll know, ‘Oh ... we can actually consider [deviating] from the policy.’”*

Despite having created group knowledge and *knowing*, the institutional norms of knowledge sharing across HRBPs did not lead to new organizational knowledge and *knowing*. The institutional norms supporting the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship system were weak, as it was dependent on informal knowledge sharing sessions and triggers of deviation or unique cases or challenges for knowledge sharing to occur. There appeared to have limited organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation, except for the revised HRBP Training Manual. However, the changes in the manual purely reflected changes in processes or policies that were developed by the HR Specialists, rather than the HRBPs. The suggestion by HRBP Isabel to have formalized sharing session, as discussed in theme 7, was to engender

more consistent knowledge across the HRBPs. However, the creation of such group knowledge might not lead to new organizational knowledge and *knowing*, even though it might impact group *knowing*. Having covered the three institutionalization mechanisms in the these 10 themes, the next seven themes are more closely related to the Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework and other factors that facilitated the learners' acquisition of *knowing*.

4.4.12 Theme 12: Tacit Knowledge in the Form of Relevant Experience was Useful for Learners to Acquire *Knowing*

Tacit knowledge in the form of relevant experience was useful for learners to acquire new *knowing*. In general, it was perceived by the participants that those with HR experience would acquire *knowing* quite quickly. HRBP Isabel credited her fast learning to her previous HR experience, and HRBP Anna recognized that her learning was expedited by her HR policy work experience. HRBP Corrine similarly added that those without HR experience would only be able to provide basic level HRBP work, rather than the much-desired customer-centric HR solutions to the business units.

Isabel *“Because I was working in a similar organization with similar practices... when I came over, I just needed to be certain [that] some things [were] in place [so that I could] pick up quickly from there.”*

Anna *“And for me, because my background in my previous organization dealt with policies... I am also aware of, like, the whole civil service policies, [and] able to link them up to other policies that we have in my current organization. And so that helps me understand better and perhaps even understand the rationale behind the policy [and] that makes it easier for me to explain that to the staff.”*

Corrine *“I think, if you did come in as a fresh officer, you would tend to look at solutions on a first level. Basically, you look at the direct solutions ... this first-level solution would have been just to inform the staff that he could not transfer because the hiring manager would not be able to wait for almost one whole year to keep the position open for him, because he did have pressing project needs. I think it does take experience to take a step back, to take a look at the overall estab [establishment] structure and define a creative work ... to attain the desired result, although not in the most direct fashion.”*

It was further noted that relevant HRBP experience would be useful to accelerate learning. HRBP Clare emphasized that “handling staff issues... comes with experience” and that her HRBP experience was definitely useful. HRBP Jane opined that she had obtained her *knowing* in interviewing prior to joining the organization and would only need to learn and adapt to the organizational procedures. HRBPs Priscilla, Emmalyn and Corrine similarly shared this point. While four of them were cognizant that the presence of prior HRBP experience involved re-learning, they pointed out that the tacit knowledge was still useful for them to acquire new firm-specific *knowing* at a faster pace.

Jane *“With the experience that I have, it does help me in terms of the interviewing skill because I have gone through it and I have met different kinds of people for different kinds of roles.”*

“So the process is a bit different. And doing up the salary proposal part is also different because in [my] previous company, we [didn't] write as much. We probably just [gave] external benchmarking and internal benchmarking and that's it.... but I guess for me it's quite easy to catch it, because ... I have been in this trade for quite some time. So I know what to write and what to look out for and what the person who signed on it is looking at. But I think ... a new person who has not been in this line for long maybe will have some difficulty in writing ...”

Priscilla *“Actually, because I was previously from another organization where I had experience in HR, and because it was in the ministry... there were actually a lot of things [where] I had the knowledge already. It's just that within this current organization it's a different process altogether. “*

“So in a way when I read through all the materials where they have certain, like, slides, flow charts, guidelines, it's kind of like recapping on the things that I already know but yet re-learning the new steps. So, it makes it easier with the background that I had. “

Emmalyn *“I think the good thing is that [from the] other organization I do have some HRBP experience, so when I come here it's more or less the same, as in the nature of HRBP role is the same. It's just that we have to adapt [to] the organization culture and processes, because each organization is different. I would think that experience is the main factor that helps me to cope well here.”*

Corrine: *“Oh, it helped that I did have prior experience as a HR Business Partner in the previous organization. Although some of the processes, the environment, and the system could be slightly different, in general, there are certain principles, which are the same. Hence ... even without the initial training as a*

HRBP [I was] able to hit the ground running and to be able to advise management staff based on what I had learned previously as a HR Business Partner.”

HRBP Wayni recognized that the newer batches of HRBPs with prior HRBP experience would learn quickly and catch up to the first batch of HRBPs. HRBP Dolly similarly agreed with this point. Conversely, HRBP Mitch pointed out that the tacit knowledge of organizational culture and norms would set the old and new HRBPs apart and could not be as easily replaced. HRBP Clare, on the other hand, took a neutral stand and simply commented that the first and subsequent batches of HRBPs had different strengths due to their different backgrounds.

Wayni *“I would say that what the new BPs lack is institutional experience, which is by no fault of theirs, so it takes time to actually gain those experiences and to ... take time to ... have sensitivity in terms of leadership style, in terms of, like, management style, in terms of, like, SOP et cetera. So other than that I would say that the new BPs and the old BPs eventually ... would level up to each other, given that they have all the same level of sensitivity to the corporate culture and management staff.”*

Dolly (When asked about newer batches of HRBPs) *“Probably they have that competency to start with, because in their previous organization most of them are actually HRBPs, so they would have gone through what a HRBP should do, and so it’s a matter of changing organizations and getting used to the new processes and procedures, but the fundamentals of doing a HRBP role still remains. So that’s where I think they have the advantage.”*

Mitch *“I would say they behave like what I [did] when I wasn’t a BP yet. [I] would feel a little bit ... reserved when [I needed] to approach the GD [Group Director], and they may not know how to approach them for advice on certain areas. So compared to us, [we] have already gone through for two years, we already roughly understand ... each individual [and] management staff, their character, so we roughly know, like, how to manage them when it comes to requests from them.”*

Interestingly, HRBP Corrine compared the HRBPs within the first batch of HRBPs and commented that the HRBPs who were previously HR Recruitment Specialists in the organization had “a good head-start” as compared to those who were not. According to her,

these HRBPs had a deeper knowledge and *knowing* to help them be more effective in recruitment activities, which was core to the work of HRBPs.

Corrine *“I did feel that those who did [the] Recruitment Specialist function previously did quite well as HR Business Partners, whereas the rest of us ... have to try to learn as much as we could. Generally, we were restricted for resources, for our candidates, basically through online ads, which may or may not give us the target audience that we would want to approach for specific positions.”*

Tacit knowledge in the form of relevant experience possessed by the HRBP buddies, HRBP mentors and HR Specialists was an important source of learning for the HRBPs. For example, HRBPs Isabel and Anna spoke of learning from their buddies, and HRBP Jane shared about her learning from her manager-mentor and the HR Specialists on how to handle specific cases. HR Specialist Susan similarly affirmed that she would leverage her tacit knowledge to advise the HRBPs on how to implement the policies for unique cases.

Jane *“So, that’s where we learned, that’s where we get experiences from – a very supportive boss and someone who is willing to teach us.”*

Isabel *“So I did learn quite a bit from her ... because of my previous work experience ... I was lacking in recruitment, and she could actually help me a lot in that particular aspect, to get up to speed and be effective.”*

Anna *“She also shared with me certain processes, about, like, ‘Okay, when it comes to an interview, how do you do it?’”*

Jane *“So, we do really have to ask, because that person has done it, and ... records will know whether this is categorized under a major or minor case, whether it’s a written warning or it’s a final warning or whatever.”*

Susan *“So this would be some of the difficult challenges that the business partners would face in the whole process, because you will need to have the back-end idea and also the prior experience in handling such discretionary cases.”*

“Okay, sometimes they do come to me to actually understand what exactly has happened before, and are these the normal cases. So as much as possible, if I’m able to recall and able to understand what exactly has happened in the past, I would try to help. But a lot of times it may need the management approval or discretion to actually give the go-ahead on how to go about doing that particular case itself.”

Through the numerous comments, it was evident that relevant tacit knowledge in the form of experience was perceived as useful for individuals to acquire new *knowing*. However, the question of how individuals acquire new *knowing* remains to be answered. The next theme covers the interaction between individual tacit and explicit knowledge to create new knowledge and *knowing*. This creation of new knowledge and *knowing* is testament that the individuals have acquired new knowledge and *knowing*.

4.4.13 Theme 13: Individual Tacit and Explicit Knowledge Interacted with *Knowing* to Create New Knowledge and *Knowing*

The role of tacit knowledge in new knowledge and *knowing* creation could be observed in the interactions between individual tacit and explicit knowledge and *knowing*. Most of the HRBP participants shared that they acquired tacit knowledge and *knowing* from their manager-mentors and buddies who guided them on the resolution of difficult situations or cases, and shared the explicit institutionalized knowledge. For instance, HRBP Isabel articulated how she had relied on a combination of her tacit knowledge, which was her past experience and her understanding of the policies; the explicit institutionalized knowledge in the manual; and the explicit knowledge and *knowing* of her buddy, which was demonstrated by the guidance of the buddy. HRBP Anna shared similar experiences of learning from her buddy's tacit and explicit knowledge, and *knowing*; and the explicit institutionalized knowledge. HRBP Janice confirmed this point in her comments that the HRBPs learnt through on-the-job learning; the tacit and explicit knowledge of fellow colleagues; and their personal tacit knowledge in terms of how they would make sense of the institutionalized knowledge and the context of the cases. HRBP Dolly asserted that the new HRBP learnt new knowledge and *knowing* through the interactions amongst the

institutionalized knowledge, the tacit and explicit knowledge and *knowing* of the HRBP buddy, and the opportunity to participate in the activity with the HRBP buddy.

Isabel *“The manual part, I guess, from my previous experience I could understand ... easily ... The difficult part was probably in terms of recruitment, which I didn't do that much. So [for] that part we had a buddy to coach [us] and bring us through, about this portion of the HR process.”*

Anna *“So when I came in as a newbie, I was assigned to a buddy. So she lent me her file to photocopy so I [could] read and learn from it, and she also brought me through, like, the HR processes that are in place, say, ‘When it comes to recruitment, what are the systems?’ Say, for example, ‘Monthly, we collate [these] recruitment numbers, so for that we need to refer to a couple of spread sheets to determine how to complete this number.’ So analysing the data and all, she brought me through that.”*

Janice *“But it’s also making sense of whether that information fits the situation and also learning on the job, working very closely with the CoE people. Let’s say, [for] those who are doing leave matters, getting in-depth ideas of what the leave matters [are is important] because the slides are pretty broad in that sense; general guidelines ... are common. But if we go into more specific details, then we have to work very closely with the CoE people. It’s more on the considerations, policies governing that. It also helps to better explain to the line. Yeah, but mainly it's on-the-job learning and actually learning from fellow colleagues who may be more familiar in certain areas.”*

Dolly *“We have a buddy system whereby, when they first join, we actually guide them. We actually shared those materials that we used to have with them, and any other new updated policies, and we also hand hold them for a while, maybe, say, for interviews we might get them to sit in for one or two rounds, and bring them down to introduce them to the management et cetera, so all this will help to bring them up to speed.”*

The interaction with and learning from others’ tacit and explicit knowledge continued to take place even when the context was changed. The learning that the HRBPs gained from other individuals from their previous employment continued to remain relevant and useful for their current learning. For instance, HRBP Candice verbalized how she had learnt from her first manager-mentor. HRBP Clare similarly attributed her present state of *knowing* to her manager-mentor from her previous organization.

Candice *“I would say that during the start of my HR career I have met with a very good mentor. He is actually my reporting officer and he is the Director of HR. He has given me very stringent KPIs [key performance indicators], and his*

expectation of the quality of work that you do is also very high... he is the more nurturing kind whereby after scolding you he will tell you, oh, where your mistakes are and how you can improve so that you don't repeat that same mistake."

Clare *"I think [the] main key factor would be mentor. In my past organization, my previous organization, I [had] a very good manager who [was] very willing and able to guide me on how I should handle certain situations or in staff issues what should you do and so on. So although you get to learn this in maybe your school days in terms of theory wise, but [when it comes to the] practical, when you face the staff, I think it's a different story. You need to react to how the staff actually react. So a good mentor who is able to give you guidance and also let you sit in and observe the opportunity given is very important."*

Some of the HRBPs added that they learnt new tacit knowledge from HRBP peers who were not their buddies. These peers included fellow HRBPs who were handling other business groups and predecessors who had handed over the business groups to them. For instance, HRBP Anna learnt from the tacit and explicit knowledge of the HRBP predecessor of the groups that she was to take over. The knowledge that she gained included tacit knowledge of the uniqueness of the business units and the optimal approaches to handle them, and the explicit knowledge expressed by her HRBP predecessor.

Anna *"Then the predecessor of the groups that were being handled... brought me through who the senior management are, their personalities, that will help me to do the job better, because I don't know who to handle and how."*

"She also guided me through what each of the divisions do, so I had a better picture of who I need to recruit and the kinds of people that I need to recruit, and then she also shared with me the demographics of the team, if they have any particular issues... So she highlighted these kinds of issues for me and for one of my other group. Yeah, so similarly the other predecessor who was still around, so she just handed over her group to me."

Even though the institutionalized knowledge was not mentioned in the above responses, almost all the respondents had learnt from the institutionalized knowledge when they first assumed the HRBP role, as discussed in theme 2. Hence, the interactions between individual tacit and explicit knowledge and *knowing* appeared to be present to create new

knowledge and *knowing*. The next theme discusses beyond individual knowledge and *knowing* creation to group knowledge and *knowing* creation.

4.4.14 Theme 14: Individual and Group Tacit and Explicit Knowledge Interacted with *Knowing* to Create New Individual and Group Knowledge and *Knowing*

Interaction between individual and group tacit and explicit knowledge with *knowing* occurred to help the HRBPs acquire new individual and group knowledge and *knowing*. The group tacit knowledge could be illustrated by the war stories shared amongst the HRBPs, while the group-explicit knowledge could be exemplified by the terminologies in the policies that were commonly known to the HRBPs. This interaction subsequently led to the creation of new individual and group knowledge and *knowing*. Beyond the individual level, the HRBPs belonged to the HRBP community and the larger HR department community within the organization. Both communities have group tacit and explicit knowledge that are unique to them. Regular exchanges of knowledge, based on *knowing*, transpired between the HRBPs and HR Specialists during the development of new HR policies, as mentioned in the discussion on theme 9. During such knowledge exchanges, the inputs of HRBPs and the sharing of the draft policy by the HR Specialists encompassed both group tacit and explicit knowledge of these two communities. The knowledge sharing resulted in all the HRBPs and the HR Specialists acquiring new personal and group tacit and explicit knowledge of policy rationale, concepts and stories from one another.

Jasper *“And how we really work with them is that, we would actually internally come out with new policies ourselves first, and it is really the first draft. After which, at the appropriate forum, such as the Monday HR meeting, we would share this with HR Business Partners to gain their inputs on what are some of the nuances that we do need to look out for, knowing that each group would have their own unique needs.”*

Discussions of unique cases took place in existing HRBP meeting platforms within the HRBP community, as commented by HRBP Clare. HRBP Anna confirmed this approach and her comments suggested that the collective rationalization and deliberation created new group knowledge within the community. Such new group knowledge would then enable the individuals to solve unique cases, thereby demonstrating acquisition of new *knowing*.

Anna “*Sometimes the situation is so rare that, like, it's a new case, and then they will just be very willing to just share alternatives and give suggestions as to how we can proceed with this. There are other points in time where also it's similar because each of us has a different background and we may have even faced a situation in our previous organizations... We all ... even [put] those experiences that we have to ... good use to solve, like, a certain situation that I faced here.*”

The above responses and interpretations suggested the presence of interactions between the various forms of knowledge and *knowing* to create new forms of group knowledge and *knowing*. There were sharing of war stories (which became group tacit knowledge as everyone came to know the stories) and policy detail (which became group explicit knowledge as everyone understood and knew the terminologies) through the meetings. The sharing resulted in the creation of group tacit and explicit knowledge as the community gained common knowledge of the war stories and policy. The group tacit and explicit knowledge, in turn, interacted with the individual tacit and explicit knowledge as they related the knowledge with their understanding of the cases and interpretation of the policies. This interaction engendered the creation of new group knowledge and *knowing*, where all the HRBPs would understand how to handle unique cases and eventually implement the policies. The next theme shows that the HRBPs' motivation to solve real work problems had encouraged them to acquire new *knowing*.

4.4.15 Theme 15: Learners' Motivation to Solve Real Work Problems Encouraged Them to Acquire Knowing

As suggested in themes 1, 2 and 4, the HRBPs appeared to be motivated by the need to handle new work challenges. These new challenges are represented by the “deviation cases” and “unique cases” of which they had no prior experience or knowledge. Their motivation, in turn, caused them to carry out certain actions that would lead them to acquire new *knowing*. HRBPs Priscilla, Jane, Anna, Clare and Emmalyn acknowledged that these situations motivated them to seek out possible sources of learning, such as fellow HR colleagues and the intranet. HRBP Janice stated that such cases also provided a good learning curve for herself.

Priscilla *“But when it comes to more specific organization scenarios and cases, then I had to actually ask around within the team to see who had the experience of handling certain cases that are similar and then trying to find a way to go about resolving it.”*

Anna *“And HR’s policies ... how do you bring them about? Like, what ... a division wants may not be what HR policy dictates. So how do you, like, bridge that gap between them? So usually then I will pick ... my colleagues’, my superiors’ brains on that one.”*

Clare *“But in this case the DD [deputy director] has already given the approval and wants that immediate transfer to another department, but it is not stated in the notes. Then I will actually ask: ‘Have you handled this case before?’ and then, ‘What should we do?’ or ‘How do you actually go about doing it?’ So she will give me the advice, say, ‘If the DD has already said so and the receiving department says that it is okay, [and] then you can actually just immediately do the transfer. There is no need, for example, [for] another round of formal interview.’ That kind of thing.”*

Emmalyn (When she encounters issues) *“Sometimes this information can be found on our intranet, or even our shared drive, so I will normally go to these two sources first before I approach my buddy.”*

Janice *“Because you deal with a lot of day-to-day issues with the line people and ... no-one is the same. So this is a good learning curve for someone who has just entered the Business Partner ... I think about two-and-a-half years ago.”*

The HR Specialists similarly recognized that these real work problems were a motivation for the HRBPs to learn new *knowing*. HR Specialist Mandy provided an example of how the HR Specialists would advise the HRBPs on ambiguous cases highlighted by the HRBPs. Similarly, HR Specialist Susan and HRBP Mitch shared that these cases were a motivation for the HRBPs to approach and learn from the HR Specialists.

Mandy *“So if there are ambiguous cases, we will need to discuss ... them. And we will also highlight potential issues that they will then bring back to the group directors for consideration.”*

Susan *“Sometimes they do come to me to actually understand what exactly has happened before, and [whether these are] normal cases?”*

“So it's really case by case and it's not something that you can actually follow according to the guideline.”

Mitch *“They asked questions. They clarified then and also after my briefing sessions, when there is a similar case that they need to manage.”*

These real work challenges represented a strong incentive for the HRBPs to learn new knowledge and *knowing* in order to perform their work effectively. It also resulted in them seeking out suitable sources of knowledge, such as fellow HRBPs, buddies, HR Specialists and the intranet, which they believed would be helpful for them to manage the unique cases. Closely related to their motivation to solve work challenges, the next theme looks at the HRBPs' attitudes towards learning and how their personal attributes affected their acquisition of new *knowing*.

4.4.16 Theme 16: Learners' Attitudes Towards Learning and Personal Attributes Affected

Their Acquisition of *Knowing*

Besides personal motivation to solve real work challenges, factors such as learners' attitudes towards learning and their personal attributes might also affect their acquisition of *knowing*. Firstly, learners' willingness to learn seemed to affect their acquisition of *knowing*.

One example of willingness to learn could be found in HRBP Candice. She spoke of her initiative to learn from various sources, such as HR magazines and the Singapore Employment Act, and even by pursuing a diploma in HR. Similarly, HRBPs Emmalyn and Dolly's comments that their keenness to ask questions was key to their acquisition of *knowing*, demonstrated their willingness to learn. HRBP Wayni's opinion on how having an open mind had helped her learning, demonstrated the importance of this attitude to support her *knowing* acquisition.

Candice *"A lot of the materials that you can read out, like, they would recommend certain books, certain magazines for you to look at, so I actually took it up. ... as and when ... I can afford the time, I would actually look through the Employment Act on my own ..."*

Emmalyn *"Initiative, yeah, I think its initiative. A lot of things I have to question, like, 'Why? What's the rationale of this? Why is this done so?'"*

Dolly *"Besides the training itself, a lot depends on yourself. You have to ask a lot of questions and find out things for yourself, because materials can only give you such limited info. Yeah, it's not everything. It doesn't encompass every single issue you encounter or situation you encounter."*

Wayni *"I thought [it was very important to] actually to keep an open mind, picking up the new areas, learning, questioning and yet at the same time not over challenging. This is something that I kind of adjusted myself along the way."*

Secondly, personal attributes, such as job fit, were believed to be important for acquisition of *knowing*. HRBP Wayni commented that the original batch of HRBPs was selected due to the compatibility of their personalities and capabilities with the HRBP nature of work. She opined that the ability to build rapport or the interest in the work are important attributes for HRBPs. Besides having similar perspective as HRBP Wayni, HRBP Corrine added that the personal capability to make judgment and interest in the work of the business units are important attributes for HRBPs. HRBP Mitch simply viewed such personal attributes as personality.

- Wayni *“All the BP members ... were actually selected based on a few criteria. The first component, I believe, would be their ability to build rapport and their interest in this area, so when we actually train them or, rather, when they actually attend a training session, right, you could actually see that everyone was, like, really eagerly absorbing all the information, you know, trying to learn as much as they could so that they would be prepared for the challenge.”*
- Corrine *“I think, one, that you have to be very interested in the work that your business group does, simply because as a HR Business Partner you will have to get into the minds of the management staff and of the general staff to understand how they think as different groups... On a personal level, I will feel that there has to be a good fit of the person to the job. I think to be a HR Business Partner you need good judgment, ability to build rapport at all levels, especially with management staff, but possibly also at a general staff level in order to understand the ground feel of the groups.”*
- Mitch *“I think it's individual personality also. For myself, I find that I'm someone who likes to communicate with other people to understand them rather than [have a] deskbound job. So, in fact, I think this is the personality, the character, that helps me to improve, and wanting to learn more.”*

Another personal attribute that affected the acquisition of *knowing* would be the preferred learning style of the individual. HRBP Jane preferred to learn through observation, while HRBP Emmalyn favoured learning from studying how things were done. Their preferred learning styles impacted how they would engage in the acquisition of *knowing*.

- Jane *“So, well, initially my role is, like, really, to sit there, and observe, mainly, and, well, I did ask questions but not as many as I wanted. But after a while, when I get used to their style, my group director's style, I know when I can actually intercept and ask questions to the candidates.”*
- Emmalyn *“Everyone learns things differently, and they have different learning styles. Because I am more of a process oriented person, then I tend to study the processes and find out why are things done, what's the rationale. I don't have a fixed method of learning things; sometimes I just talk to people; sometimes I go to the intranet to find out things, or even go on Google, on websites.”*

While these attributes and attitudes towards learning were unlikely to be exhaustive, they suggested that these two factors have a role in *knowing* acquisition. The final theme in the next section discusses how on-the-job learning would be necessary for *knowing* acquisition.

4.4.17 Theme 17: On-the-job Learning was Required for *Knowing* Acquisition

Besides the presence of positive attitudes towards learning and suitable personal attributes, on-the-job learning appeared to be required for *knowing* acquisition. All the HRBPs were cognizant that *knowing* acquisition would require practice or on-the-job learning. HRBPs Candice, Isabel, Clare and Anna labelled it as learning “on the job”. HRBP Mitch’s response of how she “slowly eased” herself into the business units through on-the-job experience, which dispersed her initial doubts and fears of approaching the group directors, was an example of on-the-job learning. HRBP Corrine also expressed that the frequent interactions with the business units enabled the HRBPs to “establish a good working rapport and relationships with the management staff” and understand the business units’ needs. Such learning could be considered as on-the-job learning, where the HRBPs would be better equipped to assess the suitability of HR processes and provide more customized solutions to business units. HRBP Jane called it “trial and error”, while HRBP Priscilla named it “practice”.

Candice *“On the job itself, when you don’t know and you start to ask around and you learn it.”*

Priscilla *“So, once you get [the] hang out of it ... after you learn the steps right, then it becomes very easy. So it's basically by, I don’t know, practice, I guess.”*

Jane *“I think it's like trial and error. Maybe after a few times, when I actually went into the interview, I [became] much more familiarized with the process.”*

Isabel *“The specific processes, I have to learn on the job.”*

Corrine *“Basically, at the group management meeting, we are able to interact with the group directors down to, perhaps, the senior manager and manager levels. We would be able to establish a good working rapport and relationships with the management staff in order to understand what they wanted for the group, in order to understand what they were actually working on as the core focus for the work here, and with such knowledge we were able to take a look at our own HR processes to understand whether we were meeting the specific needs of the groups, say, for the work year and perhaps for the short-term to mid-term requirements in the next three to five years.”*

Mitch *“First, at the start, I wasn’t very comfortable handling the management staff, as I was new to this role ... I will feel a bit, like, sceptical of whether to approach the Group Director, because I don’t really understand their job function well and their personality. So, after knowing them through interviews and getting to know them through, like, their job nature, the group’s job nature, through the manpower budgeting exercise, then I slowly eased myself into the group.”*

Both HRBPs Wayni and Janice alike shared that the acquisition of *knowing* was very much on-the-job learning.

Wayni *“Actually, I would say, really, a lot of things will have to be on-the-job kind of things.”*

“So we do believe that, you know, give them a month or two, a sort of cycle, [and] they will probably will be able to sufficiently experience the cycle of the work within HR itself. That’s for the regular work.”

Janice *“Yeah, but mainly it's on-the-job learning.”*

All the HR Specialists were in agreement that the acquisition of *knowing* was achieved via “on-the-job” learning. HR Specialist Jasper mentioned that the HRBPs showed “greater independence” over time as they learnt on the job. HR Specialist Mandy stressed that the HRBPs would learn through their operationalization of the policies with the business units. HR Specialist Susan likewise spoke of how the issues faced by the HRBPs during the implementation of policies would be a source of learning.

Mandy *“Of course in any workshop it’s easy to just deliver the materials, as to ... how effective [they were], did they really pick up what needs to be done, the nuances of the activity. In the initial stages, I have to say, not really. Of course they understand intellectually the purpose, objective, how you operationalize it, but sometimes you need to actually do it to understand the actual challenges and how do you go about addressing it.”*

Susan *“It's more when the business partners or when the business units come back to them and seek ... clarification and verification and maybe in cases whereby they need discretionary directives. That’s when the difficult part comes in, whereby the cases are not normal, and it's out of the norm, so maybe the manager’s discretion to actually deliver would need to be something out of the normal criteria ... So some out of the norm would pose ... a challenge to the business partners, I believe. So that takes time, basically, I guess.”*

The above comments suggest that *knowing* was acquired through on-the-job learning or practice, as the HRBPs engaged with the HRBP work. Through practice, the HRBPs grew familiar with the processes and policies and would exhibit the required *knowing* eventually. This also aligns with theme 4, which suggested that the HRBPs would have reduced reliance on the institutionalized procedural knowledge after they had learnt on the job.

4.5 Conclusion

The analyses of the in-depth interviews and the document review of the Report on the Customer Satisfaction Survey showed that the HRBPs acquired the basic operational *knowing* required of HRBPs. 17 themes were distilled from the 20 deductive and 17 inductive codes to support the study on how individuals acquire *knowing* as compared to the three institutionalization mechanisms. These 17 themes gave rise to several key issues to address the research problem. Firstly, different institutionalization mechanisms appeared to have different levels of success in facilitating *knowing* creation. The HR Specialists Advisory Support have the most laudable success, followed by the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System, with the institutionalized knowledge having the least success in creating *knowing*. This raised the issue of whether institutionalization of knowledge, a key emphasis in organizations and research, has been given too much recognition in terms of its effectiveness in creation and management of organizational knowledge for sustained competitive advantage. Secondly, institutionalization mechanisms seem to require reinforcement support from additional organizational change interventions to institutionalize the mechanisms for greater effectiveness. Institutionalization mechanisms alone, without the support of strong institutional norms from organizational change interventions, might not result in organizational *knowing* acquisition. Thirdly, central maintenance of institutionalization knowledge would likely be required to ensure on-going relevance and currency of the institutionalization knowledge. Without such centralized organizational effort,

institutionalized knowledge could cease to be institutionalized or relevant for the individuals in organizations. Fourthly, institutional norms might require some form of support or need to exhibit certain qualities to be effective in helping learners to acquire *knowing*. More in-depth discussion of the above issues will be found in the next chapter on findings.

5 FINDINGS

Chapter 5 discusses the findings from the data analysis to address the research question of “How do individuals interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?” From the data, 17 themes were distilled and refined into nine findings. These findings address the four research objectives to resolve the research problem of whether and how institutionalization can support the acquisition of firm-specific *knowing*.

This paragraph recapitulates the literature review on institutionalization in relation to *knowing* acquisition. Institutionalization has received keen interest from scholars and organizations for its role in the creation of organizational structures, systems and processes that contribute to the building of sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). To create sustained competitive advantage, organizations seek to build firm-specific resources such as organizational knowledge and *knowing* (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Conner, 1991). However, most organizational studies focus on organizational knowledge rather than organizational *knowing*. In organizational knowledge studies, organizational knowledge creation is viewed as involving a cyclical approach of leveraging individual knowledge and *knowing* to build organizational knowledge (Argote, 2013; Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Crossan et al., 1999; Nonaka, 1994). In organizational learning studies, organizational learning and knowledge are the outcomes of the institutionalization process, and the avenues to support individual learning (Argote, 2013; Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Crossan et al., 1999). Concurrently, most knowledge management studies focus on examining mechanisms that are intended to institutionalize knowledge or to support institutionalization. Regardless of the fields, studies across organizational knowledge, organizational learning and knowledge management emphasize knowledge rather than *knowing*. As such, it remains inconclusive as

to whether institutionalization can support *knowing* acquisition for organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation.

To investigate the effectiveness of institutionalization to support *knowing* acquisition, this research studies the institutionalization mechanisms that organizations put in place to support knowledge and *knowing* institutionalization. Specifically, the purpose of this study addresses the research question of “How do individuals interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?” With this purpose, the research aims to explore the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms to support individual acquisition of *knowing*, and to determine the factors affecting the institutionalization mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition. At the same time, this research aims to test Cook and Brown’s (1999) theory on how knowledge and *knowing* dynamically interact and lead to new knowledge and *knowing* creation, and to determine the factors affecting the dynamic interactions towards *knowing* acquisition and organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation. To achieve these four objectives, the researcher will need to understand the following from the data collection:

- i. How did the learners (i.e., Human Resource Business Partners, or HRBPs) interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?
- ii. How did the trainers (i.e., Human Resource Specialists, or HR Specialists) view the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?
- iii. How did the learners (i.e., HRBPs) interpret their experiences in their acquisition of *knowing*?

- iv. How did the trainers (i.e., HR Specialists) view the learners' acquisition of *knowing*?
- v. What factors affected the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition?

The collected data were analysed into a total of 17 themes. Specifically, 11 of the themes are related to how institutionalization mechanisms impact on *knowing* acquisition, while the remaining six themes are connected to the interactions between knowledge and *knowing* to create new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*. These 17 themes are further distilled into nine findings and organized to address the four research objectives, as shown in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Connecting the Research objectives, Themes and Findings

| Research Objectives | Themes | Findings |
|--|---|--|
| 1. Examine the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms in supporting <i>knowing</i> acquisition | 5. Institutionalization of procedural knowledge alone is insufficient for <i>knowing</i> acquisition | 1. Different types of <i>knowing</i> can be acquired |
| | 1. Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supports <i>knowing</i> acquisition 6. Institutionalized Buddy and Mentorship System enhances learners' acquisition of <i>knowing</i> 8. Institutionalized HR Specialists Advisory Support enhances learners' acquisition of <i>knowing</i> | 2. Institutionalization mechanisms have a role in supporting individual <i>knowing</i> acquisition |
| | 2. Institutionalized knowledge is the initial point of reference for learners to acquire <i>knowing</i> 5. Institutionalization of procedural knowledge alone is insufficient for <i>knowing</i> acquisition 15. Learners' motivation to solve real work problems encourages them to acquire <i>knowing</i> | 3. Institutionalization mechanisms have varying impact on the acquisition of different types of <i>knowing</i> |
| 2. Determine the factors that affect institutionalization mechanisms for <i>knowing</i> acquisition | 3. Institutionalized knowledge is difficult to be maintained by individuals' effort alone 4. Perceived usefulness of institutionalized knowledge impacts on learners' willingness to learn from it | 4. Institutionalized knowledge needs to be centrally renewed to maintain its usefulness to learners for <i>knowing</i> acquisition |
| | 7. Weak institutionalization of Buddy and Mentorship System leads to inconsistent quality of sharing 9. Strong institutionalization of HR Specialists | 5. Degree of institutionalization of each institutionalized practice affects <i>knowing</i> acquisition |

| Research Objectives | Themes | Findings |
|---|--|--|
| | Advisory Support role leads to HR Specialists' willingness to share knowledge and <i>knowing</i> | |
| | 10. Institutional norms of HR Specialists sharing leads to creation of organizational knowledge and <i>knowing</i> 11. Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and <i>knowing</i> creates group knowledge and <i>knowing</i> but may not lead to organizational knowledge and <i>knowing</i> | 6. Institutional norms encourage knowledge sharing and support <i>knowing</i> acquisition but may not necessarily lead to organizational knowledge and <i>knowing</i> |
| 3. Create a better understanding of the dynamic interaction between knowledge and <i>knowing</i> to understand how <i>knowing</i> is acquired and organizational knowledge and <i>knowing</i> are created | 12. Tacit knowledge in the form of relevant experience is useful for learners to acquire <i>knowing</i> 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacts with <i>knowing</i> to create new knowledge and <i>knowing</i> 14. Individual and group tacit and explicit knowledge interacts with <i>knowing</i> to create new individual and group knowledge and <i>knowing</i> | 7. Knowledge and <i>knowing</i> are distinct, mutually enabling and complementary |
| | 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacts with <i>knowing</i> to create new knowledge and <i>knowing</i> 14. Individual and group tacit and explicit knowledge interacts with <i>knowing</i> to create new individual and group knowledge and <i>knowing</i> 17. On-the-job learning is required for <i>knowing</i> acquisition | 8. Dynamic interactions of different forms of knowledge and <i>knowing</i> lead to new forms of knowledge & new <i>knowing</i> at individual and organizational levels |
| 4. Determine the factors affecting the dynamic interactions towards <i>knowing</i> acquisition | 7. Weak institutionalization of Buddy and Mentorship System leads to inconsistent quality of sharing 9. Strong institutionalization of HR Specialists Advisory Support role leads to HR Specialists' willingness to share knowledge and <i>knowing</i> 10. Institutional norms of HR Specialists sharing leads to creation of organizational knowledge and <i>knowing</i> 11. Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and <i>knowing</i> creates group knowledge and <i>knowing</i> but may not lead to organizational knowledge and <i>knowing</i> 15. Learners' motivation to solve real work problems encourages them to acquire <i>knowing</i> 16. Learners' attitudes towards learning & personal attributes affect their acquisition of <i>knowing</i> 17. On-the-job learning is required for <i>knowing</i> acquisition | 9. Additional factors at work besides the dynamic interactions of knowledge and <i>knowing</i> to create new knowledge and <i>knowing</i> |

5.1 Discussion of Findings

Each of the findings in Table 5.1 will now be discussed in turn. The first six findings relate to institutionalization and *knowing* acquisition. The remaining three findings convey how *knowing* has been acquired through the lens of Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework.

5.1.1 Finding 1: Different Types of *Knowing* can be Acquired

As articulated in theme 5 (Institutionalization of procedural knowledge alone was insufficient for *knowing* acquisition) and section 4.3, *Knowing* of HRPBs, there are different aspects or types of *knowing*. While Cook and Brown (1999) present a broad definition of *knowing* as part of actions undertaken by individuals, not all actions are equal in terms of their contribution to create or maintain competitive advantage. Firstly, there is operational *knowing* that is demonstrated by the HRPBs' administration of standard HR policies and procedures. Such operational *knowing* contributes to operational efficiency and allows the business units to carry out their operations, which serves to retain competitive advantage. Secondly, there is strategic *knowing* that requires the HRPBs to "understand even more of the business that the groups were involved in, to be able to anticipate likely issues and perhaps even foresee things that management might not even have realized" to develop customized HR solutions for the business units (as commented by HRBP Corrine). Such strategic *knowing* creates effectiveness and supports the business units to create sustained competitive advantage. HRBP Corrine gave the example of strategic *knowing* relating to an internal transfer case. She recounted that the present management of the staff demanded a delay in the transfer, while the receiving division urgently required the staff to be transferred earlier to deliver work. She further elaborated how she strategized a win-win solution for all parties.

Corrine “I did take a look at the available staff positions and I did realize that they [the receiving division] had another vacant position that was just vacanted, and it was a junior position. So instead of asking the person who wanted a transfer to give up on his request, well, I did suggest to the hiring manager that he could perhaps utilize the junior estab [establishment] first, and hire a lower level staff to plug the gap for the remainder of the year. As the hiring manager really did want this other staff to transfer over, I told him that he could probably meet his project needs by at least hiring one fresh body, although at a lower level to begin [with], to cover some of the base work while still extending the vacant position for the experienced staff that he wanted to transfer in. And thus, instead of losing experienced staff who did want to transfer to a mission which really needed him, I managed to work out a win-win situation in which the staff could have his transfer granted, although it would be delayed, and the hiring manager would have the experienced staff that he wanted.”

This finding is important as it illuminates the point that there is more to *knowing* than just any action. While most literature on *knowing* addresses what is *knowing*, how to manage it and how it is related to knowledge (Cook, 2014; Koloskov, 2010; Kuhn & Porter, 2011; McIver et al., 2012; Swart, 2011), there has been no discussion on the types of *knowing*. Just as there is explicit and tacit knowledge, the finding shows that *knowing* could be operational or strategic. More than that, this finding suggests that operational *knowing* impacts on operational efficiency, which could help to retain competitive advantage, while strategic *knowing* provides higher value solutions that could help to create competitive advantage. The next finding addresses the role of institutionalization mechanisms in supporting individual *knowing* acquisition.

5.1.2 Finding 2: Institutionalization Mechanisms Have a Role in Supporting Individual *Knowing* Acquisition

A HRBP’s *knowing*, comprising operational and strategic *knowing*, involves providing HR solutions to business units, ensuring consistent implementation of HR policies, and explaining HR policies to the business units and employees. According to the HRBPs, the

HR Specialists and even the business units, such *knowing* has been demonstrated by the HRBPs to varying degrees. HRBPs such as Anna and Priscilla communicated that their acquisition of *knowing* was the culmination of various supportive tools: primarily, the institutionalized knowledge (theme 1, Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported *knowing* acquisition), the guidance from their buddy and/or mentor (theme 6, Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of *knowing*) and advisory support from the HR Specialists (theme 8, Institutionalized HR Specialists Advisory Support enhanced learners' acquisition of *knowing*). These institutionalization mechanisms collaboratively supported the HRBPs' acquisition of *knowing* as exemplified by the quotes below.

- Isabel *“When I just joined they had a file, a manual ... so I actually learned most of the knowledge from there.”*
- Emmalyn *“We have a buddy system here for all the newbies, so a lot of time I rely on my buddy for information.”*
- Janice *“But it’s also making sense of whether that information fits the situation and also learning on the job, working very closely with the CoE (Centre of Excellence) people... if we go into more specific details, then we have to work very closely with the CoE people. It’s more on the considerations, policies governing that. It also helps to better explain to the line.”*

Institutionalized knowledge served as a basic knowledge repository resource to help the HRBPs gain understanding of the organizational HR policies and procedures. Such procedural knowledge, according to HRBP Wayni, was necessary foundational knowledge to help the HRBPs better serve the business units. The institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System provided an extra level of support where the HRBPs could clarify the roles and responsibilities of HRBPs, receive guidance on the daily operations of HRBPs, and learn the appropriate and correct approaches to handle unique cases. Institutionalized HR Specialists Advisory Support, as shown by HRBPs Isabel's and Dolly's responses on their reliance on the HR Specialists, provided a third level of institutional support. Specifically, the

HR Specialists Advisory Support allowed the HRBPs to seek further advice on cases unique to the collective HRBPs, and to understand the intricate policy details not institutionalized in the Training Manual. Likewise, the HR Specialists were instrumental for the HRBPs to learn new or revised organizational policies that they would have to implement to the business units. This finding was supported by comments from HRBP Clare and HR Specialist Mandy in their articulation on how new organizational policies were developed and learnt. This learning of new organizational policies represented organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation, as the HRBPs were expected to implement the policies consistently to the business units. Once the HRBPs successfully implement the policies to the business units, they would have acquired the required *knowing* relating to these policies. Hence, this finding shows that institutionalization mechanisms support individual *knowing* acquisition and organizational *knowing* creation.

This finding is significant as there has been limited literature that discusses the role of institutionalization to support *knowing* acquisition. The literature on institutionalization defines it as a process to create desired common behavioural patterns in actors in the organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), which suggests the acceptance of social processes and practices within the organizations (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983, 1996; Zucker, 1983). However, there has been little discussion on how it supports *knowing* acquisition. The findings suggest that the accepted or institutionalized social processes and practices of knowledge sharing amongst the HRBPs and by the HR Specialists have supported the HRBPs' acquisition of *knowing*. Such acknowledgement by the HRBPs illustrates that institutionalization mechanisms can impact on practices and support *knowing* acquisition, similar to their role in supporting knowledge acquisition (Moseley & Charnley, 2014). Having established that institutionalization mechanisms can impact *knowing* acquisition, the

next finding takes this discussion further to explore the different impact that each institutionalization mechanism has on the acquisition of different types of *knowing*.

5.1.3 Finding 3: Institutionalization Mechanisms have Varying Impact on the Acquisition of Different Types of *Knowing*

This section discusses the finding that different institutionalization mechanism has different impact on the acquisition of different types of *knowing*. Amongst the three institutionalization mechanisms, knowledge institutionalization enables the HRBPs to acquire operational *knowing* more than strategic *knowing*. This is clearly articulated by most of the HRBPs on how they would refer to the institutionalized knowledge to carry out HR tasks such as daily recruitment and annual performance ranking exercises (theme 1, Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported *knowing* acquisition). However, institutionalized knowledge was pertinent only during the initial period when the HRBPs assumed their roles or acted on the institutionalized knowledge for the first few occurrences (theme 2, Institutionalized knowledge was the initial point of reference for learners to acquire *knowing*). Once the HRBPs acquired the operational *knowing*, institutionalized knowledge ceased to have any relevance and importance to them. Below quote illustrates this point.

Isabel *“I don’t really use it that much, because I think I have to highlight that previously because I was working in a similar organization with similar practices, so when I came over, I just needed to be certain at some things are in place that I can pick up quickly from there. So I didn’t really refer to it that much, so it’s more like the first few months I needed to look at it. I referred more often to the centres of expertise because the manual didn’t have documentation of deviation cases. So mostly those are the situations where I need to have some direction on how to handle it and how to perform it.”*

When the HRBPs faced “deviant cases” or “unique cases”, as discussed in theme 5 (Institutionalization of procedural knowledge alone was insufficient for *knowing* acquisition)

and theme 15 (Learners' motivation to solve real work problems encouraged them to acquire *knowing*), institutionalized knowledge as a mechanism failed to help them acquire the strategic *knowing* to solve these problems. Instead, institutionalization mechanisms of the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System and HR Specialists Advisory Support enabled the HRBPs to acquire strategic *knowing* from these experts to handle the situations. This point is illustrated in the quote below:

Candice *"I would say that the specialist role ..., they are the domain knowledge person that you can go to when you are facing ... certain queries or you yourself may have certain issues about certain function, especially when it comes to like compensation, although we are the person who actually implements it and runs the operations, but we may not be the domain knowledge expertise, so we always have to go back to them to ask them what is the rationale, where the task comes from, why the recommendation is in this context, et cetera.."*

Addressing the research objective on the effectiveness of institutionalized mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition, this finding shows that institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System and HR Specialists Advisory Support were more effective for *knowing* acquisition compared with knowledge institutionalization. Institutionalization of knowledge only enables the HRBPs to learn the procedural knowledge to support operational *knowing* acquisition. On the other hand, the other institutionalization mechanisms of HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System and HR Specialists Advisory Support provided the platform for expert sharing of tacit knowledge, which allowed the HRBPs to acquire both operational and strategic *knowing*. This finding corresponds with Boh's (2007) framework on institutionalization mechanisms for knowledge acquisition. According to Boh (2007), institutionalization mechanisms that facilitate face-to-face knowledge sharing by experts, as illustrated by the HR Specialists Advisory Support, would result in greater knowledge sharing and knowledge creation than mechanisms that codify and store knowledge.

While Boh's (2007) framework focuses only on knowledge sharing for project based work and does not delve into *knowing* acquisition, this finding illustrates that his framework could be extended towards *knowing* acquisition and beyond project based work to non-project based work. This finding on the effectiveness of different institutionalization mechanisms for *knowing* acquisition is significant as it will help future research and organizations to conduct more in-depth study on the effectiveness of different institutionalization mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition. This finding can also guide organizations to carry out careful considerations and evaluations of various institutionalization mechanisms that they should invest in to create and strengthen *knowing* acquisition.

Furthermore, this finding is critical for its role in debunking the prevalent emphasis that research studies and organizations have placed on knowledge institutionalization. The vast research conducted on organizational learning, organization knowledge creation and knowledge management emphasizes institutionalization. For instance, organizational learning models focus on changes to organizational knowledge (Argote, 2013), where institutionalization is a final process in organizational learning (Crossan et al., 1999). Organizational knowledge creation addresses transforming individual knowledge into organizational knowledge or institutionalized knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). Knowledge management emphasizes facilitating and supporting institutionalization of individual and group knowledge into organizational knowledge for application (Evans et al., 2014). All the above research emphasizes knowledge rather than *knowing*. Rooted in these studies is an underlying notion that successful institutionalization of knowledge can overcome knowledge stickiness and create sustained competitive advantage (Selznick, 2011). However, this finding rejects the notion that institutionalization of knowledge supports the creation of sustained competitive advantage. Instead, this finding advocates that institutionalization mechanisms,

which *support* tacit knowledge sharing, can better create strategic *knowing*, leading to the creation of sustained competitive advantage. This research further suggests that future research on organizational learning, organization knowledge creation, and knowledge management should shift from emphasizing knowledge institutionalization as the intended product or outcome. Instead, future research could study institutionalization as a mechanism to support tacit knowledge and *knowing* sharing. In view of the role that institutionalized knowledge has on *knowing* acquisition, the next finding discusses the importance of central renewal of institutionalized knowledge for *knowing* acquisition.

5.1.4 Finding 4: Institutionalized Knowledge Needs to be Centrally Renewed to Maintain its Usefulness to Learners for *Knowing* Acquisition

This finding surfaces central maintenance and renewal of institutionalized knowledge as a factor that would affect the effectiveness of the institutionalized mechanism for *knowing* acquisition. As discussed in theme 4 (Perceived usefulness of institutionalized knowledge impacted on learners' willingness to learn from it), procedural knowledge that is perceived as less relevant or useful to the learners affects learners' willingness to learn from it. When learners believe that the institutionalized knowledge is out-dated with no or poor renewal, they may cease to refer to the institutionalized knowledge or learn from it. This notion was clearly evident in HRBP Emmalyn's response that she seldom referred to the institutionalized knowledge and would instead choose to learn from other HRBPs, as shown in the quote below.

Emmalyn *"Yes, I have, but we -- okay, most of the time we can't rely on it, because firstly, the materials are really outdated. I don't really refer to the materials, because along the way there are a lot of changes and no one has updated the materials; we have no time to update the material as well. So we have to just pick it up when it goes."*

"Okay. She (HRBP Buddy) was here for quite some time, so I guess she had all these processes in her mind. Then she would just say and then I would just take down notes."

According to theme 3 (Institutionalized knowledge was difficult to be maintained by individuals' effort alone), institutionalized knowledge that is not maintained centrally and is instead seemingly relegated to the individuals for maintenance may have detrimental consequences. Firstly, individuals who do not maintain their copies of institutionalized knowledge may share their out-dated institutionalized knowledge with new employees, as commented by HRBP Emmalyn. This may, in turn, lead to new employees experiencing distrust in the out-dated institutionalized knowledge and therefore minimize *knowing* acquisition through the institutionalized knowledge. Secondly, new HRBPs may have different versions of the institutionalized knowledge shared by their assigned buddies who had different ways of updating their materials as illustrated by this quote from Anna below.

Anna *You add your own stuff to the folder so your own personal folder sort of grows with the things that you need to know... So when a newbie ... comes along, we actually lend our folder to the newbie for him or her to photocopy."*

This, in turn, would likely lead to a corrosion of the institutionalized knowledge over time. Despite having centralized institutionalized knowledge, mentioned by HRBP Wayni, individuals did not access the manual, as they did not seem to know of its existence as mentioned by HRBP Emmalyn, "most of the time we can't rely on it, because firstly, the materials are really outdated". This may eventually result in a destabilization of the institutionalized knowledge, where inconsistency of organizational knowledge and *knowing* across the users may occur.

This finding serves to highlight the importance of knowledge renewal within the knowledge management processes of knowledge capturing, creation, organization, application, sharing and renewal (Dalkir, 2013; Evans et al., 2014) for knowledge institutionalization to be effective. To date, most knowledge management and knowledge creation research focuses on knowledge capture, creation, organization, application and

sharing (Stanciu et al., 2011; Sun & Scott, 2005; von Krogh et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2011; Wang & Noe, 2010; Watson & Hewett, 2006), with minimal discussion on knowledge renewal. Beyond organizational learning, organizational knowledge and knowledge management research, studies are also silent about knowledge renewal. Specifically, Crossan et al.'s (1999) 4I (intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalizing) organizational learning framework, which envisages organizational learning as occurring in a cyclical approach, suggests that organizational knowledge renewal occurs naturally. The cyclical approach, where individuals intuit and interpret meanings; groups integrate meanings; and organizations institutionalize meanings into systems, structures and routines that individuals learn from, does not imply any knowledge renewal. While the literature has been taciturn on the role of knowledge renewal in institutionalized knowledge, this finding amplifies the necessity of purposeful knowledge renewal for institutionalized knowledge to remain useful and valuable as a resource for sustained competitive advantage. Having discussed the impact of institutionalization mechanisms and importance of institutionalized knowledge renewal on *knowing* acquisition, the next finding discusses the impact of the degree of institutionalization on *knowing* acquisition.

5.1.5 Finding 5: Degree of Institutionalization of Each Institutionalized Practice Affects *Knowing* Acquisition

The degree of institutionalization is another factor that determines the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms to facilitate *knowing* acquisition. Amongst the three mechanisms, the sharing of the institutionalized knowledge enjoyed a high degree of institutionalization. Every HRBP, including HRBPs Candice and Emmalyn, who did not have high opinions of the institutionalized knowledge, spoke of an institutionalized practice of sharing the Training Manual with new HRBPs. The other mechanism that enjoyed a high

degree of institutionalization was the HR Specialists Advisory Support. As discussed in theme 9 (Strong institutionalization of HR Specialists Advisory Support led to HR Specialists' willingness to share knowledge and *knowing*), the HR Specialists Advisory Support was consistently applied to all HRBPs, which facilitated the HRBPs' acquisition of *knowing*. This can be illustrated by the quote below.

Mandy *“Of course we want to equip the business partners with the knowledge to run some of the things for us. If we look at things like Group PDC [Personnel Development Committee], they must understand when we do Group PDC, what’s the objective, what are things we look out for in terms of evaluating the group’s proposals, so that there is some consistency in terms of what the BPs look for within their group and therefore across the entire organization.”*

“So when we did that, we basically want them to be on the same page, so that although we pass the activity out to the individual partners, we still have some form of consistency.”

On the other hand, the institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System suffered from an inconsistency in the quality of sharing by the buddies and mentors (theme 7, Weak institutionalization of HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System led to inconsistent quality of sharing). Such inconsistency was highlighted both by HRBP Candice, who advocated for the department to have standard operating procedures (SOP) for buddies and mentors, and by HR Specialist Mandy, who opined that the inconsistency in knowledge sharing resulted in inconsistency in *knowing* across the new HRBPs. Their quotes are provided below to illustrate this point.

Candice *“I will say that the buddy system is good, but it depends on whether the new employee gets a good buddy.”*

Mandy *“I have to say the quality of the training of the new BPs, which is done probably by their more senior, more experienced business partner, ... can vary in terms of quality. I have seen BPs who are very in tune with what we are doing; they understand the thing better. I have also seen BPs, equally new, who are a little bit more lost in that sense. They may not have the benefit of having ... a more experienced business partner guide them as closely. So I would say it’s not very even in terms of the quality of training of subsequent batches.”*

The different degree of institutionalization noted in these institutionalization mechanisms is testament that the greater the degree of institutionalization, the greater the positive impact on *knowing* acquisition.

As mentioned in Section 2.1.4, the degree of institutionalization of any practice is dependent on the exteriority and objectivity of the practice (Zucker, 1977). Exteriority refers to the extent that the practice could be understood within a larger external context (Zucker, 1977). Objectivity refers to the possibility of the practice to be adopted by others while retaining a common understanding of the act (Zucker, 1977). All three institutionalization mechanisms fulfilled these conditions. Every HRBP understood and articulated the importance of the HRBP buddies and mentors, and HR Specialists to share knowledge that would be useful to the HRBPs, and every HRBP shared the institutionalized knowledge with new HRBPs. This demonstrates the presence of the exteriority condition. At the same time, all the HRBPs and HR Specialists were able to adopt the institutionalized practices expected of them: to share their knowledge and expertise when called upon and share the institutionalized knowledge with new HRBPs. This demonstrates the presence of the objectivity condition.

Besides the above two conditions of the practice itself, large-scale institutional dynamics, such as pressure from ‘above’; external conditions and context facing the actors; and internal value system and priority of the actors, also drive the degree of institutionalization (Moseley & Charnley, 2014). These institutional dynamics exist outside of the practice and impact on how the individuals interpret the institutionalized changes that they are required to implement.

The finding that the HR Specialists Advisory Support has a stronger degree of institutionalization than the HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System could be attributed to the difference in the large-scale institutional dynamics facing the HRBPs and the HR Specialists. The HR Specialists' work performance was measured by the successful implementation of the HR policies. At the same time, the HR Specialists were expected by the HR management to incorporate the comments from the HRBPs to develop more robust policies that could be better implemented to the business units. This mutual dependence nature of external condition and context, and pressure from 'above' provided the motivation and drive for HR Specialists such as Mandy and Jasper to share their knowledge with the HRBPs, as discussed in theme 9 (Strong institutionalization of HR Specialists Advisory Support led to HR Specialists' willingness to share knowledge and *knowing*). On the other hand, there was no key performance indicator (KPI) for HRBP buddies and mentors to motivate them to be good buddies and mentors. This suggests that there was neither real pressure from 'above' nor external condition to motivate the HRBPs to share their knowledge. Instead, they had been governed by their own individual internal value systems and priorities, which led to inconsistent quality of guidance to the new HRBPs. Hence, this finding suggests that large-scale institutional systems not only impacts on the degree of institutionalization (Moseley & Charnley, 2014), it also impacts on individuals' willingness to share knowledge, thereby impacting *knowing* acquisition.

As a whole, this finding is important, as there have been limited studies on the impact of the degree of institutionalization on *knowing* acquisition. Most studies focus on the impact of the degree of institutionalization on institutionalization itself (Colyvas & Jonsson, 2011; Reay et al., 2013), and not on *knowing* acquisition. Since institutionalization looks at fostering stability and persistence of organizational practices for the long-term survival of

organizations (Fleck, 2007), it is important to understand how institutionalization fosters individual *knowing* acquisition, which, when it occurs collectively, leads to organizational *knowing* acquisition. Organizational *knowing* acquisition, when it occurs, in turn represents changes in organizational practices, which support sustained competitive advantage (Selznick, 2011). In addition to the degree of institutionalization, institutional norms is also a factor that supports *knowing* acquisition. This finding will be discussed in greater details in the next section.

5.1.6 Finding 6: Institutional Norms Encourage Knowledge Sharing and Support *Knowing* Acquisition but may not Necessarily Lead to Organizational Knowledge and *Knowing*

This finding surfaces institutional norms as a factor that affects the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms for *knowing* acquisition. Specifically, the presence of institutional norms, where HRBPs and HR Specialists have been expected to share their expertise and knowledge, encourages knowledge sharing and supports *knowing* acquisition. As articulated in theme 11 (Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and *knowing* created group knowledge and *knowing* but might not lead to organizational knowledge and *knowing*), knowledge sharing across the HRBPs, notwithstanding that they were not buddies or mentors to the new HRBPs, often occurred. Similarly, the discussion of theme 10 (Institutional norms of HR Specialists' sharing led to creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing*) in the preceding chapter established that the institutional norms of HR Specialists' sharing of knowledge has been strong where the HR Specialists have not only shared knowledge upon request but also accompanied the HRBPs to explain the policies to the business units (as commented by HRBP Dolly). In addition, the HR Specialists organized briefing sessions to learn from the collective HRBPs on proposed policy changes and share with the HRBPs on the new policies, which led to the creation of new organizational knowledge. Both themes thus demonstrate that institutional norms encourage knowledge

sharing and support *knowing* acquisition. Some of the quotes to illustrate the above points are shown below.

Dolly *“Whenever we have questions we will bounce it off to them, we will go back to them, discuss on solutions et cetera, and probably during meetings we can actually get their help to come in and front the management with us.”*

Clare *“Those specialists ... come out with policies. For example, the compensation and manpower planning team ... will review compensation policies and, for example, salary range and so on. Then when they have come out with a new set of guidelines or new initiatives that they would like to launch, they will usually seek HRBPs’ advice and share with us the plans that they have and then let the BPs give them feedback on whether we think will there be potential issues in certain areas, so that they can go back and refine their policy and also take into consideration other aspects that they have not thought [of] before.”*

“Then from there, once they have refined it already and gotten the approval, they will then come back to us on the finalized policies and initiatives ... our role is that we would then implement the policies to our groups and then manage it at a ground level. We will share with the management on the revised policies. For example, there is a market adjustment component payout; so at the ground level we will manage and handle the inquiries from our management staff and, if their staff queries ... them and they are not able to handle [it], they will then come back to us for advice on how [we should] then explain to the staff and manage their expectations.”

Notwithstanding the impact of institutional norms to create organizational knowledge and *knowing*, both themes provide inconsistent evidence as to the ability of institutional norms to eventually lead to successful institutionalization, as suggested by Wang, Tseng and Yen (2014). According to Wang et al. (2014), institutional norms that encourage knowledge sharing would eventually lead to successful institutionalization. While the institutional norms of knowledge sharing by the HR Specialists led to the creation of new HR policies that were subsequently shared with the HRBPs and institutionalized in the organization, the same could not be said for the HRBPs. The institutional norms of the HRBPs created group knowledge and supported group *knowing* acquisition but did not lead to new organizational knowledge and *knowing*. While there have been common knowledge and *knowing* across the HRBPs as far as procedural knowledge is concerned, there have been no direct impacts on the creation

of new organizational knowledge and *knowing*, except through the HR Specialists. The quote below from Isabel expressing a hope for a bigger and more formal sharing platform shows a lack of platform to create organizational knowledge and *knowing* through the HRBPs.

Isabel “*we do have such informal-like sharing stuff and that’s where I tend to feel that it is better for a bigger session because common knowledge needs to be known across all the Business Partners, so that when you are addressing issues, you have standard consistent answers for the line. Rather than one Business Partner gives one answer and another BP gives a different answer.*”

This finding suggests that Wang et al.’s (2014) argument that institutional norms that encourage knowledge sharing lead to successful institutionalization may be too simplistic. Instead, this finding suggests that whether the institutional norms of knowledge sharing can lead to successful institutionalization is dependent on the type of institutionalization mechanisms. From this finding, it can be posited that institutional norms that require a purposeful sharing of knowledge and creation of organizational knowledge are keys to support the creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing*. Hence, Wang et al.’s (2014) argument that the presence of tangible institutional management, intangible institutional norms, and mediating role of trust are pertinent for successful institutionalization would need to be extended to include purposeful organizational knowledge creation. Having focused on institutionalization in Findings 1 to 6, the next finding studies the concepts of knowledge and *knowing* as prescribed by Cook and Brown (1999) and adopted for this research.

5.1.7 Finding 7: Knowledge and *Knowing* are Distinct, Mutually Enabling and Complementary

This finding addresses the research objective of creating a better understanding of the dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing* through the lens of Cook and Brown’s (1999) theory. The findings from themes 12 (Tacit knowledge in the form of relevant experience was useful for learners to acquire *knowing*), 13 (Individual tacit and explicit

knowledge interacted with *knowing* to create new knowledge and *knowing*) and 14 (Individual and group tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with *knowing* to create new individual and group knowledge and *knowing*) support Cook and Brown's (1999) theory that knowledge and *knowing* are distinct (Tsoukas, 2011) and complementary, and mutually enable each other to lead to new knowledge and *knowing*. The daily operations of HRBPs require, firstly, tacit knowledge to understand the HR policies and business units; secondly, explicit knowledge of the policies as articulated in the institutionalized knowledge and by the HRBPs' sharing of the policies to the business units; and thirdly, *knowing* as exhibited in the implementation of the policies to the business units. The quotes from HRBPs Anna and Isabel below illustrate this finding.

Anna *“Okay, so when I first started it was more of learning the policies first (Explicit Institutionalized Knowledge) because you need to know the background, you need to know your own policies before you can help [and] guide others through (Knowing). So how I gained the competence was firstly, I learned about the policies within the organization and then it's really on-the-job, because regardless of the group I handled, our HR policies don't change. So it's a matter of implementing these policies (Knowing), or when the staff have queries, share with them our rationale behind the policies as well as the policy (Explicit Knowledge). So I would say it's a lot of on-the-job learning because you would never know what kind of queries may come your way [and] it's a lot of learning from peers as well (Interaction of Explicit and Tacit Knowledge between Individuals). And for me, because of my background in my previous organization, I am also aware of the whole civil service policies (Personal Tacit Knowledge). Hence, I am able to link them up to other policies that we have in my current organization (New Tacit Knowledge). This has helped me to understand better the rationale behind the policy (New Tacit Knowledge) and that has made it easier for me to explain to the staff (New Explicit Knowledge).”*

Isabel *“Having this database (Explicit Knowledge) in place allows new officers to know that previously there were other cases and precedents set in place. ... This information helps the new officers to understand the context better (Tacit Knowledge). In terms of handling new situations they would not be so lost and without direction because if you can look at the database you would be able to see how previous leaders have thought through and came about that decision. So [the new officers] can ... find new solutions for their problems (New Knowing).”*

Both forms of knowledge, explicit and tacit knowledge, and *knowing* are distinct in terms of the roles that they play in knowledge and *knowing* creation (Cook & Brown, 1999). At the same time, both knowledge and *knowing* mutually enable each other to create new forms of knowledge and new *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999). According to HRBPs such as Candice, Priscilla and Isabel, their experience based tacit knowledge enabled them to understand the concepts and principles articulated in the explicit HR policies, and thereafter applied the HR policies uniquely to the business units. This sharing demonstrates how tacit and explicit knowledge impact on *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012) and that *knowing* is informed by knowledge (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012). During the many occasions when the HRBPs acted upon their colleagues' tacit knowledge to handle specific cases, the HRBPs acquired new tacit knowledge on the approaches to handle future similar cases. This confirms the literature that *knowing* enables individuals to build upon existing tacit knowledge to learn new forms of knowledge and new *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012). The next finding discusses how the dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing* take place to create new knowledge and *knowing*.

5.1.8 Finding 8: Dynamic Interactions of Different Forms of Knowledge and *Knowing* Lead to New Forms of Knowledge and New *Knowing* at Individual and Organizational Levels

New forms of knowledge and new *knowing* at individual and organizational levels are created as a result of the dynamic interactions between the different forms of knowledge and *knowing*. According to Cook and Brown's (1999) theory, there are four forms of knowledge: concepts (individual explicit knowledge), skills (individual tacit knowledge), stories (group explicit knowledge) and genres (group tacit knowledge). While there has been limited empirical evidence to support Cook and Brown's (1999) theory, this research provides

evidence that these four forms of knowledge are also found in the HRBPs (inclusive of HR buddies and mentors) and their interactions with the HR Specialists, as illustrated in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2: Application of the Forms of Knowledge in the Research Context

| Forms of Knowledge | Descriptions |
|--------------------|--|
| Concepts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR policies and procedures and treatments of past cases that the HRBPs buddies, mentors and HR Specialists <u>explained</u> to the new HRBPs • HR policies and principles that the HRBPs <u>explained</u> to the business units |
| Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRBP buddies, mentors and HR Specialists' abilities to <u>know how</u> to apply the HR policies appropriately to unique cases • HRBPs' ability to <u>know how</u> to apply the HR policies appropriately to the business needs |
| Stories | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRBPs' <u>shared stories</u> of how they resolved unique cases faced in the business units (both across the HRBPs and with the HR Specialists) |
| Genres | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRBPs and HR Specialists' <u>common understanding</u> of how various HR annual exercises are conducted and briefings on new HR policies by HR Specialists |

The discussions on themes 13 (Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with *knowing* to create new knowledge and *knowing*) and 14 (Individual and group tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with *knowing* to create new individual and group knowledge and *knowing*) in the previous chapter suggest that the dynamic interactions between these different forms of knowledge and *knowing* had occurred, resulting in the creation of new forms of knowledge and new *knowing* (Cook & Brown, 1999). Applying Cook and Brown's (1999) framework, the HRBPs relied on their skills to understand the HR concepts explained by their buddies, mentors and HR Specialists, where both skills and concepts helped to

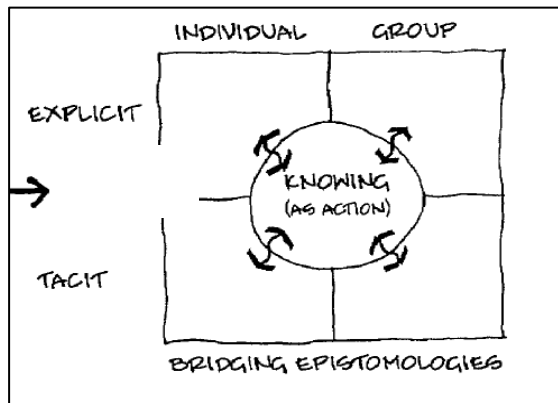
inform their *knowing* as they acted upon their knowledge. At the same time, the HRBPs also learnt concepts from how the other HRBPs handled unique cases or how their predecessors handled the business units successfully.

When such concepts are shared during the HRBP meetings, stories are created, where all HRBPs developed a common understanding of war stories to inform their *knowing*. During the briefings conducted by the HR Specialists to explain the new or revised HR policies to the HRBPs, the latter learnt new genres relating to the HR annual exercises and new HR policies. At the same time, the HR Specialists also learnt new stories as they learnt about the challenges that the HRBPs had faced with the existing policies or might possibly face with the new policies. These stories and genres further helped to inform individual *knowing*, enabling individuals to acquire new *knowing* and create new skills and concepts. This finding confirms Cook and Brown's (1999) theory that the dynamic interactions between different forms of knowledge and *knowing* lead to the creation of new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*. When new HR policies were created through the interactions between these four forms of knowledge and the HRBPs' *knowing*, new organizational knowledge was created. When the HRBPs successfully act on the new HR policies in a similar fashion, new organizational *knowing* is said to have occurred.

However, the finding suggests that Cook and Brown's (1999) theory on the dynamic interactions between the different forms of knowledge and *knowing* may be too general, as shown in Figure 5.1 below. The finding suggests that an additional set of dynamic interactions exists amongst the different forms of knowledge, beyond the interactions between the different forms of knowledge and *knowing*. More details on how this finding

leads to an extension of Cook and Brown's (1999) framework is discussed in the subsequent concluding chapter.

Figure 5.1: Cook and Brown's (1999, p. 383) Theory on Dynamic Interactions



This finding suggests that interactions across the different forms of knowledge took place when the HRBPs learnt from fellow HRBPs and the HR Specialists during the one-to-one knowledge sharing and mass briefing sessions. The dynamic interactions that took place during such knowledge exchange sessions did not involve *knowing* directly, since the HRBPs were not acting on knowledge during the knowledge sharing sessions. However, these knowledge sharing sessions facilitated the creation of new forms of knowledge for the individuals as they learnt new knowledge. These sessions additionally facilitated the creation of genres and stories, which led to the creation of new organizational knowledge and new *knowing* as the HRBPs learnt and applied the new HR policies.

The finding from theme 17 (On-the-job learning was required for *knowing* acquisition) suggests that, until on-the-job learning takes place, these knowledge-sharing sessions could only lead to the creation of new knowledge, not to new *knowing*. This finding is important as it suggests that Cook and Brown's (1999) theory, which states that new forms of knowledge and new *knowing* are created through dynamic interactions of the different

forms of knowledge and *knowing*, is too general. Instead, dynamic interactions amongst the different forms of knowledge and with on-the-job learning or practice took place first, before new *knowing* could be created, where the individuals grew confident in their actions. This suggests that Cook and Brown's (1999) bridging epistemologies framework could be further extended, which will be discussed in the subsequent chapter. The next and final finding discusses the additional factors that could further extend their framework to create new knowledge and *knowing*.

5.1.9 Finding 9: Additional Factors at Work Besides the Dynamic Interactions of Knowledge and *Knowing* to Create New Knowledge and *Knowing*

This final finding identifies the factors that affect the dynamic interactions of knowledge and *knowing* towards *knowing* acquisition. The creation of new forms of knowledge and new *knowing* requires more than just the presence of dynamic interactions between the different forms of knowledge and *knowing*. The discussion on themes 7 (Weak institutionalization of HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System led to inconsistent quality of sharing), 9 (Strong institutionalization of HR Specialists Advisory Support led to HR Specialists' willingness to share knowledge and *knowing*), 10 (Institutional norms of HR Specialists' sharing led to the creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing*), 11 (Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and *knowing* created group knowledge and *knowing* but might not lead to organizational knowledge and *knowing*), 15 (Learners' motivation to solve real work problems encouraged them to acquire *knowing*), 16 (Learners' attitudes towards learning and personal attributes affected their acquisition of *knowing*) and 17 (On-the-job learning was required for *knowing* acquisition) in the previous chapter suggest that other factors or conditions were required for new forms of knowledge and new *knowing* to be created.

Firstly, the presence of supportive institutional norms, as described in themes 10 (Institutional norms of HR Specialists' sharing led to the creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing*) and 11 (Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and *knowing* created group knowledge and *knowing* but might not lead to organizational knowledge and *knowing*), demonstrates that institutional norms encourage knowledge sharing. At the same time, these themes also show that institutional norms create a greater dynamism in the interactions of knowledge between and within the individuals. This in turns leads to more effective knowledge sharing amongst the individuals, thereby supporting the HRBPs' *knowing* acquisition.

Secondly, the degree of institutionalization impacts on the willingness of individuals to engage in knowledge-sharing, as discussed in themes 7 (Weak institutionalization of HRBP Buddy and Mentorship system led to inconsistent quality of sharing) and 9 (Strong institutionalization of HR Specialists Advisory Support led to HR Specialists' willingness to share knowledge and *knowing*). As the HR Specialists Advisory Support enjoyed the support of a stronger degree of institutionalization, there were stronger and more consistent interactions between the HRPBs and the HR Specialists. This led to the institutionalization of new policies, which represented organizational knowledge creation, a goal of Cook and Brown's (1999) theory. The above finding is testament that institutionalization has a role to play in enhancing the dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing*, which lead to new forms of knowledge and new *knowing* at the individual and organizational levels.

Thirdly, this research surfaces that learners' personal factors, such as attributes, attitudes and motivation to learn, impact on the quality of the dynamic interactions. As mentioned by many of the HRBPs, their motivation to learn from other HRBPs and HR

Specialists stemmed from their keenness to solve real work problems. If such motivation was weak, the HRBP could have easily fallen back on the policies to give standard solutions rather than design customized solutions for the business units, as commented by HRBP Corrine and discussed in theme 15 (Learners' motivation to solve real work problems encouraged them to acquire *knowing*). Other personal factors – including attitudes towards learning, where to seek clarifications and understanding, and personal attributes such as personality and job fit, as discussed in theme 16 (Learners' attitudes towards learning and personal attributes affected their acquisition of *knowing*) – also impacted on the extent that participants would engage with other individuals to seek new knowledge to inform their *knowing*. The presence of these personal factors impacted on their acquisition of skills, concepts and *knowing*. However, Cook and Brown (1999) did not include such personal factors in their framework. This finding supports the researcher's suggested extension of Cook and Brown's (1999) theory by including personal factors as factors for dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing*. More details on the extension of Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Fourthly, this research surfaced on-the-job-learning as another factor for *knowing* acquisition, as discussed in theme 17 (On-the-job learning was required for *knowing* acquisition) in the preceding chapter. Almost all the HRBPs shared that their *knowing* was acquired through on-the-job learning, more than just learning from the institutionalized knowledge. Without on-the-job learning, where the HRBPs gained experience in implementing the HR policies, the HRBPs would be unable to acquire the *knowing* that would enable them to confidently carry out their roles without help. HRBPs Janice and Wayni and HR Specialists Jasper and Mandy similarly shared this notion. On-the-job learning or repeated practices until the individuals gained familiarity and know-how was excluded

from Cook and Brown's (1999) framework. According to Cook and Brown (1999), *knowing* acquisition takes place naturally through the dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing*. However, the responses from the participants indicated that on-the-job learning was required after they acquired knowledge from their colleagues and before they eventually acquire new *knowing*. In fact, it appeared that on-the-job learning of the policies and processes took place while the HRBPs were acting on their knowledge, thus demonstrating that there were dynamic interactions across on-the-job learning, knowledge and *knowing*. Hence, this finding supports the researcher's position that on-the-job-learning should be included in Cook and Brown's (1999) theory on knowledge and *knowing* acquisition.

5.2 Conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion on the nine findings that addressed the research question "How do individuals interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in supporting the acquisition of *knowing*?" Underpinning this research question, which these findings seek to address, are four research objectives. Findings 1 to 3, which address the research objective of examining the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition, show that there are different types of *knowing*, that *knowing* can be acquired through institutionalization mechanisms, and that each institutionalization mechanism has different impacts on different types of *knowing*. These findings suggest that operational *knowing* builds operational efficiency to possibly maintain sustained competitive advantage, while strategic *knowing* has a more definitive role in helping to create and maintain sustained competitive advantage. At the same time, these findings also highlight an important conclusion, that not all institutionalization mechanisms are made equal in their contribution towards creating strategic *knowing*, which has a more impactful role in sustained competitive advantage than operational *knowing*. This conclusion

further illustrates that knowledge institutionalization, while it is useful, has a limited role as a key resource for creating sustained competitive advantage; that organizations would be wise not to complacently assume that knowledge institutionalization is the end objective; and that appropriate plans to maintain and renew institutionalized knowledge are key for institutionalization to maintain its relevance.

Findings 4 to 6 address the second research objective of determining the factors affecting institutionalization mechanisms for *knowing* acquisition. These findings show that central renewal and maintenance of institutionalized knowledge, degree of institutionalization, and institutional norms are factors that influence the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms for *knowing* acquisition. Specifically, finding 6 shows that institutionalization mechanisms with appropriate institutional norms lead to organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation, which is a key resource for sustained competitive advantage. These findings demonstrate that having institutionalization mechanisms alone does not guarantee *knowing* acquisition. Instead, organizations would need to look into knowledge renewal and maintenance and create systems that would strengthen the degree of institutionalization, thereby creating institutional norms for *knowing* acquisition to take place.

The third research objective is premised on Cook and Brown's (1999) theory, to engender a better understanding of the dynamic interaction between knowledge and *knowing* towards creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing*. Addressing this research objective are findings 7 and 8. Finding 7 indicates that knowledge and *knowing* are distinct, mutually enabling and complementary; finding 8 denotes that dynamic interactions took place to create new forms of knowledge and *knowing* at individual and organizational levels. More than that, finding 8 suggests that an additional set of dynamic interactions exist amongst the

different forms of knowledge, beyond the interactions between the different forms of knowledge and *knowing*. These findings not only confirm Cook and Brown's (1999) theory on the dynamic interactions, they also provide possible extension to Cook and Brown's (1999) theory, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The fourth and final research objective, which seeks to determine the factors that affect the dynamic interaction towards *knowing* acquisition, is addressed by finding 9. This final finding shows that institutionalization; institutional norms; and learners' motivations, attitudes towards learning and personal attributes impact on the dynamic interactions around *knowing* support. As well, this finding shows that on-the-job learning plays an important role in the dynamic interaction between the different forms of knowledge and *knowing* to create new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*. More discussion on theoretical contributions, implications for practice, limitations and recommendations for future research can be found in the subsequent concluding chapter.

6 CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter summarizes and discusses the research findings stemming from the research question of “How do individuals interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in the supporting of acquisition of individual *knowing*?” The research yielded nine findings, six of which were linked to institutionalization and the other three to *knowing* acquisition. The discussion on *knowing* acquisition had for its theoretical framework, Cook and Brown’s (1999) theory. These findings answer the research question and culminated with the participants to the research collectively perceiving that the institutionalization mechanisms can support individual *knowing* acquisition. The research likewise shows that institutionalization factors, such as the degree of institutionalization and institutional norms, impact on the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms to support *knowing* acquisition. The chapter proposes extending Cook and Brown’s (1999) theory on knowledge and knowing creation. The extension includes personal and institutionalization factors, and on-the-job learning to facilitate knowing acquisition.

Following the above discourse, the chapter addresses the theoretical contributions of the research. This is dovetailed by discussions on the implications of the research to practice, and limitations and recommendations for future research. The chapter closes with a broad conclusion of this study.

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

6.1.1 Contributions Towards a Better Understanding of Cook and Brown's Theoretical Framework to Study *Knowing* Acquisition

The first theoretical contribution of this research is to develop an extension of Cook and Brown's (1999) theory on knowledge and *knowing* creation. While the findings confirm Cook and Brown's (1999) theory that dynamic interactions between the different forms of knowledge and *knowing* can create new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*, the findings also suggest augmentations to the theory. First, while Cook and Brown (1999) described the dynamic interactions as occurring only between the different forms of knowledge with *knowing*, finding 7 (Dynamic interactions of different forms of knowledge and *knowing* leads to new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*) suggests that an additional set of dynamic interactions exists amongst the different forms of knowledge. As individuals interacted with the institutionalized knowledge and with fellow HR colleagues at both one-to-one platforms and mass briefings, interactions took place across the different forms of knowledge – namely, group tacit knowledge, group explicit knowledge, individual tacit knowledge and individual explicit knowledge. These interactions of different forms of knowledge, when further interacting with *knowing*, lead to new forms of knowledge and *knowing*.

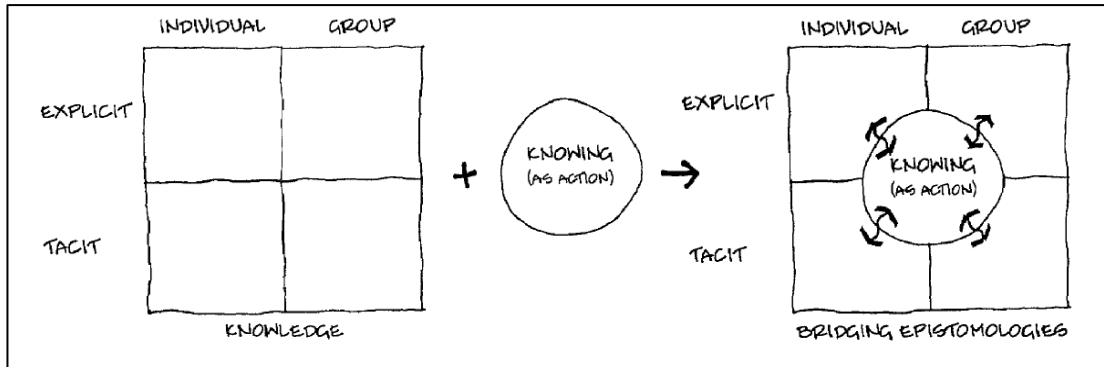
The findings also suggest another extension to the theory by including on-the-job learning or practice as an important additional component to facilitate *knowing* acquisition. This is articulated in finding 8 (Additional factors at work besides the dynamic interactions of knowledge and *knowing* to create new knowledge and *knowing*). From the responses of the HRBPs and HR Specialists, on-the-job learning or practice is required and interacts dynamically with the different forms of knowledge and *knowing* to create new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*. Their responses suggest that the interactions across the

different forms of knowledge can create new forms of knowledge but are unable to create new *knowing* without on-the-job learning or practice. The findings further suggest that new *knowing* created with the support of on-the-job learning can lead to the creation of new forms of knowledge. This hints at the importance of on-the-job learning for *knowing* creation that has been absent from Cook and Brown's (1999) theory.

The researcher also proposes extending Cook and Brown's (1999) theoretical framework by including factors that impact on the dynamic interactions of knowledge and *knowing*. Knowledge and *knowing* acquisition do not occur in a vacuum but within the contextualized world (Cook and Brown, 1999). While Cook and Brown's (1999) theory has omitted factors that may impact on the quality of the dynamic interactions of knowledge and *knowing*, the findings suggest that the quality of the dynamic interactions are largely due to institutionalization and personal factors. For example, finding 8 (Additional factors at work besides the dynamic interactions of knowledge and *knowing* to create new knowledge and *knowing*) shows that personal factors such as attitude towards learning, motivation to solve workplace problems, job fit et cetera impact on the quality of dynamic interactions to create new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*. Such personal factors impact on how the individuals interact with the institutionalized knowledge and with other HR colleagues to learn new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*. Besides personal factors, finding 8 also suggests that institutionalization factors, such as renewal of institutionalized knowledge, degree of institutionalization and strength of institutional norms play an important role for knowledge and *knowing* acquisition.

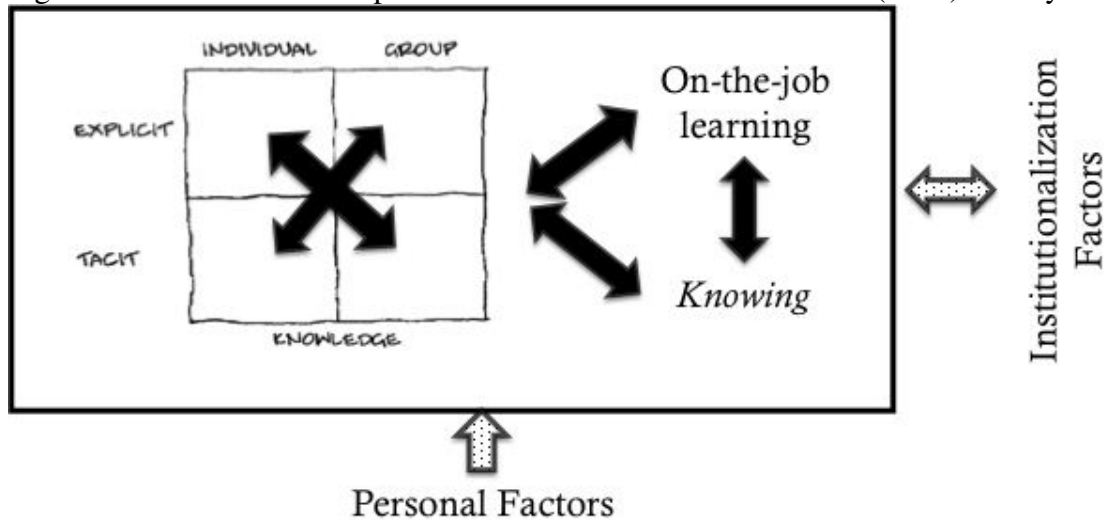
According to Cook and Brown (1999), the different forms of knowledge and *knowing* dynamically interact to create new forms of knowledge and *knowing*, as was illustrated in Figure 2.1 and replicated below for ease of reference.

Figure 2.1: Cook and Brown's (1999, p. 383) Knowledge and Knowing



To better articulate the dynamic interactions that lead to the creation of new forms of knowledge and *knowing*, the researcher of this study suggests that dynamic interactions occur amongst the different forms of knowledge, *knowing* and on-the-job learning to create new forms of knowledge and new *knowing*. At the same time, the researcher introduces institutionalization and personal factors as key factors that impact on the quality of these dynamic interactions. Figure 6.1 illustrates the proposed extension to Cook and Brown's (1999) theory.

Figure 6.1. Researcher's Proposed Extension to Cook and Brown's (1999) Theory



Within the rectangular box in Figure 6.1 are three components – namely, different forms of knowledge, *knowing* and on-the-job learning – that are key for new knowledge and *knowing* creation. *Knowing* in the enhanced theory includes both operational and strategic *knowing*. The five black-coloured bi-directional arrows in the above diagram illustrate the dynamic interactions between these three components, leading to the creation of new personal knowledge and *knowing*. New forms of knowledge can be created when individual explicit knowledge, individual tacit knowledge, group explicit knowledge and group tacit knowledge interact with one another. New *knowing* and new forms of knowledge can be created when individuals embark on on-the-job learning, where the different forms of knowledge interact with on-the-job learning and *knowing*. Through on-the-job learning, individuals gain the ability to act on their knowledge, leading to new *knowing*. Through this enhanced ability, individuals gain new tacit knowledge that can be value-added to the group knowledge during knowledge sharing sessions. This can result in the creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing* when individuals share best practices that support the implementation of the institutionalized policies.

The inclusion of on-the-job learning into the interaction between knowledge and *knowing* demonstrates its importance for individual *knowing* acquisition to take place. This importance of on-the-job learning also aligns with the general learning and development 10-20-70 model adopted by many learning and development practitioners (Kajewski & Madsen, 2013; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2010), where 10% of learning stems from classroom learning, 20% from mentoring/coaching and 70% from experience. However, institutional efforts are critical for on-the-job learning to be truly effective in supporting the creation of new organizational knowledge and *knowing*.

Institutionalization factors, with their dotted bi-directional arrows as shown in Figure 6.1, impact on the quality of interactions of the three components in the rectangular box and are also influenced by the organizational knowledge and *knowing* created. These institutionalization factors comprise types of institutionalization mechanisms, renewal of institutionalized knowledge, degree of institutionalization, and strength of institutional norms. For example, institutionalization mechanisms that encourage clarifications can result in higher quality of knowledge sharing as compared to knowledge sharing that does not support clarifications (Boh, 2007). The degree of institutionalization and strength of institutional norms impact on the persistence of the institutionalization to support personal knowledge and *knowing* acquisition, and to create organizational knowledge and *knowing*.

As the different forms of knowledge exist in the individuals and collective individuals, personal factors such as learners' motivation to learn and share, attitude towards learning and personal attributes impact on the quality of the interactions amongst knowledge, *knowing* and on-the-job learning. When individuals are motivated to learn and share, the quality of the dynamic interactions would be stronger, leading to better knowledge and

knowing acquisition. Similarly, when individuals have a good job fit, the quality of the dynamic interactions can be affected and the extent of *knowing* acquisition can be substantial. As these personal factors are unique to individuals, the extent of their influence on the quality of dynamic interactions is limited to the creation of new forms of personal knowledge and *knowing*. Thus, as compared to institutionalization factors, these personal factors have a less likely impact on the creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing*, which requires socially accepted practice and knowledge. This single directional impact of personal factor is illustrated through the dotted one-directional arrow in Figure 6.1.

This proposed extension is hinged on the dynamic interactions amongst different forms of knowledge, *knowing* and on-the-job learning. The intricacy of the model cannot be fully illustrated by the diagram but is better articulated in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1: Impact of Different Types of Dynamic Interactions

| Dynamic Interactions | Impact on Personal <i>Knowing</i> Acquisition | Impact on Personal Knowledge Acquisition |
|--|---|--|
| a. Between different forms of knowledge | Supporting impact | Lead impact |
| b. Between knowledge and <i>knowing</i> | Supporting impact | Lead impact |
| c. Between knowledge, <i>knowing</i> and on-the-job learning | Lead impact | Lead impact |

This study shows that Cook and Brown's (1999) theory may not be sufficiently comprehensive in explaining the impact of the dynamic interactions on knowledge and *knowing* creation. The study also shows that, without on-the-job learning, dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing* only have a supportive role in *knowing* acquisition. At the same time, the study shows that, while on-the-job learning is important for *knowing* acquisition, it must be well supported by institutionalization factors and well

governed to ensure a robust and consistent on-the-job learning platform for individuals. For example, organizations could implement job profile based developmental plans for individuals to ensure that they are adequately guided and have the required practice for each aspect of the job. Each newly hired or transferred individual would benefit from a personalized developmental plan with the strong support of a buddy and the guidance of a mentor. This would ensure optimal on-the-job learning opportunities for individuals. These illustrations show that on-the-job learning cannot be assumed but needs to be well managed for it to result in *knowing* acquisition.

6.1.2 Contributions Towards a Better Understanding of Institutionalization

6.1.2.1 *Institutionalized Logics and Agency*

In the area of institutionalization, this study provides a significant theoretical contribution to address the lack of research studying micro-elements, such as the influence and actions of individuals on institutionalized logics (Greenwood et al., 2014; Meyer, 2008; Suddaby, 2010; Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). Institutionalized logics is defined as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space and provide meaning to their social reality” (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008, p. 101). In this study, institutionalized logics, exhibited in the commonly held expectations of knowledge sharing by the HRBPs and the HR Specialists, are generally well shared by the individuals. The pro-activeness of the new HRBPs to learn new knowledge from the others and the willingness to share knowledge across the participants demonstrate the strength of the institutionalized logics.

This study provides greater clarity on how individuals act and respond to institutionalized logics. In this study, one group's willingness to share knowledge affirms the other group's willingness to seek and learn from the former, resulting in a consistent act of consultation. These consistent acts further strengthen the institutionalized logics, which reinforces the willingness to share and learn, in a cyclical movement. Since the willingness to share knowledge is largely due to institutionalization, we could conclude that institutionalization impacts on institutionalized logics and that individuals' actions impacts on institutionalized logics. This shows a strong relationship across individuals, institutionalized logics and institutionalization. This contribution serves to enlarge the body of knowledge in the literature on the relationship between institutionalized logics and individuals.

6.1.2.2 Role of Institutionalization to Create Strategic Knowing, and Organizational Knowledge and Knowing for Sustained Competitive Advantage

Another theoretical contribution of this study is a greater clarity of the role of institutionalization in creating organizational knowledge and *knowing* for sustained competitive advantage. Many studies relating to institutionalization focus on institutionalization of knowledge into systems and organizational norms (Currie & Suhomlinova, 2006; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Wang et al., 2014) and on the creation of organizational knowledge for sustained competitive advantage (Brătianu & Orzea, 2010; Matsudaira, 2010). The emphasis of using institutionalization to create organizational knowledge is similarly found in the field of knowledge management. According to Dalkr (2013), knowledge management has evolved into the third stage, where the emphasis is on content management and taxonomies to manage the vast organizational knowledge.

Unlike the vast literature that focuses on institutionalization of knowledge to support sustained competitive advantage, this study shows that sustained competitive advantage is supported by institutionalization mechanisms that encourage tacit knowledge sharing. Such tacit knowledge sharing is better positioned to create strategic *knowing*, as compared to institutionalization of knowledge, leading to sustained competitive advantage. Strategic *knowing*, which provides higher value solutions to organizations, is more effective than operational *knowing*, which primarily impacts on operational efficiency.

In addition, the study illustrates that institutionalization mechanisms could be more effectively deployed to strengthen tacit face-to-face knowledge sharing and organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation when they are reinforced by supportive institutional norms. Such norms are not incidental but purposefully cultured through institutionalized strategies and policies. Without well thought-through institutionalized strategies and policies that motivate individuals to share knowledge, support *knowing* acquisition, create new organizational knowledge, and renew and maintain organizational knowledge, institutionalization mechanisms alone are insufficient to motivate knowledge sharing. Hence, the role of institutionalization in supporting sustained competitive advantage lies in its ability to culture institutional norms that reinforce institutionalization mechanisms. When both institutional norms and institutionalization mechanisms are well synergized, knowledge sharing, *knowing* acquisition and organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation are likely to occur.

6.2 Implications for Practice

Since new forms of knowledge and new *knowing* are created through dynamic interactions across knowledge, on-the-job learning and *knowing*, organizations need to bear in

mind some key considerations. First, organizations need to have clarity on the type of organizational knowledge and *knowing* that are desired for building sustained competitive advantage. Besides such clarity of goals, organizations should also consider possible interplay of institutionalization and personal factors to enhance the quality of the dynamic interactions across knowledge, on-the-job learning and *knowing* to build the desired organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation. Specifically, organizations should create strategies that harness the synergy between both institutionalization and personal factors towards building organizational knowledge and *knowing*. The following paragraphs discuss these implications in greater detail.

Foremost, organizations need to have clarity on the type of organizational knowledge and *knowing* that it will need to build sustained competitive advantage. Without clarity, organizations may end up amassing large warehouses of organizational knowledge that may have little success in building sustained competitive advantage. For example, institutionalized knowledge of lessons learnt, best practices and standard procedures, amassed by most organizations, is historically context based and seldom renewed. Such organizational knowledge, while useful for learning from the past or for efficient operations, may not necessarily build sustained competitive advantage. Instead, such knowledge is at a high risk of losing its relevance over time and may create resistance to change that is required to overcome challenges. Hence, clarity of the type of organizational knowledge and *knowing* that build sustained competitive advantage is one of the basic considerations.

Next, organizations need to design supportive institutionalization mechanisms that will create dynamic interactions amongst knowledge, *knowing* and on-the-job learning, to create new knowledge and *knowing*. Supportive institutionalization mechanisms are

important to facilitate the acquisition of both explicit knowledge found in documentation and tacit knowledge retained in individuals with expertise. While explicit knowledge found in documentation does not necessarily lead to sustained competitive advantage, it provides the basic building blocks of processes, policies and structures for organizational daily operations and *knowing*. It is the tacit knowledge and *knowing* of individuals that help the individuals tap into tacit knowledge of the experts to inform and develop their *knowing*. Examples of such mechanisms are mentorship, apprenticeship, expert advice et cetera. Organizations could also develop institutionalization mechanisms such as structured training programmes that incorporate both explicit knowledge and expert tacit knowledge sharing.

For the mechanisms to be consistently applied within organizations, a strong degree of institutionalization has to be established to support these mechanisms. The strength of institutionalization is dependent on the implementation of these mechanisms. One important factor that must be included in the implementation of these mechanisms to support institutionalization is performance management. While accessibility, relevance and ease of modification of knowledge, as well as user-friendliness, accessibility and responsiveness of knowledge systems are important foundation for knowledge to be shared, individuals do not naturally share their knowledge in the system outside their work. Performance management controls and influences how individuals share knowledge in organizations. Individuals and groups whose performance measurement and management includes knowledge sharing and creation of institutionalized knowledge would exhibit stronger tendency to share knowledge and create institutionalized knowledge as compared to the scenario where such outcomes are not measured. Besides performance management, the implementation strategies would need to include clear expectations on roles, responsibilities and deliverables; and direct accountability. For example, domain specialists could be measured for the impact of their

knowledge and *knowing* sharing to the business units, or for the achievement of key milestones or projects by mentees through their guidance et cetera. When such targeted performance indicators become mandatory measurements for work performance evaluation, individuals will proactively seek to share knowledge and *knowing*. Hence, these performance management related implementation strategies play an important role in building a strong degree of institutionalization.

With these implementation strategies in place, organizations would need to proactively create institutional norms that support knowledge and *knowing* sharing across individuals. To create such norms, organizations could frequently celebrate and acknowledge the power of knowledge and *knowing* sharing, such as by hosting award ceremonies and organizational knowledge sharing conferences. Organizations could also establish knowledge and *knowing* sharing champions across organizations, provide incentives and support for divisions or individuals to initiate organized knowledge and *knowing* sharing sessions within and across divisions, and structure organizational work that requires individuals to learn from one another collaboratively. Such mechanisms would demonstrate a strong support for knowledge and *knowing* sharing and create supportive institutional norms for impactful knowledge and *knowing* sharing.

Finally, organizations need to give careful consideration to the centralized maintenance and renewal of institutionalized knowledge. Most organizations put in place knowledge management systems and processes to capture, codify and store knowledge for easy access by staff. However, there is little emphasis on the approach and frequency for maintenance and renewal of institutionalized knowledge. Without plans for maintenance and renewal, institutionalized knowledge easily becomes obsolete as organizations and their

operating environments change. On the other hand, proactive plans and implementation of such plans to renew institutionalized knowledge would ensure its continuous relevance and promote individuals learning from it. This in turn would strengthen the use of institutionalized knowledge in the organization to support knowledge and *knowing* acquisition.

The above implications for practice, as summarized in Appendix E, are organizational-centric and geared towards strengthening institutionalization mechanisms to ensure adequate support for *knowing* acquisition. These implications stem from the findings that *knowing* acquisition is not incidental and that organizational *knowing* creation requires supportive and strong institutionalization mechanisms. These implications also show that organizations should develop strategies that harness both institutionalization and personal factors to enhance motivation to share knowledge and *knowing*. When these are done synergistically, personal and organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation are better positioned to take place.

6.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This research studied the role of institutionalization on *knowing* acquisition and adopted a relatively untested theory by Cook and Brown (1999) to better understand how *knowing* is acquired by individuals. While this research has extended Cook and Brown's (1999) theory to include personal factors, institutionalization factors and on-the-job learning, there are two main inherent limitations relating to this research. Firstly, this is a single-site case study with a small sample size, and a unique research site that cannot be easily replicated to other organizations or departments (Yin, 2009). Thus, this study cannot be easily extended to other sites to derive a generalization of the findings. However, since this case study is

intended to study whether institutionalization can support *knowing* acquisition and whether the relatively untested theory of Cook and Brown (1999) is sufficiently robust, a single-site case study is still sufficient. Secondly, the data from the research curiously did not surface the issue of power, which the literature would expect to appear as both a barrier and an enabler (Chong & Besharati, 2014; Liu, Ding, Huang, & Huang, 2014). Hence, the research is unable to conclude if power has a role in *knowing* acquisition similar to its role in knowledge sharing.

To address the above limitations, to further study the relationship of institutionalization and *knowing*, and to test the extended Cook and Brown (1999) theory, some possible research studies could be carried out across multiple sites, professions and industries. These future studies are listed as follows and are discussed in the ensuing paragraphs of this section:

- i. Cook and Brown's (1999) theory and the proposed extension;
- ii. further analysis of how institutionalization impacts on *knowing* acquisition;
- iii. impact of institutionalization factors on one another and institutionalization;
- iv. further analysis of how institutional norms and degree of institutionalization impacts on *knowing* acquisition as compared to knowledge institutionalization;
- v. impact of power and personal factors on the effectiveness of institutionalization to support *knowing* acquisition; and
- vi. the types of knowledge institutionalized and institutionalization mechanisms in organizations and their effectiveness in supporting *knowing* acquisition.

6.3.1 Cook and Brown's (1999) Theory and the Proposed Extension

Further studies could also be conducted to test the extended model for its application to other industries, professions and research sites. More questions could be tailored to understand the various personal and institutionalization factors and their role in personal and organizational knowledge and *knowing* acquisition, as well as questions involving on-the-job learning within the model. Such studies would help to confirm if the extension is sufficiently robust to enhance Cook and Brown's (1999) theory across different industries, professions and research sites, thereby leading to generalization of the findings.

6.3.2 Further Analysis of How Institutionalization Impacts on *Knowing* Acquisition

This study was conducted on a single site where the participants were HR professionals in an engineering organization and where the organization has a set of unique institutionalization mechanisms. The findings analysed were also unique to the HR profession, where much of the work is perceived to be “grey”, requiring HR professionals to assess the situations they faced and make judgments as they implement the HR policies. Hence, it is difficult to conclude if the findings from this study would be similar in other industries or professions. This suggests that future studies could be conducted to understand how institutionalization impacts on *knowing* acquisition may occur in other industries and with participants from other professions. By extending this study to other industries and with other professions, we could eventually generalize the findings on the role of institutionalization to impact on *knowing* acquisition.

6.3.3 Impact of Institutionalization Factors on One Another and Institutionalization

Further studies could also delve into more conclusive impacts of the various institutionalization factors on one another and on the effectiveness of institutionalization for

knowing acquisition. The studies could further identify new institutionalization factors that have not been identified in this study. Through these studies, there would be greater clarity as to the role of institutionalization factors towards personal and organizational *knowing* acquisition.

6.3.4 Further Analysis of How Institutional Norms and Degree of Institutionalization Impacts on *Knowing* Acquisition as Compared to Knowledge Institutionalization

Future studies could specifically compare the impact of institutional norms and degree of institutionalization on *knowing* acquisition as compared to knowledge institutionalization. These studies would provide insights on each of their values for *knowing* acquisition and provide confirmation of the role of knowledge institutionalization for *knowing* acquisition. Furthermore, such studies could investigate the type of institutional norms that could support or derail *knowing* acquisition and the factors that impact on the degree of institutionalization for *knowing* acquisition.

6.3.5 Impact of Power and Personal Factors on the Effectiveness of Institutionalization to Support *Knowing* Acquisition

Further studies could be conducted on the role of power and personal factors in the effectiveness of institutionalization. These studies could surface the role of power and new personal factors beyond the several factors identified during this study and provide insight on their impact on institutionalization for *knowing* acquisition. In addition, the studies could focus on how these factors interact with one another to impact on the effectiveness of institutionalization.

6.3.6 Study the Types of Knowledge Institutionalized and Institutionalization Mechanisms in Organizations and Their Effectiveness in Supporting *Knowing* Acquisition

This study suggests that institutionalization of procedural knowledge has limited effectiveness in supporting *knowing* acquisition. To provide more robust evidence to support this finding and understand whether institutionalization of other types of knowledge can yield different results, future studies could focus on different types of institutionalized knowledge. In addition, since this study suggests that institutionalization mechanisms that encourage tacit knowledge sharing, rather than knowledge institutionalization, are more effective to support *knowing* acquisition, future studies could examine the effectiveness of different institutionalization mechanisms. At the same time, these studies could also address the literature gap identified in a recent literature review on knowledge sharing mechanisms (Navimipour & Charband, 2016). According to that literature review, little research has been conducted to compare the effectiveness of various institutionalization mechanisms (Navimipour & Charband, 2016). Hence, future studies in this area would have significant contribution with regard to knowledge sharing mechanisms.

6.4 Conclusion

This research sought to address the research question “How do individuals interpret their experiences with the institutionalization mechanisms in the supporting of acquisition of individual *knowing*?” Embedded within this research question were four research objectives, stated in Chapter 1, which were addressed by nine findings, as discussed in Chapter 5. Of the four research objectives, two are related to institutionalization mechanisms and *knowing* acquisition. Firstly, this research sought to examine the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms to support individual acquisition of *knowing*. Through this research, it can be concluded that well managed and supported institutionalization mechanisms can support

knowing acquisition but may enjoy different degrees of effectiveness due to differences in institutionalization factors. The study also concludes that knowledge institutionalization is less effective for *knowing* acquisition as compared to face-to-face tacit knowledge sharing. Secondly, this research aimed to determine the factors that affect the effectiveness of the institutionalization mechanisms for the acquisition of *knowing*. The findings show that centralized maintenance of institutionalized knowledge, degree of institutionalization, and institutional norms impact on the effectiveness of institutionalization mechanisms for *knowing* acquisition. From these findings, we can conclude that simply having institutionalization mechanisms is insufficient to support *knowing* acquisition if these factors are not carefully dealt with in organizations.

The third and fourth research objectives focused on *knowing* in relation to Cook and Brown's (1999) theory. The third objective of this research was to create a better understanding of the dynamic interaction between knowledge and *knowing*, as described by Cook and Brown (1999), to understand how *knowing* can be acquired. The study shows that dynamic interactions do occur between knowledge and *knowing*, and that *knowing* is acquired when there are dynamic interactions between knowledge, *knowing* and on-the-job learning. The fourth research objective supporting the research question was to determine the factors that affect the dynamic interactions between knowledge and *knowing* for *knowing* acquisition, and organizational knowledge and *knowing* creation. The research findings show that both personal and institutionalization factors impact on the quality of the dynamic interactions, and that the latter is able to result in the creation of organizational knowledge and *knowing*. In addressing these four core research objectives, the study provides a conclusive answer to the research question.

With the research question addressed, this study has also made theoretical contributions to the concepts of institutionalization and *knowing* acquisition. Firstly, this study extended the possibly over-simplified Cook and Brown (1999) theory. The extended model introduced on-the-job learning, personal factors and institutionalization factors as relevant for *knowing* acquisition. Secondly, this research contributed to the literature gap on the shortage of studies on individuals' responses to institutionalized logics. This study showed that there is a potentially strong relationship across individuals, institutionalized logics and institutionalization. In addition, it provided clarity that the ability of institutionalization to culture appropriate institutional norms is more relevant for sustained competitive advantage than institutionalization of knowledge. Thirdly, this study discussed the implications for practice for organizations to create supportive institutionalization mechanisms that support personal and organizational knowledge and *knowing* acquisition. Finally, this study acknowledged its limitations, and suggested further studies that would test the new model and provide generalization of its findings.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INVITATION EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Subject: Can I Solicit Your Gracious Help?

Hi fellow HR colleagues

As you may be aware, I am in the midst of embarking on my PhD studies. I have previously emailed many of you about interviewing you but I have been putting the interviews on hold, primarily due to workload. It is now time for me to re-pursue my data collection if I don't want to end up paying additional semester fees of \$9000 (not that workload is any lesser). You can refer to the attachment on my research data collection preamble and the interview questions.

The interview could be between 20mins to 45mins (depending on how much you would like to share). I really hope that you could help in my research as it so happens that our implementation of the HRBP model provides a very good qualitative case study to look into how institutionalization can transfer tacit knowledge and knowing between individuals – a topic that is hardly discussed in the academia. Hence, your participation in the research and the findings will really be of value to the academia, and of course my research.

The interviews can be held during lunch time if your timing is really tight. Lunch and coffee/tea will be on me (since I'm using your precious lunch hour).

I will fix up a meeting with you within the next few days if you are ok to participate in my research. The interviews can be conducted between now till beginning Oct.

In case you are curious about the composite of respondents, I am looking at interviewing HRBPs (who have been with us for at least 1 year), HRBP Supervisors and Trainers involved in the first mass training and developing of the training materials.

Regards

JAIME

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

HRBPs: Face-to-Face Interviews

1. What is it like to be a HRBP in LTA?
2. What are your key roles and tasks as a HRBP? Please provide some examples.
3. How effective are you as a HRBP? How have you been effective? Please provide some examples.
4. How effective are the other HRBPs?
5. What contributed to your current competency as a HRBP?
6. To what extent will you attribute your current competency to the learning material and workshop? Please provide some examples.
7. What will you do if you have a chance to influence the development & implementation plan for the HRBP model in LTA? Why would you influence the plan in such a way?
8. Based on what would you regard a HRBP to be competent? How have you come to this realization? Please provide some examples.

Trainers & Managers: Face-to-Face Interview

1. What do you hope to achieve when you developed and delivered the learning material? What have you done to achieve your goals?
2. If you have a chance to prepare the learning material and conduct the workshops again, what would you have done differently? Why would you have done these elements differently?
3. How effective are the HRBPs? Please provide some examples.

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM - CLIENTS

Project Title

This research studies the transfer of individual expertise between individuals.

Consent Statement

I have read and understood the information about the research. I am not aware of any condition that would prevent my participation, and I agree to participate in this project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my participation in the research. All questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

Please indicate whether you agree to participate in the following part of the research:

- Participate in an interview with the researcher.

Name.....

Signature.....

Date

A summary of the research report can be forwarded to you when published. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please include your mailing (or email) address below.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

APPENDIX D: A SAMPLE OF CODED TRANSCRIPT

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|--|---|---|--|--|
| Anna | <i>Okay, so when I first started it was more of learning the policies first because you need to know the background, you need to know your own policies before you can help others, guide others through. So how I gained the competence was firstly I learned about the policies within the organization and then it's really on the job, because regardless of whichever group I was handed, our HR policies don't change. So it's nearly a matter of implementing these or when the staffs have queries, sharing with them our rationale behind the policies as well as the policy.</i> | knowledge acquisition, knowing acquisition | institutionalized knowledge, Personal Tacit Knowledge: HRBP, Personal Explicit Knowledge: HRPB, knowing, Dynamic Interactions | motivation to learn, on-the-job learning | 1. Knowing, Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported knowing acquisition, 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing 16. Learners' attitude towards learning & personal attributes affected their acquisition of knowing, 17. On-the-job learning was required for knowing acquisition |
| Anna | So I would say it's a lot of on the job learning because you never know what kind of queries may come your way and it's a lot of learning from peers as well. And for me because my background in my previous organization deals with policies, so I am also aware of like the whole civil service policies, able to link them up to other policies that we have in my current organization. And so that helps me understand better and perhaps even understand the rationale behind the policy that makes it easier for me to explain that to the staff. | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, knowing acquisition | Personal Tacit Knowledge: HRBP, Personal Explicit Knowledge: HRBP, knowing, dynamic interactions | Relevant Experience, on-the-job learning | 12. Tacit knowledge in the form of relevant experience was useful for learners to acquire knowing 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing 17. On-the-job learning was required for knowing acquisition |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|---|---|---|--|---|
| Anna | <i>I think here the one good thing is that they actually have -- for the newbies; they actually prepare a folder full of the important documents. Your employee handbook is like the general guide of policies that all the other staff out there are privy to also, and on top of that some other policies that is only for our info, so not to be shared with staff. Say for example the progression guidelines, the promotion rules, these kind of things we don't really share with staff... but it's for us to know so that we can help the Group do their ranking and promotion. So, it's a matter of reading the folder that was prepared for us. Say for example the progression guidelines, the promotion rules, these kind of things we don't really share with staff -- the exact criteria you don't share with the staff but it's for us to know so that we can help the Group do their ranking and promotion for example and this kind of things. So, it's a matter of reading the folder that was prepared for us and as you go along, right, you are learning on the job and you add your own stuff to the folder so your own personal folder sort of grows with the things that you need to know.</i> | knowledge sharing, knowledge acquisition, knowing acquisition | institutionalized knowledge, dynamic interactions, personal tacit knowledge: HRBP | on-the-job learning, motivation to learn, institutionalized knowledge currency | 1. Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported knowing acquisition, 3. Institutionalized knowledge was difficult to be maintained by individuals' effort alone, 11. Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and knowing created group knowledge and knowing but might not lead to organizational knowledge and knowing 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing 15. Learners' motivation to solve real work problems encouraged them to acquire knowing, 16. Learners' attitude towards learning & personal attributes affected their acquisition of knowing, 17. On-the-job learning was required for knowing acquisition |
| Anna | <i>Say for example if you want to emplace an ESS officer to a MAXS, means an executive diploma holder to a degree scheme, the next scheme, what are the criteria behind it. So these are the sort of things that change, or when the policy has a review, there are change made, so we have to like update our own file.</i> | knowledge acquisition | institutionalized knowledge | Institutionalized knowledge currency | 3. Institutionalized knowledge was difficult to be maintained by individuals' effort alone, |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|---|--|--|---|---|
| Anna | <i>So when a newbie who comes along, we actually lend our folder to the newbie for him or her to photocopy, to then start off with that basis first that covers like the basic policies that an HR Business Partner or an HR officer should know, on top of that is what you personally learn and you add on.</i> | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing | institutionalized knowledge, Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Dynamic Interactions | institutionalized practice, motivation to share | 1. Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported knowing acquisition, 6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of knowing, 11. Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and knowing created group knowledge and knowing but might not lead to organizational knowledge and knowing 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing |
| Anna | <i>Okay, so besides the folder there were a couple of more things; one was the buddy system and the other was the fact that the predecessor was around to not say handhold me, but sort of guide me through what to expect with that group that they were previously handling.</i> <i>Okay, so and may be let me just share about the buddy first, so in HR we also have this buddy system. So when I came in as a newbie, I was assigned to a buddy. So she lent me her file to photocopy so I can read and learn from it and she also brought me through like the HR processes that are in place, say when it comes to recruitment what are the systems.</i> | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing | Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, personal tacit knowledge: other HRBPs, personal explicit knowledge: other HRBPs, personal tacit knowledge: HRBP, Dynamic Interactions | Motivation to share | 1. Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported knowing acquisition 6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of knowing, 7. Weak institutionalization of HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System led to inconsistent quality of sharing, 8. Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and knowing created group knowledge and knowing but might not lead to organizational knowledge and knowing, 14. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|---|--|--|----------------------------|--|
| Anna | <p><i>“She (the buddy) literally brought me through the nitty-gritty, so it's like literally the system, what system we use, how do we use the system, how do we generate reports from the system, how do we analyze the data, when you need to complete certain spreadsheets that we have Say for example monthly we collate this recruitment numbers so for that we need to refer to a couple of spreadsheets to determine how to complete this number. So analyzing the data and all, she brought me through that. She also shared with me certain processes, about like okay when it comes to an interview, how do you do it. So first you have to shortlist the CVs from the system, you have to forward the CVs to the division and may be if there are few key candidates, you may want to highlight them and then the division will conduct informal interviews so we don't get involved in that. When they want to shortlist for formal interview, then they will send the names through us along with the CVs for us to proceed further to process, until which level must sit in for the interview and all these kind of things, and then, okay so that's for the buddies. So she brought me through like the processers, systems and the nitty gritty that I need to know as a HR officer and a business partner.</i></p> | <p>knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, knowing acquisition</p> | <p>Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, personal tacit knowledge: HRBP, Dynamic Interactions</p> | <p>Motivation to share</p> | <p>6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of knowing, 11. Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and knowing created group knowledge and knowing but might not lead to organizational knowledge and knowing, 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing</p> |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|---|--|--|---------------------|--|
| Anna | <i>Then the predecessor of the groups that were being handled, one predecessor wasn't around and the other person who it was handed over to, handed it back to me. So she had brought me through who the senior management are, their personalities that will help me to do the job better, because I don't know who to handle and how. She also guided me through what each of the divisions do, so I had a better picture of who I need to recruit and the kind of people that I need to recruit and then she also shared with me the demographics of the team, if they have any particular issues like say for example one of the divisions in one of the groups was very concerned that they were not receiving MAC as compared to the other engineers in other groups, so how can we address that issue, how can we help them? Can we help them in other issue, may be talk about like a re-designation to a higher title or a promotion so that they are on par with like the other officers who they see doing similar things but in a different organization, because like the disparity was very great at that point in time, so this kind of things. So she highlighted these kinds of issues for me and for one of my other group. Yeah, so similarly the other predecessor who was still around, so she just handed over her group to me. Yeah, so sharing basically similar things like how to tactically handle the senior management, what are the key concerns of the group, the demographics of the group, certain</i> | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing | Personal Tacit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, personal tacit knowledge: HRBP, Dynamic Interactions | Motivation to share | 6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of knowing 7. Weak institutionalization of HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System led to inconsistent quality of sharing 11. Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and knowing created group knowledge and knowing but might not lead to organizational knowledge and knowing 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|---|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------|
| | <i>divisions they work in a certain way.”</i> | | | | |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|---|--|---|---------------------|---|
| Anna | <p><i>So say for example I have one group, a feedback which is currently now under another group, they basically deal with a lot of hotlines, they deal with email queries coming in and they have a KPI also, like they must meet the service standard levels of replying by a certain number of days. So they are a small team. Basically they cannot afford to have a lot of people going on leave at the same time. So they have to roster their leave and when people take MCs and stuff, it throws like the whole schedule off track.</i></p> <p><i>So they were having this issue of, you know when it comes to like say Christmas period, everybody wants to go on leave and it's not possible to accommodate -- so how can we go about this issue.</i></p> <p><i>This kind of scenario, this kind of situation was faced by one of the divisions, so these are some things that they highlight to me so that I am already aware and when such a situation, or such a similar scenario occurs again, I know where the division stand is, I know what the staff's concerns are and how I can come in to help them.</i></p> | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing | Personal Tacit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, knowing, personal tacit knowledge: HRBP, Dynamic Interactions | Motivation to share | 6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of knowing 11. Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and knowing created group knowledge and knowing but might not lead to organizational knowledge and knowing 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|---|--|---|--|--|
| Anna | <p><i>Question: So you mentioned about both the manual, the buddy system as well as the predecessors that were made available for you to help you really pick up on that job, so can you share with me in terms how much do you rely on these three different sources, which one would you rely more and perhaps at different phases, how do you actually interact with all those?</i></p> <p><i>"Okay, so for -- okay, actually they are quite interlinked. So my first point of reference will always be my folder, because I don't believe in like go and pick my buddy's or my colleague's brain on like things that you know are already there. There is no necessity to disturb them if the information is already there. So I always refer to my folder first if the information can be found there, because I usually tag them all out already according to like what the topic is about, what the process is about."</i></p> | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing | institutionalized knowledge, Personal Tacit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Dynamic Interactions | Institutionalized Knowledge, motivation to learn | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported knowing acquisition, 2. Institutionalized knowledge was the initial point of reference for learners to acquire knowing, 5. Institutionalization of procedural knowledge alone was insufficient for knowing acquisition, 6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of knowing, 16. Learners' attitude towards learning & personal attributes affected their acquisition of knowing |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|--|--|---|---|--|
| Anna | <i>“So if only and if and only I cannot find the information there because the scenario is slightly different or it could be a case of a situation that you know doesn’t or cannot be covered by one of the number of policies, then I will go and check with my colleagues”</i> | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing | institutionalized knowledge, Personal Tacit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Dynamic Interactions | unique case, motivation to learn, institutionalized knowledge relevance | 1. Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported knowing acquisition, 2. Institutionalized knowledge was the initial point of reference for learners to acquire knowing, 3. Institutionalization of procedural knowledge alone was insufficient for knowing acquisition, 6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners’ acquisition of knowing 15. Learners’ motivation to solve real work problems encouraged them to acquire knowing 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|--|---|---|--|--|
| Anna | <i>So my buddy is also one of my colleagues. So I will just do like a general check with her like have you faced this issue or situation before and some of them might have, so they may provide suggestion as to what they have done in their case. Sometimes the situation is so rare that like -- it's a new case and then they will just be very willing to just share alternatives and give suggestions as to how we can proceed with this. There are other points in times where also it's similar because each of us has a different background and we may have even faced a situation in our previous organizations, so we all use even those experiences that we have to put to good use to solve like a certain situation that I faced here.</i> | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, knowing acquisition | institutionalized knowledge, Personal Tacit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Dynamic Interactions, Group tacit knowledge: HRBPs | Relevant Experience, unique cases, on-the-job learning | 6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of knowing, 11. Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and knowing created group knowledge and knowing but might not lead to organizational knowledge and knowing, 12. Tacit knowledge in the form of relevant experience was useful for learners to acquire knowing, 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing 15. Learners' motivation to solve real work problems encouraged them to acquire knowing, 16. Learners' attitude towards learning & personal attributes affected their acquisition of knowing 17. On-the-job learning was required for knowing acquisition |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|--|--|--|---|--|
| Anna | <p><i>So in a sense I will always fall back on the folder first, but that's really cut and dry information that's there. Each case that comes about, if it's not a direct query it's really quite different, because the staff may be coming from a different angle, the concerns may be different, the divisions' concerns may be different.</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes the division and the staff want the same thing, sometimes they don't want the same thing, and so how do you as a HR business partner support? Do you support like a staff, do you speak up for the staff or do you support like the division and just tell the staff a straight no.</i></p> <p><i>And HR's policies how do you bring them about, like what does division wants may not be what HR policy dictates, so how do you like, bridge that gap between them, so usually then I will pick on my colleagues, my superiors, brains on that one.</i></p> | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing | institutionalized knowledge, Personal Tacit Knowledge: HRBP, Knowing, Personal Tacit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Other HRBPs, Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Dynamic Interactions | Relevant Experience, unique cases, motivation to learn, institutionalized knowledge relevance | <p>1. Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported knowing acquisition,</p> <p>2. Institutionalized knowledge was the initial point of reference for learners to acquire knowing,</p> <p>3. Institutionalized knowledge was difficult to be maintained by individuals' effort alone,</p> <p>6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of knowin</p> <p>13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing</p> <p>15. Learners' motivation to solve real work problems encouraged them to acquire knowing</p> |
| Anna | <p><i>I think first and foremost, I would add the buddy first to bring them through the systems and processes and policies that we have in place first, because without that if we were to immediately hit the ground running, it may be a bit difficult, especially if the person has no BP experience previously. So for that I will guide the newbies through this first.</i></p> | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing | Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Dynamic Interactions | Motivation to share, institutionalized practice, relevant experience | <p>1. Institutionalization of firm-specific procedural knowledge supported knowing acquisition</p> <p>6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of knowing</p> <p>11. Institutional norms of HRBPs sharing knowledge and knowing created group knowledge and knowing but might not lead to organizational knowledge and knowing</p> <p>12. Tacit knowledge in the form of relevant experience was useful for</p> |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|--|---|---|--|--|
| | | | | | learners to acquire knowing |
| Anna | <i>Then after that probably you know like a couple of months or so guide them through the current processes, for example if the officer were to join in December or October-November, that's our period where we handle ranking and promotion exercise, so I would then, like as I do my ranking process, I would have the newbie sit along and see what I do and then like let my newbie have a feel of what it's like doing it for her, his/her group. And then I can actually like be like a sounding board to say, you know like if you need to -- once you are done with it, why don't you let me have a look through first and then I let you know if there are like any issues otherwise like if you can go ahead with it, things like that. I think that's how I would work with a newbie first.</i> | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, knowing acquisition | Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, personal tacit knowledge: HRBP, Dynamic Interactions | On-the-job learning, Motivation to share, Institutionalized practice | 6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of knowing 13. Individual tacit and explicit knowledge interacted with knowing to create new knowledge and knowing 17. On-the-job learning was required for knowing acquisition |

| Participant | Quotes | Holistic Codes | Deductive Codes | Inductive Codes | Themes |
|-------------|--|--|---|---|---|
| Anna | <i>Of course there is the teaching them on how their -- if I am aware of what their group previously is like, what the management is like, what the staff concerns -- I mean the group's staff concerns are, I probably brief her on all of that. Also of course bring her about to introduce to the management to know that she is the one who is taking over, so and so and she is going to be like the link between the HR and for any issues they can always approach her, yeah sort of, yeah.</i> | knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing | Personal Tacit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Personal Explicit Knowledge: Buddies & Mentors, Dynamic Interactions | Motivation to share, institutionalized practice | 6. Institutionalized HRBP Buddy and Mentorship System enhanced learners' acquisition of knowing |

APPENDIX E: SUMMARY TABLE OF IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICES

| |
|---|
| 1. Organizations to have clarity on the type of organizational knowledge and <i>knowing</i> desired to build sustained competitive advantage |
| 2. Organizations to design supportive institutionalization mechanisms that will create dynamic interactions amongst knowledge, <i>knowing</i> and on-the-job learning, to create new knowledge and <i>knowing</i> (below are some examples) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Mentorship b. Apprenticeship c. Expert advisory d. Structured training programmes |
| 3. Organizations to implement institutionalization mechanisms that would create a strong degree of institutionalization |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Linkage with performance management b. Clear expectation of roles, responsibilities and deliverables c. Direct accountability |
| 4. Organizations to proactively create institutional norms that support knowledge and <i>knowing</i> sharing |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Celebrate and acknowledge the power of such sharing b. Establish knowledge and knowing sharing champions across organizations c. Provide incentives and support for divisions or individuals to initiate knowledge sharing sessions within and across divisions d. Structure work that requires individuals to learn from one another collaboratively |
| 5. Organizations to give careful consideration to the centralized maintenance and renewal of institutionalized knowledge for continuous relevance of knowledge |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Create plans to periodically review institutionalized knowledge b. Implement plans to periodically review institutionalized knowledge |