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in the Era of Pandemic

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**Khalid S. Soliman**

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Alena Buchalcevova, Prague University of Economics, Czech Republic  
Adela Sorinela Safta, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Doctoral Economic School, Romania  
Valentin Antohi, "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati, Romania  
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Bohdan Pac, WSB University Gdansk, Poland  
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Andreea – Emanuela Drăgoi, Institute for World Economy, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania  
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Mohammad Ayub Khan, University of Monterrey (UDEM), Mexico  
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## Improving Community Welfare of SMEs Through Learning Community

Nurhidayati NURHIDAYATI, Ken SUDARTI and Ardian ADHIATMA

Department of Management, Faculty of Economics, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung

Emails: [nurhidayati@unissula.ac.id](mailto:nurhidayati@unissula.ac.id); [kensudarti@unissula.ac.id](mailto:kensudarti@unissula.ac.id); [ardian@unissula.ac.id](mailto:ardian@unissula.ac.id)

### Abstract

Learning has a strategic role in creation, acquisition and development of organizational knowledge so as to encourage innovation behavior. The power of knowledge creation can be the key to achieving a sustainable competitive advantage in the face of change. This study aims to develop a model of SMEs' welfare through learning inter-relation processes of SMEs in the entrepreneurial community. Increasing the welfare of SMEs can be improved through learning activities by seeking and sharing knowledge. Previous research has shown that collaborative learning in the community is the basis for creating new knowledge that can be used to improve the performance of SMEs through value creation.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship Learning Community, Community Knowledge Creation, Open Innovation, Value Creation, SMEs Community Welfare

### Introduction

Organizational learning has a very strategic role for knowledge development, responding and adapting to changes in the increasingly dynamic business environment (Farukh & Waheed, 2015; Lei, Hui et. Al., 2017) and perhaps as extreme as during the covid-19 outbreak. As one of the pillars of the nation's economy, SMEs are expected to be able to contribute to solving economic and labor problems in Indonesia (Tambunan, 2007). History shows the existence of the strength of SMEs in facing economic crises and this has become the economic strength of the nation despite many obstacles in developing entrepreneurship (Tambunan, 2007; Nurhidayati, 2017). Research on organizational learning has been done by previous researchers, both internal learning and collaborative learning (Lei, Hui et. Al., 2017). Internal learning, which refers to daily operational processes carried out by trial and error, contributes to the creation and development of knowledge in the internal scope of the organization.

Experience-based knowledge is the basis for the creation of tacit knowledge and is a source of organizational strength (Terhorst et. Al, 2018). Meanwhile, external learning is limited to certain stakeholders, for example the government, in which the social interactions of learning tend to be assignment, directed, one-way communication so as to produce formal organizational-based knowledge creation. The characteristics of organization-based knowledge creation, when viewed from ownership are private, limited membership, there is compensation in the acquisition of knowledge, limited distribution and dominance of communication is using one-way and face-to-face communication. On the other hand, community-based learning carried out with other external parties in an ecosystem community has different characteristics. In terms of knowledge ownership is public property or common property, unlimited membership, unlimited knowledge distribution and the dominance of communication is using two-way communication and tends to use online media.

Several previous studies have attempted to explore collaborative learning between organizations for the creation of new knowledge, but most of the settings are carried out in large companies. Meanwhile, the cultural characteristics and learning capabilities of SMEs are different from those of large companies. In this research, there are several research gaps that can be developed. First, previous research has not revealed the mechanism by which the new knowledge creation process is carried out. Second, usually collaboration and learning collaboration are formed based on agreement, formal and mutualism. Third, collaborative learning actors only involve certain units, and have not involved business ecosystem stakeholders. Fourth, the results of collaborative learning knowledge are explicit knowledge and encourage closed innovation within the organization itself. Meanwhile, the strength of SMEs is in the knowledge obtained based on experience (tacit knowledge). Considering the above weaknesses, this study proposes an Entrepreneurship Learning Community (ELC) concept. Some studies that have

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been developed in previous research will be explored to provide solutions for SMEs on how to create new knowledge by optimizing the relationship between SMEs and stakeholders involved in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The ELC concept will encourage formal or informal collaboration with stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and will lead to the exchange of knowledge (tacit and explicit) which will form new knowledge to find solutions to short-term business problems. In the long term, it is hoped that the consistency of the entrepreneurship learning community will have an impact on the formation of innovative behavior from the open innovation process obtained from the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and the welfare of the SME community will be formed.

Research on ELC is very important to do considering that one of the weaknesses of SMEs is in the behavior of innovation, while ELC is conceptualized to be able to increase the formation and impetus for innovation behavior by utilizing the processes and mechanisms in ELC. In the activity of seeking and sharing knowledge, it will generate new thoughts, processes and apply new ways of working. Especially, by leveraging collaboration in the context of the SME ecosystem.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Organizational Learning and Knowledge Creation***

Concept of learning has its roots in social psychology which has since been widely adopted in the world of education and business. Learning is a concept that cannot be defined singly, but one widely accepted definition from constructivism states that "learning is an active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge" (Duffy and Cunningham, 2003, p. 143 in Jing). Learning is individual motivation which provides skills, insight, and competence; thus, it needs to be transformed into organization. Organizational learning is explained as the way the organization creates, disseminates and integrates new knowledge into business practices through continuous improvements of employees' skills, knowledge and experience (Kumaraswamy and Chitale, 2011; Lewis 2002), both in individual and group workplace learning (Armstrong & Foley, 2003).

The learning process and knowledge creation have become the most important organizational assets to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, especially in the era of the knowledge economy (Jukubik, 2011). For business organizations and employees, the process of creating new knowledge continuously, making the learning process faster and having more knowledge than others, is the hope of the organization. In previous studies, the terms knowledge creation and learning have been understood to have several similarities, but also have different meanings. Learning does not only include the process of creating knowledge, but also includes other processes such as destroying knowledge, re-learning, forgetting, solving problems, resolving conflicts in the learning process, and handling positions of power (Jukubik, 2011). However, both are developed in different disciplines, namely Knowledge creation theory developed in the discipline of knowledge management, while learning theory developed in the disciplines of Education and Organization Theory.

Learning and knowledge creation are both sources of new knowledge, and at the same time influenced by existing and previous knowledge. Thus, learning and knowledge are intertwined in an iterative and mutually reinforcing process. Learning is a process of producing new knowledge, knowledge has an impact on future learning (Jukubik, 2011). Understanding human relationships during learning and knowledge creation practices; and interactions between people in the community of practice (CoP) are important, especially in communities that have the same interests (Nurhidayati and Olivia, 2020; Yorks & Kasl (2002).

### ***CoP in the context of SMEs***

In the context of SMEs, learning and knowledge creation are carried out conventionally, informally and based on intuition, trial and error. Meanwhile, tacit knowledge is the strength of SMEs as a strategic asset. The SME environment which is based on the culture and character of the informal community demands a difference with the creation of formal knowledge that is held in modern companies.

Knowledge creation by SMEs can be done on a community basis. The concept of CoP adopted from social learning theory has an important role in learning interactions among the community members. The concept of CoP describes a group of people who share a concern, a series of problems, or discuss a specific topic, which deepens their knowledge and expertise in this area by learning and interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). In the CoP concept, the final results of learning are continuous internalization of knowledge as the identity of the community members (Nurhidayati and Fachrunnisa, 2020). Collaborative inquiry type where each member in collaborating tries to find meaning to be able to understand new knowledge from the experiences of other members, which is its process is free, open-source and involves equality (Yorks & Kasl, 2002).

Several previous studies have discussed knowledge creation and learning still focus on results, and there is still little research that emphasizes the processes and mechanisms of knowledge creation processes, especially those based on the SMEs community. Learning mechanisms among the SMEs community members are very important to improve the process of creating new knowledge through the process of social interaction or collaborating in the SMEs community (Jakubik, 2008; Kumaraswamy & Chitale, 2012), as well as increasing innovative behavior in an open knowledge exchange system (Terhorst et.al. , 2018). Furthermore, it is hoped that it will become a competitive force for SMEs and provide broad welfare including improving the prosperity in the SME ecosystem.

Open innovation is the development of a classic linear innovation model that comes from the push of technology through the supply chain changing to network-based or collaborative innovation. As a consequence, the flow of knowledge becomes more open and freer and involves collaborative partners (Öberg, C and Alexander, 2018). Communities and ecosystems are further meaning of observation to illustrate this open innovation.

The development of open innovation in SMEs is the right step, given the characteristics of SMEs that are weak in terms of innovation. Thus, open innovation is expected to be able to fill the innovation weakness gaps experienced by SMEs.

## Theoretical Framework

When managers or leaders of SMEs and related stakeholders have the motivation and desire to collaborate, cooperate, interact socially either to obtain and or exchange knowledge formally or informally in the entrepreneurship community, the community's willingness to create new knowledge will be high and there will be increased open innovation resulting from community learning outcomes. The two factors above will result in value creation for consumers, which will have an impact on the prosperity of the entire SME community. Thus, the model of this research proposed as follows:

H1: Entrepreneurship Learning Community affects the formation of Community Knowledge Creation

H2: Entrepreneurship Learning Community affects the occurrence of Open Innovation

H3: Community Knowledge Creation affects the formation of Value Creation

H4: Open Innovation affects the formation of Value Creation

H5: Value Creation affects the establishment of Community Welfare of SMEs.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

The concept of learning community as a source of competitive advantages of SMEs and through interaction among the community members knowledge transfer will increase knowledge creation, open innovation and value creation. Finally, those variables have an impact on the welfare of the SMEs ecosystem. The proposed model of this research identified the relationship among the variables in community observation. Engagement and participation of community members are significant to enable a mechanism of community learning. As the entrepreneur learning community, this paper are proposed constructs, thus in the future it needs more expansion of understanding and measurement of scale.

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