

# **Visibility Implementation Strategies for Tacit Knowledge in Open Educational Resources (OER) and Distance Instruction Management**

**Sunday A. Reju**

Regional Training & Research Institute for Open & Distance Learning  
(RETRIDAL)

National Open University of Nigeria  
14-16 Ahmadu Bello Way  
Victoria Island, Lagos, NIGERIA  
sunnyareju@gmail.com; sreju@nou.edu.ng

**Comfort O. Reju**

Distance Learning Institute (DLI)  
University of Lagos  
Akoka, Lagos, NIGERIA  
okwyreju@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

Knowledge has become being recently observed by many as steadily supplanting the conventional agents of production; namely, land, labour and capital, and hence becoming the most important new corporate and competitive resource. Thus it was once claimed that more United States workers produce and distribute knowledge than make physical goods. This shift requires that institutions and companies develop capacity in the capture, integration and use of expertise, know-how, and lessons learned during various forms of activities. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions therefore have the challenge of managing the generation and cultivation of applicable knowledge to real-world situations since most distance students are professionals whose quest for knowledge is mainly aimed at enhancing their professional practice.

Whereas conventional educational institutions design and develop curricula and research projects mostly within the confines of explicit knowledge, open and distance learning institutions are rather more positioned to extend the frontiers of explicit knowledge into the domain of tacit knowledge.

The rapid spread of open educational resources on various eLearning platforms has initiated knowledge visibility issues which should be more strategically researched into for the purpose of enriching relevant educational experience through open and distance learning offerings. The paper therefore explores the features of the two major knowledge categories, namely, explicit and tacit knowledge with proposals for the extraction and codification strategies of the latter for the purpose of making such visible and hence accessible as rich open educational resources (OER) for distance learners.

## 1. Tacit Knowledge versus Explicit Knowledge

Knowledge being broadly perceived as an intellectual asset has been categorised into two; namely, Explicit Knowledge and Tacit Knowledge.

The concept of tacit knowledge comes from scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi whose one famous aphorism is: "*We know more than we can tell*". By definition, tacit knowledge is knowledge that people carry in their minds and is, therefore, difficult to access. Often, people are not aware of the knowledge they possess or how it can be valuable to others. Tacit knowledge is considered more valuable because it provides context for people, places, ideas, and experiences. Effective transfer of tacit knowledge generally requires extensive personal contact and trust.

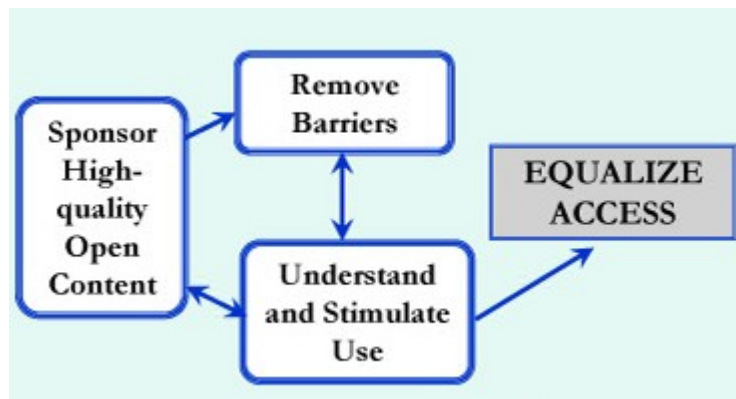
Tacit knowledge consists often of habits and culture that we do not recognize in ourselves. In the field of knowledge management, the concept of tacit knowledge refers to a knowledge embedded in human capital, which is only known by an individual and that is difficult to communicate to the rest of an organization. Precisely, tacit knowledge is rooted in how things are done, commonly shared in conversation rather than in written form.

On the other hand, knowledge that is easy to communicate is called Explicit Knowledge. The process of transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge is known as *codification* or *articulation*. Explicit knowledge is the recorded knowledge, existing in books, manuals, databases, reports, libraries, policies and procedures. Explicit knowledge is easy to identify, capture and share.

With the above distinguishing features of Tacit and Explicit Knowledge, a major focus of this paper is an exploration of the competitive advantage open and distance learning (ODL) institutions have to leverage their operational philosophy of flexibility and accessibility to exploit tacit knowledge environments inaccessible to traditional institutions. Every Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution provides a very vast interactive platform of varied experiences of both students, staff, consultants and partner institutions within which most valuable and relevant expertise can be captured and made explicit to the larger society. An immediate example is the matured student clientele groups that constitute a good percentage of many ODL institutions' enrolments, whose tacit professional experiences and skills could be identified and articulated for institutional rich content visibility for other learners and institutions' staff.

## 2. Tacit Knowledge Visibility Implementation Strategies

Open Educational Resources (OER) have gained much advocacy within the few years of their introduction into the knowledge material delivery methodologies. The Logic model for OER is depicted below:



**Figure 2.1: Logic Model for OER** (Source: <http://www.hewlett.org/programs/education/oer>)

The terminology "Open Educational Resources" first adopted at UNESCO's 2002 Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, still remain exclusive to explicit knowledge domains. These (i.e. OER) are educational materials and resources offered freely and openly for anyone to use, and under open licenses to re-mix, improve and redistribute. The resources include:

**Learning Content:** These include full courses, course materials, content modules, learning objects, and journals.

**Design and Development Tools:** These are software to support the creation, delivery, use and improvement of open learning content including searching and organization of content, content and learning management systems, content development tools, and online learning communities.

**Implementation Resources:** These are intellectual property licenses to promote open publishing of materials, design-principles, and localization of content.

A more precise definition of Open Educational Resources (OER) below is worth noting:

*‘OER are teaching, learning and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use or re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials or techniques used to support access to knowledge’.*

(<http://www.hewlett.org/programs/education/oer>)

Combining the above various definitive aspects of OER, it is crystal obvious that OER offer great avenues for visibility of tacit knowledge resources.

Conduits to some knowledge often lead to individuals unlike pathways to information that often lead to a database. Moreover, knowledge and information are distinct, while data or information does not carry the rich content of human interpretation. Most efforts today to make knowledge visible aim to get people socialize with other people, and it is an accepted fact that the richest knowledge takes place through human dialogue.

We now propose the following as some models for tacit knowledge strategic extraction and visibility implementation.

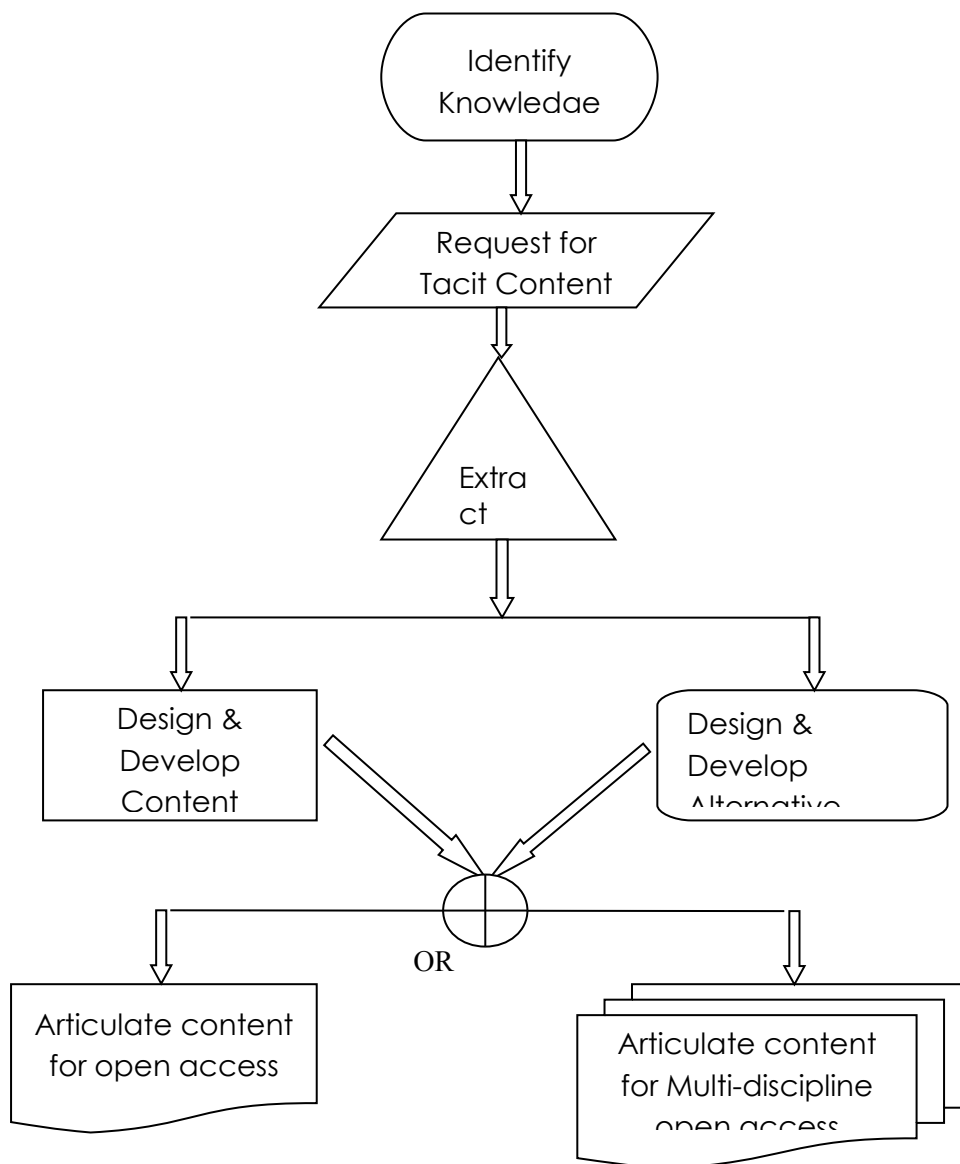
## **2.1 Specialised Short Course (SSC) Model**

As a strategic model, tacit knowledge extraction could be done through a formal process of course development for well packaged short specialized courses. In this model, a need assessment should be carried out towards the design of thematic knowledge areas that could serve some particular professional or practical training needs, among others. Identified experts in such related areas could be contacted to provide content based on proven experiences and practices. Then such thematic areas could be developed as codification focus areas for various tacit knowledge contents, and aggregates of common codified SSCs could be further developed into rich curricula for more advanced courses worth considering for inclusion in structured academic programmes in educational institutions.

A very close example that readily comes to mind is a rich resource book: *Wisdom of the CEO* – a collection of business experiences of twenty nine global leaders that focus on pressing business challenges, edited by Dauphinais et al (2000). From serious objective observations, the contents of such a book could pass for tacit knowledge resources prior their collation for publication: as they were in-depth case studies of executive strategies from various global business organizations that provide windows into successes of the selected companies. With open license agreements, various

contributions of tacit best practices from these Chief Executive Officers (CEO) could be redesigned as open educational resources for students in business and management related courses.

Below is a proposed simple codification procedure for SSC model:



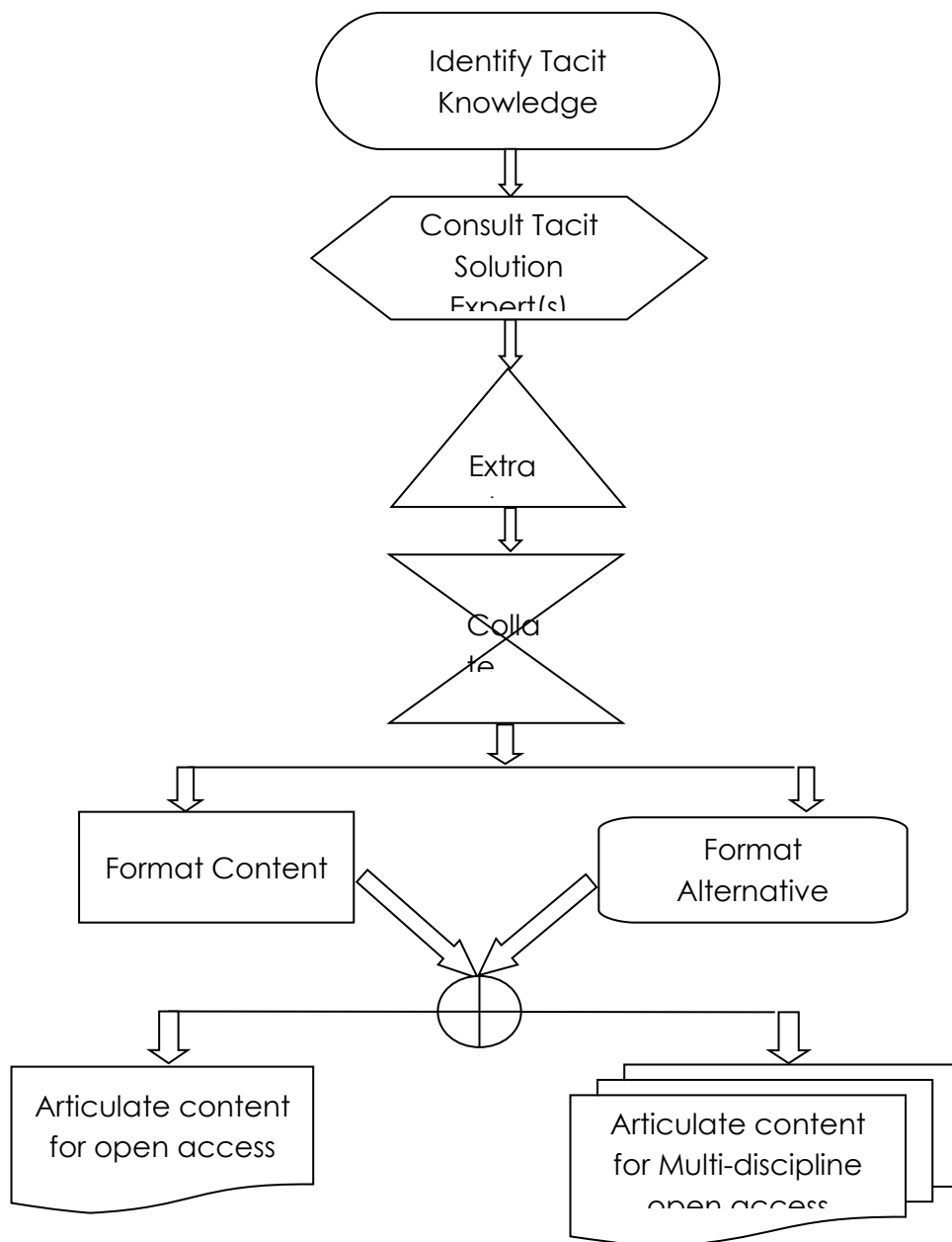
**Figure 2.2: SSC Model Codification Procedure**

The procedure above assumes a number of intermediate steps such as identification of individual candidate tacit knowledge experts. The “OR” flowchart symbol between the last two document boxes indicates the possibility of multi-discipline usability of the codified knowledge. The purpose of alternative content arises from the possibility of deploying another platform for the same content or resourcing a very similar tacit content worth articulating.

## 2.2 Case Study Learning Assessment (CSLA) Model

What is meant here is an institutional deliberate policy and arrangement to include as parts of distance student's learning assessments related topics that require students to interact with potential tacit knowledge human resources, to provide solutions or responses to such special assignments. Such assignment responses could be packaged as codified or articulated case studies in specific knowledge areas to enrich the ODL institutional educational offerings.

A Codification Procedure for this model is suggested below:

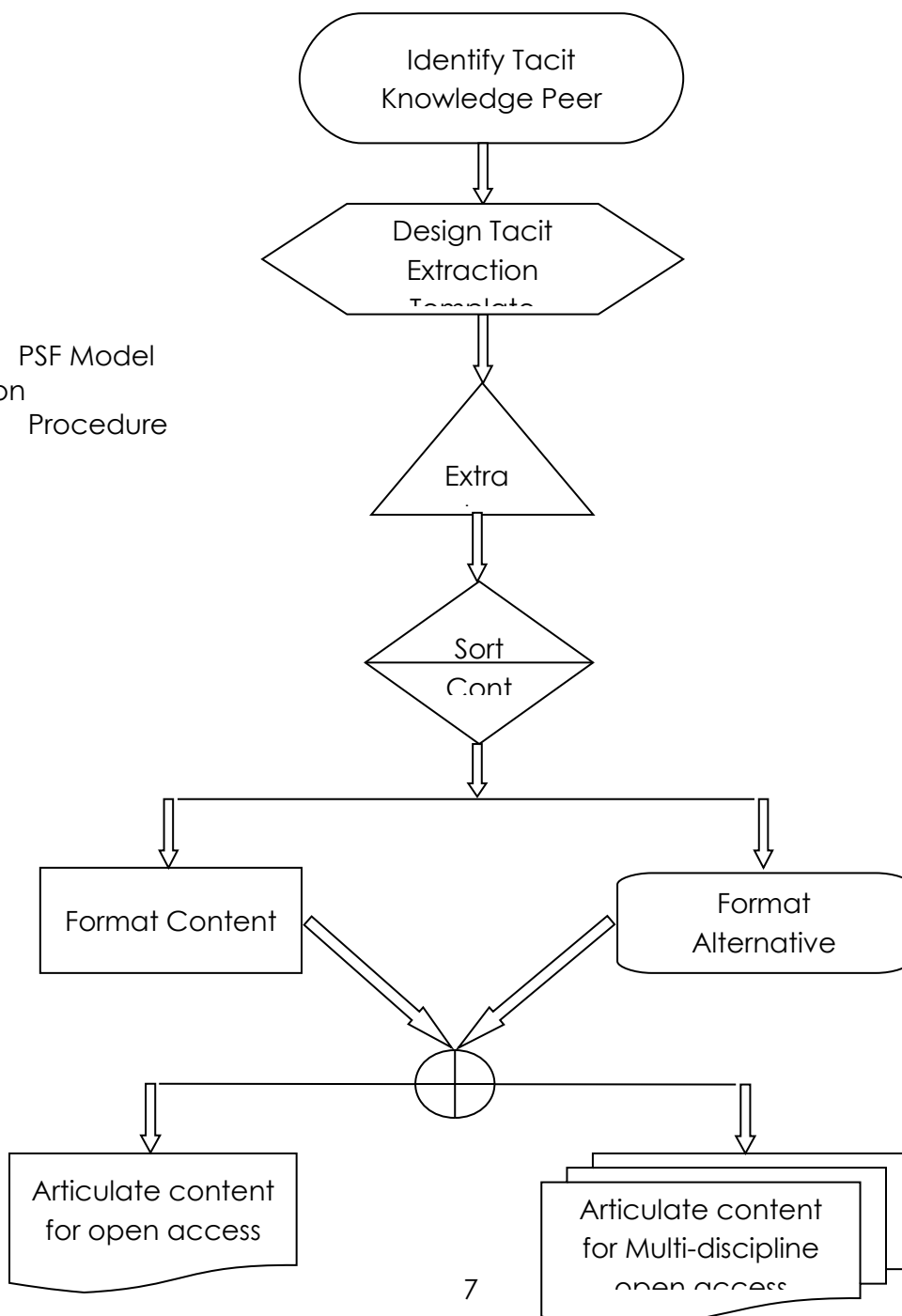


**Figure 2.3: CSLA Model Codification Procedure**

### 2.3 Peer Support Facilitation (PSF) Model

A very peculiar learning support environment in ODL setting which is not structurally common to traditional institutions is the peer support among distance learners. Most distance students bring into their learning transactions very rich prior professional experiences that could be of immense benefits to other students. Some of these experiences could fall within tacit knowledge domains which could be institutionally harnessed and strategically made accessible to other learners.

A Codification Procedure for this model is suggested below:

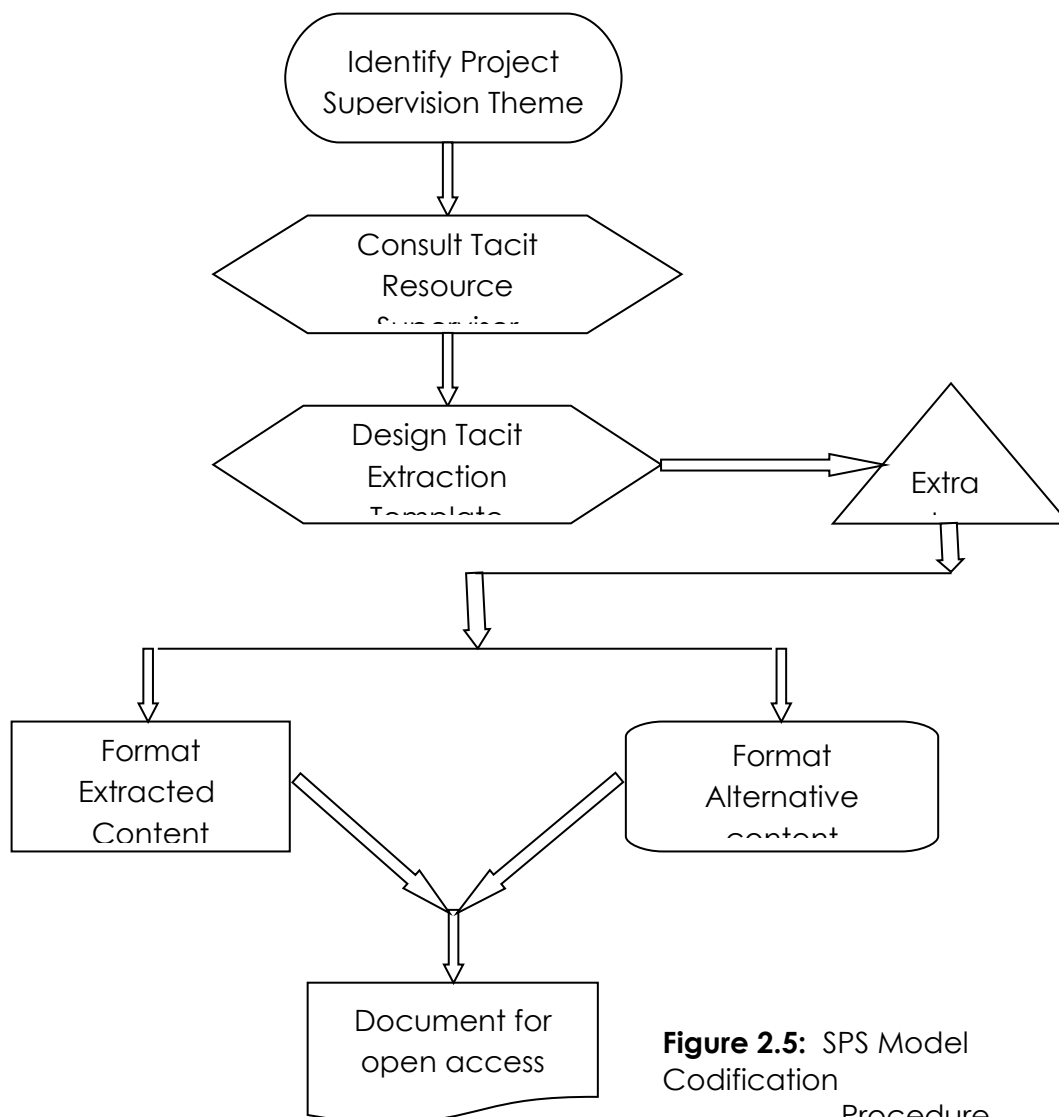


**Figure 2.4** PSF Model Codification Procedure

## 2.4 Students' Projects Supervision (SPS) Model

Without sacrificing quality on the altar of flexibility and openness, ODL institutions stand to enrich their students' learning experiences by engaging some professionally qualified experts to supervise or co-supervise some students' projects in subject areas that require expert inputs to ascertain results where such expertise is lacking among the institution's academic staff. Common examples are courses in financial or management areas. However, since the purpose is to partly extract relevant tacit knowledge from such arrangement, there is the need for clear institutional designed template for such knowledge extraction in the course of the supervision. There must be an open policy and agreement between the institution and the potential supervisors to encourage freedom of contribution of relevant rich tacit contents that go beyond mere comments on students' works.

Suggested Codification Procedure for this model is as follows:



**Figure 2.5:** SPS Model Codification Procedure

## **2.5 Social Software Technology (SST) Model**

Technology enables experts to share both explicit and tacit information. Moreover, institutional intranets facilitate exchange through email, work plans and real-time communications, which could be properly managed to serve as good tools for extraction of tacit knowledge where appropriate. In recent times, social software has become interactive platforms a number of institutions are trying to explore for use to encourage educational interactions especially among distance learners, though with some reservations from most experts.

For this model, while a specific codification is not being proposed in this paper, however, social software technology offers great promise if well customised within an institution to provide visibility features for extraction of tacit knowledge.

## **3. Conclusion**

According to Venkataraman and Henderson (Sloan Management Review, 1998), “*companies are becoming virtual in three main dimensions: in the experience offered to customers, in sourcing relationships of all kinds, and in building up expertise*”. Thus ‘rather than focusing on doing a better job of capturing internal information and internally distributing it, companies with leading knowledge management strategies have identified an integrated approach through which tacit and explicit knowledge are combined with knowledge from other vendors, suppliers and customers’ (Dauphinais, G. W et al, 2000) . Adapting the above authors’ opinions to Open and Distance Learning institutions which are by their operations more inherently virtual than many organizations, there is the need to deploy a more integrated strategy to provide comprehensive knowledge of both tacit and explicit content to enhance offerings to varied distance clientele groups.

Current models of conventional strategy and structure in most ODL institutions of providing only explicit knowledge peculiar to traditional institutions fail to meet the challenges of today’s knowledge society, and especially the visibility attribute of OER. Since ‘knowledge leverage is concerned with opportunities for leveraging diverse sources of expertise within and across organizational boundaries’, ODL institutions stand to gain more attractions as integrated knowledge hubs when there is an institutional culture that encourages and rewards sharing of both tacit and explicit knowledge.

## References

Dauphinais, G. W., Means, D., Price, C. (2000): Knowledge Management: Unifying Knowledge and Action, in *Wisdom of the CEO*, John Wiley & Sons, Pp 311-322.

Koogle, T. (2000): 'Organising Knowledge throughout the World' in Dauphinais, G. W., Means, D., Price, C. (Eds) *Wisdom of the CEO*, John Wiley & Sons, Pp 323 – 331.

Vasella, D. (2000): 'Knowledge Focused on Results' in Dauphinais, G. W., Means, D., Price, C. (Eds) *Wisdom of the CEO*, John Wiley & Sons, Pp 332 – 341.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacit\\_knowledge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tacit_knowledge)

<http://www.hewlett.org/programs/education/oer>