FIGURATIONAL DYNAMICS:
Attributes within a Knowledge transfer scenario.

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ABSTRACT

In this short paper, we discuss a dialectic methodology surrounding the interpretation of knowledge transfer, and the conditional elements which can be seen to support the concept of a unity of knowledge. We discuss a differing standpoint to knowledge and knowledge value, based on the knowledge transfer practitioner's perspective, but still in a business context. We ask why, if knowledge is vital for business success and competitive advantage, the transfer of knowledge is rarely a simple unproblematic event. Further, that the creation of knowledge before transfer is recognised as a significant factor in determining a starting point for analogous scrutiny, and often under a premise of doxastic attitude. This discussion therefore aims to synthesise current literature and research into an elemental epistemic principal of FIGURATION DYNAMICS, and in doing so, may help focus congruent knowledge transfer theories.

Purpose: Theoretical discussion
Keywords: Knowledge, Knowledge transfer, Philosophy, Perspectives, attitude

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INTRODUCTION.

In general terms, we can say that a coherent and generally accepted working definition of knowledge for the organisational environment has yet to be established. In this regards, Birkinshaw, et al. (2002) suggest that in addition to no agreed upon definition of knowledge within management literature, no commonality can be offered regarding predictive knowledge transfer characteristics. Further, that problems associated with knowledge transfer are indeed prevalent, as knowledge is difficult to define and manage as it can be ambiguous, unspecific and a dynamic phenomenon. This aligns with a view from Schultze & Stabell, (2004) and concurs with a description of philosophical implications regarding ideas about the self or personhood, from (Shapiro, 2008).

From a dynamic capacity perspective, Parent, et al. (2007) suggest that because knowledge is a subjective perspective of an individual's experience, associated problems are inextricably related to the context of the knowledge itself. Therefore, it is clear that an individuals past experiences related to knowledge, and can contribute to retaining this knowledge (Sprevak, 2009). As such, many key authors focus on ways to understand and ultimately enhance this knowledge understanding, and in doing so, explore various propositions, using occidental foci,

derived from historical secular concepts of: positivism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). empiricism (McCarthy, 2007) ,rationalism (Gabbay & Le May, 2004) and generalist philosophy (Sprevak, 2009).

In fact, it is clear why most current management literature focuses on considerations which can be effectual in using this knowledge understanding to maintain competitive advantage. It is only by analysing the complete and somewhat complex knowledge interpretation process, the identification of any 'successful' interaction between practitioners during knowledge transfer can be identified (Gherardi, 2006). This can be simply categorised as relationship between the source and the recipient; The form and location of the knowledge; The recipient's learning predisposition; the source's knowledge-sharing capability; The broader environment in which the transfer occurs.

DISCUSSION

Cachia & Compañó (2007) assert this by suggesting that even though knowledge cannot readily be identified on any balance sheet, it is identified as the singularly most valuable asset for a business or organisation. Therefore, the interpretive praxis for knowledge schema could be debated at length as there is no such thing as 'normal

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knowledge'. Aligning to the view from Dyer & Hatch, (2006), this discussion must therefore consider how knowledge philosophy fits within the interpretive theoretical overview and the formalised description of business management, literature on this subject is extremely diverse and non-definitive. However, for this discussion and in the spirit of understanding knowledge and philosophy, our focus will examine why it is important to discover, where knowledge is philosophically positioned in relation to a business context and ultimately from the practitioners point of view.

DEDUCIBLE by INFERENCE

If we adopt this inference at this juncture, it must therefore be as equally important to understand the significance of experiential reasoning behind this interpretive position of knowledge before it is transferred (Gherardi, 2006). This point of view is important because, the adaptation by the knowledge transfer practitioners involved purport to a position of justification in the transfer schema. Thus, discussion and examination of an overriding epistemic principal is required as a baseline for further critique of related literature. Therefore knowledge taxonomy and the types of knowledge related to business are discussed along with the necessary understanding of communication to transfer any notion of knowledge (Schultze & Stabell, 2004).

FIGURATIONAL TACTIC

An alternative perspective to this absorbent quandary is figurational sociology. Figurational sociology (process sociology) *Elias (1897-1990),* encompasses dynamic webs of human interaction, the emphasis being placed on people in the plural and how people are tied into social networks because of their interdependence with each other *(Elias, 1978).* The concept of a figuration allows this discussion to overcome some of the theoretical problems linked with traditional sociological terms and theories.
In particular, misleading dichotomies such as those between the individual and society, or, 'agent' and 'structure'. In this respect, *Elias (1978),* noted that it is not productive to consider the 'individual' and 'society' as two separate entities, instead, that these two concepts refer to 'inseparable levels of the same human world' *(Murphy et al, 2000, p. 92).* In the context of this discussion , process agents are affected by the actions of other process agents, who are bounded together by management structures, overarched by expectant outcomes. Additionally, *(Green, 2003, p. 17),* explains that people are often influenced and affected in a variety of ways by the actions of individuals and groups whom they may have never met. Elias conceptualises the development of human knowledge as 'a continuum

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along which blends of involvement and detachment are located and this continuum should be viewed as being 'open' at both ends. This is because, unlike concepts of 'affectivity' and 'non-affective' (*Parsons, 1951; cited in Mennell, 1992),* or the dualism of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity, there is no such thing as absolute involvement or detachment, thus, there is no 'zero-point' *(Mennell, 1992, p. 160).* The development of knowledge, moreover, is a continuous process that is developed and learned by people bonded together in complex webs of interdependence *(Dunning, 1992; Elias, 1978; Kilminister, 1998).* Conceptualising the development of knowledge in this way, will allow this discussion to consider its [knowledge] social nature, without reinforcing the traditional view that all knowledge must be considered as either true or false

As a consequence of this position, this approach also engages with the question of how an individual derives knowledge from either an internal or external locus *(Marton and Booth 1997)* thus, very importantly, eliminating the overarching duality problem encountered if a rigid 'metric only' or indeed, 'figurational only' tactic(s) were adopted.

Scrutiny at this point reflects egoistic conceptions of this reality from a knowledge transfer practitioner's perception or cautious belief of any experience other than that relative to the knowledge transfer scenario

(Marshall, 2008; Sprevak, 2009). We can identify that this is because knowledge transfer practitioner's experiential accounts of knowledge would be unable to explain the putative distinctive value of knowledge. A similarly view from Sun & Scott (2005), implies that the practitioners view of knowledge is subjective, any possibly relevant mental states are experiential, thus, knowledge as images related to cognitive content. In fact, to be able to adopt a philosophical starting point regarding an epistemic principal from which to define knowledge, knowledge, from both perspectives must consist, at least to a large extent, in a clarification of knowledge value, which does not consist in definition alone, and therefore must possess a systemic for such a clarification using an epistemic principal.

KNOWLEDGE EXISTENCE

As such, Knowledge from this perspective, can only exist because someone knows it in his mind, (See, Polanyi, 1962; 1967) and (Weiskopf, 2008), Knowledge is not an independent entity to be transferred, such as any material object might be. For example, a chair cannot be transferred as knowledge, it is not a knowledge. In an attempt to reconcile these anomalies studies by Szulanski, (2000, p. 10) defines knowledge as a 'causally ambiguous set of routines'. However, one could ask if the

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existence of knowledge, which in itself depends on the interpretation of a foundational normality is true, then all knowledge must derive from a consequence of foundational ethics which in themselves cannot be refuted by accepted moral norms.

PROBLEMATIC CRITERIA

A problem, from a philosophical perspective confuses this issue, in that, if it is difficult to define the experiential primitives, such as personal experience, then it will be equally difficult to define the primitive concepts of knowledge. This suggests that the characteristics of knowledge acquired by one actor affect knowledge creation in another one. But, as there is still a disunity in the exact definition of knowledge, since we have seen that knowledge as a 'causally ambiguous set of routines', this seems to contradict the previous literature as to why a focus on something that is misunderstood exists in the first place.

This situation is a perplexing situation to say the least as it implies that our knowledge of that real world is fallible and theory laden.

• In general, even though an alteration is detected, defining the reason why this occurred within the perspective of knowledge transfer is problematic.

• Knowledge is given a dimension of a 2-point data variation, thus, how much one data group differentiates from another?

• knowledge is distorted out of context by elements organisational of incredulity. Statistical values, on their own, cannot make discernible distinctions of knowledge within the same or apposing data set, therefore, cannot determine a perspective singularity (figuration) from multiple variables.

Knowledge exists but our appreciation of it is unclear, is singular in its focus and can also suffer from borrowed interpretations covering many disciplines. Thus, belie the potentials inherent in other focused research directions. In this sense, cognitive interpretations of knowledge transfer problems and remedies vary, and as such, are often very broad or very non-specific.

DIVERSITY

As a consequence of this position, the diversity surrounding the theoretical base of knowledge definition form many incongruities and variations, perhaps. Thus, relating this position to knowledge value, it is important to consider different asymmetries, which deliberately assume human beings hold beliefs in two distinct ways. Basic and non-basic, in fact we can say that non-basic beliefs are based on other beliefs by interference, for example 'I believe that all green apples are sweet', is based on my inference that 'all apples are sweet'. Basic beliefs, are of course not, for example 'I believe that I am sitting in front of this

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computer, writing this discussion', is based on my experience I am having right now, not by inference of some other belief.

Clearly, there is a fundamental problem in aligning these posits regarding their usefulness in proposing underpinning knowledge values or even corrective knowledge transfer axioms. Since, both positional inferences, presuppose an assumption regarding cognitive psychology, in that, they both require interpretive associations regarding knowledge. In this way, they inextricably link knowledge and knowledge transfer as a cognitive process, since if I we endorse this axiom then we can endorse both hermeneutics and foundationalism. This is important as we can therefore begin to approach epistemological issues regarding the definition of knowledge and knowledge value from a pragmatic or figurational center.

CONJECTURAL REMARKS

Philosophically, this view is remarkably similar to Kant (see Kant '1781 a critique of pure reason') for whom reason was the categorical imperative of freedom and free will. However, if one were to adjudicate a philosophical position at this point one could ask, is it possible to extend epistemic knowledge of these principals . That is, to make these concepts themselves precise and to gain comprehensive and secure insight about the fundamental relations that are present among them, moreover, the axioms that hold for them. The philosophically identifiable positions of knowledge at this point can state that any knowledge can be experienced, but has to be justified as a true belief before it can be termed knowledge or have any value.

Similarly, to assume any value or relevance to the sender or receiver of it the acceptance of the tripartite theory of knowledge, Belief, Truth and Justification (epistemic principal) must also be inferred. It is important, at this juncture to also distinguish between truth and perceived truth in the context of the knowledge experience relating to knowledge value.

Accordingly, from the standpoint of knowledge value, it is important to consider the evidence of this knowledge when deciding if it is true or not, on the basis that the knowledge itself has to be better understood before it can be transferred or if it is simply the empirical cogency that has been transferred.

FIGURATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In regards to this view, *Elias (1978)* argues that authority relations will inevitably form a central dimension *(figuration)* of interdependency ties [amongst departmental staff], as *'structural relationships' (Elias, 1978, p. 74)*. Acknowledging organisations

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difficult and complex association to knowledge *(Thompson and Walsham, 2004)*, examine the link between individual's experiences and knowledge transfer phenomena in a organisation environment. This is an important focal underpinning for this discussion, as although studies by *Cook & Brown (1999),* examine the useful collaboration of knowledge and social interaction, to date there exists little evidence to draw upon which tests relationship synergy between figurational sociology {*figurations*} *(Elias, 1978)* and complex knowledge transfer relationships.

CONCLUSION

This discussion has focused on outlining and assessment of current and historical knowledge philosophy, theory and positioning, but at the same time, places it within the realms of a business context. It concentrated on the epistemic principal of knowledge and indicated that a figurational principal of knowledge is equally important. This is because, at its core, knowledge transfer is concerned with the process of moving useful knowledge from one place to another.
We determine that at present there is no consolidated definition of knowledge or knowledge transfer in a business context .... or any other for that matter.
Consequently, there is still a need to identify if there are any alternative more useful perspectives to knowledge and knowledge transfer, specifically relating to business practices, success and competitive advantage. Ultimately, we conclude, a figurational approach may be worth consideration.

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