

PHILOSOPHY AND KNOWLEDGE SERIES

Discussions on literature II ~ *Epistemic Principals*

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ABSTRACT

To allow a pragmatic approach to understanding value of knowledge as a 'thing' to be transferred, the axiological foundationalism significance of the human perception of knowledge continues to be a significant contributing factor. Similarly the construct of our knowledge is parallel to doxastic attitudes and perspectives. Thus, through reconciliation of foundational and doxastic positions, one can view knowledge and knowledge value as a singular construct. This can be characterised through a multitude definition but not as a singular epistemic principal. This interpretation of current and historical literature offers an outline and assessment of current and historical knowledge philosophy, theory and positioning, but at the same time, tries to place it within the realms of a business context.

As a starting point for this literature perspective, Foss (1999) explains, a coherent and generally accepted working definition of knowledge for the organisational environment has yet to be established. This review will therefore concentrate on the epistemic principal of knowledge which underpin many principals within current literature.

- *What is knowledge ?*
- *What are the sources of knowledge ?*
- *How is knowledge acquired ?*
- *To what extent is it possible for a given value of knowledge to be known?*

Consequently, Alvesson and Karreman, (2001) advise that in addition to no agreed upon definition of knowledge within management literature, no structured underpinning commonality can be offered regarding the status of consequent knowledge transfer theoretical positioning. Continuing on this theme, Alvesson and Karreman, (2001) additionally assert 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.

While Thompson and Walsham, (2004) further stress that because knowledge is a subjective perspective of an individual's experience, associated problems are inextricably related to the context of the knowledge itself. Additionally, Howells, (2002) gives vision to the fact that individuals past experiences related to knowledge can contribute to retaining this knowledge, and (Von Krogh et al., 2000) retorts that personal resources also contribute. 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 (Gates, 2001), empiricism, (Gupta, 2006) and rationalism (Katz, 2000).

Thus, this first section of the review will focus on the role of knowledge, philosophy within known knowledge transfer arena's, in both academic and business communities. This section stresses the importance in understanding

of epistemic principles, which is evident in current theoretical interpretation surrounding knowledge in a knowledge transfer scenario.

This underpinning is important, prominent authors, such as (Drucker, 1993), (Stewart, 1997), and (Brooking, 1997) and practitioners, such as (Edvinsson, 1997) and (Svieby, 1997) clarified the importance of philosophical interpretation of knowledge for an organisation wishing to achieve a competitive advantage by aligning this philosophical positioning to the cultural positioning of the firm or business. Clearly, 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. Hence, it is clear why most current management literature focuses on considerations that can be effectual in using this knowledge understanding to maintain competitive advantage, by elaborating successful positioning of knowledge within knowledge transfer scenarios, including:

- *The 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.*

Assudani, (2005) asserts this very clearly by explaining that in this information age, 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 knowledge'. This thesis must therefore must consider how knowledge philosophy fits within the interpretive theoretical overview and the formalised description of business management, however literature on this subject is extremely diverse and non definitive. In deciding a concise literature framework, this is clearly a fundamental obstacle because formulating natural knowledge interaction principles regarding truth, "I

believe this is true knowledge that I am about to transfer”, is an ontic notion and justification “someone told me this is true knowledge.....”, an epistemic notion. Therefore, from an experiential perspective, it is implausible to simply assume that logical principles, which formulate conditions for the transfer of truth, or the belief in experiencing knowledge, are automatically and unproblematically mirrored by epistemic principles. There is justification therefore in examining the actual epistemic principle itself, in that, there is an assumption within current academic literature that the knowledge understanding through experience can be transmitted across any self-evident elements unproblematically. Taking direction from the literature review, in this overall research design, consideration is given to the underlying complexity of this situation since there would need to be conceptual understanding given to the various aspect of each level of analysis in a business context. Hence, the following (sub)sections will attempt to formalise a philosophical position or epistemic principal regarding knowledge, from

which the interpretation of the following chapters, regarding knowledge and business and perspective focus can be better understood from a business perspective.

Philosophy and Knowledge.

Knowledge itself is difficult to define and some authors balk at the prospect of definition. Disparagingly, (Davenport et a., 1998:43) quoted Boulding (1966 :1)

- *“considering the difficulties of defining, categorising and measuring knowledge, One feels that the efforts to do so lead into a philosophical mess from which the only escape is to climb out, clean ones self off, go home, have a dinner and forget all about philosophy”.*

However, for this study and in the spirit of understanding the importance of knowledge. It IS important to discover, how knowledge is philosophically positioned. It is also equally important to understand the significance of experiential reasoning behind this interpretive position of knowledge

before it is transferred. Important because, the adaptation by the actors involved purport to a position of justification in the transfer schema. Thus, an overriding epistemic principal is established.

This is slightly perplexing to begin with, since the actor's view of knowledge is subjective, any possibly relevant mental states are experiential. However, this cannot be reasonable if experiential states play a role in justification. If they do then they must also play a role in propositional content. If it is also true that an experience has no content, then it cannot be in virtue of its content that it provides justification for knowledge.

Scrutiny at this point reflects egoistic conceptions of this reality from the actors perception or cautious belief of any experience other than that relative to the knowledge transfer scenario. Since actors experiential accounts of knowledge would be unable to explain the putative distinctive value of knowledge.

It follows therefore, that it would be plausible to understand the abstract content of contested parts of knowledge,

since in accepting a knowledge statement of fact, it is unimportant in deciding if it is a foundational ethic or not. However, at this point, one could ask if the existence of knowledge, that 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. This situation is a perplexing situation to say the least. Sayer, (1984) affirm this, stating that our knowledge of that real world is fallible and theory laden. It exists but our knowledge of it is unclear, is singular in its focus and can also suffer from borrowed interpretations covering many disciplines, which belie the potentials inherent in other focused research directions. In this sense, cognitive interpretations of knowledge vary, are often very broad or very non-specific. For example (Nonaka, 1994; Court, 1997), maintain that a distinction can often be made between data, information and knowledge. Conversely, (Castaneda 2000, p. 3) define Knowledge as an 'elusive concept' and (Nonaka 1994, p. 15) described knowledge as 'a

multifaceted concept with multi-layered meanings'. In an attempt to bring some sort of clarity to the matter, (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) give a broad example of definition as:

“the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics” (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 13)

Nonetheless, because of the philosophical diversity surrounding the theoretical base of knowledge definition, research conclusions form many incongruities and variations. According to (Tell, 2004), even the overall characterisation of knowledge, which encompasses the tacit and explicit dimension, has so far been too simplistic. Historically, Boulding (1966) describes knowledge as images related to cognitive content. As such, Knowledge from this perspective, can only exist because someone knows it in his mind, it 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 Szulanski (2000, p. 10) defines knowledge as a ‘causally ambiguous set of routines’.

Yet, regardless of this indifference, there still exists agreement within many research streams that organisational knowledge in this dissected form, ‘is a source of competitive advantage’, (Argote and Ingram 2000, p. 156). Additional research with a similar focus highlights that knowledge has been further stipulated in other categorical instances as: organisational manufacturing capabilities (Zander and Kogut, 1995); assets (Spender, 1996); innovation (Rogers, 1995) and best practices (Szulanski, 1996). Grant (1996b, p. 110) underlines the difference between conflicting opinions by declaring that knowledge is ‘that which is known’.

From a philosophical perspective, in Occidental society, knowledge understanding can generally be regarded as falling between two arguments, the first is Rationalism, (see Descartes 1644i, Leibniz 1673ii, Kant 1787iii) which postulates that a proposition can be known from reason alone without the need for, or indeed independent from,

experience. In the context of this thesis, it is also important to recognise the impressions of Spinoza (See A Theological-Political Treatise 1670) since complimenting the rationalist connection, Spinoza contended that "God" and "Nature" were the same reality, namely a singularity that underlies the universe and everything else was simply modes or modifications. He contended that "Deus sive Natura" ("God or Nature") was of infinite attributes, hence, his account of reality was to understand physical and mental worlds as two different, parallel "subworlds", which neither overlap nor interact.

The second is Positivism (see Aristotle iv, Berkeley 1710 v, Hume 1739 vi), which postulates that propositions can only be known directly from experience. It is also important to mention logic according to Kant's vii definition: Our knowledge springs from two fundamental sources of the mind; the first is the capacity of receiving representations (receptivity for impressions), the second is the power of knowing an object through these representations spontaneity in the

production of concepts. (see Kant 1781; 1787viii). Perhaps the beginnings of a formal knowledge transfer theory ?

Thus, relating this philosophical knowledge position to knowledge value, it is important to consider these different asymmetries, which deliberately assume human beings hold beliefs in two distinct ways. Basic and non-basic. Hence, non-basic beliefs are based on other beliefs by inference, 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 computer, writing this thesis', 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. Hence, they inextricably link knowledge and knowledge transfer as a

cognitive process. From this dual philosophical standpoint, it is important at this point to acknowledge the subject groups cultural background, which will be apparent in the research data collection. It is also important to note that one of the few alternate ideologies capable of challenging and transcending prevailing knowledge transfer streams is Islam. This is because, this philosophical position or what is sometimes referred to as fundamentalist position, possesses a repertoire of powerful symbols and subsequent organisational approaches readily adaptable to political science in an occidental context. It is interesting to note the philosophical positioning of Sidahmed and Ehteshani (1996) who observe that the theological credentials and textual knowledge of most populist Islamist leaders are often rather thin, in comparison with the traditional occidental religious texts and hermeneutic positions. Thus, are already questioning the philosophical justification attached to any Islamic interpretation.

However, as an academic opinion, this is very important for this thesis, since if I endorse this axiom then I can endorse

both hermeneutics and foundationalism. This is similarly important as I can therefore begin to approach epistemological issues regarding the definition of knowledge and knowledge value from a pragmatic centre, which otherwise may escape me in this research. Dealing with these difficulties has led to the construction of two diametrically opposed views subjugated from an occidental perspective on the nature of Islamic philosophy versus occidental philosophy. The most influential view is that which stems from the work of Leo Strauss (1959), and which represents Islamic philosophy as having a great deal to hide in their writings. I think it is important to note that although Strauss espoused the utility of religious belief, however there is some question about his views on its value, considered intemperate and irrational (See Strauss 1995, Political Science and Politics). Additionally, continues that this philosophical position are taken to be involved in the skilful dissimulation of their genuine irreligious and Greek-inspired opinions in such a way that their fellow thinkers would follow their arguments to their logical conclusion,

while more modest intellects would be satisfied that they were in the presence of theories acceptable to Islam. Identification of underpinning Islamic philosophical axioms can be attributive to many authors but none more so than (See Choudhury, 1997) since Al-Ghazzali writings span at least 400 (yes 400) volumes. A central objective or caveat of Ghazzali in all his writings was the unity of knowledge, rooted in the Oneness of God, as the path for all moral concepts, ultimately, leading to the belief in God. 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. Kant, however, believed that it was a clear exposition of morality which led to belief in God. In view of these similarities, a notable Islamic academic (Choudhury, 1997) emphatically states "what Imam Ghazzali was to Islamic epistemology, Immanuel Kant was to occidental epistemology" Relative to this study it is important to note that Al-Ghazzali's concept of a unified knowledge is the source of his political theory and therefore the grounding for

his epistemic principal in this respect similar to Spinoza, as discussed earlier (See A Theologico-Political Treatise, Spinoza, 1670). The core of this theory is humanism derived from a holistic, harmonious, well-ordered cosmos, created by God for a clear purpose: good government.

Good government, is a divine gift, entrusted to a wise ruler, a monarch accountable to God " ... to bring development and prosperity to the world through justice and equitable rule" (Bagley, 1964, p. 55).

Importantly, in relation to knowledge, at the centre of Ghazzali's ideal state is the individual with a spiritual as well as a social personality. Clearly, this Islamic concept of an individual within a social community sharply contrasts with Occidental self-centred neoclassical philosophies. The neoclassical is uninterested in morals and ethics, there is no room for concern of others. From a philosophical perspective no such annulment is possible in Islam. Thus, from an Islamic philosophical perspective, analytically, the central logic of occidental economics is that

knowledge has value as a resource capture for profit-driven capitalism. Resource capture here is by means of capitalisation (Mehmet, 1995, pp. 25-9) and subsequently adds that over time, all non-capital resources will be transformed into new forms of capital. Natural resources would therefore become ecological assets, knowledge. In summary, knowledge value from this perspective, viewed as intellectual is for a singular point 'for profit'.

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. Hence, to be able to adopt a philosophical starting point regarding an epistemic principal from which to define knowledge. Knowledge, from both perspectives it seems, must consist, at least to a large extent, in a clarification of knowledge value, that does not consist in definition alone, and therefore must possess a systemic for such a

clarification using an epistemic principal. To fully debate this point would be extensive to say the least, however in the caveat of knowledge transfer it is clear than in a business context, the understanding of complex interactions of philosophical positions agrees with the premise suggested by Drucker et al and an essential underpinning to business success and competitive advantage, and warrants further investigation outwith this thesis. Thus, 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. 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. For example, when conceiving as a faculty for distinguishing between truth and falsity, any experiential decision that

would lack the cognitive status, traditionally ascribed, would be considered false, (See, Blackburn 1987ix; Craig 1985x; Wright 1989xi). 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.

Conclusion

This review indicates that investigation and understanding of knowledge is important, since at its core, the study of knowledge transfer is concerned with the process of moving useful knowledge from one place to another.

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. For example, Castaneda defines Knowledge as an 'elusive concept', and many others have had their say on the subject without definitive conclusion. (

See Descartes 1644 , Leibniz 1673 , Kant 1787, Aristotle , Berkeley 1710 , Hume 1739). Thus, the question of why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief, is really why issue of why knowledge is more valuable than any proper subset of its parts. That is, does an actor specifically desire knowledge rather than any epistemic standing? The importance of this distinction between the two value problems is seen by considering that in some cases justification adds value to a mere true belief not to the knowledge. If this last point is right, then one might reasonably argue that the fact that knowledge entails justification since there would now be a property of knowledge which mere true belief lacks and which affords greater value to knowledge over mere true belief.

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