

Knowledge Management From the Metaphorical Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present the notions connected with how knowledge management is communicated. The focus of investigation is on the place of metaphors in creating, acquiring and sharing data. The metaphorical side of knowledge management is discussed from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Thus, selected theories are supported with practical examples coming from diversified sources on knowledge management. The discussion aims at showing the positive and negative role of metaphors in various stages of knowledge management.

BACKGROUND

The way knowledge is coded and decoded has changed throughout centuries. Nowadays we can observe the growing role of technology in creating and sharing knowledge in educational (e.g. Turula, Mikołajewska & Stanulewicz, 2015) and professional settings (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2016). Thus, traditional ways of accessing and using knowledge are supported, and in some cases substituted, with virtual sources of data. Apart from the plethora of knowledge resources, the phenomenon of knowledge poverty resulting from limited or no access to information still exists. There are different types of knowledge poverty that can be categorized by taking into account such notions as purpose, target audience,

and form of dissemination. Thus, the following typology of knowledge poverty can be applied: scientific knowledge poverty, everyday knowledge poverty, professional knowledge poverty, social knowledge poverty, cultural knowledge poverty and linguistic knowledge poverty. The last type of knowledge poverty can be understood in at least two ways. First, linguistic knowledge poverty may be represented by no or limited familiarity with the official language spoken in a country one has to study or work in. The second type of linguistic knowledge poverty is connected with the minor positions of some languages or dialects in a given community (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2015b). Another phenomenon connected with restricted understanding and using knowledge is attention crash, represented in limited concentration resulting from information overload. It can be observed especially among people exposed to many impulses (mainly of a technological nature) at the same time. Nowadays this phenomenon is associated with constant access to emails, sms, chatting and talking on the phone (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2014b). One method of dealing with attention crash and knowledge poverty is to handle proper and effective communication. In addition, the linguistic turn in knowledge management is connected with the dynamic character of knowledge. For example, Wittgenstein (1992) highlights that it cannot be determined how long knowledge, skills and understanding last. Consequently, the character of knowledge management (KM) requires proper linguistic forms that will facilitate the process of

perception, comprehension and dissemination of new concepts (Bielenia-Grajewska, Carayannis & Campbell, 2013b).

LANGUAGE AND KNOWLEDGE

Recent publications written by the representatives of different studies draw the attention of readers to the discursive dimension of knowledge management. An example of such domains is discursive psychology. As Crane (2016) discusses in her contribution, interaction is crucial in knowledge creation and knowledge sharing. Thus, talk and text play an important role in KM. The narrative side of knowledge management is also stressed by Schreyögg and Koch (2005) who elaborate on the issue of narration and storytelling as well as their place in KM. In addition, the link between language and culture is discussed by researchers including Holden and Glisby (2014).

The functionality of language in knowledge management can be discussed through the prism of micro, meso and macro perspectives. Starting with the micro approach, language is applied to denote a new concept or a novel idea. The meso level is represented by the usage of linguistic tools in shaping texts. As far as the macro level is concerned, language is also used as a tool facilitating knowledge flows between different domains (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2012). It should also be highlighted that language and knowledge management do not exist in a vacuum; they shape and simultaneously they are shaped by other domains. An example is education - modern education differs from that which could be observed some years ago as teaching and learning of the twenty-first century involve not only various learners in terms of their age, gender and background, but also diversified methods of encoding and decoding knowledge. For example, with the appearance of MOOCs and other educational offers available online, modern education is not as restricted in terms of geography, prior levels of knowledge or types of accessible educational tools as it was

before. Consequently, knowledge is also gained in activities that were previously associated exclusively with the ludic character of our life. An example is the application of serious games in learning (e.g. Bielenia-Grajewska, 2016).

The way language facilitates knowledge management can also be discussed by taking into account literal and non-literal language. Focusing on the complexity of figurative language and its multidimensionality, symbolic communication in KM is given a detailed study in this contribution.

METAPHORS

The purpose of metaphors is to make people perceive one sphere of experience in terms of another, whereas cross-domain interconnections facilitate the observation of similarities between two domains within a given metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Metaphors are used in different domains of life, including, among others, investment banking (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2009), leadership (Lancaster, 2015), neuromanagement (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2013a), translation (Guldin, 2016) and biology (Boldt, 2016). The functions of metaphors are as follows. First, they are efficient in denoting novel objects or phenomena. An example is the area of investment banking, characteristic of new terms describing such economic notions as new strategies of mergers and acquisitions or derivatives (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2009). In other words, symbolic language facilitates the process of introducing new products or services, providing efficient linguistic tools to accompany economic or technological development (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2012). Their “freshness of expression”, novelty in form, makes them popular in coding and decoding different forms of knowledge. Wittgenstein (1992) underlines that a new word is like a fresh seed thrown in the soil of discussion. In the case of KM, new terms coined in professional settings may enrich specialized knowledge and they should facilitate communication between laymen and professionals. Moreover, metaphors are useful in

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