

Chapter 7.22

Phenomenon of Duality: A Key to Facilitate the Transition From Knowledge Management to Wisdom for Inquiring Organizations

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ABSTRACT

"Wisdom is what you learn after you think you know it all" - unknown

In today's knowledge-based economy, sustainable strategic advantages are gained more from an organization's knowledge assets than from its more traditional types of assets, namely, land, labor, and capital. Knowledge, however, is a compound construct, exhibiting many manifestations of the phenomenon of duality such as subjectivity and objectivity as well as having tacit and explicit forms. Overlooking this phenomenon of duality in the knowledge construct has not only led many knowledge management initiatives to stumble but has also resulted in the discussion of the apparent

contradictions associated with knowledge management in the IS literature as well as numerous discussions and debates regarding the "nonsense of knowledge management." It is the thesis of this chapter that a full appreciation of the phenomenon of duality is indeed necessary to enable inquiring organizations to reach the state of wisdom and enlightenment.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, the nature of knowledge has been central to many debates between philosophers, scientists, academics, and practitioners. In fact, it was the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil that caused

Adam and Eve to be dismissed from the Garden of Eden; in addition, interestingly enough, the understanding of Good and Evil, a duality, was to lead Adam and Eve to wisdom. A key underlying and recurring theme in some shape or form with respect to knowledge in all these discussions is the phenomenon of duality as it relates to the knowledge construct and its management. Duality, or the principle of duality, refers to the existence of two irreducible aspects or perspectives that tend to complement each other, as in the example of Adam and Eve, the Tree had knowledge of good and evil. The key to the understanding of duality is that given the existence of duality, one must take a holistic perspective and realize that there is a harmonious balance between these duals. In contrast, taking a singular or one-dimensional perspective will lead to an incomplete understanding and consequently decisions and/or judgments based on such an incomplete view will then be suboptimal or less sound.

Webster's Dictionary defines wisdom as accumulated learning that provides knowledge, the ability to discern inner qualities and relationships, that is, insight and leads to sound judgment. Succinctly stated then, wisdom requires knowledge and is concerned with understanding principles and then being able to make sound decisions and/or judgments based on such an understanding. Knowledge is not a homogenous construct, rather it is a compound complex construct. One of the reasons knowledge is compound in nature is because it exhibits numerous duals at many levels. This chapter contends that by understanding the phenomenon of duality and how it relates to the knowledge construct, not only will inquiring organizations firstly be able to better understand the compound knowledge construct and its management, but also this will facilitate their moving from knowledge management to wisdom.

In this chapter, many specific manifestations of the duality phenomenon as it relates to knowledge and its management are highlighted, such

as the subjective and objective perspectives, the consensus versus disensus perspective, the Lockean/Leibnizian aspects of knowledge versus the Hegelian/Kantian aspects, and the people versus technology dimensions. Throughout the chapter, no one perspective is singled out as correct or incorrect, rather the emphasis is on the fact that these respective duals not only underscore the duality phenomenon at different levels but are all useful, necessary, and important for an inquiring organization to fully appreciate the compound quality exhibited by the knowledge construct and thereby embrace superior knowledge management strategies, techniques, tools, and processes. In addition, a sound understanding of the duality phenomenon as it relates to knowledge will not only facilitate a better understanding of how to embrace knowledge management, an important strategy in today's knowledge economy (Drucker, 1993), but also address key needs such as identified by Nonaka that "few managers grasp the true nature of knowledge creating companies--let alone how to manage it" (Holsapple & Joshi, 2002, p. 47) and Ann Stuart that "[m]any managers would be hard pressed to explain precisely and concisely, what this evolving business trend (knowledge management) means" (Holsapple & Joshi, 2002, p. 47). The following then, serves to address this duality phenomenon with respect to the knowledge construct and thereby highlight that a true appreciation of this duality phenomenon with respect to knowledge and knowledge management, more specifically, should enable "the getting of wisdom" for inquiring organizations.

The chapter is structured as follows: first a background section which gives a brief description of key terms required for an inquiring organization to move from knowledge management to wisdom is presented as well as a brief synopsis of inquiring organizations and the integral role of knowledge and its management for these organizations. In addition, this section discusses the compound nature of knowledge and why knowledge as opposed to

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