

Chapter 5.3

The Essence of Organizational Knowledge: A Social Epistemology Perspective

Fei Gao

East China University of Science and Technology Business School, China

ABSTRACT

The relationships between organizational static substance knowledge with ‘belief’, ‘the true’, ‘true belief’, or ‘justified true belief’ have been outlined briefly in 2003. In this article, through combining new research outcomes, I further explore why different kinds of organizational static substance knowledge can be counted as belief, the true, true belief, or justified true belief. The discussion on the subtle differences between belief, the true, true belief and justified true belief will shed light on our comprehensive and intensive understanding of different kinds of organizational knowledge and will enable managers or chief knowledge officers (CKO) to effectively and efficiently manage knowledge related activities in our knowledge era. [Article copies are available for purchase from InfoSci-on-Demand.com]

INTRODUCTION

The attributive term ‘organizational’ in the phrase of ‘organizational knowledge’ makes the phrase very different from the meaning of the single term ‘knowledge’. On the one hand, organizational knowledge, as it was discussed in Gao et al (2003), must be judged by objective criteria (such as through strict scientific thinking based on scientific method, approaches, and tools like logical and rational thinking (i.e. logical deduction, rational induction, and/or rational interpretation); sensory experience (i.e. experiment or field study); and the synthesis of rational thinking and sensory experience; and Nonaka’s evaluating criteria of the market¹). On the other hand, organizational knowledge has also to be judged by subjective criteria, and further, these subjective criteria are established by the organization based on its own social and cultural background, history, and actual environmental position. This subjective aspect of organizational knowledge is different from

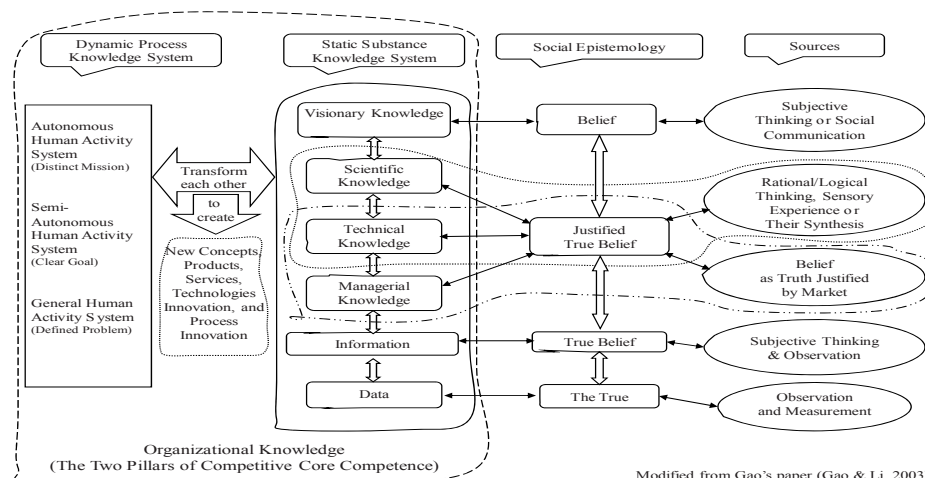
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Polanyi's postmodern philosophical meaning i.e. the tacit dimension of knowledge (Polanyi, 1958, 1962; Li & Gao, 2003). It also means that some justified true belief, such as a scientific theory or an advanced technology, can be excluded from organizational knowledge if this scientific knowledge and technological knowledge has no relationship to the organizational operation or business. What is more, a false statement might be understood as organizational knowledge and considered highly useful, as long as the people in that organization have reached some sort of consensus as to its value, such as a false interpretation of a piece of information, or a false description of an event. Although such phenomena generally would not last a long time, its negative influence on organization may. In nature, organizational knowledge is a product of the organizational social/human activity through social communication. Therefore, misunderstandings can happen. To reduce these types of mistake, organizational knowledge needs to be carefully reviewed from a social epistemology perspective as in our following paragraph.

In Gao et al's paper (2003), organizational knowledge was defined as *organizational static substance knowledge* and *organizational dynamic process knowledge*.

Organizational static substance knowledge is classified further into visionary knowledge (i.e. corporate vision, mission, and norm, plus corporate culture and value); scientific knowledge; technological knowledge; managerial knowledge; information; and data. *Organizational dynamic process knowledge* is then defined as knowledge related human activities, which are classified into the autonomous human activity of distinct mission; semi-autonomous human activity with a clear goal; and the general human activity surrounding a defined problem, because organizational knowledge in modern high-tech corporations consist of natural sciences, applied sciences/technologies, and social/human sciences (Gao, 2007; Gao, et al, 2003, 2008). Human activities here are the activities of creating, codifying, acquiring, categorizing, distributing, transferring, and utilizing various kinds of static substance knowledge and the knowledge workers' own personal knowledge to create new products; better services; advanced technologies (both hard and soft technology); and technical/process innovations for realizing the economic value of this knowledge for the good of the organization, society, and individuals (see the left-hand side of Figure 1).

Figure 1. Organizational knowledge, sources, and social epistemology perspective



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