Chapter III

The Design and Evolution of Singerian Inquiring Organizations: Inspiring Leadership for Wise Action

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Abstract

In this chapter, Singerian inquiring organizations are further developed as the most appropriate type of inquiring organization for moving from knowledge management to wisdom by elaborating on the original knowledge management concepts and framework proposed by Croasdell, Courtney, and Paradice (1998). In moving from knowledge management to wisdom, the author has integrated some of the most classic and substantive thinking, research, and practices in the leadership and wisdom literature into the design of Singerian inquiring organizations.

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to offer some insights into the nature, origins, and development of wisdom and how such understanding can be applied to inspire leadership for wise thought and action through inquiring organizations--specifically, Singerian inquiring organizations. According to the designers of inquiring organizations, Courtney,
Croasdell, and Paradice (1996), inquiring organizations are comprised of special systems whose actions result in the creation of knowledge. Inquiring organizations are based on C. West Churchman’s (1971) classic treatise, “The Design of Inquiring Systems,” and provide a new perspective on the design of learning organizations and how this design can be justified. The five main historical and philosophically-based ways of thinking and coming to know that form these inquiring systems and, in turn, the inquiring organizations are ascribed to the philosophers Lock, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and E. A. Singer. As Courtney, Croasdell, and Paradice (1998) explain, Singerian inquiring organizations operate on the principle of metrology. Using a system of measures, the Singerian inquirer continuously monitors, refines, and revises data and information in order to achieve progress in the generation of valid knowledge. Rapid learning and unlearning, insightful thinking, and wise actions are vital as we move into the 21st century with its accelerating pace, technological changes, discontinuity, unpredictability, and complexity. Beginning in 1996, Courtney, Croasdell, and Paradice outlined five types of inquiring organizations based on each of Churchman’s five inquiring systems. As Mason and Mitroff (1973) point out, dealing with ill-structured environments requires more substantive and dynamic systems of inquiry than the consensus building systems ascribed to Locke and Leibniz, which generally provide only one perspective of a problem and are thus not suited for dealing with wicked environments. Singerian inquiring organizations enable one to draw on not only the fact-oriented and functional Lockean and Leibnizian inquiring systems but also the more value-oriented and substantive Kantian and Hegelian inquiring systems. Singerian inquiring organizations are thus designed to be more efficacious in enabling the creation, acquisition, capture, sharing, adaptation, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge than any of the other four forms of inquiring organizations.

Recent literature in the management of information systems has focused on the progression of managing first data, then information, and, finally, knowledge. As this body of knowledge developed, a whole litany of knowledge management (KM) concepts and buzzwords ensued, including knowledge capture, creation, harvesting, utilization, sharing, dissemination, and so forth (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). With such a substantial body of knowledge now available on knowledge management, some are looking to take this progression to the next level. This brings us to the pursuit of wisdom and how we might understand, develop, and apply it for leading and managing organizations or learning organizations. This chapter will, however, extend that pursuit to include a more integrative and dynamic goal that is more befitting such a high aspiration as wisdom, namely, Singerian inquiring organizations.

Evolution of Knowledge Management

From Knowledge Management to Knowledge Ecology

Malhotra (1998) poses two fundamental questions regarding knowledge management: (1) Can information systems be managed? (2) Can we therefore assume that knowledge