Chapter X

Inquiring Organizations and the Wisdom of Tacit Knowledge for a Heideggerian Inquiring System: The Sixth Sense

John D. Haynes
University of Central Florida, USA

Abstract

C. West Churchman’s five inquiring systems are considered in the light of Polanyi’s distinction between tacit knowing and practical thinking. It is suggested that the five inquiring systems, as distinct and crucial elements of the learning organization, can be divided into two perspectives: the modes of tacit knowing and the levels of practical thinking. While practical thinking is of great importance to the day-to-day management and the analysis of past events of an organization, tacit knowing critically contributes to the sustainable growth and future direction of an organization through its connection
with (1) intuition, (2) holism, and (3) ethics. As an example of tacit knowing, particularly in terms of ethics and intuition, a sixth inquiring system is proposed, namely, a Heideggerian inquiring system (HIS). What characterizes a HIS is, together with traditional methods of analysis of what is known, an organizational culture directed to the aim of discovering what is unknown in terms of products, markets, and competitive strategies and, most particularly, the capacities of organizational members. An existing real-world organizational example of an HIS is provided, examined, and discussed.

Introduction

Practical thinking that results in practical applications is largely governed by logic and is directed to what is known, whereas tacit thought, that at least has theoretical consequences, is enhanced by certain capacities that support it and certain beliefs that underpin it and is mostly directed to what is unknown. In terms of capacities, Churchman (1981) makes the point that “wisdom is thought combined with a concern for ethics” (p. 9). We extend this idea to wisdom is thought underpinned by ethics and supported by the capacity for intuition. Indeed, it is argued in this chapter that ethics itself is underpinned by intuition. We define an ethical approach as action that results in good consequences for all concerned, as distinct from a moral approach that is prescriptive by adhering to sets of rules in advance of action. The question of what constitutes good consequences for all in advance of action is, it is suggested, largely intuitive.

This chapter indicates that Churchman’s five inquiring systems each articulate themselves through two perspectives: (1) as modes of tacit knowing and (2) as varying levels of practical thinking. The claim of this chapter accordingly places pragmatism into one of those two perspectives, that of practical thinking, rather than as Kienholz’s (1999) asserts, the viewpoint which “sees four levels at once” (p. 9). Seeing all four levels at once clearly entails intuition of which no mention—or any mention of any capacity of a similar vein—is entailed in the classically defined Singerian inquiring system. Nor does Kienholz provide any persuasive arguments as to why Singerian inquiring systems should or could see all four levels at once.

In other words, this chapter disagrees that pragmatism (as one of the five inquiring system types) is able to see each of the other four inquiring system types at once. Instead, it is the mode of tacit knowing that is capable of seeing—in that elevated sense—inquiring system types, including its own type (that is, seeing all five levels at once).

In order to make this point abundantly clear, a new inquiring system is proposed, a Heideggerian inquiring system (Haynes, 2000b), which, along with its own necessary practical thinking (systems that analyze what is known), is essentially defined in terms of tacit knowing—in relation to ethics and intuition—and is largely applied to what is unknown.
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