Chapter 8
Evaluation of Human Action
Foucault’s Power/Knowledge Corollary

Nilmini Wickramasinghe
Illinois Institute of Technology, USA

ABSTRACT

The people dynamic is especially significant when trying to understand knowledge management. One aspect of interactions between groups of people is the impact of knowledge, be it a gain or a lack of knowledge. The work of Michael Foucault addresses this in his thesis on power/knowledge. By analyzing traditional theories and introducing Foucault’s power/knowledge ideas, the following provides some insights into the actions and interactions of people within organizational settings.

INTRODUCTION

In today’s knowledge economy, innovating organizations are challenged to maximize a critically important asset -- their human capital. The interaction of knowledge workers with information and communication technologies (ICTs) has presented a particularly interesting dynamic to researchers who study changes in related behavioral phenomena. One such phenomenon is self-monitoring. The following serves to outline the economics of self-monitoring and the integral role of ICTs in enabling knowledge workers to self-monitor. By merging Foucault’s power/knowledge ideas

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-284-8.ch008

Copyright © 2010, IGI Global. Copying or distributing in print or electronic forms without written permission of IGI Global is prohibited.
with classical agency theory, it becomes possible to gain a richer understanding of human capital dynamics in a knowledge economy.

**DYNAMICS OF SELF-MONITORING**

Self-monitoring activities have been examined from psycho-cognitive perspectives (Mehra et al., 2001; Kilduff and Day, 1994; Caldwell and O’Reilly, 1982) and from structuralist power/knowledge perspectives (Foucault, 1980; Poster, 1990; Coombs et al, 1992). Although these writings appear to take radically different views of self-monitoring phenomena, we find that they each address different but complementary issues that together shape a more holistic explanation of the self-monitoring activities we have observed.

**ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIORS AND INCENTIVES**

What is self-monitoring, and why do people do it? According to psychological theorists, the propensity to self-monitor is a personality trait that ranges from high to low. High self-monitors actively try to shape their social worlds by constructing public selves that they believe will affect the perceptions of others in socially-enhancing ways (Snyder and Gangestad, 1986). There is some evidence that they are correct in this belief. Researchers have linked self-monitoring activities to a range of workplace-related outcomes, including performance, leadership, information management and boundary spanning (Kilduff and Day, 1994; Zaccaro et al., 1991; Caldwell and O’Reilly, 1982). For high self-monitors the incentives are the rewards associated with career advancement, such as monetary compensation, higher organizational rank, and enhanced reputation within the organization, the industry and the wider social space. Therefore, to understand self-monitoring as a personality trait means that we must study how those traits form and how those traits influence identity-shaping behavior (Erikson, 1974; Winter et al., 1998).

However, structuralists and interactionists argue that social networks mediate the effects of self-monitoring (White, 1992; Goffman, 1959). Researchers have found that the effects of self-monitoring activities do depend on the social actor’s position in the network, but that high-self monitors tend to occupy the central positions (Mehra et al., 2001). In earlier studies, high self-monitors were found to be particularly effective as boundary spanners, who benefit from self-monitoring by acting as go-betweens who are able to obtain information about resources and opportunities from a number of disconnected sources (Caldwell and O’Reilly, 1982).

While these studies have begun to examine the social networks of self-monitors,
Related Content

Differences in Electronic Medical Record Implementation and Use According to Geographical Location and Organizational Characteristics of US Federally Qualified Health Centers
[www.igi-global.com/article/differences-electronic-medical-record-implementation/70001?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/differences-electronic-medical-record-implementation/70001?camid=4v1a)
The Role of Subjective Computer Training and Management Support to Use Computers in Community Health Centers
www.igi-global.com/chapter/role-subjective-computer-training-management/35772?camid=4v1a

Early Intervention and Health Promotion in the Management of Chronic Liver Disease
www.igi-global.com/article/early-intervention-and-health-promotion-in-the-management-of-chronic-liver-disease/214995?camid=4v1a

Improving the Quality of Healthcare Research Data Sets
www.igi-global.com/chapter/improving-quality-healthcare-research-data/35784?camid=4v1a