Chapter XX

Information Quality and Its Interpretative Reconfiguration as a Premise of Knowledge Management in Virtual Organizations

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The general objective of this chapter is the attempt to develop solid epistemological foundations for discussions around the subject of knowledge management and virtual organizations. For this purpose the rich and encompassing theoretical complex of the interpretative paradigm in social sciences is adopted and a specific transfer is made from the newer sociology of knowledge, as introduced by Alfred Schutz, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. The main thrust of the chapter opens with a discussion of information quality in the context of knowledge management and develops accordingly the concept of common interpretative spaces and a tripartite model of the transformational process, which are both standing at the very heart of any approach to knowledge management in virtual organizations.

Knowledge management deals with basic questions and concepts that have a long epistemological tradition: what exactly is knowledge? Why do we have knowledge? How do we get knowledge? How are we storing, processing and sharing knowledge? If we take a closer look at current literature about knowledge management we observe one common feature that is shared unfortunately by many approaches: a rather weak theoretical foundation of the basic assumptions about knowledge, which are used – and sometimes even in an constituting manner – within the approach.

From my sociological background and a certain affinity to the encompassing thoughts of Alfred Schutz and its scholars Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann came the main thrust to explore an old sociological tradition, namely the study of knowledge,
its distribution, its genesis and its function within society, in order to develop theoretical
corcepts, which can be used within approaches to knowledge management in virtual
organizations. The interpretative paradigm, on which the newer sociology of knowledge
is based on, has not only methodological relevance for qualitative empirical studies, but
it also offers a rich theoretical framework and solid epistemological foundations, which
may eventually disclose many fresh, new insights to anyone working within the social
discourse around knowledge.1

This chapter, thus, deals broadly with interpretative conceptualizations of knowl-
dge management in virtual organizations and tackles specifically the issues of how we
are able to apply objective measurements of valuation in the transformational process of
organizational knowledge transfer and how we sustain and develop the appropriate
common interpretative spaces. In this context the notion of information quality is taken
as a point of reference and starting from its interpretative reconfiguration, two concepts
of relevance are introduced within this chapter, namely the idea of common interpretative
spaces, which constitute the semantic scope of any organizational knowledge flow, and
a small model of the transformational process, which turns interpersonally shared
information into situated and valued knowledge, a process which lies at the very heart of
any knowledge management in virtual organizations.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN VIRTUAL
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The managerial challenge of the coming decades will be influenced significantly by
two developments, which can already be identified today: first, management in its original
form as an institutionalized mode of managing material resources and long-term employ-
etes within regionally segmented markets will increasingly be substituted by more
dynamic, knowledge-oriented forms of management. Second, new virtual modes of
organizing allow future managers of intellectual assets to operate in new social spaces and
allocate appropriate human resources for specific projects instead of life-long employ-
ment. This new modus habituandi of doing business in the forthcoming decades could be
ted according to “knowledge management in virtual organizations,” a development
that is explicitly covered in its different implications and aspects by this book.

Knowledge management, as an independent discipline within business administra-
tion, did not attain wide popularity until the 1990s. Although early approaches to the topic
have been made before, it is not until this decade that the business world is commonly
accepting knowledge management as a main issue of concern. With higher degrees of
specialization and division of labor, we are currently living and working in systems and
networks, where increased dependency and highly specialized and distributed knowledge
prevail. Daniel Bell (1974) coined the term of post-industrial society and described the
inherent social changes that led to a shift from the industrial sector to a rapidly growing
service sector. Bell spoke in this context of a transformation from the good-producing
society to a new information or knowledge-society. Peter Drucker (1993; 1998), who
spoke accordingly of a post-capitalist society, coined the term “knowledge worker” and
focused his analysis of Western economies on the knowledge dimension.

The second shift has been induced by new technologies and media and comprises
new, virtual modes of organizing, which change the way we interact in business contexts
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