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ROTTEN WITH PERFECTION?

AN EXPLORATION OF THE RHETORIC OF KNOWLEDGE IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................ i
List of Figures ....................................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables ......................................................................................................................... v
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... vi
Abstract ............................................................................................................................... vii
Introduction ....................................................................................................................... viii

## Chapter One
Founding fathers & familiar forms: Mainstream concepts of knowledge in Knowledge Management ........................................................................................................ 1
- Resource-based theory of the firm ............................................................................... 2
- Organisational knowledge .......................................................................................... 9
- Summary of chapter one ............................................................................................ 22

## Chapter Two
Beyond the cheerleaders: Critical perspectives on knowledge management .......... 23
- Critical Management Studies...................................................................................... 23
- Critical perspectives of KM theory .......................................................................... 28
- The concept of knowledge in KM ........................................................................... 38
- Summary of literature review ................................................................................... 50
- Research question ..................................................................................................... 52

## Chapter Three
Invoking the light: Rhetoric, logology & cluster criticism ........................................... 58
- Classical Rhetoric ....................................................................................................... 58
- The New Rhetoric ..................................................................................................... 61
- Logology ...................................................................................................................... 62
- Cluster analysis ......................................................................................................... 76

## Chapter Four
Casting the light on texts: Embedded cluster-agon analysis .................................. 80
- Cluster-agon analysis ............................................................................................... 80
- Embedded cluster-agon analysis ............................................................................ 85
- Text selection ............................................................................................................ 93
Chapter Five
Revealing embedded meaning: Analysis of selected KM texts


Overview ................................................................. 99
Critical reading ......................................................................................... 99
Reflexive reading .................................................................................. 113


Overview ................................................................. 115
Critical reading ......................................................................................... 115
Reflexive reading ................................................................................ 127


Overview ................................................................. 128
Critical reading ................................................................................ 128
Reflexive reading ............................................................................. 139


Overview ................................................................. 140
Critical reading ................................................................................ 140
Reflexive reading ............................................................................. 149


Overview ................................................................. 150
Critical reading ................................................................................ 151
Reflexive reading ............................................................................. 163


Overview ................................................................. 163
Critical reading ................................................................................ 164
Reflexive reading ............................................................................. 176
Reflection on process of analysis .................................................. 177
Summary of chapter five ................................................................. 178

Chapter Six
Glimpses of perfection in the concepts of knowledge: Discussion of cluster-groups
Chapter Seven
Rotten with perfection? Insights from the rhetoric of knowledge & knowledge management..........................229
  Logological principles.................................................................................................................229
  Sensing the presence of a ‘god-term’.....................................................................................230
  Collective knowledge...............................................................................................................232
Implications and applications to KM.........................................................................................245

Conclusion..............................................................................................................................................250
  Research contributions .................................................................................................................250
  Future directions........................................................................................................................256
References.............................................................................................................................................259
Appendices............................................................................................................................................273
  Appendix One..............................................................................................................................274
  Appendix Two..............................................................................................................................283
  Appendix Three ..........................................................................................................................287
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Spiral of organisational knowledge creation (SECI) model.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>An illustration of communities in an intranet constellation.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Conventional view of the knowledge hierarchy.</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>The data to wisdom curve.</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Acquisition and delivery systems.</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Knowledge hierarchy according to logology.</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Timeline by centuries showing the etymology of knowledge.</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1: Examples of technologies that support KM.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2: Cognitive level, knowledge types.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3: Four discourses of knowledge management research.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4: List of articles selected.</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5: Summary of clusters and agons.</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6: List of clusters and agons (in italics) according to authors.</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7: Clusters grouped as congruent notions of knowledge and their agons.</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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ABSTRACT

Knowledge management (KM) is a topic of interest to local and national organisations on the potential of ‘knowledge’. In over a decade of theorising, the concept of knowledge as projected by theory seems to remain largely positive. My research probes these concepts of knowledge and asks if it was rhetoric that sustained these images of knowledge and, if so, what were the processes that enabled it to do so.

In this thesis, I critically examine several academic texts in KM theory and find out that the concept of knowledge in KM as portrayed by these texts is rhetorically perfect but potentially corrupted. Concepts of knowledge which have been ignored or omitted in KM become apparent in a unique method of rhetorical analysis which I have developed and called ‘embedded cluster-agon’ analysis. Based on this analysis, I propose that in the ‘perfecting’ of knowledge a ‘dark side’ has developed. In the KM theory analysed, this emerges as a pattern of assumptions that regards individuals as: resources to be exploited, pawns in organisational strategies, victims of unbalanced power relationships and anonymous nodes on networks. This hints at a possible lack of moral or ethical consideration in managing knowledge. Therefore, KM needs to be theorised with care.