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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....98
Text 1 – Wiig, K. (1997). Knowledge Management: An introduction and perspective. *Journal of Knowledge Management, 1* (1), 6-14....98
Overview....99
Critical reading....99
Reflexive reading....113
Text 2 – Sullivan, P. (1999). Profiting from intellectual capital. *Journal of Knowledge Management, 3* (2), 132-142....114
Overview....115
Critical reading....115
Reflexive reading....127
Text 3 – Garrick, J. & Clegg, S. (2000). Knowledge work and the new demands of learning. *Journal of Knowledge Management, 4* (4), 279-286....127
Overview....128
Critical reading....128
Reflexive reading....139
Text 4 – Styhre, A. (2003). Knowledge Management beyond codification: Knowing as practice/concept. *Journal of Knowledge Management, 7* (5), 32-40....139
Overview....140
Critical reading....140
Reflexive reading....149
Text 5 – Hicks, R. C., Dattero, R., & Galup, S. D. (2006). The five-tier knowledge management hierarchy. *Journal of Knowledge Management, 10* (1), 19-31.150
Overview....150
Critical reading....151
Reflexive reading....163
Text 6 – Smedlund, A. (2008). The knowledge system of a firm: social capital for explicit, tacit and potential knowledge. *Journal of Knowledge Management, 12* (1), 63-77....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....180
Cluster-groups....181
Knowledge as a physical entity....185
Knowledge as an underlying force....198
Knowledge as movement....207
Knowledge as influence....214
Summary of chapter six....226

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

Number *Page*

Figure 1: Spiral of organisational knowledge creation (SECI) model. 12
Figure 2: An illustration of communities in an intranet constellation. 15
Figure 3: Conventional view of the knowledge hierarchy. 46
Figure 4: The data to wisdom curve. 47
Figure 5: Acquisition and delivery systems. 159
Figure 6: Knowledge hierarchy according to logology. 239
Figure 7: Timeline by centuries showing the etymology of knowledge. 285

LIST OF TABLES

Number *Page*

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

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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.