Response to Denham Grey's Posting of

29th September 2002 entitled "Missing claims?"

at

http://www.knowledgeboard.com/doclibrary/knowledgeboard/generations_of __km.pdf

By

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And
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September 29, 2002

Original Quotations are in black, responses are in blue.

Denham, thanks for your comment.

Denham Grey wrote:

"Joe and Mark take KM generation knowledge claims to task in this
extract from their new book:

 http://www.knowledgeboard.com/doclibrary/knowledgeboard/generations_of
 __km.pdf

Actually, this is an extract from our forthcoming, 2003 book. The likely publication date
is March, 2003.

I wonder if this strident critique really leads to 'knowledge'?, "

We don't know, Denham, we think that very much depends on what one means
by "strident" and also what one means by "knowledge". Let's take "strident" first. The
dictionary says that "strident" is "harsh or grating". Perhaps our paper is that, but we
suspect that judgment is more in the eye of the beholder and depends on whether one
approaches its analysis with a bias against evaluating alternative knowledge claims by
trying to find the errors in them.

If one does approach things in this way then we suspect one will find that our
examination, while critical and detailed, is not particularly harsh or grating. It is just
critical, as one would expect from a process that uses criticism to eliminate errors. On

the other hand, if one approaches knowledge claim evaluation by looking for support for one's own knowledge claims (an approach that cannot possibly lead to the growth of knowledge), rather than by seeking out errors, then yes, our approach which seeks out error in order to eliminate it and get closer to the truth may seem "strident." We prefer to think of our critique as merely thoroughgoing and rigorous, but not discourteous or uncivil as the term "strident" sometimes implies.

Let's move to "knowledge." As you know, we think there are three types of knowledge, and that mental knowledge and knowledge in cultural artifacts are the two types that are important in organizations. We believe the critiques we put forward of the "Generations" Theories of Mark Koenig and Dave Snowden were fair critiques of knowledge claims they advanced in their articles. Our critiques are detailed analyses of what they wrote with numerous quotations and other references.

We can't say for sure whether our critiques and the development in our own work that they helped to stimulate will lead to better "mental knowledge" (that would be tough to measure anyway), or to knowledge claims that are more survivable with the passage of time. But I suspect the next version of both Koenig's formulation and Snowden's will be stronger because they've seen and adjusted to our views.

"and
why they did not include this paper from Davenport and Cronin, 1999
in their analysis as it also looks at KM evolution models?

 http://www.alise.org/conferences/conf00_Davenport-Cronin_paper.htm"

Joe didn't know of the Elizabeth Davenport/Blaise Cronin Paper until you just called his attention to it, for which he thanks you. Mark had run into it, but thought it was not strictly relevant to this paper because it does not offer a well-articulated theory of change in KM. Note that the book is about raising and addressing Key Issues in KM, and that we never intended to do a thorough review of the literature on KM evolution theories, and have made no claims about doing a thorough literature review of the issue. Rather, the three theories were highly visible and we thought we could carry out a valuable discussion of the issues by limiting ourselves to the three we selected for purposes of the book.

Joe did look at the Davenport/Cronin paper this evening, and his initial reaction to it is quite favorable, though we hasten to add we haven't yet had a chance to do a close analysis of it. The paper presents three views of KM: KM1: the information management view: (KM is about managing the organization of existing information), KM2: The Process Engineering View: (KM is about the Management of "Knowhow", processes and process ontologies, and KM3: KM Optimizes the Adaptive Co-evolution of the Organization and the Environment (KM is about the establishment of conditions and spaces that encourage the conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge and back). While this view is very interesting and could perhaps form the basis of an evolutionary theory,

Davenport and Cronin say little about an evolutionary view in their paper beyond a statement at the end to the effect that:

"In evolutionary terms, we have moved from information management (KM1) to informatizing (KM2) to information ethologies (KM3)."

There is little additional information sketching out what the theory claims with respect to evolution. McElroy, Snowden, and Koenig came much closer to talking about time periods, and the points of demarcation among the three periods. So the Davenport/ Cronin view is much more about three views of KM than it is about a theory of evolution from one view to another.

Our initial comment about the match between the KMCI view and the Davenport-Cronin viewpoint is that we are closer to KM3 than either of the other two types. This may not seem true since we talk about processes very frequently. But our notions of process do not correspond to the classic notions of normative business processes one finds in BPR.

Our processes are behavioral in character, contain large elements of self-organization, and in addition are viewed by us as produced by a social network and by CAS agents involved in organizational learning cycles. Anyone who reads the "Generations" paper and especially the Key Issues Book (out next Spring) will note a good part of the conceptual backdrop for our knowledge and KM processes. This backdrop has much more in common with the KM3 view than it does with the KM2 or KM1 views.

Having said the above, we will also say that if we had the chance to analyze the Davenport-Cronin work closely, it is likely that we would have problems with the fact that it seems to base KM3 squarely on Nonaka's SECI Model, and on the importance of conversions from tacit to explicit knowledge. Our problem here is not that we don't recognize the existence of tacit knowledge, but rather that we place it in a broader psychological context than we think is present in Nonaka's work.

- Thus, we think the SECI model is unclear in telling us whether tacit knowledge is predipositional, or situational in character.

- We also think that if it is predispositional, it is unclear in telling us how tacit predispositions are different from other kinds of predispositions.

- On the other hand, if it is situational in character, then the Nonaka model is too narrow because it doesn't have anything to say about predispositional knowledge.

- Further, if tacit knowledge is situational, then the Nonaka view doesn't seem to distinguish between implicit knowledge and tacit knowledge, a

distinction originally made by Polanyi himself (the source of Nonaka's terminology).

- Still further, in the realm of explicit knowledge, it is not clear whether a distinction is made between explicit knowledge in the mind and codified knowledge. So it is not clear whether the conversion from "tacit" to "explicit" is a conversion that occurs merely in the Gestalt field of the individual or whether it involves the crossing of the boundary from private belief knowledge to public, sharable, and codified knowledge.

- It frequently seems to be the latter, but the former is possible and it is important to know where explicit mental knowledge exists in the SECI framework, if it is recognized at all by Nonaka. In short, we think the psychological grounding of the SECI model is weak, and that insofar as it relies on that model, the Davenport-Cronin view of KM3 may also have problems.

Regards,

Joe and Mark