

Organizational forms, coordination and knowledge types

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Organizations are collections of human - and artificial- actors regulated by coordination mechanisms. The actors are intelligent where intelligence is accounted for by knowledge and cognition. Cognition is that aspect of (human) actors by which they are said to think, reason and decide. The most important elements of cognition are an architecture, representations and operations on these representations. Knowledge can be distinguished in terms of content (domain) and form (types). Vital in knowledge as well as in cognition are the representations. They may concern tasks, processes, the organizational structure, other actors or the external environment. If we combine knowledge, actors, organizations and representations, we could say that people participating in organizations have shared representations of their interactive behavior. Our knowledge of organizational, task and other actor reality is semiotic, that is, it is a representational construction. In our Castor-Project (Castor stands for: 'knowledge Conversion And Semiotic Theories Of Representation'), we follow both the semiotic and the cognitive route in our investigation of organizations and the management of (organizational) knowledge.

Our main objective is to analyze coordination in organizations in terms of the dominancy and allocation of knowledge types of the members in the organization. Knowledge exists as a set of representations. The interacting actors share these representations. In the context of organizations adaptive behavior involves both the continuous exploitation of given knowledge and the exploration of new knowledge. The members of the organization use various types of knowledge. We distinguish sensory (tacit), coded, and theoretical knowledge. 'Sensory' refers to perceptual knowledge, 'coded' to conventional, usually but not only linguistic knowledge, 'theoretical' to rational and scientific knowledge. We model the three forms of knowledge in a so called 'Knowledge Space'. Every member as well as every organization - as the 'sum' of its members - can be located somewhere in the Knowledge Space.

We think a close relationship consists between the types of knowledge of the various members in the organization and the way the organization is structured. Take for example organizational forms such as web, market, clan, bureaucracy or hierarchy. Despite the many differences within these forms we think that for example the dominant knowledge type in a bureaucracy is coded knowledge, whereas in a clan the dominant type is sensory (tacit) knowledge. On the other hand determining the preferred organizational form given a constellation and dominancy of assessed knowledge types should be possible. The aim of our research is to strengthen the theoretical underpinnings of work done in the field of knowledge management.

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