

# Knowledge Management or Management of Knowledge? Why People Interested in Knowledge Management Need to Consider Foucault and the Construct of Power

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## ABSTRACT

*In this article we argue that, to date, the knowledge management literature has insufficiently addressed the construct of power. The power literature is reviewed using three categories: power-as-entity, power-as-strategy and power-is-knowledge. We find that much of the knowledge management literature, while not directly addressing power, aspires to the dictum "knowledge is power", which corresponds to the power-as-entity approach. Drawing on the work of Foucault we go on to show that, while the power-as-entity approach is important, it is not sufficient. Foucault's work demonstrates how our understanding of knowledge management can be enriched by adopting a power-as-strategy approach. Further, the work of post-Foucauldian power theorists, especially Flyvbjerg (1998), shows that while knowledge is power, "power is also knowledge"—and thus the nature and context of power shapes organizational knowledge. We argue that Foucault's inseparability of knowledge and power provides a foundation from which it can be shown that the inversion of the "knowledge is power" dictum to "power is knowledge" has significant implications for the theory and practice of knowledge management.*

## INTRODUCTION

In light of the attention that knowledge management is currently receiving in academic and practitioner arenas, it is time to take stock of where the literature seems to be headed. Early sections of this paper examine the knowledge management literature and establish its emergent boundaries using a methodological approach advocated by Barley, Meyer and Gash (1988). Such an approach provides the foundations for building a Foucauldian archaeology of knowledge management discourse. It shows that, to date, the literature remains dominated by technical disciplines, notably information technology. Moreover, where organizational theorists have shown an interest in knowledge management they have tended to insufficiently address its relationship with the construct of power.

Later sections of the paper are used to illustrate why, conceptually, it is important for

those theorists and practitioners interested in knowledge management to pay more attention to the issue of power. The power literature is examined using the three broad categories of "power-as-entity", "power-as-strategy" and "power-is-knowledge". We apply genealogical analysis as advocated by Foucault to these three categories in order to illustrate how the juxtaposition of discourse and practice offers significant insights into theory and practice of knowledge management. Further we draw upon the work of contemporary power theorists, notably Flyvbjerg (1998) and Huagaard (1997; 2000) to contrast the conceptual themes that underpin each of these categories.

We conclude that if as Foucault's power-knowledge nexus indicates, power and knowledge are inseparable, then the limited coverage of power within the knowledge management literature renders much of this literature problematic. Accordingly, we assert that the theory and practice of knowledge management can be

enriched by research that recognizes how the struggle for power within an organization may influence the design, implementation and ongoing management of a knowledge management system while at the same time the knowledge management system will influence the struggle for power.

### THE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT LITERATURE: ESTABLISHING THE BOUNDARIES

Some theorists have already suggested that the management of knowledge is not necessarily anything new. Pemberton (1998) points out that records have been kept for thousands of years before the emergence of philosophy and its focus on knowledge. In order to demonstrate his point, he goes back to the pre-Socratic times of the sixth and fifth centuries BC and discusses thinkers such as Anaximander, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras and Thales. More recently, the nature and role of knowledge in organizations and society has attracted the attention of a number of key theorists including, for example, Foucault (1966) (discussed later in more detail), Durkheim (1893), Weber (1914), Mannheim (1975). However, and as shall be seen, none of this literature sits easily within the boundaries of what one would currently recognise as the knowledge management literature. This raises the question of what literature the field comprises and, for us, whether this literature incorporates any discussion of the issue of power.

A number of edited volumes have recently been published which go some way to establishing the parameters of what might be termed the "contemporary" knowledge management literature (e.g. Little et al, 2001; von Krogh et al, 1998; 2000). None of them directly discuss the issue power, but as Warhurst (2001) and others have noted, these works cannot be taken as representative of the entire field. Thus, an alternative way of establishing the boundaries of the knowledge management field and whether it encompasses the issue of power is required. Here we draw

on the methodology used by Barley, Meyer and Gash (1988) in their article *Cultures of Culture: Academics, Practitioners and the Pragmatics of Normative Control*; this article being recognized as an exemplary piece of research (Frost and Stablein, 1992). This is an approach to the study of the knowledge management literature have been adopted previously by Raub and Clemens-Ruling (2001) and Scarborough and Swan (2001). These studies, aim to use their data in order to identify and discuss the rise of knowledge management as a possible fad or fashion. Our study however, uses the data it generates in order to examine the way in which the knowledge management literature treats the issue of "power" over a particular period of time. More specifically, it provides the foundations from which an archaeology of knowledge management discourse can be framed.

### TOWARDS AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

For the purposes of our study, we chose to use the ABI/Inform databases. These hold abstracts, full text and referencing details for more than four million articles in business journals throughout the world. Other, similar such databases might have been used in our study. However, we believe that by virtue of its size, ABI/Inform captures most of the perspectives and approaches that organizational practitioners and theorists will be drawing on when thinking about designing and implementing knowledge management systems and it is therefore the most appropriate to use.

An initial global search using the keywords "knowledge management" found that four thousand two hundred and thirty five articles matching the keywords were published between January 1986 and July 2004. It was then possible to establish the growth pattern in the publication of knowledge management articles over this period by searching on the same keyword for each year of the period. The search only included articles in periodicals and did not include newspapers.

The search results reported in figure 1 clearly show that the growth of published knowledge management articles started to gain momentum around 1994 – a finding that is in line with other surveys of the knowledge management literature (Raub and Clemens-Ruling, 2001; Scarborough and Swan, 2001). The number of publications appeared to peak at nearly eight hundred in 2002. Thereafter, the figures for 2003 and 2004 suggest a decline. There is some evidence that this pattern of growth, followed by a levelling out and then decline, is a normal occurrence in the life cycle of a fad or fashion (Abrahamson, 1996; Gibson and Testone, 2001). Since the decline in knowledge management publications only occurred from 2003 it is of course possible that this turns out to be a temporary aberration and that in subsequent years numbers of publications return to the levels recorded for previous peak years. However, assuming that this is not the case and that the decline continues, the management fads and fashions literature suggests that it marks the beginning of either one of two scenarios. It could either mark the beginning of knowledge management's fading away as its adopters tire of it and the effort to maintain it, or it could be the beginning of a period where the number of knowledge management publications are somewhat less than those recorded in the peak years, but are nevertheless significant enough to suggest that it has become established as a mainstay of our management repertoire (Gibson and Testone, 2001).

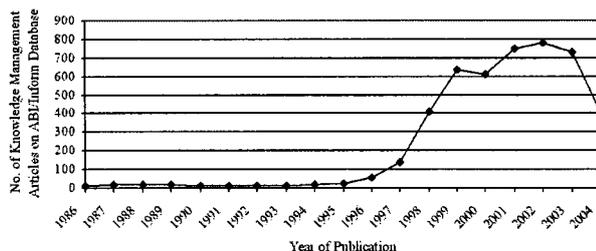


Figure 1 Growth in Knowledge Management literature.  
*n* = 4235 (total number of publications 01/01/1986 – 31/07/2004).

Our finding that the growth of published knowledge management articles started to gain

momentum around 1994 can be explained by examining the activities and observations of a number of knowledge management researchers. For example, in the early 1990s Davenport and Prusak started a research program on new approaches to information management. However they report that by 1994 it had become clear to them that what was now needed were insights into breakthrough processes that information management could not supply regardless of how well it was managed. They became convinced that these insights could only be achieved through the effective use of knowledge (Davenport and Prusak, 1998: xii). Around the same time that they were formulating these views other management writers appear to have been thinking along the same lines. Drucker (1993) identified knowledge as the new basis for competition in the post-capitalist society; Stewart (1995) warned that companies need to focus on what they know rather than on what they own, that is, they need to focus on their intellectual capital; Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) published a ground-breaking study of the generation and use of knowledge in Japanese firms; and Leonard-Barton (1995) published a study on the role of knowledge in manufacturing firms. These publications appear to mark the start of a period of rapid growth in the knowledge management literature.

A further survey of this body of literature revealed the extent to which, and in what ways, it addresses the construct of power. This was achieved by searching the three thousand one hundred and ninety five records that matched the keywords “knowledge management” for the keyword “power” between 1986 and 2004. The search yielded one hundred and thirty eight matches respectively. None of them refer to publications that appeared prior to 1994. For the purpose of discovering which themes dominate the knowledge management literature between 1986 and 2004, further searches for keywords including: “culture”, “knowledge intensive firms / companies”, “organization development”, “organizational change” “sustainable competitive advantage”, “organizational learning” “information”, “organizational memory”, “human capital”, “human resource

management", "strategy", and "technology" were also carried out. The results are shown in figure 2. They clearly show that, to date, the literature has been dominated by the themes of "information" and "technology" and that in comparison to these two themes, power has not played a prominent role in the development of the knowledge management literature. The data also show that there has been a significant growth in the knowledge management literature concerning "strategy" and "organizational learning", and to a lesser extent, "culture" and human resource management. In line with our findings concerning the knowledge management literature and power, no publications concerning organizational learning, culture and human resource management and only five concerning strategy appeared before 1994.

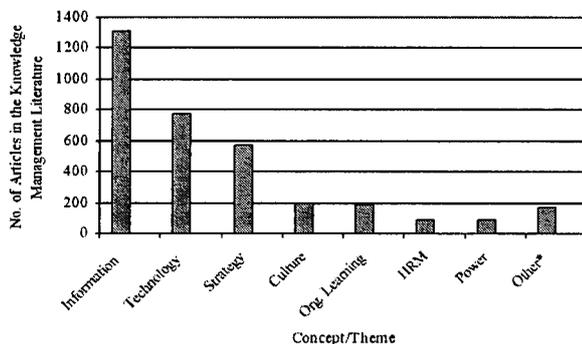


Figure 2 Comparison of concepts/themes in the Knowledge Management literature. \* Refers to a combined total for words and phrases identified in less than 40 articles over the 1986-2004 period using the keyword search facility on ABI/Inform. These include "knowledge intensive firms / companies", "organisation development", "organisational change", "sustainable competitive advantage", "organisational learning", "organisational memory", and "human capital".

Of the one hundred and thirty eight knowledge management articles that mention power, nearly half use the word power but do not discuss the relationship between knowledge management and power. Twenty of these articles discuss knowledge as a resource that "is", "gives" or "equals" power with just over a third of them having a title that includes the term "knowledge is power". As we will show later, this indicates that those articles that do address power are most likely doing so with

respect to the "power-as-entity" approach.

Only four of the articles on power treat the relationship between knowledge management and power as being problematic. One of these articles, by Mclaughlin and Webster (1998), explores the impact of a new information technology system on the knowledge claims and occupational boundaries of professional groups within a hospital laboratory setting. A second article by Garrick and Clegg (2001) examines power and the legitimization of project-based learning initiatives in the workplace. A third article by McKinley (2002) shows how prescriptive and managerialist approaches to knowledge management ignore its impact on the power related dimensions of the labour process and the importance of organizational politics. In a fourth article, Gray (2001) shows how knowledge management systems increase the extent to which some employees are interchangeable while reducing the level of skills they need to carry out their work. He argues that where managers choose to capitalise on these effects to increase their control, these employees may find their power positions eroded. These four studies are particularly useful in that they explore the relationship between facets of knowledge management and power, and in so doing begin to shift to a power-as-strategy approach to power (the power as strategy approach is discussed in more detail further on).

In sum, a substantial growth in the knowledge management literature began in 1994. The concepts and themes which, to date, have dominated the literature, are related to information and technical disciplines; concepts such as culture, organizational learning and strategy are beginning to gain more attention in the field while the concept of power remains under-explored. Those few journal articles that do mention power tend to treat it as unproblematic and aspire to the power-as-entity approach. While there is at least some indication that the power-as-strategy approach has been broached, there is no evidence of the power-is-knowledge approach.

## TOWARDS A GENEALOGY OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The organizational power literature is permeated by polarities, paradoxes and tensions (Bradshaw, 1998). Some of these tensions include obedience versus resistance (Jerrier et al, 1994) power versus powerlessness (Gaventa, 1980) individual agency versus structure (Lukes, 1974); oppression versus emancipation (Alvessen and Wilmott, 1992); and overt versus unobtrusive power (Hardy, 1995). The result is that there are numerous and often contradicting definitions.

In the following sections the power literature is reviewed using the three broad categories of "power-as-entity", "power-as-strategy" and "power-is-knowledge". The main objective is not to offer a comprehensive coverage of the power literature. Rather, it is to show how the form of genealogical analysis advocated by Foucault can be used to illustrate a juxtaposition between discourse and practice (i.e. discourses constrain power practices and power practices shape discourses) across these three categories. More specifically, we will illustrate that Foucault's approach to genealogy not only acts as a major turning point in the study and understanding of power, but also offers potential new insights into the field of knowledge management.

### POWER AS ENTITY

The work of Marx and Weber exemplifies the power-as-entity approach to power and many theorists have used their models as a basis for developing their own theories (see Parsons, 1937; 1951; Dahl, 1961; Gouldner, 1970). While the Marxian and Weberian models are distinctly different in perspective, they both refer to power as an entity; that is, something that somebody or some group either does or does not have. It is often referred to as person "A" doing something to person "B", that causes "B" to do something they would not otherwise do. Such an approach views power as being overt, embedded in decision making and thus indissoluble from its exercise.

Marx's (1867) view of power was a radical critique that argued that the outcomes of power were predetermined by a class structure, in which the social elite or owners of capital dominated and oppressed the labour force. Weber (1914), however, who saw the Marxian view as being crude and deterministic, recognized class distinction but argued that labour also had access to power. He suggested that the labour force could exercise power because they possessed the skills and knowledge needed by the owners and controllers of capital.

After almost one hundred years, Bachrach and Baratz (1963) and then shortly after, Lukes (1974) offered the first significant enrichment of the Marxian and Weberian models of power. The Marxian and Weberian models have subsequently been recognised as representing the first dimension of power. Bachrach and Baratz added a second dimension, arguing that Marx and Weber, along with Dahl (1961), who had by this time, introduced the community power debate, did not address "what does not happen". Non-issues, non-decision making, the shaping of agendas and the mobilisation of bias through everyday routines were introduced to show how power was accomplished through more covert inaction, rather than through the overt exercise of causal power (Clegg, 2000). It is important to note, however, that Bachrach and Baratz continued to see power as being related to an entity compelling another to do something they would not otherwise do.

Lukes (1974) took Bachrach and Baratz's critique and added a third dimension. He argued that not only are people capable of causing non-decisions, they are also capable of influencing how people see the world through the management of meaning. He suggested that what was needed was a conception which showed how power worked, not only against people's expressed and implicit interests, but also their "real interests"; their real interests being something that they were not aware of. The concept of "real interests" comes from the work of Marx, in which it is used as a grounding from which to illustrate the concept of "false consciousness". For Marx, false consciousness

is where a class of people is unable to recognise how the day-to-day routines of the system in which they exist are the source of their entrapment. Lukes also drew upon the work of Gramsci (1932) to introduce the concept of ideological hegemony. This is where people are oppressed within a system of domination and are unable to recognise what they really want or could have. The idea is that rather than a ruling class there is a dominant culture permeating institutional arenas.

In summary, within the power-as-entity literature, which is much broader than discussed here, we recognise that Bachrach, Baratz and Lukes build on and enrich the Marxian and Weberian models, in that they expose a more surreptitious dimension to power. However, they still view power as being held by an entity. The difference is that Luke's third dimension of power introduces interests and social structure to the debate. In short, for Lukes "'A' exercises power over 'B' when 'A' affects 'B' in a manner contrary to 'B's' interests" (1974: 27). In addition to viewing power as being held by an entity, the first, second and third dimensions of power are all somewhat normative in that they promote a form of power that aspires to ideals i.e. ideas about how things "should" be. For Weber the ideal is "rationality", for Marx, Bachrach and Baratz, and Lukes it is "democracy". The underlying theme for the power-as-entity approach appears to be a need to demystify processes and structures of domination so the subjugated can escape from them. Such a theme aligns itself with the normative assumption that with knowledge comes "truth", that is, a situation free from power. As we shall now show, the work of Foucault shakes the power-as-entity approach and normative idealism to their very core (Clegg and Hardy, 1996).

## POWER AS STRATEGY

As several writers have already pointed out, Foucault's work is not easily understood. Many have embraced his revolutionary ideas, but in translation the diversity of interpretation has resulted in a voluminous secondary literature that is fragmented and often contradictory (Clegg,

1989). However, one does not have to get lost in this myriad of interpretations. Clegg points out that there are writers who treat Foucault "as a very concrete and descriptive writer on power, in a line of scholarship in which Weber would not be unrecognizable" (Clegg, 1989: 153). Here, Haugaard's (1997) discussion of Foucault's work will be principally drawn upon, although it should be noted that several other writers have also provided excellent interpretations (e.g. Bauman, 1982; Crozier and Griedberg, 1977; McKinley and Starkey, 1998; Smart, 1985; Gane, 1986; Rabinow, 1991)

Foucault's work may be divided into three main phases: the archaeological, the genealogical and the care of the self. The archaeological writings include *The Order of Things* (1966), *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969); the genealogical writings include *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (1976); and the care of the self includes *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2* (1984) and *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality, Volume 3* (1984). In order to demonstrate why it is important for people interested in knowledge management to read Foucault we will focus mainly on the first two phases.

In his archaeological phase, Foucault uses history to show how things become taken for granted in the present, i.e. in everyday life. By "taken for granted" he means those things that people accept without question as constituting their reality. In doing so, he argues that reality is culturally specific; that is, reality is historically constituted with respect to the way things are done in a particular cultural setting. Since culture has a plurality, this specificity implies, as per the post-structuralist argument, that reality has a plurality. "Hence, there is no 'true' or 'correct' interpretation based upon the discovery of the truth" (Haugaard, 1997: 43).

In essence, Foucault's "archaeology of knowledge" refers to how meaning systems are historically constituted—a meaning system

being a historical a priori system of order that makes it possible for individuals to make sense of their world (Foucault, 1961). He uses many terms to describe meaning systems, such as episteme, regime of truth, discourse formation and interpretative horizon. The differences among these will not be discussed here; suffice to say that an underlying body of knowledge as well as codes by which people can make sense of their world, underpin them all.

While language obviously plays an important role in the transfer of meaning, Foucault shows that it does not construct meaning on its own. By comparing what was constituted as "truth" within different historical periods and different cultural settings, he is able to show that at a deeper more unobtrusive level there are rules and codes that govern meaning construction. For example, he argues that statements gain their meaning from their relationship with other statements in which they exist as a chain. He shows how the rules or codes, which govern the nature of the relationship among these statements, change in different historical and cultural settings. Over time, statements are used in different contexts and within knowledge bases that change. For instance, many people are familiar with the sentence "dreams fulfil desires". Foucault (1969: 103) notes that this statement "may have been repeated throughout centuries; but it is not the same statement in Plato and in Freud."

Haugaard (1997) offers a further interpretation of the codes that govern the construction of meaning. He adds that these codes are not spoken, nor are they deliberately created; rather they exist as a result of the experience of order, an unobtrusive order that makes it possible for actors to understand their world. This means that for people to make sense within a cultural system they need to know the codes that underlie that system's historically constituted knowledge. If they do not know these codes, they will find it difficult to make sense of much of what is going on around them. This is evident in the feeling of alienation that many people say they experience when they enter an unfamiliar cultural environment.

Foucault's archaeology begins to make the power-as-entity approach, to employ one of his own phrases, "groan with protest" (Foucault, 1977: 54). By using history to understand how the present has come to be, he destabilizes the principles of modernity. Throughout the modern period the human body and human mind form the locus of control and the source of knowledge and truth. Foucault's archaeology of knowledge questions the concepts of "identity" and "self" by suggesting that there is no core self; rather, perceptions of self are socially constituted. Foucault suggests that the modern period is as certain of collapse as the classical was: "one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea" (Foucault, 1966: 387). What Foucault is arguing here is that people are not the only source of knowledge or truth; rather the meaning systems in which people exist guide how truth is produced and subsequently what is constituted as knowledge. The significance of this point to knowledge management is that for knowledge management systems to actually manage knowledge they need to recognise, reflect on, and encapsulate how the meaning systems in which they exist guide truth production.

There is a problem, however, with Foucault's archaeology of knowledge. The idea of a meaning system determining what is considered to be truth and knowledge offers no explanation for change or the extension of knowledge within this system. That is, if the past determined the present, things would never change. Foucault addressed this criticism with genealogical analysis, which is the study of the strategies and conflict that go into the creation of a meaning system. For Foucault, "truth production" and the dynamic of knowledge are situated in a theory of power. He argues: "'truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to the effects of power that induce and extend it" (Foucault, 1977: 133). Thus, it is power that enables, drives and shapes the production of new "truths" and constitutes (new) knowledge. This means, the production of truth and hence knowledge, is inseparable from power.

It follows from this that the production of "truth" and knowledge in any cultural formation is the consequence of a struggle for power. Haugaard (1997: 68) interprets this as suggesting that such struggle results in a disqualification of some representations of knowledge as idiocy and a fight for others as "truth". Foucault (1975) argues that when the struggle for power gives rise to a representation being seen as "truth", there has been a positive outcome of power. This is what Foucault means by power in a positive form. He does not see this as positive in the sense that it is something people should welcome. Rather he sees it as being positive because it introduces change into the system by virtue of creating new realities, truths and thus, knowledge (1997).

Such a view of power suggests that power can no longer be seen as a convenient, manipulable and deterministic resource. It is more than just something that "A" does to "B" to make "B" do something that "B" would not otherwise do. Nor can one simply argue that power is "A" making "B" do something against "B's" interests. Foucault's work, while sympathetic to that of Marx (1867), Habermas (1970; 1984) and Lukes (1974), by decentering the "self" challenges the concepts of "real interests" and "false consciousness". His archaeology of knowledge shows that because cultural groups have their own bodies of knowledge and perceptions of truth and reality there is no grand narrative; people cannot assume that they know the best interests of other groups, or that these groups are victims of false consciousness. To do so, is to assume an intellectual superiority and in a cultural sense is also unavoidably ethnocentric.

In summary, Foucault's work positions actors within a web of power relations from which there is no escape (Clegg, 1989). "It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (Foucault, 1977: 52). Thus, truth, knowledge and reality are constituted by the struggle for power. Foucault's thrust is strategic, descriptive and empirical (Clegg, 2000). Such an approach challenges the normative

idea that truth and knowledge exist independently of context; rather truth and knowledge are strategically constituted by the outcomes of power struggles.

## POWER IS KNOWLEDGE

Of the many theorists who have built upon and critiqued the work of Foucault, the work of Barnes (1988), Clegg (1989), Fuller (2002), Giddens (1979; 1984), Hinds (1997), Haugaard (1997; 2000) and Flyvbjerg (1998) is of particular significance to the field of knowledge management. This section concentrates on the recent work of Haugaard (1997) and Flyvbjerg (1998) which is especially significant to the field of knowledge management and the nature of change in today's business environments.

Haugaard (1997) reflects upon the work of Lukes, Giddens, Barnes and Foucault in order to develop a theory of power that encompasses the concepts of institutions, conflict, freedom, resources and truth. His main contributions are his development of the concept of practical consciousness and his negotiation of Luke's problem of assuming other people's "real interests".

Building on the work of Giddens (1984), Haugaard suggests that an organization's meaning systems are subject to its own forms of "practical consciousness". By practical consciousness he means a set of codes that govern sense production, codes which have been constituted relative to the daily routines of both doing and talking about work. The practical consciousness of a doctor's surgery would be very different to that of a hardware store. The recognition of an organization's practical consciousness and how it differs from the practical consciousness of other organizations is of particular importance to people interested in knowledge management systems. For instance, how might the practical consciousness of organizations influence the design of their knowledge management systems? Alternatively, how does the implementation of a knowledge management system affect

the practical consciousness of those within an organization?

With respect to Lukes' dilemma, Haugaard suggests that it is not necessary to make assumptions about what people's real interests are, but to explain to them the way that their structured practices, in particular their organization's "practical consciousness", feed into and reinforce a regime of domination. The key is to converse with people so that they can reflect upon how this regime of domination may affect their interests, which are already known to them. An interesting question here is—particularly in an era in which the empowerment of lower level workers is recognised as a necessary strategy for survival—, are knowledge management systems being designed to reinforce or disperse existing regimes of domination? And if so, how and why?

At issue for Haugaard (1997: 141) is not whether interests are true or false, but how the maintenance of large bodies of knowledge as practical consciousness is bound up in the reproduction of relations of domination which takes the form of a constraining discourse. Within organizations, the effects of power (the production of truth and knowledge) depend upon the relationship between the practical consciousness of people and the discursive consciousness that various discourses proffer (Clegg, 2000). It is perhaps for these reasons that information technology, and more recently knowledge management, have become two of the most influential discourses shaping the direction of contemporary organizational change.

Flyvbjerg, on the other hand, provides an empirical study that exemplifies the problematic nature of representation. He shows how the politics among interest groups within a Danish city—council departments, business associations and environmental groups—cause a plan to rationalise the transport infrastructure of the city to degenerate into a string of petty incidents with unintended, unanticipated and undemocratic consequences (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 225). Through the use of the Foucauldian

power-as-strategy approach, Flyvbjerg (1998: 6) discovers that the main question is not who governs "but what government rationalities are at work when those that govern, govern?" His focus is on how people use representations to rationalise rationality. Like Foucault, Flyvbjerg argues that power shapes what is seen to be rational. Furthermore, Flyvbjerg's work is particularly valuable because it provides a richly documented narrative which shows, through the use of empirical data, how the struggle for power shapes rationality.

For Flyvbjerg, while the Francis Bacon (1620) dictum "knowledge is power", is important, it does not go far enough. Like Foucault he draws upon the work of both Machiavelli and Nietzsche to show that "power is knowledge". In doing so, his thrust is also strategic and empirical. Through this approach he is able to show that, while the modern ideals of "truth", "justice" and "democracy" might be virtuous and worth fighting for, they are not, as normative theory would argue, context independent. On the contrary, they are context dependent and the context of these ideals is power. He shows that rationalization presented as rationality is the principal strategy in the exercise of power and that rationalization can be seen as the production and construction of domination / influence through the negotiation of meaning and political struggles. In short, in a given context, people are capable of strategically representing their interests and intentions so that they are seen as being rational.

If Flyvbjerg is correct rationality can be shown to have a plurality which is context dependent. This raises several important questions. For example, what happens to this rationalization process when a knowledge management system is introduced to an organization? Will the organization witness a whole new range of rationalization strategies that result in the reinforcement, or change, of the "guard"? Alternatively, how does the rationalization process affect the design, implementation and ongoing management of the knowledge management system?

## CONCLUSIONS

Prior to Foucault the power-as-entity approach dominated people's understanding of power. As mentioned earlier, power was seen as a convenient, manipulable and deterministic resource: something that someone possessed and could use in order to get someone else to do something they would not otherwise do. If "knowledge is power", then possession of knowledge implies possession of power. This dictum, while important, adheres to the power-as-entity model. With respect to this model, the more knowledge a person has the closer he or she is to "truth". Furthermore, if knowledge is power then it seems reasonable to suggest that the knowledge management literature should seek to examine whether the knowledge management systems that are put in place in organizations are designed and managed in a way that is commensurate with this perspective of power. However, the review of the contemporary knowledge management literature reveals that this is not the case. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that power has, with a handful of exceptions, been either ignored or normalized.

Perhaps more importantly, Foucault's work shows that the power-as-entity approach, while important, does not go far enough. This does not mean that the approach is invalid; on the contrary, Francis Bacon's (1620) assertion that "knowledge is power" is correct. The point is, however, that the work of Foucault and the post-Foucauldian power theorists, in particular the work of Flyvbjerg (1998), shows us that "power is also knowledge". Bearing in mind that Foucault also argued there was an inseparability between knowledge and power, the inversion of the "knowledge is power" dictum to "power is knowledge", has significant implications for the field of knowledge management. For instance, the thrust of the statement "power is knowledge" is distinctly empirical so that in order to appreciate how "power is knowledge" one must adopt a strategy-and-tactics approach to power. In such an approach, who governs – as per the Weberian model – is not as important as understanding what strategies

and tactics are used to rationalise people's interests and intentions.

The power-as-entity approach is distinctly normative in that the theories underpinning this approach aspire to ideals such as "truth", "rationality" and "democracy", all of which are supposed to exist independent of context. These ideals represent viewpoints of how things "ought" to be done. In contrast, the work of Foucault and in particular Flyvbjerg shows that rather than studying what "ought" to be done, theorists need to reorient themselves towards studying what is "actually" done. Flyvbjerg (1998) empirically demonstrated, in contrast to normative theory, that "power is truth", "power is knowledge" and "power is rationality". This implies that power is inescapable and thus no knowledge or ideals are context free. This also implies that no knowledge management system is free from the effects of power.

To date, the power-as-strategy approach to power has been largely ignored by the knowledge management literature. In consequence, those reflecting on the current knowledge management literature are unlikely to recognise and appreciate the problematic nature of the relationship between power and knowledge management systems. It is unlikely that they will be alerted to how the struggle for power within an organization may influence the design, implementation and ongoing management of a knowledge management system, or for that matter, how the knowledge management system will influence the struggle for power. It is therefore crucial for theorists and practitioners to introduce the construct of power and its implications into their thinking, research and practice of knowledge management.

If knowledge and power are inseparable, then the limited coverage of power and, in particular, the lack of a strategy-and-tactics approach to power, render much of the knowledge management literature problematic. At the least, the literature can be enriched by research that adopts a more in-depth approach to power. One could argue that organizations may not have a choice. Today's business envi-

ronments are in a continuous state of change and are becoming more diverse nature. The boundaries of identity and power relationships in and between organizations are becoming less salient. People and organizations have multiple signs, in the form of diverse social roles and cyberspace icons, as opposed to a single identity (Clegg, 1989; 1990). As a result, people are being bombarded by an array of discursive representations and discourses that reflect unfamiliar bodies of knowledge and systems of sense production. Truth and rationality are not singular, they have a plurality that the modern and normative theoretical approaches cannot engage with. Thus, knowledge management theorists and practitioners need to adopt a more in-depth understanding of power and in so doing expose themselves to the power-as-strategy and the power-is-knowledge approaches.

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