

The Third Space of Knowledge. Leadership and Creativity

Concluding remarks at the conference on Leadership and Creativity, Bramstrup, June 2004.

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Introduction

At the conference on Leadership and Creativity, Bramstrup June 2004, I had the opportunity to try to summarise our three days of lectures, performances and discussions. This short paper represents a summary of my summary, inviting participants to improve and comment on my points. I will start by presenting what for me seemed to be the central concept of our discussions, i.e. the concept of knowledge. From there, I will briefly summarise those three topics, which for me emerged as the basic themes during our discussions.

The Mystery of Knowledge

The Weird World of “Mind vs. Reality”

According to Cartesian philosophy, the world can be divided into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. The thinking subject versus the external – not-thinking – world. Consequently, knowledge is the result of a correspondence between mind and world.

Thus, to know something is to establish a link or a correspondence between mind and reality. Just listen to the words: A “link”. “Mind versus reality” – as if mind isn’t reality, and as if thoughts are models “corresponding” to an external world. According to this world-view, to know something is to transport knowledge from the external world into the mind. Consequently, knowledge is the store of facts (in the computer- age: the memory of information), and to share knowledge is to transfer knowledge from one file to another.

Still, most epistemological theory implicitly assumes that this weird world of correspondences, of minds outside reality and realities outside mind, constitutes the indisputable precondition for talking about knowledge. You may disagree about what comes first. You may be “realist” or “antirealist”. Still, however, the very distinction between mind and reality is beyond discussion (for a recent example see Klausen 2004).

In accordance with this theory, modern knowledge management theory defines knowledge as a substance. Knowledge management is equal to management of physical processes. It is a theory about how to file, to transport and to provide access to knowledge substances.

Critique of “the ghost in the machine” paradigm

Inspired by e.g. Edmund Husserl’s critique of the Cartesian philosophy, in 1949 the English language philosopher Gilbert Ryle reacted against this paradigm. He characterised the idea that there should exist a certain thinking device, which did not belong to the world, as “the ghost in the machine” paradigm. As a result of his criticism, Ryle concluded that knowledge cannot primarily be understood as knowledge-of something. With his famous statement in *The Concept of Mind* “knowing-that” presupposes “knowing-how” (Ryle 1949). In order to know that something is the case, one must know the conditions on which it is the case. Facts are not simply facts, but they are facts according to an attitude or a point of view, which could be otherwise. The innocence of pure knowledge has been lost.

With his critique of pure knowledge and with his addition of knowing-how to knowing-that, Ryle broke the curse of knowledge. Knowledge is more than knowing-that. He passed from first order to second order knowledge. i. e. from simple knowledge (knowledge of something) to reflexive knowledge (knowledge of knowledge). However, he did not reach the third or fourth orders of

knowledge, i.e. the orders of knowledge in which the mystery of knowledge occurs: The orders in which new knowledge is created.

Categories of Knowledge

Inspired by the phenomenological critique of the Cartesian paradigm, and particularly influenced by the American anthropologist and epistemologist Gregory Bateson, in a new book, *The Knowing Society*, with the subtitle: "The mystery of knowledge, learning and culture" (Qvortrup 2004) I have systematised the categories of knowledge with a special focus on the third category of knowledge, creative knowledge.

In accordance with Ryle's critique of Cartesian dualism, in the 1960s Bateson suggested that learning and communication can be divided into four categories: first, second, third and fourth order learning (Bateson 2000 [1972])¹. Taking inspiration in Bateson's categorisation, from a phenomenological or systems theoretical approach one can identify four forms of knowledge. First order knowledge is simple knowledge: Knowledge about something. Second order knowledge is knowledge about knowledge, i.e. reflexive or situated knowledge. This category corresponds to Ryle's "knowing-how". Third order knowledge is knowledge about knowledge about knowledge, i.e. knowledge about the preconditions for reflexive knowledge. Finally, one can identify a fourth category of knowledge, which represents the social evolution of knowledge, i.e. the collective and perhaps unconscious knowledge process and the total knowledge potential. This is closely related to what Edmund Husserl called the meaning horizon of society.

The theory presented in *The Knowing Society* builds on this idea. Its main claim is that a mundanised subject observing the world in order to know about the world – and all subjects are mundanised subjects – must make the following forms of observation:

- it must observe the world as an object of observation
- it must observe itself in the world
- it must observe the world as a precondition for observing the world

In addition, this theory of knowledge presupposes that the world, including the subjects observing the world, exists as a knowledge horizon, i.e. as a totality of what can be known. The theory furthermore presupposes that this world is dynamic, i.e. that it changes in unforeseen directions (this is the result of its hypercomplexity, cf. Qvortrup 2003) and thus makes change of knowledge possible. It isn't just a knowledge world, but also a knowing world. Society can not adequately be characterised as a "knowledge society", but it should be termed a "knowing society". Finally, the theory assumes that changes in the world take place by virtue of the world itself. Drawing a distinction between the subject and the world, the mundanised subject changes the world through its observation, and it is changed by the world through its observation: It transforms the world and is transformed thereby, whether this last change is called socialisation or learning.

This implies that four categories of knowledge can be identified:

Knowledge category	Knowledge form	Knowledge designation
1. order or simple knowledge	Knowledge about something	Factual knowledge
2. order or complex knowledge	Knowledge about the conditions of knowing	Reflexive or situative knowledge
3. order or hypercomplex knowledge	Knowledge about the conditions of the reflexive knowledge system	Systemic or creative knowledge
4. order knowledge	Society as dynamic knowledge horizon, i.e. the knowing society	World knowledge

¹ See also the detailed review of Bateson's categories of learning in Qvortrup 2001.

Where the first forms of knowledge represent observation-based forms of knowledge, i.e. relations between subject and world (including the subject's knowledge of itself as a subject in the world), the fourth form of knowledge is not knowledge about the world but the world as knowledge.

First order knowledge is knowledge about something. For instance, I know that from where I am sitting I can see a beautiful bed of rhododendrons, and I know that the large plant in the middle is a *Rhododendron Cawtabiensis*.

Second order knowledge is knowledge about knowledge, i.e. the capacity for self-observation. Not only do I know that the shrub out there is a *Rhododendron Cawtabiensis*, but I also know that I know it because I had to elaborate my wishes to the owner of the nursery I bought it from. I also know that the fact that I consider it beautiful may be because I planted it myself. In other words, I am not only capable of categorising what I see, but I also have the ability to stand next to my own observation and consider it.

Third order knowledge is knowledge about knowledge about knowledge, i.e. knowledge about the system of knowledge that first order knowledge is based on. I know what I know according to a knowledge system or paradigm. It can, for instance, be knowledge of the botanical systematics, which lead to the designations of species that I employ. Or it can be knowledge of the aesthetic criteria for beauty, which make me find my garden beautiful. My aesthetic preferences could be caused by a predilection for English garden aesthetics rather than the more formal French or Italian classicist garden aesthetics.

Finally, fourth order knowledge is knowledge transcending the preconditions for the knowledge systematic. One sometimes says that it is represented by the entire cultural system, into which these knowledge forms and judgements of taste are embedded. Following Bateson's categories of learning and communication, this fourth order knowledge is a very particular form of knowledge, which cannot be contained within one person but resides in the social community of which the individuals are members.

The Third Order of Knowledge: String Quartets and other Hypercomplex Knowledge Systems

In order to realise that knowledge is more than knowing-that, and particularly in order to understand the inherent dynamics of third order knowledge, one should return to the critique of the Cartesian paradigm and its replacement by the phenomenological paradigm. As already emphasised, this paradigm states what should be obvious: that the human mind is part of the world. This implies that the mind is an extensive thing and that it can be studied as such. But it also implies that the world is – creative. Creativity belongs to the world, not just to the human mind.

This third order of knowledge has been explored by many modern philosophers, among others by the French philosopher Michel Serres (cf. Serres 1997). According to Serres, in order to learn something one doesn't just go from what one knows to what one doesn't know. It is the change of "view" that represents the real learning, and it is only by changing one's view that something new is created. "In crossing the river, in delivering itself completely naked to belonging to the opposite shore, it has just learned a third thing. The other side, new customs, a new language, certainly. But above all, it has just discovered learning in this blank middle that has no direction from which to find all directions." (Serres 1997 p. 7)

Traditionally, this category of knowledge would have been called "transcendental knowledge", because it transcends factual and reflexive knowledge. It may also be called the "event of knowledge", because it doesn't designate the specific instances of knowledge, e.g. in a performance or in a musical piece, but it represents that which happens when these instances are experienced as a totality, i.e. as an event.

In addition to designating third order knowledge "systemic knowledge", I also suggest that it should be called "creative knowledge". Partly, this suggestion is based on the fact that the one who knows or just get a glimpse of the conditions of his or her first and second order knowledge (knowledge of the world and reflexive knowledge) is able to change the conditions of these basic knowledge forms. Partly, and more importantly, it is based on the fact that knowledge, which is based on its own reflexive conditionality, isn't just complex, but hypercomplex knowledge.

The term of hypercomplexity was introduced in sociology by Niklas Luhmann: According to him a hypercomplex system is a system "...that is oriented to its own complexity and seeks to grasp it as complexity, because the attempt – since it occurs within the system and must be established as self-description – produces more than itself. (...) In hypercomplex systems, the presentation of the system within the system can be experienced as contingent." (Luhmann 1995 [1984] p. 471).

Michel Serres has expressed the same quality of knowledge as pointing out of itself in a more poetic manner. According to him like an ellipse knowledge has two centres. In my terms it would be first and second order knowledge. However, knowledge in its third order observes the relationship between itself in its first and second order. What informs the distinction between knowing-that and knowing-how? The answer, which is creative, is given in a third question, i.e. knowing-why. In the words of Serres, "...knowledge functions elliptically, as Kepler already said of the planetary system. (...) To measure the constant separation of these two poles, to estimate what the flamboyant star owes to the blind point and the latter to the former, to search for the reasons for such a distance, to evaluate the productivity of the dark zone and even the fecundity of this double and no longer simple command or attractive regulation (...) this is the program of the Third Instruction, given in terms of Kepler's law." (Serres 1997 [1991] p. 37f)

Potentially, string quartets – and other similar social systems, which orient themselves towards their own complexity, which search for the secret of the distance between the two centres of the ellipse, which constantly orient themselves towards observing their own blind spot – should be coined: hypercomplex knowledge systems. Such systems are unpredictable. They produce more than can be predicted from within the system. They are, in a systematic sense, creative.

The Basic Themes of the Bramstrup Conference

During the three days of performances, lectures and discussions at the Bramstrup estate, three basic themes emerged:

- Communication through art
- Leadership of creative processes
- Art(ist) in residence

I will briefly summarise these three themes.

Communication through art

Looking at the ways in which we communicate through art, art is observed as a communication medium. When persons communicate or phenomena are observed through art – the third form of knowledge – it is possible to address the conditions or basic assumptions of that what is said, i.e. the decision premises of that what is decided.

At the conference, this was exemplified by the former managing director of Novo Nordic, Mads Øvlisen. "When I communicate with my employees through a work of art, we can address the basic conditions of our communication", he said. Or, similarly: "Through art we can talk about that which otherwise cannot be talked about."

For me this implies that one should make a distinction between so-called "tacit knowledge" (cf. Polanyi) and the third form of knowledge. According to Polanyi, bicycling is tacit knowledge, because one cannot verbally instruct others in how to ride a bicycle. However, bicycling certainly is not art. Thus, tacit knowledge does not represent that, which cannot be talked about, but it represents that, which cannot be explicated, e.g. dance, gestures etc.

Leadership of creative processes

Discussing the issue of how to lead creative processes, the leadership of art performances was the main example. One case was the explicit leadership of the conductor, while another case was the implicit leadership of the string quartet, i.e. the fact that the playing of the string quartet is not necessarily lead by a conducting primarius, but may rather be lead but something else, which for the

sake of better words is often referred to as a “mutual spirit”. I would, of course, suggest that this should be called the third order knowledge of the string quartet.

To conduct means con-ducere, leading through. Thus, a conductor is a medium for observation. Those who are conducted may observe something special through the conductor.

Three types of observation can be made through the explicit or implicit conductor.

Ex-acting: Here, the function of the conductor is to make exact acting possible. This relates to the first form of knowledge. The actors – musicians – play the right notes at the right time, i.e. they are informed by factual knowledge.

Inter-acting: Here, the function of the conductor is to make acting together – interaction – possible. This relates to the second form of knowledge, situative knowledge. Through the conductor the actors – e.g. musicians – observe each other, not just in order to play exact, but in order to observe themselves through the other. What and how should I play, observing that the other plays this or that? Situative knowledge supports improvisation, and improvisation means: Observing myself through the other. The musician plays as he does instructed by the performance of the others. This may be termed second-instructedness.

Trans-acting: Here, the function of the conductor is to make acting possible according to the transcendentality of the work of art, e.g. the piece of music. This relates to the third form of knowledge, creative knowledge. The actors do not just observe the notes or each other, but through the conductor or through their collective spirit they observe what Aristotle called the “catharsis” of the work of art. Here, the musician plays, what he plays, observing the “spirit” of the collective action. This may be termed third-instructedness.

Art(ist) in residence

Art can be defined as a communication medium. Observing the world through art – or through science – is to observe the preconditions of our common observations, or the transcendentality of knowledge. Through art we understand – or we get a glimpse of that fact – that every observation is an observation made according to an otherwise in-observable attitude.

Art or artists in residence – and in a strict sense every artist is in residence – is re-contextualised art or artists. To introduce art in a business enterprise or to invite an artist into a company is to introduce a new view into that organisation. It is to invite the employees to observe the otherwise in-observable attitude on which all everyday observations and actions are based.

During the conference, different metaphors for re-contextualised art or artists were suggested:

- *The readymade metaphor.* Here the artist uses the business enterprise or the organisation as Duchamp used readymades. Duchamp re-contextualised an ordinary and practically useful object and thus created a new vision of that object. The artist in residence recontextualises the enterprise from inside by making it an art work. Thus, the enterprise is used by the artist as he would traditionally use canvas for his oil painting.
- *The diplomacy metaphor.* Here the new place of art, the organisation or enterprise, is defined as a negotiation arena for people speaking different languages, and to be an artist in residence is to be a translator or mediator between world views or languages. However, the artist in residence has certain privileges. He has a “diplomatic passport”.
- *Art gallery or atelier metaphor.* Here the organisation or enterprise is a context for art, a place to decorate or in which to place the art works. The artist in residence produces the works of art himself, or he acts as a curator within the organisation.
- *Organisation engineering metaphor.* Here the artist in residence is invited into a new enterprise environment in order to change this environment. By tradition, the manager would have invited an organisation consultant. Today, she invites an artist.
- *Trojan horse metaphor.* Here the organisation is perceived as the enemy of the artist, who has slipped into this foreign realm by hiding his real intentions. Having entered this new world, it is his intention to change it from inside – not knowing that entering a new place is to change yourself accordingly.

- *Sameness/otherness metaphor*. Here the artist represents something different from the organisation. A new view or a new spirit is introduced into the organisation with the aim of inspiring the employees – cf. the fact that inspiration means exactly in-spirate, i.e. the introduction of a new spirit.

Instead of a Conclusion

I certainly dare not to bring this personal summary of the Bramstrup conference into a conclusion. However, I am looking forward to continuing the discussion of art and research as a third category of knowledge, and to discuss its implications for communication through art, for leadership of creative processes, and for art and artists in residence.

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