

THE DUALITY OF KNOWLEDGE

More than emphasizing the dichotomy of knowledge – of which a lot of the mentioned personalities labeled using their own terms – I believe that human knowledge is best described as being dual in nature.

Inside every human brain exists a balance between what is termed as soft and hard knowledge – a delicate combination of know-how that is best experienced and yet not fully expressed, and know-what that can be clearly communicated. The degree to which the two scales tip appear different from person to person. It is this duality that pushes the study of Knowledge Management to advance from merely capturing soft knowledge and transforming it into hard knowledge, into coming to terms with the idea that true knowledge is gained from both explicitly communicated knowledge and consistent human interaction.

Personally, I find it interesting that over the years, scientists have belabored trying to capture and illustrate the dichotomy of knowledge. In the material of Hildreth and Kimble, the segment that discusses this dichotomy cited several works of researchers – a number of which enlightened and amused me on the subject. There's Conklin's *formal and informal* knowledge; Rulke, Zaheer and Anderson's *transactive and resource* knowledge. What is quite easy to relate to is Brown and Duguid's *know-how and know-what*. I think, the latter presented a clear picture of how dichotomizing knowledge can be such a one-track minded proposition.

Leonard and Sensiper's knowledge continuum appealed more to me, making it clear how the realm of man's knowledge can be so encompassing. Tacit knowledge on one extreme, and explicit knowledge on the other; what lies at the center is where most of our everyday knowledge can fall. In my mind however, I see little need for Knowledge Management to control tacit knowledge and make it explicit, or the other way around. That is because doing so would render one and the other fruitless, or shall we say unnecessary.

In essence, I think arguing that any piece of information stored in one's head can have both soft and hard knowledge qualities is the way to go. It is neither nor, instead of either or. Now, the idea of "managing" soft knowledge into "shareable" pieces or experiences is best seen in the way Communities of Practice operate.

For instance, in the parish where I belong, leadership is a big thing among the youth. Having been exposed to leadership opportunities in my younger years, I have always made it my mission to pass on whatever I've learned to new members who I believe have strong potentials. It is easy to pass on the knowledge that I've gained through the parish manual, the project and activity guides that exist, and sometimes, via pictures and footage of actual seminars and fora I have conducted in the past. However, trying to train a group of youngsters to understand and value the group's purpose the way I do is quite hard to pass on. It takes more than word of mouth, more than written tests and accomplishment reports. The community I have helped foster among the potential leaders allows for shared personal experiences that become journeys of faith. Still, my past experiences are not the same as theirs. Events during my time are different from what they now undergo. Hence, the soft knowledge that I have inside me is never going to be replicated in their case. And no matter how hard I try to explain or speak about it, I will never be able to explain clearly why I handle problems differently than they do.

Back to my reaction paper, one thing that I find critical in the discussion was the idea of boundary objects. These can convey information over distances and serve as crucial links that people can actually use to manage knowledge. Here is where I see the intimate role of Information Technology in closing the wide gaps between people and places, cultures and traditions, as well as soft and hard knowledge between and amongst peoples' heads. But this can only happen with human interference, for IT definitely has its limitations, and trying to transform soft knowledge into hard knowledge is one of these.