Knowledge Scenarios: Organic Knowledge and Inorganic Knowledge

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Abstract: Knowledge Management consist nowadays in a wide range of practices. However, there are two basic concepts in the Knowledge literature: Tacit and Explicit Knowledge. This article suggests conceptualizing both concepts related to 'the reality', and proposes a basic model for Acquisition, Creation and Transmission of knowledge, introducing the idea of 'Organic Knowledge' and 'Inorganic Knowledge'.

About Tacit Knowledge and Explicit Knowledge

We have heard the terms "**tacit**" and "**explicit**" many times. Probably so many times what it might seem that Knowledge Management has nothing more to explain, except these terms. This is not entirely true, but it is a bit correct because these terms are real bases for Knowledge.

About Philosophy

It is well known the existence of Schools of Philosophy that for centuries up to today have maintained several points of view -still valid- on the reality of the world and, in relation to this, on Knowledge. We will not detail them here, but at least we mention them as a key reference about knowledge.

Trying to understand the "why" of things will always provide us with a solid basis for directing our actions, even though we know that philosophical discussions do not solve our everyday business problems.

It is worth thinking about the primitive mechanism that works in the world and to understand thoroughly what happens around us, related to knowledge. Thus, in this way, it will be easier to plan present and future strategies.

Let's start by considering the existence of a "**World**" composed of "**Objects**" and "**Subjects**" capable of knowing the objects. We will talk about people as "subjects".

About Knowledge

Knowledge is described from philosophy as a flow, a relationship between a subject that accedes to know and an object that will be known.
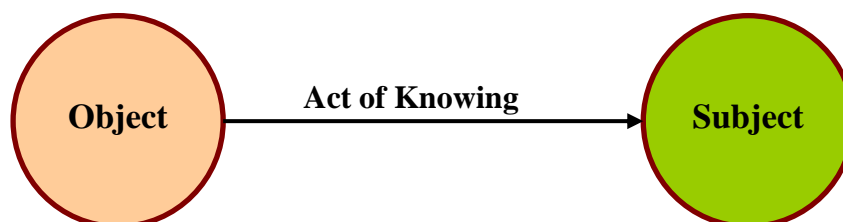
Based on that, I'm going to explain this simple schema:

Reality and Knowledge
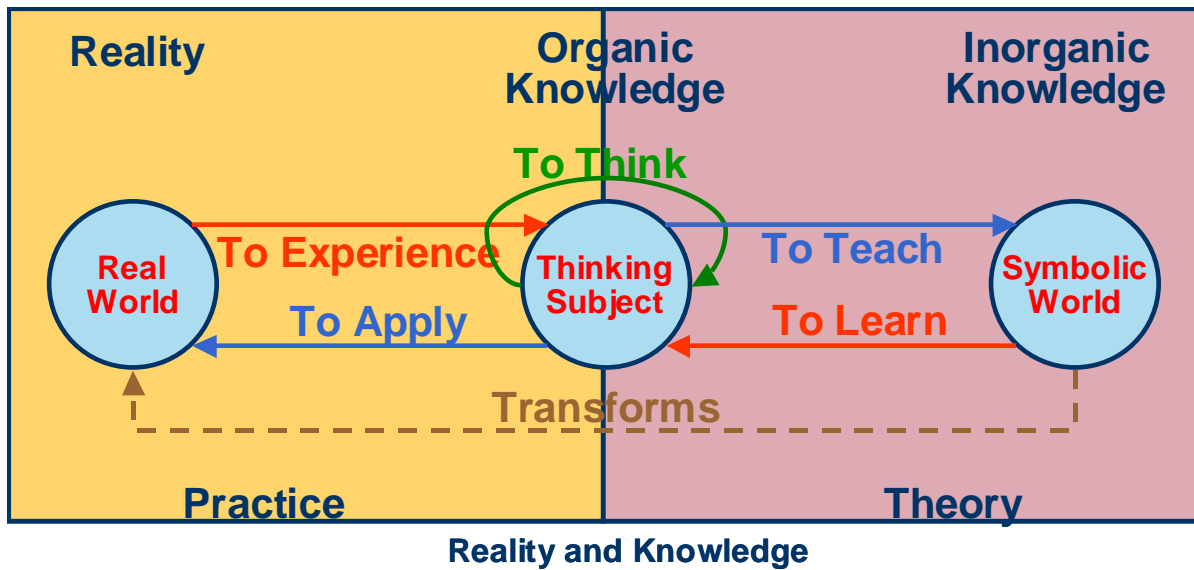
About Real, Interpreted and Symbolic World

The "**real world**," what we usually agree to consider as a real world, is captured in the "subject's mind" by the "experience" that his senses allow him.

The capacities of the subject, his previous experiences, his beliefs, etc., will quickly configure in his mind an "**interpreted world**" that he will incorporate as his own knowledge and his own criteria.

So, a deer exists, first, in the real world and this does not depend on whether we know it or not. But once we have known it, it also exists in our mind and has a specific meaning for us.

In addition, humans have the distinctive ability to "get" this deer out of his mind, to rebuild it in a "**symbolic world**" that allows to communicate and transmit knowledge. Then, the caveman paints the deer in his cave and transmits his existence to other clan members who have not yet seen it.

The '**Symbolic World**' is the third level where things 'exist'. And is the second level of knowledge, after the knowledge in people's mind ('**Interpreted World**') and beyond the 'original' reality ('**Real World**').

The Eiffel Tower exists in Paris, (1st) Reality or "Real World". It also exists in our minds (2nd) 'Organic knowledge' or 'Interpreted world', and it also exists in photographs, films, paintings, books ... etc, (3rd) 'Inorganic knowledge' or 'Symbolic world'.

About 'To Experience', 'To Think', 'To Teach', 'To Learn' and 'To Apply'

The 'Subject' **'Experiments'** the 'Real World' and acquires a direct knowledge about it, that is stored in his mind.

After that, thanks to '**Thinking'**, the subject can discover and design in his mind, new realities, based on the existing ones.

Then, the subject can "**Teach**" his knowledge, that is, take it out of his mind and give it shape by configuring a "symbolic World" of knowledge (for example, a book). When we "teach" verbally, we externalize our knowledge through language and the sound waves acts as a medium to support it. If we record our voice in a magnetic medium, this knowledge remains there longer, but not forever either.

Who uses the 'formalized' knowledge from the 'Symbolic World', we can say, he is '**Learning'**. How many people knows Eiffel Tower and never have been in Paris?

Finally, a subject can "**Apply**" his knowledge back to the real world, transforming it. Eiffel, as an architect, experienced the world, learned, thought, taught and finally applied his knowledge directly to the real world, transforming it, when he created the famous Eiffel Tower in Paris.

Also, what we have 'Taught', this is, the knowledge we have externalised in several mediums, '**Transforms**' somehow the 'Real World', in which the 'Symbolic World' represents a subset that explains and projects it.

About Apprentice and Master

A person 'Experience' the 'Real World' and 'Learn' from the 'Symbolic World'. 'Experiencing' and 'Learning' he makes an '**Apprentice'** function. 'Teaching' and 'Applying' his knowledge, the subject makes a '**Master'** function. When the person 'Thinks' is '**Autodidact'** and makes a function of Master and Apprentice at the same time.

About Theory and Practice

When we have a relationship with the 'Real World', 'Experiencing' and 'Applying', we are making a function of '**Practice'**. When our relationship is with the 'Symbolic World', 'Teaching' and 'Learning', we are making a function of '**Theory'**.

Let's see our model now in terms of Knowledge Acquisition, Creation and Transmission:
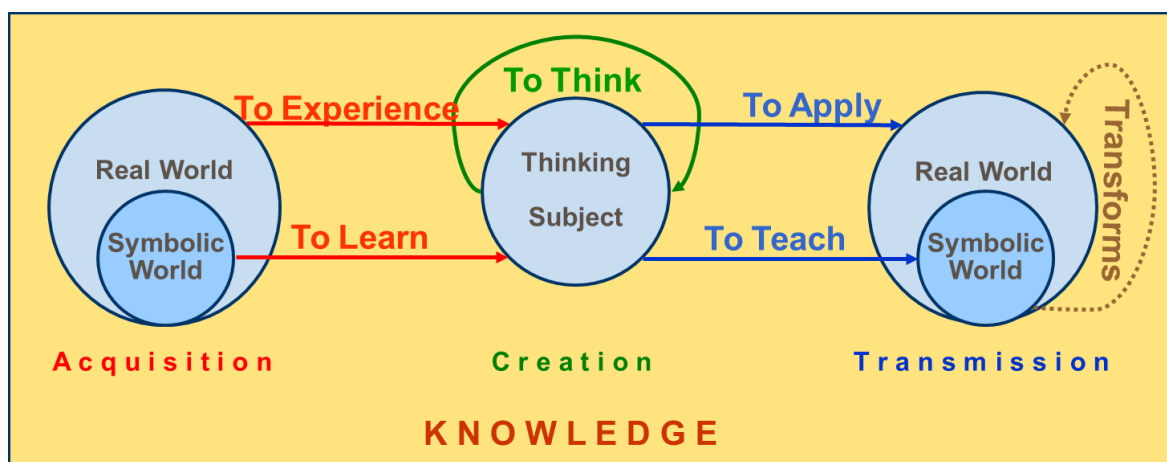
About Acquire, Create and Transmit Knowledge and Knowledge Management

The knowledge in people is '**Acquired**' –with the intellect and senses help- '**Experiencing**' and '**Learning**'. It is '**Created**' by '**Thinking**'. And it is '**Transmitted**' by '**Teaching**' and '**Applying**' (AGT Model)

In a company, a good **Knowledge Management** practice must deal -at least- with how to increase employee's experience (To Experiment), how to stimulate their ideas (To Think), how to promote the sharing of their knowledge (To Teach), how to provide learning facilities (To Learn) and how to improve the way they produce (To Apply)

About Organic/Inorganic - Tacit/Explicit Knowledge

In short, it exists a '**Real World**' which knowledge and explanations are held as hypothesis in our minds, configuring an '**Interpreted World**'. One portion of this 'Interpreted World', can be transferred to external supports, building what we could agree in calling a '**Symbolic World**', that explains the 'Real World' and its potential projections (like science fiction).

The 'Interpreted World', is an '**Organic Knowledge**' in our minds, and we could agree in to assimilate it to the '**Tacit Knowledge**'. The 'Tacit Knowledge' that we put in external supports (with several degrees of durability), configures the 'Symbolic World', that is, an '**Inorganic Knowledge**' that we could agree in to assimilate it to the so called '**Explicit Knowledge**'.

In the traditional literature about Tacit and Explicit Knowledge, some authors suggest that Tacit Knowledge is only the knowledge that is difficult –or even impossible- to make it explicit, to be transmitted or to be formally represented.

This consideration can create confusing frontiers. So, it could be interesting to start with more solid principles. Let's go to say that we can identify an accepted 'Reality', also we can identify an 'Organic Knowledge' in people (Tacit) and we can identify an 'Inorganic Knowledge' in objects (Explicit) that have been elaborated by people.

So, as we commented at the beginning of this article, if we hear a lot about tacit and explicit knowledge it is because, from this point of view, things exist only in one "reality" and then the knowledge of this reality exists only into two places: in the inaccessibility of any single people mind (tacit) and registered in sharable documents (explicit).

Knowledge Scenarios represents then the main existing interactions of knowledge flow between Real World, People and Symbolic world (a growing subset of the Real World).

Finally, this is a simple model to argue about Knowledge and Knowledge Management, but it doesn't close our reflection about it, because in an increasing way, Symbolic World is becoming digital and we are incorporating technology as extension of our perceptive capacities and even as an extension of our capacity to think. This will drive us, for sure, to new considerations about it.

The **AGT Model** aims to contribute to the debate.