

Targeting the Blind Spot: Personal Knowledge Management as an Enabler for Knowledge Creation and Application

Richard Pircher

Bank- und Finanzwirtschaft
Fachhochschule des bfi Wien
Wohlmuthstraße 22
A-1020 Wien
richard.pircher@fh-vie.ac.at

Summary: The paper focuses on an integration of diverse research paths (mainly neuroscience, systems research and management studies) related to personal knowledge and capabilities. Challenges on the way to new knowledge – which potentially contradicts existing knowledge – are identified. Personal knowledge management is defined and core topics are described. Corresponding methods and tools are assigned to these core areas of personal knowledge development. Practical consequences for management development and education are drawn.

Methodology: Results from expert interviews have been used to select relevant fields of research and literatures. These research paths have been analyzed and integrated to identify a comprehensive definition of Personal Knowledge Management (PKM) and to identify core topics and adequate methods.

1 Targeting the Blind Spot

Biological system theory proposes the notion of operational closeness of cognitive and social systems. This basically means that the cognitive processes of an organism are self determined. It implies that only the processes within the organism itself define which stimuli or signals are perceived and how they get processed (Maturana / Varela 1987). The inner structures are influenced but not determined by the outside. Consequently the distinction inside – outside appears to be crucial for the development of mental structures. The organism builds internal mental structures and mental models [Se06], [Ki93] based on processing of perceptions during the history of the being. As the stimuli and there processing definitely are subjective and fragmentary the structures built on them are alike. Aspects of the environment or of the organism itself which are not covered by the inside structure may be called blind spots. A crucial characteristic of these blind spots may be seen in the fact, that we usually do not see them. “We do not see that we have a blind spot. In other words, we do not see that we do not see” [Fo93].

Based on neurological and brain research it may be noticed that both rational and emotional processes are important for successful, goal-oriented behavior [Ci02], [Da07], [Hü08]. Moreover mind and body are mutually integrated and may only be separated on a theoretical, hypothetical basis. Not the brain thinks, but the entity of body and mind does [Fu09], [Dy96]. Not only the past stimuli and mental processes, but also anticipation of the future influences the current mind processes. Mental and social processes respectively neuronal and social networking are strongly influenced by each other [BL67], [Sc00], [Sc01], [Pi10].

It may be summarized that the following aspects substantially influence the personal knowledge and internal mental processes:

- *the past*: the origin of today's internal mental structures, which may be reflected
- *the future*: anticipation of potential futures effect the present status
- *social interaction*: social networks consciously and unconsciously influence internal structures
- *the unknown, the blind spot, the not-yet-known*: to become open for potential future knowledge it requires temporary independence from the currently dominating mental models and differentiations.

2 PKM – a definition:

PKM aims at uncovering blind spots and at steering mental processes. It aspires to foster the development and utilization of personal knowledge and competencies. Adequate methods support the knowledge on the own personal knowledge (meta-knowledge), the thinking process, learning, problem solving and mental organization (meta-cognition). Equally PKM covers emotional and motivational aspects of knowledge creation and application (self-reflection) [Pi10], [Hü07].

3 Objectives and Methods for PKM

As a summary the following topics and methods may be specified for PKM (compare [Pi10], [WW07], [RE08], [Dr99]):

Orientation, goals:

- Topic: Definition of goals for knowledge development and core competencies
- Methods: e.g. life line, synergy map

Self-reflection:

- Topic: conscious reflection of mental structures and processes
- Methods: e. g. reflexive communication, feedback

Inner clearness and order:

- Topic: growing awareness, structuring and reflection of rationality, emotion and motivation
- Methods: e.g. feedback analysis, mind-body-harmonization, mindfulness based stress education, left-hand column

External clearness:

- Topic: correspondence of actions, decisions and internal structures (values, competencies, etc.)
- Methods: e.g. reflexive communication, left-hand column, feedback

External order:

- Topic: selection and structuring of information assimilation and distribution
- Methods: e.g. strategies for searching, Eisenhower-matrix and TRAFing, information mapping, categorization and classification

Reflection and design of information assimilation and distribution

- Topic: Am I actually able and willing to assimilate information? What is my attitude towards this information, towards the sending person? etc.
- Methods: e.g. mind mapping, concept mapping, SQ3R

Personal contacts and relationships:

- Topic: Overview and identification of potential for development
- Methods: e.g. contact net, relationship management

Learning:

- Topic: planning of fields of knowledge which ought to be deepened
- Methods: e.g. learning strategies, FAQs, checklist, micro-article, story template, learning diary, feedback analysis

Literature

- [BL67] Berger, P. L.; Luckmann, T.: The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge. Anchor Books, 1967
- [Ci02] Ciompi, L.: Gefühle, Affekte, Affektlogik. Ihr Stellenwert in unserem Menschen- und Weltverständnis. Picus, 2002
- [Da07] Damasio, A.: Descartes' Irrtum. List, 2007
- [Dr99] Drucker, P.: Managing Oneself, Harvard Business Review, March-April 1999, p. 65-74
- [Dy96] Dychtwald, K.: Körperbewusstsein - Eine Synthese der östlichen & westlichen Wege zur Selbst-Wahrnehmung, Gesundheit & persönlichem Wachstum. Synthesis, 1996
- [Fo93] von Foerster, H.: Wissen und Gewissen. Suhrkamp, 1993
- [Fu09] Fuchs, T.: Das Gehirn denkt nicht, Brand eins 11/2009, S. 80-83,
<http://www.brandeins.de/archiv/magazin/denken/artikel/das-gehirn-denkt-nicht.html>
(19.7.2010)
- [Hü08] Hüther, G.: Macht der inneren Bilder. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008
- [Ki93] Kim, D. H.: The Link between Individual and Organizational Learning. MIT Sloane Management Review, Fall 1993, 37 – 50
- [MV87] Maturana, H.; Varela, F.: Der Baum der Erkenntnis. Goldmann, 1987
- [Pi10] Pircher, R.: Wissensmanagement, Wissenstransfer, Wissensnetzwerke: Konzepte, Methoden, Erfahrungen: Konzepte, Methoden und Erfahrungen. Publicis, 2010
- [RE08] Reinmann, G.; Eppler, M.: Methoden für das persönliche Wissensmanagement. Huber, 2008
- [Sc00] Scharmer, C. O.: Presencing: Learning From the Future As It Emerges - On the Tacit Dimension of Leading Revolutionary Change.
<http://www.dialogonleadership.org/Presencing00.pdf>. (19.7.2010)
- [Sc01] Scharmer, C. O. et al.: dialog on leadership. <http://www.dialogonleadership.org>
(19.7.2010)
- [Ci02] Senge, P.: The Fifth Discipline. Currency Doubleday, 2006
- [WW07] Willfort, R.; Willfort, R.: Der genetische Code des persönlichen Erfolgs, Wissensmanagement, Oktober 2007,
http://www.wissensmanagement.net/online/archiv/2007/10_2007/code.shtml
(19.7.2010)