Chapter 12
Subjectivism of Information

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ABSTRACT

Objectivism has given the domain, rationality, definition, and purpose that are commonly attributed to information and knowledge management, as well as the definitions of the concepts of information, knowledge, communication, and learning. Objectivism does not provide a theoretical foundation to information management; the question that arises is whether subjectivism may or may not offer a compelling alternative. Finally, the answer is no because the subjectivist rarely pays attention to what the fundamental lines of private organizations are and pays attention increasingly to the public sector, in the realization of economic value. Thus, there is no other way but to combine objectivism with subjectivism in a comprehensive approach of integrated information management. However, this chapter illustrates the differences between the philosophical principles of thought.

OBJECTIVES

This chapter has as its main objective to know if subjectivism may or may not offer a compelling alternative to objectivism, in the theoretical foundation and practice for the information management.

WHAT IS SUBJECTIVISM?

Subjectivism is a philosophical tradition which opposes itself to objectivism. Subjectivism means *provide an alternative to human experience and understanding, instead of objective truth* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In objectivism, human behavior is the result of forces that act in the world, that people cannot control, and are difficult to comprehend. The interest and motivation of objectivism is therefore providing people as law, the rational knowledge that will help them work successfully in the outside world.

Since the objectivism is directed to the external aspects of the understanding, the internal aspects are the primary domain of subjectivism. What motivates the subjectivism is the awareness; understanding, truth, and meaning that are relative to the physical and cultural context, people's way of life, as well as

the mental structures of how the world works (Putnam, 1983). When the contexts and mental conceptions of people are seriously opposed to each other, there can be no valid objective, understanding, truth, and universal meaning. On the other hand, understanding, truth and meaning are not strictly personal. When the meaning is entirely personal, each individual understanding may be called a truth.

In this extreme case of subjectivism, the human sense would be totally spontaneous. The imaginative sky would be the limit. The story mentioned of the Trobiand Papuas illustrates how objectivism and subjectivism extreme visions are both inadequate, at least for those aspects of reality that are related to human intervention, such as the information management. The meaning the Papua gave to the game of cricket is neither objective nor personal, but subjective. The meaning the Papua gave to the game of cricket is neither objective nor personal, but subjective. They gave a common sense to the game, which is now common knowledge. The location of this fact prevents them from participating in the World Championship, but presumably they do not care. Subjectivity is relevant to many forms of organization, because it allows the collective action of the organizational units – a Department, a management team, a network of professionals – based on experience and locally sharing understandings (Weick, 1995).

The example of the Papuas illustrates also the truth and the true knowledge are always dependent on how people understand experimentally their worlds and where people find meaning and significant in their lives. For time, what people give importance is not only relevant in the objectivism of their rational knowledge, but also of their imagination, intuition, emotions, values, beliefs, experiences and aspirations.

All Papua could explain, we are not only objective and rational, because the economists would have said it, but also *imaginatively rational* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Sometimes we want something more and we go around. We have a dream and spend enormous amounts of time, energy and money chasing it. Sometimes we do not share information simply because we do not like the others, even if it damages our reputation. This imaginative rationality is elaborated in the literature of subjectivism, for example, linking ICT to hospitality (Ciborra, 2004), learning the identity (Wenger, 1998), information to power (Introna, 1997), and the technological objects to sociability (Knorr-Cetina, 1997). In objectivism, all human aspects are ignored.

In the research of objectivism, economic rationality and the disembodied truths of human beings are separated from objects in their environment. The fundamental interest of subjectivism is to restore the ' bridge ' between the world of objects and of the subject. We are part of the environment and as such, we change it and we are changed by it. Here, in the subjectivism, understanding, truth and meaning come from interaction with the physical environment and with the people. When developing relevant knowledge of the practice, we must not focus so much on the inherent properties of the objects, but more in their interaction characteristics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The properties of the interaction are subjective meanings given to objects that are out of people and make sense of their world in the process of human communication and negotiation, reflecting what they believe is important to their private lives and organizations.

Returning to the example of the roses, the objectivism of knowledge represents its inherent properties, the characteristics of rose that are independent of any human observer, such as the thorns. However, nobody gives roses to their girlfriend because they have thorns, but because they are understood as the symbol of love. When the donor and the receiver unite this symbolic meaning of the rose, the message is transverse. The Objectivists are right when they claim that the objects exist in an objective reality independent of the will and the thought of the human being. We do not build the objects-a rose is a rose, but we build our interactions with them (Tsoukas, 2005).

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