

From Organisational Knowledge Management to Personal Knowledge Management - Reflecting and Researching Ongoing Management Practice: exploring the way we think through semiotics – how signification processes determine action patterns

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Abstract: Semiotic theory has accompanied the development of Western thought since Antiquity. The historical origins of semiotics are as early as the roots to Western culture. Semiotics was already present in Ancient Greece, through the works of Hippocrates, Plato and Aristotle. Present day semiotics is widely diverse and it offers a sophisticated analysis of complex phenomena, from social and cultural areas to biological and information technology spheres. Today's schools of thought have been influenced by the works of Saussure and Peirce, which were developed at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Semiotics is a powerful reading matrix because it enables the interpretation – and the de-codification and deconstruction – of signification processes, that is, how meaning emerges out of social interaction and language use. The present context of the information society, where technological evolution has triggered the profusion of new information – new patterns, new codes, new genres, new formats, new channels and new styles – implies that there is a growing need to understand and decipher such complexity. This need is particularly relevant within management settings, where both at individual and at organisational level there is a growing effort to understand information production and exchange. Communication, leadership, motivation, innovation and creativity are all deeply connected to the production and interpretation of signification processes. New academic areas emerge, which are directed at the analysis of such processes. Knowledge management is an example of a new discipline that addresses such concerns. This knowledge field emerged in the last two decades and it has benefited from the influence of widely diverse schools of thought, which, by itself, is an indication of the complexity of the phenomena being addressed. The present Round Table proposes a discussion on the importance of semiotics to the understanding of current organisational contexts from the perspective of the individual practitioner. Individual and organisational development are closely interlinked and mutually influence one another. Semiotics is a powerful interpreting tool, which has been largely neglected within management traditional settings. This Round Table seeks to inform and to raise awareness towards the critical role that semiotics plays in current contexts and the need to bring semiotic theory into contemporary management education and practice. This challenge may only be met through the experiencing of strong events that directly show, at an immediate level, the power of semiotics and how it is ever-present and unavoidable in all human action and thought. And such is the challenge for this Round Table, to offer examples of semiotics in action. This Round Table deals with one of the most central and ubiquitous processes in human activity and yet largely neglected and ignored by the management community. Meaning-making, that is, making sense of the world around – and within – us, is a largely automatic and unconscious process. However, the more aware we become, the greater the chances of making the best out of such interpretation and understanding efforts. Such is the role of semiotics.

Key words: knowledge management, personal knowledge management, semiotics, signification processes, action patterns, innovation.

