VALUATION OF A LANGUAGE AND BENCHMARKING OF A CULTURE

A PROPOSAL FOR A COLLOQUIUM

by

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Introduction

With increased globalization of business and economy, organizations find themselves having to choose from among alternatives, that working language which offers the most effective economic means of knowledge creation and management within the context of the strategic environment in which they exist and operate. Also, with the emergence of the knowledge economy, organizations are increasingly paying close attention to the culture that describes their knowledge creation processes.

The colloquium proposed here will be delivered in two parts. The first part will describe how an organization may assess the economic value of alternative languages available to it to choose from. The second part will describe an approach to benchmarking of organizational culture against other cultures that prevail in the knowledge economy.

PART I

The Organizational Working Language

Language is the means by which an organization (or any community) communicates its culture to members within the society in which it operates. Thus, the language of a community or an organization may be viewed as the repository of that community's knowledge. As such, it has economic value.
An Illustration

Consider a multinational business organization with its world headquarters in Switzerland, where about 10 languages are spoken. While 70 percent of the Swiss speak Schwyzerdütsch (Swiss German), Switzerland has 3 official languages and four national languages. The official languages are German, French spoken by about 20 percent of the population, and Italian spoken by about 10 percent of the population. The national languages include these three and also Romansh, which is based on Latin and is spoken by 1 percent of the population. The multinational organization in question is located in Basle, where Swiss German is spoken. It is a pharmaceutical company. Its strategic environment includes North America, South America, Europe, South and Southeast Asia, Japan, Africa, and Australia.

We will illustrate our colloquium by describing how this Swiss multinational pharmaceutical organization may develop a judgment-analytic decision support system for the assessment of the economic value of languages. Such a system will aid the multinational organization in the process of selection of a working language that affords the most economic value to the organization in light of its strategic environment. The design of the judgment-analytic decision support system will be achieved through the application of social judgment theory [1].

Note that in terms of the rapidly developing technologies for communication, data management including storage and retrieval, such decision support systems could also aid the development of efficient computer-based languages.
PART II

Emergence of the Knowledge Economy

The traditional paradigm of organizational theory views an organization as a system that processes information and solves problems through decision making. It seeks to improve the efficiency with which information is processed within the context of decision making in an uncertain environment. Recently, however, an alternative paradigm has emerged. This new paradigm suggests that organizations in the contemporary environment should be viewed as systems that create information and knowledge management [2], [3], [4]. This new paradigm is the basis of a growing body of literature on knowledge. Nonaka [5] has attempted to develop the essential elements of a theory of organizational knowledge creation. Blackler [6] reviews concepts of knowledge, classifies them, and examines processes for generating, storing and applying knowledge. He has developed a typology of knowledge organizations. Sveiby [7] defines an information-knowledge dichotomy. This dichotomy is useful for understanding the conflicting nature of demands for accountability projected onto knowledge organizations, and for guiding responses to these demands. Other writers have discussed various aspects of management of knowledge [7], [8], [9], including designs of work systems for knowledge workers [10], organizational learning in knowledge-intensive firms [11], power and control of expertise [12]. During 1997, there have been at least ten significant conferences on knowledge management in the United Kingdom alone. Long Range Planning issued a special supplement on intellectual capital in its June 1997 issue.
The Culture of Knowledge Creation

With increased interest in the development and management of the knowledge creation process, organizations have become increasingly aware of the organizational culture that defines them. Defining "culture" is not easy. The term can have several meanings within the context of socioeconomic research. The primary definition of culture in the WWWebster Dictionary reads as: "... the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties especially by education ... the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations ... the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group ... the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes a company or corporation..." [13].

Definitions of culture provided by various dictionaries focus on the concept of culture as a selective slice of intellectual, artistic or otherwise creative activity, or on the process of obtaining knowledge of these areas. These definitions are generally derived from what is termed as the classic definition of culture provided by the English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in 1871: "Culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." [14, p.1].

In this colloquium we will describe an approach to benchmarking of the emerging institutional culture of a knowledge creating organization. In doing so, we will describe the experience of an emerging academic institution in Victoria, Australia [15]. This colloquium will initially describe how the School of Business at Swinburne University of Technology set about to change its culture in response to a changing environment. It will
then describe how it benchmarked the emerging culture against institutions where aspects of the desired culture had already been established. This benchmarking will, again, be achieved through the application of social judgement theory.

**Another Illustration**

The context of the application of our approach to benchmarking will be the promotion of the academic staff from the rank of Associate Professor to full Professor, because in this issue the culture of knowledge creation is explicitly recognized. We will demonstrate how this approach will effectively ascertain if the School in question is similarly positioned relative to others that have been successfully assimilated into the desired culture of knowledge creation and have a background similar to it. To this end, an international comparison will be described with the School of Business Administration at the Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in USA.
REFERENCES


