

KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

MOVING FROM RESEARCH TO ACTION

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Foreward by Francisco Javier Carrillo

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*“A little knowledge that acts
is worth infinitely more
than much knowledge that is idle.”*

Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)

FOREWARD

by Francisco Javier Carrillo ¹

While Evolutionism as a scientific theory has contributed to making humans aware that we share biological roots with the rest of Nature, Globalism as a world perspective has contributed to making us conscious that we share a planetary future with all life on Earth. That future looks increasingly grim, as evidence on biosphere disruptions, climate changes and ecosystem imbalances resulting from human action, as well as on the associated environmental and social impacts, becomes substantial. Particularly on the social front, we are far from foreseeing and being prepared for the challenges posed by today's global dynamics.

What sort of changes, what kind of knowledge is required to confront this unprecedented challenge to mankind? It is evident enough that both changes in individual behavior that have environmental impacts as well as changes in cultural and political frameworks that breed them are required. It may be less evident that in order to accomplish those changes our understanding of collective human behavior and our capacity to manage it are key factors. Knowledge about ourselves and the ability to innovate social organization at local and global scales are at the core of human destiny.

Enter Knowledge Mobilization as a powerful methodological framework and action program, and the relevance and timing of this book becomes evident. Alex and David Bennet shed new light on the social knowledge cycle, recognizing all significant agents and processes of a knowledge value system. While doing so, they show awareness of the complex interweaving of both highly institutional (e.g., universities and government) and highly self-organizing (e.g., communities and networks) agents and processes. But the conceptual sophistication required to incorporate advanced contemporary theories does not prevent them from focusing into what is primordial: social improvement. While it is arguable whether knowledge is or is not necessarily action-laden, when it is it leads directly to what Peter Drucker wisely saw as the core of management: committing current actions with future value outcomes. In the end, this connection between knowledge and social value is what matters from the perspective of collective well-being.

Under this perspective, an evolutionary path for Knowledge Management emerges. Such a path moves along the capacity to fully incorporate advancements from the Social Sciences into the theoretical, methodological and technical frameworks of social value delivery. Conversely, since KM is dealing primordially with the “intangible” or “intellectual” dimensions of social value, it belongs naturally into the explanatory and technical realm of the social sciences. KMB is a leading example of capitalizing social science theory and methods into KM practice. This is an impressive collection and innovative array of concepts, methods and tools that is

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at the same time sensible and pragmatic to serve the purpose of putting the best of existing and emerging human knowledge at the service of creating social value.

A knowledge society basically means one conceived, designed and evolving according to the value dynamics of represented or knowledge entities (ideas, emotions, foresights), which is by far an uncharted territory. Therefore, knowledge societies are to a large extent still utopic, though not improbable. They are possible to the extent that the task of understanding and managing their subject matter advances. There is enough circumstantial evidence that the perceived principles that account for micro and macroeconomic behavior have reached their limits when dealing with knowledge-based value. Knowledge Economics and Knowledge Management will benefit significantly when they fully incorporate the explanatory and technological resources that have been developed to unravel the represented realities of human behavior and social structure. Such powerful resources should leverage the capacity to understand and manage social knowledge-based processes such as value production and distribution, collective decision-making and participation, social identity and belongingness, cohesion and innovation, etc. Such understanding, in turn, should help overcome the decaying walls of industrial civilization corroded by unsustainable consumerism, mediatized democracy, unbalanced world institutions and self-centered ethos.

The transition from industrial to knowledge societies is not a mere ideal, for societal and human development is an ongoing process, and even major disruptions start from existing conditions. Incremental moves in that direction are already taking place in emerging knowledge societies—cities, regions, countries—deliberately and systematically applying knowledge-based development policies. These policies often include imaginative and bold changes in social organization and role definitions; for example, in the way in which public information, collective knowledge construction and community participation are improved through both conversational and ICTs-based methods. These qualitative changes will more often and more deeply be required to transform the archaic institutions of the industrial civilization into the purposeful design of knowledge societies.

The knowledge-based perspective founding KMb is as advanced as it is pertinent. While a large proportion of what is done in the name of KM is still resource-based (i.e., content transactions subordinated to a prevailing and often tacit value structure), the KMb approach subverts and makes explicit the value base against which all knowledge assets and processes are to be weighted. This move reveals the true meaning of Knowledge Economy as an understanding and management of the whole of collective human preferences—not only those with a material or monetary base—and Knowledge Society as a civil order in which dynamic community balance (including continued self-sustenance) and not just financial growth become central.

Hence, KMb can be identified as a k-based value system. In that sense, it incorporates the meta-knowledge platform required to feed back practice into awareness. Increasing local and global social consciousness and capacity to take effective action might be the only path to the medium-term survival of life on Earth. Even more transcendental, it might be the path to overcome the entanglement of

the human condition so clearly pointed out by biologist Jeremy Griffith: the flagrant contradiction between human moral ideals and human behavior drives.

In the decisive quest for global environmental and social balance, ignorance—in the form of intolerance, superstition, dogmatism and self-denial patterns—is the worst liability, and knowledge mobilization—in the form of transparency, public awareness, community action, social innovation and international reorganization—the best asset. Major landmarks in human history may well be described as transcendent knowledge mobilizations. Perhaps the most transcendent knowledge mobilization so far, and the first of a global scale, is required right now.

PREFACE

The leadership shown by the government of Canada in creating and implementing the Knowledge Impact on Society program designed to move knowledge from the researcher to the citizens has stimulated the preparation and research forwarded in this book. As we move into the future the importance of optimizing the applications of research for the welfare of all citizens grows exponentially. The Canadian approach to knowledge mobilization serves as a model for future research, where knowledge mobilization complements—and becomes as important as—the research itself. This book lays the groundwork for that movement forward.

As used throughout this book, the term community denotes the target audience in the knowledge mobilization (KMb) process, that group of people who are the beneficiaries of implementation of research findings. That group may be a community of preschoolers, or a community of small business owners, or a geographically dispersed community of immigrants or single parents. The term community leaders denotes those individuals who—though not necessarily formal partners in the KMb process—understand, are involved in, and have passion around helping their community and its citizens. They are part of the larger stakeholder group, and may be considered advocates within the community.

Representative of the KMb approach itself, relying on pragmatic language and actions with theoretical grounding, this book presents KMb in a way that makes sense and is accessible to researchers, practitioners, change agents, community leaders and other invested stakeholders. The goal is for the stakeholder community itself to become a community of learners as they implement research findings, moving from awareness, to understanding, to belief, to feeling good about it, to ownership, to being empowered and knowing what to do, and finally to taking action and changing behaviors.

This book is intended as an idea-generator and resource. It is not prescriptive. Just as knowledge is situation dependent and context sensitive, so too is the KMb approach for implementation of new knowledge. As the study of society, and the human relationships within and with society, the social sciences disciplines include a wide array of fields such as sociology, psychology, economics, anthropology, history and political science. Each of these fields has a unique focus and approach to exploring human society and human relationships, with as many differences in research areas as there are people within each field! Therefore, any KMb approach must be as robust and flexible as needed—both proactive and adaptive—to support the area of research, the target audience, and the larger stakeholder community.

As we continue to explore the exciting potential offered through knowledge mobilization, we simultaneously begin to realize that knowledge mobilization is on the cutting edge of knowledge management, moving new ideas and shared understanding into the hands of the people at the point of action. This is where the day-to-day decisions are made that will improve our communities, our businesses, and our nations.

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Finally, our deep gratitude and best wishes to those researchers, practitioners, community leaders, and stakeholders who are mobilizing knowledge to frame a new world. May you achieve great successes.

Alex and David Bennet
July 15, 2007

