

# Patterns in the Knowledge Management Discourse-

*an Analysis of selected Knowledge Management  
Theorists*

by  
**Emily Anna Bester**

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**Supervisor: Prof J Kinghorn**

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## OPSOMMING

Kennisbestuur is 'n gefragmenteerde en dubbelsinnige bestuurspraktyk. Dit is duidelik uit die menigvuldige definisies wat voorgelê word vir die veld. Die uitgangspunt van hierdie studie is dat verskillende diskoerspatrone in kennisbestuur ook tot die dubbelsinnigheid bydra.

Vier teoretiese lense beskryf die tipiese diskoerse wat geassosieer word met die vorming van bestuurspraktyke, naamlik bestuursinnovasie, sambreelkonstruksies, bestuursmodesiklusse en die institutionalisering van bestuurspraktyke. Die volgende aspekte is 'n aanduiding van die tipes diskoerse betrokke – die rasionaal, besigheidsuitkoms, bestuursnis, die definisie van die oplossing en die middele wat vir die implementering van die praktyke verskaf word.

Die diskoerse van sewe *voorstaaanders* is geanaliseer aan die hand van bogenoemde, naamlik Verna Allee, Nancy Dixon, Leif Edvinsson, Ikujiro Nonaka, David Snowden en Matthieu Weggeman. Drie hoofpatrone is geïdentifiseer, gebaseer op die analise van die wyse waarin die vier teoretiese lense in die geselekteerde diskoerse manifesteer. Hierdie patrone verteenwoordig drie verskillende konsepsualiserings van kennisbestuur, naamlik -

- (i) *Kennisbestuur as 'n meta-praktykraamwerk*: die fokus is op die assimilasië en sintese van die verskillende kennisgebaseerde praktyke wat deel is van ander bestuurspraktyke (soos kwaliteitsbestuur), of praktyke wat ontwikkel uit vloeibare inisiatiewe in organisasies (bv. die rol van die bibliotekaris wat transformeer na die van 'n informasiemakelaar), of die definisie van nuwe praktyke aan die hand van sistematiese eksperimentering (soos die potensiaal van sosiale media vir intelligensie analise).
- (ii) *Kennisbestuur as 'n platform en katalisator vir sistemiese bestuursinnovasie*: die strewe is om nuwe benaderings te definieer wat toepaslik is vir die bestuur van organisasies as komplekse kennis-gebaseerde stelsels. Hierdie benaderings moet bestuurspraktyke wat gewortel is in Newtoniaanse of meganistiese denke vervang. Kennisbestuur word beskou as 'n revolusionêre praktyk wat nuwe benaderings voorstel, konsepsualiseer en versprei, soos *Value Network Management* (Verna Allee) en die *Cynefin-raamwerk* (David Snowden).
- (iii) *Kennisbestuur as 'n meesteridee of meesternarratief*: hierdie kennisbestuur-diskoers omvat die teoretisering van nuwe strukturele reëlins wat, as 'n reaksie op die nuwe vereistes wat 'n kennisgedrewe ekonomie stel, in organisasies na vore kom. Hierdie teoretisering beïnvloed die denke, begroning en praktyke van verskeie bestuursvelde, soos strategiese beplanning, menslike hulpbronnbestuur en organisasie-ontwerp.

## SUMMARY

Knowledge management is a fragmented and ambiguous management practice. This is evident from the plethora of definitions available for this field. The premise of this study is that different discourse patterns in knowledge management also contribute to the ambiguity.

Four theoretical lenses describe the typical discourses that are associated with the formation of management practices, namely management innovation, umbrella construction, management fashion cycles and institutionalisation of management practice. The following propositions are indicative of the types of discourses involved – the rationale, business outcome, management niche, solution definitions and the means provided for the enactment of the practice.

The discourses of seven proponents were analysed according to the above, viz. Verna Allee, Nancy Dixon, Leif Edvinsson, Ikujiro Nonaka, Laurence Prusak, David Snowden and Mathieu Weggeman. Three main patterns were identified based on the manner in which the discourses associated with the four theoretical lenses manifest in the analysed discourses. These patterns represent three different conceptualisations of knowledge management, namely -

- (i) *Knowledge management as a meta-practice framework*: the focus is on the assimilation and synthesis of the various knowledge-based practices that are part of other management practices (such as quality management), or practices that originate from fluid initiatives in organisations (e.g. the role of the librarian transforming to become an information broker), or practices that are defined through systematic experimentation (such as the potential of social media for intelligence analysis).
- (ii) *Knowledge management as a platform and catalyst for systemic management innovation*: the quest is to define new approaches that are appropriate to manage organisations as complex knowledge-based systems. These approaches should supersede management practices still rooted in Newtonian or mechanistic thinking. Knowledge management is regarded to be a revolutionary practice that proposes, conceptualises and diffuses such new approaches, e.g. value network management (Verna Allee) and the Cynefin framework (David Snowden).
- (iii) *Knowledge management as a master idea or master narrative*: this knowledge management discourse is about the theorisation of novel structural arrangements that emerge in organisations as a response to the new requirements of a knowledge-driven economy. This theorisation influences the thinking, premises and practices of various management fields, such as strategic planning, human resource management and organisational design.

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Knowledge management has developed into an ambiguous and fragmented management field. According to Sveiby the “concept of Knowledge Management is unusual in its ambiguity, extraordinary in its depth, unfathomable in its rapid expansion”.<sup>1</sup> The ambiguity is also evident in the plethora of definitions put forward for knowledge management. The understanding of knowledge management can be complex, contradictory, confusing and overwhelming for managers and practitioners who seek to make sense of the variety of perspectives, definitions, theories and prescriptions.<sup>2</sup>

Knowledge management is not lead by an all-powerful single management guru figure.<sup>3</sup> There are a number of gurus or protagonists that influence the thinking and formation of knowledge management over a period of time.<sup>4</sup> The gurus’ discourses are an important part of the process that lends meaning, authority and respectability to a practice. In addition to the exposition of the practice, discourses also include rhetoric that affirms the justification thereof. The justification is supported by communication conformance with recognised beliefs, principles and/or accepted rules and standards. Practices that appear desirable, proper or appropriate have the advantage that the necessary support and resources will be more likely supplied to them.<sup>5</sup> Discourses are also shaped by the challenge to capture the “attention of an overly stimulated and an increasingly sophisticated and distracted audience”<sup>6</sup> in a highly competitive market of management ideas. We should thus also take note of rhetorical

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<sup>1</sup> Sveiby. 2005. *The new organisational wealth: foreword to New Korean edition 2005*.

<sup>2</sup> Imani. 2011. The formulaic and embryonic dimensions of knowledge management strategy. p.132

<sup>3</sup> Jackson. 2001. *Management gurus and management fashions: a dramatistic inquiry*. p.176

<sup>4</sup> Grant. 2011. Knowledge management, an enduring but confusing fashion. p.117

<sup>5</sup> Suchman. 1995. Managing legitimacy. p.575

<sup>6</sup> Jackson. 2001. *Management gurus and management fashions: a dramatistic inquiry*. p.177

elements in discourses that focus beyond communicating the rational definition and explanation thereof. Some discourses are intended to portray a new practice as superior to other management practices with the intent that managers should rather support the new practice than the existing practice. Some discourse makes use of associations with current management practices to establish legitimacy for the practice.

The premise of this study is that the notion of multiple gurus participating in the knowledge management discourse contributes to the ambiguous and fragmented nature of the field. These discourses of the gurus should not only be analysed to understand their respective view points and interpretations of knowledge management, but also to understand the meaning of the discourse patterns on the formation of knowledge management.

According to Davenport, Prusak & Wilson gurus do not necessarily create business and management ideas from scratch.<sup>7</sup> They assemble and provide structure to ideas they learn about from their interaction with companies, other gurus in the field or other fields, as well as theoretical and philosophical explorations. They package the ideas as appealing concepts and broadcast them. Most gurus do some research, some writing, some speaking, some consulting and some evangelism to convert sceptical business people to the new idea and practice. Gurus can be business academics, consultants, journalists, practicing managers or practitioners.<sup>8</sup>

For the purpose of this study, knowledge management will be “defined broadly and inclusively to cover a loosely connected set of ideas, tools and practices centring on the communication and exploitation of knowledge in organizations.”<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2 Research definition

Knowledge management, like other management practices, was not created instantaneously and has been shaped and established over a period of time.<sup>10</sup> Abrahamson & Eisenman posit that management practices do not manifest themselves as independent, transitory and un-cumulative phenomena.<sup>11</sup> Management practices are defined, established and maintained through a gradual, cumulative and protracted process and discourse that over time influence

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<sup>7</sup> Davenport, Prusak & Wilson. 2003. *What's the big idea?* pp.69-74

<sup>8</sup> Davenport, Prusak & Wilson. 2003. *What's the big idea?* pp.69-74

<sup>9</sup> Scarbrough & Swan. 2001. Explaining the diffusion of knowledge management. p.3

<sup>10</sup> Berger & Luckman in Hirst. 2010. A study of the intra-organisational processes of institutionalisation. pp.2-3

<sup>11</sup> Abrahamson & Eisenman. 2008. Employee-management techniques: transient fads or trending fashions? p.719

what managers and practitioners think about, express and enact.<sup>12</sup> Berger & Lackman notes that new management institutions are not created instantaneously and always have a history, and that it is important to understand the processes and discourses over time that produced the practice.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.2.1 Research objective and design

The aim of this study is to provide an explanatory account of knowledge management discourse *patterns* over a period of time. The study does not aim or pretend to interpret, evaluate or, in any way adjudicate between the various voices over time in the field of knowledge management. The interest of the study is in the identification of patterns of discourse and exploring the meaning such patterns for the development of knowledge management. Such understanding will assist with the explanation of the emergence and the continuing formation of knowledge management as a distinct management field.

To achieve the above aim the study consists in a descriptive analysis of discourses of selected proponents of knowledge management. Although the study does not engage in the judgement or evaluation of the conceptual validity and rigour of discourses, it does focus on the various definitions and views of knowledge management, and methodologies and solutions.

The dynamic nature and underlying forces of these discourses are analysed according to a model that is based on four theoretical lenses that describes the typical discourses that are part of the formation of a management practice. These theoretical lenses are management innovation, management fashion cycles, management umbrella construction and the institutionalisation of management practices. These lenses are representative of the lifecycle stages of a management practice. Management innovation and management umbrella construction describes how a management practice emerges. Management fashion depicts the period during which a novel management practice is a popular item on the intra-organisational management agenda and the associated rapid diffusion thereof. Management institutionalisation refers to the stage when a management practice has become a taken-of-granted part of organisational life and at which point the abandonment thereof is unlikely.

The scope of this study is limited to the text-based discourses of the following selection of seven proponents who have been part of the knowledge management discourse for an

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<sup>12</sup> Abrahamson & Eisenman. 2008. Employee-management techniques: transient fads or trending fashions? p.719

<sup>13</sup> Berger & Luckman in Hirst. 2010. A study of the intra-organisational processes of institutionalisation. pp. 2-3

extended period of time. Each of them puts forward a distinct argument and point of view with respect to the understanding and appreciation of knowledge management as a professional management practice. The selection aims to provide a reasonable diversity to underpin the analysis. Of particular importance for this study was to ensure a significant list of publications that could be used as a plausible platform for the analysis presented in the thesis. With the partial exception of Nonaka, these proponents are both theorists and practitioners in the knowledge management field.

The seven proponents selected are -

- Verna Allee
- Nancy Dixon
- Leif Edvinsson
- Ikujiro Nonaka
- Laurence Prusak
- David Snowden
- Matthieu Weggeman

### **1.2.2 Thesis structure**

In order to support the systematic interrogation and discussion on discourse patterns in the formation of knowledge management, this thesis is structured according to the following chapters.

#### ***Chapter 1. Introduction***

In this chapter the background to this study, the research objective and overview of the structure of the thesis is discussed.

#### ***Chapter 2. Overview and framework of the types and the nature of management practice discourses***

This chapter provides the framework for analysis of the discourses of the selected protagonists in Chapter 3. The framework will be based on a literature review of the various types of discourses that are typical during the formation of a management practice.

#### ***Chapter 3. Analysis of selected knowledge management discourses***

A breakdown of the discourses of each of the proponents will be discussed based on the framework presented in the previous chapter. The discourse pattern/s for each proponent will also be depicted.

***Chapter 4. Patterns in the knowledge management discourse***

A comparison and synthesis of the discourses analysed in Chapter 3 will be discussed, as well as the meaning thereof for knowledge management.

## Chapter 2

# Types of Management Practice Discourses

### 2.1 Introduction

Green states that the legitimacy and diffusion of a management practice is not based on a mere rational process that looks at assessments of prior adoption, but should rather be regarded as an active product of managerial discourse.<sup>14</sup> The discourses of knowledge entrepreneurs or idea providers such as consultants, professional organisations, gurus and academics shape and inform the collective beliefs and evaluations of the legitimacy of management practices.<sup>15</sup> The influence of personal leaders tends to be relatively transitory and idiosyncratic. They do, however, play a substantial role in disrupting old institutions and introducing new institutions.<sup>16</sup>

Various studies provide insight into discourses and how these influence the emergence, formation, evolution, diffusion and on-going support of recent management practices, such as quality management, business process re-engineering and knowledge management. These studies look at it from four perspectives or lenses, namely -

- (1) the generative mechanisms associated with *management innovations* or new practices that originate as experiments in an organisation/s to create new competitive advantage or solve problems that impact competitiveness<sup>17</sup>;
- (2) *umbrella constructs* which entail a grouping of practices under a consolidating label<sup>18</sup>;

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<sup>14</sup> Green. 2004. A rhetorical theory of diffusion. p. 65

<sup>15</sup> Jackson. 2001. *Management gurus and management fashions: a dramatisic inquiry*. pp.28-29

<sup>16</sup> Suchman. 1995. Managing legitimacy. p.581

<sup>17</sup> Birkinshaw, Hamel, & Mol. 2008. Management innovation.

<sup>18</sup> Hirsch & Levin. 1999. Umbrella advocates versus validity police.

- (3) the popularity wave during which there is a high inter-organisational adoption and diffusion of a new management practice that is described as a *management fashion cycle*<sup>19</sup>;
- (4) *the institutionalisation of management practices* with the focus on the entrenchment of practices to such an extent that abandonment or change is unlikely, and that it is regarded as a permanent element in the organisational management repertoire.<sup>20</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the typical types of discourses that are associated of the four perspectives as reported in the management literature. In summary, a framework will be presented that will be used in Chapter 3 to map the discourses of the selected proponents who are participating in the knowledge management discourse.

## 2.2 Management innovation discourses

Management innovation is associated with the introduction of a novel management practice into an established organisation. This results from the recognition of a performance gap and an inventive idea to address this performance gap. This perceived performance gap could be caused by a specific problem, and/or could be as a result of the identification of unexploited opportunities or new threats, and/or the recognition of a potential performance gap associated with anticipated environmental changes, and/or the desire to find new competitive differentiation that will supersede the commodification of once-distinctive capabilities.

Birkinshaw, Hamel & Mol define management innovation as “the generation and implementation of a management practice, process, structure, or technique that is new to the state of the art and is intended to further organizational goals”<sup>21</sup>. Management innovation establishes new rituals and recipes into everyday practices.<sup>22</sup> It is also characterised by a marked departure from traditional management principles or customary organisational forms. Such management innovations can produce breakthroughs that allow companies to cross new performance thresholds that can create long-lasting advantage and shifts in competitive position and industry leadership.<sup>23</sup> Management innovations can come about by means of a systemic process where a novel solution is sought to address a challenge, or it can emerge

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<sup>19</sup> Abrahamson & Fairchild. 1999. Management fashion: lifecycles, triggers, and collective learning processes.

<sup>20</sup> Zeitz, Mittel, & McAuley. 1999. Distinguishing adoption and entrenchment of management practices; Perkmann & Spicer. 2008. How are management fashions institutionalized? p.811

<sup>21</sup> Birkinshaw, Hamel, & Mol. 2008. Management innovation. p.835

<sup>22</sup> Hamel. 2006. The why, what and how of management innovation. p.3

<sup>23</sup> Hamel. 2006. The why, what and how of management innovation. pp.1,3

through serendipitous events which are only in retrospect recognised and framed as a potential management innovation.<sup>24</sup>

Hamel<sup>25</sup> proclaims that four elements are part of a systemic process for management innovation. These elements are -

- *A commitment to a big management problem.* It can be an existing problem/s in the organisation, an emerging challenge, or a deficit caused by new performance levels reached by the competition.
- *Novel or unconventional principles* that illuminate new approaches and opens up new opportunities. The selected management challenge should guide the search for new principles.
- *A deconstruction of management orthodoxies* that is required to loosen ‘the grip that precedent has on your imagination.’
- *Analogies from atypical organisations* that redefine what is possible and that can suggest new ways to approach the management challenge at hand.

The above is also instrumental in the definition and agenda-setting of a new management discipline.

The conceptualisation and implementation through experimentation of a new management practice is a social process characterised by an active discourse between individuals inside and outside the organisation in a quest to make sense of and validate the emerging management practice. The activity of innovation within an organisation is accompanied by the reporting thereof to inter-organisational constituencies. These discourses also facilitate intra-organisational adoption of management innovations.<sup>26</sup>

Various kinds of discourses are associated with the management innovation process that define and negotiate what make sense in the world of management ideas and what actually works in practice.<sup>27</sup> The list below provides an overview of these discourses -

- *Agenda-setting discourses or the generation of influential points of view.* This is achieved by linking interpretations of changes or challenges in the environmental context

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<sup>24</sup> Birkinshaw, Hamel, & Mol. 2008. Management innovation. p.829

<sup>25</sup> Hamel. 2006. The why, what and how of management innovation. pp.3-10

<sup>26</sup> Birkinshaw, Hamel, & Mol. 2008. Management innovation. pp.828-829

<sup>27</sup> Birkinshaw, Hamel, & Mol. 2008. Management innovation. pp.831-839



with the practical issues that the organisation faces. It also shows that these issues cannot be resolved by existing solutions.

- *Thought experiments that entail the generation and proposal of novel ideas to address the challenge, as well as the linking of ideas with the context-specific considerations in the organisation.* This could include speculation on new ways to address identified issues and idea refinement. Idea refinement is a form of disciplined imagination during which the consequences and implications of a particular idea in terms of how it might work is being explored on a conceptual level. With these thought experiments, intellectuals draw from prior experience and their deep knowledge of a particular domain or function to sharpen the idea. These insights influence and direct the implementation of management innovations.
- *Reflections on the in vivo implementation of the new practice, including evaluation of the progress against the original idea and the conceptual validity.* This often takes the form of action research. These reflections also include idea linking that reconciles the intellectuals' knowledge bases with the context-specific and empirical evidence in the specific environment.
- *Theorisation and labelling* afford the diffusion of valid and useful management innovations. Labelling is a way to frame the new practices in a way that appeals to broader inter-organisational audiences and also induces the sense of novelty that is a key factor in the fashion cycle phase. This will be discussed in Section 2.4.4.

Theorisation is aimed at the formalisation of the practice into specific and operational concepts that can be understood and implemented. It involves the development of an adequate theoretical model of the practice, the specification of the failings of old recipes and generating legitimacy around the new practice. Theorisation entails the design and supply of frameworks that suggest, recommend or prescribe certain courses of action and/or detail operational models of how a practice functions. Theoretical models provide rigour to a practice and facilitate the transportability thereof from one setting to another.<sup>28,29</sup> Theorisation also provides rationales to motivate for intra-organisational adoption of the new practice and also an expression of the logic of the new practices in terms that resonate with potential adopters. It verifies the significance of the challenge

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<sup>28</sup> Zeitz, Mittal & McAulay. 1999. Distinguishing adoption and entrenchment of management practices. p.743

<sup>29</sup> Theorisation is also a key part of institutionalisation and in that context extended to standardisation.

and contextualises the innovation in terms of contemporary business challenges, specifies the important organisational goals associated with the practice, and communicates how the practice yields value as an efficient means of attaining these goals. Theorisation also represents support from recognised experts in the field and, as such, enhances the credibility of a practice.<sup>30</sup>

Theorisation also encompasses management fashion rhetoric (see Section 2.4) and institutionalisation rhetoric (see Section 2.5).

### 2.3 Umbrella constructs

Hirsch & Levin put forward the idea of an umbrella construct that is defined as “as a broad concept or idea used loosely to encompass and account for a set of diverse phenomena”.<sup>31</sup>

They postulate that umbrella constructs are evident in fields without a theoretical consensus and where consensus on how to operationalise an umbrella construct is rarely achieved.<sup>32</sup>

According to Hirsch & Levin there are cognitive and political reasons underlying umbrella constructs. From a cognitive perspective, too many unconnected concepts render our understanding of the world difficult. An umbrella construct provides theoretical order for seemingly unconnected and isolated concepts and as such supports comprehensibility. An umbrella construct can also provide a form of political positioning of a concept or idea. By connecting with constructs or rising conceptual stars with established acceptance and interest, the concept is perceived to be more legitimate. There is a potential for strategic ambiguity where political consensus is the primary goal and not clarity. Linkages between otherwise isolated concepts may be part of such a politically-orientated umbrella construct.

A key dynamic related to umbrella constructs is the critique concerning the definition and validity of the umbrella that follows after the initial excitement about the new concept. This validity challenge is a dialectic tension and discourse between those with a broad perspective (‘umbrella advocates’) and those with a narrower perspective (‘validity police’). The umbrella advocates argue that ‘broad perspectives are necessary to keep the field relevant and in touch with the larger, albeit messier, world.’<sup>33</sup> The validity police calls for a more methodological orientation with “narrower perspectives that will confirm to more rigorous

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<sup>30</sup> Perkmann & Spicer. 2008. How are management fashions institutionalized? pp.818; 827-829

<sup>31</sup> Hirsch & Levin. 1999. Umbrella advocates versus validity police. p.200

<sup>32</sup> Hirsch & Levin. 1999. Umbrella advocates versus validity police. p.200

<sup>33</sup> Hirsch & Levin. 1999. Umbrella advocates versus validity police. p.201

standards of validity and reliability.”<sup>34</sup> Where umbrella advocates are concerned that the field may become disconnected and irrelevant by excluding too many interesting problems, validity police guards against scattering and sloppiness because of the inclusion of too many elements.

The outcome of the dialectic discourse between the umbrella advocates and validity police can be one of the following three options - (1) an agreement to override the challenges, or (2) the acceptance of the on-going tension between the advocates and validity police, or (3) the collapse of the construct if it is not possible to create a coherent umbrella construct that encompasses all the divergent meanings.<sup>35</sup> Not all the elements that were part of the umbrella construct will necessarily dissipate as well. Elements from a collapsing umbrella construct could be integrated into existing or new fields.

A noticeable characteristic of most umbrella-related discourses is typologies that are used to tidy up the umbrella construct. Typologies depict what is included and what is excluded, as well as the relationship between the various elements included.

In conclusion, Hirsch and Levin<sup>36</sup> proposes the following five propositions pertaining to umbrella constructs -

- (1) The more a field lacks theoretical consensus, the more it will rely on typologies to tie together different elements.
- (2) An umbrella construct that seeks to tie different elements together will eventually have its validity seriously challenged.
- (3) The elements of an umbrella construct that has collapsed could outlive the construct. These elements can be integrated within other existing or new umbrella constructs or management professions.
- (4) An umbrella construct that undergoes collapse can be reborn with a new and different name.
- (5) The more an umbrella construct has a (non-academic) constituency, the less vulnerable that umbrella construct will be to validity challenges.

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<sup>34</sup> Hirsch & Levin. 1999. Umbrella advocates versus validity police. p.201

<sup>35</sup> Umbrella constructs often represents the dialectic tension between umbrella advocates and validity policing frameworks and provides a means to strike a balance between relevance and integration, on the one hand, and scientific rigor and focus, on the other. (Hirsch & Levin. 1999. Umbrella advocates versus validity police. p.201)

<sup>36</sup> Hirsch & Levin. 1999. Umbrella advocates versus validity police. p.205

## 2.4 Management fashion perspective

A fashion is a popular manner of doing something. Czarniawksa & Panozzo describe a fashion as “a *collective choice* among competing tastes, things, and ideas; it is orientated toward *finding*, but also toward *creating* what is typical of a given time”.<sup>37</sup>

This could refer to a particular management practice, but also to a management fashion trend or a management niche or a business outcome that is fashionable or typical of a given period.

### 2.4.1 Management fashion trends

According to Abrahamson & Eisenman<sup>38</sup> the study of management fashions should not only view the fashion trend of a single management practice, but also include the understanding of the production and influence of management fashion trends or trending preferences for certain paradigms. The sequence of various fashion-setting discourses culminates into a clear directional trend and influences what managers read, think about, express and enact behaviourally. Over time the direction of the trend is clarified and reinforced. Management fashion trends encapsulate the cumulative effect of consecutive and thus implicitly interrelated practices. Abrahamson & Eisenman further suggests that management fashion trends manifest themselves through language. Lexical shifts differentiate a fashion trend that prescribes certain management practices relative to its predecessors. Language shifts can also be instrumental in creating the impression of perpetual progression.<sup>39</sup>

### 2.4.2 Management niche

A management niche can be regarded as a unifying theme that stems from the need to rationally manage particular types of organisational components, such as employees, finances, infrastructure and knowledge. A succession of fashionable management practices could be accommodated in the realm of a management niche.<sup>40</sup>

### 2.4.3 Business outcome

The business outcome articulates the intended impact, outputs and consequences of the management practice. Business outcomes, like management niches, are representing normative attitudes and belief system of what is important for the vitality and

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<sup>37</sup> Czarniawksa & Panozzo. 2008. Preface: trends and fashions in management studies. p.5

<sup>38</sup> Abrahamson & Eisenman. 2008. Employee-management techniques: transient fads or trending fashions. pp.725-727; 741-742.

<sup>39</sup> Abrahamson & Eisenman. 2008. Employee-management techniques: transient fads or trending fashions. p.743

<sup>40</sup> Abrahamson & Fairchild. 1999. Management fashions. p.712

competitiveness of an enterprise. The appreciation and evaluation of the business outcome associated with a practice influence judgement of quality, value and relevance. The appropriation and measurement of these business outcomes could be inherently difficult because of the tacit nature and time required for the consequences and outcomes to materialise.<sup>41</sup>

Perceptions of the expected value can be based on reports of prior adoptions, as well as justifications that are based on pathos and/or logos. Pathos justifications make an appeal on the emotions and self-interest of people, such as fear, greed, or security. Logos justifications are linked to the rational desires for effective and efficient action. These are often supported by methodological calculations of means and ends, such as *return on investment (ROI)*. A management practice in this context is viewed as efficient means to important ends.<sup>42</sup>

#### 2.4.4 Management fashion discourses

Management fashion discourses will be discussed based on two perspectives. The first perspective is based on the understanding of a fashion as a transitory phenomenon that is replacing a previous fashion and that will be replaced by the next fashion based on the discussion of Abrahamson & Eisenman.<sup>43</sup> These fashion setting discourses tend to be promotional and evangelising. Czarniawska & Panozzo propose a second perspective. They argue that the management fashion stage should be regarded as a period of inter-organisational experimentation during which new practices are tested and refined. Some of these practices will be retained and institutionalised.<sup>44</sup> These discourses are referred to as transitional discourses.

##### 2.4.4.1 Fashion setting discourses

The choice of 'fashion' as label for the stage during which a management practice is popular, could also suggest that the practice will be of a transitory nature and it is presumed that it is a natural cycle for managers to embrace new ideas, explore them and then move onto the next progressive management practice.<sup>45</sup> Thus the management fashion setting process can be described as the process by which proponents continuously disseminate messages that

<sup>41</sup> Suchman. 1995. Managing legitimacy. p.579-582

<sup>42</sup> Green. 2004. A rhetorical theory of diffusion. p.657; Abrahamson & Fairchild. 1999. Management fashion. p.713

<sup>43</sup> Abrahamson & Eisenman. 2008. Employee-management techniques: transient fads or trending fashions. p.

<sup>44</sup> Czarniawska & Panozzo. 2008. Preface: trends and fashions in management studies. p.5

<sup>45</sup> Jackson 2001. *Managemen gurus and management fashions: a dramatic inquiry*. p.148; Abrahamson & Fairchild. 1999. Management fashion. p.712

redefine both their and fashion followers collective beliefs about which management techniques are at the forefront of rational management progress.<sup>46</sup>

According to Abrahamson & Fairchild there are six forms of discourses that can be associated with the management fashion setting process.<sup>47</sup> These discourses have a strong focus on communicating progressive rationality. The discourses can be categorized as follows. The first category of discourses promotes the new practice based on the inherent relevance and qualities thereof. These discourses also tend to be promotional and portray the fashion as universally effective and problem free. A second category of discourses promotes the new practice by showing how it supersedes or replaces other practices. The third category of discourses questions the legitimacy of the practice and calls for a replacement or abandonment of the practice without suggesting a substitute. The discourses in the third category often shows traits of disillusionment in that the management practices were not able to deliver as promised and will either reject the fashion without advocating a replacement, or promote a replacement, or reframe the management practice in order to repair the legitimacy.<sup>48</sup>

<b>Discourse category</b>	<b>Form of discourses</b>
Discourses that promote the adoption and on-going support of the new practice based on the inherent properties thereof.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solution-based discourses describe the fashion with claims that is all powerful in scope and impact.</li> <li>• Problem-based discourses propose theories about the problem source motivating the practice.</li> <li>• Bandwagon discourses report the successful adoption of the fashion.</li> <li>• Sustaining discourses call for the on-going support for a management practice despite problems and concerns. Three typical sustaining arguments are to - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- narrow the scope of application by suggesting that the practice only work under certain conditions, e.g. with active leadership.</li> <li>- suggest that the involvement of more skilled resources (such as consultants or facilitators) will render the practice effective.</li> <li>- suggest broadening tactics that position the practices as part of a larger toolkit or a bigger cause.<sup>49</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>46</sup> Abrahamson. 1996. Technical and aesthetic fashion. p.120

<sup>47</sup> Abrahamson & Fairchild. 1999. Management fashion. p.714

<sup>48</sup> Abrahamson & Fairchild. 1999. Management fashion. p.715

<sup>49</sup> Relates to umbrella construction.

Discourses that show how the new practice supersedes or replace other practices.

Discourses that call for the replacement or abandonment of the practice without providing an alternative.

- Surfacing discourses that advocate a transition from one management practice to the next.
- Debunking discourses that advocate a rejection of a management practice without suggesting a substitute.

**Table 2.1 Overview of fashion setting discourse types**

#### *2.4.4.2 Transitional discourses*

If the management fashion stage is viewed as a period of inter-organisational experimentation with a new management practice then the focus is not as much on the promotional discourse, but rather on the elements of the discourses that are shaping the practice for potential institutionalisation. Transitional discourses continue the theorisation started during the management innovation phase. It focuses on the formalisation of the practice, the understanding of the compatibility with other practices, as well as communicating systematic coherence with other concepts and practices and the existence of ‘webs’ of interdependencies.<sup>50</sup> The focus on compatibility and coherence is important because the constant transient use of management techniques and organisational forms causes temporal instability in organisations.<sup>51</sup> This is in contrast with the promotional discourses listed in the previous section that focus on communicating differentiation and showing that there is a new practice that should replace other practices.

According to Czarniawska & Panozzo<sup>52</sup> fashions are adopted, or imitated, because of (1) the perceived superiority reflected in the technical quality (logical reasons), (2) the people who coined the fashion (power-symbolic) and (3) the power of associations. The discourses identified by Abrahamson & Fairchild explain and describes the technical quality and logical reasons.

The power of associations can *inter alia* be seen in discourses that link a practice to existing practices and fields with established legitimacy or through mimicry-orientated discourses focus on making practices appear similar to existing management institutions. The power of associations is also facilitated by pragmatic ambiguity that is defined “as the condition of

<sup>50</sup> Perkmann & Spicer. 2008. How are management fashions institutionalized? p.6

<sup>51</sup> Abrahamson & Fairchild. 1999. Management fashion. p.715

<sup>52</sup> Czarniawska & Panozzo. 2008. Preface: trends and fashions in management studies. p.5

admitting more than one action.”<sup>53</sup> As such it affords the transportability of the practice to more contexts and accommodates the interpretive variability that increases with more industries and actors becoming involved in the shaping of the practice. Giroux suggests that pragmatic ambiguity is both a result and resource of a collective construction process that occurs during the rise in the popularity of a new management practice.<sup>54</sup>

## 2.5 Institutionalisation

Management institutions are practices that are entrenched and taken-for-granted as an acceptable and permanent element and convention of organisational life. An institutionalised practice is unlikely to be abandoned.<sup>55</sup> The focus of institutionalisation is on understanding how practices emerge and how these then become established and remain institutionalised. Lawrence & Suddaby define institutionalisation as purposive action aimed at creating, maintaining, and/or transforming institutions.<sup>56</sup>

### 2.5.1 Institutionalising discourses

There are various types of discourses that are reported to be part of the institutionalisation process. One report of discourses is associated with three characteristics that underpin institutionalisation, namely (1) the self-replication of the practice in different contexts, (2) habitualisation of behaviours that are part of the practice and (3) the sedimentation of the practice in belief systems and operations.<sup>57</sup> A second report looks at the discourses that are active during the three phases in the lifecycle of an institution, namely the creation of an institution, the maintenance of the institution, including potential transformation, and the potential disruption thereof.<sup>58</sup>

*Self-replication* is supported by theorisation and standardisation. Theorisation was discussed as a management innovation discourse. Theorisation provides a bridge between a management innovation and potential institutionalisation. Standardisation is about the development of generally accepted and mandated rules with respect to a management practice, such as ISO standards and certified methodologies. Through these standards

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<sup>53</sup> Giroux. 2006. 'It was such a handy term'. pp.1254

<sup>54</sup> Giroux. 2006. 'It was such a handy term'. pp.1232-1233;1248

<sup>55</sup> Perkmann & Spicer. 2008. How are management fashion institutionalized? p.5

<sup>56</sup> Lawrence & Suddaby. 2004. Institutions and institutional work. p.228

<sup>57</sup> Hirsch & Levin. 1999. Umbrella advocates versus validity police. p.200

<sup>58</sup> Lawrence & Suddaby. 2004. Institutions and institutional work. pp.228-238



practices are presented as precise programmes that can be routinely implemented and commercially sold by certified agents.<sup>59</sup>

*Habitualisation or routinisation* is reflected in similar structural arrangements enacted in various organisations, as well as similar policies and procedures associated with the same set of problems within various organisations that are evoked with minimal decision making effort. Two aspects of theorisation support habitualisation, namely –

- the creation of a public definition and recognition of a generic organizational problem, and
- the justification of a particular formal structural arrangement as a solution to the problem based on logical or empirical grounds, including diagnostic theories, theories that are compatible with a particular structure as a solution or treatment accompanied by evidence of actual success.

Adoption during the earlier stages of a new management practice is afforded by imitation or comparable structures that were pre-tested in other organisations. The adopters tend to get, however, more heterogeneous as diffusion is widening and there are more variation in the form of structures in organisations. Thus, the theorisation impetus shifts from affording imitation to establishing a normative legitimacy base.<sup>60</sup>

*Sedimentation* is underlying to the long-term retention and continuity of a practice across generations of members. According to Tolbert & Zucker<sup>61</sup> sedimentation is supported by relatively low resistance by opposing groups, continued cultural support and promotion by advocacy groups, as well as a strong positive correlation with desired outcomes. Sedimentation also involves both the ‘width’ and ‘depth’ of the institution. According to Zeitz, Mittal and McAulay<sup>62</sup> a sedimented or well-entrenched practice –

- address deep aspects of an organisation,
- involve every level of the organisation,
- are driven by the need for congruency between the organisation and its environment,
- are affected by external and internal stakeholders in the organisation,

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<sup>59</sup> Zeitz, Mittal & McAulay. 1999. Distinguishing adoption and entrenchment of management practices. p.743

<sup>60</sup> Tolbert & Zucker. 1994. Institutional analysis of organizations. pp.15-22

<sup>61</sup> Tolbert & Zucker. 1994. Institutional analysis of organizations. pp.15, 23

<sup>62</sup> Zeitz, Mittal & McAulay. 1999. Distinguishing adoption and entrenchment of management practices. p.743

- concern technology, financial and legal considerations, and
- is supported by the commitment of considerable resources.

### 2.5.2 Discourses associated with the lifecycle phases of an institution

Based on an overview study by Lawrence & Suddaby, two forms of discourses can be enacted during the emerging phase of a new institution, namely (1) discourses that focus on rules and (2) discourses that effect changes in norms and belief systems including the construction of identities.

#### *Discourses that effect changes in norms and belief systems*

Reconfiguration of belief systems and normative frameworks is attained through the construction of identities and the construction of intra-organisational normative networks that sanction the practice and perform peer-based monitoring and evaluation. It is also about the changing of the normative connections between the set of practices and the moral and cultural foundations for those practices. This is related to the identity construction that is instrumental in the provision of moral legitimacy to a practice.

According to Perkmann & Spicer legitimacy is generated across a range of different stakeholders by advocating a certain practice to a profession or field of management.<sup>63</sup>

Lawrence & Suddaby pose that the changing of normative associations often leads to new institutions in parallel or complimentary to existing institutions.<sup>64</sup> New management institutions does not necessarily imply new professions or functional groups, but could take the form of colonization where existing professional groups interpret new ideas in ways that integrate with their professional expertise and ultimately serve their interest. As such the jurisdiction of existing professions is extended and altered to include these new practices in their realm.<sup>65</sup> The association with existing management fields and professional groups anchors the new practice also with more widely anchored discourses and grounds the practice in a broader normative framework.<sup>66</sup> Where more than one professional group includes a management practice into their realm, it could lead to competition. Each community seeks to develop interpretations that reflect their own norms and practices. This leads to the proposition that management practices that cuts across existing professional boundaries will

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<sup>63</sup> Perkmann & Spicer. 2008. How are management fashions institutionalized? pp.817; 825-826

<sup>64</sup> Lawrence & Suddaby. 2004. Institutions and institutional work. p.228

<sup>65</sup> Perkmann & Spicer. 2008. How are management fashions institutionalized? pp.818

<sup>66</sup> Perkmann & Spicer. 2008. How are management fashions institutionalized? pp.818;827-829

stimulate multiple ways of framing the problem and justifying the solution among professional groups.<sup>67</sup>

Norms and belief systems are also influenced by mimicry, theorisation, templating and education. Mimicry is about associating a new practice with existing institutions and can provide a powerful means for new entrants into a domain to legitimise a new practice by highlighting its continuities with the past as much as its distinctiveness. Templating, theorisation and education are associated with the extension and elaboration of institutions. Formalisation lowers the cost of adoption.

#### *Discourses that focus on rules*

Rule systems that underpin an institution are shaped by advocacy, as well as definition and vesting.<sup>68</sup>

- Advocacy involves the mobilisation of political and regulatory support that could lead to the establishment of systems and structures underlying compliance, monitoring and evaluation.
- Definition involves the construction of rule systems that confer status or identity, define boundaries of membership or create status hierarchies within a field. Lawrence & Suddaby<sup>69</sup> found that defining work is more about the creation of 'constitutive rules', which enables, than rules that constrain institutional action.
- Vesting focuses on the creation of rule structures that confer property rights.

## **2.6 Consolidated framework for discourse analysis**

In the previous sections, various forms of discourses were discussed that promotes and support the adoption and support for a management practice. In this section, a framework is presented that will be utilised to map and discuss the discourse patterns of the proponents included in this study in Chapter 3.

The framework is based on five elements. The first two elements provide the necessary understanding of why the management practice is necessary and what it entails. These elements also demarcate the focus of enquiry. According to Liles et al, a discipline is demarcated by a focus of enquiry that articulates a unique fundamental question that emerges from the needs of society. This fundamental question defines the goals and objectives of the

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<sup>67</sup> Scarbrough & Swan. 2001. Explaining the diffusion of knowledge management. p.5

<sup>68</sup> Lawrence & Subbasy. 2004. Institutions and institutional work. pp.221-223;228

<sup>69</sup> Lawrence & Subbasy. 2004. Institutions and institutional work. pp.221-223;228

discipline, as well as a world view, paradigm or unique perspective that attracts a group of people and allows for open ended problem solving by this group of people.<sup>70</sup> The resultant theories within such a management discipline changes the behaviours of managers who start to act in accordance with the theory.<sup>71</sup>

(i) *Rationale*

The rationale provides the motivation, impetus and substantiation for knowledge management as a new management practice.

(ii) *Definition of the new management practice*

This element looks at form/s of discourse applied to define the new management practice.

The following two elements could be regarded as an extension and specification of the first two elements. These elements are specifically named as they represent specific rhetoric that contextualises the practice. These two elements are discussed as part of the management fashion perspective in Section 2.4. They are included in the framework as elements that represent significant propositions that will inform the analysis of the patterns in the discourses. In the framework, it will be postulated how these elements manifest in each of the four theoretical lenses. These two elements highlights what knowledge management is regarded to deal with.

(iii) *Management niche*

The declaration of the management niche focuses the knowledge management propositions of a discourse. For the purpose of this study, knowledge is assumed as the generic management niche. The interest is thus on depicting the interpretations or perceptions of knowledge that are at the centre of the discourses to be analysed.

(iv) *Business outcome*

The articulation of the intended business outcome of a management practice represents the value to be expected when implementing that practice, or the belief of the significance of the practice. It could be regarded as a key reason or driver for adoption, other than the technical propositions that explains what the practice entails and how it operates.

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<sup>70</sup> Liles, Johnson & Meade. 1996. The enterprise engineering discipline. p.2

<sup>71</sup> Ghoshal, 2005. Bad management theories are destroying good management practices. p.77

The last element explains how the management practice works and is about the means provided to enact the practice.

(v) *Enactment*

The enactment of a management practice is supported by frameworks, methodologies, tools and understanding of the conditions and steps to implement proposed solutions.

The following table presents a mapping of the various types of discourses discussed to the elements. This table will be a useful reference to identify the discourse patterns of the selected proponents that will be analysed in Chapter 3.

<i>Discourse element</i>	<b>Management innovation</b>	<b>Umbrella construction</b>	<b>Management fashion cycle</b>	<b>Management institutionalisation</b>
<i>Overview of lens</i>	The proposal, conceptualisation, definition and validation of a novel management practice to address performance deficiencies or leverage new performance opportunities. This could be either based on a systemic process, or be the result of serendipitous events.	Umbrella constructs provides theoretical order that connects concepts and practices and entails the assembly of a collection of practices in a coherent framework.	The management fashion cycle refers to the period when a management practice is in vogue and tends to be high on the management agenda.  This period is also characterised by increased intra-organisational adoption of the management practice.	Focus on aspects that lowers the implementation threshold and affords a practice to become entrenched to such an extent that abandonment is unlikely. It supports the taken-for-grantedness (an aspect of cognitive legitimacy) of a practice.
<i>Rationale</i>	The rationale is portrayed by agenda setting and thought experiment discourses that generate influential points of view, including a commitment to a big management problem, novel or unconventional principles, a deconstruction of management orthodoxies and analogies from atypical organisations.	The rationale-orientated discourses focus on explaining the motivation and substantiation for the new umbrella or the transformation of an existing umbrella, as it manifest in umbrella advocacy or umbrella policing.	The rationale is encapsulated in discourses that promote a management practice by communicating progressive rationality (positing that a management practice is at the forefront of management progress), and portrays a management practice as being typical of a given time. Typical discourses that communicate the rationale are problem-based discourses, solution-based discourses and surfacing discourses. Debunking discourses is also a form of rationale discourse.	The rationale discourse stems from the reconfiguration of belief systems and normative frameworks, and/or the necessity of implementing management practices to comply with a rule-based system. The rationale discourse may also entails the introduction and promotion of a new or adjusted rule-based system.

<i>Discourse element</i>	<b>Management innovation</b>	<b>Umbrella construction</b>	<b>Management fashion cycle</b>	<b>Management institutionalisation</b>
<i>Definition</i>	The definition of the new practice is based on thought experiments, the reflections of the vivo experimentations, and theorisations that provide the necessary consolidation and rigour to the novel practice to afford intra-organisational diffusion.		The definition of the practice will be mainly based on a solution-orientated discourse. Surfacing discourses also defines the new practice in the context of another practice.	The practice is defined in terms of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) a belief or rule-based system (that conveys the rationale of the practice)</li> <li>(b) methodologies and frameworks that supports the enactment of the practice, affording self-replication and habituation.</li> <li>(c) Frameworks that show the breadth and depth of impact on the organisational system, that is referred to as the level of sedimentation associated with a practice.</li> </ul>
<i>Management niche</i>		The focus on a certain organisational element provides the selection criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of practises in the umbrella construction. Hence, the declaration of the management niche is important in umbrella construction.	A focus on a certain management niche could also be regarded as a management fashion trend.	The management niche is indicative of the focus of the discourse.

<b>Discourse element</b>	<b>Management innovation</b>	<b>Umbrella construction</b>	<b>Management fashion cycle</b>	<b>Management institutionalisation</b>
<i>Business outcome</i>		The business outcome would provide a common purpose to the various practices being included in the umbrella construct.	Focus on certain business outcome may be indicative of associations with management fashion trends.	The business outcome put forward could influence the breadth and depth of sedimentation involved. It will depend on the level the business outcome is declared, e.g. if it is a product of knowledge-based process (such as a strategy) or new organisational capabilities (such as collaboration).
<i>Enactment</i>	<p>The practice methodologies and tools are developed through reflections on the <i>in vivo</i> implementation of the new practice.</p> <p>Theorisation and labelling supports the above by formalising the practice into specific and operational concepts that can be readily understood and implemented. As such theorisation affords comprehensibility that is necessary for intra-organisational diffusion and adoption of the practice.</p>	Enactment of umbrella practice frameworks as supported by frameworks that explains the interrelationships between included practices, as well as the context in which certain practices that form part of the umbrella construct will be relevant to implement.	Mimicry and pragmatic ambiguity are two discourse forms that support enactment.	Elements that support self-replication, habitualisation and/or routinisation lower the implementation threshold. These provide 'templates' for the replication-like implementation of the practice. The 'template' could also be based on a mimicry-orientation discourse where the practice is explained in terms of a known practice.

Table 2.2 Mapping of discourse elements to types of discourses



## 2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter the typical discourses associated with the formation of a management practice were discussed. These discourses do not only focus on the exposition of the technical logic of a practice, but also contain rhetorical elements that are aimed at promoting the relevance of the practice and grab the attention of managers within an overstocked market of management ideas. The influence of these rhetorical propositions on the formation of knowledge management will be explored in the next chapters.

## *Chapter 3*

# Analysis of selected Knowledge Management Theorists

### **3.1 Introduction**

There are various proponents with active discourses that represent influential points of view that could be perceived as gurus in the knowledge management field. Gurus play a significant role in the formation of management practices. They provide thought leadership encapsulated in their rhetoric, structure and legitimacy dispositions. The discourses and products (such as methodologies) of gurus also shape the definition and formation of the practice, and facilitate the inter-organisational diffusion of practice/s.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the text-based discourses of the proponents in scope for this study according to the framework presented in Chapter 2. The patterns of the discourses of the various proponents will be compared and synthesised in Chapter 4. The meaning of these patterns for knowledge management and the knowledge management profession will be addressed in Chapter 4. A critique of the propositions and claims are beyond the scope of this study. Propositions will only be noted as put forward in the texts of the proponents.

The analysis of the discourses of the following people will be presented in this chapter. They were selected based on their active and on-going participation in the knowledge management discourse since the early stages – Verna Allee, Nancy Dixon, Leif Edvinsson, Ikujiro Nonaka, Laurence Prusak, Dave Snowden and Matthieu Weggeman.

The discourses of each of these proponents will be discussed as follows – firstly an overview of the discourse propositions will be given. The propositions will be presented in a table format. Secondly the discourse patterns that can be identified in the discourse will be discussed. Reference to related propositions in the discussion of the discourse patterns will use the following notation – [Table Number – (Row Number, Column Number) – e.g. Table 3.4-4a.

## 3.2 Verna Allee

According to Allee she has more than 20 years' experience in leading-edge management practices that focuses on the management of complex work in organisations. Allee states that she works mainly on a strategic level with large corporations, small businesses, associations and government organisations as a consultant.<sup>72</sup>

### 3.2.1 Overview of propositions

Allee states that her focus is to assist organisations to “fundamentally rethinks their business, and not just to put a nice piece of KM overlay onto it and patch it to the existing strategy.”<sup>73</sup> Her focus is not on finding the best way to align knowledge management with business strategy, but on rethinking strategy based on a fundamentally different understanding of business when you view it from a knowledge perspective or the perspective of intangibles. Her focus is on *knowledge based management*.<sup>74</sup>

Allee regards knowledge management as but one of the practices in her repertoire that focus on the management of complex work in organisations in order to create value. The other practices are value networks, intellectual capital, new business models and strategy development.<sup>75</sup> The inclusion of all these practices in her repertoire is based on the premise that “to develop the skills and knowledge we need for this more complex economy, we are engaged in a business learning journey that extends beyond knowledge management, customer relationship management, e-business, or any one business question. The meta-level learning that we are all engaged in is learning to work with network principles.”<sup>76</sup>

Allee's propositions can be categorised according to two threads -

- The first thread is about the proposal of a new synthesis of existing management practices from a knowledge-based perspective. Allee synthesises the thinking and existing methods from various fields that is concerned with knowledge, learning and performance.<sup>77</sup> She also assembles existing tools for collective sense-making into an umbrella framework<sup>78</sup> (see Table 3.1-a for discussion).

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<sup>72</sup> Allee. 1997. *The knowledge evolution*. p.11

<sup>73</sup> Barth. 2001. Verna Allee on rethinking KM. p.1

<sup>74</sup> Barth. 2001. Verna Allee on rethinking KM. p.1

<sup>75</sup> Allee. 1997. *The knowledge evolution*. p.11

<sup>76</sup> Allee. 2003. *The future of knowledge*. p.xiv

<sup>77</sup> Allee. 1997. *The knowledge evolution*. pp.xiv-xv

<sup>78</sup> Allee. 2003. *The future of knowledge*. pp.113-150

- The second thread focuses on the introduction of the value network perspective and the establishment of the Value Network Analysis methodology. The focus of this thread later shifts to the application of this management methodology to current management agendas, such as collaboration and social media (see Table 3.1-b for discussion).

The table below provides an overview of Allee's propositions for these two threads.

Aspect		a	b
		Synthesis and assembly <sup>79</sup>	Proposal of value networks as a new perspective <sup>80</sup> and the establishment of value networks as practice <sup>81</sup>
1	<b>Rationale</b>	<p>Allee proposes that new perspectives are required to look at organisations since the environment in which they operate and compete is changing. Allee frames these as <i>knowledge questions</i> which she regards as the real management questions to be asked in the knowledge-based era. The main questions are -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do we need to pay attention to in order to be successful?</li> <li>• How is value created?</li> <li>• How is business knowledge evolving? How are organisations changing? What are the implications thereof for the practices required?</li> <li>• How does our focus on knowledge and intangibles prepare ourselves for a very different world of enterprise – one that is fluid, complex, and more interdependent than ever before experienced in human history?<sup>82</sup></li> </ul> <p>Allee’s discourse echoes the paradigm shift that moves away from mechanistic and linear thinking to the dynamic views of the organisations as living and complex systems. Allee argues that intellectual capital and balanced scorecard approaches are still rooted in industrial age models and that new thinking is required to understand and leverage the value derived from intangible assets.<sup>83</sup>The rationale is a central theme in Allee’s discourse over time and applies to both threads.</p>	
2	<b>Outcome, outputs and consequences</b>	<p>The stated outcome is the development of organisational competencies. Allee views organisational competencies to consist of knowledge competencies and core performance competencies -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge competencies are the expertise and technical knowledge that is unique to a particular</li> </ul>	<p>The outcome is the leveraging and configuration of value networks that generate economic value through complex and dynamic value exchanges between one or more enterprises, its customers, suppliers, strategic partners and the community. The proposition includes an appeal on prosperity as the eventual outcome that</p>

<sup>79</sup> Main source: Allee. 1997. *The knowledge evolution*

<sup>80</sup> Main source: Allee. 2003. *The future of knowledge*

<sup>81</sup> Main source: Allee & Schwabe. 2011. *Value Networks and the true nature of collaboration*

<sup>82</sup> Allee. 1997. *The knowledge evolution*; Allee. 2003. *The future of knowledge*. pp.xiii,xiv

<sup>83</sup> Allee. 1999. *The art and practice of being a revolutionary*. p.121

Aspect		a	b
		Synthesis and assembly <sup>79</sup>	Proposal of value networks as a new perspective <sup>80</sup> and the establishment of value networks as practice <sup>81</sup>
		<p>business.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Core performance competencies or the mechanisms by which core knowledge competencies are turned into products and services (e.g. bringing products to market quickly or optimising logistics).<sup>84</sup></li> </ul>	<p>suggests longevity and long term perspective.<sup>85</sup> Later on, Allee focus on value networks as it specifically applies to collaboration as the intended outcome of understanding and interventions.<sup>86</sup></p>
<b>3</b>	<b>Management niche</b>	<p>There are reference to two niches or elements that requires management –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Knowledge in the organisation that is viewed as collaborative intelligence or collective fields of knowledge.<sup>87</sup></li> <li>(ii) Allee proclaims that knowledge management is concerned with an umbrella question, namely how value is created.</li> </ul>	<p>The networked value that underpins business success should be the focus of management. Specifically, value networks and the role of knowledge in value creation, communities and organisations. Following the focus on networked value, Allee posits that we should look at organisation as value networks. Value networks could be any group of people engaged in purposeful activity. By describing work in terms of value networks, a business activity or organisation is depicted as a living network.<sup>88</sup> The central question stays the same as during the first stage, namely how is value created?</p>
<b>4</b>	<b>Proposal and definition of a new solution/ practice</b>	<p>According to Allee it is about the knowledge-based management of organisations. She notes that there is no single leverage point or best practice to advance knowledge and that it must be supported at multiple levels</p>	<p>According to Allee value is created by working consciously with the intangible assets of an organisation, such as the competence of people, the ability to get things done, the efficiency of internal</p>

<sup>84</sup> Allee. 1997. 12 principles of knowledge management. p.73

<sup>85</sup> Allee. 2003. *The future of knowledge*. p.23

<sup>86</sup> Allee & Schwabe. 2011. *Value networks and the true nature of collaboration*

<sup>87</sup> Allee. 1997. *The knowledge evolution*. p.19

<sup>88</sup> Allee. No date. *Excerpt from the Future of Knowledge*

Aspect		a	b
		<b>Synthesis and assembly</b> <sup>79</sup>	<b>Proposal of value networks as a new perspective</b> <sup>80</sup> <b>and the establishment of value networks as practice</b> <sup>81</sup>
		<p>in a variety of ways. She proposed two frameworks to guide the crafting of such a knowledge strategy –</p> <p>The solution proposed for this entails an assembly and synthesis of existing practices (see next row for details).<sup>89</sup></p>	<p>structures and systems, the web of relationships, as well as the knowledge flows that are essential to leverage these intangible assets.<sup>90</sup> Allee is proposing that we should look at organisations as value networks that depicts the before mentioned. A value network generates economic value through complex dynamic value exchanges between one or more enterprises, its customers, suppliers, strategic partners and the community. Such value networks operate on the principle of fair exchanges of knowledge and benefits in addition to revenue exchanges. Value flows in these networks are not simply one directional. They are interwoven, interdependent and multidirectional. The value flows cycle and loop back in a complex series of exchanges, encompassing many threads or chains of value.</p>
5	<b>Enactment – methods and conditions</b>	<p>Allee’s discourse could be regarded as a quest to establish legitimacy for a new practice field, based on a new management perspective and outline for a comprehensive knowledge strategy. This is supported by the creation of two frameworks to show in which context certain existing practices are relevant and the correct approach. Allee</p>	<p>Value Network Management is introduced as a new strategic perspective and tool to analyse and depict knowledge flows as a primary vehicle for value creation.<sup>95</sup> Later on, Allee publish a practice-orientated book that shows how value network modelling and analytics provide better support for collaborative,</p>

<sup>89</sup> This approach is supported by the following two statements: “this book attempts to integrate concepts and relationships that have been described across a variety of disciplines pertaining to knowledge in the organisation. My purpose is to build on our common wisdom and reach a new synthesis.” and “The new solution proposal is thus a re-interpretation of existing practices, and offers new cohesion, synergies and grouping of practices.” (Allee. 1997. *The Knowledge Evolution*. p.xii)

<sup>90</sup> Allee. 2004. *Excerpts from an interview conducted in the summer of 2004 by Alex Bennet*

Aspect	a	b
	<b>Synthesis and assembly</b> <sup>79</sup>	<b>Proposal of value networks as a new perspective</b> <sup>80</sup> <b>and the establishment of value networks as practice</b> <sup>81</sup>
	<p>based her evaluation on the understanding that knowledge is more organic than mechanical<sup>91</sup> and assert that how you define knowledge determines how you manage it.<sup>92</sup></p> <p>The first framework assimilates practices that support collaborative learning, such as Total Quality Management, benchmarking, best practices, learning organisations and knowledge mapping.<sup>93</sup></p> <p>In a second framework, Allee presents a framework that assimilates tactical approaches for sense making as it manifests in knowledge networks and learning communities, as well as communal learning and systems thinking. Practices such as communities of practice, social network analysis, conversations, action reviews, storytelling, Open Space Technology and knowledge cafes are incorporated in this framework.<sup>94</sup></p>	<p>emergent work and complex activities, including various templates and case studies.<sup>96</sup></p> <p>The enactment of the practice is further supported by -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunity to certify as a qualified Value Network Analysis practitioner.</li> <li>- The inclusion of value network analysis (VNA) as part of enterprise architecture and business modelling standards, including ITIL3 Handbook (2007), a mention in the eTOM standard (mobile) as a method for strategy-level mapping, and inclusion in the Value Delivery Method (VDM) for the OMG standards group.<sup>97</sup></li> </ul>

**Table 3.1 Overview of Allee's propositions**

<sup>95</sup> Allee. 1999. *The art and practice of being a revolutionary*. p.128

<sup>91</sup> Based on this understanding, Allee proposes the following principles about knowledge – knowledge is messy, self-organising, seeks community, travels via language, and the more you try to pin knowledge down, the more it slips away. She also put forward that there is no one solution, that knowledge does not grow forever, that no one is in charge and that it is not possible to impose rules and systems if knowledge is self-organising (Allee, 1997. 12 principles of knowledge management. p.72).

<sup>92</sup> Allee. 1997. 12 principles of knowledge management. p.72

<sup>93</sup> Allee. 1997. *The knowledge evolution*. pp.195-209

<sup>94</sup> Allee. 2003. *The future of knowledge*. pp.111-146

<sup>96</sup> Allee & Schwabe. 2011. *Value networks and the true nature of collaboration*.

<sup>97</sup> Allee & Schwabe. 2011. *Chapter 7: Deep dive into the methodology: History of Applied VNA*.



### 3.2.2 Discussion of Allee's discourse

There are two distinct discourse patterns in Allee's discourse, namely umbrella construction and management innovation. These two patterns will be discussed, as well as how institutionalisation is supported through these. The manifestation of management fashion rhetoric in Allee's discourse will also be discussed.

#### 3.2.2.1 Allee's discourse as umbrella construction

Allee's discourse started out as the construction and advocacy for knowledge management as an umbrella practice.<sup>98</sup> Allee states that "When knowledge itself is the strategic focus, it often serves as an umbrella for integrating Total Quality Management and learning organisation principles. For example, the core competencies approach is also perfectly compatible with other quality and learning strategies. We do not have to throw out everything we have done before to move to a more comprehensive knowledge strategy."<sup>99</sup> According to Allee, the umbrella nature of knowledge management makes it different to other management practices, such as Total Quality, Six Sigma and business process re-engineering that have a more singular focus. Allee proposes that many of these practices that have knowledge or learning as key components are "some of the best vehicles that have surfaced for knowledge creation."<sup>100</sup> Allee's contribution is thus on providing a new premise and framework to incorporate elements from various existing management practices into a new and coherent framework for knowledge-based management (see Table 3.1-4a,5a).

Allee's umbrella construction is not cumulative. She proposes one umbrella construct in her first book, and a different umbrella construct in her second book.<sup>101</sup> She then moves on to Value Network Management without maintaining or rejecting the two umbrella frameworks. As a result the relevance and rigour of these umbrella constructs may become outdated if the management fashion trends underpinning the advocacy, as reflected in the rationale, management niche and business outcome are not regarded as current management focus areas anymore. More recent practices are also not accounted for within these umbrella constructs.

#### 3.2.2.2 Allee's management innovation discourse and related support for institutionalisation

The second thread of Allee's discourse exhibits typical characteristics of a management innovation discourse that transcends into an institutionalisation discourse. It is about the advocacy and diffusion of a single methodology conceptualised and developed by Allee, in contrast to the

<sup>98</sup> An overview of Thread 1, which is an umbrella discourse, is available in Table 3.1-a.

<sup>99</sup> Allee. 1997. *The knowledge evolution*. p.209

<sup>100</sup> Allee. 1997. *The knowledge evolution*. p.201

<sup>101</sup> Table 3.1-5a

umbrella orientation of the first thread that assimilates existing practices. It starts out with agenda setting and though experimentation that puts forward the premise that value networks are the underlying dynamic to interrogate in order to understand and influence value creation from intangible assets (see Table 3.1-1b,2b,3b). This is followed by the proposal of the Value Network Management methodology (see Table 3.1-4b). All of the above is consolidated in a theorisation discourse that provides the substantiation and operational framework (see Table 3.1-b). The operational framework fosters institutionalisation by the exposition of the Value Network Management methodology, as well as the specific application thereof to foster collaboration and the leveraging of social media as topical business agendas (see Table 3.1-2b). Self-replication strengthened by the inclusion of multiple case studies that contains reports of reflections of *in vivo* experimentation and implementations. Self-replication is further supported by the provision of a well packaged training product that leads to certification (see Table 3.1-5b).

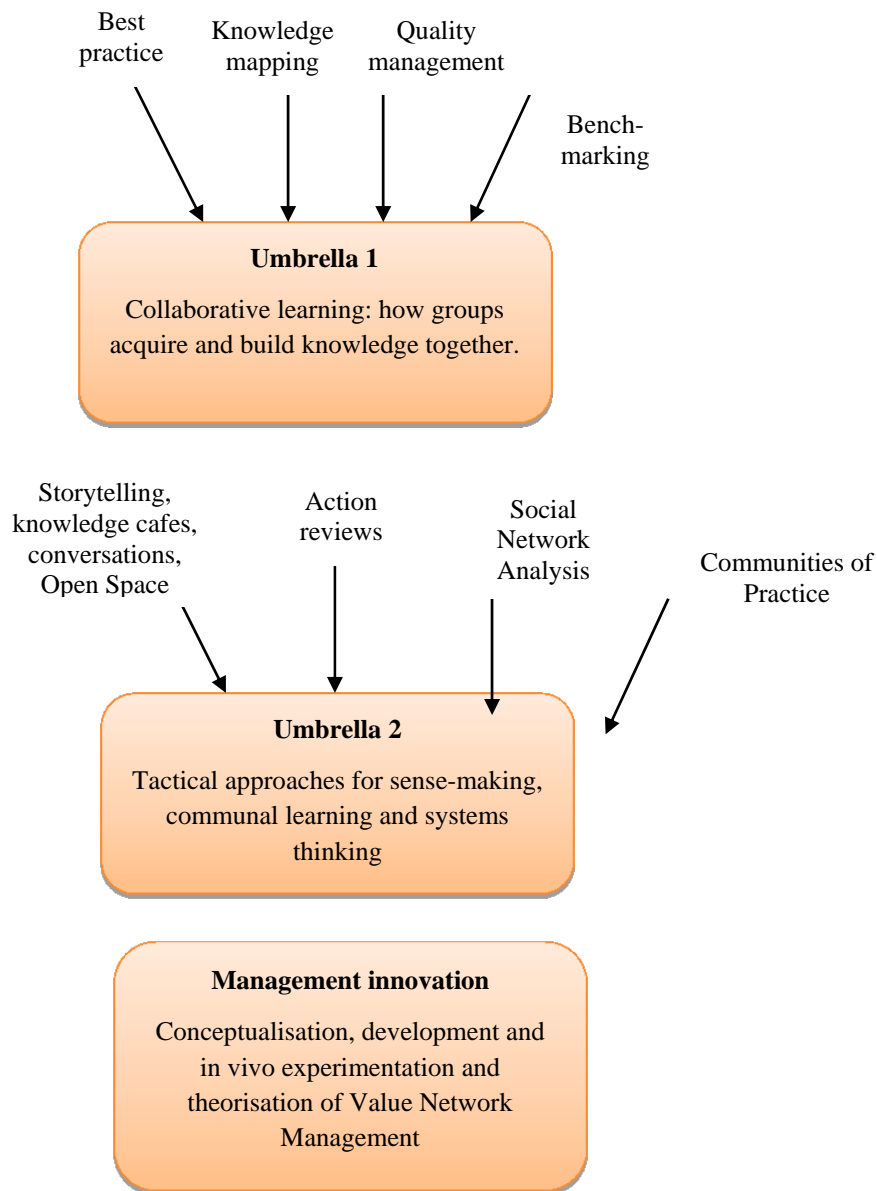


Figure 3.1 Three discontinuous stages of Allee's discourse

The institutionalisation appeal of the Value Network Management methodology is based on the influencing of belief systems of managers, i.e. that the dynamic exchanges of tacit and explicit elements are the core of understanding and influencing value creation.

### 3.2.2.3 Management fashion rhetoric in Allee's discourse

Allee's discourse is in essence a solution-orientated discourse focusing on providing new options to drive value creation. It is based on an overarching surfacing discourse proclaiming that industrial age thinking should be replaced with more progressive complexity-based thinking that views the organisation as a living organism (see Table 3.1-1ab).

She also makes use of association with management agendas that are topical of the period in which the discourse is situated. This is best reflected in the statement of business outcomes – namely organisational competencies in the first thread, and collaboration in the second thread (see Table 3.1-2a,2b). Allee also uses terminology of management fashion trends, such as tacit knowledge. It could also be regarded that she introduces or popularise language in her network, such as the knowledge-based discussion and value network terminology.

## 3.3 Nancy Dixon

Nancy Dixon states that her perspective is based on a background and interest in organisational learning and not on a technology orientation.<sup>102</sup> She is a consultant-practitioner whose career started out as an academic in organisational sciences. Her book, *Common Knowledge*, was listed as one of the best 100 business books.<sup>103</sup> She is thus regarded as influential in the management cadre.

### 3.3.1 Overview of propositions

Dixon refers to herself as a knowledge management professional that is intrigued by the knowledge management professionals' "expanding comprehension of what we need to take into account as organisational knowledge".<sup>104</sup> Her premise is that the knowledge management professional's view of knowledge – what it is and how we use it – influences the selection of knowledge management strategies to design and implement.<sup>105</sup> Dixon's model that depicts three categories or eras in knowledge management serves as a summary of her interpretation of shifts in the views of knowledge and how these extended the knowledge management concern in organisations. It also

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<sup>102</sup> Dixon. 2009. *Welcome to Conversations Matters*.

<sup>103</sup> Dixon. 2009. *Bio*.

<sup>104</sup> Dixon. 2009. *Where Knowledge Management Has Been and Where It Is Going- Part Three*.

<sup>105</sup> Dixon. 2009. *Where Knowledge Management Has Been and Where It Is Going- Part One*.

shows how these shifts lead to the inclusion of different practices over time in the knowledge management repertoire.

The first era focus on the leveraging of explicit knowledge associated with knowledge management practices that document best practices and the building of repositories. The second era represents a shift towards the leveraging of experiential knowledge through the enactment of Communities of Practice and knowledge transfer practices as core activities on the knowledge management agenda. The focus of the third era is on the utilisation of conversation-based practices that can bring collective knowledge from the whole organisation to bear on strategic issues.

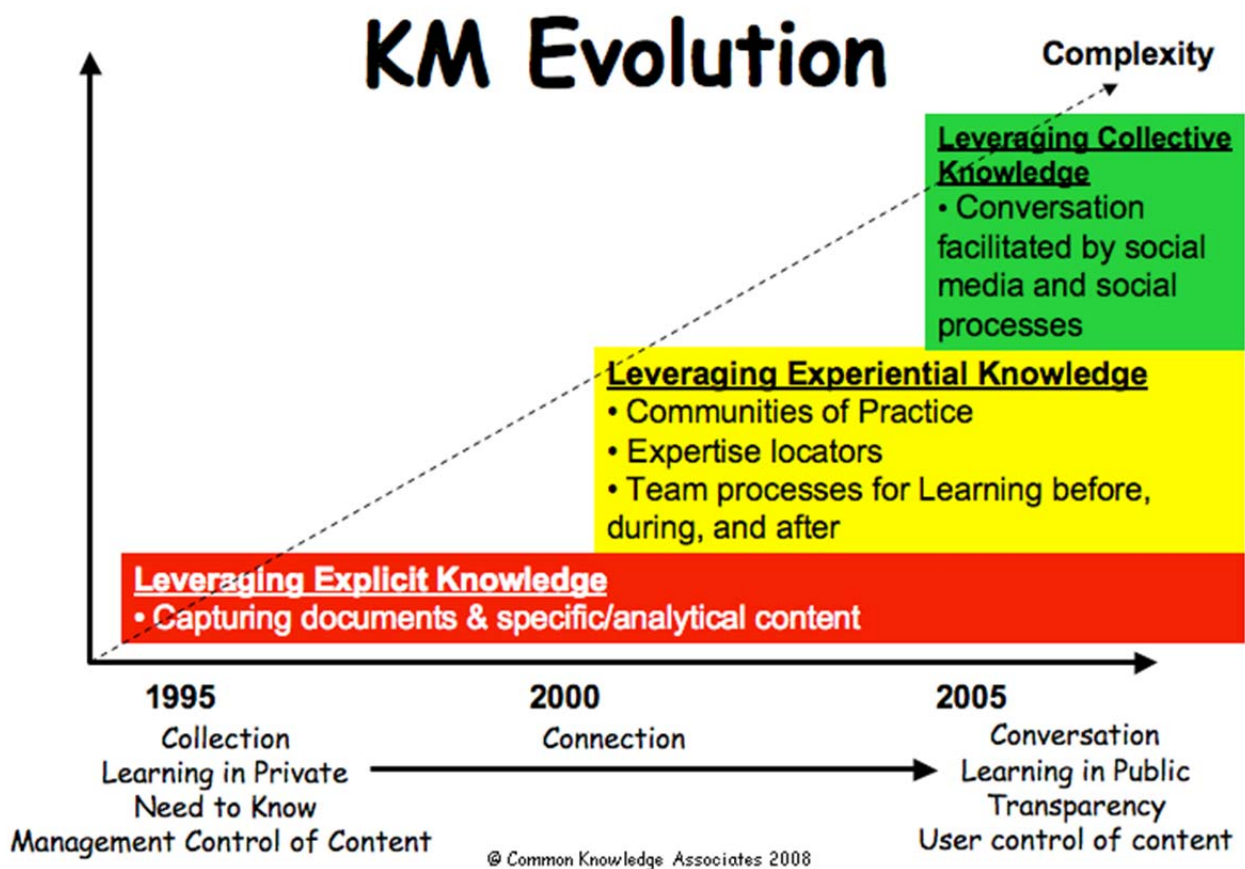


Figure 3.2 Three eras of knowledge management according to Dixon<sup>106</sup>

The analysis of Dixon’s knowledge management discourse will be related to the second and third categories of Dixon’s framework, i.e. from 2000 onwards. Dixon was not yet part of the knowledge management discourse during the first era (1995-2000). During the period from 1992-1998 Dixon laid the foundation for her knowledge management orientations in various articles about organisational learning, conversations and sense-making as instrumental mechanisms in the

<sup>106</sup> Dixon. 2009. *Where Knowledge Management Has Been and Where It Is Going- Part On*.

development of organisations.<sup>107</sup> Dixon effectively entered the knowledge management discourse in 1999 with an article titled the “Changing face of knowledge”<sup>108</sup> and her first knowledge management book – *Common Knowledge* – that was published in 2000. Her discourses were now grounded in the recognition of knowledge as a management niche that demands certain practices to be enacted as opposed to the earlier discourses in which organisational learning was the point of departure. There was thus a shift from viewing a process or verb, such as organisational learning as the management niche to focus on knowledge as a noun as the management niche. The various descriptions of knowledge demand different practices or processes, and hence, knowledge management is presented as a collection of processes and practices that enacts knowledge in an organisation. This is similar to the first two stages of Allee’s discourse and later be discussed as a form of umbrella advocacy.

The propositions relevant for this study for the second and third categories are noted in Table 3.2.

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<sup>107</sup> Dixon. 1992. Organizational learning: a review of the literature with implications for HRD professionals; Dixon. 1993. Developing managers for the learning organization; Dixon.1994. *The organizational learning cycle*; Dixon. 1996. *Perspectives on dialogue*; Dixon. 1998. The responsibilities of members in an organization that is learning.

<sup>108</sup> Dixon. 1999. The changing face of knowledge.

Aspect		a	b
		Discourse propositions for Category 2 (from 2000 onwards)	Discourse propositions for Category 3 (from 2005 onwards)
1	<b>Rationale</b>	According to Dixon the first era's focus on the codification of explicit knowledge failed to deliver the expected return on investment because the right things were not done. Her proposal is a knowledge transfer methodology as "a way to fix a knowledge management system that is not working by adding to it the social processes that make it come alive." <sup>109</sup>	Suitable practices are required to address the complexity, ambiguity and fast paced of organizational change in today's enterprises. These practices should represent a shift from the lateral communication (prevalent in Category 2) to integration of vertical communication. Dixon states the knowledge management professionals need to pay attention to conversations if they want to make a difference in organisations. Underlying the third era is the proposition that new value for organisations will be derived from collective intelligence and collective sense-making. <sup>110</sup>
2	<b>Outcome, outputs and consequences</b>	Competitive advantage should be derived from experiential knowledge (Category 2) rather than explicit knowledge (Category 1). Knowledge transfer is critical for current viability, whilst creation of common knowledge is crucial for future viability. <sup>111</sup> Knowledge management is directed towards performance improvement. <sup>112</sup>	The goal of knowledge management is to make use of the collective knowledge in an organisation to create more effective strategies. The strategic plan and stated objectives of our organizations are regarded as products of knowledge. <sup>113</sup>
3	<b>Management niche</b>	Experiential knowledge that Dixon labels as <i>common knowledge</i> . It is knowledge generated from the experience of people engaged in organisational tasks. Common knowledge	Collective intelligence that is in the community and the network. Collective sense-making is the underlying process to be enabled.

<sup>109</sup> Dixon. N.d. *Preparing for conversations with Nancy Dixon: creation and reuse of project knowledge*.

<sup>110</sup> Dixon. 2010. *The three eras of knowledge management - summary*

<sup>111</sup> Dixon. 2000. *Common knowledge*. p.20

<sup>112</sup> Dixon. 2009. *A Challenge to KM Professionals to Address Strategic Organizational Issues*.

<sup>113</sup> Dixon. 2009. *Where knowledge management has been and where it is going – Part I*; Dixon. 2009. *A Challenge to KM Professionals to Address Strategic Organizational Issues*

Aspect		a	b
		Discourse propositions for Category 2 (from 2000 onwards)	Discourse propositions for Category 3 (from 2005 onwards)
	is unique to an organisation and has more potential to provide a competitive advantage than knowledge that is equally available to others, such as customer information. The underlying process is system level learning based on knowledge transfer.		
4	<b>Solution definition</b>	Dixon's solution definition could be regarded as a cumulative definition of an umbrella practice which goal is to make use of the collective knowledge in an organisation. She continually integrates existing practices in the realm of the knowledge management professional to reflect the changes in how organisations think about their knowledge. <sup>114</sup> (see Figure 3.1)	
5	<b>Enactment – method, conditions.</b>	<p>The understanding and view of knowledge influences the selection of the type of knowledge management strategies, which is depicted by Dixon according to three categories. Each category focuses on a specific form of knowledge and associated practices as depicted in Figure 3.2. In addition to the comprehensibility afforded by this framework, Dixon supports the enactment of the practice as follows -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Theorisation</i> that outlines knowledge transfer as a systemic practice. The competitive advantage from common knowledge is realised by organisations that engage repeatedly in two kinds of knowledge activities that leverage available knowledge (transfer knowledge</li> </ul>	<p>The utilisation of conversation-based processes that can bring collective knowledge from the whole organisation to bear on strategic issues related to invention of solutions for increasingly ambiguous issues. Conversations are also a suitable mechanism to address the complexity, ambiguity and fast paced organization change in today's enterprises.<sup>119</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Theorisation</i> such as the reporting on the in vivo reflection of the leveraging of social media technologies in the US Defence and Intelligence agencies.<sup>120</sup></li> <li>- <i>Self-replication</i> is supported by various blog posts with advice for sensible implementation.<sup>121</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>114</sup> Dixon. 2010. *The three eras of knowledge management - summary*

<sup>119</sup> Dixon. 2010. The three eras of knowledge management: summary

<sup>120</sup> Dixon 2009. Do we really need so many kinds of social media?; Dixon. 2009. July 16. A-Space (Facebook-like) is making a difference across the U.S. Intelligence community.

<sup>121</sup> Connection before content: meetings that are knowledge based; Guidelines for leveraging collective knowledge and insight; Conversations that share tacit knowledge; How to make use of your organizations collective knowledge – accessing the knowledge of the whole organization.

Aspect	a	b
	Discourse propositions for Category 2 (from 2000 onwards)	Discourse propositions for Category 3 (from 2005 onwards)
	<p>across time and space), and also continually reinvent and update their common knowledge (create new knowledge). An effective knowledge transfer system translates available knowledge into a form usable by others, as well as the adaptation of the knowledge by the receiving team or individual to use in their particular context. Dixon provides a framework to help organisations to determine the best suited type of knowledge transfer system for their situation. The framework is based on the study of extensive study of knowledge transfer practices in organisations world-wide.<sup>115</sup> This framework also affords <i>self-replication</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Self-replication</i> is further afforded by various methodologies and guidelines, such as - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Knowledge Assessment Methodology: assessment of where the current state of leveraging knowledge and the development of new knowledge; assist with defining the knowledge vision of where the organisation want to be with regards to the leveraging and creation of common or experiential knowledge</li> <li>○ Guidelines for activities such as Peer Assists, After-Action Reviews, etc<sup>116</sup> and various blog posts with</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>The theoretical foundation for conversation-based processes could be traced back to Dixon's books published before her involvement in knowledge management.</p>

<sup>115</sup> Dixon. 2000. *Common knowledge*.

<sup>116</sup> Dixon. N.d. *Resources*.



Aspect	a	b
	Discourse propositions for Category 2 (from 2000 onwards)	Discourse propositions for Category 3 (from 2005 onwards)
	<p>advice for sensible implementation of knowledge management interventions.<sup>117</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Report on the lessons learned from setting up the US Army's premier community of practice, Company Command. It also provides a step-by-step guide for creating a knowledge community.<sup>118</sup></li> </ul>	

Table 3.2 Overview of Dixon's propositions

<sup>117</sup> Nancy Dixon's blog. *Conversation Matters*, is available at <http://nancydixonblog.com>

<sup>118</sup> Dixon, Allen, Burgess, Kilner & Schweitzer. 2005. *Company Command: Unleashing the power of the army profession*

### 3.3.2 Discussion of Dixon's discourse

Dixon puts forward a perspective about the scope and repertoire of tasks of the knowledge management professional with an inward looking discourse. Dixon's discourse focus on the relevance, practicality, utility and efficiency of knowledge management practices. This manifests in the following ways in Dixon's discourse –

- as an umbrella discourse that affords on-going relevance as a sustaining discourse, and
- as a management institutionalisation discourse that is supported by theorisation reflections of *in vivo* experimentations (discourse forms associated with management innovation).

#### 3.3.2.1 Dixon's discourse as umbrella construction

Dixon's framework depicting knowledge management as the incremental and cumulative assimilation of practices over time is an example of umbrella advocacy (see Figure 3.1). Dixon does not argue for a replacement of practices but for the extension of the repertoire of practices to address the limitations of the practices of the previous era. Dixon's model implies that the shift and extension of the focus of knowledge management is evolutionary and that 'each successive era has expanded the type of knowledge that organizations considered important [to success – author] without eliminating the need for and use of previous types of knowledge.'<sup>122</sup> She thus views knowledge management as a cumulative practice that unfolds over time. The new eras build upon the practices of previous era/s and did not replace those practices or render earlier practices as irrelevant or redundant. She also notes that "it has been a steep learning curve and we still have a steep curve head of us, but we are learning as evidenced by how our thinking about our strategies for dealing with organizational knowledge has changed and evolved."<sup>123</sup> This leaves the door open for the even further broadening of the scope of knowledge management in future.

This umbrella construction is based on retrospective coherence.<sup>124</sup> The framework only includes practices once it is implemented as part of knowledge management programmes she is involved with. It differs in this sense from the all-encompassing and inclusive index of possible practices presented by Allee. It should be noted that Dixon already published two books related to the conversational practices propagated as part of the third era during the first era.<sup>125</sup> One explanation for this apparent lag in implementation could be that the notion of conversations as enabler in organisation has only become fashionable in more recent times and as such the adoption and

<sup>122</sup> Dixon. 2010. *The Three Eras of Knowledge Management – Summary*

<sup>123</sup> Dixon. 2009. *Where knowledge management has been and where it is going – Part 1*

<sup>124</sup> Dixon comments that it is harder to get a perspective on a conceptual frame in the midst of a change that it is to look backward. (Dixon. 2009. *Where Knowledge Management Has Been and Where It Is Going- Part Three* )

<sup>125</sup> Dixon. 1996. *Perspectives on Dialogue*; Dixon. 1998. *Dialogue at work*.

acceptance thereof by organisations is more likely with the synchronisation of management fashion trends.

### 3.3.2.2 Dixon's discourse as a management fashion discourse

Dixon's umbrella advocacy can be regarded as a form of a sustaining discourse in the sense that it calls for the on-going support for knowledge management over time. Dixon uses umbrella advocacy to communicate the ability of knowledge management to stay relevant over time. Her model with three categories portrays knowledge management as a forward-moving field and communicates a sense of progressive rationality. The notion of knowledge management as a progressive practice is also supported by the systematic and reflective theorisation of the appropriation of social media technologies as knowledge management tools that will be discussed in the next section. She shows in this way that it was not necessary for a new conceptualisation of knowledge management to incorporate and leverage new perspectives (e.g. the significance of conversations) or new technologies. Allee put forward a new framework to incorporate the latest emerging practices.<sup>126</sup>

The proposition of three categories is a form of umbrella advocacy that was indicated as a tactic to keep a field relevant in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3). It can be described as a sustaining discourse that broadens the scope of knowledge management with the addition of each new category. It is also sustaining in the sense that through this cumulative umbrella advocacy, Dixon is able to integrate management fashion trends in the realm of the knowledge management professional in a structured manner. Dixon describes the progression as a process where knowledge management professionals are influenced by new thinking from the books and blogs they read, which is reflected in the following of management fashion trends such as sense-making and conversations noted in Table 3.2-4,a. They then use those ideas to create new knowledge management strategies in organizations.<sup>127</sup> Dixon, is however, not convinced that the knowledge management professional is doing enough to capitalise on the progressive opportunity of knowledge management. She comments that "I fear we have stayed where it is safe, not where we are needed. We have been good employees, but perhaps not good organizational citizens."<sup>128</sup> Dixon addresses the concern with her on-going theorisation contributions as discussed in the next section.

The transition between the categories includes surfacing rhetoric -

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<sup>126</sup> Table 3.1-5a

<sup>127</sup> Dixon mentions explicitly that the following five thinkers influenced her interpretation of knowledge management strategies: Chris Argyris, Karl Weick, Reg Revans, Ron Heifetz and Peter Block (Dixon. 2009. *Where Knowledge Management Has Been and Where It Is Going- Part One*)

<sup>128</sup> Dixon. 2009. *A challenge to KM professionals to address strategic organisational issues.*\

- The transition from Category 1 to Category 2 is based on the premise that social knowledge transfer processes are required to fix the deficiencies of the codification approach dominating in Category 1 (see Table 3.2–1,a).<sup>129</sup>
- The inclusion of Category 3 is substantiated by the claim that the lateral communication prevalent in Category 2 must be supplemented with the organisation-wide vertical integration of communication to leverage the collective knowledge (see Table 3.2–1,b).

The surfacing discourse in Dixon's case is different from the typical surfacing discourse described in Table 2.1. Dixon does not argue for the replacement of existing practices, but rather the addition of practices to address the short comings of these existing practices.

The discourses related to Category 2 tends to focus on the propagation of relevant and rigorous knowledge transfer practices, whilst the Category 3 discourses focus more on the delineation and maintenance of the relevance of the role of the knowledge management professional by including conversational approaches into the repertoire. Dixon is able to integrate topical topics in the management discourse or management fashion trends into the realm of knowledge management in a structured manner.

### ***3.3.2.3 Management institutionalisation supported by management innovation elements***

The discussion in Table 3.2-5a,5b shows that Dixon is engaged in on-going theorisation with a focus on providing frameworks, methods and guidelines that enables self-replication. The identity of the knowledge management professional thus includes the responsibility to nurture the skills and processes to make the appropriate knowledge practices effective in the organisation.<sup>130</sup>

The theorisation during stage 2 (see Table 3.2-5a) is about the reframing of practices already implemented with success in various organisations and the labelling these as knowledge management methods. The theorisation during the third stage (see Table 3.2-5b) is based on Dixon's own experiences and is based on participatory action research or reflections of the *in vivo* experimentation within the organisations she is acting as a consultant, such as the utilisation of social media technologies in the US Defence and Intelligence Agencies. The second stage theorisation is a form of assimilation and systematic description of available good practices, whilst the third stage theorisation is about innovation, i.e. the conceptualisation, development and description of new approaches and methods for knowledge management.

The apparent lack of sedimentation rhetoric is also a potential weakness. A sedimented practice is more likely to be regarded as an integral part of the operations of an organisation. Without a notion

<sup>129</sup> Dixon. 2004. Does your organization have an asking problem. p.18

<sup>130</sup> Dixon. 2010. *The three eras of knowledge management – summary*.

of sedimentation, these practices could be regarded as optional add-ons that could be shut down without significant consequences to the core operations of the organisation. Dixon's approach tends to suggest methods for knowledge-based interventions (such as strategy planning) and the knowledge-enablement of certain processes in the organisation (e.g. intelligence analysis).

### 3.4 Leif Edvinsson

Leif Edvinsson is a core protagonist and pioneer in the Intellectual Capital field. He oversaw the creation to the release of the first Intellectual Capital Index for a company as a supplement to the financial report for Skandia in 1994.<sup>131</sup> This report is regarded as a benchmark for intellectual capital.<sup>132</sup> Since he left his position as corporate executive at Skandia, he is acting as a management scholar<sup>133</sup> and management consultant.<sup>134</sup> Edvinsson is also a member of several advisory boards and international think-tanks, such as *The Club of Paris*.<sup>135</sup> Edvinsson won the prestigious award, Brain of the Year in 1998 in competition with Microsoft founder Bill Gates and Paul McCarthy from The Beatles.<sup>136</sup> Edvinsson is thus regarded as an influential thinker.

#### 3.4.1 Overview of propositions

Edvinsson's focus as a management scholar and strategic management consultant is on the theory and application of Intellectual Capital management in organisations and on a societal level. Edvinsson is advocating for knowledge leadership as the need to understand if, and how value is created through intangible assets in addition to the understanding of value creation through tangible assets. Intellectual Capital management is the perspective and practice proposed to enact this knowledge leadership.<sup>137</sup>

Two threads have been identified in Edvinsson's discourse, namely -

- Intellectual Capital management as an accounting approach and strategic management concern,
- the practice of futurising that aims to elicit the requisite understanding of the emerging requirements for corporate and societal innovation, as well as experimentation with new management ideas emerging from the newly acquired insights in the requirements.

Edvinsson's propositions will be noted in the Table 3.3 according to these two threads.

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<sup>131</sup> Edvinsson & Malone. 1997. *Intellectual Capital*.

<sup>132</sup> The Global Journal. 2011. Intellectual Capital of the Nations.

<sup>133</sup> Edvinsson holds academic appointments in his capacity as a management scholar at the University of Lund and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

<sup>134</sup> Edvinsson has founded the Universal Networking Intellectual Capital – a networking organisation devoted to the application of intellectual capital based methods.

<sup>135</sup> Anon. 2011. *Leif Edvinsson*.

<sup>136</sup> Anon. n.d. *AOK: Preparing for conversations with Leif Edvinsson*.

<sup>137</sup> 2003. The knowledge: Leif Edvinsson.p.1

Aspect		a	b
		Intellectual Capital Management	Futurising and knowledge navigation
1	<b>Rationale</b>	<p>The discourse started out with an agenda to search for a new sense of logic with regards to how to measure and utilise resources at the disposal of an organisation, and a search for a new accounting approach that can explain the variance between market capitalisation value and book value. The old economy does not help to explain the hidden value drivers of enterprises, nations or regions. Thus a new way to describe and analyse the new patterns of value creation and emerging new business logic is required. The industrial value chain processes no longer dominate value creation, but innovation. Innovation also yields more return on investment than incremental improvement of the existing production lines. Thus, investment into systemic innovation is required that implies investment in Intellectual Capital.<sup>138</sup></p>	<p>Edvinsson is actively involved in futurising in terms of understanding the emerging directions and requirements for Societal Innovation, <i>inter alia</i> in his capacity as a member of The New Club of Paris that focus on the development of a more refined agenda of Knowledge Era politics. New investigations are required on how enterprises and nations should prepare for the challenging knowledge economy issues. The problems faced calls for an ecological approach to economics that extends beyond harvesting potential of available resources. The focus should be on knowledge navigation and the cultivation of the ecosystem for intellectual capital.<sup>139</sup></p>
2	<b>Outcome, outputs and consequences</b>	<p>The management and development of the intellectual capital of organisations, cities, regions and countries in such a way that it will contribute to long term prosperity.<sup>140</sup> The process of improving and renewing Intellectual Capital is a critical dimension to advance the future wealth and well-being of citizens. Edvinsson &amp;</p>	<p>Systemic nurturing of innovation as a core competence to maintain continuous renewal and development, with a specific focus on societal innovation in the recent years.</p>

<sup>138</sup> Daum. 2001. *Interview with Leif Edvinsson*.

<sup>139</sup> Edvinsson. N.d. *Knowledge navigation and the cultivating ecosystem for intellectual capital*.

<sup>140</sup> Bounfour & Edvinsson. 2005. *Intellectual capital for communities: nations, regions, and cities*.

Aspect		a	b
		Intellectual Capital Management	Futurising and knowledge navigation
		Malone posit that Intellectual Capital is associated with a “shift from the management of the past to the navigation into the future in terms of renewal and development.” <sup>141</sup>	
3	<b>Management niche</b>	Knowledge as the new source of wealth, as it manifests in the intellectual capital of organisations, cities and national states. Edvinsson also mentions that it is brain power that matters and not knowledge per se. <sup>142</sup>	
4	<b>Solution proposal</b>	Intellectual Capital Management is a perspective and method that provides an alternative way to look at the interrelated nature of the sources of value. It looks at human and structural factors as value creators in addition to financial factors. Intellectual Capital is expressed as the sum of human capital and structural capital. <sup>143</sup>	Questioning that will help us to see and understand what is happening from several perspectives and shapes a holistic intelligence that underpins Knowledge Navigation. Knowledge Navigation is a way to remove barriers and obstacles in uncovering new opportunity spaces and the many doors around these opportunities.
5	<b>Enactment – method, conditions.</b>	Intellectual Capital management alters the way that companies and entire countries visualise, analyse, measure, develop and utilise resources at their disposal. Self-replication is supported by various the various methods that facilitates the application and capitalisation of Intellectual Capital theory and conceptualisations, including - 1. Intellectual Capital accounting: a method to visualise and benchmark the intellectual capital of cities, regions	Self-replication is supported by various the various methods -  <i>Corporate Longitude and Navigator</i> : a navigation tool that assists enterprises and societies to determine the best position, direction and speed for development of intellectual capital to foster long-term propensity. Intellectual Capital management assumes a shift from the management of the past to the navigation into the future

<sup>141</sup> Edvinsson & Malone. 1997. *Intellectual Capital*. p.55

<sup>142</sup> Bounfour & Edvinsson. 2005. *Intellectual capital for communities: nations, regions, and cities*.

<sup>143</sup> “Human capital encompasses the combined knowledge, skills, innovativeness, and the ability of the company’s individual employees to meet the task at hand. Human capital also includes the company’s value, culture and philosophy. Structural capital refers to the hardware, software, databases, organisational structure, patents, trademarks and everything else of organisational capability that supports the individual’s productivity. Structural capital is described as the embodiment, empowerment, and supportive infrastructure of human capital.” (Edvinsson & Malone. 1997. *Intellectual Capital*. p.11)

Aspect	a	b
	<p data-bbox="434 240 1227 277"><b>Intellectual Capital Management</b></p> <p data-bbox="483 285 1200 571">and countries. This informs the assessment and comparison of national competitiveness and performance in a knowledge-based economy. The right empirical indicators should be identified and measured to provide the same objective and comparative base to Intellectual capital as that applies to financial capital.<sup>144</sup></p> <p data-bbox="456 584 1200 999">2.IC Multiplier methodology which explains how an organisation realise the full value of the talent and individual skills is has at its disposal by combining good talent with structural capital. This is complimented by a focus on knowledge care that looks into how employers provide the right context for individuals to benefit from the multiplier effect. Links the impact of the working environment on an employee’s productivity and capacity to innovate to IC management.<sup>145</sup></p> <p data-bbox="456 1011 1200 1083">3.Intellectual Capital growth model which involves intellectual capital, human capital injection, human</p>	<p data-bbox="1249 240 2011 571"><b>Futurising and knowledge navigation</b></p> <p data-bbox="1267 285 2011 571">in terms of renewal and development. This includes examining the kind of strategic structural capital required to leverage the human capital for organisations, cities and regions, and how to nourish capital in waiting.<sup>147</sup> Leadership is also addressed by stating that is a leadership liability not to address the potential or Intellectual Capital in waiting.</p> <p data-bbox="1267 628 2011 874"><i>Future Centres:</i> the practice of futurising that is supported by Future Centres as a laboratory and prototyping space for organisational development, as well as an environment that encourages new ideas and creative process and a place where people meet other people they usually do not meet.<sup>148</sup></p> <p data-bbox="1267 925 2011 1083">Edvinsson posits that the practice of Quizzics (the art of questioning) will augment strategic innovation perspectives much more than the traditional cost saving focus. He argues that a cost saving focus is mainly</p>

<sup>144</sup> Edvinsson. 2002. *The knowledge capital of nations*; Lin & Edvinsson. 2008. *National intellectual capital*. p.525; Bonfour & Edvinsson. 2005. *Intellectual capital for communities: nations, regions and cities*; Edvinsson & Malone. 1997. *Intellectual Capital*. p.16

<sup>145</sup> 2003. *The knowledge: Leiff Edvinsson*. p.1

<sup>147</sup> Edvinsson & Malone. 1997. *Intellectual Capital*. p.55

<sup>148</sup> 2003. *The knowledge: Leiff Edvinsson*. p.1



Aspect	a	b
	<p data-bbox="434 240 896 276"><b>Intellectual Capital Management</b></p> <p data-bbox="488 288 1200 443">capital transformation into structural capital, and structural capital injection. Edvinsson relates these to knowledge management functions in the following ways -</p> <ul data-bbox="477 456 1200 703" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="477 456 1200 576">- Human capital injection involves the effectiveness of knowledge sharing; installation of IT based knowledge systems and knowledge exchanges.</li> <li data-bbox="477 584 1200 703">- Transformation into structural capital requires the packaging of knowledge into recipes to be shared globally and rapidly.<sup>146</sup></li> </ul> <p data-bbox="456 711 1200 783">4. Method for comparative Intellectual Capital Indexes for countries.</p>	<p data-bbox="1247 240 2011 403">resulting in the search for outsourcing to lower labour cost supplying.<sup>149</sup> Questioning is used to find new thinking and ideas for societal innovation.<sup>150</sup></p>

Table 3.3 Overview of Edvinsson's propositions

<sup>146</sup> Edvinsson. 2000. Some perspectives on intangibles and intellectual capital.

<sup>149</sup> Edvinsson. 2005. Some strategic quizzics; Edvinsson. 2010. Evolution of IC science and beyond, p.15

<sup>150</sup> The relevant questions been asked include – (a) How will the influence of intensified flow of knowledge with the evolution of the Internet, social media and mobile access on the networking of brains and thought impact the Knowledge Era dimensions?; (b) What are the emerging signals to look for and perceive?; (c) Will the Knowledge Era be replaced by some other era, based on the indications of early signals that we are moving to event more intangible perspectives?; (d) Why and in what way is the city and its design an important knowledge tool? - Edvinsson. 2010. Evolution of IC Science and beyond. p.15; Edvinsson. 2005. Some strategic quizzics

### 3.4.2 Discussion of Edvinsson's discourse

Edvinsson's discourse is not a knowledge management discourse per se. He regards it as to be part of the (new) economics conversation and a strategic management concern (see Table 3.3-4a,b). Edvinsson views knowledge management as one of the methods that is part of Intellectual Capital management (see Table 3.3-5a). The implications of such a perspective will be discussed in Chapter 4. On a practical level, it does refer to Knowledge Leadership and knowledge-focused strategy suggests an association with knowledge management. Edvinsson also views Intellectual Capital as an outcome of knowledge management.<sup>151</sup> In this sense, knowledge management is anchored into a broader management discourse that could contribute to the perspective of sedimentation and necessity thereof.

The pattern in Edvinsson's discourse starts out with management innovation rhetoric<sup>152</sup> that is complimented by institutionalisation elements.<sup>153</sup> Edvinsson discourse follows a path from management innovation to institutionalisation in two cycles. The context of the first cycle was corporations and the context of the second cycle is societal structures, such as cities, regions and national states. Edvinsson's discourse is also part of management fashion trend around the Intellectual Capital management, and the focus on intangible assets (see Table 3-3-1a).

The following diagram depicts these patterns. Edvinsson's discourse encompasses the premises and methods for a distinct management practice and does not include umbrella construction.

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<sup>151</sup> Edvinsson & Malone. 1997. *Intellectual Capital*. p.55

<sup>152</sup> Management innovation is implied by the self-acclaimed novelty in the following statements: "... because Intellectual Capital represents a **fundamentally new way** [author emphasis] of looking at organizational value that it will never be confined to playing an adjunct role to traditional accounting" and "intellectual capital new model of measuring value that will **transform** [author emphasis] not just the economy but society itself in its wealth creation and value extraction." (Edvinsson & Malone. 1997. *Intellectual Capital*)

<sup>153</sup> Edvinsson states that already in the first book that the focus is on the application and capitalisation of Intellectual Capital management, "because for the rest of this decade and beyond hundreds of thousands of companies, large and small, through-out the world will adopt Intellectual Capital as a way of measuring, visualising, and presenting the true value of their business." Edvinsson & Malone. 1997. *Intellectual Capital*)

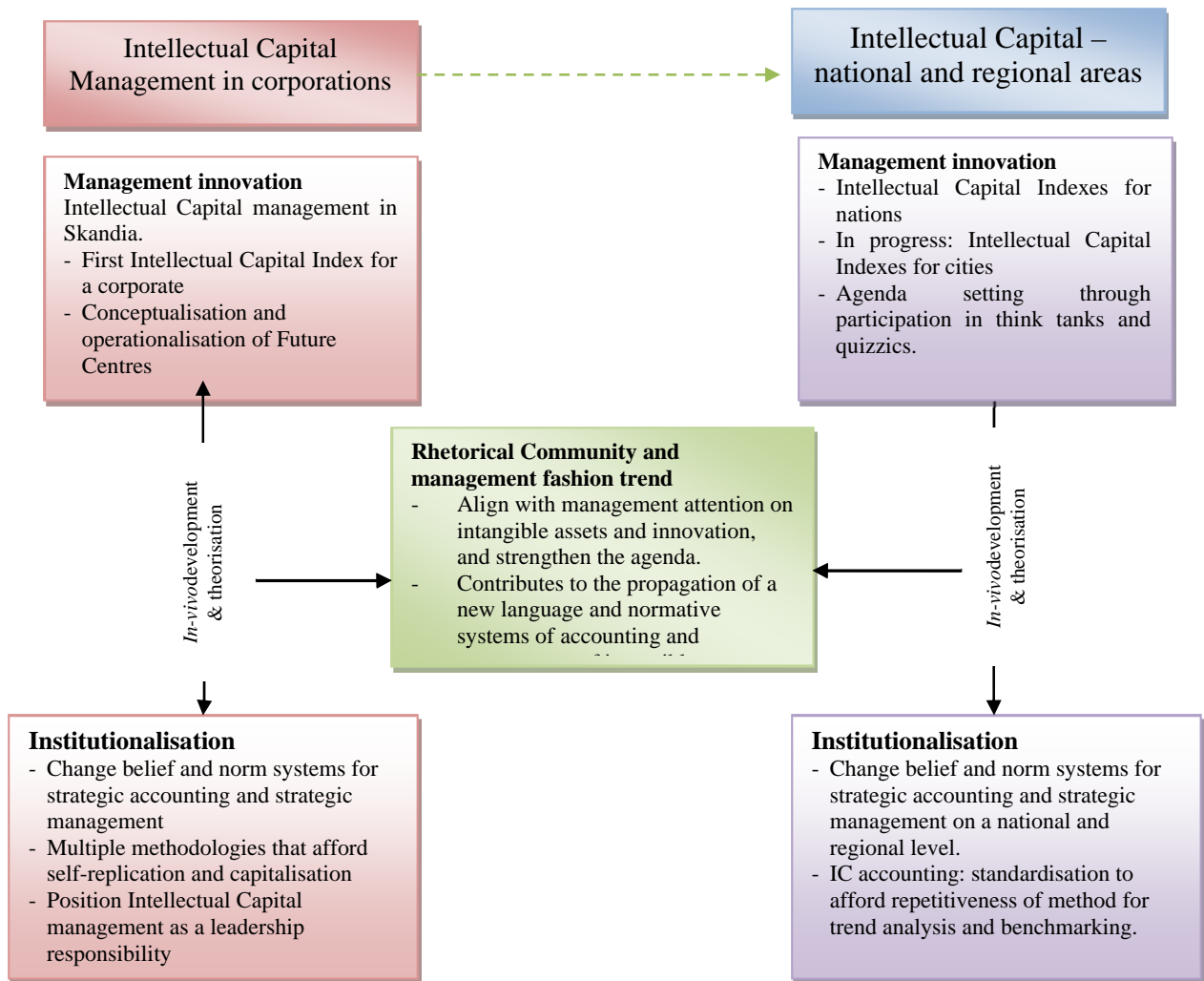


Figure 3.3 Overview of Edvinsson's discourse patterns over a period of 20 years

### 3.4.2.1 Management innovation discourse

Edvinsson's discourse encapsulated in his book *Intellectual Capital*, is a report of the pioneering of Intellectual Capital as a management practice. It provides the related agenda setting and thought experimentation (see Table 3.3-1a,2a,3a,4a), as well as reflections of the *in vivo* experimentation and theorisation that affords intra-organisational adoption (see Table 3.3-5a,5a). Edvinsson is still an active practitioner in this field and actively participating in the continuing *in vivo* development and theorising of the practice in the new context of societal innovation.

The practice of futurising and knowledge navigation (see Table 3.3-b) encourages on-going agenda setting and thought experimentation that provides ideas and needs for management innovation required to deal with the new and emerging realities of a knowledge economy supported by methods such as the Knowledge Navigator and Quizzics (see Table 3.3-5b).

Future Centres are a method to perform the related *in vivo* experimentation (see Table 3.3-6b).

### 3.4.2.2 Institutionalisation discourse

Edvinsson's discourse is a righteous discourse that argues for a change in the normative dispositions of strategic and executive managers, as well as accounting professionals (details noted in Table 3.3-1a,b; 2a,b). Institutionalisation is based on the influence of belief and normative systems. Edvinsson assumes a stance of taken-for-grantedness by stating that the "rise of Intellectual Capital is inevitable, given the irresistible historical and technological forces, not to mention the investment flows that are sweeping across the modern world and driving us toward a knowledge economy. Intellectual Capital will come to dominate the way we value our institutions because it alone capture the dynamics the organizational sustainability and value creation."<sup>154</sup> This influence is supported by a solution-orientated discourse and a management fashion setting discourse (to be discussed in the next section).

The following elements that afford institutionalisation are evident in Edvinsson's discourse -

- *Mimicry*. Edvinsson proposes that intellectual capital management is complimentary to existing accounting and strategic management methods, without debunking or negating other strategic management or accounting practices.<sup>155</sup> Comprehensibility is also achieved by means of mimicry as it manifests in the association with the language and notions of traditional accounting. This mimicry highlights the continuities with the past as much as distinctiveness of new management practices.
- *Self-replication*. Theorisation that provides understanding of the technical details of the practice, as well as the relevance of the practice to the strategic management of innovation for future prosperity. Various methodologies that afford self-replication and lowers the cost of adoption are made available (see Table 3.3-5a,5b). These methods are also important to ensure that comparable results are produced for benchmarking and trend analysis over time.
- *Sedimentation*: The proposition and active implementation and publication of intellectual capital indexes as a norm for trend analysis and over time across organisations, cities or countries could lead to potential sedimentation beyond the active involvement of Edvinsson or his collaborators (see Table 3.3-2a,4a,5a).

<sup>154</sup> Edvinsson & Malone. 1997. *Intellectual Capital*. p.22

<sup>155</sup> Edvinsson & Malone. 1997. *Intellectual Capital*. p.55

Edvinsson's active practicing of Intellectual Capital management over an extent period of time is also supporting the strengthening of institutionalisation elements. There was not a shift in focus of the practice as is noted in the discourses of other proponents (such as Allee and Snowden).

### 3.4.2.3 Management fashion rhetoric

It could be argued that Edvinsson is a member of a rhetorical community<sup>156</sup> that is propagating a new management fashion trend through a new language and proposition of new norms. Intellectual Capital Management is regarded to be part of a (new) economics conversation that focus on the value potential of intangible assets (see Table 3.3-1a,b). Edvinsson's rationale discourse is a form of a surfacing rhetoric, advocating for a new solution for accounting to address the inadequacies of current accounting practices to deal with value based on intangible assets.

## 3.5 Ikujiro Nonaka

Ikujiro Nonaka is globally highly regarded as a management scholar. In the Knowledge Management fraternity his notable contribution is the publication of the book *The Knowledge Creating Company* in 1995 that is regarded to be a key catalyst for the mainstreaming of knowledge management. His research and expositions revolves around the development of a knowledge creation theory for the firm. Nonaka is of the opinion that the next generation business leaders should focus on leveraging and nurturing the knowledge creating capability of a firm.<sup>157</sup>

### 3.5.1 Overview of discourse propositions

Nonaka's quest is to contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms of knowledge creation in the firm and to clarify the implications of this understanding for managers and leaders so that they can help their organisations to create knowledge more consciously. According to Nonaka his focus on knowledge creation began in 1982 with a presentation of the innovation processes of Japanese companies to a symposium at Harvard Business School. It was during discussions at this symposium that they realised that these companies were not just processing information, but that they created knowledge organisationally. This was the

<sup>156</sup> Sullivan provides an overview of the Intellectual Capital rhetorical community and indicates that the Intellectual Capital discourse already started in 1981. The term Intellectual Capital was coined in 1990. Members noted as part of the Intellectual Capital discourse include Hiroyuki Itami, David Teece, Brian Hall, Hubert St Onge, Karl-Erik Sveiby, Patrick Sullivan, Tom Stewart, Gordon Petrash (Sullivan, n.d. *A brief history of the ICM movement*)

<sup>157</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 2011. *The wise leader*. p.59

impulsion for the on-going research and theorisation of the processes by which organisations create knowledge.<sup>158</sup> The premise is that organisations should not be seen as information processing machines, but as knowledge creating entities that reshape the environment and themselves through knowledge creation.

Nonaka interest is in the understanding of the firm as an entity that creates the future through knowledge creation.<sup>159</sup> He states that “... all this talk about the importance of knowledge-for both companies and countries-does little to help us understand how knowledge gets created. Despite all the attention by leading observers of business and society, none of them has really examined the mechanisms and processes by which knowledge is created. This distinction is what separates the Japanese approach from theirs. More important, it is for this reason that the Japanese experience is especially interesting and useful.”<sup>160</sup>

An overview of the propositions is presented in Table 3.4. There are two progressive shifts of focus in Nonaka’s discourse. The first progression is the extension of the notion of tacit and explicit knowledge as the niche to be managed, to include phronesis as a distinct type of knowledge to be managed (see Table 3.4-3a). The second parallel progression is to extend to discussion of the implications of a knowledge creation theory of the firm for managers and organisational design, to address the implications thereof for leaders as well (see Table 3.4-5b).The diagram below depicts the above as two threads of a knowledge creating theory discourse.

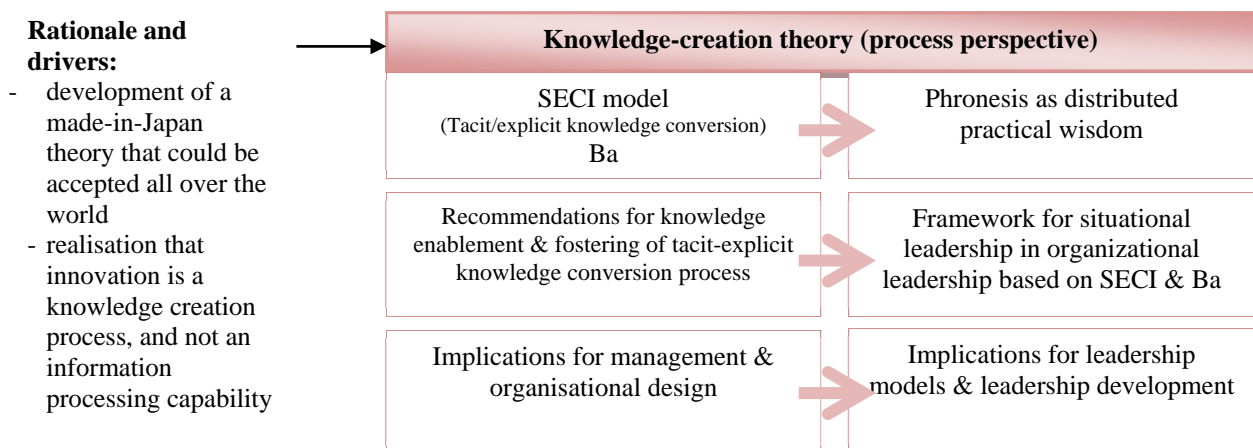


Figure 3.4 Overview of Nonaka’s discourse shifts

<sup>158</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 2011. *The wise leader*. p.59; Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata. 2008. *Managing flow*. p.xviii

<sup>159</sup> Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata. 2008. *Managing flow*. p.245

<sup>160</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 1995. *The knowledge creating company*. p.7

Aspect		a
		Discourse propositions
1	<b>Rationale</b>	Nonaka postulates that the Japanese companies have been successful because of their skills and expertise at organizational knowledge creation and that organisational knowledge creation is the key to the distinctive ways that Japanese companies innovate. He also suggests that Japanese companies historically turned to organisational knowledge creation as a means of breaking away from the past and moving into new and untried territories of opportunities. He also remarks that “all this talk about the importance of knowledge-for both companies and countries-does little to help us understand how knowledge gets created. Despite all the attention by leading observers of business and society, none of them has really examined the mechanisms and processes by which knowledge is created. This distinction is what separates the Japanese approach from theirs. More important, it is for this reason that the Japanese experience is especially interesting and useful.” <sup>161</sup>
2	<b>Outcome, outputs and consequences</b>	The business outcome projected is continuous innovation that leads to competitive advantage. Knowledge management in this sense is regarded as the means or way to perpetuate that rapid change within the organisation that is demanded by the continuous and widespread changes in the turbulent external environment. <sup>162</sup> It includes the premise that a firm not only need to plan for a future, but also must create new futures to survive. These futures cannot only be extension of the past and should be idealistic “leaps of faith into tomorrow”. <sup>163</sup> The knowledge-based outcome is the development of the collective intellectual capability of a firm. <sup>164</sup> In recent discourses this intellectual capability is interpreted to include both the ability to create fresh knowledge and to make enlightened decisions that are based on judgement beyond that analysis of empirical data and deductive reasoning. <sup>165</sup>
3	<b>Management</b>	Three management niches are suggested in Nonaka’s discourses, namely (1) the knowledge creating firm, (2) tacit and

<sup>161</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 1995. *The knowledge creating company*. p.7

<sup>162</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 1995. *The knowledge creating company*. p.10

<sup>163</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 2011. *The wise leader*. p.67

<sup>164</sup> Helgesen. 2008. *The practical wisdom of Ikujiro Nonaka*. p.53

<sup>165</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 2011. *The wise leader*. pp.60;67

Aspect		a
		<b>Discourse propositions</b>
	<b>niche</b>	<p>explicit knowledge as enacted the knowledge conversion process and (3) phronesis.</p> <p>i. The understanding of the firm as an entity that creates the future and value through knowledge creation.<sup>166</sup> This understanding is extended to include the perspective the firms exist in complex relationships in a business ecosystem that includes customers, partners, suppliers etc.<sup>167</sup> Knowledge-creating organisations are better equipped to deal with turbulences, uncertainties, inconsistencies, contradictions and paradoxes.<sup>168</sup></p> <p>ii. The SECI process that outlines the conversations between tacit and explicit knowledge (see row above for detail).</p> <p>iii. Phronesis is the latest management niche proposed. Phronesis, also referred to as practical wisdom or practical reasoning, is tacit knowledge acquired from experience that enables people to make prudent judgement and take actions based on the actual situation, guided by values and morals; it is the know-what-should-be-done.<sup>169</sup></p>
<b>4</b>	<b>Solution definition</b>	<p>Nonaka's solution entails a description of the organisation as a knowledge creating entity based on the appropriation of Japanese practices as a universal theory of knowledge-creation.<sup>170</sup> The fundamental question underpinning the proposed theory is: how to build an organisational system to convert tacit knowledge in the market and the organisation to explicit knowledge and finally crystalize it into a product. The theory also includes the re-conceptualisation of organisational design and strategy from the perspective of knowledge creation.<sup>171</sup></p> <p>This is a descriptive theory that is rooted in a dialectic epistemology of tacit and explicit knowledge. Nonaka's premise is two-fold –</p> <p>i. Organisations create new knowledge by converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, and vice versa. This conversion process is encapsulated in the SECI model that depicts form modes of knowledge conversion, namely socialisation (tacit to explicit), externalisation (explicit to tacit), combination (explicit to explicit) and internalisation</p>

<sup>166</sup> Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata. 2008. *Managing flow*. pp.2;243

<sup>167</sup> Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata. 2008. *Managing flow*. p.243

<sup>168</sup> Takeuchi & Nonaka. 2004. *Hitotsubashi on Knowledge Management*. pp.25-26

<sup>169</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 2011. The wise leader. p.60-61; Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata. 2008. *Managing flow*. p.3-5

<sup>170</sup> Helgesen. 2008. The practical wisdom of Ikujiro Nonaka. p.6

<sup>171</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 2011. The wise leader. p.60



Aspect	a
	<p><b>Discourse propositions</b></p> <p>(tacit to tacit). The SECI process includes many interfaces with the environment as well, such as acquisition of tacit knowledge from partners, suppliers and customers and the provision of explicit knowledge to the environment in the form of technologies, services, products and values. Knowledge creation is an interactive process through which individuals continually change themselves and their environments. Management of a firm becomes a reflection of this activity.<sup>172</sup></p> <p>ii. Knowledge is a resource that is created by human beings in processes and relations with each other and the environment. This is conceptualised as <i>ba</i>– a Japanese term that describes a field or space where people freely and openly share what they know in the service of creating meaning and something new.</p> <p>The understanding and true nature and management requirements of the knowledge-creating firm is informed and illustrated by case studies of various successful Japanese companies.<sup>173</sup></p>
<p><b>5 Enactment – method, conditions</b></p>	<p>A solution-orientated discourse that focuses on the dynamics and enabling factors for knowledge creation supports enactment. Knowledge management is defined in terms of knowledge creation (see also Row 2 of this table) and is defined as the process of continuously creating new knowledge, disseminating it widely through the organisation and embodying it quickly in new products and services, technologies and systems.<sup>174</sup> Knowledge creation is presented as the process of continuously creating new knowledge, disseminating it widely through the organisation, and embodying it quickly in new products and services, technologies and systems.<sup>175</sup> The underlying premise is that knowledge cannot be managed, but only enabled. Thus enactment entails knowledge enabling that is described as the overall set of organizational activities that positively affect knowledge creation. Enactment is supported in two ways: firstly by providing the SECI and other frameworks that explains the knowledge creation processes (discussed as part of the solution proposal in the previous row of this table), and secondly by detailing the practical managerial and leadership</p>

<sup>172</sup> Nonaka, Toyama & Byosiere. 2003. A theory of organizational knowledge creation. pp.495;498

<sup>173</sup> Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata. 2008. *Managing flow*. p.1

<sup>174</sup> Takeuchi & Nonaka. 2004. *Hitotsubashi on knowledge management*. pp.ix-x

<sup>175</sup> Takeuchi & Nonaka. 2004, *Hitotsubashi on knowledge management*. pp.ix-x

Aspect	a
	<p data-bbox="439 240 752 272"><b>Discourse propositions</b></p> <p data-bbox="456 284 1099 316">implications of a knowledge-creating perspective.</p> <p data-bbox="456 368 2007 488">The proposition is that management is about nurturing the following conditions that support and sustain the knowledge creation process, namely instil a knowledge vision, managing conversations, mobilising knowledge activists, creating the right context, and globalising local knowledge.<sup>176</sup></p> <ul data-bbox="483 499 2007 1126" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="483 499 2007 703">- Nonaka puts forward a set of managerial implications and recommendations for what companies in the West should do to convert themselves into knowledge-creating companies. These include practical management tasks such as creating a knowledge vision, developing a knowledge crew, building a high-density field of interaction at the front line, piggyback on the new product development processes, adopt middle-up-down management, switch to a hypertext organisation, and constructing a knowledge network with the outside world.<sup>177</sup></li> <li data-bbox="483 715 2007 919">- Nonaka is also of the opinion that the traditional disciplines of management do not lend themselves to knowledge management and should be revised so that the knowledge based competence of a corporation can be managed effectively and efficiently. Traditional notions about strategy, human resource management, finance and marketing should be re-examined and revised in order to manage knowledge for competitive advantage.<sup>178</sup> He suggests that organisational design and strategy should be (re)-conceptualised from the perspective of knowledge creation.<sup>179</sup></li> <li data-bbox="483 930 2007 1126">- Reinterpret strategic management as distributed practical wisdom (phronesis). Strategy is not created form the logical analysis of environment and a firm's resources. It is created out of the existential belief or commitment to a vision of the future, the ability to interpret the environment and resources subjectively and the interaction between objectivity and subjectivity. These are abilities at the need to be distributed among organisational members than just held by a selected few in top management.<sup>180</sup> Based on this reinterpretation, new propositions for leadership is</li> </ul>

<sup>176</sup> Von Krogh, Ichijo & Nonaka. 2000. *Enabling knowledge creation*.

<sup>177</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 1995. *The knowledge creating company*. pp.227-230

<sup>178</sup> Nonaka & Toyama. 2007 . Strategic management as distributed practical wisdom (phronesis). p.7

<sup>179</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 2011. The wise leader. p.60

<sup>180</sup> Nonaka & Toyama. 2007. Strategic management as distributed practical wisdom (phronesis). pp 371;391

Aspect	a
	<p data-bbox="439 244 752 276"><b>Discourse propositions</b></p> <p data-bbox="533 288 2011 488">tabled, namely that leaders should cultivate the phronesis or practical wisdom throughout the organisation. This will not only enable organisations to created new or fresh knowledge but also to make enlightened decisions. They also discuss six related abilities of phronetic leaders, namely the ability to judge goodness, to grasp the essence, to create shared contexts, to communicate the essence, to exercise political power and to foster practical wisdom in others.<sup>181</sup></p>

Table 3.4 Overview of Nonaka's propositions

<sup>181</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 2011. The wise leader. pp.60-67

### 3.5.2 Discussion of Nonaka's discourse

In Nonaka's discourse, knowledge management is framed as a management perspective and not as a set of tools and methods to leverage knowledge as noted in the discourses of other proponents, such as Allee, Dixon and Snowden. Knowledge management is not regarded as an instrumental practice, but rather as a perspective that will transform management. Takeuchi & Nonaka<sup>182</sup> is of the opinion that knowledge management is at the centre of *what management has to do* in a fast changing, complex and uncertain world. They also state that "since knowledge creations is at the heart of management in today's 'knowledge society', that model will serve as the universal model for management at large."<sup>183</sup>

Nonaka's discourse consists of (i) theorisation that supports institutionalisation and (ii) management fashion rhetoric. The manifestation of the above will be discussed in the next sections.

#### 3.5.2.1 Theorisation

Nonaka's discourse is a typical theorisation discourse that formalise observed practices in Japanese companies into normative and operational concepts that shows the implications thereof for management, organisational design and leadership (see Table 3.4-5a). It also provides a theoretical model that explains the normative basis and practical logic that Nonaka argues is the reason for these firms' sustainable competitive advantage (see Table 3.4-2a,4a). This theory describes the dynamics of organisational knowledge creation and broadens the perspective on the theory of the firm and its role in society.<sup>184</sup> The systematic and continuing process of theorisation serves to provide a grounded and systemic exposition of the practices underlying of the perceived competitive advantage of Japanese firms and to facilitate the transportability of these practices to companies in the West. In a commentary about Nonaka, Helgesen suggests that through *inter alia* Nonaka's discourse "Japan has become a sort of management conscience to the rest of the world, and through its best companies, an exemplar of superior achievement."<sup>185</sup> (see also Table 3.4-1a)

The theorisation is based on philosophical thought explorations and case studies. Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata state that "to build and illustrate the theory we have relied on case studies because we find the method of historical narrative or storytelling the most useful for grasping

<sup>182</sup> Takeuchi & Nonaka. 2004. *Hitotsubashi on Knowledge Management*. pp.ix-x.

<sup>183</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 1995. *The knowledge creating company*. p.226.

<sup>184</sup> Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata. 2008. *Managing flow*. p.241

<sup>185</sup> Helgesen. 2008. The practical wisdom of Ikujiro Nonaka. p.4

context in relationships and the processes between events. A criticism of narrative is that it cannot exclude subjectivity in the selection of events to be related and unified. In our view, subjectivity is the more important element, since the self, as subject in process, is created and at every moment in the continuing effort to give new meaning to past experiences in relation and in unity with the experience of the “here-now”<sup>186</sup>. The philosophical exploration is regarded for the purpose of this study as management fashion rhetoric and will be discussed in the next section.

The discourse support institutionalisation as it influence norms and belief systems, and provide various structural arrangements that affords implementation based on habitualisation. The structural arrangements are noted in Table 3.4-5a, and includes enabling conditions, management responsibilities and associated arrangements (such as the hypertext organisation and knowledge crews), as well as the role of leadership. The belief system is influenced by the rationale propositions that attribute the stated superior performance of Japanese firms to the way knowledge creation is enacted (see Table 3.4-1a). Belief systems are also shaped by the proclamation of the management niche to be the conversation of tacit and explicit knowledge and phronesis (see Table 3.4-3a).

The theorisation discourse also includes the reframing of the understanding of the firm, management and innovation that is also a form of reframing of belief systems. The firm is reframed as an entity that creates the future through knowledge creation.<sup>187</sup> This leads to the reframing of management as “a process whereby individuals with their unique accumulations of experience envision a future and then make their best decisions and the best action at a particular time-space to actualize that future.”<sup>188</sup> Innovation is re-framed as a knowledge creation process in the organisational system (see Table 3.4-2a,3a).<sup>189</sup>

Nonaka does not generate new ideas for management innovation. His contribution is the systematic exposition of observed practices in a new theoretical framework, and influencing the thinking of leaders and managers to recognise the centrality of knowledge creation in organisations as innovative entities.

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<sup>186</sup> Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata. 2008. *Managing flow* pp.244-245.

<sup>187</sup> Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata. 2008. *Managing flow*. p.245

<sup>188</sup> Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata. 2008. *Knowledge flow*. p.243

<sup>189</sup> Nonaka, Toyama & Hirata. 2008. *Managing flow*. p.243

### 3.5.2.2 Management fashion rhetoric

Nonaka's discourse is based on a surfacing rhetoric that advocates for a new disposition to supersede Industrial Age thinking (such as information processing) that is not adequate for the current context in which organisations operate (see Table 3.4-1,a). The surfacing discourse also rejects the Western management style in favour of the management style prevalent in the Japanese firms been studied. The discourse does not argue for the replacement of a specific management practice, such as business process re-engineering (BPR) (see discussion of Snowden's discourse that includes arguments against specific practices such as BPR and Six Sigma). Nonaka's surfacing discourse seeks define of what is typical belief of what the reason for the success and survival at a given point in time, such as the focus on tacit knowledge and introduction of the Aristotelian concept of phronesis (see Table 3-4-3a). Progressive rationality is implied by the underlying premise that knowledge creation explains the superior performance of Japanese companies, and hence, should supersede the current practices in Western companies.

Nonaka's discourse could also be regarded as a management fashion trend setting discourse. It seeks to contribute to the management language by operationalizing and popularising philosophical notions such as Polyani's concept of tacit knowledge and the Aristotelian concept of phronesis, as well as the construct of knowledge creation (see Table 3.4-3a). This discourse also places topical considerations on the agenda, such as the role of the middle manager, the hypertext organisation and a re-evaluation of the role and attributes of leadership. Nonaka also introduces new terminology, such as *ba* and the SECI model (see Table 3.4-5a).

## 3.6 Laurence Prusak

According to Prusak he was part of the first multi-company research programme devoted to knowledge management. The book, *Working Knowledge*<sup>190</sup>, which he co-authored with Davenport, is regarded to be one of the first full scale treatments of knowledge in organisations from an executive perspective. Prior to his knowledge management interest, Prusak was involved with information management.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Davenport & Prusak. 1998. *Working knowledge*.

<sup>191</sup> Prusak. 1999. Laurence Prusak shares thoughts on success and knowledge management. p.31

### 3.6.1 Overview of Prusak's discourse

For Prusak knowledge management should be more than just another consultant intervention. It should be a practitioner-based and substantive response to real social and economic trends, such as globalisation, ubiquitous computing and the knowledge-centric view of the firm. According to Prusak the purpose of knowledge management is to work toward a deeper understanding of the knowledge dynamics in organisations.<sup>192</sup> Prusak posits that the various intellectual antecedents that contribute to the definition of knowledge management provide it with the rigour, conceptual scope and substance required to “wrestle with the real human and structural complexities of knowledge in organisations.”<sup>193</sup>

An overview of Prusak's propositions is given in the following table.

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<sup>192</sup> Prusak. 2001. Where did knowledge management come from. p.1002

<sup>193</sup> Prusak. 2001. Where did knowledge management come from. p.1004

Aspect		a
1	<b>Rationale</b>	<p>According to Davenport &amp; Prusak the realisation by firms that they require more than a casual (and even unconscious) approach to knowledge management to succeed in the current and future economy stems from the recognition that knowledge should be the focus, rather than information or data.<sup>194</sup> Davenport &amp; Prusak also note that knowledge loss and corporate amnesia as a result of downsizing lead to organisations wanting to understand what they know, what they need to know, and what to do about it.<sup>195</sup></p> <p>The need for knowledge management as a distinct management practice is also based on the claim that other management fields do not sufficiently address the dynamics of the knowledge-based organisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Human Capital focuses on the individual whereas most knowledge management work is concerned with groups, communities, and networks. Knowledge management is more concerned with group knowledge and the processes of social capital that underpin group knowledge.</li> <li>- Organisational learning tends to fail to explain how learning occurs (sociology) and what business and economic outcomes we can expect from learning (economics).</li> <li>- Quality management are mostly geared towards manufacturing process, while knowledge management has a broader scope and is also applicable to processes that cannot be readily measurement or does not have a clear definition.<sup>196</sup></li> </ul>
2	<b>Solution definition</b>	<p>Knowledge management is about paying systemic attention to knowledge in organisational settings, the detection of errors in thinking and practice, and providing solutions to resolve these errors. Studies should look at how knowledge is managed, mis-managed and unmanaged in organisations.<sup>197</sup></p> <p>Knowledge is also different from information, and hence, the practices and methods should be different than those of information management. The focus is on understanding how knowledge functions in organisations.</p>

<sup>194</sup> Davenport & Prusak. 1998. *Working knowledge*. p.ix

<sup>195</sup> Davenport & Prusak. 1998. *Working knowledge*. p.x

<sup>196</sup> Prusak. 2001. Where did knowledge management come from. p.1006

<sup>197</sup> Fahey & Prusak. 1998. The eleven deadliest sins of knowledge management. p.265



Aspect		a
		This understanding informs knowledge interventions that change what the organisation knows, how the organisation knows or how it shares what it knows and allows an organisation to enter a new phase by leveraging added, distributed or enhanced knowledge. <sup>198</sup>
3	<b>Management niche</b>	The focus is on knowledge in organisational settings. <sup>199</sup> In later discourses, Prusak states that groups and networks should be the unit of analysis and the focal points of organizational knowledge since knowledge exists and grows in such structures. The focus also shifted towards the understanding and fostering of social capital. <sup>200</sup> According to Prusak connectivity and access to knowledge artefacts or information is not real knowledge. Knowledge is information assimilated through experience. Information, regardless of how it is managed, cannot supply insights such as best practices, new ideas, creative synergies and breakthrough processes. Knowledge acquisition is a time-consuming process that requires a distinct approach. <sup>201</sup>
4	<b>Outputs, outcomes and consequences</b>	The only sustainable advantage a firm has comes from its ability to compete with its own collectively knowledge, and how efficiently it uses what it knows and how readily it acquires and uses new knowledge to compete. This capability provides the continuity that allows firms to thrive over time. Knowledge tells an organisation how to do things and how they might do it better. In support of the above, the following business outcomes are also noted - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Productivity of knowledge workers in line with on a renewed emphasis on a competency-based or resource-based theory of the firm.<sup>202</sup></li> <li>- Social capital.<sup>203</sup></li> <li>- The collaborative enterprise that is able to combine the knowledge of diverse specialists.<sup>204</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>198</sup> Davenport & Prusak. 2003 . *What's the big idea?* p.189

<sup>199</sup> Fahey & Prusak. 1998. The eleven deadliest sins of knowledge management. p.265

<sup>200</sup> Prusak. 2001. Where did knowledge management come from. p.1004

<sup>201</sup> Stowe. 2006. Larry Prusak: The world is round

<sup>202</sup> Matson & Prusak. 2010. Boosting the productivity of knowledge workers. pp.93-96; Davenport & Prusak. 1998. *Working knowledge*. p.ix

<sup>203</sup> Prusak & Cohen. 2001. How to invest in social capital. pp.86-93

<sup>204</sup> Adler, Heckscher & Prusak. 2011. Building a collaborative enterprise. p.96

Aspect		a
5	Enactment methods, conditions –	<p>Davenport &amp; Prusak supported the enactment of knowledge management by documenting and contextualising practices in various organisations by means of an on-going theorisation -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge-orientated management lessons from 50 firms are presented in their book titled <i>Working Knowledge</i>. The organisation is depicted as a knowledge market in which several knowledge processes are active, such as knowledge generation, knowledge codification and coordination, knowledge transfer. Structural arrangements, such as enabling roles and skills, as well as technologies are also discussed.<sup>205</sup></li> <li>- Provide suggestions for knowledge interventions to address the barriers the impedes the productivity of knowledge workers, such as communities of practice (to mitigate physical and technical barriers), building a culture of knowledge sharing and collaborative problem solving (to mitigate social or cultural barriers), employee rotation programs (to mitigate contextual barriers), and deploying roles such as knowledge brokers (to mitigate the barrier of time).<sup>206</sup></li> <li>- Providing structured exposition of how Internet companies serve as models for organisations that want to more effectively market knowledge to their employees by making it easier to find, browse and qualify content.<sup>207</sup></li> <li>- Describe how new value can be created from proprietary knowledge by means of knowledge visualisation.<sup>208</sup></li> <li>- Describe findings of a research programme in selected organisations with the aim to identify means of improving employees' ability to create and share knowledge in social networks, including building understanding of a network's learning potential by identifying points of knowledge creation and sharing within an organisation that holds strategic relevance.<sup>209</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>205</sup> Davenport, Prusak & Wilson. 2003. *What's the big idea*. p.53

<sup>206</sup> Matson & Prusak. 2010. Boosting the productivity of knowledge workers. p.94-96

<sup>207</sup> Weiss, Capozzi & Prusak. 2004. Learning from the Internet giants. p.79

<sup>208</sup> Weiss, Capozzi & Prusak. 2004. Learning from the Internet giants. p.79

<sup>209</sup> Cross, Parker, Prusak, Borgatti. 2001. Knowing what we know. p.100

Aspect	a
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identified the social elements that contribute to knowledge sharing, innovation and high-productivity, and show how managerial action can enhance or diminish an organization's social capital.<sup>210</sup></li> <li>- Derive the four key elements for enabling the collaborative enterprise, based on studying institutions that have sustained records of both efficiency and innovation. The four elements are a shared purpose, an ethic of contribution, development of processes that enable people to work together in flexible but disciplined projects and creation of an infrastructure in which collaboration is valued and rewarded.<sup>211</sup></li> </ul> <p>Prusak also focuses on aspects such as -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transactional costs of knowledge interactions, suggesting that the focus should shift from knowledge seeking to knowledge application - devising strategies to help employees to use what they have found.<sup>212</sup></li> <li>- Detection of errors so that knowledge management does not become yet another fad that promised much but deliver little. Some of the errors noted are failing to recognise the importance of experimentation, substituting technological contact for human interface, seeking to develop direct measures of knowledge, not focusing on the future as well and emphasizing knowledge stock to the detriment of knowledge flow.<sup>213</sup></li> </ul>

Table 3.5 Overview of Prusak's propositions

<sup>210</sup> Cohen & Prusak. 2001. *In good company: how social capital makes organisations work*.

<sup>211</sup> Adler, Heckscher & Prusak. 2011. Building a collaborative enterprise. p.96

<sup>212</sup> Jacobson & Prusak. 2006. The cost of knowledge. p.34

<sup>213</sup> Fahey & Prusak. 1998. The eleven deadliest sins of knowledge management. p.265-276

### 3.6.2 Discussion of Prusak's discourse

Prusak's discourse is essentially a theorisation discourse complimented by management fashion rhetoric that addresses the requirement for systemic attention to the management of knowledge in organisational settings (see Table 3.5-2a).

#### 3.6.2.1 Theorisation in support of institutionalisation

Prusak provides a knowledge-orientated framing and labelling of observed practices and structural arrangements and does not put forward novel practices he envisioned and pioneered. The theorisation of these observed practices provides guidance in terms of the organisational arrangements required to afford knowledge productivity in organisations. The propositions include roles, such as knowledge brokers, descriptions of the organisational culture required to leverage knowledge, and elements for building social capital (see Table 3.5-5a). These elements are forms of habituation guidelines that underpin institutionalisation.

Prusak's theorisation quest is to provide the necessary "substance and validity that cannot be readily hijacked by sales representatives and sloganeers."<sup>214</sup> The theorisation is intended to portray knowledge management as a legitimate practice that is developed, evaluated and used to good effect by people and organisations. This theorisation also translated ideas presented by *inter alia* Toffler and Drucker into a managerial frame of reference.<sup>215</sup>

In addition to books and articles, Prusak theorisation discourse also takes on the form of an on-going commentary focusing on the enactment of knowledge in organisational contexts, for instance as a Harvard Business Review blogger.<sup>216</sup> This on-going commentary also serves as a sustaining rhetoric, as it provides the opportunity to address critique and cynicism about the ability and rigor of knowledge management. It also keeps the knowledge-orientated discourse topical within the broader management discourse.

#### 3.6.2.2 Management fashion rhetoric

Prusak's discourse rationale is a surfacing rhetoric. He explains why another management practice is required. This is based on the premise that existing practices does not adequately deal with the dynamics of knowledge in organisational settings (see Table 3.5-1a).

One of Prusak's discourse focuses is to detect and address errors in thinking and practice. This implies a sustaining rhetoric that addresses issues that impedes the perceived legitimacy of a

<sup>214</sup> Prusak. 2001. Where did knowledge management come from. p.1006

<sup>215</sup> Davenport, Prusak & Wilson. 2003. *What's the big idea*. p.185

<sup>216</sup> A listing of Prusak's blog posts on the Harvard Business Review site is available from <http://hbr.org/search/Larry%Prusak>.

practice. As discussed in the previous section, this discourse takes on the form of an on-going commentary.

In the quest to provide the necessary structure and understanding to establish knowledge management as a taken-for-granted or institutional aspect of organisational life, Prusak also engage in sustaining rhetoric that discusses errors in thinking and practice and provide related solutions. Sustaining rhetoric is a form of management fashion discourse.

### 3.7 David Snowden

Snowden's involvement with knowledge management started with an assignment at the then newly established Knowledge and Differentiation Programme (K&DP) by IBM in 1997. The objective of this program was to experiment with innovative models and methods for the management of capital both within and outside of IBM.<sup>217</sup> This management innovation orientation is still evident in Snowden's current quest and discourses as Chief Scientific Officer of Cognitive Edge. Cognitive Edge is a research network that focuses on the development of theory and practice of sense-making and narrative. Snowden is acting as a management consultation with an interest to promote his perspective and productive in a competitive management consulting market. He also holds academic appointments at various universities.

#### 3.7.1 Overview of Snowden's propositions

Snowden describes his discourse as a "personal diary of experiences, thoughts and cases from the frontiers of applying complexity (and other related sciences) to the field of management."<sup>218</sup> Prior to his association with knowledge management, his interest was with decision making in organisations.<sup>219</sup>

The following table notes Snowden's propositions. The overview is presented as a singular thread with sense-making at the core. Since the early days of his knowledge management discourse Snowden stated that sense-making is the purpose and the only valid objective of knowledge management.<sup>220</sup> It culminated in the Cynefin framework as the central construct of the discourse.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Snowden. 2005. *Storytelling and other organic tools for Chief Knowledge Officers and Chief Learning Officers*. p.2

<sup>218</sup> Snowden. 2005. *Stories from the frontier*. p.155

<sup>219</sup> Snowden. 2005. *Storytelling and other organic tools for Chief Knowledge Officers and Chief Learning Officers*. p.2

<sup>220</sup> Snowden. 1999. *Liberating knowledge*. p.10.

<sup>221</sup> Snowden. 2010. *The origins of Cynefin*, discusses the history of the development of the Cynefin framework.

Aspect		a
1	<b>Rationale</b>	<p>Snowden argues that there are two distinct schools in knowledge management that functions according to different metaphors of organisations and society in which it operates. He rejects of the Newtonian mechanistic metaphor associated with scientific metaphor in favour of an organic metaphor. He describes the quest as follows: “No one should underestimate the difficulty of achieving a shift from a reengineered, downsized organisation to the open networks of trusted communities and individuals that the knowledge economy requires.”<sup>222</sup> He argues that knowledge management requires a switch in thinking from the development of prescriptive and universal models to one that enables the community to accurately describe itself and its environment.</p> <p>Snowden’s second premise is that a third age in the management of knowledge is emerging. The first age was about the appropriate structuring and flow of information to decision makers and process engineering which failed to recognise the value of knowledge gained through experience and knowledge transfer, as well as the collective nature of knowledge. The second age centres around the movement between tacit and explicit knowledge based on Nonaka’s SECI model. Snowden posits that the second age’s limitation was that it privileged knowledge as thing. Thus a third age is emerging that focus on knowledge as both a thing and flow. According to Snowden the third generation of knowledge management is based on complex adaptive systems theory to inform a sense-making model that utilises self-organising capabilities of the informal communities and identifies natural flow model of knowledge creation, disruption and utilisation. He states that it was not necessary to abandon second-generation practice, but it needs to be extended because of its limitations.<sup>223</sup></p>
2	<b>Outcome, outputs and consequences</b>	<p>Initially, Snowden posits that return on intellectual assets is the intended outcome.<sup>224</sup> Subsequently, he argues that the outcome focus is resilience that required a prepared mind and a prepared organisation to ensure resilience, i.e. an ability based on fast detection, fast recover, and early exploitation.<sup>225</sup> This rests on the proposition that naturalistic sense-making is instrumental in improving the systemic functioning of the organisation as a complex entity.<sup>226</sup></p>

<sup>222</sup> Willmott & Snowden. 1997. Knowledge management: pitfalls and promises.

<sup>223</sup> Snowden. 2002. Complex acts of knowing. pp.100-102

<sup>224</sup> Snowden. 1999. *Liberating knowledge*. p.10

<sup>225</sup> Snowden. 2011. *The resilient organisation: introduction*.

<b>Aspect</b>		<b>a</b>
3	<b>Management niche</b>	There are two articulations of the element or management niche that should be the focal point. Initially the focus was on the return on intellectual assets. The focus later shift to knowledge as the capacity to act, based on the understanding of naturalistic sense-making that asks - how do I make sense of the world so that I can act in it? <sup>227</sup> A complimentary niche is narrative as a prime sense-making capability, based on the premise that human society evolved using narrative as a means of creating meaning and communicating knowledge within a network of families, clans and tribes. <sup>228</sup>
4	<b>Solution proposal</b>	<p>Snowden views knowledge management as a developing body of methods, tools, techniques and values through which organisations can acquire, develop measure, distribute and provide a return on their intellectual assets or the capacity to act. It is fundamentally about creating self-sustaining ecologies in which communities and their artefacts can organically respond to, and confidently pro-act with, an increasingly uncertain environment.<sup>229</sup></p> <p>According to Snowden, the three functions of knowledge management are<sup>230</sup> -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to support effective decision making, i.e. to management the ecology of knowledge flow in the organisation in addition to information systems;</li> <li>- to create conditions for innovation, i.e. allowing for a degree of mess and opportunity for adaption;</li> <li>- to facilitate top-down and lateral knowledge flows, i.e. the sensing and understanding of day-to-day micro narratives uttered in the organisational system.</li> </ul>
5	<b>Enactment – method, conditions.</b>	<p>Three aspects are part of the discourse that informs the enactment of Snowden’s proposed practice, namely –</p> <p>(i) Proposition of heuristics as the basis for the way the solution should be enacted, including seven heuristics<sup>231</sup> that guide the thinking regarding knowledge-based methods, as well as heuristics for interventions in knowledge ecologies</p>

<sup>226</sup> Snowden. 2000. *Cynefin, a sense of time and place.*

<sup>227</sup> Snowden. 2008. *The dogmas of the quiet past.*

<sup>228</sup> Kurz & Snowden. 2006. *Bramble bushes in a thicket.* p.1

<sup>229</sup> Snowden. 2004. *Story telling: an old skill in a new context.* p.8

<sup>230</sup> Snowden. 2011. *...forever blunt and merciless.*

Aspect	a
	<p>based on the premise that the organisation is not a machine but a complex and interdependent network of communities whose intellectual capital cannot be discovered or managed using traditional techniques of consultancy.<sup>232</sup> The Cynefin framework can also be regarded as a form of heuristic, since it explains that the context for the relevant application of narrative-based sense-making practices.</p> <p>(ii) A suite of methods to facilitate system-level sense-making based on narrative in support of decision-making, strategy, as well as monitoring and evaluation. These methods include good practices for facilitation narrative-based sessions, as well as a software application that is used to capture and analyse narrative fragments.<sup>233</sup></p> <p>(iii) Discourses that discuss the implications and application of the heuristics for various knowledge management aspects, such as a commentary on the role of the Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO) , social media and knowledge sharing. Snowden states the Cynefin framework has outgrown its application in knowledge management. As a result his discourse is shifting towards the implications and application of the Cynefin framework to other practices, such as agile development, strategy market creation, leadership, and customer relationship management.<sup>234</sup></p>

Table 3.6 Overview of Snowden's propositions

<sup>231</sup> The seven heuristics are: knowledge can only be volunteered it cannot be conscripted; we only know what we know when we need to know it; in the context of real need few people will withhold their knowledge; everything is fragmented; tolerated failure imprints learning better than success; the way we know things is not the way we report we know things; we always know more than we can say, and we will always say more than we can write down. (Snowden. 2008. *Rendering knowledge*.)

<sup>232</sup> These heuristics are: finely grained objects (narrative fragments) should be used, distributed cognition should be based on creating and using human sensor networks and disintermediation should happen which means enabling direct contact between the decision and raw material without interpretative layers (Snowden. 2011. *The resilient organisation: introduction*).

<sup>233</sup> Listing of methods available at <http://cognitive-edge.com/method.php>. Overview of the SenseMaker Suite is available at <http://www.sensemaker-suite.com/>.

<sup>234</sup> Snowden & Boone. 2007. A leader's framework for decision making; Snowden. 2009. Ingenuity and co-evolution. pp.1



### 3.7.2 Discussion of Snowden's discourse

Three forms of discourses are noticeable in Snowden's discourse, namely umbrella construction, management fashion rhetoric and a management innovation discourse. Institutionalisation is afforded by the theorisation aspect of the management innovation discourse. The management innovation and institutionalisation properties of Snowden's discourse will be discussed as one pattern.

#### 3.7.2.1 Umbrella construction discourse

The Cynefin framework is a taxonomy and as such represents an umbrella construction. The discourse includes both umbrella advocacy as a sustaining rhetoric and validity policing as a surfacing rhetoric.

##### *Umbrella advocacy as a sustaining rhetoric*

Umbrella advocacy argues for the inclusion of perspectives to keep a field relevant (see Section 2.3). The Cynefin framework could be regarded as an umbrella construct that through 'radical synthesis'<sup>235</sup> provides a consolidation of existing knowledge management practices and emerging practices propagated by Snowden.<sup>236</sup> Snowden states that it is not necessary to abandon the second era practices that focus on the movement of knowledge between explicit and tacit states. His intent is to show that it is necessary to recognise that additional practices are required to address the limitation associated with the before mentioned. He posits that it is not about choosing between views and approaches, but to bound the approaches to their appropriate domains as encapsulated in the Cynefin framework that depicts these multiple contexts<sup>237</sup> (see Table 3.6-1a,5a). Snowden challenges the universal application of management practices without consideration of the contextual relevance thereof.

The above can be regarded as a sustaining rhetoric since it does not call for the replacement of existing practices as with a surfacing rhetoric. The inclusion of a wider perspective of practices is a broadening sustaining argument that positions available and emerging practices in a larger context. In this way, the Snowden presents the concerns with many of these practices without advocating for the abandonment of those.

##### *Validity policing as a surfacing rhetoric*

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<sup>235</sup> Snowden. 2002. Complex acts of knowledge. p.111

<sup>236</sup> It is interesting to note that Snowden includes practices not usually regarded as knowledge management practices per se in his knowledge management discourse, such as business process re-engineering and Six Sigma.

<sup>237</sup> Snowden. 2002. Complex acts of knowing. pp.102;110

Snowden, however, in parallel also deploys surfacing rhetoric to substantiate and promotes his focus on narrative and naturalistic sense-making. He negates the suitability and value of practices such as that Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) and Six Sigma to sustain the competitiveness and sustainability of organisations, and argues that a new complexity-based approaches is required that should supersede these practices that are rooted in the mechanical metaphor and understanding of organisations (see Table 3.6-1a).<sup>238</sup> The discourse is a form of validity policing that narrows the perspective to support more rigorous standards of validity and reliability (see Section 2.3). This validity policing discourse is a form of surfacing rhetoric as it argues that mechanistic practices, such as BPR should be replaced by practices suited for the systemic functioning of organisations as complex entities. It is as if Snowden's discourse is oscillating between a sustaining (umbrella advocacy) and surfacing rhetoric (validity policing).

### 3.7.2.2 Management fashion rhetoric

Snowden's discourse displays a strong sense of management fashion rhetoric. Snowden's discourse is characterised by the positioning and declaration of his propositions in context of other management thinking and practices. The manifestation of surfacing and sustaining rhetoric was discussed in the previous section. The following management fashion rhetoric is also noted in Snowden's discourse -

- *Management fashion trend following*: complexity-based thinking is typical of the current period in which Snowden's discourse is situated, and he builds strongly on leveraging complexity thinking as the substantiation for his proposition of a narrative-based solution for sense-making (see Table 3.4-1a,2a). He also taps into the shift in thinking in the broader management discourse from looking at competitive advantage as the desired business outcomes to resilience as a business outcome (see Table 3.4-2a).
- *Surfacing discourse*: implications of progressive rationality by labelling his knowledge management proposition as the "third era" that supersedes another major management trend, namely Business Process Re-engineering and extending the scope of the proposition of Nonaka as a highly regarded proponent in the knowledge management and management discourse. The direct comparison with these two management discourses also implies that the so-called "Third Era" is of similar importance (see Table 3.5-1a,2a).

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<sup>238</sup> Snowden. 1999. *Liberating knowledge*. p.7

The surfacing discourse also serves to differentiate his perspective from what he regards as the mainstream knowledge management practice (see Table 6.3 1-a,2-a,5a).

- *Pragmatic ambiguity*: Snowden states that the Cynefin framework has outgrown its application in knowledge management. The focus of Snowden's discourse shifts towards the application and appropriation of the Cynefin framework in other management contexts, such as strategy<sup>239</sup>, leadership<sup>240</sup> and agile systems development<sup>241</sup>. He uses the tactic of pragmatic ambiguity to create new application areas for his work. Snowden's discourse is not an as much a knowledge management discourse anymore, but rather a management discourse. The potential implications thereof will be discussed in Chapter 4.

### **3.7.2.3 Management innovation and institutionalisation**

Snowden's discourse displays the characteristics of a typical management innovation cycle, as discussed in Section 2.2. He put forwards a new agenda for knowledge management thinking that breaks with perceived orthodoxies underpinning what he regards as the mainstream knowledge management practice. Snowden is also actively engaged in thought experimentation that leads to the suggestion for novel methods for facilitating system-level sense-making. These thought explorations are encapsulated as heuristics that is key to the substantiation of his suite of methods and proposals for sense-making based interventions. The thought explorations are complemented by on-going reporting of reflections of *in vivo* experimentation with methods to enact the thought schemas (see Table 3.5-5a). Snowden also base his practice development on participatory action research like Dixon. These reflections are reported as a series of blog posts.

Snowden's theorisation revolves around showing the practical application of the Cynefin framework in knowledge management, as well as other management contexts as discussed in the previous section. The theorisation affords institutionalisation of a specific methodology by influencing the belief systems of management practitioners (i.e. narrative based sense making is the logical solution for the complexity-orientated realities of the current times), and self-replication (i.e. the focus on the practical application of the Cynefin framework and a reference source of supporting methods and techniques) (see also Table 3.5-5a).

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<sup>239</sup> Snowden. 2011. *Cynefin for strategy: new seminars*.

<sup>240</sup> Snowden & Boone. 2007. A leader's framework for decision making of the circumstances they face.

<sup>241</sup> Pelrine. 2011. On understanding software agility.

### 3.8 Matthieu Weggeman

Matthieu Weggeman is a management scholar in the Netherlands. His quest is to interpret the implications and demands of a continuously globalising and unpredictable society. Weggeman has a background in industrial engineering and organisational science. His primary expertise lies in the field of organisational design, innovation management and work processes in knowledge-intensive organizations.<sup>242</sup>

#### 3.8.1 Overview of discourse

Weggeman's focus is on the arrangements and management required for living and working productively in the knowledge society and knowledge intensive organisations that consist of primarily knowledge workers. The knowledge workers have a dominant influence on the functioning of the primary processes of the organisation.<sup>243</sup>

The knowledge productivity focus is in his opinion a broader management concern. Subsequently the target audiences for his discourse include knowledge workers and professionals, those who should provide the requisite leadership (knowledge managers, and managers of professional groups), as well as those who are responsible to influence the work arrangements of knowledge workers directly (ICT, human resource managers, quality services, administration services, etc).<sup>244</sup>

The following table provides an overview of the propositions of Weggeman's discourse.

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<sup>242</sup> Weggeman. 2000. *Kennismanagement: de praktijk*. p.79

<sup>243</sup> Weggeman. 2000. *Kennismanagement: de praktijk*. pp.79,216

<sup>244</sup> Weggeman. 2000. *Kennismanagement: de praktijk*. p.27

Aspect		<b>a</b>
		<b>Discourse propositions</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	Our living and working in the knowledge society is influenced by the globalisation of the playing field, the dramatic acceleration of developments and changes (demographics, technological, socio-cultural, ecological and political), as well as the increased complexity of (business) interactions. <sup>245</sup>
<b>2</b>	<b>Outcome, outputs and consequences</b>	Weggeman states that the strategic goal of knowledge management is to formally and informally influence knowledge productivity. Knowledge productivity is seen as the efficiencies and effectiveness of the processes related to the development/creation, sharing and application of knowledge. Leadership, management styles and organisational culture influence knowledge productivity. He also regards the development of knowledge as learning productivity.
<b>3</b>	<b>Management niche</b>	Weggeman focus is on knowledge on an individual and organisational level – (i) Knowledge that is defined as a dynamic capability that is based on the information, experience, skills and attitude of individuals. This follows from his premise that knowledge does not exist outside of the individual. (ii) Corporate knowledge that is seen as the sum of the knowledge of the employees. The management niche focus is then on the organisation as a distributed knowledge system in which the synergy between the knowledge workers, the structure, the culture, as well as the work and management style determines the organisational competency and competitive advantage. This distributed knowledge system is inclusive of both the firm and the networks that the firm participates in. He also includes knowledge processes that should be enabled as part of the distributed knowledge system. Knowledge processes have become highly complex because it is dispersed over globally distributed organisations and team members.
<b>4</b>	<b>Solution proposal</b>	Weggeman suggests that knowledge management as a formal form of influence manifests in managers taking responsibility for the knowledge productivity of the people under their lead. They are expected to provide guidance to knowledge workers. <sup>246</sup> In the case of informal influence the employees themselves are encouraged to pursue ways to

<sup>245</sup> Weggeman. 2000. *Kennismanagement: de praktijk*. p.217

<sup>246</sup> Weggeman. 2000. *Kennismanagement: de praktijk*. pp.18-20

Aspect		<b>a</b>
		<b>Discourse propositions</b>
		increase the efficiencies and effectiveness of their knowledge as an input factor to organisational success. In this sense, knowledge management is about providing guidance to knowledge workers. <sup>247</sup>
<b>5</b>	<b>Enactment – method, conditions</b>	<p>The enactment is based on the premise that knowledge management should be a central concern for managers who should focus on how they should change management styles, practices and design of organisations to foster knowledge productivity. Weggeman provides practical frameworks and models that guides the thinking and practical implications that applies to various organisational functions -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the design and management of the knowledge-intensive organisation, including the changes implied for strategy, structure, systems, employees, management style and organisational culture.<sup>248</sup></li> <li>• the arrangements and management of the processes in the knowledge value chain to increase the efficiencies and enjoyment of knowledge as production factor. The value chain processes include establishment of knowledge required, creation of an inventory of existing knowledge, knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge application and evaluation of knowledge.<sup>249</sup></li> <li>• the development of the willingness and ability of the individuals to create and share new knowledge so that it can be fast applied in innovation processes, products and services. A specific focus is the relationship between organisational aesthetics and knowledge productivity.<sup>250</sup></li> <li>• a movement away from planning and control to the instilling a collective ambition and inspiring vision.</li> </ul> <p>These propositions for enactment are based theorisation that entails both the identification and description of management practices that are already been enacted in successful knowledge-intensive organisations and systematic</p>

<sup>247</sup> Weggeman. 2002. Verhoging van de kennisproductiviteit. p.15; Weggeman. 2004. De organisatie van kennisproductiviteit. p.47

<sup>248</sup> Weggeman. 2000. *Kennismanagement: de praktijk*. p.28

<sup>249</sup> Weggeman. 2000. *Kennismanagement: de praktijk*. pp.13;28

<sup>250</sup> Weggeman, Lammers & Ackermans. 2007. Aesthetics from a design perspective. p.347

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>a</b>
	<b>Discourse propositions</b> conceptual studies to develop descriptive models of specific aspects, such as the relationship between organisational aesthetics and knowledge productivity. <sup>251</sup>

Table 3.7 Overview of Weggeman's propositions

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<sup>251</sup> Weggeman. 2000. *Kennismanagement: de praktijk*. p.215

### 3.8.2 Discussion of Weggeman's discourse patterns

Two patterns have been identified in Weggeman's discourse, namely theorisation that supports institutionalisation and assimilates the practical implications for management of knowledge-intensive organisation for various professions, as well as management fashion rhetoric based on a solution-orientated discourse.

#### 3.8.2.1 Theorisation and institutionalisation

Weggeman's discourse is essentially a theorisation discourse seeking to influence the belief systems of various management practitioners. Institutionalisation of these changing belief systems are supported by providing frameworks that supports habituation. Weggeman puts forward various structural arrangements that will foster knowledge productivity for both the individual knowledge worker, as well as the organisation as a distributed knowledge system (see Table 3.7-5a). These propositions provide guidance as to how the thinking and practical implications applies to various functions in the organisations, such as product planning, process management, engineering and quality, as well as different industries (government, manufacturing, finance, consulting etc). Weggeman's theorisation is based on the knowledge-based framing of observed arrangements in organisations.

Weggeman regards knowledge management not as a distinct function or management practice in the organisation, but rather as a perspective with practical implications for various organisational functions and management professions (see Table 3.7-4a). This is similar to the discourse of Nonaka that views knowledge management as a call to transform broader management, including organisational design and strategy. According to Weggeman the interest in the management of knowledge intensive organisations extended to various management fields over time.<sup>252</sup>

- Phase 1 (<1990): the creation of awareness of knowledge management and establishment of concepts, including what is knowledge management, why is it important and what should be done, as well as the concepts of knowledge stock and knowledge flows.
- Phase 2 (>1990): focus on the role of information technology and the management of knowledge stocks, including intranets, content management, yellow page systems.

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<sup>252</sup> Weggeman. 2000. *Kennismanagement: de praktijk*. pp.10-12



- Phase 3 (>1995): human resource management and human talent management become part of the knowledge management agenda with a focus on employability, corporate universities, and knowledge as flow.
- Phase 4 (>2000): organisational design incorporates ideas from the knowledge management discourse that should lead to more knowledge friendly organisations, such as fuzzy, hypertext and web organisational structures, knowledge infrastructure engineering and re-centralisation.

The sedimentation of knowledge management is enhanced as more and more aspects of organisational life are incorporated and knowledge management arrangements become embedded in multiple organisational facets. Weggeman's discourse is not about the formation of a distinct knowledge management function in organisations, but advocates for the consideration and enactment of the requisite practical considerations across the various organisational practices. Weggeman thus provides a systemic organisational perspective on the management of knowledge productivity, including the productivity of the knowledge worker and knowledge processes (see also Table 3.7-2a,4a,5a).

### ***3.8.2.2 Weggeman's management fashion rhetoric***

Management fashion rhetoric is not as prominent in Weggeman's discourse. It is a solution-orientated discourse– the rationale focus on the new requirements that are necessary as a result of the emerging knowledge society. This is in contrast with most of the other proponents whose rationale is based on a surfacing rhetoric that firstly explains the inadequacies and deficiencies of existing practices and then proposing a new practice (see Table 3.7-1a). Weggeman's discourse is less based on superseding and replacement of existing practices and more about transformation of management.

Weggeman's discourse does contribute to the propagation of a management fashion trend that focuses on the management of knowledge-intensive organisations to various management fields.

## *Chapter 4*

# Patterns in the Knowledge Management Discourse

### **4.1 Introduction**

This study is about understanding the discourse patterns underlying the formation of knowledge management, as well as the meaning of these patterns for knowledge management. The discourse propositions and discourse patterns of selected individual proponents were discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter the patterns across the various individual discourses will be discussed.

The discussion will focus on the manifestation of the discourses associated with the four theoretical lenses that were discussed in Chapter 2. These lenses are management innovation, umbrella construction, management fashion cycles and management institutionalisation. The four lenses explain the different types of discourses involved in the formation of a management practice. Postulations about the implications of the discourse patterns for knowledge management will be presented at the end of each section. The last section of this chapter will provide a summary of the discourse patterns in knowledge management and concluding comments for this study.

### **4.2 Management innovation discourses in knowledge management**

Three patterns of management innovation discourses are evident from the discourses analysed in Chapter 3. Firstly, there is a theorisation discourse pattern that is about the synthesis and consolidation of existing practices into a knowledge-orientated framework. A second pattern entails a management innovation discourse that comprises the proposal, development and packaging of novel methods. The third pattern is also a theorisation discourse based on observed practices in organisation. The focus of this discourse thread is

on the systemic exposition of new perspectives that advocate for transformation of leadership, management and other organisational disciplines.

#### 4.2.1 Theorisation of a practice framework

In Chapter 2 it was noted that new and novel management practices are created by means of a systemic process, or that it can emerge as serendipitous events which are only in retrospect recognised as management innovation. Serendipitous management innovation is provided with the necessary retrospective substantiation, structure and operational models by means of theorisation. Theorisation supports intra-organisational diffusion and adoption.<sup>253</sup>

The knowledge management discourses of Allee, Dixon and Prusak started out as the theorisation of existing practices. Allee's theorisation provides a synthesis of elements of existing management approaches, such as learning organisations and quality management. These elements are now re-labelled as knowledge management practices and provided with a knowledge-based value proposition.<sup>254</sup> Dixon's theorisation is two-fold. Firstly, she provides a framework that describes knowledge transfer as a systemic organisational practice. The theorisation is based on the analysis of various serendipitous initiatives in organisations, even though these were not necessarily recognised as knowledge transfer practices before Dixon's exposition.<sup>255</sup> Secondly, Dixon presents a framework that incorporates various knowledge management practices that are part of knowledge strategies. Dixon incorporates existing practices, such as Communities of Practice, expertise locators and project-based learning into her framework.<sup>256</sup> The assimilation-based discourses of Allee and Dixon will further be discussed as umbrella construction in Section 4.3. Prusak's theorisation entails the structuration and knowledge-orientated contextualisation of relevant serendipitous practices and behaviours in organisations. This follows the recognition by Prusak and others that knowledge should be the focus rather than information. The outcome of Prusak's theorisation is the proposition of organisational arrangements (including knowledge roles and skills and knowledge technologies) to support knowledge processes and dynamics.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Section 2.2

<sup>254</sup> Table 3.1-5a

<sup>255</sup> Table 3.2-5a

<sup>256</sup> Table 3.2-5a

<sup>257</sup> Table 3.5-5a

Allee has since moved away from this type of theorisation discourse to a management innovation and institutionalisation discourse for Value Network Analysis.<sup>258</sup> Dixon's discourse continues to focus on the theorisation of knowledge-based practices, especially conversations and sense-making. The later theorisation is based on participatory action research and based on the reflections of the *in vivo* experimentation that she is actively involved with.<sup>259</sup> These two patterns will be further discussed in Section 4.2.2.

Prusak's discourse pattern did not significantly change. His discourse is an on-going commentary of reflections and theorisation for observed knowledge practices, events and behaviours in organisations. As discussed in Section 3.6.2.1 this on-going commentary serves to keep knowledge-based thinking on the management agenda and captures latest thinking and developments. It is also a form of sustaining rhetoric that addresses cynicisms and critique of knowledge management.<sup>260</sup>

#### ***4.2.1.1 Propositions for knowledge management***

This discourse pattern suggests that knowledge management started out as the construction of a meta-practice framework that assimilates methods and tools. These methods could be part of existing management practices or be based on the retrospective coherence provided to serendipitous initiatives in organisations. Knowledge management was thus not a novel management method, but rather a new perspective that labels and brings together various knowledge-based methods and approaches. Labelling is an important aspect of practice formation. Hulschebosch notes that by naming an existing and scattered practice, it becomes a legitimate activity and a recognised part of professional practice.<sup>261</sup> The theorisation of a meta-practice framework and the associated labelling was instrumental in creating a new professional identity, namely that of the knowledge management professional.

As a meta-practice framework, umbrella construction could be expected to be an important aspect of the knowledge management discourse. The manifestation of umbrella construction in knowledge management will be discussed in the Section 4.3.

If knowledge management is regarded as a meta-practice framework, then the focus is on providing strategic guidance in terms of selecting the best suited methods and tools for the context. A major focus of knowledge management would be on the strategic crafting of

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<sup>258</sup> Table 3.1-b

<sup>259</sup> Table 3.2-b

<sup>260</sup> Section 3.6.2.1

<sup>261</sup> Hulschebosch. 2005. *Communities of practice: Nancy Dixon on knowledge transfer*.

knowledge management programs in organisations. Secondly, the role of the knowledge management discourse is to provide the necessary labelling and theorisation for serendipitous management innovations that are knowledge-based. In this sense, knowledge management is based on a retrospective discourse rather than the fostering of novel methods.

This form of knowledge management discourse could also be regarded as a form of commentary on the development and implementation of knowledge-based arrangements and practices in organisations. Prusak's on-going discourse is such an example. Fahey & Prusak indeed posit that the purpose of knowledge management is to be systemic attention to how knowledge is managed (or mis-managed) in organisations.<sup>262</sup>

In lieu of the above, the origins of knowledge management practices could be attributed to so-called idea practitioners in organisations. The idea practitioner is continuously busy to scout the environment for new management ideas and then introduce associated practices as experiments in organisations at the right time. The idea practitioner has a certain ability and skill to envision a new reality, to package and translate ideas to fit with the organisations specific needs and culture, to advocate for new ideas to persuade leader and management to support it, and to make it happen. Idea practitioners tend to be restless and not as cynical about the plethora of management ideas propagated. They rather focus on matching the potential of ideas with organisational needs and opportunities.<sup>263</sup> Davenport, Prusak & Wilson comment that without idea practitioners, new ideas would remain on the periphery of organisations and would never get embedded into practice.<sup>264</sup>

Since idea practitioners usually get involved in the early stages of implementation and small-scale experimentation their involvement may be too short to provide the necessary rigor and drive for institutionalisation in an organisation.<sup>265</sup> Participatory action research and the ability to document the related theorisation are important work required to provide the necessary elements to support institutionalisation, such as methodologies and guidelines to support self-replication. Dixon is a role model for the above as is evident from her publication of books, reports and blog posts.<sup>266</sup> This aspect will be further discussed in the next section.

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<sup>262</sup> Fahey & Prusak. 1998. The eleven deadliest sins of knowledge management. p.272

<sup>263</sup> Davenport, Prusak & Wilson. 2003. *Who's bringing you hot ideas and how are you responding*. pp.60-61

<sup>264</sup> Davenport, Prusak & Wilson. 2003. *Who's bringing you hot ideas and how are you responding*. p.64

<sup>265</sup> Davenport, Prusak & Wilson. 2003. *Who's bringing you hot ideas and how are you responding*. p.61

<sup>266</sup> Table 3.2-5a,5b

#### 4.2.2 Discourses for novel management practices

Four of the proponents' discourses include reports of the conceptualisation and development of novel methods.

- Edvinsson's discourse is about providing an operational model for Intellectual Capital Management as a novel management practice that focus on the strategic guidance of value creation from intangible assets.<sup>267</sup> Edvinsson also propagates methods to interrogate the requirements of the emerging knowledge economy and in this way provide agendas and ideas for new management innovation required. These methods support thought experimentation – one of the elements of a management innovation. The interrogation methods are complimented by methods to implement experiments for new management ideas, such as the Future Centres.<sup>268</sup>
- Both Snowden's and Allee's later discourses are about the proposition and propagation for novel management thinking and associated methods. Allee's discourse is about Value Network Management<sup>269</sup> and Snowden's discourse is about the Cynefin framework and naturalistic sense-making.<sup>270</sup> The establishment of these new management methods happened *inter alia* within the knowledge management discourse. However, the application thereof expanded beyond the realms of knowledge management. Both Value Network Management and the Cynefin framework are now applied outside the knowledge management fraternity. Knowledge management is but one of the application areas for these methods.
- Dixon's later discourse is also about development of new methods as part of the knowledge management repertoire.<sup>271</sup> Allee and Snowden's management innovation stems from thought experiments searching for new approaches that are appropriate for the management of complex adaptive systems. Dixon's management innovation is as a response to the availability of new technology - in this case social media - and the emergence of conversational-based approaches as a management fashion trend. Her focus is on experimenting with these technologies to find the value and good practices for the implementation thereof as knowledge management practices. Her discourse thus focuses

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<sup>267</sup> Table 3.3-a; Section 3.4.2

<sup>268</sup> Table 3.3-1b,5b

<sup>269</sup> Table 3.1-b

<sup>270</sup> Table 3.6

<sup>271</sup> Table 3.2-b

on reflections of more pragmatic and responsive *in vivo* experimentation and theorisation with new technologies.<sup>272</sup> Allee and Snowden's discourses on the other hand started out with agenda setting and thought experimentations based on new dispositions of the organisational system as a complex rather than a mechanistic entity. They then propose and define a solution as a result that they then develop through experimentation and package for diffusion and adoption by means of theorisation. Especially Snowden proclaims the legitimacy of his proposed solution by constant referral to rigorous thought experimentation grounded in theory.

#### 4.2.2.1 Propositions for knowledge management

It was indicated in Section 4.2.1 that knowledge management started out as the definition of a meta-practice framework based on the synthesis of existing practices that originated in other management approaches and as serendipitous activities in organisations. In this section, it was shown that knowledge management is also a platform and catalyst for more systemic management innovations that seeks for solutions to address the requirements to manage knowledge-based firms as complex systems. This is in line with Hamel's call that the management thought leaders "... must cultivate, rather than repress, their dissatisfaction with the status quo."<sup>273</sup> Hamel further states that management thought leaders should not be content with the codification of best practice. The focus should as such not be on asking "Has anybody else done this?", but rather on asking "Isn't it worth trying?"<sup>274</sup> Allee also argues for systemic innovation by positing that knowledge management should be a revolutionary practice that drives debate to bring new thinking that will supersede the limitations of mechanistic and Newtonian thinking.<sup>275</sup>

Knowledge management can be the breeding ground for novel management thinking and practices on two levels. Both levels are indicative that knowledge management can continue to be a progressive practice, i.e. a practice that is at the forefront of management thinking and keeps up with emerging developments.

- Methodologies that provides a framework for the fundamentally different understanding of business, by looking at the organisation from the perspective of Intellectual Capital, or depicting the business as a value network. These entail the proposition of unconventional

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<sup>272</sup> Table 3.2-5b

<sup>273</sup> Hamel. 2009. Moon shots for management. p.2

<sup>274</sup> Hamel. 2009. Moon shots for management. p.2

<sup>275</sup> Allee. 1999. The art and practice of being a revolutionary. p.121

principles and deconstruction of management orthodoxies.<sup>276</sup> The products of these methodologies are descriptive models that inform strategic management interventions, and/or propose new management agendas to pursue. The intended outcome of these interventions is increased performance.

- Methodologies to leverage the new opportunities of new technologies and approaches, such as social media and conversations. These are more practically focused on the crafting of associated knowledge methods and do not necessarily entail deconstruction of management orthodoxies and new principles for organisations. The outcome of these innovations is improved knowledge products, such as strategy and intelligence reports. These kinds of innovations are based on experimentation and action research. These portray that knowledge management is keeping up with new developments.

Allee and Snowden's focus shifted from defining knowledge management as practice to the theorisation, experimentation and propagation of their specific methods. This is similar to Edvinsson's discourse that is an economic and strategic management discourse that could also be part of a knowledge management programme. Snowden's and Allee's discourses and focus also moved beyond knowledge management as they started to find wider application for their methods. Edvinsson's discourse is part of the knowledge management discourse, but is not a discourse about knowledge management as such. Edvinsson regards knowledge management as but one of the ways to develop Intellectual Capital.<sup>277</sup>

These discourses foster the emergence of rhetorical communities that coalesce around the respective visions and paradigms of the methods. A rhetorical community shares a common symbolic ground and usually spans multiple professional fields.<sup>278</sup> We can distinguish between discourse patterns that focus on the shaping and maintaining a distinct professional identity for knowledge management and the discourses that focus on specific management methodologies within rhetorical communities. There can be multiple rhetorical communities that are part of a discourse of a profession. Intellectual Capital, value network management and the Cynefin framework are all part of the knowledge management discourse. The discourse of a rhetorical community is however not exclusive to a professional community or management field. For instance, value network management and Intellectual Capital can be part of a strategic management discourse as well.

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<sup>276</sup> Barth. 2001. *Verna Allee on rethinking KM*. p.1

<sup>277</sup> Table 3.3-5a

<sup>278</sup> Jackson. 2001. *Management gurus and management fashions: a dramatisitic inquiry*. pp.52-58



Even though some management innovations may originate within knowledge management, they do not necessarily remain exclusive to knowledge management. The implications thereof could be three-fold. Firstly, these new methods could be regarded as the progressive practices that superseded main-stream knowledge management. Knowledge management is then regarded as a practice that becomes stale without the necessary impetus to influence the future of organisations or create new dispositions for competitive advantage and sustainability. On the other hand, the perceptions of the rigor of knowledge management as a catalyst for new management innovations are strengthened. These systemic management innovations ensure that the practices that are part of the knowledge repertoire continue to be progressive and able to keep up with the forefront of management thinking. This aspect will be further explored in Section 4.4 as part of the discussion of management fashion discourses in knowledge management. Thirdly, the application of these methodologies in multiple management fields enriches the knowledge management discourse, especially in instances where the proponents, such as Allee and Snowden, are still active in the knowledge management discourse as well. It anchors the knowledge management discourse in a wider management conversation and exposes knowledge management to diverse thinking and reflections of applications in a variety of contexts.

#### 4.2.3 Theorisation of a transformative management discourse

Lambe suggests that the potential lasting influence of knowledge management will depend on how it matures, develops and embeds itself as a valuable perspective on the science of management, and properly inform how we approach the conduct of business in the new century.<sup>279</sup> The before mentioned can be achieved by means of systemic management innovation, as discussed in the previous section. Another approach is the systemic theorisation that transforms our understanding of the emerging requirements for management and leadership, as well as the best suited organisational arrangements in a knowledge intensive economy. The discourses of Nonaka, Prusak and Weggeman are representative of this discourse pattern.

- Nonaka's discourse is about propagating new dispositions for management and leadership. Nonaka posits that knowledge management is at the centre of what management has to do in a fast changing, complex and uncertain world.<sup>280</sup> He suggests new thinking and various practical arrangements for management and leadership that

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<sup>279</sup> Lambe. 2002. Fashion, magic and knowledge management.

<sup>280</sup> Nonaka & Takeuchi. 1995. *The knowledge creating company*. p.226

foster the requisite enabling conditions for knowledge creation. The propositions are encapsulated in a knowledge creation theory that is based on case studies of practices and related organisational arrangements in Japanese firms. The knowledge creating theory is grounded by philosophical explorations of the conceptions of knowledge of *inter alia* Polyani (tacit knowledge) and Aristotle (phronesis or practical wisdom).<sup>281</sup>

- Prusak partakes in a broader management discourse with a focus to embed knowledge management as a taken-for-granted aspect of organisational life. His discourse informs a knowledge-centric view of the organisation and positions notions such as the productivity of knowledge workers, social capital and the collaborative enterprise from a knowledge perspective as management concerns. Prusak's discourse includes explanations of how managerial decisions and actions can enhance or diminish the organisation's ability to compete with its own collective knowledge and/or social capital that in his opinion underpins knowledge productivity.<sup>282</sup>
- Weggeman's premise is that managers should take responsibility for the knowledge productivity of their people and business. His discourse focuses on showing why and how strategy, management styles, organisational design, leadership and organisational culture should change to influence knowledge productivity.<sup>283</sup>

#### **4.2.3.1 Propositions for knowledge management**

This form of knowledge management discourses play an important role in the agenda setting, thought experimentation and theorisation calling for the transformation of various management fields. This is in line with Allee's reference to the meta-learning required for the knowledge-based management of organisations.<sup>284</sup> Knowledge management in this sense takes on the role of a master idea or meta-narrative. According to Czarniawska & Joerges master ideas come from the narratives of the past, which are translated into the present set of concepts and projected into the future.<sup>285</sup> This is another way of describing theorisation that is about the systematic exposition of observed phenomena into conceptual frameworks and operational models. This form of theorisation entails the analysis, abstraction and simplification after the fact in order to impose order and patterns on previous activities that

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<sup>281</sup> Table 3.4

<sup>282</sup> Table 3.5-2a,5a

<sup>283</sup> Table 3.7-2a,5a

<sup>284</sup> Allee. 2003. *The future of knowledge*. p.xiv

<sup>285</sup> Czarniawska & Joerges. 1996. *Travels of ideas*. p.37

were lived forward by involved idea practitioners. Weick describes this as “life is understood backward”, in Kierkegaard’s words. This practice-driven hindsight is in contrast with the management innovation discourse patterns discussed in the previous section. Management innovation is about theory-driven foresight that informs living forward.<sup>286</sup>

A master idea gives managers a sense of rationality and ways to express and present rationality to others, which may often be in opposition to the present. Knowledge management as a master idea thus influences management conversations of various fields by providing a knowledge-orientated narrative. As a master narrative, knowledge management in this context could also be regarded as a management fashion trend setting discourse. Master ideas have the power to excite, to mobilize and to energize. The taken-for-grantedness and obviousness associated with master ideas afford explanatory power.<sup>287</sup> Knowledge management will be a fashionable concern to different fields at different times. As a master idea, knowledge management is not necessarily regarded as a distinct management function. As a master idea or perspective, knowledge management practices become embedded in other management functions or management practices.

A pragmatic ambiguity discourse<sup>288</sup> that affords the diffusion of knowledge management across management fields and methodologies could be expected. Pragmatic ambiguity describes discourses that link a practice to existing practice fields or topical management agendas with established legitimacy, such as human resource management and strategic planning. Knowledge management in this way derives legitimacy and support from these associations. On the other hand, this could contribute to the perception that knowledge management is not a management function in its own right. Knowledge management should then rather be regarded as but one of the practices that should be part of *inter alia* a human capital development strategy (as per Nonaka, Prusak & Weggeman<sup>289</sup>), or as a field of expertise that provides methods and skills that will improve the strategic planning process (as per Dixon<sup>290</sup>). A third such perspective is that knowledge management is about interventions to foster certain organisational capabilities, such as resilience (Snowden<sup>291</sup>), innovation

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<sup>286</sup> Weick. 2009. Theory and practice in the real world. p.454

<sup>287</sup> Czarniawska & Joerges. 1996. Travels of ideas. p.37

<sup>288</sup> Section 2.4.4.2

<sup>289</sup> Allee states that knowledge management is one of the practices that is part of a repertoire of practices that focus on the management of complex work in organisations. Other practices are intellectual capital, business modelling and strategy development (Allee. 1997. *The Knowledge Evolution*. p.11).

<sup>290</sup> Table 3.2-2b

<sup>291</sup> Table 3.6-2a

(Edvinsson<sup>292</sup>, Nonaka<sup>293</sup>) or collaboration (Allee<sup>294</sup>, Prusak<sup>295</sup>). The associations with existing functions or topical management agendas are evident from the declarations of intended outcomes in the discourses analysed.

The reliance on pragmatic ambiguity contributes to the fragmented and ambiguous nature of knowledge management. According to Giroux pragmatic ambiguity has three consequences, namely increased vagueness, increased ambiguity as a result of an increased variety of acceptable definitions and compound phrases and increased generality as a result of more encompassing definitions.<sup>296</sup>

### 4.3 Umbrella construction discourses in knowledge management

As discussed in Section 4.2.1 umbrella construction could be expected to be an important aspect of the discourse when knowledge management is viewed as a meta-practice framework. Mehrize and Bontis remark that knowledge management is a “highly widespread and heterogeneous field that seems to be an eclectic melange of different and inconsistent definitions, notions, models, approaches and frameworks.”<sup>297</sup> Umbrella construction was discussed in Section 2.3 as a means to encompass and account for such a set of diverse phenomena. Umbrella construction provides coherence to various elements, even when there is limited theoretical consensus or limited agreement on the operationalization of a solution. This is another indication that umbrella construction would be a likely discourse pattern in knowledge management. Umbrella construction manifests as follows in the discourses of Allee, Dixon and Snowden –

- Allee notes that knowledge as a strategic focus serves as an umbrella to bring together various practices, such as Total Quality Management, learning organisations, communities of practice, action reviews, storytelling etc. Her focus is to assimilate practices into a framework that can inform knowledge-based management. Allee’s umbrella construction is discontinuous. She does not build on the first umbrella construction that focus on practices that affords collective learning, but propose a second umbrella construct that focuses on the assimilation of tactical approaches that affords

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<sup>292</sup> Table 3.3-2a

<sup>293</sup> Table 3.4-2a

<sup>294</sup> Table 3.1-2a

<sup>295</sup> Table 3.5-2a

<sup>296</sup> Giroux. 2006. ‘It was such a handy term’. p.1248

<sup>297</sup> Mehrizi & Bontis. 2009. A cluster analysis of the KM field. p.793

sense-making. She does not position the second umbrella as a replacement of the first umbrella.<sup>298</sup> Allee uses umbrella construction to provide a comprehensive framework to guide the definition of a knowledge strategy for an organisation.

- Dixon's umbrella proposition depicts knowledge management as an incremental and cumulative assimilation of practices over time.<sup>299</sup> Her umbrella construction is partly a retrospective perspective on the formation of knowledge management, and partly a forward looking proposition depicting the direction the knowledge management professional should be heading towards to sustain its relevance and sphere of influence. She only includes elements that are already regarded as part of the knowledge management repertoire. Some of these may still be in an experimental phase.<sup>300</sup> Dixon uses umbrella construction to explain the shift of focus in her knowledge management propositions and assignments.
- Snowden uses umbrella construction to propagate the logical necessity of a new approach that is suited to a complex-adaptive systems paradigm. Snowden's umbrella construction positions his emerging practices in context of established paradigms and practices.<sup>301</sup>

#### 4.3.1 Propositions for knowledge management

Umbrella construction provides the necessary coherence to the variety of methods and approaches that are regarded to be part of knowledge management as a meta-practice framework. Although the umbrella constructs in knowledge are presented as providing cognitive comprehensibility, it serves just as much as a mechanism for the political positioning of proposed knowledge management solutions. As cognitive constructs, umbrella frames informs the crafting of knowledge strategies (see also discussion in Section 4.2.1.1). As a political construct, umbrella construction is about sustaining the relevance of knowledge management. It is also about providing context and substantiation for practices that are not (yet) part of mainstream knowledge management.

*Umbrella advocacy as means of sustaining relevance*

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<sup>298</sup> Table 3.1-4a,5a; Section 3.2.2.1

<sup>299</sup> Table 3.2-5a; Section 3.3.2.1

<sup>300</sup> Table 3.2-5a; Section 3.3.2.1

<sup>301</sup> Table 3.7, Section 3.8.2.1

As a sustaining rhetoric the umbrella constructs portrays knowledge management as a progressive practice that can incorporate and enact latest thinking (e.g. complex adaptive systems paradigms; conversations as a key catalyst for sense-making). It shows that knowledge management stays relevant and broadens the sphere of influence of knowledge management by incorporating more practices that are regarded within the broader management discourse to be at the forefront of management thinking. This is also referred to as umbrella advocacy.

It should be asked if it would be sustainable to continue to grow the knowledge management repertoire to assimilate the next wave of management fashion trends, management agendas and management innovations whilst maintaining established practises. Will the necessary resources be made available to still both support established practices and to enact new emerging practices? The transfer of available funds to support the latest management propositions will influence the institutionalisation of knowledge management since there is not necessarily enough resources and time available to embed it properly as a taken-for-granted way of doing business.

Dixon questions the knowledge management professional's readiness to embrace the opportunity to play a significant role in the operationalization of this progressive management thinking.<sup>302</sup> It is necessary to look if this concern is adequately addressed in the knowledge management discourse. The assessment of the before mentioned is not within the scope of this study.

#### *Umbrella construction as substantiation for new methods*

Both Snowden and Dixon use an umbrella construct to position their latest methods and focus in relation to mainstream practices that are already accepted to be part of knowledge management. Dixon regards her latest focus on conversational approaches to leverage collective knowledge as a logical extension of the knowledge management repertoire. Snowden, however, uses umbrella construction as a surfacing discourse to show how his proposed complexity-based methodologies supersede other practices. This is referred to as validity policing. In his discourse, he guards against the indiscriminate application of methods not suited to complex contexts. Snowden's umbrella construct is a form of a surfacing discourse calling for the replacement of existing practice by the new proposed practice.

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<sup>302</sup> Section 3.3.2.2

## 4.4 Management fashion discourse in knowledge management

In Chapter 2 the role and types of management fashion rhetoric was discussed. Management fashion rhetoric is instrumental in creating what is typical of a given period and to capture the “attention of an overly stimulated and an increasingly sophisticated and distracted audience.”<sup>303</sup> It serves to communicate that a management practice is progressive and at the forefront of management thinking, as well as the sense that a management practice is a logical solution to address current issues.<sup>304</sup> Management fashion discourses are an important part of a process of translation that matches the perceived attributes of the idea to the perceived characteristics of the *zeitgeist*. Czarniawska & Joerges refer to the *zeitgeist* as a perceptual readiness for an idea.<sup>305</sup> These discourses are a form of a meta-narrative that provides the propositions for a management practice.<sup>306</sup>

A management fashion setting community consists of both fashion setters and fashion followers. Fashion setters provide the discourses that make new ideas to appear fashionable and legitimate. Fashion followers are those actors who translate fashionable ideas into workable practices. A proponent can be both a fashion setter and fashion follower. For instance, Snowden’s discourse contains an element that make complexity thinking fashionable, as well as elements that shows how complexity thinking is translated into methodologies. According to Czarniawska & Joerges individuals cannot create fashion, but they may influence it as fashion setters and/or fashion followers.<sup>307</sup>

The following elements in the analysis framework provide insight into the expressions of fashionable ideas in the knowledge management discourse – the rationale, management niche, and outcomes.

### 4.4.1 Rationale statements

The rationale aspect of the discourses analysed is in essence based on describing a problem that demands a new solution and management practice. The following rationale themes were identified -

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<sup>303</sup> Jackson. 2001. *Management gurus and management fashions: a dramatic inquiry*. p.177

<sup>304</sup> Section 2.4

<sup>305</sup> Czarniawska & Joerges. 1996. *Travels of ideas*. p.149

<sup>306</sup> Czarniawska & Joerges. 1996. *Travels of ideas*. p.36

<sup>307</sup> Czarniawska & Joerges. 1996. *Travels of ideas*. p.36

- available approaches are not suited to the new environment in which organisations compete and operate (including the fast pace of change, globalising and more complex business interactions) (Allee<sup>308</sup>, Weggeman<sup>309</sup>, Dixon<sup>310</sup>);
- current thinking at that point in time failed to explain value derived from intangible assets, such as knowledge (Edvinsson<sup>311</sup>, Allee<sup>312</sup>);
- other management fields do not sufficiently address knowledge in group and organisational settings (Prusak<sup>313</sup>);
- mainstream thinking in knowledge management is better suited to a mechanistic metaphor, and does not address the requirements for complexity-based views of organisations and systems (Snowden<sup>314</sup>).

The rationale statements provide the motivation for knowledge management as a logical response to these new realities and focus areas. The rationale discourse positions knowledge management as a fashion following community that translates these fashionable ideas (complex adaptive systems, value from intangible assets, globalisation, etc.) into workable practices.

#### 4.4.2 Management niche and outcome statements

The discourses analysed tend to start out with a problem-based rationale statement that is followed by a solution-based exposition of what the response would entail. It is framed as a solution that will be suited to a specific management niche<sup>315</sup> and that focuses on attaining certain business outcomes.<sup>316</sup> As with the rationale statements, the articulation of the management niche and business outcomes is also varied. Shifts are also evident pertaining to these two aspects. The tables below provide an overview of expression of niche and outcomes in the discourses analysed in Chapter 3. The variation in terms of the terminology

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<sup>308</sup> Table 3.1-1ab

<sup>309</sup> Table 3.7-1a

<sup>310</sup> Table 3.2-1b

<sup>311</sup> Table 3.3-1a

<sup>312</sup> Table 3.1-1a

<sup>313</sup> Table 3.5-1a

<sup>314</sup> Table 3.5-1a

<sup>315</sup> Section 2.4.2

<sup>316</sup> Section 2.4.3



used, as well as the number of categories is notable. These variations contribute to the ambiguous nature of knowledge management.

Expressions of management niche	Later management niche expressions
Category: Descriptions of knowledge	
Collaborative knowledge; collective fields of knowledge (Allee <sup>317</sup> ); experiential knowledge (Dixon <sup>318</sup> )	Phronesis (Nonaka <sup>319</sup> ); Collective intelligence (Dixon <sup>320</sup> )
Category: Knowledge processes	
Naturalistic sense-making and narrative (Snowden <sup>321</sup> ); conversion between tacit and explicit knowledge (Nonaka <sup>322</sup> )	Collective sense-making (Dixon <sup>323</sup> )
Category: Context	
Knowledge in organisational settings (Prusak <sup>324</sup> ) Individual and corporate knowledge (Weggeman <sup>325</sup> )	Groups and networks in which knowledge exists and grows; social capital (Prusak <sup>326</sup> )
Category: Descriptions of the firm	
Knowledge creating firm (Nonaka <sup>327</sup> ) Distributed knowledge systems (Weggeman <sup>328</sup> )	Value networks (Allee <sup>329</sup> ) Collaborative enterprise (Prusak <sup>330</sup> )
Category: Economic indicators	
How value is created? (Allee <sup>331</sup> ) Knowledge as a new source of wealth (Edvinsson <sup>332</sup> )	

**Table 4.1 Summary of management niche propositions**

The management niche rhetoric is both fashion setting and fashion following -

<sup>317</sup> Table 3.1-3a

<sup>318</sup> Table 3.2-2a

<sup>319</sup> Table 3.4-2a

<sup>320</sup> Table 3.2-2b

<sup>321</sup> Table 3.6-3a

<sup>322</sup> Table 3.4-3a

<sup>323</sup> Table 3.2-3b

<sup>324</sup> Table 3.5-3a

<sup>325</sup> Table 3.7-3a

<sup>326</sup> Table 3.5-3a

<sup>327</sup> Table 3.4-3a

<sup>328</sup> Table 3.7-3a

<sup>329</sup> Table 3.1-3b

<sup>330</sup> Table 3.5-3a

<sup>331</sup> Table 3.1-2a

<sup>332</sup> Table 3.3-3a

- *Fashion setting*: the expressions of the management niche are propagating knowledge-based concepts in the management discourse, such as tacit knowledge, distributed knowledge systems, collective knowledge and knowledge creation.
- *Fashion following*: incorporate broader management concepts into the knowledge management discourse, such as value creation, sense-making and the collaborative enterprise.

Expressions of business outcome	Later business outcome expressions
Category: Organisational capabilities	
Organisational competencies (Allee <sup>333</sup> , Prusak <sup>334</sup> )	Collaboration (Allee <sup>335</sup> , Prusak <sup>336</sup> )  Resilience that requires a prepared mind and organisation – fast detection, fast recovery, early exploitation capability (Snowden <sup>337</sup> )
Category: Knowledge-focused outcomes	
Productivity of knowledge work and knowledge workers (Prusak <sup>338</sup> , Weggeman <sup>339</sup> )  Efficient use of collective knowledge  Development of the collective intellectual capability of the firm (Nonaka <sup>340</sup> )	Social capital (Prusak <sup>341</sup> )  More effective strategies, as a knowledge product (Dixon <sup>342</sup> )
Category: Strategic concerns	
Competitive advantage; performance improvement  Systemic nurturing of innovation in enterprises and societal innovation (Edvinsson <sup>343</sup> , Nonaka <sup>344</sup> )	Economic value derived from value networks (Allee <sup>348</sup> )

<sup>333</sup> Table 3.1-2a

<sup>334</sup> Table 3.5-2a

<sup>335</sup> Table 3.1-2b

<sup>336</sup> Table 3.5-2a

<sup>337</sup> Table 3.6-2a

<sup>338</sup> Table 3.5-2a

<sup>339</sup> Table 3.7-2a

<sup>340</sup> Table 3.4-2a

<sup>341</sup> Table 3.5-2a

<sup>342</sup> Table 3.2-2b

<sup>343</sup> Table 3.3-2a

<sup>344</sup> Table 3.4-2a

Expressions of business outcome	Later business outcome expressions
Continuous innovation; perpetuate rapid change (Nonaka <sup>345</sup> ) Improve and renew Intellectual Capital; long term prosperity (Edvinsson <sup>346</sup> ) Return on intellectual assets (Snowden <sup>347</sup> )	

**Table 4.2 Summary of business outcome propositions**

The business outcome rhetoric is also both fashion setting and fashion following.

- *Fashion setting*: conceptualisation of knowledge-based outcomes are introduced to broader management discourse and discourses of various management fields, such as the productivity of knowledge work and the knowledge worker and the collective intellectual capability of a firm.
- *Fashion following*: incorporate broader management concepts into the knowledge management discourse, such as value creation, sense-making and the collaborative enterprise.

#### 4.4.3 Propositions for knowledge management

The presence of both fashion setting and fashion following propositions are indicative of a reciprocal interaction between the knowledge management discourse and the broader management discourse. Knowledge management is a stimulus for a knowledge-orientated language (e.g. tacit knowledge, the knowledge creating firm, collective fields of knowledge), whilst knowledge management uses the language from the broader management discourse to anchor the significance of knowledge management into a topical and recognised management purpose (e.g. value creation, collaboration, innovation). However, one of the challenges is that knowledge management is not the only management field claiming these rationale statements, management outcomes and management niches. Knowledge management competes with various management fields that also use similar language and propositions as management niche and outcome declarations.

As discussed, certain knowledge-based concepts are popularised through the knowledge management discourse. The knowledge management discourse also integrates fashionable

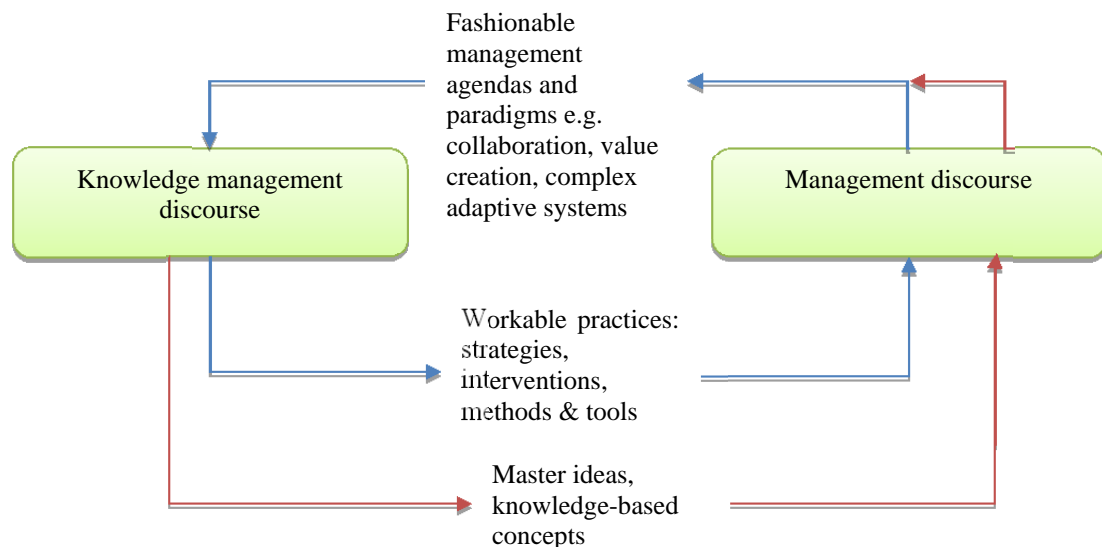
<sup>348</sup> Table 3.1-2a

<sup>345</sup> Table 3.4-2a

<sup>346</sup> Table 3.3-2a

<sup>347</sup> Table 3.6-2a

concepts from a broader management discourse as part of the substantiation of the proposed solutions. Knowledge management provides workable practices to the management community for these fashionable agendas. The proposed workable practices could take on three forms, as discussed in Section 4.2: a meta-practice framework that informs a knowledge strategy, a master idea that guides the knowledge-orientated transformations required in other management fields, or new approaches and methodologies. The interaction between the knowledge management and management discourses is depicted in Figure 4.1.



*Figure 4.1 The interaction between knowledge management and management discourses*

According to Simmel the function of fashion is also to unify a community by conforming to what is accepted and to separate by differentiating them from other communities.<sup>349</sup> Fashionable management agendas are not only pursued by the knowledge management community. Various other management practice fields also put forward propositions as a response to these. This begs the question: how unique is the value proposition of knowledge management as a distinct management practice field? Can knowledge management compete with other practice fields with a longer history and that is taken for granted as part of the organisational structure, such as human resource management and information technology services? The knowledge management discourse is happening in parallel with discourses in other practice fields with a similar focus and outcome propositions, for instance collaboration and leadership. The management of knowledge (and the various interpretations thereof) does not exclusively belong to knowledge management. Further research will be required to map the current knowledge-orientated inter-field discourse and to establish the need to nurture

<sup>349</sup> Simmel. 1973 in Czarniawska & Joerges. 1996. Travels of ideas. p.38

such a discourse more consciously in knowledge management. The focus of such a study will be on the knowledge-orientated discourse across multiple management fields as a management fashion trend<sup>350</sup>, rather than the knowledge management discourse focus underlying this study. Based on the discourses analysed for this study, the following tentative patterns of inter-field discourse are noted.

- As a master-idea, knowledge management informs and influence the discourses of other management fields, such as organisational design, strategy, leadership and human resource management (Nonaka & Weggeman).<sup>351</sup>
- Snowden's discourse is interweaving critique on other management practices, such as business process re-engineering and Six Sigma into his discourse. He is also now engaging in a discourse about the application of his propositions in other management practices, such as agile development. This application beyond knowledge management is not only broadening the influence of knowledge-based thinking, it also exposes knowledge management to thinking of other management practices and fields.
- Edvinsson regards the Intellectual Capital discourse as an economic and strategic leadership discourse. By virtue that intellectual capital is part of the knowledge management discourse, it elevates and exposes knowledge management thinking to economic and strategic leadership concerns and paradigms.<sup>352</sup>

The varied propositions for the management niche and business outcomes may provide an explanation why knowledge management has not (yet) become an institutionalised organisational function, such as human resource management and finance. These propositions suggest that knowledge management materialises as an instrumental practice should be part of various organisational programmes and initiatives, such as strategy planning and collaboration enablement, or interventions directed towards building organisational capabilities such as resilience.

#### **4.5 Institutionalisation discourse in knowledge management**

The focus of institutionalisation discourses is to establish practices as a taken-for-granted and permanent element of organisational life. This assumed taken-for-grantedness is underpinned

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<sup>350</sup> Section 2.4.1

<sup>351</sup> Section 3.5; Section 3.8

<sup>352</sup> Section 3.4.2

by normative belief systems or rule-based directives, as well as three characteristics – self-replication, habituation and sedimentation.<sup>353</sup>

#### 4.5.1 Knowledge management as a belief system

The underlying substantiation of knowledge management is about the influencing of belief systems and not derived from rule-based requirements that demand compliance.<sup>354</sup> This is attained through management fashion rhetoric contained in the expressions of the rationale, management niche and business outcome, as discussed in Section 4.4. Even though the belief that knowledge should be a management niche is widely accepted, the strength of the belief system that knowledge management should be a permanent element or management function in organisations is challenged. Knowledge management is but one profession or management field that subscribes to the belief system that new approaches and solutions are required to leverage knowledge as a key driver of competitiveness and sustainability in the emerging knowledge economy. Knowledge management is thus competing with established management functions and professional associations that are already taken-for-granted elements of organisational life. It is possible that knowledge management as master idea is more readily taken-for-granted than the need for knowledge management as a distinct management function. Debates about the future of knowledge management should thus be able to distinguish between knowledge management as a professional identity with a distinct repertoire of practices, knowledge management as a master idea, and/or knowledge management as a breeding ground for management innovations.<sup>355</sup>

#### 4.5.2 Institutionalisation elements in knowledge management

Self-replication refers to the ability to implement a practice in different contexts. It is supported by methodologies and guidelines. Habituation is reflected in the description of arrangements of the organisational structure, policies and procedures that are used to enact the practice. The level of sedimentation depends on the significance of the impact on the re-conceptualisation and restructuring of the organisational arrangements required.<sup>356</sup>

The following two patterns are noticed from the analysis of the discourses in Chapter 3 –

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<sup>353</sup> Section 2.5.1

<sup>357</sup> Section 3.5.1.2

<sup>355</sup> Section 4.2

<sup>356</sup> Section 2.5.1

- Discourses that are about knowledge management as a practice framework provide various methods to support self-replication (Allee, Dixon, Edvinsson, Snowden).<sup>357</sup>
- Institutionalisation of the solutions presented in discourses that presents knowledge management as a master idea, that informs the approach and practices of various management fields, is based on implementation of certain structural arrangements as enablers for knowledge productivity and effectiveness of knowledge dynamics in organisations (Allee, Nonaka, Prusak, Weggeman).<sup>358</sup> These are habituation-orientated propositions that afford imitation of comparable structures that were pre-tested in other organisations and are rather prescriptive. The sedimentation factor of these knowledge management propositions are also higher and more far reaching for these discourse. It entails more than just the application of a robust methodology to knowledge-based concerns in organisations. Habituation propositions call for new organisational designs (e.g. the hypertext organisations<sup>359</sup>), new conceptualisations of the organisations and the interaction of the organisation with its environment (the organisation as a value network in constant interaction with its environment<sup>360</sup>) and new dispositions for organisational cultures (e.g. the collaborative enterprise).<sup>361</sup>

#### 4.5.3 Propositions for knowledge management

Habituation-orientated propositions have far reaching implications for organisational design, management and leadership. This discourse pattern is part of knowledge management as a transformative meta-narrative, as discussed in Section 4.2.3. The distinct focus on knowledge management will most likely dissipates as these knowledge-orientated propositions become embedded and sedimented in organisational structures, organisational processes and organisational cultures. It is likely that these new habits, or ways of doing things, are not attributed to knowledge management as such. For instance, in Prusak's discourse about the collaborative enterprise there is no reference to knowledge management as such. This discourse could just as well be regarded to be appropriated as a performance improvement or innovation management discourse. This begs the question if the role of the knowledge management discourse as meta-narrative for management is being superseded by discourses

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<sup>357</sup> Table 3.1-5a; Table 3.2-5a; Table 3.3-5a; Table 3.6-5a

<sup>358</sup> Table 3.1-5b; Table 3.4-5a; Table 3.5-5a; Table 3.7-5a

<sup>359</sup> Table 3.4-5a

<sup>360</sup> Table 3.1-5b

<sup>361</sup> Table 3.7-5a

that focus on building certain organisational capabilities with embedded knowledge management thinking, such as innovation and collaboration.

With self-replication as basis, the knowledge management fraternity could also be regarded as a Community of Practice that acts as the stewards of a practice-orientated knowledge base. Actors from different professional domains and management fields could be part of such a Community of Practice. This also provides a potential explanation for the challenge of knowledge management to establish itself as a distinct management function in organisations. The characterisation of knowledge management as a Community of Practice supports the notion of knowledge management as an instrumental practice that is part of various programmes situated within other management units (such as Human Resource Management and Information Technology).

#### **4.6 Summary of discourse patterns**

As suggested in Chapter 1, the ambiguous and fragmented nature of knowledge could also be ascribed to different discourse patterns. The different discourse patterns culminate into three different parallel trajectories or threads. Each thread represents a different perspective on the nature and role of knowledge management, i.e. (1) as a meta-practice framework, (2) a master idea or master narrative, or (3) as a catalyst for systemic management innovation. The threads are depicted in Figure 4.2.

The underlying belief system of knowledge management is that new thinking, approaches and solutions are required to leverage knowledge as a key driver of competitiveness and sustainability in the emerging knowledge economy. This provides a sense of unity across the various discourses on a very high level. This belief system is shared with multiple management fields and as such, does not provide a unique value proposition for knowledge management.



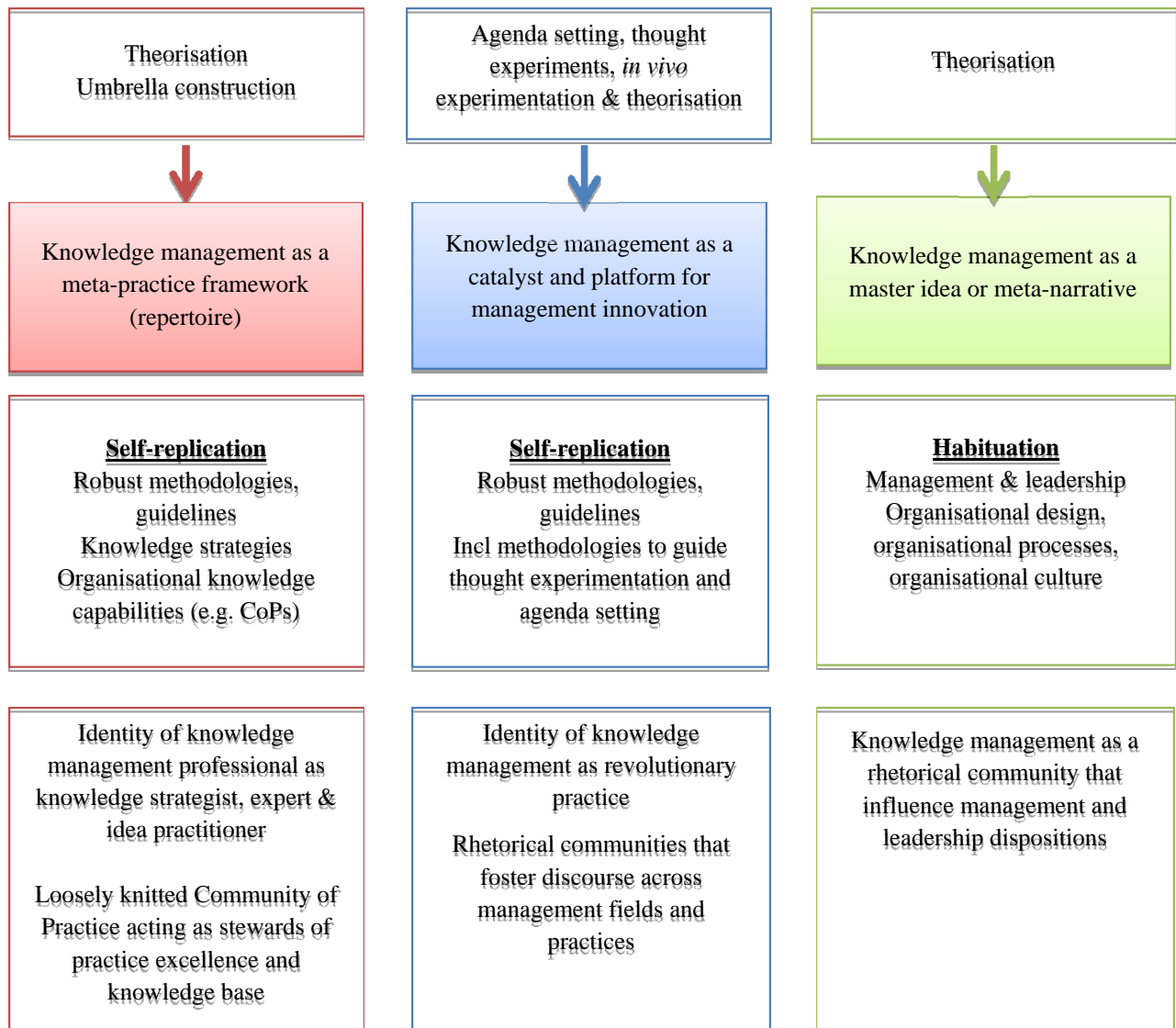


Figure 4.2 Three parallel discourse trajectories in knowledge management

#### 4.6.1 Knowledge management as a meta-practice framework

As a meta-practice framework, the focus is on the assimilation of a coherent practice repertoire and the provision of methodologies and guidelines to support the self-replication of these practices. Theorisation and umbrella advocacy underpin this assimilation.

Two identities are associated with this perspective. Firstly, the role of the knowledge management professional as an expert that focuses on crafting and implementing relevant knowledge strategies. The knowledge management professional must be able to partake in strategic conversations and be able to act as an idea practitioner who is able to include relevant management ideas at the right time in the knowledge strategy of an organisation. Secondly, the knowledge management fraternity needs to be stewards of the knowledge base. This stewardship is situated within a loosely knitted and distributed community of practice.

As community of practice, the rigor of knowledge management relies on knowledge management professionals who are documenting and sharing the reflections of on-going *in vivo* implementation of knowledge management practices and invest the effort and time required to package methodologies and guidelines to support self-replication. These knowledge management professionals practise participatory action research.

The challenge for knowledge management as meta-practice framework is to manage a balance between sustaining established practices, such as Communities of Practice, and the shaping and incorporation of new methods and approaches into knowledge strategies, such as conversations as a key sense-making tool for strategy development. A further challenge is that knowledge management as practice framework is competing with established organisational functions and professions. As an instrumental practice it does not have the same level of taken-for-granted support and default resource allocation as these functions.

One of the reasons for the on-going extension of the knowledge management repertoire is to portray progressiveness that is in line with topical management agendas and the *Zeitgeist*. It is uncertain if this pattern is sustainable.

#### **4.6.2 Knowledge management as catalyst for systemic management innovation**

Whereas the initial formation of knowledge management was about the synthesis of serendipitous innovations and existing practices with a knowledge base, the propositions underpinning knowledge management gave rise to systemic management innovation. These propositions are encapsulated in the rationale statements that call for new thinking and approaches to manage organisations as complex adaptive systems. These rationale statements set the agenda for thought experiments that culminate in new methodologies, such as value network management and the Cynefin framework. These new methodologies gave rise to the emergence of rhetorical communities that extend beyond the knowledge management community. These novel methodologies are also not exclusive to the knowledge management repertoire and are applied in various management fields.

The ability of knowledge management thinking to produce novel management methodologies supports the notion that knowledge management should be a revolutionary practice that drives new thinking that will supersede mechanistic paradigms.

The challenge associated with this discourse pattern is that these management innovations could be regarded as superseding mainstream knowledge management and distract the focus

from the institutionalisation of knowledge management as practice field. This gives rise to a parallel discourse within knowledge management – a sustaining discourse to reconfirm the legitimacy and institutionalisation propensity of so-called mainstream knowledge management and a surfacing discourse that calls for new paradigms that supersedes the proclaimed mechanistic metaphors underlying main-stream knowledge management. Umbrella construction is important to provide the necessary coherence to these parallel discourses in such a way the tension is accepted as an integral and logical part of knowledge management.

#### **4.6.3 Knowledge management as a master narrative**

As a master narrative, the knowledge management discourse advocates for the transformation of management and leadership to meet to the requirements of the emerging knowledge economy. These discourses are targeting various disciplines, such as human resource management and organisational design, as well as leadership and strategy dispositions. The propositions are based on a theorisation discourse that encompassing a backward understanding of the new realities as it unfolds in organisations in response to the new demands of the knowledge driven world. These discourses are proposing transformative habituation arrangements for organisations to both formally and informally influence the productivity of knowledge work, knowledge work and knowledge processes. The master idea or meta-narrative also addresses deep aspects of organisational life, including the environment, and as such carries a potential for sedimentation in management thinking.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

The formation of knowledge management is a gradual and cumulative process that culminated in three parallel trajectories. These three trajectories underpin different conceptualisations of knowledge management – knowledge management as a meta-practice framework, knowledge management as a platform and catalyst for systemic innovation and knowledge management as a master narrative for transformative management. These conceptualisations provide a different perspective to explain the ambiguity of the knowledge management field. It provides the knowledge professional with an alternative frame of reference to navigate, interpret and evaluate the various knowledge management discourses and propositions available.

This study also shows that knowledge management is a multi-faceted management field that on the one hand explains emerging practices based on theorisation that is about “life

understood backwards” and on the other hand knowledge management fosters theory-driven foresight that informs living forward. Both roles are important as we are learning to thrive in the emerging knowledge society and compete in a knowledge-driven economy.

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