

# Organizational Knowledge Communication – a Nascent 3rd Order Disciplinarity

PETER KASTBERG

*Aarhus University, Denmark*

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There is an emerging tendency that the organizational communication functions of larger companies enter into a symbiotic relationship with the companies' Knowledge Management function. A tendency this journal has labelled Organizational Knowledge Communication. This should come as no surprise to neither the researcher nor the practitioner; after all who can say where a corporation's knowledge work ends and where its organizational communication begins – and vice versa? In this paper I will present a theoretical account of the three disciplinary trajectories that, in my view, have given rise to Organizational Knowledge Communication, i.e., organization studies, communication theory and Knowledge Management, respectively. In their synthesis the three trajectories form a disciplinary triple helix, a triple helix which, in turn, gives rise to Organizational Knowledge Communication as a novel, 3rd order disciplinarity. Whereas each discipline is a strand in its own right in the helix, these strands, nevertheless, also allow for disciplinary integration, albeit punctually and dynamically. And it is exactly in such trilateral punctual and dynamic integrations that Organizational Knowledge Communication becomes visible, becomes a disciplinarity. I theoretically present an example of such a punctual integration and point to some of the immediate research promises that it holds. This theoretical account ends by describing Organizational Knowledge Communication as a nascent 3rd order disciplinarity.

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*Key words: Organization, communication, knowledge, triple helix of disciplinary trajectories, trilateral punctual integration, 3rd order disciplinarity*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Although the term Organizational Knowledge Communication is novel (and so far exclusive to this journal), the practice of ‘doing’ Organizational Knowledge Communication is ubiquitous. This claim, I hold, has a firm basis in theory as well as practice. From the point of view of organizational theory it is a truism that “[e]very form of society requires organization”. (Littlejohn and Foss, 2010: 293). At the most fundamental level, and therefore also at the most influential level, all corporations are in fact (also always) the result of endeavors of organization, the primary goal of which is to accomplish the corporation’s mission, its *raison d’être*, as well as its vision – regardless of what they may be in particular (Cheney et al., 2010). In terms of the field of knowledge studies, Lyotard (1984), Stehr (1994 et passim), and most recently Leydesdorff (2006), to name but a few, hold that we are currently living in a what is known as a knowledge era, in the era of the “knowing organization” (Choo, 1998), or of the “knowledge intensive company” (Alvesson, 2004). A core feature of which is the commonly accepted fact that it is the production, customization, proliferation and utilization of knowledge that constitute the driving force behind organizational (as well as societal) growth (e.g., Qvortrup, 2003, and Kastberg, 2007). And last, but certainly not least, due to a veritable paradigm shift in the appreciation of what communication is, current communication theory now views communication as a cooperative, a participatory, an inherent social endeavor (e.g., Tomasello 2008)<sup>10</sup>, whereby – among other things – communication has become inseparable from the very fabric of organizing.

Leaving the theoretical disciplines and turning to real-life organizational practice, there is no doubt that the three disciplines in question make up a rudimentary infrastructure of mutual dependencies of organizing, knowing and communicating in the day-to-day lives of knowledge intensive companies. As would be obvious to most scholars, such a real-life synthesis of disciplines does not, however, translate well to the rather rigid separation of university disciplines. Well, then, one might ask, where does this leave Organizational Knowledge Communication? Have I merely stated that what has analytically and academically been divided into separate disciplines does in fact empirically form a coherent corporate synthesis; a synthesis that we would otherwise call the day-to-day practices of the knowledge intensive company? I have, but I have also done more than that. My point of for this claim can be found in Wartofsky’s credo that:

*“Though it may appear that we have arranged our learned disciplines to reflect the way the world is, it is rather the case historically that we have construed the world in the image of our disciplines.” (Wartofsky, 1997)*

Whereas the above (and other) traditional university disciplines have unquestionably given us immense insights, they have also given us tunnel vision, i.e., as disciplinary specialization progresses our insight grows deeper and deeper, yet in many cases also less and less relevant to fewer and fewer people – a development, which Scharmer calls a pathology (2009). Secondly,

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<sup>10</sup> This is, then, in stark opposition to viewing communication as (merely) the neutral vehicle of message delivery (e.g., Shannon and Weaver, 1949).

consciously turning away from a more traditional university view (which would spur me to look at organization studies, and Knowledge Management and communication theory separately) would allow me to favor a synthetic look at Organizational Knowledge Communication. Such a synthetic view would imply two things. It implies that I allow myself to leave behind the comfortable and reassuring institutionalized mono-disciplinarity. It also implies that I leave behind the constraining confinement of the mono-discipline(s) in question. At a somewhat more abstract level this is in many ways congenial to Law, when he holds that:

*“If the world is complex and messy, then at least some of the time we are going to give up on simplicities. But one thing is sure: if we want to think about the messes of reality at all then we are going to have to teach ourselves to think, to practice, to relate, and to know in a new way.” (Law, 2004:2)*

Derived from the above I hold that, in order to study Organizational Knowledge Communication – in itself a novel perspective, deeply immersed in the “messes of reality”, as we saw in section 1 – I need to suspend disciplinary simplicities. Suspending disciplinary simplicities, however, does not mean giving up on disciplines altogether. Organizational Knowledge Communication does in fact pay homage to its parent disciplines much in the same way as Bernard of Chartres would pay homage to the “ancients”:

*“We are like dwarves perched on the shoulders of giants [in casu: the disciplines], and thus we are able to see more and farther than the latter. And this is not at all because of the acuteness of our sight or the stature of our body, but because we are carried aloft and elevated by the magnitude of the giants.” (Bernard of Chartres, app. 1134)*

In this sense Organizational Knowledge Communication resembles a sort of prism<sup>11</sup> through which several disciplines each cast their particular light on the same entity, each beam of light being a beam in its own right yet in their integration the beams contribute to establishing a synthetic impression hitherto unseen (cf. sections 5 and 5.1)<sup>12</sup>. The view, which I advocate at this point, is, then, in tune with Horgan, when he states that:

*“The basic idea of the edge of chaos is that nothing novel can emerge from systems with high degrees of order and stability, such as crystals; on the other hand, complete chaotic [...] systems such as turbulent fluids or heated gases, are too formless. Truly complex things – amoebas, bond traders, and the like – happen at the border between rigid order and randomness.” (Horgan, 1996:196-197)*

Organizational Knowledge Communication does acknowledge its parent disciplines, i.e., the “systems with high degrees of order and stability”. Yet at the same it challenges the restrictions imposed by said parent disciplines’ “order and stability”. On the one hand this entails that Organizational Knowledge Communication is neither out to debunk disciplinarity in general nor out to deconstruct the three particular university disciplines in question. On the other hand it

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<sup>11</sup> I am thankful to my colleagues Thomasen and Abell for introducing me to the idea of the prism in this sense.

<sup>12</sup> This is what I coin a “trilateral punctual integration” later on in this paper.

entails that Organizational Knowledge Communication is consciously looking for what happens “at the border between rigid order and randomness”, i.e., when the prism casts new light on the meeting places in-between disciplines.

## 1.1. Research agenda and organization of the paper

With a point of departure in the framing presented in the introduction, I will theoretically establish, investigate and account for three things in this paper. Firstly, I will establish disciplinary trajectories of current dominant ideas of the three parent disciplines (sections 2, 3 and 4). Secondly, I will establish a synthesis of these trajectories, i.e., the triple helix of Organizational Knowledge Communication (section 5). Thirdly, I will enter into the triple helix and identify and investigate one salient and theoretically promising meeting place between these parent disciplines, a trilateral punctual integration in my terminology. In the process I will account for some of the core research promises that such trilateral punctual integrations harbor. I will subsequently utilize the insights thus gained as a stepping stone to reinterpret the notion of disciplines and point to Organizational Knowledge Communication as being a nascent 3<sup>rd</sup> order disciplinarity (section 5.1). The paper ends with a vision of a two pronged research strategy for Organizational Knowledge Communication (section 6).

Needless to say, a caveat must be issued here. Due to the fact that organization studies, communication theory and Knowledge Management are not merely complex concepts but indeed also (immense) fields of study each in their own right, I approach them from a certain perspective (cf. y Gasset, 1923, on perspectivism in this sense). For the sake of the argumentation in this article, the perspective chosen is that of trajectories of current, dominant ideas. As mentioned above, a synthesis of these three trajectories – a triple helix of trajectories – is presented and one exemplary and salient meeting place between the disciplinary strands is identified and discussed. For when selecting specific dimensions of vast disciplinary fields, focusing on a limited number of concepts within these dimensions, and viewing these concepts from a certain perspective, I am knowingly blurring or even blotting out other dimensions, other concepts, other perspectives. I explicitly do so, however, in strict adherence to the notion that conscious “perspective taking” is a prerequisite for any systematic analysis (Perner et al., 2003:358).

## 2. AN ORGANIZATIONAL TRAJECTORY

Though man has probably organized himself (and others) since time immemorial, modern organizational theory typically traces its academic roots back to the seminal works of German sociologist Max Weber<sup>13</sup>. Since then a number of scholars from within organizational studies have given their view on the evolution of modern day organizations and – sometimes more to the point – how we may look at the nature of organizations. Scott (1998), for instance, applies three perspectives unto his understanding of organization theory. 1) Organization theory seen from a “rational” perspective, with a focus on production processes and structure; implying that the organization is seen as a “machine”. 2) Organization theory seen from a “natural” perspective, with

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<sup>13</sup> For an English introduction to Weber’s main ideas and concepts see Collins, 1986.

a focus on behavioral processes and motivation; implying that the organization is seen as an “organism”. 3) Organization theory seen from an “open” perspective, with a focus on the organization’s relationships to its surroundings; implying that the organization is seen as an open and loosely-coupled network. Stemming from Scott’s reading of seminal theoretical works on organizational theory, he is able to depict a sort of history of ideas of organizational theory. Prototypically, organization theory up until the 1930’ies would be seen as predominantly “rational”, equally prototypically organization theory in the time span from the 1930’ies to the 1960’ies would be seen as predominantly “natural” and last but not least from 1960’ies onwards organization theory is seen as predominantly “open”. The underlying idea of an evolution in organization theory along the lines stipulated by Scott seems to be generally accepted. We see a similar idea of evolution in the work of Likert (1967). Here organization theory is seen to be progressing through perspectives labeled authoritative, consultative and participatory, respectively. Glasl and Lievegoed (1997) sum it up rather nicely when they see the evolution of organization theory as a progression from classical techno-structural theories (e.g., Taylor, Weber, Fayol) via psycho-socially theories (e.g., Mayo, Lewin, Herzberg) to systems theories (e.g., Burns & Stalker, Lievegoed, Mintzberg). What these theories have in common – and I am explicitly looking away from what may separate them – is a sort of shared history of ideas, a shared trajectory, as it were. There is a tendency to acknowledge a development over time; a development of going from a perception of the organization (as well as its practices and processes) as being structurally relative simple, relatively mechanistic and relatively closed to an understanding of the organization as a highly complex, a highly dynamic and an open entity. That is from rigid bureaucracies (in the Weberian sense) to open and loosely-coupled network organizations (cf. e.g., Rogers and Kincaid, 1980) and self-organizing, autopoietic systems (Luhmann, 1984, et passim). This trajectory forms the first strand in the triple helix.

### 3. A COMMUNICATION TRAJECTORY

As is well-known to the community of communication practitioners and researchers, communication theory, too, has undergone a considerable development. Beebe et al. sum it up in this way:

*“Our understanding of communication has changed over the past century. Communication was initially viewed as a transfer or exchange of information, but it evolved to include a more interactive give-and-take approach. It then progressed even further to today’s view that communication is a process in which meaning is created simultaneously among people.” (Beebe et al., 2004:11)*

The shift in focus in these phases is quite revealing: From communication as a matter of “the sender” sending (communication seen as transmission or signaling) via communication being a matter of “the sender” adjusting to feedback from the “receiver” and / or the environment (communication seen as interaction, typically from a cybernetics point of view) to the idea that communication is basically a cooperative enterprise (Tomasello, 2008) calling for the equal involvement of both “sender” and “receiver” – explicitly perceived as communication partners (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981) – in a joint meaning making process (communication as transaction,

typically based on a systems theory approach)<sup>14</sup>. In lieu of this new theoretical appreciation of communication, communication has also been elevated to being seen as epistemic (e.g., Scott, 1967) or constitutive (e.g., Putnam and Nicoreta, 2008), i.e., when we communicate we do more than merely send our messages. We do in fact communicatively construct ourselves, others as well as the world in which we live. Reflections of such an evolution within general communication theory are also to be found at the level of organizational communication. In her book on organizational communication, Miller (2003) offers a condensed version of a history of dominant ideas, a history where management philosophies (or approaches) are paired with the communicative aspects of content, direction, channel and style.

| Characteristics of Prototypical Approaches to Organizational Communication :<br>from classical to current |                     |                                |  |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------------|--|
|   | Classical approach  | Human relations approach       | Human resources approach                           |
| Communication content   | Task                | Task and social communication  | Task, social, innovation                           |
| Communication direction   | Vertical (top-down) | Vertical as well as horizontal | All directions, typically team-based               |
| Communication channel   | Usually written     | Often face-to-face             | All channels                                       |
| Communication style   | Usually formal      | Usually informal               | Formal as well as informal, but typically informal |

Table 1: Characteristics of Prototypical Approaches to Organizational Communication : from classical to current (based on Miller, 2003:57)

Even if this table is a crude generalization of trends, it nevertheless becomes clear that – over time – organizational communication has evolved as a field in as much as it has gone through a number of phases, which have transformed it – essentially following the evolutionary phases of general communication theory. For organizational communication the transformation may be subsumed under such headings as: from univocality to a plurivocality, from a unilaterality to a plurilaterality, from mono-modal to multimodal, and from centralized to decentralized. This trajectory forms the second strand of the triple helix.

#### 4. A KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT TRAJECTORY

Even if the academic study of knowledge may trace its intellectual roots back to Plato's *Theaetetus*, the study of Knowledge Management (henceforth KM) – as well as the coining of the phrase itself – is a much more recent phenomenon. According to Wiig (1997) KM emerges as a discipline in its own right as late as in the 1980'ies, but although it is not much more than three decades old, KM

<sup>14</sup> Further elaborations on this understanding of communication theory history are to be found in e.g., Windahl et al., 2008, as well as Littlejohn and Foss, 2010.

has nevertheless matured remarkably fast as a discipline. Guretzky establishes, in a recent article, the following trends in the history of dominant ideas of KM:

| Trends in the History of Ideas of Knowledge Management |   |
|--|---|
| KM generations   | Focal points  |
| KM 1.0   | Making implicit knowledge explicit  |
| KM 2.0   | Let's communicate!  |
| KM 3.0   | Deregulate, integrate and empower the employee to adapt to complex situations |

Table 2: Trends in the History of Ideas of Knowledge Management (translated from von Guretzky, 2010)

KM 1.0 is crowned by the seminal works of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) as well as Choo (1998). Here the bulk of the effort going into investigating organizational knowledge focuses on making tacit knowledge explicit. The strong focus on the process of “translating” tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge stems from two interconnected ideas. 1) Knowledge is a valuable organizational resource, which (therefore) needs to be managed, and 2) only explicit knowledge can be managed. Well-known representatives of KM 2.0 would be Davenport and Prusak (1998), who – with a firm basis in a Communities of Practice approach – would emphasize communication as essential to knowledge work in organizations. KM 3.0 is still an emergent field (for a discussion of core aspects of this generation of KM see Kastberg, 2007 and 2010a). We may, however, say that it draws on the previous KM generations but adds to them the idea of emancipating the knowledge worker; i.e., of self-governance in the knowledge work.

This table, however crude the generalization may be, does nevertheless depict a clear disciplinary development. In terms of evolutionary development the legacy of the early cognitivist idea, i.e., that knowledge is an entity which we can make explicit, easily isolate, somehow package and then send to whomever is in need of that particular parcel of knowledge, seems to be vanishing. And, at least ideologically, KM seems today to adhere to some form of constructivism (be it social, e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966, or radical, e.g., von Glasersfeld and Smock, 1974) or – more recently – constructionism (Gergen, 1985). This trajectory forms the third and last strand of the triple helix, which will be introduced and elaborated on in the next section.

## 5. A TRIPLE HELIX OF DISCIPLINARY TRAJECTORIES

In the above sections 2, 3 and 4 I have sketched out the three trajectories; and although each trajectory is a school of thought in its own right, the trajectories are not altogether unrelated as I stated in section 1. But not only are they not unrelated in the day-to-day operations of real-life knowledge intensive companies, theoretically speaking I do in fact see the trajectories forming a triple helix. That is: A triple-stranded, interdependent, spiraling structure in which the strands converge on one another, but never quite merge, in a strict disciplinary sense. This idea of the triple helix of communication, organization and KM is, of course, a metaphor borrowed from the double helix of the DNA strands (Watson 1968). Dwelling for a moment on DNA research, it is well-known that certain nucleotides in the strands punctually bind together across the double

helix, a binding that is referred to as a base pair. In much the same way, the trajectories of our three parent disciplines are also linked punctually; what DNA research calls base pairing, however, is – in the case of Organizational Knowledge Communication – rather a punctual linking by means of what we may refer to as boundary objects (Star and Griesemer, 1989) of a conceptual nature. Let us take a closer look at the theoretical possibility for establishing such boundary objects in the triple helix in question. Conceptually speaking a boundary object binding organizational studies to communication theory is established by a statement by Kleinbaum, Stuart and Tushman. In a relatively recent paper they are able to present an empirical study substantiating one of the credos that the field of professional communication otherwise (truism-like) tend to take for granted, i.e., that “[c]ommunication is heavily constrained by formal organizational structure” (2008). The conceptual boundary object which binds communication theory to knowledge studies is established by the explicit mentioning of innovation in table 1 (i.e., communicating knowledge for purposes of innovation) as well as – at a more general level – the transactional view on communication itself, stressing the co-operative meaning making or knowledge creating, epistemic nature of communication (cf. section 3). Whereas such bilateral punctual integrations are interesting in and of themselves they are probably not all that uncommon (I have coined them 2<sup>nd</sup> order disciplines in section 6 below). What is unique to Organizational Knowledge Communication, however, is that it gives rise not to bilateral but to trilateral punctual integrations. In fact, Organizational Knowledge Communication only becomes visible as a disciplinarity in the trilateral punctual integrations it is able to establish. In the next section I will present one such trilateral punctual integration binding KM to both communication theory and organization studies.

## 6. FROM TRILATERAL, PUNCTUAL INTEGRATION TO NASCENT 3<sup>RD</sup> ORDER DISCIPLINARITY – AND BACK TO TRILATERAL PUNCTUAL INTEGRATION

In order to illustrate the idea of the trilateral punctual integration, I will now take a closer look at one such meeting place. For this illustration I have chosen to look at the KM phenomenon of „ba”<sup>15</sup>, i.e., “a shared place for emerging relationships” as well as for “knowledge creation” (Nonaka and Konno, 1998:40). “Ba” comes into existence as a trilateral punctual integration thanks to the fact that the KM trajectory has currently arrived at a dominant idea where knowledge creation is explicitly linked to, in fact made dependent on, the forming of a knowledge enabling organizational design, particularly of fostering micro-communities in which communication is cooperative and transactional (von Krogh et al., 2000). All of which are properties otherwise traditionally found within the realms of current organization studies and communication theory, respectively (cf. the three trajectories above). That it: What makes „ba” a trilateral conceptual boundary object binding the disciplinary trajectories in question is the fact that, strictly theoretically speaking, „ba” can only come about at a point in time where – in the course of the trajectory of dominant ideas of all the disciplines – the scholars involved would have:

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<sup>15</sup> “Ba” is Japanese for place or location.



1. A systems theory understanding of organizations (cf. section 2)
2. A transactional understanding of communication (cf. section 3)
3. A constructivist/constructionist understanding of knowledge (cf. section 4).

And it is exactly thanks to trilateral punctual integrations such as this one that Organizational Knowledge Communication sets itself apart not only from mono-disciplines but equally from the myriad of inter- and transdisciplines. Organizational Knowledge Communication, quite simply, exists in an altogether different disciplinary ecology. In order to substantiate such an, admittedly, rather bold claim a presentation and discussion of the disciplinary identity of Organizational Knowledge Communication is called for at this point. I can probably best describe the disciplinary identity of Organizational Knowledge Communication by contrasting it to other types of disciplines. The disciplinary types with which I contrast Organizational Knowledge Communication I have coined 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order<sup>16</sup> disciplines.

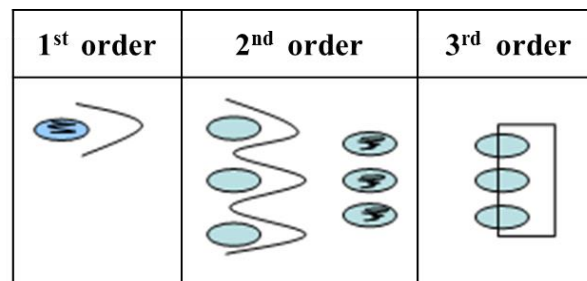


Figure 1: An ordering of disciplinarity (adapted from Kastberg, 2007)

1<sup>st</sup> order disciplines are the product of what in a European university environment would be a prototypical “Humboldt” division of university disciplines. It is depicted in the figure to the far left. A first order university discipline comes into existence when a particular object of study is exclusively being examined by a fixed conglomerate of theories and methods, which, in turn, has been sanctioned and codified over time from research carried out into that very object. (It is questionable if many pure 1<sup>st</sup> order disciplines exist today.) The two middle images depict 2<sup>nd</sup> order disciplines – typically referred to as inter- or transdisciplines. The first of the two middle images show the kind of 2<sup>nd</sup> order discipline which comes into existence when different objects of study are examined by means of one overarching theory. It could be the application of, say, critical theory unto objects of study from different fields as such as social science, pedagogy, and history. The latter of the two shows the kind of 2<sup>nd</sup> order discipline which comes into existence when different objects of study are examined by means of one all-pervading method. It could be the application of, say, statistical method unto such fields as population studies, corpus linguistics, and economics. What formally establishes these as 2<sup>nd</sup> order disciplines is the fact that they imbed the possibility for 1<sup>st</sup> order disciplines. The image to the far right depicts what I have labelled a 3<sup>rd</sup> order disciplinarity (Kastberg, 2007). A 3<sup>rd</sup> order disciplinarity comes into existence when not one overarching theory and not one pervading method is the common denominator. The common denominator is the object of study itself and unto that object (in principle) any theory and any

<sup>16</sup> The idea of “ordering” in this sense goes back to Bateson, 1972.

method may be applied. That is, first of all, a third order disciplinarity is independent from the restraints of any one theory, any one method. Its only obligation, its telos, being to match the complexity of the object of study with modes of examinations befitting said complexity. What formally establishes this as a 3<sup>rd</sup> order disciplinarity is the fact that it imbeds the possibility for 2<sup>nd</sup> order disciplines.

Let us now look at Organizational Knowledge Communication through the optics thus provided. Acknowledging its three parent disciplines with their different theories, methods, and objects of study, Organizational Knowledge Communication, quite simply, cannot be a 1<sup>st</sup> order discipline. Neither is Organizational Knowledge Communication a 2<sup>nd</sup> order discipline. There is, quite simply, no one overarching theory, no one overarching method through which to investigate an object of study. And, in the terminology introduced in section 5, the bilateral, punctual integration of 2<sup>nd</sup> order disciplines does not suffice if one wants to adequately encompass the triple helix of Organizational Knowledge Communication. What, then, characterizes Organizational Knowledge Communication as a 3<sup>rd</sup> order disciplinarity? Well, first of all, I am, and quite deliberately so, referring to Organizational Knowledge Communication not as a discipline but as a disciplinarity. I do so, because Organizational Knowledge Communication is quite simply not an institutionalized university discipline, if we compare it to this definition:

*"[...] the primary unit of internal differentiation of science [...]. There exists a long semantic prehistory of disciplina as a term for the ordering of knowledge for the purposes of instruction in schools and universities. But only the nineteenth century established real disciplinary communication systems. Since then the discipline has functioned as a unit of structure formation in the social system of science, in systems of higher education, as a subject domain for teaching and learning in schools, and finally as the designation of occupational and professional roles." (Stichweh 2001:13727).*

Secondly, I refer to it as a 3<sup>rd</sup> order disciplinarity because it eludes standard definitions of disciplines (of both the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> order kind). As a 3<sup>rd</sup> order disciplinarity, i.e., as something apart from standard disciplines, Organizational Knowledge Communication pays equal homage to three parent disciplines, none of which holds an a priori privileged position (as would be the case in any 2<sup>nd</sup> order discipline). As we saw in the example above, "ba" is looked at through a prism of three equal lenses. Last but certainly not least, Organizational Knowledge Communication is inherently dynamic and uniquely so. It is inherently dynamic because it can only be observed, it can only find its expression in the trilateral punctual integrations. And it is that very characteristic that makes Organizational Knowledge Communication unique. It is only the flux of the three trajectories that Organizational Knowledge Communication emerges; it does so when a "perturbation" is generated (von Glasersfeld, 1989:11) in this flux. At this point it is paramount that I add that to me perturbations are in fact meeting places. Metaphorically speaking they constitute meeting places much akin to the ancient Greek "agora", if you will, or town square. In the "agora" people from all walks of life, all strata of society, from the "polis" proper and beyond would meet in order to buy, sell, negotiate and gossip. But the "agora" was not only a common ground; it was also a neutral ground. As a common, neutral ground the trilateral punctual integration holds the potential of being (or of becoming) such a productive meeting place for the exchange of ideas,

practices and policies across traditional disciplinary borders. A trilateral punctual integration, then, binding the three trajectories at a certain point is a perturbation in this sense. It is a perturbation in the flux of mono-disciplinary trajectories because, otherwise, these disciplines would (merely) progress in accordance with their own 1<sup>st</sup> (or 2<sup>nd</sup>) order disciplinary logics, respectively. And it is exactly because of the constitutive force of these unique, trilateral punctual integrations that Organizational Knowledge Communication is not yet another inter- or transdiscipline, that it is in fact a nascent disciplinarity of a novel kind.

Returning yet again to the trilateral punctual integration of “ba”, which was used above as an exemplary illustration, we saw that this particular prism of Organizational Knowledge Communication consists of:

1. A systems theory understanding of organizations (cf. section 2)
2. A transactional understanding of communication (cf. section 3)
3. A constructivist/constructionist understanding of knowledge (cf. section 4).

Something which, at a more concrete level, could theoretically integrate organizational design theory (e.g., Jones 2012), 2<sup>nd</sup> order cybernetic communication theory (e.g., von Förster, 2003 et passim), and knowledge flow theory (e.g., Nonaka et al., 2008). This particular trilateral punctual integration, then, would be able to address and consistently integrate particular research questions such as these:

1. What would characterize organizational practices favoring knowledge enabling communication?
2. What would characterize KM practices favoring knowledge communication across organizational boundaries?
3. What would characterize communication practices favoring the co-construction of knowledge as well as the organizational practices necessary to do so?

In the “ba” example the trilateral punctual integration is (Chimera-like) part organizational design theory, part 2<sup>nd</sup> order cybernetic communication theory, and part knowledge flow theory, each of which is an approach in its own right, and yet their integration holds a promise that we may hope to understand, to appreciate to investigate “ba” at a deeper and more fulfilling level.

## **7. ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE COMMUNICATION – ENVISIONING A TWO-PRONGED, EXPLORATIVE RESEARCH STRATEGY**

As may be inferred from the above, it is my belief that these strands, again theoretically speaking, are converging ever closer – typically by means of such trilateral punctual integrations as “ba”. This does not mean, however, that I am advocating the coming of a new, all-encompassing paradigm in the Kuhnian sense (1970), a new transdiscipline or the like. Neither am I advocating a

sort of Heraclitian notion that “everything flows” – disciplines and concepts alike – since this could very well lead to the rampant relativism otherwise known as postmodern paralysis. As Knodt laconically states: “[t]he end of metanarratives does not mean the end of theory, but a challenge to theory” (1995:xi). Rather than being destructive (to the disciplines) I see the challenges posed to the disciplines by the punctual integrations as being productive; as being impetus for new insights. I see trilateral punctual integrations as being such border phenomena between schools of thought “with high degrees of order and stability” (cf. the Horgan quote above).

What I am envisioning, research-wise, based on the above theoretical framing of Organizational Knowledge Communication as a 3<sup>rd</sup> order disciplinarity is a two-pronged, explorative research strategy. First of all, that research into Organizational Knowledge Communication at the level of trilateral punctual integrations be carried out in such a way as to give rise to a wealth of novel ways of diagnosing and solving some of the highly complex theoretical problems evolving around the infrastructure of mutual dependencies of organizing, knowing and communicating in the day-to-day lives of knowledge intensive companies (e.g., how to define success, how to ‘do’ innovation, how to raise entrepreneurial awareness etc.). Secondly, and this more as a sort of spin-off, that research into Organizational Knowledge Communication at the level of 3<sup>rd</sup> order disciplinarity be carried out in such a way as to shed new light on ‘old’ questions or problems (in a Popperian sense) of each or the three disciplines involved in forming the triple helix of Organizational Knowledge Communication.

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