

Designing Sequences for Knowledge Exchange: The Hau-Ba Model

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The question of knowledge is more and more related to the issue of organisational design. So far, the issue of knowledge creation and dissemination has been considered mainly by taking into account the intrinsic nature of knowledge. I will argue here, that beyond this important perspective, we should consider further the issue of organisational design sequences, in a context dominated by the instability in social links. To tackle this latest perspective, a model is developed: the “Hau-Ba” model. The model has been developed on the basis of the consideration of the deep transformation of socio-economic systems, and especially the emergence of the community as an importance perspective for organising activities, which leads to the emergence of what has been conceptualised elsewhere as “communalism” (Bounfour, 2006). Indeed, the question of communities’ governance, beyond the designing and articulating of mental, physical and virtual spaces is clearly posed: how to make specific rules embedded within groups and communities, without necessarily making them explicit? In my previous works (Bounfour 2005, 2006), a taxonomy of socioeconomic systems, has been proposed based on the issue of emerging communities, to which are associated specific types of intangibles, as well as specific types of IPRs regimes. But beside these categories, a managerial issue is still posed: how to articulate the transactional regime to the community regime and what type of conceptual approach should be privileged? Answering this question, I suggest reconsidering certain principles of the theory of gift, more precisely those developed by Marcel Mauss (1924), especially the Hau principle, and confront them with the Japanese Ba theory developed by Nishima and applied by Nonaka and Konno (1998) in the management science area. The confrontation of these two theories led to a hybrid theory, named elsewhere: The Hau-Ba Theory (Bounfour, 2000, 2003).

The Ba theory insists on the importance of articulating three spaces (Ba) in conducting any process of innovation: the physical Ba, the virtual Ba and the mental Ba. But beyond innovation practices per se, this approach is very stimulating for designing and implementing any form of collective organising: innovation, production, marketing, human resources and networking.

The « Hau » theory refers to the triple obligations of behaviour in primitive societies, brought to the fore by Mauss: the obligation to use, to circulate and give back exchanged objects. Applied to our present societies, these obligations appear as of extraordinary modernity. Because, it is precisely what modern organisations are searching to implement within their boundaries, as well as around. Organisations are seeking to make these rules the most embedded as possible in innovation processes, and more generally in any process of information and knowledge exchange.