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Knowledge Moves

By Jack Boulton

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'Knowledge comes from, and is drawn into, different organisational structures. At the same time, the notion that knowledge travels... Invites one to reconstruct communities in its wake, tracing connections after the fact.' (Strathern 2004: 15).

We are surrounded by knowledge in different forms. Although your own personal understanding of technology may not match that of, say, a computer programmer, the computer you are using to read this piece - or, indeed, the printer you used to print it - are the products of applied knowledge, products which become symbols in a particular context. Your computer may mean one thing - or nothing - to you, but to someone else in a different place it means something else.

The computer programmer is perhaps a good example of how one form of knowledge can be turned on its head and transformed into something else. The programmer uses the computer to metamorphose his knowledge of programming into a piece of software which in turn is used by another to transform their knowledge... And so on. This transformation - flow - of knowledge is common in contemporary society. We are part of a culture which is obsessed with information.

I intend here to describe how information is produced, particularly scientific facts, using examples from Power (1997) and Latour and Woolgar (1979). I will also use evidence from Strathern (2004), Tsoukas (1997) and Latour (1999) to illustrate how knowledge changes meaning as it travels.

Constructing Fact.

In *Laboratory Life* (1979), Latour and Woolgar apply sociological theory to their ethnography of a scientific laboratory. They successfully trace the construction of a scientific fact to the creation of order out of disorder. To them, the fundamental feature of a 'fact' is that it does not appear to be constructed by any outside forces: it is a taken-for-granted statement unflawed by modality. However they point out that in the laboratory situation, the environment can be broken down into 'specific histories' which have enabled items such as scientific equipment to become available at a certain point in time. Bachelard (1953) refers to laboratory equipment as 'reified theory', that is, that each piece of equipment is a construct of a theory that has been proven factual at a previous point in time.

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Auditing People.

The concept of the 'audit society' was pinpointed by Michael Power (1996, 1997) and concerns a very particular pattern of knowledge designed to 'develop essentially similar measures or conclusions from an examination of the same evidence, data or records' (American Accounting Association 1966: 10). Essentially the audit is a process by which information is gathered in order to verify that something is happening as it should do, and/or to suggest methods by which this activity can be adjusted in order to function more effectively.

In the area of health and medicine, one use of audit data is 'to stimulate more effective use of increasingly limited resources by creating an element of competition between those who supply medical services... And those who must purchase those services.' (Power 1997: 104). Tsoukas (1997) also states that

'... In a modern hospital the sick person is turned into an information-rich patient; information about his or her illness can be systematically gathered - the information speaks for, describes, represents the

patient. And when the NHS computerises its files, a patient can be emailed, so to speak, from one part of the country to the other.' (1997: 833).

Here already we can see that information is on the move. From its origination with the patient, an illness is reduced to a number (for example, an ICD-10 [1] code) and then moved firstly to another part of the hospital and then to somewhere completely different. The illness itself will have significant meaning to the patient, whilst the ICD-10 code will have a different meaning depending on who is using the data. Another example is the QALY (Quality-Adjusted Life Year) which is calculated using patient-reported data obtained by using various measures and tests in interview situations [2] (Hyland 1997). The QALY is a figure between 0 and 1, and is an indication of how good or bad a medical treatment is based solely on how long it keeps a patient alive for and at how high a quality of life. Whereas the experience of illness is likely to have a significant meaning in the life of the patient, it is equally likely that the QALY will have very little meaning to them. It will, however, be of significant interest to a health economist or to individuals working within the field of medicine. Of course I am not striving to point out that information is interesting to different people. What is important here that it is essentially the same information that is undergoing a process of change as it moves around. It is also worth pointing out that after it has undergone its first change it is unlikely to be of interest to the person responsible for reporting it.

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Strathern (2004) points out that knowledge moves by virtue of being embedded within the objects that it is used to create. Therefore, for example, the price of buying a computer includes not only the metal and plastic box that you look at, but also the price of the research and development that went into creating it. This is also extensible to the creation of knowledge in the scientific community. Embedded into any scientific paper is not only the immediate knowledge that it purports to show, but also the information contained in the papers that were used to produce the hypothesis on which it is based. We can return to the work of Latour for a clearer example of how information changes as it shifts location. In Pandora's Hope (1999) he describes a field trip by a group of scientists to the Amazon, designed to investigate a botanical mystery at the edge of the rainforest. Several small trees that usually grow only in the savannah around the forest had been found a few metres inside the wood, and there was some debate as to whether this was a sign that the forest was advancing (the tree was a

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scout) or retreating (the tree was left over by a shrinking forest).

Latour traces the plot of a group of soil samples from their position at the edge of the Amazonian jungle to their eventual resting place in the academic literature. From the ground, a sample is moved to a pedocomparator (a briefcase-sized grid) whereby it can be compared to other samples. Then via a process of inscription the same soil sample becomes a figure in a chart. Latour likens the process to a movement from 'thing' to 'sign'. Once the soil sample has 'become' a sign, it can be transmitted and reproduced with ease (ibid 1999: 54).

Information then, is transformed as it moves through both time and space. Latour and Woolgar's ethnography demonstrates that as historical information (in the form of facts) is used by people it becomes part of something else, a new 'fact', in the present day. Tsoukas points out that the individual is a rich source of data which almost immediately becomes decontextualised and readily moved about. As it moves, information takes on new meanings dependent on the situation it is used in and the person that is using it.

Notes

[1]International Classification of Diseases Revision 10. This is used by hospitals to classify patients according to the illness, disease or accident that they are admitted for.

[2]Commonly used tests include the standard gamble, feeling thermometer and time trade-off techniques. The Health Technology Assessment Programme has published a review of all of these measures (see references).

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Jack Boulton is the editor of Stimulus Respond, the E-Zine for Urban Anthropologists (www.stimulusrespond.com). You may reproduce this article with permission (obtained by emailing jack@stimulusrespond.com) and on the condition that the author is credited along with a link to Stimulus Respond.

Klondike Solitaire – A Winning Strategy

By Boris Sandberg

Klondike Solitaire, or simply Solitaire, is the classic solitaire game. Klondike is probably the best known solitaire game in the world. The rules of this game are known to almost everyone.

Not all games of Klondike Solitaire are solvable. Playing Klondike game involves a lot of guesswork and it is the main reason why you do not win the vast majority of the games.

This article covers some strategy tips that that could be helpful for improving your win/loss ratio.

1. Turn up the first card off the deck before making any other moves. It increases the initial number of possible moves and gives you the opportunity to make a better choice.
2. Always move an Ace or Deuce to the foundation whenever it is possible. This rule seems to be clear and logical and does not need any further explanation.
3. Expose hidden cards. If you have a choice from several possible moves that expose hidden cards, choose column with the largest number of hidden cards.
4. Hold off the moves that are not important. The best move is one that provides you with opportunity to make other moves or expose hidden cards.
5. Do not empty a tableau pile if you do not have a King to put it in. You gain nothing if you get an empty pile. A space in Klondike solitaire can only be filled by a King or a sequence starting with a King, so leave your options open.
6. If you have a choice between a black King and a red King to fill a space with, be cautious in your decision. Look at the color of the blocking cards and make the appropriate color choice. For example, if you have a red Jack that blocks some hidden cards, you have to select a red King and then wait for a black Queen.

There are two basic ways to deal cards from the stock in this game: player deals either the cards at a time, or only one card is dealt at a time. The recommendations given above are applicable to both variations. The only difference for the "deal three at a time" variation is that you have to pay close attention to the order of the cards in the order of cards in the deck. Some people suggest dealing all the cards to the waste pile once without making any moves and remember the order of the cards in the deck.

If you play computerized version of Klondike, you can use the unlimited undo function as many times as you want to try different choices and to maximize your chances of winning.

Boris Sandberg is a developer of the BVS Solitaire Collection, a set of about 400 different solitaire card games, including Spider Solitaire. For more information please visit



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