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**JED ASAPH D. CORTES**

# EXPLORING NON-HUMAN AGENCY IN THE ORGANIZING OF A KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT UNIT: A VENTRILOQUIAL ANALYSIS OF A PROPOSAL AND A PROPONENT'S CERTIFICATE

Dissertation Adviser:

**JEAN A. SALUDADEZ**
Faculty of Information and Communication Studies

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**ACCEPTANCE PAGE**

This paper prepared by **JED ASAPH D. CORTES** with the title: **"EXPLORING NON-HUMAN AGENCY IN THE ORGANIZING OF A KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT UNIT: A VENTRILOQUIAL ANALYSIS OF A PROPOSAL AND A PROPONENT'S CERTIFICATE"** is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Communication.

_____ _____

**JEAN A. SALUDADEZ**
Chair, Dissertation Committee — Date

_____ _____

**ALEXANDER G. FLOR**
Member, Dissertation Committee — Date

_____ _____

**PRIMO G. GARCIA**
Member, Dissertation Committee — Date

**ROBERTO B. FIGUEROA, JR.**
Dean
Faculty of Information and Communication Studies

_____
Date

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jed Asaph D. Cortes is an instructor of development communication at Visayas State University (VSU) in Baybay City, Leyte, where he teaches journalism, knowledge management, and multimedia production. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Development Communication, *cum laude*, from VSU and his Master of Science in Development Communication from the University of the Philippines Los Baños as a CHED Faculty Development Program scholar. He is also a certified Knowledge Management Practitioner, trained by Community and Corporate Learning for Innovation (CCLFI) in a program aligned with ISO 30401.

Alongside teaching, he spent several years leading VSU's institutional systems, including its web team, printing press and multimedia center, quality management system portal, and data privacy compliance. The portal began as his KM certification practicum, which led to his 2021 proposal for a knowledge management unit for the university's research and extension functions, which he subsequently organized and headed under the research office. He has also served as a knowledge management consultant for a DOST-PCAARRD-funded regional innovation program and trained extension workers on knowledge-based monitoring and evaluation for the Agricultural Training Institute. He founded CampusJourn University, an online resource for campus journalism for Eastern Visayas student journalists and press advisers, and edited *The CampusJourn Manual: A Guide for Student Media Organizations*.

He entered the Doctor of Communication program of the University of the Philippines Open University in 2023 and went on study leave to pursue it. The organizing of the knowledge management unit became the focus of his dissertation, which adopts ventriloquism as its theoretical lens and analytical framework.

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work and that of his colleagues in CCO. I am particularly grateful for his comments during our brief interaction at the 2026 CCO Colloquium, when I presented an early version of this work. That brief exchange became part of the longer intellectual journey that eventually brought this dissertation to where it is now.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife, Jen, and to our kids, Hans, Sef, and Gwen, who have been my greatest inspiration to do my best and see this DCOMM journey through.

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## ABSTRACT

Knowledge management is usually studied as something people do with knowledge once an organization already exists. This study asks what non-human agents participate in bringing a knowledge management unit into being, and what do those participants accomplish. Working from the Communicative Constitution of Organization (CCO) and from Cooren's theory of ventriloquism, I analyzed two naturally occurring documents from the founding of a knowledge management unit at a Philippine state university—my own KM practitioner certificate and the proposal to establish the unit. Following the four-phase framework for ventriloquial analysis set out by Nathues, van Vuuren and Cooren, I identified 17 ventriloquial effects: instances in which a figure is made present and made to say or do something, together with the vent that animates it. The figures trace back to three chains of authorship, which I call the canonical, institutional and technological voices. Technical knowledge on KM is the only vent that crosses both documents, and it animates most of the figures. The non-human agents perform five things: they authorize, they bound the field, they reconstitute an organizational reality, they supply a purpose, and they defer. Technical knowledge of the field emerges as the condition on which the organizing runs, since the canonical categories that claim the university's people, outputs and losses for the unit have to be held well enough to be applied. The study adds to the work on ventriloquial analysis that deals with documentary data with no live interaction, and it also contributes to CCO through the *canonical voice*, as an aspect of organizing where technical knowledge of the field is required, with the KM unit as an incident of such organizing.



**Keywords:** *knowledge management; communicative constitution of organization; ventriloquism; non-human agency; textual agency; organizing; higher education; Philippines*

# Chapter I

## RATIONALE

This study is about the organizing of a unit in and through communication, particularly (and incidentally) a knowledge management unit of a higher education institution in the Philippines. The unit could have been a sustainability office or a digital transformation unit, and the questions would still hold. I treat it as one incident of organizing, and the study speaks to organizational communication. Since knowledge management supplies the setting, vocabulary, and the canon, I start by giving an overview of knowledge management as a field of discipline and practice and how it connects to communication as the starting point of this study.

### Knowledge management as a field

The main premise of knowledge management as a field is that knowledge can be considered an intangible yet valuable asset in a company, which can be leveraged for its financial benefits (Handa, Pagani, & Bedford, 2019). Whereas industries used to consider a company's finances, buildings, and other tangible properties as assets, the movement to include the "intellectual assets" of a company's human resource only started to gain traction in the 80's and 90's.

KM started as a field of interest in the corporate world in the 1990s, as a recognition that "intellectual assets" are a new form of capital that can be leveraged for business gains (North & Kumta, 2018, p. 2). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) are two of the earliest people to cultivate the notion, with Davenport being considered as the "intellectual father" that made KM ideas mainstream (Davenport & Prusak, 1998).

Such premise came from firms, where the single bottom line was profit. This perspective has limits for an institution like a state university, that works on development problems and answers to a mandate that faces outward to the people, since the knowledge that a university holds isn't supposed to be held for financial return. These contexts give rise to specific yet modified applications of knowledge management, such as KM4D or knowledge management for development. Treating KM as fixed by its legacy definitions and configurations would understate what it now contains, including its applications in the public sector and development work.

## Knowledge management and communication

Knowledge management often finds itself *intersecting* with communication, both as a topic of study and an area of practice. Since its flourishing as a field, knowledge management has found its way in college curricula of communication and related fields, like its introduction in the Philippines as a "CHED-required course" in undergraduate communication, journalism, and media, in the 2017 program guidelines released by the Commission[1]. KM is also commonplace in graduate communication programs. When development institutions also adopted KM in development work, communication professionals are commonly the ones who fit the job description (Flor, 2024, p. 118-119).

In the current academic and professional discourse of knowledge management, we commonly find an emphasis on the use of technology and material systems because of its potential to improve the latter's practice in organizations (Husain & Ermine, 2021). In KM, technologies—whether analog or digital—are accorded an

[1] CHED CMO Nos. 35-37, S. 2017. These are the latest Program Standards and Guidelines (PSGs) for the undergraduate programs for communication, journalism, and development communication.

important role in “knowledge management systems” or KMS as repositories of information that enable knowledge sharing (Lindvall, Rus, & Sinha, 2003).

The prevailing worldview of communication in knowledge management discourse is largely functional—that of transmission and information flow—and rarely as constitutive of its organizing. Technology and material tools then are given a support role in knowledge management.

In organizational communication, there is a theoretical space that grew parallel to KM—the communicative constitution of organizations or CCO (Putnam, 2022). For Bencherki, Basque, & Kuhn (2022), CCO is a "sensibility", a way of looking at things as “constituted and maintained through what we say and do" (p. 2), ergo, communicatively constituted. CCO scholars have expounded on this through various theoretical and empirical explorations, one of which is through the concept of human and non-human agents—meaning "what or who appears to make a difference" (Cooren, 2006, p. 82)—communicating and, therefore, organizing. Extending this view, technology and things that are involved in the practice of knowledge management can be considered as *non-human agents*.

At this time and to my knowledge, no empirical study has been done to explore non-human agency in the organizing of knowledge management. There is then opportunity to start from a *communicational ontology of organization* (Cooren, 2012, p. 4) and explore technology and tools as such—communicative agents that constitute the organizing of knowledge management—particularly in this case, a KM initiative in a research & development office of a state university in the Philippines.

I find myself in a position to study this, having completed a KM practitioner course, written a proposal to establish a KM unit, and headed it. (Although it was initially proposed to cover the whole university, it was adopted into the research office

to cover research operations.) Thus, the certificate and the proposal presented themselves as *naturally occurring data*, having been produced in the course of the work and for that work. What this research did was to make the familiar *unfamiliar*. That is what I tried to do with the two documents which seemed ordinary paperwork at that time. I return to my position in them in the methodology.

# Chapter II

# REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews four bodies of literature. It begins with knowledge management in higher education, which is the practical setting of this study, and then turns to the questions that KM theory has left unsettled, particularly around what knowledge is and how communication figures in it. From there it moves to how communication scholarship has taken up knowledge and knowing. It closes with actor-network theory: how KM has already used it, and how it conceptualizes agency. I deliberately follow this order to show that each body of work poses the question of *non-human participation* in knowledge work a little differently, and this study is positioned as an addition to the earlier framings.

## KM in higher education

Universities are asked to do knowledge management for research, for learning, and to improve performance management (Quarchioni, Paternostro, & Trovarelli, 2022, p. 315). Rowley (2000) helped establish a recurring orientation in the higher education KM literature: treating knowledge management as something to be *adopted* by universities and asking whether institutional structures, cultures, and practices were ready for it. Marouf (2017) asks a similar question of KM readiness, although it's specifically for academic libraries, seventeen years later.

Two reviews also establish the shape of the field: Quarchioni, Paternostro and Trovarelli (2022) review KM in higher education; Al-Kurdi, El-Haddadeh and Eldabi (2018) review knowledge sharing in higher education institutions.

Adhikari (2010) names three KM tools an institution needs in order to exploit knowledge: its technology, its organizational structure, and other specific knowledge tools (p. 98). Veer Ramjeawon and Rowley (2017, 2020) give the fullest statement of the same architecture, across Mauritius, South Africa and England. Across these papers, these appear to stabilize KM within organizations: leadership and top-management support, organizational culture, organizational structure, rewards and incentives, IT infrastructure, human resources, funding, and time.

In the developing sector, the practice of KM faces obstacles. Veer Ramjeawon and Rowley (2017) report that more barriers than enablers were identified in their Mauritian study, and their barriers include “a lack of policies and reward mechanisms, resources, data, funding and time for research” (pp. 366–375)

The direction of some of these factors is contested. Fiscal (2021) found that leadership had a negative and significant impact on international outlook across three Philippine state universities. Novak, Breznik and Natek (2020) found that transformational and transactional leadership styles both positively influence knowledge infrastructure. The two findings sit side by side in the same literature, and the Philippine one is the closer analogue for this study.

In the Philippines, KM in higher education is still being worked out. Bitera (2022) studied five universities and concluded that knowledge management in Philippine higher education institutions is “still in the infancy stage” (p. 111), with operationalization “inadequate and not clearly delineated because of lack of framework to guide” (p. 105). Agawin (2025) surveyed 425 faculty across six private institutions in Laguna and Batangas and found moderate awareness of KM alongside an absence of formal practices and strategic frameworks. Natividad, Bennet and Vatananan-Thesenvitz (2023) come closest to the setting of this study. They design a

framework for measuring knowledge mobilization in Philippine higher education institutions, working from the Commission on Higher Education's mandate that institutions lead in technology-directed and innovative research, and their respondents are seventeen research directors and project research leaders. What they produce is a measurement framework.

The regional picture is consistent. Nur, Fauzi and Sukoco (2017) found that the top Indonesian universities have the basic infrastructure for KM implementation. Devi Ramachandran, Choy Chong and Ismail (2009) found the six KM processes only moderately practiced in Malaysian institutions. Ngoc-Tan and Gregar (2018) link KM to innovation in Vietnamese public universities.

This literature describes the condition of KM in universities: what is in place, what is missing, and what would have to be added. As to how a KM unit comes to exist and what takes part into that process is something academic literature cannot yet answer.

## What KM's vocabulary can hold

The word "management" is in the phrase itself, which carries the idea that it is possible to control "knowledge" as an asset of an organization. However, there is a lingering objection to this (Wilson, 2002). Unlike tangible things, "knowledge" as an asset cannot truly be controlled or managed. The alternative explanation is that KM intends to manage the processes and the environment surrounding knowledge sharing.

One of the most basic concepts in KM is the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967). Tacit knowledge resides in people's minds and somewhat holds a certain mystical property from a management perspective, whereas explicit

knowledge is the kind that is coded and documented, and thus the dimension that receives better attention regarding possibility of control.

This is where technology comes in. KM often emphasizes the role of technology (Liao, 2003; Lindvall, Rus, & Sinha, 2003) to facilitate and store information and knowledge, which in part reinforces the idea that knowledge can be managed.

The literature is robust, and its own reviewers report that the field has not settled its ontology or agreed on what its "elementary issues" are (Ragab & Arisha, 2013). Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) state the difficulty more fully, itemizing five problems with popular understandings of knowledge: "(a) ontological incoherence; (b) vagueness; (c) an all-embracing and somewhat empty view on knowledge; (d) objectivity and robustness; and (e) functionalism" (p. 997). The point they're making, as far as I understand, is that "knowledge" encompasses many things that even two similar studies may not be about the same thing.

Some of the sharpest statements of this problem come from inside KM rather than outside it. Smith (2012) argues that KM systems fail in part because the label "tacit" has been asked to carry too much: what gets called tacit knowledge is in fact "a disparate assortment of phenomena," which he re-specifies as *hidden knowledges* in order to acknowledge their unspoken character without making claims about their cognitive status. Barley, Treem, and Kuhn (2018) make a related argument at the level of the field. Reviewing three decades of research, they identify four trajectories along which knowledge moves between *integrated* and *differentiated* states, and observe that KM has invested heavily in only one of them—producing common ground—while the other three "encompass organizational processes that are vital" but under-studied (p. 286). I find it important that neither of these is an argument against KM. I believe

what they’re saying is that KM has been describing a wider phenomenon beyond what its vocabulary can currently hold.

Burk (2018) names the two things organizational knowledge requires. Drawing on Tsoukas, he distinguishes an *entitative approach* to organizational knowledge, which treats knowledge as a set of stable representations that can be accumulated and re-used, from an *enactive approach*, which attends to the messy use of those representations in practice. His claim is that organizational knowledge requires both. Static, robust entities have to be created and then used in open-ended contexts. What happens in most KM scholarship, he argues, is that the entitative side is well developed while the enactive side goes unaccounted for, and because the entitative view treats knowledge as objective and impersonal, scholars working within it are apt to overlook the constitutive role of communication. In a purely entitative view, communication only describes what is happening; it does not participate in it (pp. 28–29).

This is where the present study locates itself. The current and prevailing conception of knowledge management treats communication as a vehicle and a tool. Communication as constitutive of knowledge management and its organizing has not been studied a lot. Few studies ask about KM from a communicative standpoint, even within development or public sector settings. The argument that follows takes the entitative account as one of the two that organizational knowledge requires. The enactive one asks for more attention.

Talisayon, who trailblazed KM in the Philippines, observed that "because KM started from the private sector and not from the academic sector, KM practice had been well ahead of KM theory. Among KM practitioners, consensus on perspectives and methodology remains an ideal" (2009, p. 7).

Lambe (2023) documents what that gap looks like from within the field. Reviewing the histories of communication audits, information audits and knowledge audits, he finds that each developed with limited engagement with the traditions that preceded it. About one in two hundred of the knowledge-audit literature traces its lineage back to communication audits (p. 24). Each audit type has developed its own professional community, working "within strict disciplinary silos and only rarely looking above the parapets" (p. 25), while the field as a whole has "invented, reinvented, and forgotten or ignored a wide range of tools and methods" (p. 26). Lambe therefore describes the field as "hampered by the lack of a common language about the origins and nature of knowledge auditing" (p. 5).

This helps reconcile the two claims this study makes about KM. KM scholarship may show limited continuity in how its own theoretical and methodological developments are connected, while its canon can nevertheless exercise authority. A body of knowledge can provide the definitions, categories, and credentials that establish what a thing is and who may legitimately propose it, even when the scholarship itself does not maintain a clear account of its own lineage. Authority and accumulation are therefore separate properties, and it is the former that does the work in my data.

This distinction also helps locate the communication critique within the history of KM. Heaton and Taylor's (2002) contribution to a forum in Management Communication Quarterly is the clearest early statement of this problem from a communication standpoint. They take up the conversion model directly, noting that current KM theories "postulate a cycle of knowledge creation, refinement, and implementation that hinges on the transformation of tacit, or practical, into explicit, or discursive, knowledge" (p. 211), and argue "for a richer view of knowledge than simply

the conversion of individual knowledge into a form susceptible to transmission" (p. 211), grounding knowledge in what Lave and Wenger (1991) call *communities of practice*. Their claim concerns text: the key to understanding how knowledge is generated and shared "is the role of text as both knowledge representation (product) and the means by which communities sustain organization (process)" (p. 211). The organization is therefore "a complex mosaic of situated knowledge, grounded in process" (p. 211). Their target is named directly: Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI model, and its premise that tacit knowledge becomes useful to the organization only once externalized into explicit form.

Kuhn and Jackson (2008) shift the object of study from *knowledge* to *knowing*. They characterize the conventional interest as one that assumes "knowledge is a commodity and that competitive advantage results from a greater or more creative collection of it. Like other objects, knowledge can be possessed, stored, and transferred" (p. 455). Their alternative directs attention to "arrays of knowledge-accomplishing activities" (p. 475), studied through the situations in which knowing is done rather than through the substance presumed to be moving.

## How communication scholarship has taken up knowledge

Communication scholarship engaged knowledge management directly in a 2002 forum in Management Communication Quarterly on knowledge management and/as organizational communication (Zorn & May, 2002), an explicit attempt to bring communication theory into conversation with a KM field then at its peak. Two of the arguments made there are discussed above, since they are addressed to KM's own difficulties. What the forum established is that knowledge in organizations can be studied as something accomplished in communication.

There is also a bridge literature that belongs to neither camp exclusively. Tsoukas (2009) locates new organizational knowledge in "the individual ability to draw new distinctions," articulated when "organizational members engage in dialogical exchanges" that produce *self-distanciation*, or "individuals taking distance from their customary and unreflective ways of acting" (p. 941). This is a dialogical and therefore communicative account of knowledge creation, developed entirely within KM's own conversation. The practice turn more broadly—Brown and Duguid (1991), Cook and Brown (1999), Orlikowski (2002), Gherardi (2000)—occupies similar ground.

What this line of work shares is an interest in knowledge as something *done*. It leaves open the question of what takes part in the doing *besides people*.

## Knowledge management and actor-network theory

KM has already taken up actor-network theory, and has done so for two decades. The uptake concentrates on the information-systems and knowledge-sharing side of the field rather than in the mainstream knowledge-as-asset strategy literature, and it proceeds in several waves.

The early theoretical import belongs to Hull (1999), whose reading of KM through a combined Latourian and Foucauldian lens remains the foundational bridge, and to Doolin and Lowe (2002), who established ANT as an addition to a broader critical project in information systems research. Their argument gave KM's IS wing the vocabulary of translation, inscription, and enrolment, and made the point that without substantial resources and effort, ideas do not travel and knowledge does not circulate. Knowledge mobility, on this account, is a socio-technical achievement rather than a property of the knowledge itself.

A second wave applied Callon's four moments of translation directly. Twum-Darko and Harker (2017) use problematisation, interessement, enrolment, and mobilisation to address "the formation, growth and stability of a network of aligned interest" (p. 56), reframing knowledge-sharing barriers as failures of network alignment rather than as individual deficits. Adam, Gluch, and Julin (2014) apply the fuller apparatus to knowledge sharing in an architecture firm, conceptualizing knowledge-based work "as a heterogenous network consisting of several actants, human and non-human" (p. 1235). Smith, Rose, and Hamilton (2010) tell the story of a university knowledge-exchange network through the sociology of translation, and make the non-human point concretely: including non-human actors, they argue, shows the importance of actors such as white papers, pots of funding, and physical buildings. That is a direct precedent for treating documents and material artifacts as agents in university knowledge work.

Steiner (2009) extends the line toward systems theory, foregrounding ANT's core commitment that actions are contingent phenomena mediated by human actors and non-human actants (pp. 68–69). More recently, Shahbaznezhad, Rashidirad, and Vaghefi (2019) import the actant directly into the knowledge-transfer literature, proposing that actants in knowledge transfer include the sender and receiver, the team, and the organization, while objects refer to technology, knowledge, and knowledge exchange. Barley, Treem, and Kuhn's (2018) review, discussed above, is the consolidating statement, and its identification of three under-studied trajectories is an opening that practice- and communication-based views are positioned to fill.

Two concepts do most of the work in this literature. *Translation* reframes knowledge sharing as network alignment rather than transmission. *Inscription*—translating an interest into durable material form—addresses KM's central

preoccupation with codifying and moving knowledge, but recasts it as a socio-technical achievement rather than a transfer of substance.

One caveat matters for how I position this study. Across this body of work, ANT arrives in KM as a lens borrowed from outside, and it is mostly information-systems, critical-management, and practice scholars doing the borrowing. The mainstream prescriptive tradition has stayed with capture, store, and reuse. Since ANT's uptake sits in the critical and practice wing of the field, I can pose what follows as an extension of a line of work that already exists inside KM, and not as a challenge to KM as a whole.

What ANT does with agency starts from what it calls "generalized symmetry." Agency, on this account, does not sit in anyone; it is an effect of relations, and that is why ANT prefers the word actant to actor. An actant is whatever has the force to make a difference in a situation, whether or not it is human. Callon's (1986) scallops of St Brieuc Bay are actants on the same footing as the scientists studying them and the fishermen catching them, which is the move that makes readers either take ANT seriously or set it aside.

The test, as I understand it, is what an entity does, and intention does not enter into it. Latour's speed bump slows drivers where a police officer otherwise would, and since it has no intentions at all and the drivers still slow down, we can say it has agency. Two operations move agency around. In *translation*, one actant speaks for another or shifts what that other is trying to do. In *delegation*, a capacity for action is handed over to something durable, which is what the speed bump is: a decision about speed that someone made once and no longer has to enforce.

Networks assembled this way are fragile, and they hold only for as long as the work of holding them keeps being done. Symmetry is the part that gets argued about.

To this effect, Sayes (2014) surveys what it does and does not mean to say that non-humans have agency.

## Agency and intent across disciplines

The word “agency” differs across disciplines. In ordinary use and in much of social theory, agency implies intent: an agent is someone who means to do what they do. In other words, agency is the capability to do things with intention.

In multi-agent systems, an agent is a system that perceives its environment and acts on it autonomously, and the vocabulary of belief, desire, and intention is carried as an abstraction for design (Wooldridge & Jennings, 1995; Shoham, 1993). In computer systems, Johnson (2006) makes a distinction in which systems designed have agency but its human designers and users retain moral agency. In other words, the application, platform, or algorithm may act, but the intent belongs to whoever wrote the code.

In anthropology, a similar arrangement exists. Gell (1998) regards *artefacts* as secondary agents that pass on the intentions of primary agents (ergo, humans).

However, in ANT—and in extension, CCO—intention is not assumed. Agency is simply the *capacity to make a difference* in an ongoing course of action. This study adopts that lens while acknowledging that there are other positions in different fields with regards to intention and agency.

I note, though, that while much of communication studies draw an agency distinction between humans and non-humans, systems and IS studies have not held agency to be exclusively human.

In this study, I then add, that I treat communication as the site where non-humans come to make a difference. A communicational ontology, in Cooren’s (2012) sense,

starts from communication in order to explain organizing and that is the starting point that I take here.

## The space this study enters

The literature I have reviewed here all agree that *non-human entities* matter to knowledge work, although they differ in how much standing they give them. Conventional KM treats them as things that help. Actor-network theory treats them as things that count. But to see them as things that bring a unit to existence is not something we see yet.

Conventional KM knows perfectly well that documents, platforms, deadlines and institutional culture matter to knowledge work, and three decades of research on enablers, barriers, codification and organizational memory establish as much.

What caught my attention reading across these sources is the verbs they use. Knowledge infrastructure "*provides* organizations a platform on which knowledge management can be developed" (Novak, Breznik, & Natek, 2020). Enablers "*play* [a role] in carrying out knowledge management" (Yeh, Lai, & Ho, 2006). Technology "*facilitated* KM through a) IT resources, and b) infrastructure," and structure "*facilitated* KM through a) top management support: mandate, actions, resources; and b) KM inclusion in organizational structure" (Bitera, 2022, p. 107). A knowledge management strategy "will *create an environment*" (Fombad, 2018). IT infrastructure "*facilitates* the internal communication of the institution" (Ngoc-Tan & Gregar, 2018, p. 320).

Provides, facilitates, plays a role, creates an environment, enables… Each of these gives the non-human something to do but not to start. The infrastructure provides a platform, and someone else (read: humans) develops KM *on* it. The

strategy creates an environment, and someone else attains something in it. In each case the non-human is the setting, and a person or the organization is the one acting.

The barrier literature runs the same grammar backwards. Absences are what cause things: "a lack of policies and reward mechanisms, resources, data, funding and time for research" (Veer Ramjeawon & Rowley, 2017), or an operationalization that is "inadequate and not clearly delineated because of lack of framework to guide" (Bitera, 2022, p. 105). I find it interesting that a missing object is allowed a force that a present one is not.

On the other hand, here's one that reads a little bit differently. Dooley, Corman and McPhee (2002) write that "the knowledge directory *returns* a list of individuals rank ordered by the mutual affinity between their own areas of expertise and the content of the query." The directory returns, and what it returns is people, ranked. The study also says, "a database that can be searched via query," so within a few lines the directory is both the one acting and the thing acted on.

From these papers I read, it seems that non-human elements do not count as the ones founding, mandating, authorizing, proposing, or convening. Non-humans facilitate, provide, support, enable, influence, and return. Whenever something is established, it is usually a person or a collective. Swanson and Rajalahti (2010) write that "an extension system might be transformed and strengthened through specific policy and organizational changes as well as needed investments," in a World Bank document whose whole purpose is to tell people how to change extension systems. The system is transformed, and by whom is not quite said. These are my observations which I do not necessarily generalize for the whole literature.

This is why I treat ANT literature on KM as important jump off point. It treats documents, funding, buildings, and other material entities as actants capable of

shaping organizational outcomes. In higher education, for example, white papers, funding mechanisms, and physical spaces have all been shown to participate in knowledge exchange (Smith, Rose, & Hamilton, 2010). Translation and inscription likewise recast knowledge sharing as a socio-technical accomplishment rather than a purely human activity. What ANT does not explain, however, is how a particular document comes to matter in a particular interaction. Symmetry establishes that the non-human participates, but it does not show how that participation is accomplished in the moment.

There is also a question that neither literature has taken up. KM units, offices and functions are studied as things that *already exist*. Agarwal and Marouf (2014) offer "a diagrammatic, theoretical framework for initiating KM successfully in colleges and universities," which is a careful template for what an institution should do. Farmani, Zare, Arabi and Mohammad Khani (2020) work out what a KM office should contain, in five categories that include its structural arrangements (p. 103). Kwanya et al. (2024) content-analyze KM job advertisements and find that most "did not indicate the position of the advertised jobs in the organisational structure" (p. 29), which tells us organizations are often unsure where to put a KM function. Braganza and Möllenkramer (2002) and Storey and Barnett (2000) account for why initiatives ended. Lin (2011) models KM evolution through initiation, implementation and institutionalization, and measures those stages with survey data from managers. Together, this literature explains what KM units should look like, where they belong, and how they develop. What it does not explain is how a KM unit comes into being in the first place. It does not follow the process through which a proposal becomes an office, a mandate is authorized, positions are defined, responsibilities are assigned, and a new organizational function is made institutionally real. The founding itself has

not been examined. It is examined least in the settings where a new function has to be argued for against existing mandates, which includes development agencies and state universities.

That is the space this study enters. I ask what non-human agents take part in organizing a knowledge management unit, and what they accomplish. These are questions the entitative account was not built to answer, and answering them takes a vocabulary in which a non-human can be the subject of a verb of authorizing.

# Chapter III

# RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND QUESTIONS

## Research Framework

For this study, I adopt the perspective of the Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) as its research framework.

### The communicative constitution of organization

Communication as constitutive of organization (CCO) begins from the premise that communication is not something that happens inside an organization that already exists, but the process through which organization comes to exist and is sustained and transformed (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019). Knowledge, on this view, is not a stock the organization holds. It is something accomplished in the same communicative practices that bring the organization into being.

Communication theorists and scholars studying CCO share an overall goal: ‘’to examine how communication constitutes organization” (Putnam, 2022).

The schools of thought recognized under CCO are the Montreal School, Four Flows School, and the Luhmannian School (Putnam, 2022), each differing in how they attempt at explaining the communicative constitution of organization.

For Bencherki, Basque, & Kuhn (2022), CCO is a "sensibility", a way of looking at things with "an attention attuned to asking, for each facet of our collective life, how it came to exist in the first place, and how it continues to sustain itself and to change" (p. 2) ... "the reflex of not taking things for granted, of looking beneath the surface at how beliefs and realities that might appear “normal” are in fact constituted and maintained through what we say and do" (p. 2).

## CCO and knowledge

Since the context of knowledge management is also organizations, its ideas have already been taken up in CCO scholarship, one of the earliest of which is in the communicative accomplishment of knowledge (Kuhn & Jackson, 2008).

Burk (2018) deliberated on *entitative* vs *enactive* approaches to knowledge in his PhD dissertation. The empirical data from his study was also utilized for his and his adviser's paper on the communicative accomplishment of authority in collaboration (Koschmann & Burk, 2016).

Finally, Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren's (2009) landmark paper put forward a proposal—as one of the possible applications of organizational communication's consideration of socio-materiality—to look more into how heterogeneous knowledge emanates from problem-solving communication in sites (pp. 38-39).

## Agency in organizing

One key concept under CCO is that the organizational world is a "plenum of agencies"—by agents, meaning "what or who appears to make a difference" (Cooren, 2006, p. 82). In actor-network theory (Latour, 2013), agency is not only accorded to humans. Non-humans or things are also considered as agents, doing things through communication (Clifton, Fachin, & Cooren, 2021, p. 258) even things that humans themselves cannot do.

Taking this view, CCO, particularly the Montreal School, gave ANT an "interactional and organizational twist" (Fairhurst & Cooren, 2009, p. 474), by positing that objects and technology and even intangible things are considered agents that take part in organizing and organization in communication. For example, Saludadez (2022) explored how digital media became agents that made a difference in being platforms

of open universities, as compared to the common perspective of them being merely tools to carry out open education.

This is why I believe among the three schools of CCO, the Montreal School best fits the inquiry. For the Montreal School, the organization emerges in its "conversations and texts" (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). As Putnam (2022) expounds, "Conversations co-orient around something to be done and how to do it. They consist of the sayings and doings in situated practices and are fleeting while texts, as what's done, have the capacity to be stored to transcend local interactions". This description is already indicative of a (re)explanation of knowledge management from a communicational ontology which begs to be elaborated.

In particular, Cooren's theory of ventriloquism—humans and things making someone or something else say or do things (Cooren, 2010)—offers this study a way of picking apart the non-human agency in question. Cooren's ventriloquism developed along the Montreal School discourse as one way of explaining how humans and non-humans are able to acquire their agencies that help make the organization emerge.

The idea comes from the analogy of the ventriloquist and the dummy, where the former makes the latter say and do things on their behalf. In CCO's ventriloquism, agents communicating act and speak in the name of other human and non-human agents, which makes them "partake in the communication" (Nathues & van Vuuren, 2022).

Thus, a ventriloqual perspective of who or what makes others speak and act helps surface what are the agents involved in constituting the organization and its processes, e.g., knowledge management.

At this time and based on my review of extant literature, there has been no such study exploring non-human agency in the organizing of knowledge management this way.

The resources for asking that question are well developed in CCO. Cooren (2004) established that texts have agency in organizational settings: a document does things, and what it does is not reducible to the intentions of whoever wrote it. Ventriloquism gives this a mechanism. Cooren (2012) conceives communication "as a form of ventriloquism, which translates our capacity to make other beings say or do things while we speak, write, or, more generally, conduct ourselves" (p. 1), and takes as his starting point that "a variety of forms of agency are always in play in any interaction" (p. 4).

Three features of the account matter for a study of KM. First, what is invoked need not be material in any narrow sense: a principle, a rule, or a body of knowledge "exists through all the effects of representation, incarnation, materialization that make it present in our actions, productions, and conducts, whether these incarnations take the form of the paper on which it is written or the voice of someone who would invoke it" (Cooren, 2012, p. 6). Second, the relation runs both ways. Using the Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy example, Cooren observes that "if Charlie McCarthy is animated by Edgar Bergen, it is therefore noteworthy that Edgar Bergen himself is also animated by the dummy he is supposed to manipulate," and it is "precisely this oscillation or vacillation between the ventriloquist and the dummy" that the term names (p. 5). Third, the relation is tied to authority: to position oneself as speaking in the name of an organization's interests, an idea, or a principle is to claim an attachment to them and to claim that they also animate us (p. 5). The technical vocabulary this involves—figure, vent, animation, *presentification*—is set out in the framework chapter that

follows. What matters here is that it gives a communicative and observable account of how a non-human comes to make a difference.

**How CCO extends actor-network theory through ventriloquism**

The Montreal School is genealogically indebted to ANT. Taylor and Cooren (1997) already drew on Latour's account of distributed action, and Fairhurst and Cooren (2009) describe what the School has done with it as giving ANT "an interactional and organizational twist" (p. 474). What the School offers is an extension of ANT and not a displacement of it, and I read that extension as working on four points.

The first two concern where the analyst looks and what is found there. ANT distributes agency across heterogeneous networks, while ventriloquism locates its enactment in interaction, which gives the communication researcher something empirically tractable to work with: the utterance, the document, the turn in which something is made to speak. And where ANT describes delegation, ventriloquism describes an interlocutor who has agency and simultaneously gives voice to something else—a principle, a policy, a document, an emotion—so that the something else acts through the interlocutor's own performance. Because the relation is bidirectional, the animator is animated in return. This is a finer-grained mechanism than one-way delegation, and it is what allows an analysis to say not only that an artifact made a difference but who made it speak and to what end.

The other two concern what the extension makes sayable. Invoking a non-human figure is how a speaker enacts authority, by presenting themselves as animated by other agencies and by being able to animate those agencies in turn (Clifton, Fachin, & Cooren, 2021); where ANT's symmetry is largely descriptive, ventriloquism ties non-

human agency to the constitution of authority and therefore to organizing. The ontology is also broader. Reumont, Simard, and Lapalme (2025) describe the Montreal School's position as "a radical extension of ANT, which traditionally focuses on technological artifacts, to acknowledge the agency of 'things' such as principles, values, ideas, procedures, status, collectives and groups" (p. 135). For a study of knowledge management this is decisive, since much of what is invoked in KM work is precisely of this kind: a principle, a standard, a mandate, a deadline.

What that means concretely for a study like this one is that where a KM study working with ANT would say that a database inscribes and mobilizes knowledge, the analysis proposed here can show the same database being ventriloquized: made to speak in a memorandum, made to author what participants then treat as settled, and made to confer or withhold authority. The correspondence preserves the socio-technical realism of the earlier literature while relocating the action into communication, which is the level at which a communication dissertation can contribute.

Empirical work in this vein has begun to accumulate, and the researchers doing it describe the extension in their own terms rather than leaving it to be inferred. Clifton, Fachin, and Cooren (2021) analyze how artefacts "do" leadership, arguing that they do so when a hybrid presence is made relevant to the interaction and when that presence provides authoritative grounds for influencing others; they take ANT's symmetry as a premise and supply the communicative micro-mechanism, and they are explicit that this involves refusing to separate the human and the non-human, which they treat as calling into question "the dichotomization of the world into the human, which has agency, and the non-human which are passive objects through which human agency is enacted" (p. 260). Their position is anti-reductionist rather than

anti-human: the point is not that people do not act, but that the difference the non-human makes is *not nothing* (pp. 273–274). Reumont, Simard, and Lapalme (2025) come closest to the present study's object. They follow a single observation grid through a research project and show that it "gives a voice to yet other other-than-human actors" (p. 133), performing differently at different moments, and that it worked as intended by authoring how human actors understood what was wrong, even though it had been perceived quite differently at the start. Bencherki and Trudel (2026) add that the agencies made present in scripted organizational events cannot be reduced to participants' intentions (p. 1038), and that attending to how figures are assembled into configurations answers a standing criticism that ventriloquism cannot reach beyond the immediate interaction (p. 1052). Two further studies locate this work in the setting of the present research: Saludadez (2015, 2022) traces digital media in open universities from tools to agents making a difference, which is the same conceptual move this study makes for KM's documents and platforms, and Casaljay (2024), a dissertation from the same program as the present one, analyzes a compliance certificate as a non-human agent in solid waste management, demonstrating that a routine administrative artifact can be shown to *teleact* in a Philippine public-sector setting.

What has not yet been done is the one this study attempts. CCO has examined knowledge and knowing, and it has examined non-human agency, but it has rarely examined the two together in the setting of a knowledge management unit being organized. The KM apparatus—its documents, its platforms, its principles, its procedures—has not been analyzed as a set of participants in its own establishment.

Studying agency ventriloquially means asking "what appears to make a difference in a given situation and how this difference is made" (Cooren, 2015, p.

477)—that is, who made it speak, on whose behalf, and to what effect. My questions follow that formulation.

## Research Questions

Taking on the CCO perspective, this study assumes that both human and non-human agents participate in the communicative constitution of organization. In particular, ventriloquism—making someone or something else say or do things—shall be used as a theoretical lens to surface the role of technologies and other non-human agents that are communicatively involved in a knowledge management initiative of a state university.

Thus, I aim to address the following research questions:

1. What are the non-human agents that participate in organizing a knowledge management unit?
2. What do these non-human agents accomplish in organizing the unit?

# Chapter IV

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## Research design

This study follows a ventriloquial approach, guided by Cooren's (2010) theory of ventriloquism and its corresponding methodology, in an attempt to understand knowledge management organizing using a communicational ontology.

By communicational ontology I mean what Cooren (2012) describes as "an invitation to start from communication in order to explain organization and organizing and not the other way around" (p. 4). With this commitment, the focus of analysis shifts from communication as something through which people describe organization to communication as the *site* where organizing takes place. If organizing is accomplished in communication, then the participation of non-human agents can be traced in the communicative practices through which documents, platforms, and other materialities are made to act. The study therefore approaches texts not simply as records of organizing, but as material sites where different voices are made present, actions are accomplished, and organizing takes place.

## The case and the data

I drew on two pieces of naturally occurring data from my experience in organizing a knowledge management unit under the Research Office at Visayas State University, particularly my KM practitioner certificate and our proposal to establish a KM unit in the university.

My first foray into knowledge management was through an online course that—upon finishing it—"certified" me to be a knowledge management practitioner. Shortly

after, I proposed to institute a knowledge management unit for my university. The proposal was not carried because of the university's recent restructuring in the previous year. The research office took it up afterwards, and the unit was established inside the university's research functions. I was assigned to head it. The unit assists in the research, development and extension activities of the university.

The data are *naturally occurring* in the sense that these were produced in the course of the work itself, for the purposes of the work, and not for the purposes of this research. In other words, these documents were not made in order to be studied ventriloquially, at least originally. A figure invoked in the certificate was invoked in the process of certifying the person as a KM practitioner; a figure invoked in the proposal was invoked in the process of convincing the organization to establish the unit. Because the analytic question is what non-human agents were made to do in the organizing, the material has to come from the organizing.

## Positionality and reflexivity

I find it important to note here that I hold the certificate, which means it presupposes that I took the course that it certifies, and I wrote the proposal, meaning I am the proponent.

In ventriloquism, figures and vents are positions occupied in a moment, not properties belonging to entities. In writing the proposal, I occupied the position of a vent, making figures such as a certificate, a definition, and an institution speak while I was animated by them as well. Caronia and Cooren (2014) describe this generally: people are active in their own destiny and also passive, and "things literally and figuratively pass or communicate through them" (p. 48). Analyzing the documents, I occupy that position again, now making them speak as data.

Thus, in this study, I treat these two documents as the sites of organizing.

## The vocabulary of ventriloquism

Ventriloquial analysis works with a distinct set of terms, and I set them out here because they are what the analysis was carried out with. Each names something I had to be able to recognize in a document before anything could be coded.

**Figure.** A figure is what is made present and given voice in a situation. It can be a document, an artifact, a principle, a value, a rule, a deadline, a collective, or an absent person. A figure need not be material in any narrow sense. As Cooren (2012) puts it, a principle "exists through all the effects of representation, incarnation, materialization that make it present in our actions, productions, and conducts, whether these incarnations take the form of the paper on which it is written or the voice of someone who would invoke it" (p. 6).

**Vent and animation.** A vent is what animates—what appears to make a figure speak, or what leads an utterance to say what it says. A figure is invoked; a vent is recognized. In practice, a vent is often not named anywhere in the text.

**Mere existence is not enough.** Nathues, van Vuuren, & Cooren (2021) put the condition plainly: "the mere existence of a meeting guidelines poster does not make the poster a figure. However, as soon as the poster is invoked by a meeting participant or as soon as its guidelines appear to direct behavior (through animation), the poster counts as a figure or vent—materialized and brought to matter through processes of communication" (p. 1464). Anything can potentially be a figure or a vent. What makes it one is that it is invoked, or recognized as animating. This is the condition that decided what was coded and what was passed over.

**Oscillation.** Cooren points out that "if Charlie McCarthy is animated by Edgar Bergen, it is therefore noteworthy that Edgar Bergen himself is also animated by the dummy he is supposed to manipulate," and that it is "precisely this oscillation or vacillation between the ventriloquist and the dummy" that the term names (Cooren, 2012, p. 5). The relation runs both ways. Figure and vent are therefore positions occupied in a given moment, not properties belonging to particular entities (Cooren, 2010).

**Folded and unfolded figures.** Some figures can be identified from what we already know of a situation. Others have to be found within the text itself. Cooren & Sandler (2014) call the first kind unfolded, or explicit, and the second folded—implied within the text as ideologies, ways of writing, genres, styles, norms, values, principles, statuses, professions, preoccupations, and concerns (p. 231). \

**Presentification.** Benoit-Barné & Cooren (2009) describe *presentification* as making present a being that is not itself in the room, so that it can be consequential to what happens there. A certificate *presentifies* the person and position who signed it; a logo *presentifies* the institution it represents. This is also how authority gets accomplished, since invoking a figure augments the number of those who can be heard saying the same thing (Cooren, 2015).

**Chains of authorship.** Ventriloquism holds that action has no absolute origin, propagating instead along chains in which multiple actants share in accomplishing a situation (Cooren, 2010). Asking of any figure in whose name it ultimately speaks is what Nathues, van Vuuren, & Cooren (2021) call tracing back chains of authorship.

## The unit of analysis

The unit of analysis is the *ventriloquial effect*: an instance in which a figure is made present and made to say or do something, together with the vent through which it is animated. From the two documents studied, there were 17 of such effects found and these are displayed in Table 1.

An effect is *not* necessarily one and the same as a document, a sentence, or an artifact, even a noun. A single sentence may carry more than one effect if it invokes more than one figure, and a single figure may recur across many effects in different documents doing different things. Figures are invoked rather than possessed, so the same figure is available for different work depending on the situation it is made to speak in.

## Data analysis and interpretation

Studying agency ventriloquially means asking “what appears to make a difference in a given situation and how that difference is made” (Cooren, 2015, p. 477). Working from that question is what allowed me to account for effects of authority in the situations at hand.

Nathues, van Vuuren, and Cooren (2021) offer a four-step framework for ventriloquial analysis which was adopted as the study's methodology, and which Nathues, Cooren, and van Vuuren (2024) restate for qualitative organizational communication research. The four phases were carried out as follows.

1. **Identifying.** Explicit and implicit invocations (figures) and animations (vents) were pointed out across the data set, yielding the 17 ventriloquial effects I have found. Both unfolded and folded figures were included. Cooren and Sandler (2014) draw this distinction: some voices can be

identified from what we already know of the situation, while others "can be found and recognized within the text itself," the first being already unfolded or explicit, the second tending to be "folded within the text" as ideologies, ways of writing, genres, styles, norms, values, principles, statuses, professions, preoccupations, and concerns (p. 231).

2. **Grouping and assigning activities.** Figures and vents were sorted based on what they had in common as invocations. These were then consolidated into non-human agents, which are the study's answer to its first research question. In parallel, I tried to make sense of what they were trying to accomplish in the text.
3. **Relating.** These were then put together into an integrated structure by tracing back chains of authorship. This phase produced three main categories of organizing voices, which I call Canonical, Institutional, and Technological agents.
4. **Showing.** Powerfully illustrative sequences may be selected and elaborated to show how the voices manifested in them. For this study, the analytical matrix and discussion already do the work for the vignettes and thus this phase not required.

**Table 1**

*Matrix of ventriloquial analysis of the KM practitioner certificate and KM unit proposal*

| Excerpt | Figure | Vent | What it does |
|---|---|---|---|
| **KM Practitioner Certificate** | | | |
|   | Training organizer logos (CCLFI & AIJC) | KM training expertise | Signifies authority on KM education/training |
| "…Who completed ten (10) weeks of online training on Knowledge Management theory, practiced thirty (30) basic Knowledge Management skills and successfully completed an eight-week workplace Knowledge Management practicum." | 10 weeks KM theory<br>30 KM skills<br>8-wk KM practicum | In-depth technical knowledge & experience on KM | Shows experience in KM practice |
| Dr. [redacted]<br>Course Mentor and CEO, CCLFI<br>22 February 2021 | Course mentor name & signature | KM expertise | Certifies competence in KM theory & practice |
| KM Unit Proposal | | | |
|   | Institution logo & name | Institutional authority | Authorizes the proposal, speaking on behalf of the university's authority |
| MR. JED ASAPH CORTES, Head, VSU Web Team & Certified KM Practitioner | Proponent's credentials | Technical knowledge on KM<br>Technological knowledge | Made to say that the proponent is competent to propose the KM unit through technical knowledge of the field & technological knowledge |
| "Knowledge Management is the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge" (Davenport, 1994) | Definition of knowledge management | Technical knowledge on KM | Establishes the initiative as bounded by academic discipline |

| Excerpt | Figure | Vent | What it does |
|---|---|---|---|
| KM as a discipline grew alongside quality management, change management, ICT for development, and even development communication | Other fields of practice | Multidisciplinarity | Made to say that KM is a legitimate field because the institutions recognize the others as well |
| Organizations, small and large, including the World Bank, have benefited from KM. | KM organization exemplar | KM practice | Made to say that KM is important in important institutions |
| …being a large organization of knowledge workers… | Knowledge workers | Institution's workforce | Casts faculty & researchers as knowledge workers, setting the stage for the appropriateness of a KM program |
| A KM office and program can benefit the university… | KM benefits | Researchers / employees | Constitutes a beneficiary, thereby giving the unit a purpose |
| …despite the high turnover of experienced and skilled staff due to resignation or retirement, the university can safeguard its collective wisdom from getting lost… | Collective wisdom | Institutional memory | Authorizes the unit to address the need manage institutional memory |
| "By creating communities of practice or COPs (that gather like-minded individuals towards the same purpose), it can strengthen organizational communication…" | Communities of practice | Technical knowledge on KM | Structures the organizing process by gathering "like-minded individuals" |
| "Spearhead the development of a knowledge management research agenda for the university" | Research agenda | KM scholarship | Orients the unit's direction to align with the institution |
| "Supervise" the development and management of the university's knowledge products | Knowledge products & services (KPS) | Technical knowledge on KM | Constitutes the university's research outputs are KPS, thereby |

| Excerpt | Figure | Vent | What it does |
|---|---|---|---|
| and services." | | | a scope of KM work |
| "Train academic and administrative staff on KM practices and skills to enhance individual competencies, as well as group collaboration" | KM practices & skills | KM practitioner certificate Technical knowledge on KM | Reproduces the competencies of one person to more persons towards the same purpose |
| "Develop and maintain platforms and resources for KM." | Platforms | Tech infrastructure | Made to speak for the potential of technology in KM |
| "If approved, the VSU KMO shall, within a year, aim to craft a three-year KM strategy for the university, which shall be approved by the VSU Board of Regents for immediate implementation." | KM strategy…Board of Regents | Legitimacy | Authorizes the unit as legitimate if it can craft a strategy & the institution approves it |

# Chapter V

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter answers two questions: What are the non-human agents that participate in organizing knowledge management, and what do they accomplish in organizing?

## The Non-Human Agents that Participate in Organizing Knowledge Management

I analyzed two documents. First is my KM Practitioner Certificate, presented in Figure 1. The second is the proposal to establish a knowledge management unit at Visayas State University, the excerpts of which are laid out across the chapter as well.

Following Nathues, van Vuuren, and Cooren (2021), I identified what was invoked in each document, what animated them, then grouped the results and traced them back to chains of authorship.

The two documents ask different things. The certificate settles a question about *knowledge*: the person *knows* and understands KM (i.e., epistemic authority; see Caronia & Nasi, 2022); the proposal asks a question about permission: this unit *may be established* (i.e., deontic authority; ibid.).

## Figures in the KM Practitioner Certificate

I identified three figures appearing in the certificate: the training organizer logos, the training duration and scope, and the course mentor's name and signature. Below, I present the KM practitioner certificate in Figure 1 and, right after, a discussion of ventriloquial effects derived from the certificate.

**Figure 1**

*KM Practitioner certificate*




**The training organizer logos**

The certificate carries the logos of the organizers of the training: Community & Corporate Learning for Innovation (CCLFI) and the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication (AIJC). The logos are the figure.

What animates them is *KM expertise*. Neither institution was present when the certificate was given, but both were evoked by their logo mark and text. Benoit-Barné & Cooren (2009) call this *presentification*—and such presence "is always an effect" (p.11) of a communicative move.

What the logos are made to say as figures is that this training was conducted by bodies with authority and expertise in KM and its training.

They *make a difference* in a sense that it speaks, on top of the name and list of hours. With them, the claim of competence acquires co-authors. Authority here is

augmentation (from the Latin root word *augere*) and “increasing the authority of a statement or position thus consists of increasing the number of its authors” (Cooren, 2015, p. 478).

Scarbrough (2002) traces how professional groups and consultants shaped knowledge management as a management fashion, and his account explains what a training body’s mark accomplishes as a figure: intermediary groups are where the field's authority is held and circulated. CCLFI and AIJC are considered intermediary groups in this sense.

**The training duration and scope**

The certificate specifies ten weeks of KM theory, thirty KM skills, and an eight-week KM practicum. These specifications are the figure. *In-depth technical knowledge and experience on KM* is what animates them.

What these specifications are made to say is that the knowledge being certified is technical and has been practiced. Ten weeks of theory, thirty skills and an eight-week practicum describe a technical qualification, thus the holder is certified as knowledgeable. (The holder, though, is not necessarily certified as an expert, only a practitioner.)

This is what makes the certificate work as a vent. Technical knowledge on KM is a recognized source of power in ordinary management terms, and in ventriloquial terms it is what animates the figures that follow. The same proposal written from a development communication background alone would not have produced these effects, because the categories that do the claiming come from KM and have to be held well enough to apply.

Building upon this, the certificate is made to say that its holder knows enough of the field to propose a KM unit. This does its own work later in the proposal, showing that the proponent has the qualifications to forward a proposal.

**The course mentor's name and signature**

The certificate also bears the name and signature of the course mentor (these have been redacted for privacy). These are animated also by *KM expertise*.

The figure makes a difference in the sense that it attaches a person who can be asked. The mentor may be physically absent in every situation that the certificate is read or acknowledged, but is nevertheless made present in each of them by the signature, similar to Cooren's (2006) account of a contractor's signature that "represents and commits its signatory, who herself represents and commits its organization" (p. 95) and through this work, the organization/s can be said to act at a distance (i.e., teleaction).

What the mentor's signature is made to say is that a recognized expert of knowledge management vouches for the certificate-bearer's competence in KM theory and practice.

Taken together, we can see that these three figures as non-human agents install knowledge as an authority, particularly *epistemic authority*. What differentiates an organization from a crowd is direction. In this case, it comes from technical knowledge of the field, speaking through a certificate.

**Figures in the KM Unit Proposal**

Founding a KM unit has a literature of its own. Agarwal and Marouf (2014) set out a step-by-step template for initiating knowledge management in colleges and

universities, while Farmani, Zare, Arabi and Mohammad Khani (2020) conceptualized the KM office as an organizational entity in academic development centers.

Both describe what a proponent should do and what the office should contain. I approach the founding process from the other side, asking what the founding document itself accomplishes as the proponent works to establish the unit.

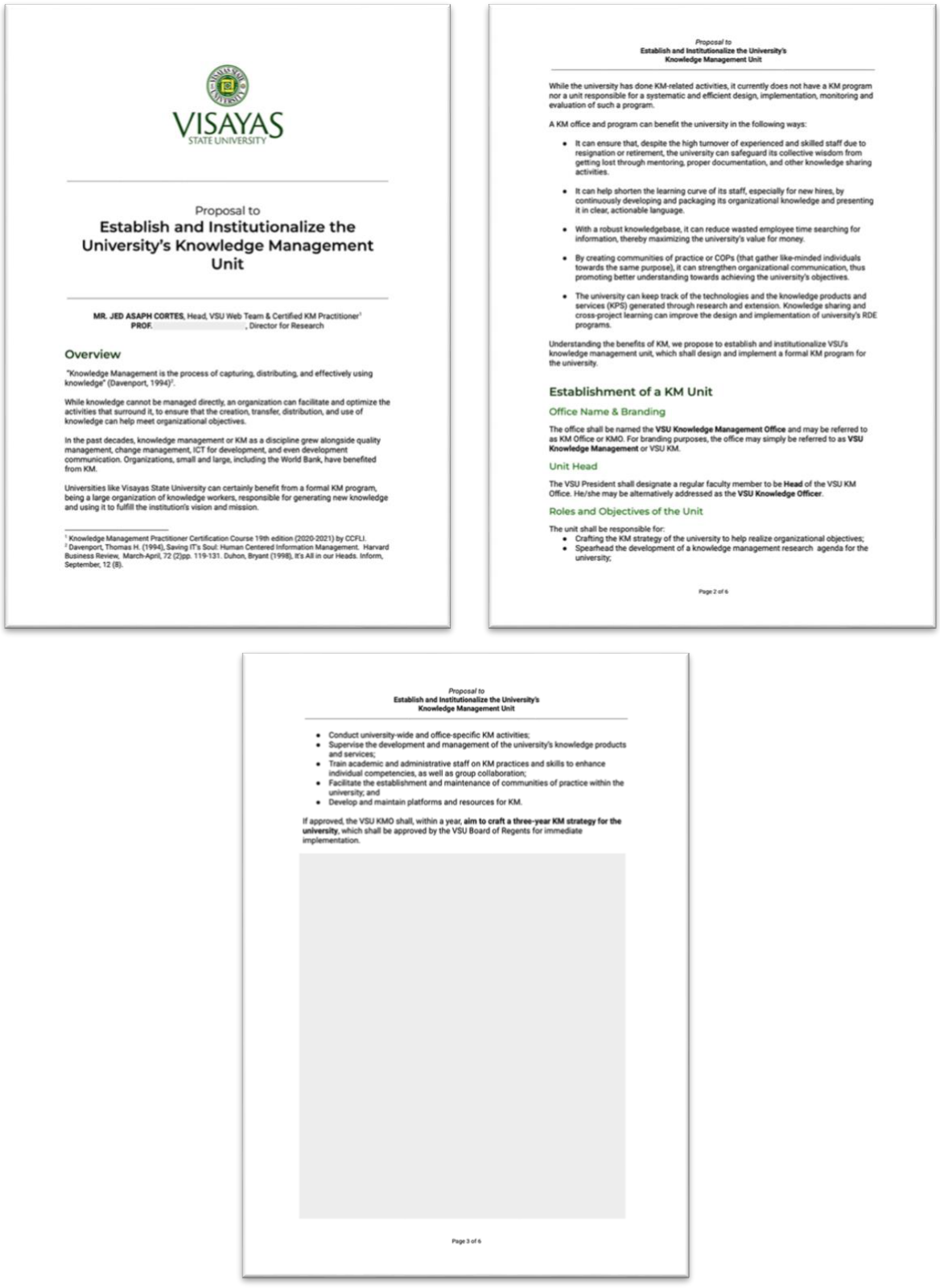
I limited the analysis to the first portion of the proposal for establishing a KM unit within a state university: the overview, the rationale, and the roles and objectives of the unit, ending at the sentence beginning "If approved." Fourteen figures appeared in that portion.

The first three pages of the proposal, which contains the excerpt covered in this analysis, are displayed below (see Figure 2). What were not included were implementation details including office and staff structuring, budget, and staff and equipment particulars.

A discussion of each figure identified in the proposal immediately follows. The full matrix of ventriloquial effects is presented in the previous chapter (see Table 1).

**Figure 2**

*Excerpt from the KM unit proposal.*



VISAYAS
STATE UNIVERSITY

Proposal to
**Establish and Institutionalize the University's Knowledge Management Unit**

**MR. JED ASAPH CORTES**, Head, VSU Web Team & Certified KM Practitioner[1]
**PROF.** , Director for Research

## Overview

"Knowledge Management is the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge" (Davenport, 1994)[2].

While knowledge cannot be managed directly, an organization can facilitate and optimize the activities that surround it, to ensure that the creation, transfer, distribution, and use of knowledge can help meet organizational objectives.

In the past decades, knowledge management or KM as a discipline grew alongside quality management, change management, ICT for development, and even development communication. Organizations, small and large, including the World Bank, have benefited from KM.

Universities like Visayas State University can certainly benefit from a formal KM program, being a large organization of knowledge workers, responsible for generating new knowledge and using it to fulfill the institution's vision and mission.

[1] Knowledge Management Practitioner Certification Course 19th edition (2020-2021) by CCFLI.
[2] Davenport, Thomas H. (1994), Saving IT's Soul: Human Centered Information Management. Harvard Business Review, March-April, 72 (2)pp. 119-131. Duhon, Bryant (1998), It's All in our Heads. Inform, September, 12 (8).



While the university has done KM-related activities, it currently does not have a KM program nor a unit responsible for a systematic and efficient design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such a program.

A KM office and program can benefit the university in the following ways:

- It can ensure that, despite the high turnover of experienced and skilled staff due to resignation or retirement, the university can safeguard its collective wisdom from getting lost through mentoring, proper documentation, and other knowledge sharing activities.
- It can help shorten the learning curve of its staff, especially for new hires, by continuously developing and packaging its organizational knowledge and presenting it in clear, actionable language.
- With a robust knowledgebase, it can reduce wasted employee time searching for information, thereby maximizing the university's value for money.
- By creating communities of practice or COPs (that gather like-minded individuals towards the same purpose), it can strengthen organizational communication, thus promoting better understanding towards achieving the university's objectives.
- The university can keep track of the technologies and the knowledge products and services (KPS) generated through research and extension. Knowledge sharing and cross-project learning can improve the design and implementation of university's RDE programs.

Understanding the benefits of KM, we propose to establish and institutionalize VSU's knowledge management unit, which shall design and implement a formal KM program for the university.

## Establishment of a KM Unit

### Office Name & Branding

The office shall be named the **VSU Knowledge Management Office** and may be referred to as KM Office or KMO. For branding purposes, the office may simply be referred to as **VSU Knowledge Management** or VSU KM.

### Unit Head

The VSU President shall designate a regular faculty member to be **Head** of the VSU KM Office. He/she may be alternatively addressed as the **VSU Knowledge Officer**.

### Roles and Objectives of the Unit

The unit shall be responsible for:

- Crafting the KM strategy of the university to help realize organizational objectives;
- Spearhead the development of a knowledge management research agenda for the university;





- Conduct university-wide and office-specific KM activities;
- Supervise the development and management of the university's knowledge products and services;
- Train academic and administrative staff on KM practices and skills to enhance individual competencies, as well as group collaboration;
- Facilitate the establishment and maintenance of communities of practice within the university; and
- Develop and maintain platforms and resources for KM.

If approved, the VSU KMO shall, within a year, **aim to craft a three-year KM strategy for the university**, which shall be approved by the VSU Board of Regents for immediate implementation.

**The institution logo and name**

The proposal opens with the university logo and name (see Figure 3). The logo is the figure, animated by *institutional authority*.

**Figure 3**

*The institution's logo and name in the proposal letterhead.*




The logo authorizes the proposal. It speaks on behalf of the university's authority, and it does so before a single word of the proposal has been read. A document proposing a new unit inside an institution has to be recognizable as coming from inside that institution. The logo accomplishes that recognition, and it goes on accomplishing it in contexts nobody planned for, because texts and marks "have a life of their own so to speak" and continue to function in the absence of those who produced them (Cooren, 2010, p. 32). Without it the same text is a suggestion from a private person.

**The proponent’s credentials**

The proposal names its author as "MR. JED ASAPH CORTES, Head, VSU Web Team & Certified KM Practitioner." The credentials line is the figure. Two things animate it, technical knowledge on KM and technological knowledge.

The line is made to say that the proponent is competent to propose a KM unit. It does this by claiming two standings at once and attaching them to a person. "Certified

KM Practitioner" reaches back to the certificate and brings its logos, its hours, and its mentor's signature into the proposal. "Head, VSU Web Team" claims a standing that belongs to the institution. Nathues and van Vuuren (2022, p. 216) call this *appropriation*, the third working, and their own example is a member appropriating an organization's expertise "by highlighting his membership — such as by writing his university affiliation on an article." I wrote this line as proponent and the credentials line is where my own authorship and the authority of two institutions are folded together.

**Definition of knowledge management**

The overview quotes Davenport (1994): "Knowledge Management is the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge." The definition is the figure, animated by *technical knowledge on KM*.

The definition is made to say is that the initiative being proposed belongs to a discipline. The definition bounds the proposal, ruling out interpreting the unit as a filing office or a website team. What participates here is the quoted text, which is *textual agency* in Cooren's (2004) sense: texts "on their own, also seem to make a difference," and reflecting on that difference means adopting a performative view of organizations (pp. 373–374).

Quoting this definition is notable, especially in KM, where the meaning of knowledge is not settled. Heisig (2009) compared 160 KM frameworks and found substantial variation in how knowledge itself was understood. Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) likewise describe knowledge as ambiguous, unspecific, and dynamic, creating a tension between knowledge and management. The proposal does not present this uncertainty by quoting a single line from Davenport. The definition therefore helps bound the initiative: it presents one understanding of knowledge as settled and gives

the proposal a fixed point from which to define what KM is and what the unit should do.

**Other fields of practice**

The proposal states that "KM as a discipline grew alongside quality management, change management, ICT for development, and even development communication." These other fields are the figure, animated by multidisciplinarity.

The four fields are made to say that KM is a legitimate field, because the institution already recognizes the fields standing next to it. The move works by association, and the conclusion is evoked. The proposal never states it. A reader who accepts *quality management*[2] and *development communication*[3] as things a university does is being invited to accept KM on the same terms. What is invoked here is the company that KM keeps.

**KM organization exemplar**

The overview states that "*Organizations, small and large, including the World Bank, have benefited from KM."* The institution is the figure as a KM organization exemplar, animated by *KM practice*.

It is made to say that KM is important for important institutions. The rest of the argument is left for the reader to complete: 1) important institutions practice KM; 2) a university is an important institution; therefore, 3) a university should practice KM. I find this figure and the previous one as working together. They both make the establishing of a KM unit appear to be the natural thing for a serious institution to do.

[2] The university has an ISO 9001-certified quality management system.
[3] The university offers undergraduate and graduate programs in development communication.

Mehta (2001) documents how the World Bank moved to position itself as the Knowledge Bank, seeking to lead in development expertise and knowledge transfer rather than in capital transfer alone. The proposal invokes an institution that had spent a decade making itself invokable in exactly this way. What the figure carries into the proposal is the outcome of that work.

The World Bank's standing in KM came from its practice, telling stories about its own work, giving the field the narrative dimension of knowledge management (Denning, 2000). The proposal invokes an institution that made itself invokable.

Ventriloquism is not only the adding of figures; the way figures are arranged "necessarily implies a course of action forward" (Bencherki & Trudel, 2026, p. 1041).

**Knowledge workers**

The rationale of the proposal describes the university as "*being a large organization of knowledge workers.*" Knowledge workers is the figure, animated by the *institution's workforce*.

This figure recasts the people that already employed at the university. Faculty and researchers are not described as faculty and researchers *per se* but as "knowledge workers", which is a category from KM. Once the workforce is cast that way, a unit that manages knowledge is thereby made appropriate. In other words, the figure (re)*constitutes* the population that makes the proposed unit necessary. Incarnation is a matter of names, and names are what allow us "to interactively appropriate and attribute various incarnations and embodiments" (Cooren, 2010, p. 11).

**KM benefits**

The rationale also states that "A KM office and program can benefit the university." The word benefit is the figure. What animates it are the researchers and employees.

Invoking a benefit implies a beneficiary. The moment the word appears, someone is being spoken for. Cooren (2016) puts it this way: because matters of concern are supposed to concern some of us, "the people who will act on their behalf will be their spokespersons," and those concerns then "participate by proxy in the decision making process" (p. 21). Here the researchers and employees of the university are made present as the ones who stand to gain, and they are made present without being asked. This is the first working, *appeal*: the figure is asked to speak in the proponent's place (Nathues & van Vuuren, 2022, p. 215). The figure *constitutes* a beneficiary, and in doing so it gives the proposed unit a purpose. Authority alone does not make an organization. A purpose is the other requirement, and this word supplies it.

**Collective wisdom**

The rationale states that "despite the high turnover of experienced and skilled staff due to resignation or retirement, the university can safeguard its collective wisdom from getting lost." Collective wisdom is the figure, animated by institutional memory.

The figure constitutes an often unacknowledged need of the institution and authorizes the unit to address it: turnover. Collective wisdom is made to say that something valuable leaves with each (human) departure, and that this loss is preventable. The unit is then positioned as what prevents it. The problem is not invented by the proposal, but is often unacknowledged. So here, it is named, and the

naming is what makes it available to be assigned. Organizational memory studies have long recognized the role of communication in remembering, while describing it mainly through human agency (Laaksonen & Lambotte, 2022, p. 421).

Walsh and Ungson (1991) define organizational memory as "stored information from an organization's history that can be brought to bear on present decisions" (p. 61), and it is from this premise that the KM concept of *retention* is built. Dewah and Mutula (2016) surveyed knowledge retention strategies in sub-Saharan African public sector organizations and found codification, personalization, training, mentoring and apprenticeship in use against staff departure. The problem the proposal names is therefore a recognized one with a recognized set of responses. What the phrase *collective wisdom* does here is constitute it as the proposed unit's problem to address.

**Communities of Practice (COPs)**

The proposal states that "By creating communities of practice or COPs (that gather like-minded individuals towards the same purpose), it can strengthen organizational communication." Communities of practice is the figure, animated by technical knowledge on KM.

This figure tells the proposal how *the gathering* should be organized: as a community of practice. The phrase "like-minded individuals towards the same purpose" describes the arrangement it recommends. In this sense, the figure is *convoked*—it is summoned as something that tells the organizers what should be done (Cooren, 2016). The figure here is a KM concept. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) set out how communities of practice can be cultivated by an organization, and that is the form the proposal refers to: a gathering that can be created. Beyond the intentions and appreciation of its (human) proponent, the COP concept in itself as a figure here does work in the organizing.

**The research agenda**

Among the roles listed is to "Spearhead the development of a knowledge management research agenda for the university." The research agenda is the figure, animated by KM scholarship.

A research agenda is a familiar object in a state university. Invoking it orients the proposed unit toward something the institution already values and already governs. The figure aligns the unit's direction with the institution's, which matters because a unit with its own direction has to justify it more. What the proposal borrows here is *durability*, which is one of the properties by which authority endures beyond the moment of its accomplishment (Benoit-Barné & Fox, 2022).

Rowley (2000) asked early whether higher education was ready for knowledge management and located the answer in institutional priorities. Natividad, Bennet and Vatananan-Thesenvitz (2023) studied knowledge mobilization in Philippine higher education institutions against the same institutional backdrop. Aligning the unit with a research agenda is therefore a reasonable move in the proposal.

**Knowledge products and services (KPS)**

Another listed role is to "Supervise the development and management of the university's knowledge products and services." Knowledge products and services is the figure, animated by technical knowledge on KM.

The figure renames what the university already produces. Theses, technical reports, extension materials, and publications become knowledge products. That renaming brings them inside the scope of KM work. The unit does not have to acquire a domain, since the domain is *(re)constituted* by the term itself. This is the same operation the sixth figure performs on people, applied to work and its outputs.

**KM practices and skills**

Another role is to "Train academic and administrative staff on KM practices and skills to enhance individual competencies, as well as group collaboration." KM practices and skills is the figure. Two things animate it, the KM practitioner certificate and technical knowledge on KM.

This is where the two documents connect in a clear manner. The competencies certified in Figure 1 are held by one person. The proposal is made to say that these competencies can be reproduced to more people in the institution. What the certificate first establishes for the proponent becomes a program for the staff. Read together, the two documents show that the certificate does not stop working when the proposal begins. It continues to animate a role within it.

This entry shows why the analysis needs both documents. Tracing chains of authorship means reconnecting what has been separated by asking who or what authored a figure (Nathues et al., 2021, p. 1465). Here, the chain runs from a certificate, through a credentials line, to a training role. It crosses two documents and several years. The connection is therefore not contained in either document alone. It becomes visible only when the two are read together.

**Platforms**

Another role is to "Develop and maintain platforms and resources for KM." Platforms is the figure, animated by technological infrastructure.

The figure speaks for the potential of technology in KM. The platforms are not only channels through which knowledge moves. They are invoked in the proposal before it exists, and its invocation obliges the unit to build and keep it. A ventriloquial perspective can ascribe agentic qualities "even to absent, missing, or not-yet-existing beings, as long as they materialize—come to matter—in communicative turns"

(Cooren, 2018, as cited in Nathues et al., 2021, p. 1460). A promised platform participates in the organizing by committing the unit to a kind of work.

Technology holds a canonical place in KM, and I take that up in the discussion of the technological voice below.

**KM strategy & Board Approval**

The portion ends: "If approved, the VSU KMO shall, within a year, aim to craft a three-year KM strategy for the university, which shall be approved by the VSU Board of Regents for immediate implementation." The KM strategy and the Board of Regents are the figure, animated by legitimacy.

Two absent beings are presentified here: a strategy that does not yet exist and a governing board that is not *yet* in the conversation. The Board is convoked, summoned as a being that requires something of the unit (Cooren, 2016). What the two are made to say together is that the unit will be legitimate on two conditions. It must produce a strategy, and the institution must approve it. The sentence names a deliverable, a deadline and an approver at once, which is what Bencherki, Sergi, Cooren and Vásquez (2021, p. 610) call *crystallizing* a course of action. The proposal excerpt closes by handing its own authorization to a body above it. This is *appeal*: the Board is asked to authorize in the unit's place. I read this as the clearest instance in the data of a figure conferring legitimacy by deferring to another figure.

A KM strategy is a standard deliverable in the field. Zack (1999) sets out how one is developed, and Earl (2001) sorts KM strategies into a taxonomy of schools. Both treat the strategy as something an organization produces once it is working. In this sentence the strategy is produced in the opposite order. It is promised by a unit that does not yet exist, to a policy making body that has not yet asked, as the condition of the unit's own legitimacy.

**Tracing back chains of authorship in KM organizing: Three organizing voices**

The third phase of the analysis brings these separate traces of authorship together. Nathues, van Vuuren and Cooren (2021, p. 1465) describe this as tracing back chains of authorship, while Nathues and van Vuuren (2022, p. 220) identify the analytical instrument as the four workings of *in the name of*. Ventriloquations weave configurations "by appealing to figures to speak for oneself, by sharing authorship with figures, by expressing possession of figures, or by attributing action to figures."

Reading Table 1, the seventeen figures trace to three chains. I call them the ***canonical voice***, the ***institutional voice*** and the ***technological voice***.

**Table 2**

*Chains of authorship traced across the seventeen figures.*

| Chain | Figure | Vent | Working of *in the name of* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Canonical** | Training organizer logos | KM expertise | Authority / authorship |
| | Training duration and scope | In-depth knowledge & experience on KM | Authority / authorship |
| | Course mentor's name and signature | KM expertise | Authority / authorship |
| | Definition of KM | Technical knowledge on KM | Authority / authorship |
| | Other fields of practice | Multidisciplinarity | Authority / authorship |
| | Communities of practice | Technical knowledge on KM | Appeal |
| | Knowledge products and services | Technical knowledge on KM | Appropriation |
| | KM practices and skills | KM practitioner certificate · Technical | Appropriation |

| Chain | Figure | Vent | Working of *in the name of* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | knowledge on KM | |
| **Institutional** | Institution logo and name | Institutional authority | Authority / authorship |
| | KM benefits | Researchers · employees | Appeal |
| | Collective wisdom | Institutional memory | Appeal |
| | KM strategy · Board of Regents | Legitimacy | Appeal |
| **Technological** | Platforms | Technological infrastructure | Appeal |
| **C + T + I** [a] | Proponent's credentials | Technical knowledge on KM · technological knowledge | Appropriation |
| **C + I** | KM organization exemplar [b] | KM practice | Authority / authorship |
| | Research agenda [d] | KM scholarship | Authority / authorship |
| **I + C** [c] | Knowledge workers | Institution's workforce | Appropriation |

[a] canonical and technological vents under an institutional title; [b] canonical vent, institutional figure; [c] institutional vent, canonical figure; [d] canonical vent, institutional orientation. Workings follow Nathues and van Vuuren (2022, pp. 215–216).

**The canonical voice**

By the canon, I mean the doctrine of knowledge management: its concepts, definitions, theories, and recognized authorities. I use *canonical* in the disciplinary sense, referring to the principles, models, and frameworks that the field accepts as authoritative. I call it a voice because it speaks through figures. No KM scholar or trainer is present in either document. The doctrine is.

Technical knowledge and expertise on KM animates the training organizer logos, the mentor's signature, the proponent's credentials, Davenport's definition, communities of practice, knowledge products and services, and the training role.

Variants of it animate three more: in-depth knowledge and experience on the field on the certificate, KM practice behind the World Bank, KM scholarship behind the research agenda. Technical knowledge on KM is also the only vent that appears in both documents. (The vents I name here are my readings, and some are not entities recognized by the KM ontology. Technical knowledge on KM, KM expertise, and KM scholarship name what appears to animate a figure at a given moment. So do multidisciplinarity and institutional memory. A KM scholar would not find these terms in a glossary of the field. I assigned them by asking what each figure was made to speak for. Table 2 shows the excerpt on which each assignment is based.)

Each time it authorizes something different. Through the logos it authorizes a training body. Through the signature, a person. Through the credentials line, a proposer. Through a field definition, a scope. Through communities of practice, a form of gathering. Through knowledge products and services, a domain of work. Through the training role, a program.

Almost every canonical figure works through authority and authorship. The figure speaks next to the proponent, and the claim acquires a co-author. This voice also bounds the field, and no other voice does: a canonical definition, the adjacent disciplines and the World Bank all establish what KM is and where it belongs. And it never defers.

The canon that these figures speak for is conventional KM: Davenport's definition, the World Bank as a KM organization exemplar, knowledge workers, knowledge products and services, as well as communities of practice—most of these come from KM's corporate lineage. On the other hand, KM4D is not very much recognizable in the document. Invoking KM for firms is notable especially that the proposed KM unit is being founded in a state university in a developing country. I read

this as part of the result. Organizing animated by KM4D, invoking a different canon—knowledge sharing across organizations, communities of interest & champions (Flor, 2009), and knowledge that doesn't diminish when shared—would have resulted in a different outcome. Such a comparison may warrant a later study.

I read this as the main answer to the first research question. Technical knowledge on KM is the non-human agent that most of the seventeen figures are made to speak for. It participates by lending authority to whatever needs authorizing at that point in the document, and what needs authorizing changes as the organizing proceeds. *A KM unit cannot be organized without technical knowledge of the field,* because the thing doing most of the authorizing is the knowledge itself.

This claim may sound circular: knowledge management authorizing a knowledge management unit. The analysis breaks the circularity by asking what, specifically, did the authorizing. In this document, that could have been the institution, the proponent's position, an existing mandate, a budget line, or a directive from above. Here, it was a field definition, two logos, a signature, and a set of canonical categories. The tracing identifies which of these actually performed the authorizing. That is something the document itself does not make obvious.

**The institutional voice**

Institutional authority animates the university logo. The institution's workforce animates the figure of knowledge workers. Researchers and employees animate the word *benefit*. Institutional memory animates collective wisdom. Legitimacy animates the KM strategy and the Board of Regents.

This voice gives the proposal its purpose and secures the (deontic) authority needed for the unit to be established. It names who will benefit, what is at stake, and what authority the unit needs. Its main workings are *appropriation* and *appeal*. The

credentials line claims institutional standing for itself; *benefit* is made to speak for people who were never consulted; and the Board is asked to authorize the unit in the proposal's place.

I notice, though, that the institutional voice does not bound the field. It speaks throughout the proposal but it does not say what knowledge management is.

**The technological voice**

Technology, though, is also canonical in knowledge management. Alavi and Leidner's (2001) review, the most cited statement of KM's conceptual foundations, emphasizes the role of information technology in supporting knowledge processes. Heisig (2009) reports that KM passed through a period he calls "technological euphoria" before turning toward its other success factors. Pee and Kankanhalli (2009) model KM maturity on people, process and technology, giving technology one of three positions. Yeh, Lai and Ho (2006) place it among the enablers a KM program requires.

Only one figure traces to this voice (as its lone vent): platforms.

KM discourse is consistent with its *grammar* on technology. Ngoc-Tan and Gregar's (2018) instrument asks respondents whether "IT infrastructure facilitates the internal communication of the institution" and whether it "facilitates governance of the institution" (p. 320). Technology facilitates, supports, enables, but it doesn't necessarily found, mandate, authorize or convene.

The proposal echoes the same line. Platforms appear once, in a role assigned to the unit, as something to be developed and maintained. On its own, the technological voice in my data speaks once, as a task for people to do.

Martine, Cooren, Bénel and Zacklad (2016) take up technology adoption from a CCO position and argue that what matters is what a technology is made to do in the

situations where it appears. The promised platform is made to do one thing here: it commits the unit to building it.

I think the single occurrence is itself a finding that's worth noting. In a founding document written by a certified KM practitioner, technology did not authorize anything. The authorizing was done by a certificate, a logo, a definition and a set of categories. The platforms figure appears only at the point where work is already being assigned.

**Figures that have multiple voices**

A number of figures carry more than one chain. Their figure sits in one voice and their vent in another. Three run between the *canon* and the *institution*. The fourth, the credentials line, holds all three chains.

"Knowledge workers" is a canonical category animated by the institution's workforce: the canon renames institutional people. The World Bank is an institution animated by KM practice: an institution is made to speak for the canon. The research agenda is animated by KM scholarship while orienting the unit toward institutional priorities: the canon bends toward the institution. The credentials line carries canonical and technological vents under an institutional title, which makes it the only figure in the data holding three chains at once.

This is polyphony at work (Cooren and Sandler, 2014): "recognizing that many things come to express themselves or say something through what someone says, writes, or does" (p. 226). The multiplicity is not only a matter of many voices distributed across a document. It "can be, and routinely is, heard simultaneously, even within single words," which is what Bakhtin called double-voiced discourse (p. 228). Their illustration is when a comedian parodies a politician, the utterance "contains two voices that are heard throughout the utterance, in every single word."

I consider these figures as *double-voiced* in that sense. *Knowledge workers* is not a canonical phrase laid over institutional people from the outside. Both voices are audible in the phrase itself. The same holds for the World Bank, which cannot be heard as merely an institution in this proposal without also being heard as a practitioner of KM too.

In CCO, the organization is a plenum of agencies and through the lens of ventriloquism, we see that vents and figures are configured in a way to make a difference (Bencherki & Trudel, 2026). In my data, the canonical voice authorizes and bounds, the technological voice assigns the work, and the institutional voice defers.

## Accomplishment of Non-Human Agents in KM Organizing

From the 17 ventriloquial effects across the two documents, I traced five performances:

### They authorize

The organizer logos, the mentor's signature, the university logo, and the proponent's credentials each add an author to a claim that would otherwise rest on one person. Authority here is augmentation. Each figure invoked is another voice standing behind the proposal.

### They bound the field

The definition of KM, the other fields of practice, and the World Bank establish what KM is and where it belongs. They rule out competing readings of the proposed unit and place it inside a discipline the institution can recognize.

**They (re)constitute a certain kind of organization**

Knowledge workers, knowledge products and services, and collective wisdom rename things the university already has. Faculty become knowledge workers, research outputs become knowledge products, and the loss of departing staff becomes a memory problem. Each renaming brings an existing thing inside the unit's scope. The unit does not acquire a domain. Its domain is constituted in the writing.

**They supply a purpose**

The word *benefit* speaks for researchers and employees. Collective wisdom speaks for institutional memory. Communities of practice specify the form the gathering will take. A crowd becomes an organization when there is direction and something to be done, and these figures supply the something.

**They defer**

The research agenda aligns the unit with the institution's direction. The KM strategy and the Board of Regents make the unit's legitimacy conditional on approval from above. Deferral, though, shouldn’t be cast as a weakness or limitation of authority in the proposal. Massaro, Dumay and Garlatti (2015) find approval structures throughout the public sector KM literature, and a unit inside a state university has to be established through them. What the figures do is convert that requirement into a course of action the unit is already committed to.

## Oscillation: The certificate and the proposal as vents

In ventriloquism, the figure and vent are positions, not properties of things. There is no absolute starting point. A figure can become a vent, and a vent can become a figure. This oscillating movement between the two positions gives ventriloquism its

relational character (Clifton et al., 2021, p. 274). Each of the seventeen figures can therefore be read from the other side.

The certificate shows this oscillation: In Figure 1, I treated it as a document on which figures are made to speak; but it is also a vent moving forward. The requirement it sets—that a KM unit needs technical knowledge of the field—reaches the proposal through the credentials line, which names its bearer a Certified KM Practitioner. The same goes with the definition of KM and the World Bank: they were made available because the training was attested by the certificate. Caronia and Cooren (2014) describe this more generally: acknowledging the *dialogicity* of things means recognizing that people are *active* in their own destiny and also *passive*, "that is, things literally and figuratively pass or communicate through them" (p. 48). I was the proponent, and these things passed through me.

The oscillation is also expected to happen further. Once written, the proposal would become a vent, animating what comes after it. The roles and functions that it lists would become the work that the unit is expected to accomplish. The platform that it promises will become a deliverable, and so on. A document that was animated will become something that animates.

## Technical knowledge of the field as the condition of KM organizing

Technical knowledge on KM is the only vent that appears in both documents. It animated the training organizer logos, the mentor's signature, the proponent's credentials, Davenport's definition, communities of practice, knowledge products and services, and the training role. It also goes by *in-depth knowledge and experience on KM* on the certificate, *KM practice* behind the World Bank, *KM scholarship* behind the research agenda. It crosses over from the certificate to the proposal.

Technical knowledge on KM carries with it a *constitutive* vocabulary. Knowledge workers, knowledge products and services, communities of practice, collective wisdom—canon to the field—and these are applied to something the university as an organization already has. Faculty and researchers are already there. Research outputs, reports, and extension materials are already there. Staff have always been leaving or retiring.

The certificate also set a standard: 10 weeks of KM theory, 30 KM skills, an eight-week practicum. I read these earlier as saying that the knowledge certified is technical and practiced.

Such is confirmed by the proposal: A KM unit cannot be proposed, much less organized, without technical knowledge of the field, because the terms that constitute the collective come from KM canon and must be understood well enough to apply them to this institution, this unit, and the people who will make it up. In other words, *a proposal to organize cannot hold textual agency without technical knowledge of the field.* Epistemic authority is a requirement.

Cooren's (2006) account of appropriation helped me see how the certificate keeps working after it is issued. A course mentor signed it, and his signature vouches in every situation where the certificate is presented or the certification is mentioned, including inside a proposal written shortly after. Cooren calls this *teleappropriation* (“tele”, meaning at a distance) “…by appropriating the action of other actors, one can act from a distance and across time” (p. 82). The certificate, as a non-human agent, did work in the proposal and animated a role inside it.

Technical knowledge on KM is therefore an indispensable non-human agent in KM organizing as a condition. In this study, the certificate installs it and the proposal

put it to work. The depth of that knowledge determined how much of the existing institution can be claimed as the KM unit is constituted in communication.

## What this offers to KM

Knowledge management has its own name for this claiming operation: the knowledge audit. Through this procedure, an organization establishes what it already knows and inventories it as knowledge assets (Ayinde et al., 2021; Lambe, 2023). The audit is therefore presented as a process of discovery: the assets are assumed to exist already, and the audit finds and inventories them. The intervention is still practiced and continues to be developed, although since 2018 it has appeared rarely in top KM journals such as the *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *Knowledge Management Research & Practice* and *Knowledge and Process Management*, and its methodological references remain largely those established before then. In the two documents examined here, however, the sequence is reversed. The invocation constitutes the assets before any audit takes place—and before the unit itself exists.

The field's literature *on establishing a KM function* is largely prescriptive. Agarwal and Marouf (2014) set out a step-by-step template for initiating knowledge management in colleges and universities, and the template tells a proponent what to do. Farmani, Zare, Arabi and Mohammad Khani (2020) come closest to the unit itself, conceptualizing the KM office as an entity with a describable form.

Communication scholars have taken up KM before. Barley, Treem and Kuhn (2018) reviewed two hundred articles from twenty years of influential KM research and sorted them into four processes: producing common ground, maintaining common ground, producing specialization, and maintaining specialization. All four describe knowledge moving between people. They found the literature gravitated heavily

toward the first two, and they trace this tendency to a habit of treating knowledge as "a stable and predictable input to, or output of, an organizational system" (p. 296).

In this study, technical knowledge is neither an input nor an output. Instead, it authorizes: a training body, a person, a proposer, a scope of work, a form of gathering, and a training program. In authorizing, technical knowledge on KM itself organizes.

Canonical figures did the constituting of knowledge workers, knowledge products and services, communities of practice and collective wisdom from the university's faculty, its outputs and its losses for an organization yet to be created. Technical knowledge of the field is what made them available. A KM unit cannot be organized without technical knowledge of the field.

As non-human agents, these figures and vents authorized and gave the would-be unit a purpose. Assembled in such a way, they recommend a course of action (Bencherki & Trudel, 2026, p. 1041). As heard from the voices in the two documents, the organizing of a knowledge management unit emerged through beings that are not humans, before anyone signed anything.

# Chapter VI

# SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

## Summary

I completed an online course in knowledge management that certified me as a KM practitioner, and shortly afterwards I proposed a knowledge management unit at Visayas State University, a unit I was later assigned to head. The certificate and the proposal were produced in the course of that work, not for research.

Knowledge management as a field studies what happens after a KM function is in place. How a unit is brought about has not been closely studied. CCO opens up that opportunity because it treats organization as emerging in communication. Ventriloquism lets non-human beings be heard in it: a figure is what is made present and given voice, and a vent is what animates it.

I therefore asked two questions. What are the non-human agents that participate in organizing a knowledge management unit? And what do these non-human agents accomplish in organizing the unit?

I analyzed two documents: my KM practitioner certificate, and the first portion of the proposal to establish the KM unit, from the letterhead to the sentence beginning "If approved." The analysis followed the four-phase framework of Nathues, van Vuuren and Cooren (2021) for ventriloquial analysis. I identified explicit and implicit invocations and animations, established what each figure was made to say, traced the figures back to their chains of authorship using the four workings of *in the name of*. The unit of analysis was the ventriloquial effect. Seventeen were found across the two documents.

**To the first question**, the non-human agents that participate are figures of three kinds, sorted by the chains of authorship they trace back to. The canonical voice is the doctrine of knowledge management: its concepts, definitions, theories, and the bodies recognized as authoritative within it. It animates most of the seventeen figures, and technical knowledge on KM is the only vent that appears in both documents. The institutional voice is the authority, workforce, memory and legitimacy of the university, and it animates the university logo, the figure of knowledge workers, the word *benefit*, collective wisdom, and the KM strategy awaiting the Board of Regents. The technological voice animates one figure, platforms. Four figures carry more than one voice at once, with the figure sitting in one chain and the vent in another.

**To the second question**, these non-human agents accomplish five things. They authorize, adding an author to claims that would otherwise rest on one person. They bound the field, establishing what KM is and where it belongs. They reconstitute an organizational reality, renaming the university's faculty as knowledge workers, its outputs as knowledge products and services, and the departure of experienced staff as a loss of collective wisdom. They supply a purpose, naming who benefits and what form the gathering will take. And they defer, aligning the unit with the institution's direction and making its legitimacy conditional on approval from above.

The analysis also showed the certificate working as a vent as well as a figure. The requirement it sets, that a KM unit needs technical knowledge of the field, reached the proposal through the credentials line naming its bearer a Certified KM Practitioner.

## Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, I draw four conclusions on the constitutive role of communication in knowledge management organizing.

The first is that technical knowledge on KM is what most of the organizing is made to speak for. The canon of knowledge management speaks as a voice, and technical knowledge on KM is the vent through which it speaks. No KM scholar and no trainer appears in either document. What appears are the figures the doctrine animates: two training organizer logos, a course mentor's signature, a credentials line, Davenport's definition, communities of practice, knowledge products and services, and a training role. Three more are animated by variants of the same vent.

Technical knowledge of the field is the only vent that appears in both documents. The university animates five figures and the technological infrastructure animates one.

Second, these non-human agents authorize, bound the field, reconstitute, supply a purpose, and defer. The figures from the canonical voice authorize something different each time, and what needs authorizing changes as the organizing proceeds: a training body, a person, a proposer, a scope, a form of gathering, a domain of work. Authority here is augmentation, and each figure invoked is another author standing behind the claim (Cooren, 2015).

The figures of the institutional voice supply what the canonical voice does not: they name who benefits, what is at stake, and whose approval the unit requires. Its workings are appropriation and appeal. The word benefit speaks for researchers and employees who were never consulted, and the Board of Regents is asked to authorize the unit in the proposal's place.

On its own, the technological voice speaks once, as work to be done. In a founding document written by a certified KM practitioner, technology authorized nothing.

A crowd becomes an organization when there is authority and something to be done. Figures supplied both.

Third, of all these agents, technical knowledge on KM is the primary non-human agent in KM organizing. The canonical figures recast the university's existing people, outputs and losses as knowledge workers, knowledge products and services, communities of practice and collective wisdom. These come from KM canon and must be understood well enough to apply them to the institution, the unit, and the people who will make it up.

The certificate set some standard: 10 weeks of KM theory, 30 KM skills, an eight-week practicum. The certificate installs the knowledge and the proposal puts it to work, which is why knowledge on KM crosses both documents. A KM unit cannot be organized without technical knowledge, because the thing doing most of the authorizing is conceptual and practical knowledge of the field itself.

Finally, knowledge management organizing is a communicative accomplishment. Current knowledge management discourse treats knowledge as something an organization holds, captures, transfers, audits and loses. In the KM organizing process I studied, knowledge spoke, and this expands how we appreciate knowledge management as a process and its organizing in and through communication.

The organizing of a knowledge management unit is a communicative accomplishment, and the ventriloquial analysis showed how. Seventeen figures were made present and made to say something across two documents, and tracing them back gave three chains of authorship. Technical knowledge on KM animates most of them. Through those figures, it authorized a training body, a person, a proposer, a scope, a form of gathering, a domain of work and a program; it renamed the university's faculty, outputs and losses as the unit's domain; and it committed the unit

to work before any entity approved it. Nothing was captured, stored or transferred. Things were made to speak, and the speaking is where the unit came about.

I came into this program asking how knowledge management is a subfield of communication. This study and the two documents cannot settle that. What they show is that a communicational ontology—starting from communication in order to explain organization and organizing, and not the other way around (Cooren, 2012, p. 4)—accounts for something the field has treated as a management problem. The organizing of knowledge management is communication.

Before there was a unit to speak for, there were a certificate, a logo, a definition and a handful of categories that were made to speak in its name. Knowledge management was constituted in communication, and the making was done both by human and non-human agents, often distanced by space and time.

## Recommendations

I forward several recommendations, beginning with theory and ending with practice.

This study's contribution to CCO is the *canonical* voice. An earlier UPOU study traced a strategic planning voice in the founding minutes of a university and, another, traced a technological voice in a students' confessions page (Perez, 2024). What I traced here is a third: a chain of authorship running back to a field's accepted body of knowledge, speaking through credentials, definitions, categories, and the marks of the bodies that teach it. The canonical voice authorizes, and it bounds what the organizing can be about. In my data it never defers. It should be available wherever a collective is founded inside a discipline, and a professional association, a licensing regime or an accreditation standard would each be places to look for it.

For the wider literature on organizing, the study offers an alternative to agency as an alignment of intentions. Conventional accounts read the founding of a unit as a process in which intentions come into alignment: a proponent persuades, colleagues buy in, change is managed, and a system is installed. This account works at the level of what people mean. Reading the same founding as a plenum of agencies changes what counts as part of the account. A definition, a certificate, and a governing board appear alongside the proponent, each making a difference to what happened next. For readers coming from a systems or transmission tradition, the move is simple: each of these beings was made to speak in the course of the work, and what it said changed what the document could claim.

Closer to my own field, conventional KM and CCO share substantial ground. Both traditions treat knowledge as central to contemporary organizing; the knowledge-based theory of the firm (Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996) and the CCO uptake begin from the same premise. Both take the tacit or experiential dimension seriously. Heaton and Taylor (2002) build on Polanyi's (1967) insight, and their quarrel is only with the conversion mechanism. Both attend to materiality, texts, and information systems, which the Montreal School has given a central role since Taylor, Groleau, Heaton, and Van Every (2001) and which KM has long addressed through codification and organizational memory (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). And both treat boundary-crossing as a real problem, whether through boundary objects and transfer mechanisms (Star & Griesemer, 1989; Carlile, 2004) or through the circulation of texts (Taylor & Van Every, 2000).

The two accounts differ in what they take knowledge to be, and so in what they take as the unit of analysis. Table 3 below sets the two side by side. It describes two

ways of posing the question, and it should be read alongside Burk's (2018) point that organizational knowledge requires both.

**Table 3**

*Two ways of viewing organizational knowledge: conventional KM vs CCO*

| Dimension | Entitative framing (Conventional KM) | Enactive framing (CCO/Montreal School) |
|---|---|---|
| **What knowledge is** | An asset or commodity that can be codified, stored, and transferred | An accomplishment continually enacted in communication |
| **Core mechanism** | Tacit-to-explicit conversion; the knowledge cycle | Text–conversation dialectic; co-orientation; ventriloquial invocation |
| **Where knowledge is located** | In individual minds, aggregated upward to the organization | Relational, distributed, sociomaterial; talked into being |
| **Agency in knowing** | A human knower using passive tools | Distributed across humans and non-humans; artifacts made to speak co-author knowing |
| **Role of the document** | A container for knowledge put into storable form | Both representation and constitutive force; agentive |
| **What management means** | Knowledge can be captured and leveraged through managerial design | Management is itself a communicative accomplishment; knowing is emergent and only partly inscribable |
| **Unit of analysis** | The stock, the repository, the transfer event | The situated array of knowledge-accomplishing activities |

The two columns answer different questions, and an organization doing knowledge work has to face both. What the right-hand column makes available is a way of asking what the documents, platforms, and procedures of a KM apparatus do when they are put to work.

This can be turned into an empirical question. A study could take a single KM practice—a repository, an audit, or a community of practice—and ask what each

perspective can say about it, and where, if at all, they describe the same thing. This is where *transdisciplinarity* becomes relevant: what would matter is whether the two perspectives can engage a shared problem, beyond sharing terms.

Such a study would continue what I began here. This study is my own humble attempt to rediscover knowledge management—at least one part of it, organizing—in communication. CCO, particularly the Montreal School, may also shed light on other working assumptions in conventional KM, such as knowledge-as-resource, the SECI model of knowledge creation, and technology. Each of SECI's four conversions is a communicative accomplishment, and each can be re-examined ventriloquially. A ventriloquial reading of a conversion episode would ask what is made to speak at each turn, and whether the conversion is what the model says it is. A later study could propose a model of its own, where knowledge creation is read as a configuration of voices, and what SECI calls tacit knowledge becoming explicit is read as a figure being made to speak in a new setting. For technology, it is worth examining what it is made to say about the work of the people using it, a question a CCO study of technology adoption is equipped to answer (Martine, Cooren, Bénel, & Zacklad, 2016).

Beyond KM, a communicational ontology can be carried into fields adjacent to my own: KM4D, development communication, agricultural and rural extension, and health communication. I find Professor Alexander Flor's (2024) proposition of the Los Baños or *Makiling School*, where "communication is considered constitutive of sustainable development" (p. 146), a worthwhile communicational ontology project to pursue along this line—for me and my colleagues in development communication.

Carrying the approach into these fields also raises a question of method. Ventriloquial studies have generally worked with talk: leadership (Clifton, Fachin, & Cooren, 2021), strategy (Nathues, Endedijk, & van Vuuren, 2023), shareholder

engagement (Slager, Gond, & Sjöström, 2024), organizational memory (Laaksonen & Lambotte, 2022), diversity initiatives (Caidor, 2026). This study worked with two documents and no live interaction, and the four-phase framework of Nathues, van Vuuren and Cooren (2021) still held up. I recommend the framework be used on documentary data in other settings, and that founding documents in particular be read for what they accomplish.

The collective in those studies already existed as an entity. In this one, it did not yet exist. Many founding documents of other kinds—charters, enabling acts, board resolutions, project proposals—are available for a similar reading, and what they are made to accomplish before the collective exists is largely unexamined.

My analysis also stops at the sentence beginning "If approved." The oscillation should run forward from there: once written, a proposal becomes a vent that animates what comes after it. A study designed to follow that movement would need data past the point where mine ended, and it would be able to say what a founding document goes on doing once the unit it proposed is operating.

Practitioners need not wait for that study. For those proposing a KM unit, the founding document is where the organizing happens. The categories a proposal uses decide what the unit will be understood to be responsible for, and they decide it before any structure exists. Naming the university's outputs as knowledge products and services brought them inside the unit's scope; leaving them unnamed would have left them outside it.

For those already running one, the same holds for what comes after. A unit's own artifacts speak for it or fail to. A proposal that names an obligation creates one. A role listed becomes work expected.

For institutions establishing a KM function, technical knowledge of the field is a vital part of what makes the organizing possible, over and above being a qualification of the person to be hired. The concepts the proponent knows determine which parts of the institution can be brought into the unit's scope. Without sufficient technical knowledge on KM, the proposal will claim less, and the unit will begin with a narrower domain than what is possible. With more, it can claim more. Either way, it is in and through communication that the organization is constituted.

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