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Intrinsic Sustainable Development: Epistemes, Science, Business and Sustainability, F. Birkin, T. Polesie. World Scientific Publishing Ltd., Singapore (2012), 368 pp.

The authors of this book present new ways of perceiving sustainable development. It is written from one person's view in particular, Older boy. Older boy is a researcher in accounting, but with technical background and with interest in sustainability issues. The book describes how Older boy gets affected by the work of Michael Foucault, which makes him think about his research and about the world in new ways. The authors use Foucault and his interpretation of *epistemes* to historically describe our relationship to nature and how sustainable development and business management might become intrinsically intertwined in the future. By *intrinsic* sustainable development, the authors mean that sustainability will be an essential and inherent part of every organization and something that is not possible to exclude from the organization's operations.

Epistemes, according to the authors, is a notion used to explain how we organize our knowledge during a specific period of time. The concept has been compared to Kuhn's paradigm (1996) by for example Piaget (1970) but is according to Foucault (1970) much more extensive. A paradigm describes how research is performed and perceived during a certain period of time within a discipline, whereas epistemes, on the other hand, include all discourses within a certain time period and may well include many different paradigms. The foundation of an episteme is a number of assumptions that are so fundamental that they are not questioned or even reflected upon. In the first half of the book we are invited to follow Older boy and see how he develops his (and, thus, the authors) understanding of epistemes. In the beginning he cannot understand how he could use this concept in his research, but in the second part of the book, Older boy is starting to realize how epistemes can connect accounting and business to sustainability. Older boy together with two colleagues then suggest how an emerging episteme, *the Primal episteme*, could look like.

The authors describe primarily four different epistemes, the classical episteme, the Renaissance, the modern episteme and the Primal episteme. Within the classical episteme, religion is a strong influence. What one could not explain was seen as something sacred, while what one could observe was perceived as knowledge. Their knowledge order meant that they felt secure in their understanding of the world. The humanists of the Renaissance were also religious but their view of nature differed from that during the classical episteme. Instead of acting merely as a religious manifesto, they considered that nature was not only created by God but rather *for* God. This meant a mindset where they had to protect nature, since everything had its own special place in God's perfect world. Parallels can be drawn to ancient China, where the desire to live in harmony with nature was strong (Waley, 1959). This mindset would soon disappear, first in the West and later in China, mainly because of the modern episteme.

The modern episteme that has been dominant during the last centuries is influenced by how the perception of the economy has evolved, as a result of seminal economists like Adam Smith (1723-1790) and later David Ricardo (1772-1823). From

being a way to simplify trading of goods and services, the economy has become a living thing. Successful business is no longer just a tool for increased welfare in society but an end in itself. Just like decisions during the Renaissance and the classical episteme could be justified through religion, decisions can now be justified if they provide economic benefits. One major difference between the former and this episteme is that religion had an ethical framework in which egoism and individualism was seen as something negative. The authors' verdict is harsh: "*Nature and God had breathed life. The Modern Episteme forgot how to breathe.*" (p. 227).

The new, emerging episteme, as described by the authors, is based on knowledge of things as they are created; a knowledge of primal processes. Primal processes are based on a diversity of *thermodynamic dissipative structures* (Hornborg, 2001) which exist in nature. Some of these processes might suddenly change without us being able to do anything about it or even without us knowing about it. The same goes for how the ordering of knowledge for humanity has evolved through history. The authors describes the knowledge order during the modern episteme as a drilling of holes into the classical table of knowledge, and these holes were drilled deeper and deeper down as more knowledge was gained. These holes represent different regions of knowledge, and these regions could not be separated from respective hole. The shift to the Primal episteme will result in that these holes are no longer separate, but the knowledge will instead create a three dimensional space where it is united and spread across disciplines, creating an epistemological block or space (Birkin and Polesie, 2012). This is one of the core conditions of *intrinsic* sustainable development for business and one contribution of this book to management researchers and reflecting practitioners. Because knowledge will no longer be bound to certain regions, we cannot focus on only on our own field, our own hole, but instead use a more holistic and interdisciplinary perspective in order to run business and research successfully.

Although it is very complex to explain and understand past epistemes within another episteme, the authors manages to present a comprehensive explanation of our historically close contact with nature and how we in the modern episteme gradually detached ourselves from it. The authors present several signs that we are beginning to see a shift from the modern episteme into something else, but it feels somewhat contrived to outline this new episteme so thoroughly from inside our current episteme. The authors think that a sustainable mindset is on its way back, just like the one common during the Renaissance but for quite different reasons, and that this is of great importance for the new episteme. But in order to possibly push this new episteme, organizational theorists and business managers must know how and why these episteme shifts take place. This has, however, partially been omitted from the book. The authors does not present any practical solutions that can be implemented in an organisation right away by business managers or CSR executives. Never the less, the new and emerging episteme, as presented by the authors, is theoretically well-crafted and can show organizations how to intrinsically act and think in new, more sustainable ways. In order for the Primal Episteme to become reality, we will all have to become more conscious. This book contributes to this consciousness, which is required in order for an episteme shift to occur.

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