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Francis Kwansa
University of Delaware

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REFLECTIONS ON INTELLECTUAL CRAFTSMANSHIP IN HOSPITALITY RESEARCH

Francis A. Kwansa

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how a hospitality epistemology can be created. It defines knowledge and the process of its creation. The paper also suggests a framework for contemplating research in an applied area such as hospitality and a process for engaging in systematic reflection as part of good intellectual craftsmanship.

Building One's Own Epistemological Identity

C. Wright Mills (1959) distinguished between methodology and epistemology in his book, "Sociological Imagination." Whereas methodology is a study of methods and offers theories about what researchers do when they are at work, epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge. That is, in hospitality, we are concerned with the character of knowledge (its basis and boundaries) and how it is created or found.

Knowledge? Knowledge simply represents explanations and interpretations of phenomena in society. Human beings live, work and play within the context of society; therefore, what happens to them in this milieu, why it happens, and how they behave constitutes the basis of knowledge. Robert Merton (1967) identified several kinds of knowledge: 1) myth and legend, 2) religious knowledge, 3) philosophical-metaphysical knowledge, 4) positive knowledge from mathematics and the natural sciences, 5) positive knowledge from the social sciences, and 6) technological knowledge.

The concept of hospitality is a phenomenon that occurs in society and therefore fits under the umbrella of social science. Yet, I believe, it is a special area of social behavior such as political science, economics, criminology, geography, nutrition and many more, requiring answers to such fundamental questions as:

- 1) What are the essential components of hospitality and how do they relate to each other?
- 2) How does it differ from other kinds of social phenomena?
- 3) What is its place within and its meaning for the development of humanity as a whole?
- 4) What kinds of human nature are revealed in the practice of hospitality?

Seeking answers to these questions and many more like them describes the pursuit of knowledge, and this journey is complete when we have found answers that are unique to the questions of hospitality.

How do we know when we have created or found knowledge? Traditionally, we have found or created knowledge through contemplation or observation of phenomena around

us, then through using quantitative models to validate what has been contemplated or observed. The nature of the validation has typically involved explaining phenomena by identifying the regularities in the relationships that underlie events. If this process of validation is successful, then we have explained a phenomenon and created knowledge.

There is another view of how knowledge is created that is described by Andrew Sayer as the realist philosophy. This philosophy recognizes that objects and social relations have causal powers, which may or may not produce regularities. Therefore, this philosophy places less weight on quantitative methods for discovering and assessing regularities (i.e., creating knowledge) and more on methods of establishing the qualitative nature of social objects (as opposed to natural objects) and relations on which causal mechanisms depend.

In summary, explaining social phenomena creates knowledge, and the process adopted to achieve this goal is important in assuring us of this accomplishment. That means, in the development and establishment of our epistemological identity, not only is the subject of inquiry important, but so too is the methodology — mode of explanation, the research design and analysis. In the quantitative vs. qualitative debate, therefore, one is not superior to the other; rather, the choice of one over the other must be made after careful reflection on the nature of the subject/phenomenon, the purpose of the research, and the method.

Creating a Palette: My Graduate School Reality

The philosophy of my graduate education was that hospitality management represented the core of the curriculum and the six functions of management — finance, marketing, human resources, operations, administration, and strategy and policy — were the peripheral specializations around the core. Once the area of specialization was selected, then you were required to take a number of courses pertaining to this area. The purpose was to familiarize the student with the theoretical underpinnings of this chosen area of specialization as well as its research literature.

The hospitality management core helped you establish your epistemological identity, and then the area of specialization helped you define your field identity. Built into this model was the concession that hospitality research would, by and large, be applied research in the beginning. That is, we would use the theories learned from our areas of specialization to attempt to explain phenomena in the hospitality domain — abstracted empiricism. In the process we would be able to accumulate enough evidence to show where and how the management of hospitality is different from the management of other industries specifically and to demonstrate that hospitality is a unique social phenomenon generally. The success of the previous stage would then provide the foundation for the beginnings of theory construction in hospitality.

In summary, our field identities provided by the areas of specialization collectively represent the palette of colors from which we paint and paint more clearly the picture(s) of hospitality. Our challenge as hospitality researchers is to stay true to and focused on the picture(s) of hospitality by identifying and stating clearly problems that are substantive to hospitality and which help us understand the phenomenon better. These questions can

arise sometimes from our interactions with industry professionals and other times from our own reasoning. Reasoning has an important role to play in the hospitality knowledge creation process. As C. Wright Mills put it, "Facts discipline reason; but reason is the advance guard in any field of learning." Reasoning helps with definitions and hypotheses. It also helps with developing logical relations using these definitions and hypotheses, and we are able to discard points of view and statements of fact that are fallacious. Therefore, good intellectual craftsmanship can be found both in empirical studies that depend on sound methodology and conceptual studies.

Having selected your area of interest or specialization, what do you write about?

C. Wright Mills (1959) suggests some requirements for developing good craftsmanship in the social sciences:

- 1) Learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work.
- 2) Be personally involved in every intellectual product you engage in.
- 3) Develop your own ways of systematically reflecting on your past and present experiences.
- 4) Use the ideas and thoughts generated to form the basis of your research agenda and for developing project proposals.

How do you accomplish systematic reflection in hospitality?

- Set up a file or notebook.
- Record in this notebook personal and professional experiences and research studies that are of interest to you. The purpose for doing this is to bring together what you experience as a person and your intellectual activity.
- Also in this notebook, record bits of information and highlights of conversation with students, colleagues and industry practitioners.
- Periodically organize the notebook entries into items that strongly relate to your area of interest, those that relate tangentially, and those which are unrelated.
- Carefully reflect on the items that are strongly and tangentially related to your area of interest and determine if and how they contribute to your past and present work. Sometimes the reflection may lead to the discovery of connections between seemingly unrelated events and ideas.

This process of systematic reflection is itself the cornerstone of the "intellectual manufacturing" process (knowledge creation). Following such a process and engaging in research derived from it makes it easier for others to discern in your intellectual activities your area(s) of interest or what some would refer to as your research stream. The above process is in no way offered as a prescription. There is plenty of room for creativity in designing one's own process. However, the requirements are that it must be done and done systematically. Following through and practicing a process of systematic reflection ensures that you will be "on call" intellectually twenty-four hours a day. In other words, blending

your life experience with your intellectual work guarantees that you are never without ideas and things to write about or develop into projects. You will be always "at work."

Choosing how to publish in hospitality — what, where, and why?

Selecting what to research and publish begins with the systematic reflection process. One admonition is to surround yourself with all the relevant environment, socially and intellectually, that will facilitate your systematic reflection in the direction of your research agenda. The following are some of the ways to create the relevant hospitality environment:

- Join and participate in as many industry groups, associations, and societies as your time and resources will permit. These represent the forums where issues of relevance and importance to the hospitality domain as well as ideas that are of substance to the industry will be derived.
- Attend industry trade shows and conventions as your time and resources will allow.
- Read the mainstream journals that represent your area of specialization to keep abreast of new theories and methods that may lend themselves to application.
- Read purposefully the trade journals and other relevant magazines. For someone in the area of finance, the following are examples of relevant magazines: Nations Restaurant News, Lodging, Hotel and Motel Magazine, Wall Street Journal, Businessweek, Inc, Black Enterprise, U.S. News and World Report, and others.

From this environment will emerge the questions of relevance and substance to write about. Remember to write about those research questions of substance to the hospitality domain. Above all, the findings and conclusions of the research should meet the "so-what" test.

Another issue regarding what to publish has to do with conducting and publishing empirical vs. conceptual studies. If one selects empirical studies, then these studies must have relevance to the manner in which we practice hospitality and offer implications for theory construction in hospitality management. In addition, such studies must conform to the paradigms of empirical research and the models of verification; otherwise, the outcome of one's intellectual activities becomes nothing more than ad hoc narratives. Embarking on conceptual studies is particularly problematic for beginning faculty in the hospitality academy. Due to lack of status and the fact that they have not "paid their dues," getting the attention and confidence of the larger readership is generally difficult. Moreover, in practical terms, it takes a few years of being a part of the academy to fully understand the hospitality pedagogy. Therefore, publishing studies of an empirical nature that are of interest to the beginning hospitality researcher and later graduating to studies of a conceptual nature would be a prudent strategy.

With regard to where to publish, the refereed journals are the most preferred because only they offer the combination of the assurance of substantiveness, rigor, and contribution to the hospitality body of knowledge. In other words, the refereed journals help the beginning researcher establish credibility. Yet, opportunities to publish in non-refereed journals and trade magazines should be considered carefully and accepted only where the pub-

lished paper offers an opportunity to disseminate findings and implications of previously published research.

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Francis A. Kwansa, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management at University of Delaware.