Peer Review in the academy and quality assurance

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Presentation focus

- The essence of the framework for institutional audits.
- Why the peer review process?
- The quest for objectivity in the peer review process.
- Reflexivity and the peer review proses.
- The limits and possibilities of internal audits and the peer review mechanism.
- The future of the peer review mechanism under COVID.

The essence of the framework for institutional audits

- Traditionally the focus is has always been on self-evaluation and self-reflection within institutions.
- Hence the need for reflexivity among academics during the audit process.
- It also involves external peer reviews and evaluation of institutional activities and programmes.
- The assumption is that, of objectivity when being externally evaluated and reflexivity when the focus is internal audits within institutions.

Why the peer review process?

The peer review model is the most preferred because of the perceived "objectivity" of the outsider.

Is the peer reviewer apolitical ahistorical, and neutral?

The nature of our knowledge.

- If reality is socially constructed as Berger and Luckman taught us long time ago, how do we account for the "objectivity" & the "value free" notions of the peer reviewer in the audit process?
- If the role of the "objective" peer reviewer germane to logical positivism becomes "legitimate", "institutionalized", and taken for granted in the practice of peer reviewing, how do we change it?

The quest for objectivity in the peer review process emphasizes:

- The need to be critical and reflexive at the same time.
- Taking what others refer to as an <u>epistemological</u> gaze. Can we maintain that distance?
- This becomes a challenge we must address because:
  - Empirical facts do not exist independent from our mental or conscious activities (Willis, 2007:53)
  - As we adopt a reflexive approach, we need an <u>interpretive</u> understanding of the audit process in universities.

The limits and possibilities of the peer review mechanism

- It fails to:
  1. Account for the subjectivity and relativity of the experiences of academics in a university or universities.
  2. Accentuate the position that, reality of what academics do in universities is socially constructed and politically or even racially charged.
  3. Acknowledge that learning is fundamentally experiential and fundamentally social. (Wenger 1998:227).
  4. Accept that true knowledge of the peer reviewer comes from <u>knowing in context.</u>

The shift to modes of belonging & the objective of a community of practice during audits.

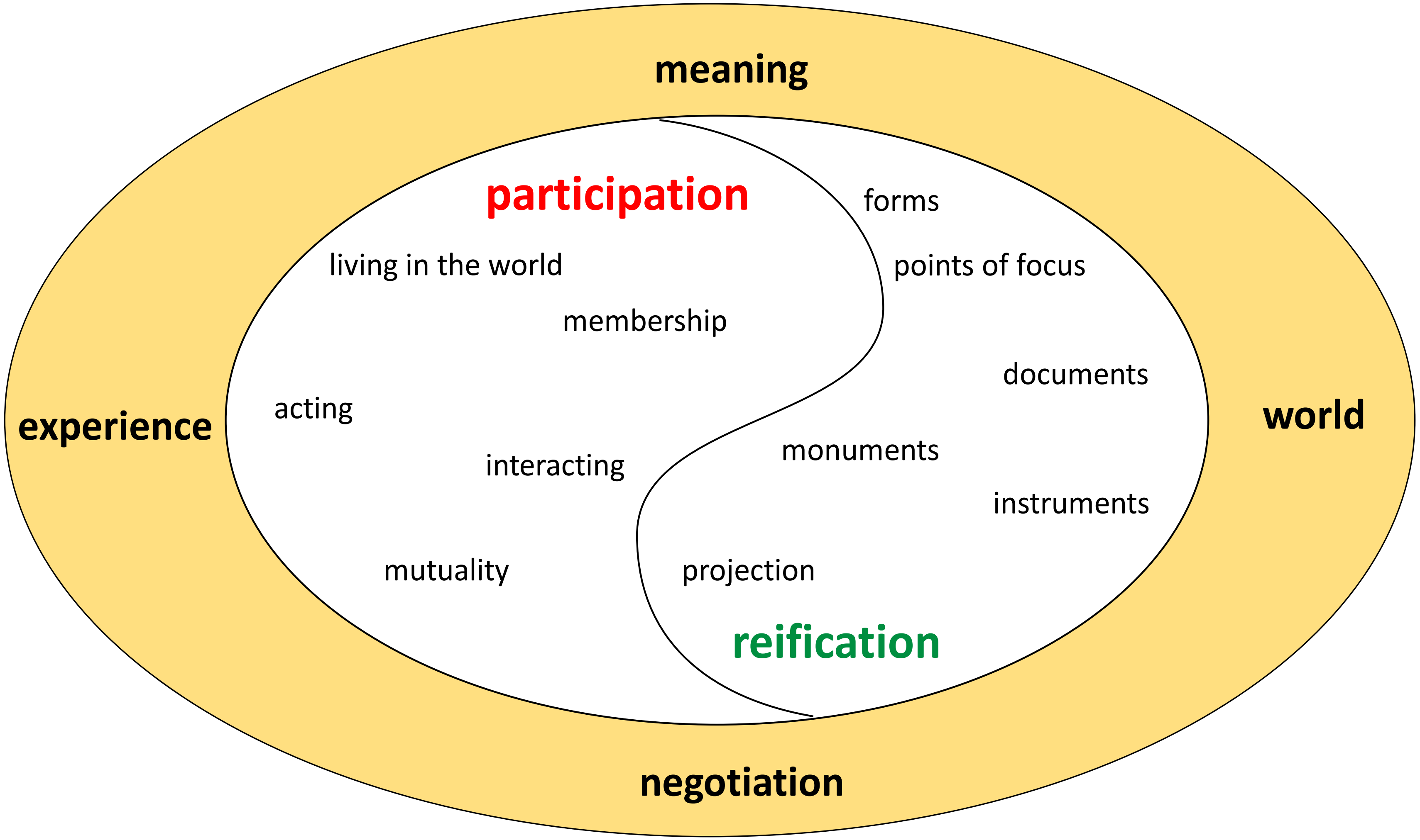
The generation and sharing of new knowledge about QA.

What are the issues:

- Whose knowledge?
- What type of knowledge?
- Whose discourse of audits prevails?

Current modes of participation in peer review processes

- Negotiation of new meanings about internal and external audits.
- Participation by interacting with peers in the process of internal and external audits.
- Experiencing and negotiating new points of focus.
- Reifying the process of peer reviews and external audits.
- Constructing different worlds regarding audits.



The duality of participation and reification. Wenger (63:1998

Whose knowledge predominates in the audit process?

- The need to re-imagine and re-think our discourse practices of internal and external audits so that we address the issue of the form, content, and orientation of the knowledge of peer reviews and external audits.
- Hence, we need to interrogate the notion of <u>objectivity</u> in external audits in particular "the independence of the observed subject from the observer or peer reviewer"(Weiler, H.(2006:64).

What type of knowledge should be used in the peer review process?

- First what we require is what Sabelo J. Gatsheni Ndlovu refers to as epistemic de-colonization.
- It involves a de-colonial critical engagement with knowledge.
- It’s focus is about adding and including local knowledge about the peer review process.
  - Local knowledge generation.
- The objective is democratizing ecologies of knowledge.

What type of knowledge about internal and external audits?

- De-colonial knowledge seeks to radically transform hierarchical relations in the QA and both internal and external audits domain.
- It is a re-humanization of knowledge about QA and the audit process.
- That way we unmask existing contradictions in order to construct knowledge about audits that is transformative an local.

Whose discourse of audits prevails?

- We need to address this question if we are to develop our own autochthonous knowledge and discourse practices of the audit process.

Production of discourse and discursive practices in audits

- Talks to statements surrounding the formation and articulation of ideas about audits & peer reviews in a historically situated time.
- What is the nature of the statements about audits, peer reviews, and QA and how they combine to produce “regimes of truths? Whose truths is it about audits?

What is to think critically & reflexively about audits and peer reviews?

- According to Achille Mbembe "To think critically is to work with the fault lines, to feel the chaotic touch of our senses, to bring the compositional logics of our world to language.
- Critique is witnessing as well as endless vigilance, interrogation, and anticipation. A proper critique requires us to first dwell in the chaos of the night in order to precisely to better break through into the dazzling light of the day.
- We recognize the moment of pessimism when the layers of the present fall into the void of the past, that is a place that is not a place".

The essence of reflexivity . . .

- “Reflexivity refers to the systematic exploration of the unthought-of categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought”. (Wacquant, 1992:40).
- It is critical that we take a reflexive approach in our work.

The reflexivity of the peer reviewer

- When one is reflexive, it means that we are continuously interpreting our own interpretations.
- This means also means that:
- ◦"Looking at one's own perspectives from other perspectives and turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author". (Alvessonand KajSkoldberg2002)

The future of the peer review and internal audits under COVID 19

- The COVID pandemic has disrupted our lives in the university in a manner that was unimaginable a year or so ago.
- The new digital age requires us to re-think strategies for the post pandemic era.
- To cope with this new normal, we need to change the DNA of the innovative university inside out.
- We also now need t reinvent the university so that we can transform even the curriculum so that we are able to train our students for a digital future as Klaus Schwab and others have argued.

Conclusion. . .

- University education will never be the same again. *Ipso facto* QA and both internal and external audits will now need to be reimagined.
- The key question for me is how to re-imagine QA and Audits so that we are in tune with the new normal that is upon us?
- In fact, we should rethink how we are going to utile the university as it is constructed today!

Thank you