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# Knowledge Gap: A Panacea for Conducting Research and Theory Building

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**Abstract:** Knowledge play key role in giving meaning to the world we live through the conscious activities of individuals as a reflective process to progressive problem solving. However, the paper focused on knowledge gap as a panacea for conducting research that aid in knowledge building especially in the behavioral research setting. Nevertheless, it argued that research is not just about data collection but an interpretation of facts that give credence to theory building through the process of closing identified gaps in literatures therefore, such theory must be capable of dealing with issues of applicability which are emancipatory to identifying key hidden choices surfaced to inform human inquiry. It concluded that closing the identified gaps only becomes relevant when its outcome contribute to the body of knowledge by making salient epistemic claims. These claims must be subjected to human inquiry and as such add value to knowledge by explicitly expressing views on the very nature of evidence and how it should be investigated with rigorous methodological standard that would be justifiable.

**Keywords:** Contradictory evidence, experiential knowledge, knowledge claim, skill knowledge, theory building

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## INTRODUCTION

Knowledge plays key role in giving meaning to the world we live through the process of knowing which contributes to the construction of our conceptual system (Bratianu, 2010). Hence, the knowing process is specific to human and knowledge is its outcome which is subject to human inquiry (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). However, considering the challenges facing mankind and his environment, the quest for knowledge building becomes inevitable and in meeting this knowledge need, certain gaps need to be bridge. The relevance of bridging or addressing these identified gaps supports in recognizing the importance in theory building. The knowledge gap concept was first conceptualized by Tichenor, Donohue and Olien in 1970 as an infusion of mass media effect into social system which they believed influences individual's ability to access information that gives rise to a gap in knowledge. These inequalities resulting from socioeconomic status brought about a gap in knowledge (Gaziano, 2017).

However, the contention in this paper is shifting ground to a more reflective process of progressive problem solving geared towards addressing critical issues that tends to build or test theory since research is not just about data collection, arrangement and classification of information but data interpretation (Dissanayake, 2013; Uyangoda, 2011) that give credence to

theory building through the process of motivating researchers to bridge identified gap (Muller-Bloch & Kranz, 2015). Hence, the question of knowledge void, theory application void, contradictory evidence, evaluation void, methodological and action knowledge conflict, becomes the focal point of this paper considering the paucity of research in the behavioral sciences that tend to address knowledge gap as the basis for conducting research and theory building.

### **Concept of Knowledge**

The concept “Knowledge” is universal and has drawn scholarly attention from philosophers, psychologist, social scientists, etc. Knowledge is an expressive tool to make salient epistemic claims within a social space that is subject to human inquiry (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018; Vega-Encabo, 2016). However, knowledge is not an object but a field of force that involves the process of knowing and understanding the social world and the phenomena around it. The concept as seen in Gaziano (2017) is an information gained and remembered through the process of learning. Wang and Noe (2010) perceived knowledge to be information processed by individuals in the forms of ideas, judgment, facts and expertise relevant for organization and individual performance. Also Coker and Macaulay (2019) view knowledge as an embodiment of learned behaviour built upon careful observation of phenomenon, factual information, stored data and or skills acquired through practice and education.

However, the concept of knowledge cannot be totally understood without the epistemological assumptions that concerns the very bases of knowledge which involves its nature and forms, how it can be acquired and communicated to others (Louis, Lawrence & Keith, 2007; Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Nevertheless, knowledge is presupposes consciousness which is basic to epistemology and knowledge starting point (Omogbe, 2009), which is certain and stable. Therefore, in giving meaning to the concept of knowledge, consciousness which is a fundamental activity that takes place in the mind must be included in the definition, considering the thinking activities, knowing, learning, listening, imagination, feeling, etc, that are embedded in the human mind. Although, we are not deviating totally from Coker and Macaulay definition above but in a nutshell, this study view knowledge as an embodiment of information gained via learned behaviour and conscious activities acquired through educational practice which is a reflective awareness of our experience (that is usable in solving or addressing contemporary issue(s)). Based on the definition, the study adopts Dombrowski, Rotenberg and Bick (2013) three categorization of knowledge (experiential, skill and knowledge claim) for the purpose of justification.

### **Knowledge Categorization**

Knowledge as an integrative concept has three basic categorization as posited by Dombrowski, et al., (2013) which include skill, experiential and knowledge claim. The categorizations are interconnected with each other but seemingly with different unique features (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). Nevertheless, they encompasses both the individual and organizational level which are fundamental to knowledge manifestation in different ways through continuous interaction with the environment that support in developing conscious cognition via direct interface with the environment which consist in reflection. However, it is rooted in the sensory system which when processed is open to abstract considerations (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018).

The experiential knowledge is personal acquired knowledge through direct interface with the environment obtained via the sensory system and processed by the brain (Dombrowski, et al.,

2013; Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). Individual perspectives of viewing things around their vicinity tends to influence their interpretations of phenomenon around them such that it creates a powerful interaction between their emotional, spiritual and rational knowledge, considering the fact that their entire body system and the mind are actively involved in the participative process (Bratianu, 2015).

Knowledge claims are what we know that exist in our cognition without the use of conscious rational process that enable individuals to learn from each other as well build shared knowledge (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2015; Dombrowski, et al., 2013). The skill knowledge is a procedural kind of knowledge that is action oriented and well-structured by performing a task unconsciously in a repeated manner. It is all about performing an assigned task in accordance with a given procedure that enable individuals to recognize a pattern as well build mental model via experience (Klein, 2003).

### **Knowledge Gap**

Several studies conducted, aim to bridge identified gaps in knowledge (Gaziano, 2017) and how these gaps are bridged is fundamental to theory building and or extension. However, the knowledge gap conceptualization was born out of the field of mass communication as an infusion of mass media information into social systems where individuals of higher socioeconomic status have access to information than those of lower socioeconomic status (Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1970) such that the gaps between these segments tend to increase rather than decrease. Though, Bonfadelli (2002) in contention with the above, asserted that the gaps between these segments is as a result of some causal mechanisms for the effect of media on knowledge which he latter attribute to media structure, selective use, poor knowledge, acceptance and storage of information. Nevertheless, Gaziano (2017) viewed the concept (Knowledge gap) from two distinct partway such as awareness of an issue and in-depth information where the former hinges on the Minnesota team categorization of lower and higher socioeconomic status access to information and the latter holds on an in-depth knowledge of an information in relation to issues, causes and solutions.

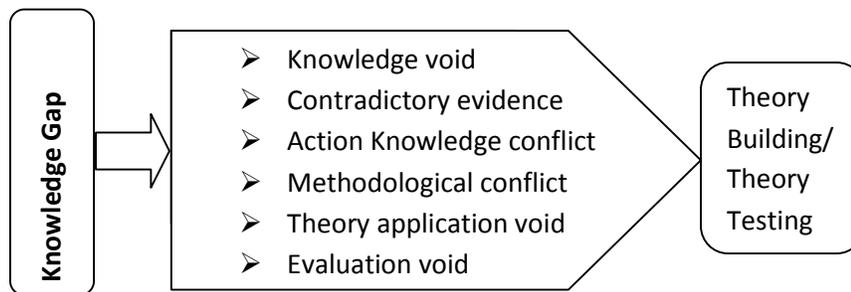
However, in the context of this paper, knowledge gap is shifting ground from the awareness issue of the Minnesota team to that of an in-depth knowledge of information that would inevitably add value to the body of knowledge. Thus, the goal of motivating researchers to bridge these gaps should identify critical issues in knowledge (Webster & Watson, 2002) that would express certain views on the nature of evidence and how it should be investigated with rigorous methodological standards that stand to be justifiable. Hence, Muller-Bloch and Kranz (2015) hold the starting point for research to begin with the identification of gap in knowledge. This gap according to Robinson, Saldanha and McKoy (2011) arises when an individual ability to draw conclusions is inadequate and narrow. Perhaps, this could be the reason why Jacobs (2011) call for resolution and action when there is a gap in information that requires researchers to resolve amidst inherent differences in information through new knowledge generation and theory introduction. However, Muller-Bloch and Kranz (2015) noted that research gap arises due to a gap in some set of information that is derived from literature synthesis that requires further investigation to resolve though recognizing other sources of knowledge gap identification other than literature synthesis is equally feasible.

### Knowledge gap identification and theory building

In an attempt to create new knowledge, research gap set the foundation for scholars to explore knowledge which is believed to be attainable through rigorous literature synthesis (Dissanayake, 2013; Robinson, et al, 2011). However, the review must be required to meet certain rigorous methodological standards of reproducibility by identifying research gaps (Rowe, 2014; Hart, 2009; Cooper, 1998) where problems must be derived by means of the review of literatures (Jacobs, 2011). Hence, the gap arises where there is paucity of information derived from the said literature synthesis and require further investigation to bridge (Muller-Bloch &Kranz, 2015). Nevertheless, in deepening our understanding of how these gaps may be identified aid in theory building which sets the template for new knowledge creation.

Perhaps, this is why Jacobs (2011) came up with the six forms of identifying research problems which include theoretical conflict, provocative exception, methodological conflict, knowledge void, contradictory evidence and action knowledge conflict. In contention with Jacobs (2011); Muller-Bloch and Kranz (2015) argued while refining their characterization of research problem in order to cause theoretical penetration expunge provocative exception and theoretical conflict due to their lack of support and identification. The current paper in an attempt to set a clear template for theory building synthesizes contradictory evidence, knowledge void, action knowledge conflict, methodological conflict, theory application void and evaluation void as the bases for theory building in behavioral research settings. It is believed that synthesizing the various constructs in a model could give rise to theory building in the behavioral sciences.

### Knowledge gap and theory building model for behavioral science research



**Sources:** *Researchers' conceptualization adapted from Muller-Bloch and Kranz, 2015; Jacobs 2011.*

According to Muller-Bloch and Kranz (2015) knowledge void result in a situation where desired research findings do not exist and as such pave way for new research in such area in order to close the void. However, Jacobs (2011) contended that knowledge void emanates in two distinct settings where the first instance results in a situation where knowledge is limited or may not exist in a particular field of research and as such require scholars to explore from related domain in order to close the void. The second results in the discrepancy in a study outcome from its expected result thereby motivating researchers to delve into such direction in order to build new knowledge base.

Contradictory evidence allows for conclusions in their own right but is contradictory when examined from a more abstract point of view. Coker and Macauley (2019) in this view, opines that contradictory evidence gap entails contradiction in thought regarding to the findings

of a previous research which could be misleading. Hence, an interrogatory approach on the contradictory evidence found in literature synthesis set the base for theory extension or building.

Knowledge conflict arises when professional behaviour and practice deviate from a research outcome or outside the research scope (Muller-Bloch & Kranz, 2015). The research in this context could seek to uncover the reason behind this deviation in behaviour in order to bridge the differences. In the case of variation of research methods, methodological conflict tends to arise in order to generate new insights or avoid distorted findings of previous research outcome. Coker and Macaulay (2019) perceived this gap to offer new line of inquiry and method in order to draw conclusion on issues that have been over researched.

In order to generate new insights into the body of knowledge, theory application becomes useful and relevant for improved action and practical problem solving (Lynham, 2000) since this application makes the practical world become an essential source of knowledge and experience for ongoing development and because theory is never complete, it becomes expedient to continually refine and develop it to avoid theoretical application void (Muller-Bloch & Kranz, 2015; Lynham, 2002).

The evaluation void is an up sooth of Muller-Bloch and Kranz (2015) developmental framework for the identification of research gaps. According to them, an evaluation void occurs when a research findings need to be evaluated or verified empirically which they believed can be done through rigorous studies challenging or confirming the notion before such assumption could be generalized or warranted to add to knowledge.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is a universally acclaimed fact that research is basically conducted on the basis of two standpoints i.e., practical problem solving and or filling identified gaps in knowledge. These standpoints give rise to the fact that individuals would always seek to universally understand the social world and the phenomenon around its environment in order to give meaning to human life. In an attempt to give this meaning, knowledge acquisition becomes relevant as it pave way for researchers to uncover(create) new knowledge through rigorous mental exploration which sets the foundational framework for analysis as well facilitates the efficient development needed for the applicability to practical real world situation. Nevertheless, identified gaps in knowledge stand to be the basis for conducting research in most field of human enquiry which we believe supports in theory building and or extension. Hence, these theory building must be capable of dealing with issues of applications which are emancipatory through the process of identifying potential hidden choices surfaced to inform human inquiry.

However, the study's position concludes that knowledge gap becomes meaningful to scholars and academia when its outcome contributes immensely to the body of knowledge by making salient epistemic claims. These claims must be subjected to human investigations and invariably add value by identifying critical issues in knowledge that would explicitly express views on the very nature of evidence and how it should be investigated with rigorous methodological approach that would be justifiable

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