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When *Not Knowing* is a Virtue: A Business Ethics Perspective

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Abstract How leaders and managers respond to *not knowing* is highly relevant given the complex, ambiguous, and chaotic business environment of the twenty-first century. Drawing on the literature from a variety of disciplines, the paper explores the dominant, unfavorable conceptualization of *not knowing*. The authors present some potential ethical implications of a negative view of *not knowing* and suggest how organizations would benefit from identifying any unhelpful aspects of the culture that may encourage unethical, undesirable, and/or hasty actions in situations of *not knowing*. The paper specifically illustrates how patience, courage, honesty, integrity, and humility are integral to negative capability in the contexts of *not knowing*. Finally, the paper calls for deeper inquiry into the role of virtue ethics in preparing managers and leaders for *not knowing* and urges organizations to embrace negative capability in *not knowing* rather than engaging in damaging delusion.

Keywords Not knowing · Virtue ethics · Negative capability · Knowing

Conceptualizing *Not Knowing*

Individuals are conditioned by being praised for knowing and criticized or reprimanded for *not knowing* (Ralston

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2010). Prior to the Information Age, ignorance or *not knowing* was reputedly tolerated as an unremarkable and inevitable part of life (Ungar 2008). The emergence of the so called 'knowledge economy' has brought rewards and recognition to those who are knowledgeable whereas *not knowing* comes with 'unfortunate connotations' (Taylor 2010, p. 401) and risks (Ungar 2008) in its associations with a lack of intelligence and/or sophistication (Roberts and Armitage 2008).

Like Alvesson and Spicer (2012, p. 1195), it is not intended here to engage in a discussion over what constitutes knowledge per se but it is clear that knowledge intensive companies and knowledge workers constitute a large part of the global economy and workforce (Davenport 2005). Although the concept of knowledge is much celebrated in the context of management studies and the business world, Alvesson (2001) referred to its conceptual "slipperiness" (p. 863) not least, as he later concluded, because in itself it is far from a reliable resource being both uncertain and ambiguous (Alvesson 2011, p. 1644). Ambiguity arises when the necessary assumptions for rational decision making are unmet and there are no guarantees that information will remedy the situation (Weick 1995, p. 92). Ambiguity may surround the intrinsic nature of a problem, the extent or reliability of information, inconsistent interpretations, lack of clarity around goals and roles, poor understanding of cause and effect or responsibility around decision making (Weick 1995, p. 93). In these kinds of contexts, individuals engage in sense-making whereby they try to understand events or issues that appear confusing, ambiguous, unexpected or simply not previously encountered (Maitlis and Christianson 2014, p. 57; Whittle and Mueller 2012, p. 112). Despite the potential for ambiguity, knowledge is considered to be a robust resource and few are prepared to question its

boundaries or limitations (Alvesson 2001, 2011, p. 1657; Alvesson and Spicer 2012, p. 1195).

A tacit assumption exists that there is something *wrong* in *not knowing*. Understandably, individuals or organizations may be inclined to avoid disclosing states of *not knowing*. The problem with this response, however, is that it lays organizations open to 'stupidity management,' fostering a false belief in mastery, superficiality, and pseudo-knowledge distracts attention from doubt, ignorance, and mindless action (Alvesson and Spicer 2012). If uncertainty and doubt are indeed the one constant in organizational life (French 2001), failing to engage with *not knowing* leaves organizations particularly vulnerable. These circumstances may explain suggestions that a deeper examination of the concept of *not knowing* is long overdue in management studies (Roberts and Armitage 2008, p. 335).

The concept of *not knowing* has been directly or indirectly explored in a variety of disciplines such as psychiatry (Betts 2009; Bion 1986; Taylor 2010), sociology (Cornish 2011; Ungar 2008), management and its epistemology (Lau 2006, p. 110; Spender 2004), leadership (Jameson 2012; Simpson and French 2006, p. 245; Simpson et al. 2002, p. 1202), and in relation to the uncertainties, ambiguities, and doubts that come with organizational change (Argyris 1986; French 2001; Handy 1991). As Ou (2009) has observed, religion may also prove a useful source of understanding *not knowing*. Buddhism, for example, in the meanings around 'sunyata,' embraces the state of *not knowing* by remaining open and resisting the apparent securities of knowledge (Ralston 2010; Smart and Hecht 2007). Likewise, 's*amyak jnana*' and '*samyak darshana*' in Jainism concern states of *not knowing* (Gopalan 1975) and Taoism also encourages the experience of *emptiness* (Smart and Hecht 2007).

A significant contribution to conceptualizing *not knowing* has emerged from the context of literature (see for example, Lau 2006; Ou 2009; Pfahl 2011) that explores what is referred to as, 'negative capability,' first coined by John Keats in 1817 in personal correspondence,

> …what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean *Negative Capability* that is when a man [sic] is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason (John Keats 1817/2002, p. 60).

Negative capability appears to be an oxymoron. French (2001, p. 483), for example, refers to the inherent paradox and contradiction of conjoining the positive concept that capability suggests with a negative. Negative capability is not synonymous with *not knowing*, per se, but rather describes how individuals experience and respond to states of *not knowing*. Thus, Ou (2009) interpreted negative capability as a readiness to acknowledge and grapple with *not knowing*. Negative capability is a challenging and complex line of inquiry, not only because it involves interrelated antecedents and successors (Ou 2009, p. x) but also because it's conceptual and theoretical development is somewhat scattered across disciplines or relegated to a contributing argument rather than being the primary focus of an entire paper. Ou's (2009, p. x) adoption of the metaphor of negative capability as a "constellation of stars" is apt.

Negative capability requires 'reflective inaction,' the curious ability to *not* do something (French 2001). Cornish's (2011, pp. 142–143) reference to 'the suspension of the active intellect,' however, does not seem to assume the abandonment of intellect altogether but rather a shift from action-orientated responses. Nor is the notion of suspending the intellect comparable to Heidegger's (1966, p. 45) "flight from thinking" as a bi-product of a superficial world or indeed as a result of the thoughtlessness accompanying stupidity management (Alvesson and Spicer 2012).

Contrary to negative capability, positive capability favors 'decisive action' by leaders and following routines (Simpson et al. 2002). It thrives in action-orientated organizations where the corporate cliché of 'stop thinking about it and start doing it' reigns (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, p. 1206). It draws on skills and competences (French 2001) and the tools of the experimental method, testing and observation (Taylor 2010, p. 404). Thus, positive capability works best with knowing, but as Haughey (2009, p. 108) cautions, it is a mistake to assume that knowing always leads to synthesis or wholes despite having an affinity to do so.

Literature around *not knowing* and negative capability has been associated with uncertainty (Jameson 2012; Simpson et al. 2002), confusion (French 2001) lack of clarity, ambiguity, doubt (Bacon 1605/1974; French 2001), the unexpected, complexity, the unfamiliar (French 2001), and ignorance (Roberts and Armitage 2008, p. 336). Whether ignorance can be regarded as conceptually synonymous with *not knowing* is debatable, however, since responses to *not knowing* such as concealment and silence assume that one knows about *not knowing* but ignorance also includes not knowing about what is not known (Roberts 2012). The concept of *not knowing* also encompasses oblivion and nothingness as well as partial knowledge and unformed possibilities. *Not knowing* necessitates 'letting go' and a tolerance for personal abandonment, loss of self and self-control (Cornish 2011, p. 144; French 2001; Simpson et al. 2002; Simpson and French 2006, p. 245). It also calls for the negation of personality (Lau 2006, p. 84) and remaining open to multiple perspectives (Cornish 2011, p. 135; Lau 2006, p. 84; Simpson et al. 2002).

Like positive and negative capability (Simpson et al. 2002, p. 1202), *Knowing* and *not knowing* are not polarized or mutually exclusive but linked on a continuum. As Roberts (2012) maintains, knowing begins with *not knowing*. Even knowing is not certain being subject to revision. It is only in the discovery and experience of *not knowing* that one can know (Smart and Hecht 2007). This signifies a temporal relationship in that what is known today may not have been known in the past. Similarly, Heifetz (1996) regards the relationship between *not knowing* and *knowing* as one that moves back and forth between the two. De Bruin (2013, p. 587) implies that individuals are most likely to adopt positive capability in investigating issues and action in the pursuit of knowledge and only when this course reaps inconclusive results do they then suspend belief, neither believing or not believing. Thus individuals tend to assume that some knowledge around a subject matter exists before realising it doesn't and at this point, states of *not knowing* are established. Given the blurring between *knowing* and *not knowing,* the tendency to favor *not knowing* over knowing is misplaced. One is not superior to the other or more moral (Simpson et al. 2002; Smart and Hecht 2007). In other words, there are no sharp distinctions between knowledge and ignorance (when it is defined as *not knowing*) (Roberts and Armitage 2008) because ignorance is tied to the uncertainty and contested nature of knowledge in that where one can be found, so can the other (Ungar 2008).

The Implications of *Not Knowing* in Management and Organizations

Not knowing and negative capability are relevant to managers, not least because subordinates expect them to *know*, to be in control of situations (Heifetz 1996) and to deal with wicked problems that are ambiguous, novel, confusing, complex, and having no right or wrong answer (Grint 2005). Weick (1995, p. 91) has also observed that organizations routinely have to make sense of things in ambiguous and uncertain circumstances. Negative capability is probably most desirable for those operating in organic or adaptive roles (Heifetz 1996) such as strategic leadership, innovation, research and development, and consulting, where expert advice or solutions to problems cannot always be informed by knowledge obtained from formal education (Alvesson 1993; Marsh 2009) as it has traditionally been delivered.

French (1999, p. 4) equates *not knowing* with 'capacity' rather like 'a containing space whose nature enables something to happen.' Organizations need to consciously make spaces for *not knowing* so that leaders and managers are able to gain experience in developing negative capability that allow for unexpected insights to emerge. Without those spaces that make possible the emptiness of mind required for creativity (Lau 2006, p. 110), managers will likely approach problems arising from *not knowing* by treating them in the same way as other similar ones encountered in the past since imitation, according to Garrels (2011), is how we structure and understand the world. The organizational spaces for *not knowing* and negative capability are unlikely to flourish in contexts where, according to Simpson et al. (2002) and Cornish (2011), a societal and organizational culture is dominated by targets, deadlines, control, and performativity. When organizations perpetuate a one sided, negative view of *not knowing,* the development of negative capability is stigmatized and opportunities to learn about what is not known or for new thoughts and ideas to emerge are lost (French 1999; 2001).

Resistance to *not knowing* and negative capability has been explained to some extent by high anxiety over potential social disapproval and loss of control (French 1999, 2001). In psychological terms, *not knowing* is experienced by individuals in ways that signal safety or unsafety (Tynan 2005). Feeling unsafe in the experience of *not knowing* arises from negative evaluations and social judgments that intensify existential anxiety around becoming insignificant and isolated (Giddens 1991). In some senses, it is those managers who have 'an active, seeking mind' (French 2001, p. 483) otherwise applauded, that may be most resistant to accepting the mystery inherent in *not knowing.*

Freud's daughter, Freud (1939), maintained that people draw on unconscious defense mechanisms when faced with unpleasant circumstances. Assuming that anxiety around *not knowing* constitutes an unpleasant experience, Anna Freud's work can be usefully applied to that context of *not knowing.* For example, *denial* could be framed as refusal to acknowledge *not knowing*, *rationalization,* making an acceptable excuse for *not knowing*, *displacement* as indulging in emotional outbursts arising from the anxiety around *not knowing*, *regression* as behaving childlike in a state of *not knowing*, *identification* as copying others or following how others behave when one does not know about something and *substitution* may be interpreted as drawing attention to proficiency in another area so as to cover up *not knowing.*

Concealing *not knowing* is one form of denial. In some organizations, ambiguity is repressed thereby creating a false sense of certainty (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, p. 1202). Alvesson (1993) suggests that in struggling with ambiguity, individuals may engage in certain kinds of rhetoric. Silence, for example, as a form of rhetoric (Glenn 2004), may be adopted as a strategy for concealing *not knowing* and can be explained in terms of the 'mum effect' referring to the tendency to avoid communicating bad news (Tesser and Rosen 1972).

A gamut of unwanted consequences can arise in organizational cultures where employees perceive negative capability as 'risky' in situations of *not knowing*. The unacceptability of *not knowing* may give rise to 'skilled incompetence' whereby those who are able to communicate spontaneously and unrehearsed come to habitually avoid difficult and searching questions and thereby fail to learn from them in the process (Argyris 1986). An inability to deal with *not knowing* may also give rise to mindless action, or more precisely, reaction (Simpson et al. 2002). Premature attempts to manage the unknown may result in misguidedly oversimplifying inherently complex issues by breaking down problems into manageable parts (French 2001)—an error bemoaned by Gosling and Mintzberg (2003, p. 54). Approaching *not knowing* in this way is not surprising given that humans tend to make sense of things by providing structures around what is known (Weick 1995, p. 4) and divide up or categorize knowledge into various forms (Alvesson 2011, p. 1644; Cornish 2011, pp. 142–143). *Not knowing* may also lead people to do what they have always done in similar situations, perhaps because humans reportedly cling to the security of what is known in order to reduce the intensity of uncertainty (Betts 2009; Bion 1986, p. 124; Symginton and Symginton 2002).

Ana Freud's (1939) defense mechanisms and some of the unwanted consequences of avoiding *not knowing*, described in the previous paragraph, have been expressed elsewhere in the literature as dispersal (Simpson et al. 2002). The term 'dispersal' was adopted by the philosopher, Jacob Needleman, to describe how humans, in times of uncertainty around difficult questions, are moved to provide some sort of explanation, however, inadequate (Needleman 1980, p.167). Dispersal is the diversion of energy away from engagement and toward distraction and when someone experiences the impulse to disperse; it may well suggest that negative capability is most needed (Simpson et al. 2002, p. 1213). French (2001) interprets Needleman's use of the term dispersal as the path an individual takes when he or she cannot tolerate the emotional strain of uncertainty and rather than relying on a capacity for negative capability, rushes to action (French 2001). Unsatisfactory responses to anxiety, associated with *not knowing*, are arguably a form of impression management (Goffman 1959) or emotional labor that can come at a psychological cost to well-being, inducing stress, emotional exhaustion, and dissonance (Humphrey 2012; Humphrey et al. 2008). Alvesson (2011, p. 1649) has also alluded to the energy that is invested into impression management when knowledge work involves ambiguity. Under these circumstances, the ethics, authenticity, and trustworthiness of managers and employees are tested (Gardner et al. 2009; Humphrey 2012).

A capacity for reflection is associated with the appropriate management of *not knowing* where negative capability is required (French 2001). Gosling and Mintzberg (2003) identified a reflective mind-set that enables managers to take a 'step back' from situations and think them through (p. 56). Conversely, Alvesson and Spicer (2012) argue that stupidity management is characterized by a lack of reflection. Reflection in this sense is reminiscent of Heidegger's (1966, p. 46) meditative thinking—the contemplation of meaning operates as a counter to calculative thinking, an obsession with computation, and a tendency to race from one prospect to another. It has been argued that when organizations fail to make spaces for reflection in contexts of *not knowing*, ethical scandals associated with disasters, corporate crimes, and financial crisis become more likely (Karakas 2010; Whittle and Mueller 2012).

Since ethics offers little certainty (Hartman 2008, p. 314) and has been described as a reflective process (Bishop 2013), it provides an appropriate lens or discipline for appreciating *not knowing*. As Cornish (2011, p. 136) has also observed, the management of complexity and uncertainty is embedded in areas of ethics and reflective practice. That is, a capacity for reflective inaction and negative capability is necessary in the uncertain conditions of contemporary organizations from an ethical perspective (Ou 2009; Simpson et al. 2002, p. 1224). French (2001) described negative capability as a response to 'grey' areas in organizational life. These 'shades of grey' can leave organizations vulnerable to ethical lapses of judgment (Bishop 2013, p. 636) and suggest that clear communication around ethical behavior is imperative. Although no "magic formula" exists for deciding whether a positive or negative capability is appropriate in a particular situation (Simpson et al. 2002, p. 1202) by making a space for necessary reflection, ethical decision making is more likely to occur (Bishop 2013).

Virtue Ethics in Negative Capability and Contexts of *Not Knowing*

Virtue ethics has attracted considerable attention in business ethics (De Bruin 2013, p. 583) and negative capability, described as moral in nature (Lau 2006, p. 110; Ou 2009) has common ground with virtue ethics too (Cornish 2011, p. 142). As Winter (2012) argued, it has long since been established that virtue is also connected to knowledge and by extension, we suggest that it also has a relationship with *not knowing* and that negative capability calls for a number of virtues. De Bruin (2013: 584) for example, refers to the virtue of

temperance or sobriety in the sense of showing restraint rather than rushing toward assumptions without proper consideration. Simpson et al. (2002) linked negative capability to tolerance. Courage, patience, integrity, humility, and honesty are also associated with negative capability and are variously described as both epistemic and Aristotelian moral virtues tied to the common good, the well-being of self and others (De Bruin 2013, p. 585; Hartman 2006; Hollenbeck 2009, p. 137).

Courage

Courage, like other epistemic virtues, is often referred to as an aspect of character (Amos and Klimoski 2014; Crossman 2013, p. 544; Intezari and Pauleen 2014; Koerner 2014, p. 16). Curiously, it is under-researched at the organizational level (Amos and Klimoski 2014, p. 114) if one accepts the assertion that it is at the heart of good management and decision making (Harris 2013). Organizations can be morally complex environments where courage is required to practice ethical action (Owens and Hekman 2012) and refrain from unethical actions whatever the pressures and temptations (Hannah et al. 2011, p. 555). In her work focussing upon courage in organizational settings, Koerner (2014, p. 64) assumes that courage involves an intentional action in pursuit of a moral goal despite some threat. In situations of *not knowing,* negative capability involves courage because not acting immediately may risk social losses such as losing friends (or in the work context, close colleagues) (Koerner 2014) or psychological pain in having to face fear and anxiety (Cornish 2011, p. 136; Koerner 2014; Simpson and French 2006; Simpson et al. 2002, p. 1214) or economic losses through career derailment (Koerner 2014). Courage is required too, in having to resist politically safe decisions and conventional wisdom (Simpson et al. 2002, p. 1214).

In the face of threats like this, the courageous also need to remain optimistic and confident (Amos and Klimoski 2014, p. 116; Aristotle 2004, p. 69) in order to inspire and reassure others in the organization who will likely share anxieties around *not knowing* and the identification of an appropriate response. In this sense, negative capability in contexts of *not knowing* is not simply a matter for the individual manager. It has political and social ramifications (Lau 2006, p. 110; Ou 2009). Indeed, the social significance of courage is intrinsic to assertions that it is grounded in self-sacrifice and service to the common good (Harris 2013; Koerner 2014, p. 65) as is virtue ethics more broadly (Martin 2011, p. 89). Just as managers, like academics (according to Haughey 2009, p. 105) reputedly invest energy into knowing for the benefit of the common good, the courage required in negative capability and *not knowing* would seem to have the same aim.

Patience

Patience has been connected with negative capability and states of *not knowing* by Bion, the psychoanalyst, and others (Simpson and French 2006). Callan (1993) suggested that patience, in comparison to courage, is a woefully marginalized virtue in contemporary ethics and it would still seem to be the case. Patience involves 'slowing down, waiting, enduring and doing things at the appropriate pace and the appropriate time' (Mehta 2011, p. 417). The valuing of time that all but defines patience (Mehta 2011) is integral to negative capability in the context of *not knowing* where time is necessary to listen, observe, wait for insights, or perhaps for relationships to develop or resources to become available (Simpson et al. 2002, p. 1202). It is the antithesis of the error of impatience and consequent rushing to assertions rather than being prepared to suspend judgment in moments of doubt (Bacon 1605/ 1974, p. 40). The instant gratification of knowledge seekers with the emergence of the Internet arguably contributes to a certain contemporary expectation of finding things out quickly and may run counter to acknowledging patience as a virtue. Similarly, Simpson and French (2006, p. 246) refer to the tendency to want to address the situation of *not knowing* as soon as possible rather than considering it as an unavoidable part of life that affords us with an opportunity to learn. Cornish (2011, p. 144), by drawing on the work of others, illustrates this point, alluding to the Apollo and Cuban missile crises as examples of events where it was necessary to endure a period of anxiety patiently rather than responding unwisely in haste.

Transparency, Honesty, and Integrity

An ethical approach to situations of *not knowing* entails integrity, honesty, and transparency. Carr (2014) has identified honesty as an epistemic virtue and Singh (2008) and Trevino et al. (2003) have identified all three as virtues and intrinsic to ethical approaches in both managerial and organizational functions. Integrity is usually viewed as a construct that manifests on the individual level compared to say transparency that tends to be regarded as an organizational-level construct (Palanski et al. 2011, p. 201). In the context of this inquiry, transparency is understood to be concerned with 'personal decisions around processes, procedures, performance and function' (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer 2012, p. 139) and therefore intrinsically linked to ethical forms of communication. That is, transparency involves revealing 'personal decisions around processes, procedures, performance and function' and is therefore intrinsically linked to ethical forms of communication. As an epistemic and moral virtue, integral to good character (Scherkoske 2012, p. 186) integrity is crucial in situations

of *not knowing*. Behavioral integrity has been defined as a consistency between words and actions and is particularly relevant to negative capability in that managers with integrity do not bow under the pressure to proceed and demonstrate a resistance to taking the easier path (Provis, forthcoming). As discussed earlier in this paper, one response to *not knowing* is concealment. Concealment of *not knowing* is an intentional deception designed to protect self-interest rather than organizational interests or those of the common good (Fraedrich et al. 2013). Dishonesty and untruthfulness include incomplete disclosure and suggest a lack of integrity; all behaviors of reputable organizations shun (Fraedrich et al. 2013).

As argued earlier in this paper, how managers, executives, or leaders respond to situations of *not knowing* has social and cultural implications for the whole organization. Their words and actions disseminate ethical or unethical examples for others around them to follow (Sims 1999). If the tendency to cover up *not knowing* is present among managers or leaders, they may thus contribute to unethical organizational climates (Schminke et al. 2005; Trevino et al. 1998) through poor role modeling (Kaptein 2011; Sims and Brinkmann 2002).

Addressing unethical behavior is an organizational responsibility (Stead et al. 1990). Managers and leaders should attract a high level of scrutiny not least because any unethical behavior has the potential to be 'contagious,' contaminating all levels of the organization (Singh 2008, p. 733). The organizational environment is crucial in making an ethical space for negative capability in situations of *not knowing* because individuals are more likely to commit unethical actions in organizations where hiding relevant information and being secretive and deceitful are perceived to be acceptable and in some cases, even desirable. The conditions are ripe for unethical responses to *not knowing* where managers are punished and deemed incompetent when they are honest about what they do not know (Roberts and Armitage 2008; Sims 1999) or where a highly competitive, profit-driven environment exists (Fraedrich et al. 2013).

Humility

Humility is said to be constituted of self-awareness (recognizing one's 'abilities and limitations'), openness (willingness to 'learn from others'), and transcendence (realization of the presence of 'something greater than the self') (Morris et al. 2005, p. 1331). Humility has been acknowledged as an important aspect of leadership, organizational effectiveness, and perceptions of job performance (Johnson et al. 2011; Morris et al. 2005; Owens and Hekman 2012). Despite arguments suggesting its importance and that humility is an emerging research topic in

management and psychology (see Ou et al. 2014), little appears to be known about the construct (Owens and Hekman 2012, p. 787) and even less about its role as a virtue, necessary for the development of negative capability in contexts of *not knowing*.

Concealing *not knowing* suggests a lack of humility in a manager (Senge and Kaeufer 2000, p. 25) who may be reluctant to be perceived as less than well informed. Negative capability invites humility, the suspension of the ego and open communication (Cornish 2011; Simpson et al. 2002) around personal vulnerability. The Aristotelian epistemic virtue of humility accepts fallibility in contrast to the vice of vanity where individuals are preoccupied by self-importance, parading what they do know and failing to acknowledge all they do not and the limitations of personal intellectual capacities (De Bruin 2013, pp. 591–592).

Conclusion

By encouraging the virtues of courage, patience, transparency, honesty, integrity, and humility, the stage is set for an optimum response to *not knowing*. It is understandable that individuals and organizations would ultimately want to move from *not knowing* to knowing, but preferable that they should do so with inquisitiveness and not desperation (French 2001). As Roberts (2012) appears to imply, however, not all unknowns subsequently prove knowable but through an awareness of negative capability, habitual, and reactive responses may well come under closer scrutiny (Simpson et al. 2002, p. 1211). Organizations would benefit from identifying any unhelpful aspects of the culture that may encourage unethical, undesirable, and/or hasty actions in situations of *not knowing*. This kind of process begins with management scholars and practitioners rethinking the negative notions attached to *not knowing* and appreciating its usefulness and inevitability. At the same time, we caution managers of the possibility that some employees may try to take advantage of an organization's appreciation or tolerance for *not knowing* as a 'cloak of invisibility' around procrastination and shirking responsibility.

The discussion here prompts a call for a deeper, empirical inquiry by researchers into the role of virtue ethics in preparing managers and leaders for *not knowing*. Research of this nature will better prepare organizations in planning for appropriate professional development and other strategies for assessing any cultural factors within the organization that may foster or impede ethical responses to *not knowing*. The aim was for organizations and their leaders to embrace negative capability in *not knowing* rather than engaging in damaging delusion and dispersal.

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