

***Hermeneutic method:  
Theory of interpretation in action***


- Introduction and plan
- Background, authors and reading
- Hermeneutics, its roots and connections
- Text and its analogues
- History and distance
- Process of understanding
- Reflection
- Theory
- Evaluation
- Sharing and action
- Summary

***October 2010***



**Pradip Sarkar:**  
Management of inter-org concerns  
*Lived experience*  
*Evaluation - confirmability*  
Husserl / van Manen

**Tanya Linden:**  
Domain knowledge crystallisation  
*Action - Reflective theory formation*  
*Process investigation*  
Gadamer / Heidegger



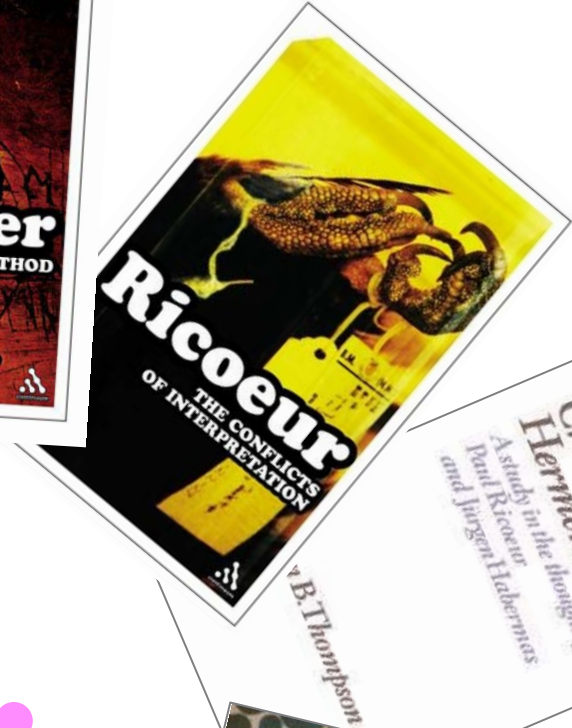
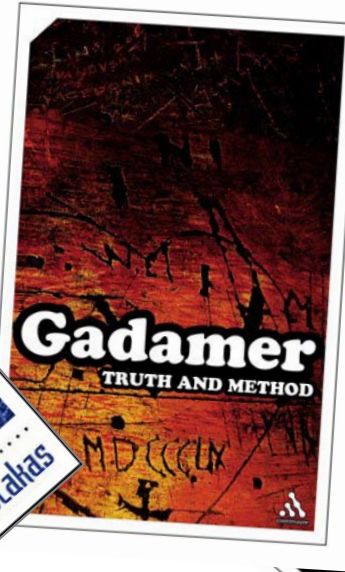
**Projects with the  
elements of  
Hermeneutics &  
Phenomenology**

**Belinda Moloney:**  
Perception of value in IS  
*Primacy of perception*  
*Theoretical saturation*  
Merleau-Ponty

**Stas Lukaitis:**  
Ownership in B/IT alignment  
*Imaginative variation - dialectics*  
*Collaborative hermeneutics*  
Gadamer / Ricoeur

# Essential resources on Hermeneutics

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# What is Hermeneutics?

Word  
Philosophy  
Theory  
Methods  
Concepts

## Word - Understanding

- *Hermeneuion (Greek)* = to interpret, to understand
- *Hermes (Greek mythology)* = divine messenger

## History – Study of text

- Greeks, Christians and Jews studied their sacred and legal texts
- In seventeenth century biblical studies developed new methods
- Focus on *critical interpretation* of sacred text (*exegesis*)
- Hermeneutics consists of *theories, principles, rules and methods*
- Hermeneutics is the *'grammar' and 'logic'* of exegesis

## Philosophy – Theory of interpretation

- Language is central to understanding –  
*"The symbol gives rise to thought"* (Ricoeur)
- Focus on *sharing of meaning* between people
- Central aim is to *gain understanding*
- Implied objective is to grasp an author's *meaning and intention*
- Hermeneutics is the *theory of interpretation*

## What is 'text'?

- Any message that conveys meaning intended by its author
- Any system of signs capable of conveying meaning

## What is a text analogue?

- Anything that can be interpreted as a message conveying meaning
- Anything that was created with the intention of being perceived and understood
- Anything that is supposed to trigger cognitive or emotional responses

## 'Text' in 4 reported projects:

- Book ● ● ●
- Article or essay ● ● ●
- Elicited opinion ● ● ● ●
- Interview transcript ● ● ● ●
- Tabulated data ● ● ● ●
- Notes and reflections ● ● ● ●
- Software design ● ● ● ●
- Computer screen ● ● ● ●
- Movie or video recording ● ● ● ●
- Event, action or process ● ● ● ●

## What else can be text?

- Observation
- Instructions
- Requirements specification
- Computer listing or report
- Computer program
- Speech
- Music or song
- Dance or performance
- Artwork



## ■ Modern Hermeneutics (German roots)

- *Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher* was a German Protestant theologian who compared reading of text to speaker-listener interaction. He suggested that grammar elucidates intention and assumptions.
- *Wilhelm Dilthey* was Schleiermacher's biographer, who argued that to gain understanding interpreter needs to move from text to the historical and social circumstances of the writer.
- *Martin Heidegger* established phenomenological hermeneutics, with focus on understanding of human existence rather than mere text (hermeneutic of *Dasein* - the being for whom being is a question).
- *Hans-Georg Gadamer* recognised tradition as including inquirer who mediates between the past and present, and who fuses multiple horizons of understanding (e.g. the author's and interpreter's).
- *Jürgen Habermas* is the founder of critical hermeneutics, in which any understanding is viewed as occurring in the social context of conflicting interests, which must be understood and acted on by the investigator.

## ■ Foundation of the Hermeneutic Method (Arc)

- Gadamer suggested a method of inquiry where understanding is gained by circular movement from whole to its parts and then from parts to the whole in ever-widening circle of meaning.

## **Author / Co-researcher**

- holds personal views and opinions about some phenomenon;

## **Interpreter / Researcher**

- reveals the author's intended meaning and assumptions;

## **Distance**

- an author and interpreter are separated by historical and cultural circumstances;

## **Text**

- symbolic and purposeful message produced by an author;

## **Aim**

- for the interpreter to understand the author's views and opinions by studying his or her text;

## **Starting point**

- interpreter's own biases, prejudices and misjudgements form the initial understanding;

## **Hermeneutic circle**

- insights gained iteratively from various sources, analysed for consistency of views and then integrated;

## **Reflexivity**

- An interpreter is aware of the influence of own views on the process of understanding;

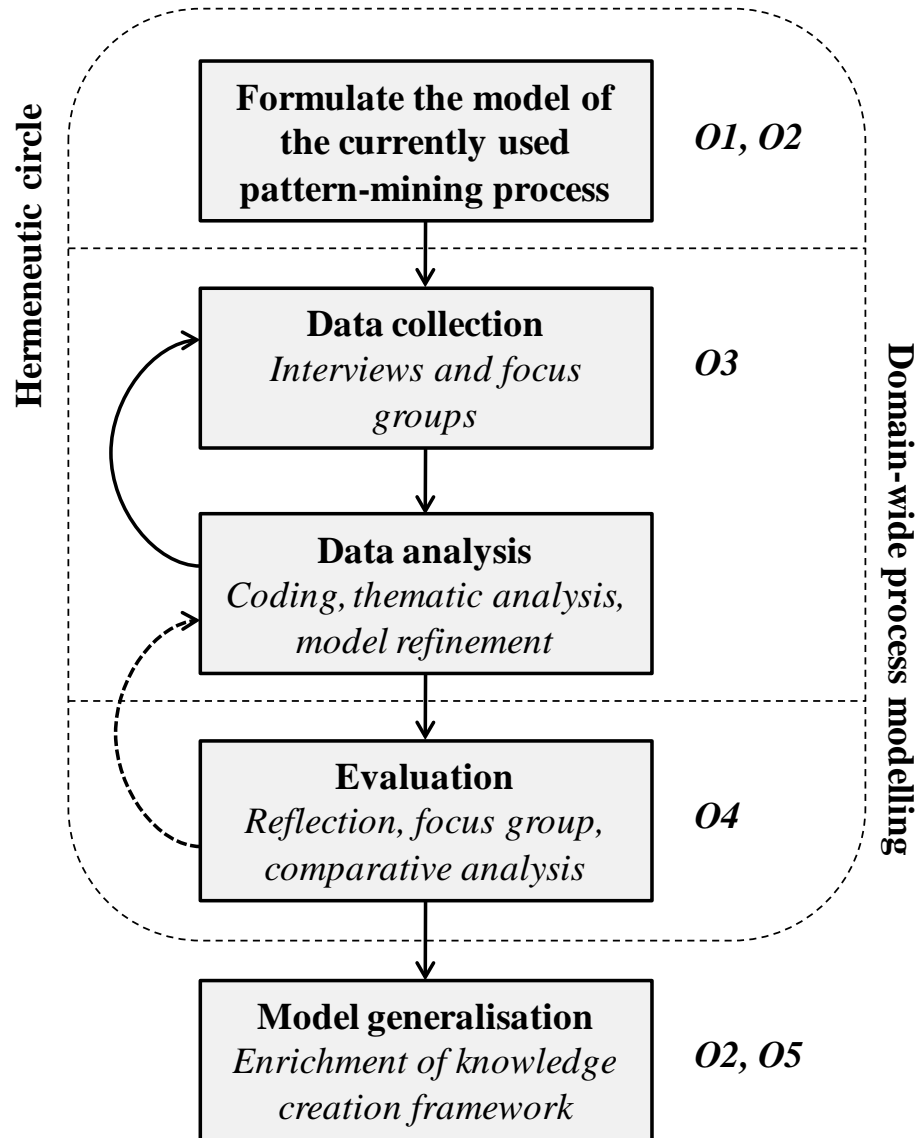
## **End point**

- all insights are fused into a consistent whole and new insights no longer alter this understanding;
- Understanding gained in the process can be put into a purposeful action.



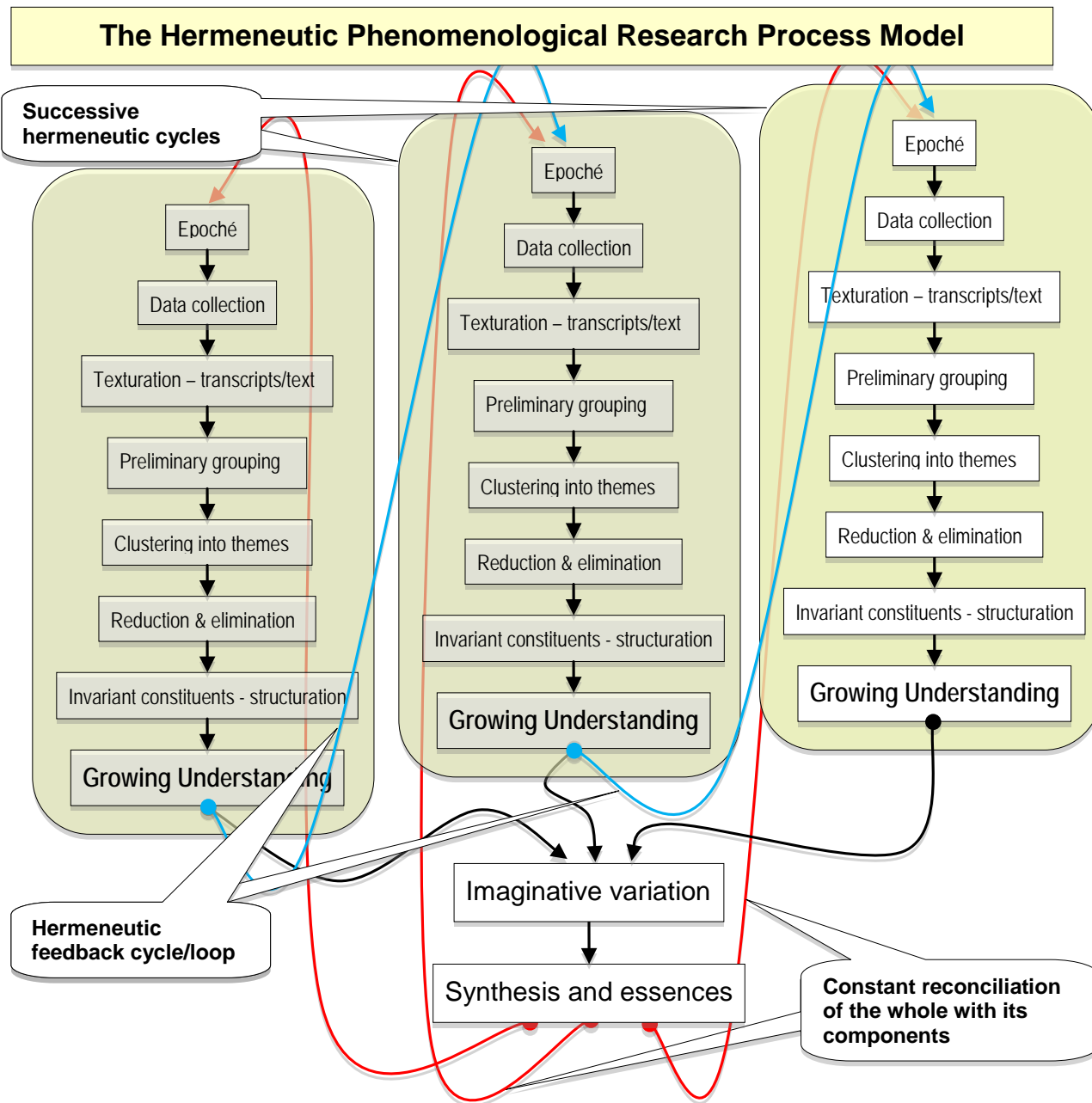
# Example of Hermeneutic Method

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● (Linden 2010)

# Example of Hermeneutic Phenomenological Method 10



(Lukaitis 2010)

# How can understanding be understood?

Distance

Bias and prejudices

Sources of information

Principle of suspicion

Suspension of judgment

Fusion of horizons

Dialectic

Reflection and theory formation

Circularity and saturation

- **Distance** between the author and the reader is a challenge for hermeneutic researchers:
  - Place and time
  - Language and culture
  - Intention and social milieu
- **In all four of the previously mentioned projects:**
  - Researchers were academics, whereas their co-researchers were practitioners;
  - Discussions were carried using language and concepts from the professional domain, often unfamiliar to the researchers;
  - Many reported events occurred in some unknown locations;
  - Majority of investigated phenomena occurred in the past (months and years before).
- **Prior experience** alters the researcher's understanding of analysed text:
  - Biases
  - Prejudices
  - Prejudgements
- **In all four of the previously mentioned projects:**
  - Researchers personally experienced investigated phenomena;
  - Researchers were involved in the professional practice;
  - Researchers conducted literature study to acquire preliminary knowledge;
  - Pilot studies were undertaken;
  - Research questions were selected prior to work commencement.



- Data is commonly collected from **multiple sources** of information.
- Co-researchers are assumed fallible, so all data is cross-checked and subjected to the researcher's **suspicion**.
- At the same time, the researcher is conscious of own biases and must aim to suspend personal **judgment** in interpretation.
- **Fusion of horizons** of understanding is the main objective of data analysis. This can be aided with texturation and coding, structuration via thematic analysis, tabulation of insights, charting, etc.
- The process is repeated by bringing new insights in a circular fashion until **saturation** and understanding.

## Why is it important to distrust your co-researchers' statements?

- Their memories are fallible;
- They are likely to incorrectly rationalise their actions;
- They may colourise their accounts of past events;
- They may be novelising their stories to capture your interest;
- They may unconsciously be willing to please their interviewer;
- They may lie to present their case from the best stand point;
- Your original questions may have been leading or misleading;
- Your record of interview may incorrectly reflect the actual statement;
- Your interpretation of what's been recorded may be incorrect;
- Etc...

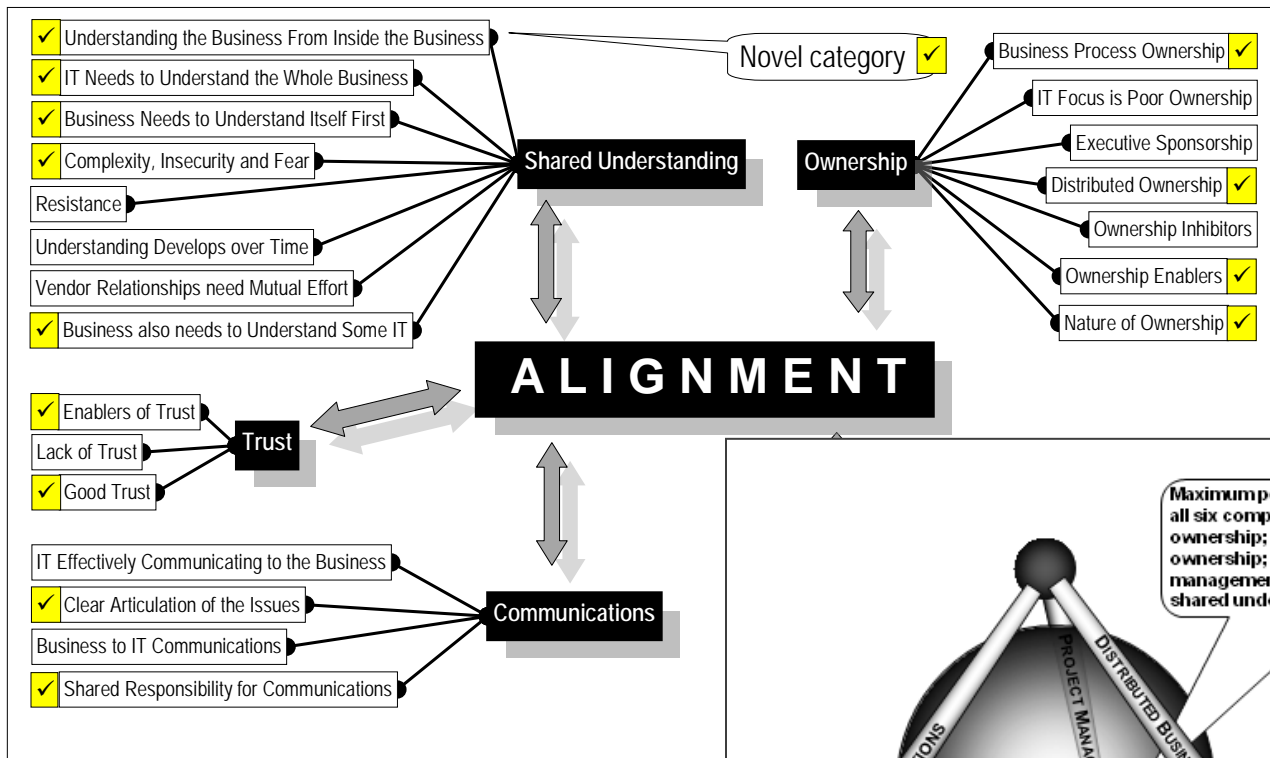
- All emerging findings are open to dialectics, i.e. opposing views are actively sought before their synthesis.
- In absence of disagreement, additional sources of information are sought, interpretations are varied, and omissions are filled.

● (Lukaitis and Cybulski 2004)

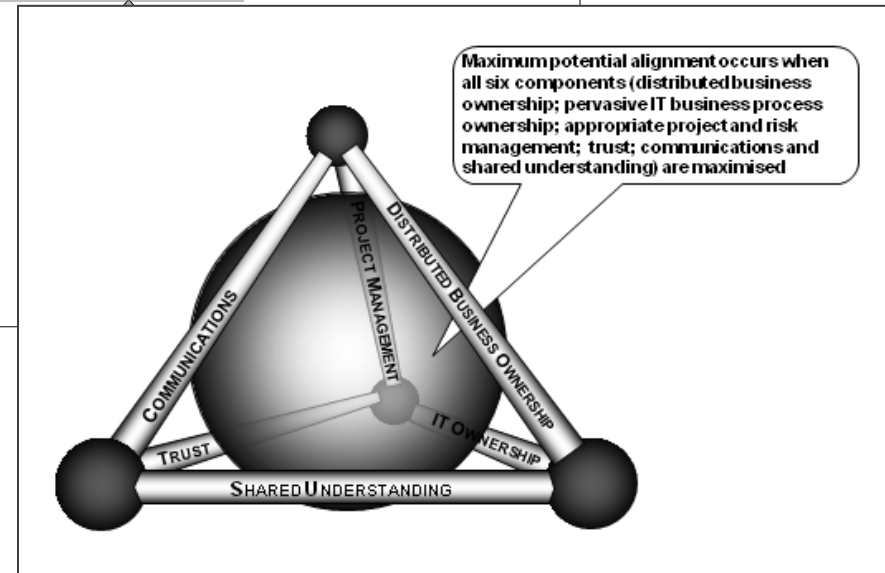
Ref #	Intention of Communicative Action	Stakeholder	Opinion	Phenomena	Researcher's Interpretation / Findings
M3	Fact  Setting expectations	Authors Hindsight	"In August 1994, Mayor Webb approved the construction of a backup system. At the same time, he notified BAE of a \$12,000-a-day penalty for not finishing the baggage system by BAE's original October 29, 1993, completion date."	Non-delivery, breakdown of communication, start of hostilities	Legal means such as penalties are not advisable in situations which require cooperation. Whenever there is still some chance of problem resolution, communication and negotiation should be used instead.
M4	Novelisation  Setting expectations	Gene Di Fonzo President BAE 1994	"He would reflect whether he should just cancel the contract and cut his losses, or attempt to negotiate with the city for the support required to finish the system as specified, despite the severe deterioration in communication and rising hostility."	Regidity, lack of communication, hostility	If all fails project cancelling the projects may be the only option. Negotiating project outcomes in case of hostility is also an option.
M5	Setting expectations  Leading  Appeal to technical prowess	Authors Hindsight	"Could the problem with the automated system be overcome with the dedication of additional resources? Given that the system represented a significant departure from conventional technology, would reducing its size and complexity facilitate resolution of the problems that plagued it?"	Hypothesis: Smaller size and complexity additional resources	By offering a hypothetical reason for the project collapse early in the teaching case, the authors are likely to lead the reader towards these as a conclusion.

These documents that can be further analysed





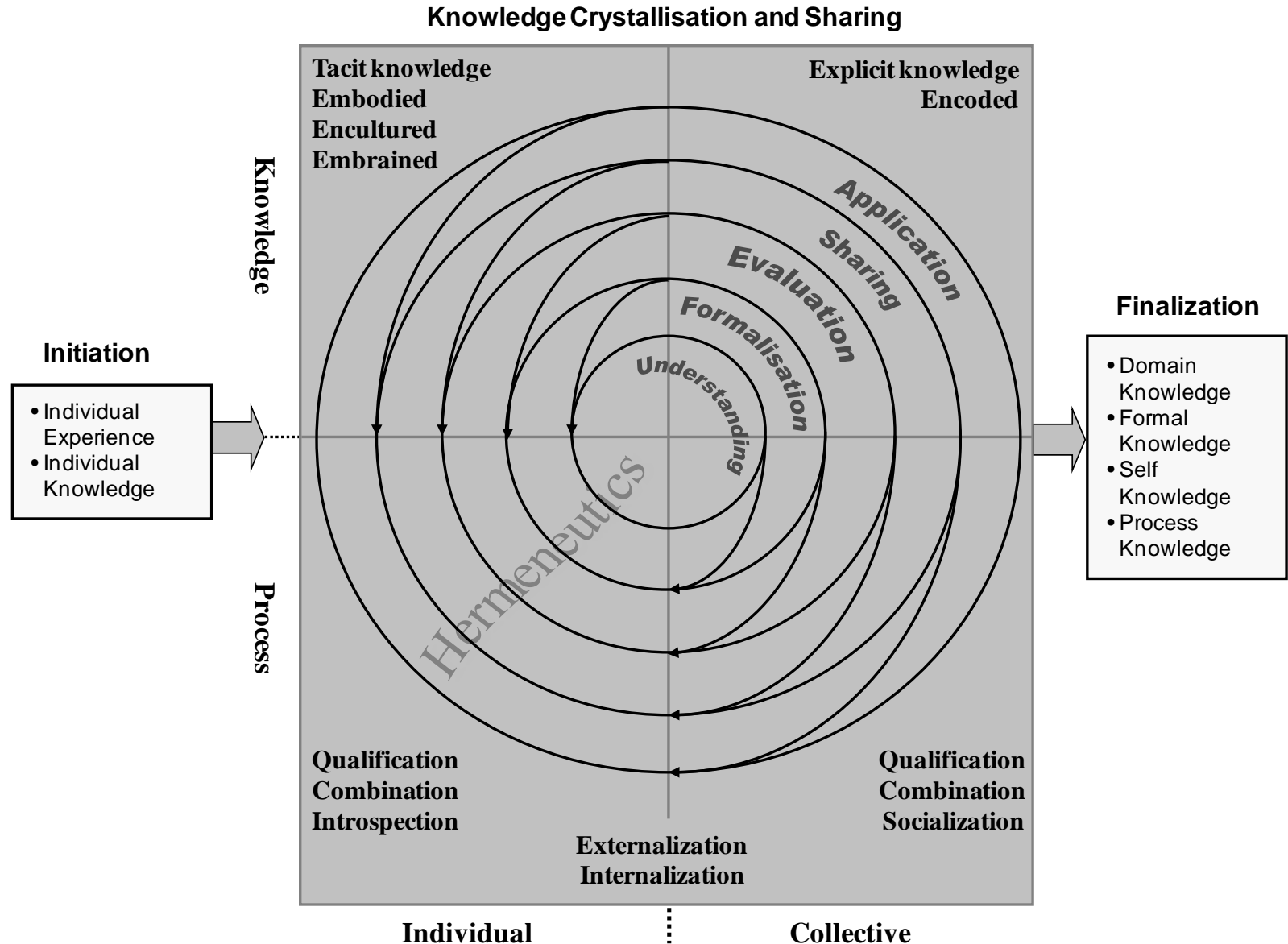
(Lukaitis 2010)



# Caution!

**Essence statement 2:** Each business will have a “maximum potential alignment” that can be achieved depending on the effectiveness, optimality and interactions between the six identified factors at any given point in time.

This meta-model of a process was constructed entirely from researcher's reflections collected in the course of literature survey and the subsequent investigation. (Linden 2010) ●





Is it only understanding?

Circle of knowledge  
Evaluation of hermeneutic findings  
Sharing and application  
Individual and collective knowledge  
Double hermeneutics



## Hints and guidelines

There are no facts only opinions

State your biases and prejudices

Suspend your judgment

Expose all text

Make interpretation explicit

Seek alternative interpretation

Failure is valuable to learn from

There is not one truth

Reflections and findings are also text

Show analysis and synthesis

Stop on saturation

Evaluate not validate

Seek confirmability not generalizability

Formulate the essence

**Summary and conclusion:**  
**What does it all mean?**

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Thank you!  
Any questions?