

An Outsider's Expressed Ignorance in the Form of Six Big Questions

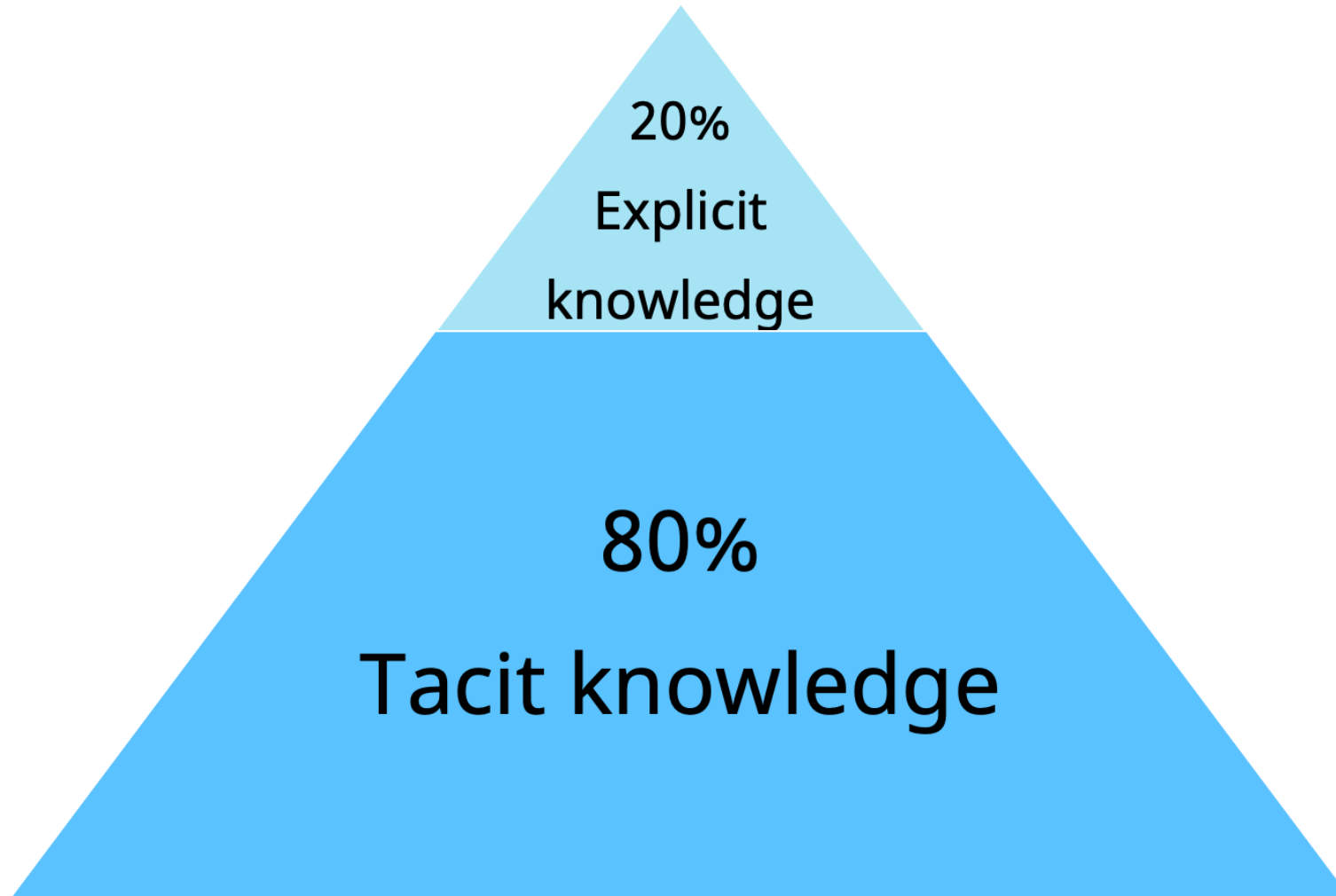
Dean Keith Simonton, Discussant

1. What exactly is insider knowledge?

- Explicit vs implicit?
- Secret vs accessible?
- Generic vs task specific?

e.g. the earlier presentation of “tacit” knowledge and its main features, but equivalent to insider knowledge or just a subset?

In any event, often estimated as extremely important ...



** Source: Botkin J, Seeley C. The knowledge management manifesto. Knowledge Management Review, 2001*

N.B.: The above assumed to drive more *innovation*

2. What role does such knowledge play in high performance?

- Knowing who knows what?
- Tricks of the trade?
- Tacit or intuitive “feel”?

also intra-group communication and cohesion, as in Army insider language? Essential to elite military units?



The Immortals of Persia



The Sacred Band of Thebes



Alexander's cavalry



Julius Caesar's 10th Legion



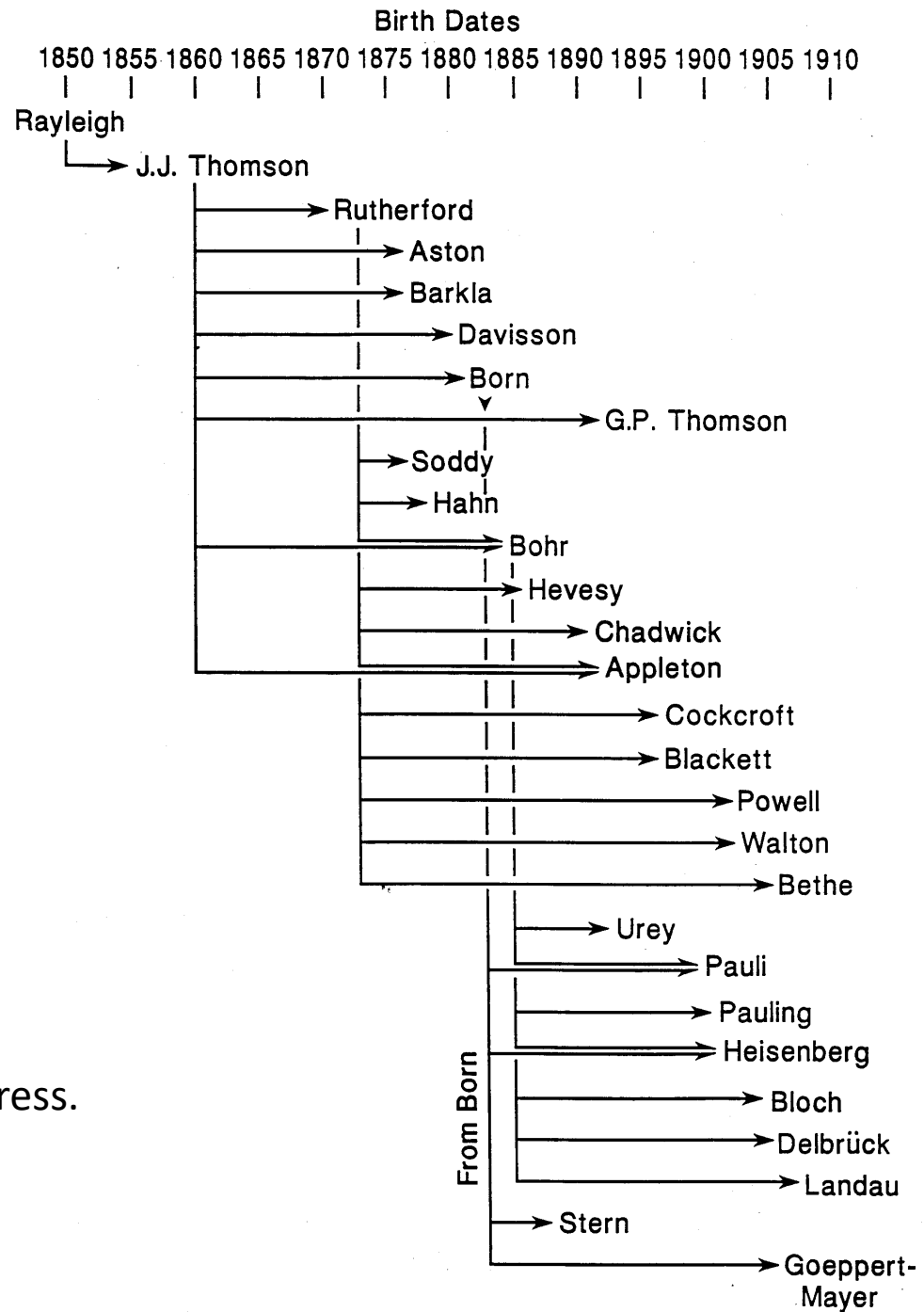
The Varangian Guard of Byzantium

**... Mongolian cavalry,
Japanese samurai,
Hospitaller Knights,
English longbowmen,
Swiss Reisläufer,
Ottoman Janissaries,
Nepalese Gurkhas,
RAF Fighter Command,
Navy Seals,
Delta Force, ...**

3. Who are the insiders who possess this knowledge?

- Acquired: training, position, seniority?
- Arbitrary: age, gender, ethnicity, ancestry, SES?

e.g. earlier treatment of gatekeepers in academic talent development,
particularly when gatekeepers are also mentors;
To illustrate, ...



Specific Illustration:

Nobel laureates who studied under previous Nobel laureates

Reconfigured from

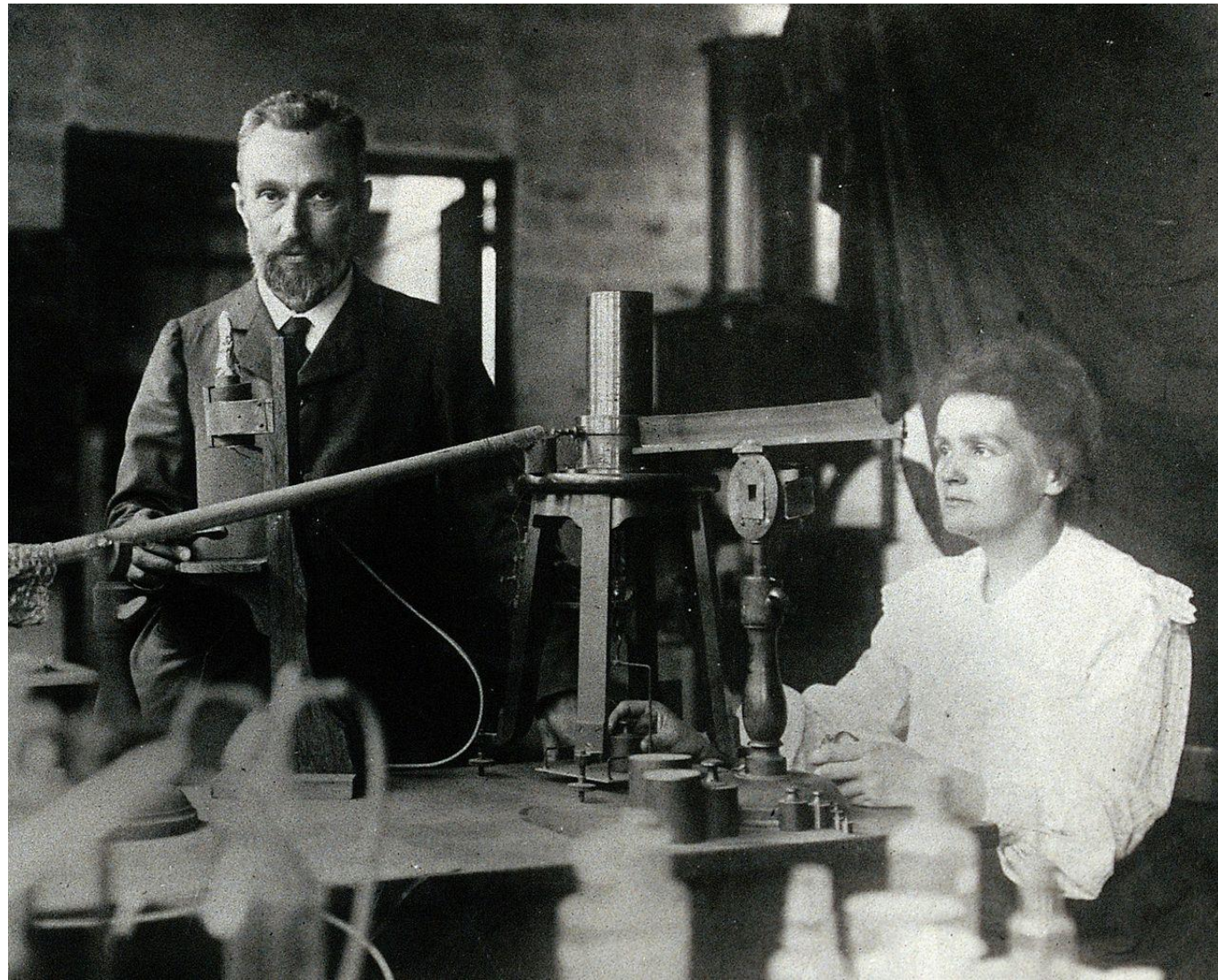
Zuckerman, H. (1977). *Scientific elite*. New York: Free Press.

4. How is insider knowledge acquired?

- Informal? - Observation? Consultation?
- Formal? - Instruction? Initiation?

e.g. the earlier discussion of mentoring as a major factor of talent development

A striking historical illustration of
familial insider knowledge



Nobel laureates Pierre and Marie Skłodowska-Curie



Irène and Marie Curie

Note. Irène's doctoral advisor was Paul Langevin, a former student of her deceased father and a former lover of her widowed mother



Nobel laureates Irène and husband Frédéric Joliot-Curie



Distinguished Nuclear Physicist H el ene Langevin-Joliot

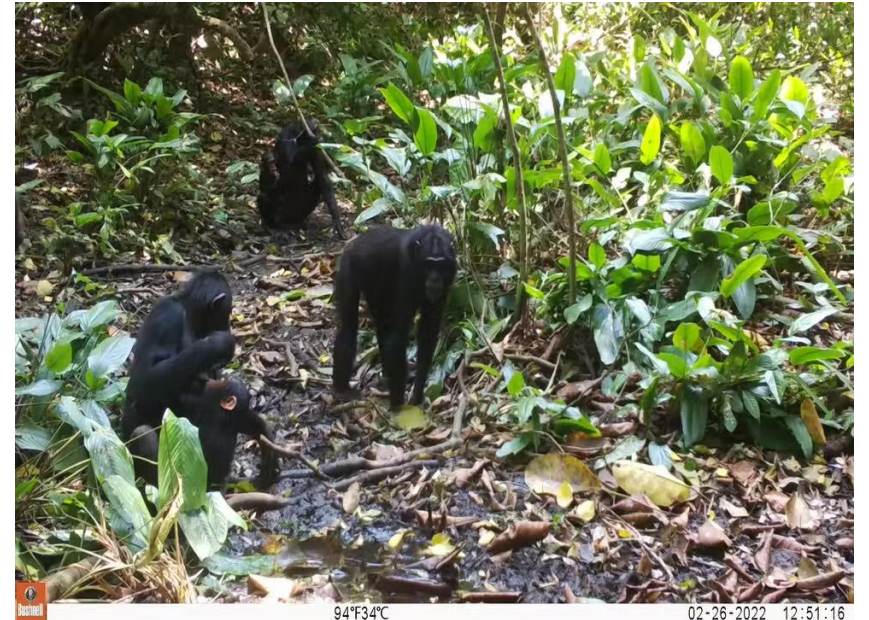
Daughter of Ir ene and Fr ed eric Joliot-Curie, who married Michel Langevin, the grandson of the Paul Langevin (who had mentored her mother and who had an affair with the widowed Marie Curie, H el ene's grandmother) Etc. (brother Pierre Joliot, biophysicist, and son Yves Langevin, astrophysicist, both distinguished)

N.B.: Familial insider knowledge solves a problem confronting Francis Galton's argument in his 1869 *Hereditary Genius*:

- Why were his family pedigrees almost entirely domain specific?
- Are there really genes for doing great physics?
- Or does insider knowledge from distinguished family members give you a head start in achieving in the same or similar domains?

5. Does outsider knowledge exist as well?

- Marginality
 - Professional?
 - Educational?
 - Cultural?

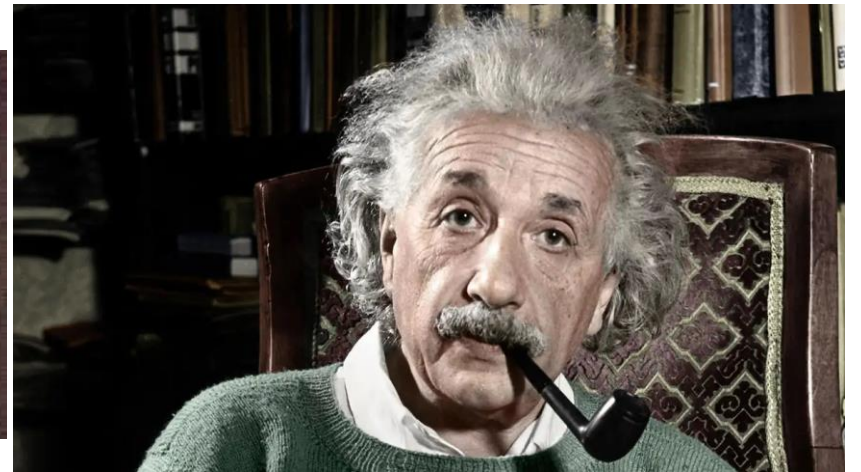
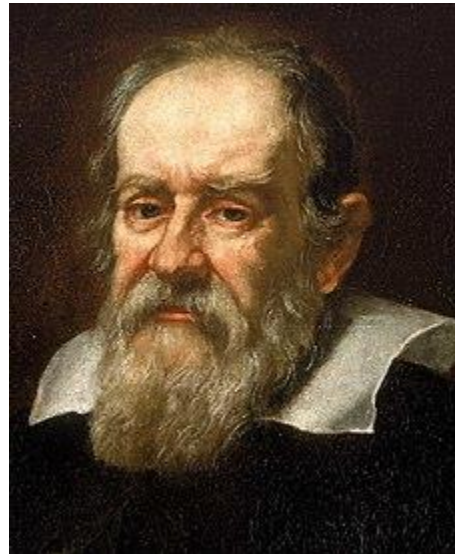


Chimp teaches rainforest primates how to find water

According to a study published in the journal *Primates*, rainforest dwelling chimpanzees in Uganda learned how to dig wells in the forest floor by observing a chimp who immigrated from another habitat. "Well digging is quite rare, so its appearance in a rainforest group was a surprise," said study co-author Cat Hobaiter.

6. When is outsider ignorance an asset?

- Thomas Kuhn (1970) on scientific revolutionaries: “Almost always the [scientists] who achieve these fundamental inventions of a new paradigm have been either very young or very new to the field whose paradigm they change ... for obviously these are the [scientists] who, being little committed by prior practice to the traditional rules of normal science, are particularly likely to see that these rules no longer define a playable game and to conceive another set that can replace them” (p. 90)



6. When is outsider ignorance an asset?

- Dick Fosbury's "flop" high jump
- From incompetence to Olympic Gold Medal





Hence, the Biggest Question:
*How does the distribution of knowledge
across insiders and outsiders influence
different domains of high performance?*