The Enterprise Social Learning Architectures Task: Social Learning Research at DSTO: an Overview

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Outline of presentation
- The Task
- Work to date
- Methodology
- Current Setting: NHQ
- Study findings to date
- Strawman Architecture
- Conclusion and Questions

The Task
Understand successful social learning practices (including knowledge transfer)
Develop architectures that optimise social learning
Guide development of systems which closely support way users work and enterprise learns
Achieve and maintain crucial knowledge management practices
Achieve and maintain strategic advantage in organisational learning

Social Learning: definition
Learning done in or by a cultural cluster (an organisation, organisational department, task group, committee, study group, etc.)
Includes
- procedures for transmitting knowledge and practice across posting cycles, different work situations and time
- procedures that facilitate generative learning (ie enterprise’s adjustment / creative reaction to dynamic and unexpected situations)

Work to date
Tactical Headquarters: 82 Wing, SRG, RAAF Amberley - 1998
- Single service - aircrew represent homogeneous group of cultures with strong sense of common identity

Strategic Headquarters: C3ID / C4ISREW, 1999 - 2000
- Study extended in response to organisational changes

Complexities:
- Personnel distributed - geographically, culturally and functionally
- Outcomes heavily reliant on prevailing economic and political climate
- Area subject to numerous reorganisations over the life of the study

Data Collection - Methods and benefits
- Immersion in setting being studied
- Observational field work
- Observing work in different settings
- Directed questioning to clarify issues
- Capture of insiders’ perspectives
- Evidence/sinformation provided to challenge assumptions
- Observe day-to-day work practices (actual vs documented)
- Can see key concepts influencing that setting

Ethnography
Other methodologies and tools

Supplementary methodologies have been used in this study - to validate findings and increase reliability

- Team Management Index
- Quantitative survey and open ended questions
- Structured and / or semi-structured interviews with selected Staff

How we work

- Thorough observation of workplace processes, interactions and relationships (ie, *flies on wall*)
- Long term immersion in setting
- Prefer to work in pairs
- May augment with other means of data collection
- Focus on systemic issues, not individuals
- All data treated with strictest confidentiality
- No individuals are identified in reporting of data

Current Study: Navy Headquarters

Key Issues:

- Are social learning constructs different in a single service strategic HQ?
- What are the learning issues involved in NHQ generally, including making the transition from ship to base to ADHQ?
- Other issues are likely to emerge as the study progresses

Combined Study Findings

Factors In Social Learning

- **ENABLERS & SUPPORTERS**
- **OVERARCHING VALUES**
- **INHIBITORS**
- **CHALLENGERS**

**INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT**

**C4ISREW study findings:**

Key Enablers and Influences on effective Social Learning
Typical Findings to date

Social learning facilitated by:
- Shared / common cultural identity and language
- Acceptance and support of gender differences
- Effective use of humour (to unite and to foster a supportive climate)
- Bricolage and improvisation (to facilitate knowledge creation)
- Personal networks (staff are important reservoirs of tacit knowledge)
- Peer review
- Valuing skills

Social learning inhibited by:
- Poor quality of handovers / takeovers
- Ineffective IT systems
- Poor records keeping procedures
- Inadequate access to electronic corporate records
- Absence of opportunities for reflection and inquiry
- Culture of "negative reinforcement"

VOICES:

ON COMMON IDENTITY
“We need a far more open information network that actually allows us to see how the organisation works.”

ON PROBLEM SOLVING
“We spend so much time in the detail on the process that we’re in, that we rarely give ourselves the opportunity to think strategically about what we’re doing and to really determine the priorities of where our effort is worthwhile and where it isn’t. I think you need to do that both individually and at a group level again with the people that you work with.”

ON TEAM BUILDING
“you get bitten around the head if you do something wrong but rarely you hear anything positive”

ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION
“I believe that physical files in the Staff are no longer managed well because their management has been farmed out to outside bodies. With the file clerks there was consistency of procedures but the file clerks are no longer part of the procedure.”

“To verify current information is difficult, to get any new information is getting increasingly more difficult, but tracing back of records and information is almost impossible.”

EIRG, Monash University (C) 2000
It’s a bastardised Intranet in its current form. You can’t search information. Unless you know what you’re looking for on a file, you won’t find it. So, I would call it only 10 per cent useful, 20 per cent useful.

When you’re all lumped together and everybody can hear what everybody is saying and everybody’s saying a hundred things at the same time, sometimes it can be an absolute nightmare.

“Through my 25 years experience, handovers are a disaster, for the most part - with some exceptions. If the individuals take extra effort to do a good handover, that will occur. Organisationally, there’s very little in place to make it happen.”

Change Fatigue is rife in ADO: Change is a challenger - it can be an inhibitor or an enabler.

Environmental Factors that Contribute to Effective Social Learning

Overarching Principles and Values which Facilitate Social Learning

Encouragement of Individual Expertise and Mastery

Recognition of Shared Purpose, Objective, Vision

Awareness of Organisational Interdependencies and Interrelations

Management of Organisational Mental Models

Facilitation of Communities of Practice

Culture of Information Sharing, Learning from Mistakes

Shared Purpose / Objectives / Vision

Maintenance of Overarching Principles and Values which Facilitate Social Learning

Power and empowerment

Trust

Forgiveness

Commitment

Cultural cohesiveness

Openness of decision making process

Sharing of information

Overarching principles and values
What Now?

- Are social learning constructs different in a single service strategic HQ?
- What are the learning issues involved in making the transition from ship-to-base-to-ADHQ

Continue:
- Feedback to client
- Collection of data
- Development of architecture
- Refinement of methodology

Questions and Discussion