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Master Thesis

- Reflective Practices as a way of Learning in Organizations -

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Content

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate how reflective practices can affect learning in the organization. In the theoretical background two views on knowledge are presented – "knowledge as possession" and "knowledge as practice". This is followed by an elaboration of the concept of knowing in the organization. The concept of knowledge is connected to learning in organization, with a presentation of two perspectives on learning corresponding to the views on knowledge. This leads up to the introduction of the concept of reflection, which incorporates the two previously presented perspectives. Critical reflection and collective reflection is highlighted. Ending the theoretical part, knowledge sharing is presented as enabling collective reflection.

The research question is investigated through a case study. The case under investigation is Norsk Pasientskadeerstatning, in which 15 employees participated. First, reflection meetings were conducted; secondly, five of the participants were selected to an in-depth interview.

The findings from the study indicate that the reflection meetings did not elicit reflections to a large extent. Reflective practices currently existing in the organization seem to affect learning to a greater extent, and informal reflective practices seem to be more prominent. The context in which employees are embedded could influence how reflective practices affect learning in the organization, suggesting a need for readiness to reflect.
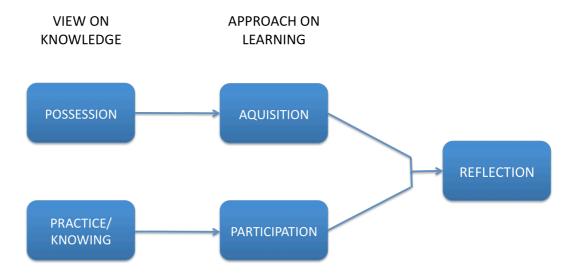
Introduction

Major changes, such as advancing technology, new management structures and global competition are occurring across a range of professional groups and workplaces resulting in increasing complexity, uncertainty, uniqueness and value conflict in day-to-day practice (Rigano & Edwards, 1998; Schön, 1983). Organizing knowledge within this environment is the single most important challenge facing all types of organizations and a critical aspect of what organizations do (Brown & Duguid, 1998; Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough, & Swan, 2009). Although the responses to these challenges of everyday life are performed in a spontaneous, intuitive way, and cannot be completely and accurately described and explained, they appear to be learnable (Schön, 1983). However, this tacit knowledge resides only in the minds of people and can only be learned through interaction with others in the social practice (Filstad & Blåka, 2007).

A preoccupation with managing explicit knowledge through technology may have led organizations to neglect the important and challenging task of facilitating the sharing and use of tacit forms of knowledge (Holste & Fields, 2010). In organizations, much of the most useful knowledge may be tacit in nature. Although critical to organizational decisions, such knowledge has been infrequently studied (Brockmann & Anthony, 1998). However, the focus in organizations are shifting from emphasizing "teaching people what to do" to "helping people to learn" (Rigano & Edwards, 1998). Reflection, defined as "the process of stepping back from an experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences" (Daudelin, 1996, p. 39), is a natural and familiar process which can be used when "helping people to learn"(Reynolds, 1998). Reflection is by several scholars seen as an important prerequisite for learning (Filstad, 2010) underpinning the importance of embracing formal reflective practices as a way of encouraging learning (Daudelin, 1996). This master thesis aim to investigate how reflection over the tacit knowledge embedded in work practices can affect learning in the organization. Thus, the following question is put forth;

> How can reflective practices affect learning in the organization?

Structure of the paper

The thesis starts to give an overview of the current literature on knowledge and knowing in the organization. The two perspectives on knowledge is linked to two perspectives of learning. After elaborating on these two perspective, reflection is introduced as a creating a third view of learning encompassing both of the previously presented perspectives. These connections are illustrated in the model below. After presenting the theoretical background, the method is presented, followed by findings and discussion, conclusion and limitations and future research.

VIEW ON KNOWLEDGE   APPROACH ON LEARNING

POSSESSION → AQUISITION

PRACTICE/ KNOWING → PARTICIPATION

REFLECTION

Knowledge in organizations

Organizational knowledge is often perceived as "a learned set of norms, shared understandings and practices that integrates actors and artifacts to produce valued outcomes within a specific social and organizational context" (Scarbrough, 2008), and can be reflected in what people say and do, or in the technologies, routines and systems that they use (Newell et al., 2009). In the literature concerning knowledge in organizations, there are two main epistemologies of knowledge, "knowledge as possession" and "knowledge as practice". Those viewing "knowledge as possession" treat knowledge as a mental capacity or resource, that can be developed, applied and used to improve effectiveness in the workplace, while those who view "knowledge as practice" treats knowledge as constructed and negotiated through social interactions (Newell et al., 2009). In other words, people either see knowledge as a possession existing within individuals, or as something interpersonal, to be found in relations between people. These underlying assumptions about knowledge influence the tactics, strategies and analytical tools used when attempting to manage knowledge work more effectively (Newell et al., 2009).

Knowledge as a possession or practice

Researchers who consider knowledge to exist within individuals often focus on identifying different types, or forms, of knowledge people have. A common practice is to differentiate between tacit and explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is systematic, universal and transparent, and can be written down, encoded, stored, and reused (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). It can be communicated and explained to anyone with some basic understanding of the topic and is available to everyone who desires it (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). Tacit knowledge is not formally taught and often cannot be explained in words (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). It includes know-how, and is highly personalized, based on individual experiences, context-dependent, and anchored in practical work (Newell et al., 2009). Within this perspective, knowledge is treated as a universal and abstract commodity located in people's minds, and the result of a systematic analysis of our sensory experience of a knowable external reality (Chiva & Alegre, 2005). It exist prior to, and independently from the knowing subject, and can be codified, stored and transmitted to others. Said differently, knowledge is considered to be a collection

of representations of the world, and the goal is to generate the most accurate representations (Chiva & Alegre, 2005).

By adopting the perspective of knowledge as a possession, one often fail to take into account the more subjective, equivocal and dynamic nature of knowledge, and overstate the separation between tacit and explicit knowledge (Newell et al., 2009). Opponents argue that knowledge is constructed and negotiated through social interactions (Newell et al., 2009), thus a socially constructing or creating act, rather than a objective representation (Chiva & Alegre, 2005). Reality is socially constructed based on interaction and communication and bound to our senses and previous experiences. This means that knowledge is not accurate representations of the world, but rather subjective and diverse constructions (Chiva & Alegre, 2005). Consequently, the world is unique to each one of us. Knowledge is the act of creating a world, and is situated in the system of ongoing practices, always rooted in a context of interaction and acquired through some form of participation (Chiva & Alegre, 2005). The word "practice" is ambiguous, and can refer to performance in a range of professional situations, or preparation for performance (Schön, 1983). Barnes (2000, p. 27) defines practice as "socially recognized forms of activity, done on the basis of what members learn from others". People develop a repertoire of expectations, images and techniques, and learn what to look for and how to respond to what they find. As their knowledge become increasingly tacit, spontaneous, and automatic they are turning into specialists in their fields (Schön, 1983). Some advocates of understanding knowledge as practice prefer to use the term "knowing" rather than knowledge to underpin the active, processual and social nature of knowledge (Newell et al., 2009).

Knowing in organizations

According to Polanyi (1962) people are only aware of certain aspects of their knowledge at particular points in time, and by attending to something and making it explicit, people automatically push other things into the background, or into tacitness. The decrease of consciousness of certain things enables expansion of consciousness of other things, and given a certain context, we assimilate, interiorize and instrumentalize certain things in order to concentrate – focus – on others (Tsoukas, 2006). This means that people become unaware of their

knowledge of how to carry out a specific task to reach a certain goal, because they focus their attention on the goal to be reached. Furthermore, becoming unaware of the knowledge of "how to" enables people to concentrate on reaching the goal. The integration of knowing "how to" and the result of doing it is essentially tacit and irreversible, meaning that we come to know a set of behaviors without being able to identify them (Tsoukas, 2006). Thus, we get things done and achieve competence, by becoming unaware of how we do so. We know the task by relying on our awareness of how to perform to reach the goal, and if the task is separated from the goal and examined independently its meaning will be lost (Tsoukas, 2006). Tacit knowledge is displayed in what we do, and cannot be "captured", "translated", or "converted" into explicit knowledge, and any explicit, codified knowledge will always be incomplete or partial because even the most explicit kind of knowledge is underlain by tacit knowledge. Thus, tasks can only be accomplished by combining explicit knowledge with tacit knowledge developed through experience, and new knowledge comes about not when the tacit becomes explicit, but when our skilled performance is combined in new ways through social interaction (Newell et al., 2009; Tsoukas, 2006). The tacit dimensions of individuals' knowledge base make them especially valuable contributors to group projects and cannot be obtained any other way except through interactions with other members of the social practice (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001).

Organizational learning – two metaphors

Adapting the latter perspective on knowledge, developing organizational knowledge becomes equivalent to engaging in organizational learning. Here, organizational learning and organizational knowledge both underpin the social construction of beliefs and shared meanings, and focus on the totality of the learning experience, rather than on differentiating explicit and tacit knowledge (Chiva & Alegre, 2005). Understanding knowledge as practice or knowing and that developing organizational knowledge is equivalent to engaging in organizational means adopting the social approach to learning in organizations. This perspective builds on the participation metaphor in which learning is about becoming a participant in the social practice, and the goal of learning is community building (Sfard, 1998). A knowledgeable person is someone who is participating in, and belonging to the community (Sfard, 1998). The social

approach tries to capture the dynamic between the individual and the social context and see learning as a situated and distributed process (Filstad & Blåka, 2007; Sfard, 1998). Learning exists in everyday organizational life and work, and individual learning cannot be isolated from the complexity of the social context where it takes place (Magalhães, 1998). Learning is not viewed as a way of knowing the world, but as a way of being in the world where social context, cultural artifacts, collective group actions and participation play an essential role (Chiva & Alegre, 2005).

A different approach to learning adopts an acquisition metaphor and proposes that organizational knowledge is a result of organizational learning. Using the acquisition metaphor, learning is to acquire something and the goal is individual enrichment (Sfard, 1998). A detachment of learning and knowledge is implied, meaning that the two concepts can be treated independently (Chiva & Alegre, 2005). Knowledge is understood as a possession and being knowledgeable means being in the possession of some commodity (Sfard, 1998). Organizational Learning is a process concerned with growth and changes in knowledge, and an efficient procedure for the processing, interpretation and improvement of representations of reality, also known as knowledge. Researchers adopting the cognitive-possession perspective is concerned with the development of concepts that illuminate or enhance the application of explicit strategies, tools and practices that seek to make knowledge a resource for the organization (Newell et al., 2009). They have tended to concentrate on freeing knowledge from the individual and make it widely available as an organizational resource developing information and communication technologies (ICTs) or guidelines and recipes to facilitate sharing of explicit knowledge, and more or less neglected the task of facilitating tacit knowledge (Holste & Fields, 2010). Initiatives based solely on the assumption that knowledge is a possession, like using information management tools and concepts to design knowledge management systems have often failed (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001; Newell et al., 2009). Research suggests that employees prefer to share knowledge interpersonally rather than with a database (Bordia, Irmer, & Abusah, 2006).

The metaphorical mappings

Acquisition metaphor		Participation metaphor
Individual enrichment	Goal of learning	Community building
Acquisition of something	Learning	Becoming a participant
Recipient (consumer), (re-)constructor	Student	Peripheral participant, apprentice
Provider, facilitator, mediator	Teacher	Expert participant, preserver of practice/discourse
Property, possession, commodity (individual, public)	Knowledge, concept	Aspect of practice/discourse/activity
Having, possessing	Knowing	Belonging, participating, communicating

Source: Sfard (1998)

Coping with the two perspectives simultaneously

Duncan and Weiss were in 1979 among the first authors to bring together the two perspectives (Magalhães, 1998). They proposed that while the individual is the only entity in the organization who can learn, the overall organizational knowledge base emerges out of a process of exchange, evaluation and integration of knowledge (Duncan & Weiss, 1979). Further, Sfard (1998) argue that both the acquisition and the participation metaphor of learning has something to offer that the other cannot provide, and an adequate combination of the two would highlight their respective advantages. In line with this, a third approach to learning have developed, which characterize organizational learning as a combination of skills and knowledge acquisition and participation in communities of practice (Elkjaer, 2004). The individual is neither independent from, nor controlled by the organization, but decides whether or not to participate in events as a part of the organizational life and practice (Elkjaer, 2004). Organizations are understood as social worlds consisting of a recognizable form of collective actions and interactions shaped by individual commitment. Action and interaction is a continuous process influenced by historic courses of events and the conditions under which they have unfolded (Strauss, 1987), implying that one should focus events and situations, and the time and conditions surrounding them, rather than

individuals or organizations when looking at why individuals and groups acts or do not act, and why organizations react or do not react (Elkjaer, 2004). Thinking should be understood, not as an isolated and individual cognitive process, but as part of a transactional relation between individual(s) and environment, resulting in a continuous and mutual formation of both the individual and the organization (Elkjaer, 2004). The perspective use the concepts "experience" and "reflective thinking" to shed light on what happens in this meeting between learner(s) and the organizational life and work practice (Elkjaer, 2004).

Table 1 Three ways of organizational learning

	The 'first way'	The 'second way'	The 'third way'
Learning content	To be skilled and knowledgeable about organizations	To become a skilful practitioner in organizations	To develop experience as part of a continuous transaction between individuals and organization
Learning method	Acquisition of skills and knowledge	Participation in communities of practice	Individual and joint inquiry or reflective thinking – begins with body, emotion and intuition
Relation between individual and organization	Traits and possible to separate in analysis and practice	Individuals as part of communities of practice	Transactional – mutual formation of individuals and organization
Organization	System	Communities of practice	Social worlds

Source: Elkjaer (2004)

Learning from experience through reflection

There is an immerse learning potential hidden in everyday experience (Daudelin, 1996). When intuitive, spontaneous performance yields nothing more than the results expected for it we tend not to think about it. However, an experience of

surprise triggers reflection, defined as the process of stepping back from an experience to assess how or why we have perceived, thought, felt or acted (Daudelin, 1996). It involves making thoughtful and productive use of otherwise uncoded experience (Reynolds, 1998), and is applied to resolve uncertain situations that arise (Elkjaer, 2004; Mezirow, 1990). Such challenging work experiences may be described as trial-and-error experiments that produce learning(Daudelin, 1996). By attending to features of the situation that were previously ignored reflection start a process of inquiry leading to an understanding of experiences that may have been overlooked in practice and provides a basis for future action (Raelin, 2001). Thus, learning occurs through a process of analysis that explores causes, develops and tests hypotheses, and eventually produces new knowledge leading employees to approach the external world in a way that is different from the approach that would have been used, had reflection not occurred (Daudelin, 1996).

Schön (1983) differentiate between three levels of reflection; knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action. A competent practitioner recognize phenomena, make judgments of quality and displays skills without being able to accurately describe or explain how he does this (Schön, 1983). This refer to the tacit knowledge level, and is a form of know-how (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). Skillful action often reveals a "knowing more than we can say," and as a practice becomes more repetitive and routine, the practitioners may miss important opportunities to think about what they are doing (Schön, 1983). They may be drawn into patterns of error which they cannot correct, and learn to be selectively inattentive to elements that do not fit the categories of their current knowing-in-action. When this happens, the practitioner is no longer learning or developing knowledge, but is simply practicing his current skills.

Reflection can counteract the negative effects of specialization. Reflection tends to focus interactively on the outcomes of action, the action itself, and the intuitive knowing implicit in the action (Schön, 1983), and people may reflect on tacit norms which underlie a judgment, implicit strategies and theories, feelings in a situation, the framing of a problem or the roles they have constructed for themselves within the organization (Schön, 1983). Reflection contributes to the

consciousness of change by helping us to understand how knowledge has been constructed and managed and how people have reached current common sense or what is consider to be relevant (Raelin, 2001). By reflection-in-action professionals reflect on the understandings which have been implicit in their action to deal with situations of complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict (Høyrup, 2006). This on-the-spot process of surfacing, criticizing, and restructuring understandings is reflected in further action (Schön, 1983). Reflection-on-action is to reflect on an action in retrospect, and has no immediate connection to the actual action (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). Reflection-on-action involves looking back on personal experiences to evaluate practical reasoning and build theories of action (Rigano & Edwards, 1998).

Critical reflection

When reflection involves questioning of social, cultural and political taken-for-granteds, it is called critical reflection (Reynolds, 1998; Vince, 2002). It is a more elaborate process than simply making thoughtful choices between available courses of action (Reynolds, 1998). Critical reflection allow us to search for truths even if they are unpleasant to us, to take personal causal responsibility for problems, and to allow us to accept some pain in order to learn how to become a better societal participant (Raelin, 2001). It targets a deeper level than trial-and-error experience and seeks to challenge the standard meanings underlying our habitual responses. In addition to questioning assumptions, critical reflection pays particular attention to the analysis of power relations, and is concerned with emancipation (Reynolds, 1998). By reflecting critically one move from a position of unawareness to awareness of the consequences of one's behavior, and we become aware of the discrepancy between what we say we do and what we actually do (Raelin, 2001). Moreover, we increase the awareness of our biases in how we obtain information and "errors" in our perceptions of reality, thus often applying solutions that may not fit (Raelin, 2001).

Collective reflection

When individuals reflect individually, reflection can be seen as is a highly personal and cognitive process where a person "takes an experience from the outside world, brings it inside the mind, turns it over, makes connections to other

experiences, and filters it through personal biases" (Daudelin, 1996, p. 39).
Various practitioners bring different constants into their process of reflection,
such as language, world views and role frames (Schön, 1983). These differences
affect the scope and direction of reflection. Thus, to reflect alone may just be the
beginning of the process. Dialogue ensures that multiple points of view are heard,
leading to new ways of thinking and ultimately of acting (Raelin, 2001).
Reflection with others generates ideas by the sharing of different perspectives
(Daudelin, 1996), and converting thoughts into language and bringing it out in the
presence of others, may lead people to change their viewpoints slightly or even a
great deal as the conversation continues (Raelin, 2001). Action produced from
reflection tends to be more coordinated than before, since it has engaged everyone
involved in a public reflective process (Raelin, 2001).Furthermore, to engage in
critical reflection with others enables people to recognize the connection between
individual problems and the social, cultural and political context within which
they are embedded.

Organizing reflection

Reflective practice can to be used to place thoughtful action based on theoretical
formulations and research findings into practice, develop practical knowledge or
"rules of thumb" about how to act in particular situations, or reorganize or
reconstruct experience (Raelin, 2001). Challenges and puzzles confronted in daily
work could almost always benefit from public dialogue, and many come to realize
that they are not the only one with the good ideas and solutions (Raelin, 2001).
Through communicative action, and subjecting our entire experience to criticism,
even our tacit understanding, we are able to reach agreement about disputed
claims in our society (Raelin, 2001). Vince (2002) propose that reflective
practices in the organization should contribute to the collective questioning of
assumptions within which tasks or problems are organized in order to make power
relations visible and act as a "container" for the anxieties raised by making power
relations visible. Current organizational dynamics could unwittingly contribute to
reserved or unconfident managers who fear change, failure, risk and conflict and
therefore isolate themselves within clusters and empires (Vince, 2002). Then the
politics and power relations that shape ways of organizing are not openly reflected
on and could result in poor communication across the boundaries of different

groupings within the organization (Vince, 2002). Although assumptions are necessary, they must be subject to review and revision as change occurs (Raelin, 2001). Such an assumption-breaking culture is one that deliberately keeps itself off-center, but is difficult to achieve because it requires having people in control lose their grip on the status quo (Raelin, 2001). A reflective culture makes it possible for people to constantly challenge things without fear of retaliation (Raelin, 2001). Reflection in this sense contribute to democracy in the organization where all parties in the human condition are treated as empowered entities or as human beings with dignity (Raelin, 2001; Vince, 2002).

Sharing knowledge to enable collective reflection

To enable organizational learning through collective reflection, reflective practices should occur simultaneously with knowledge sharing so that new meaning and methods people bring to the table can be accessed by organizational members and partners (Raelin, 2001). van den Hooff and de Ridder (2004, p. 118) define knowledge sharing as "the process where individuals mutually exchange their knowledge and jointly create new knowledge". Knowledge sharing can be said to have primarily two goals. One is to create new knowledge by differently combining existing knowledge, and the other is to improve the exploitation of existing knowledge (Christensen, 2007). Recognizing knowledge as a social activity impossible to separate from practice, tacit knowledge must be shared through sharing of peoples' practices. Engaging in organizational learning entails sharing knowledge through social interaction with other members of the practice, resulting in change and adaption of the practice. Moreover, knowledge work takes place in a broader institutional context and interconnected sets of practices, and change in one area of practice potentially disrupts a wide range of other practices (Newell et al., 2009). This underpins the importance of sharing of knowledge across boundaries in the organization to ensure that practice in one part of the organization is not interfering with other parts of the organization. Research suggest that both warm personal relationships most likely developed through face-to face interactions, trust and solid respect for another worker's professional capability is required for the sharing of tacit knowledge (Holste & Fields, 2010). The levels of risk and uncertainty that are associated with tacit knowledge transfer are reduced by trusting relationships (Holste & Fields, 2010)

By making use of reflection in work life both the individual and the social elements of knowledge and learning in organizations is taken into consideration. This thesis aim to look at how reflective practice affects learning in an organization, and the intention of such reflective practices is to enable organizations to manage knowledge through a process of turning unreflective practice into reflective ones. This is done by clarifying the rules guiding the activities of the practice, help shape collective understandings, and by facilitating the emergence of heuristic knowledge (Haridimos Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001).

Method

Methodology is a way of thinking about and studying social phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Such underlying assumptions influence the tactics, strategies and analytical tools used when designing a study. Quantitative approaches emphasize distribution and numbers through standardization, while qualitative approaches seek deeper insights into phenomena by focusing on their meaning (Thagaard, 2009). Research in the field of organizational learning have tended to adopt either the individual or the social perspective of learning, while the potential learning effects of reflection is less understood. Because of the lacking contributions within this topic, a qualitative approach is appropriate (Thagaard, 2009). The goal of qualitative research is to discover and develop new knowledge by studying participants' knowledge and practices (Flick, 2009). By using a qualitative approach the researcher is able to reveal the existence of several views of a phenomenon within social relations and gain insights into them in the context in which they are embedded (Flick, 2009; Toulmin,1990). Most phenomena are too complex to be studied in isolation, and instead of reducing issues to single variables, qualitative methods represent them as a whole within the practices and interactions of subjects in everyday life (Flick, 2009). The fluid, evolving and dynamic nature of this approach creates possibilities to learn more about how people experience events, and the meanings they give to those experiences, as well as discovering rather than testing variables (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Scarce research on how reflection can affect learning in organizations and the complexity and subjectivity of knowledge justifies the qualitative approach as most appropriate for this study.

Case study – a qualitative approach

A case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, and is likely to be useful for the types of research questions that starts with "How" or "What" (Yin, 1994). Case studies can capture the process studied in a detailed and precise manner and aim not to make statements merely about the particular organization, but to use the organization as an example to shed light on the phenomena being investigated (Flick, 2009), in this case, how reflective practices might affect learning in organizations.

In this study, the case under investigation is Norsk Pasientskadeerstatning (NPE), an organization governed by the Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services. NPE handles claims of compensation from patients who argue that they have an injury as a result of faulty treatment in the Norwegian health care system. NPE is divided into six departments that handle the compensation claims. Three departments specialize in processing the question of responsibility, one department specializes in the calculation of the economic compensation the patient is entitled to, and two departments have employees who handle both issues. Each department has certain medical areas they cover. In addition to these six departments, there are one department specializing in the laws and regulations concerning the system in which the organization exists, and one department consisting of medical experts who make assessments of the medical part of the compensation claim.

Most of the employees have either an education within law or medicine, or a combination. Each is responsible for a certain amount of compensation claims, and report to a group leader. Their work day consists for the most part of processing compensation claims independently in their respective offices. The organization aspires to be a profiled and externally oriented competency based organization through proactive work and professional practices, and aims to carry out high quality proceedings in an effective manner (NorskPasientskadeerstatning, 2012). In order to do this, employees are encouraged to work according to a "good enough" standard, meaning that they should neither focus too much on quality nor on effectiveness, but seek to find the right balance between them. Because of these aims, the organization was highly positive to participate in the research study, hoping to gain insights into how they could further improve their work practices.

Research design

The aim of the study is to gain insights into how reflection can affect learning in the organization. Two ways of gaining insights into this is through observing participants when engaging in reflective practice, and asking them about their experiences related to reflection. Thus, the study was designed to be conducted in

two stages. The first stage consisted of conducting meetings designed to engage the participants in reflection to observe the participants, and make sure they have had an experience of engaging in reflective practices before being interviewed about their experiences of such. In the second stage, some selected participants were interviewed about their experience of participating in the meeting and other reflective practices in the organization.

Stage one – Conducting a meeting intended to facilitate collective reflection

The reflective practice can be seen as a type of focus group, and was conducted in accordance with focus group theory (Stewart, Rook, & Shamdasani, 2007). By having employees engaging in a reflective practice it is possible to study their attitudes, opinions and experiences within the context in which they occur, and discussions in this setting correspond to the way in which opinions are produced, expressed and exchanged in everyday life (Flick, 2009). Moreover, these reflective meetings provide insights into common processes of problem solving in the group (Flick, 2009). In the beginning of each meeting, an explanation of the procedure where given, and expectations for the participants were expressed. This was followed by a short introduction of the members to one another and presentation of a case intended to stimulate discussion (Appendix 1). The interview guide used in these reflection meetings is found in the appendix of this thesis (Appendix 2). Moreover, the participants were free to incorporate own work experiences into the discussions.

The participants received an e-mail with a short description of the topic and agenda of the meeting two days before it was scheduled. Participants in the first meeting got the case the same day as they were to participate in the meeting. After feedback from these participants, and evaluation of the execution of the meeting, a few alterations were made to the introductory explanation, and to the description of the topic and agenda in the e-mail. Moreover, the case was attached to e-mail sent out on beforehand. The total number of participants amounted to 15 employees. The meetings were conducted in three groups of 4-6 participants and discussions lasted for about 90 minutes.

The purpose of the reflection meetings was to have the participants reflect on their work practices based on the case they were given and share these reflections with the other participants. The assumption is that these meetings, in which participants reflect on a specific case, facilitates learning and development of knowledge in the organization through sharing their practices, which in many cases is highly tacit in nature.

Stage two – interviewing participants

An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The intention of a qualitative research interview is to try to understand the world from the subject's point of view, and unfold the meaning of their experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The specific intention in this study was to learn about the participant's thoughts and experiences concerning the reflection meeting, and other settings at work in which they have engaged in reflection. This was done by using a semi-structured interview. This is "a planned and flexible interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 327). This means that the interview guide includes an outline of topics to be covered, together with suggested questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews conducted varied somewhat in duration, ranging from 23 minutes to 55 minutes.

The purpose of the interviews was to gain additional insight into the research question by investigating if in fact reflection is perceived by employees to facilitate learning and development of knowledge in the organization.

Sample

The sampling were purposive, meaning that the people to be studied were selected according to their relevance to the research topic (Flick, 2009). The purpose of the reflection groups was to increase the dynamics of the discussion so that many different perspectives would be expressed and reflected upon (Flick, 2009). Thus, a heterogeneous group was desirable, and the selection was based on an objective of maximal variation. The participants varied in terms of age, gender, educational background, tenure in the organization and section in which they worked. To avoid issues of power differences, all participants stemmed from the same hierarchical position in the organization. In the second stage, five participants

were selected for in-depth interviews. The five participants selected for an additional interview were selected partly from a convenience criterion, and partly from a maximum variation criterion. Two men and three women from four different departments were interviewed. Their tenure in the organization varied from less than a year to more than 15 years.

Assessing the validity

Validity in qualitative research can be defined as to what degree a method investigates what it claim to investigate, and is involved in all phases of the research process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Data collection

The reflection meetings were designed based on current theory of reflective practices. Daudelin (1996) argue that it is unlikely that anyone could create case studies with greater relevance or challenge than a manager's or employee's own work experiences. Thus, the case was developed by help from an employee with several years of work experience in the organization. The interview guide was based on theory, and questions were designed to elicit reflection.

Before conducting the reflection meetings, I familiarized myself with my role as a moderator. In qualitative research not only the subjectivity of those being studied, but also the subjectivity of the researcher becomes part of the research process (Flick, 2009). Generally speaking, the moderator's role is to create an open space in which the discussion keeps going first through exchange of arguments (Flick, 2009). However, pragmatic reasons call for some moderation by the researcher (Flick, 2009). In this study the agenda was controlled, and the beginning of the discussion was fixed. Additionally, topics were steered by introducing new questions into the ongoing discussions. The questions asked were intended to initiate reflective thinking and were developed from theory of reflection.

After reading the case, the participants in the first meeting were asked to give their immediate thoughts concerning the process of the proceedings in this case in relation to their current guidelines of solving their tasks sufficiently. In the first group, one of the participants started with saying that there was too little information given in the case to discuss it at all. To assess whether the case was

solved in relation to their norm of working sufficiently, she needed to know the exact questions to and answers from the expert. This sat the standard for the rest of the meeting, which was characterized by mostly informing me and each other in more general terms about how they worked instead of reflecting amongst each other over their actions in daily work. At the end of this meeting I asked for feedback from participants regarding how to improve the method.

Before going into the second meeting, I made some changes to the wording of the e-mail sent out. In the meeting, I explained that I was aware of the fact that information given in the case was inadequate, and that the case was only meant as an example to start discussing from. This was done to avoid getting the initial reaction to the case as in the first meeting. The conversations throughout the meeting were flowing nicely, and I did not play as big part in getting people to talk as I did in the first meeting. The participants did not inform as much as in the first meeting, and quickly got into issues of their daily work life.

In the third meeting, all participants except one were from the same department, and the remaining participant had collaborated closely with the others. The fact that they all know each other might imply a high level of trust, leading them to express their true thoughts and feelings. However, it might also have led them to adopt similar opinions, attitudes and perspectives, meaning that fewer perspectives is present in this meeting compared to the previous meetings.

The interview guide used in the semi-structured interviews in the second stage of the study was developed in accordance with the procedure described in Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) Interviews – Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing (Appendix 3). Before conducting the interview, a small pre-study was conducted where two individuals were interviewed using the interview guide. One of the interviewed individuals is an employee in the organization.

All of the gathered material was recorded. Because of technical issues, the second half of one of the individual interviews was not recorded. However, notes were taken immediately after the interview.

Transcribing

I personally transcribed all the recorded material. To transcribe means to transform, to change from one form to another, and transcripts are impoverished, decontextualized representations of live interview conversations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Recordings of the interviews involves an abstraction leading to a loss of body language, and transcriptions of the interviews involves a second abstraction in which the tone of the voice, intonations and breathing are lost (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The choices concerning the transcription procedure depend on the intended use of the transcript (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In this study, the purpose of the transcriptions is to report the subject's accounts in a readable public story. Thus, pauses, emphases in intonations and emotional expressions like laughter and sighing have been excluded. The interviews have for the most part been transcribed verbatim; however, frequent repetitions of words and parts of sentences have been removed. Moreover, names of the participants have been removed to ensure anonymity. The names have been replaced with codes according to their tenure in the organization. Employees working in the organization for less than a year got the label N for newcomer, employees with more than 10 years of experience were labeled E for experienced, and the rest of the participants were labeled P for participant.

Analysis

Qualitative analysis is a process of examining and interpreting data in order to obtain meaning, increase understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Like many social science projects, this study addresses three issues, the description of the phenomena observed, specification of the underlying causes of their occurrence and variation, and identification of the consequences of the phenomena (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006).

When analyzing the reflection meetings I used the "Scissor-and sort technique" used for analyzing focus group discussions (Stewart et al., 2007). The first step according to this method is to identify those sections relevant to the research question, and based on this develop a classification system for major topics and issues (Stewart et al., 2007). Based on the purpose of conducting the reflection meetings I specifically looked for instances where reflection in some form

occurred, in order to make some preliminary conceptions regarding how reflection might affect learning in the organization. Additionally, topics and issues that were discussed throughout the meetings were identified because I regarded it as useful for providing supplementary understanding of the impact of such meetings on learning and development of knowledge.

The analysis of the interviews conducted using an open coding approach. Coding is a process in which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways (Flick, 2009). The aim of open coding is to produce concepts that seem to fit the data (Strauss, 1987). The analysis of the material from reflection meetings and the interview resulted in four broad categories; reflection meeting, current reflective practices, informal reflection and readiness to reflect.

Reliability and generalization of the study

Reliability in qualitative studies is often seen in conjunction with the assessment of the ability to reproduce the result at other times by other researchers, while analytical generalization relevant for qualitative case studies concerns the ability to transfer the knowledge produced in one context to another, relevant context (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The use of methods has been accounted for, and transcriptions of the meetings and interviews make it possible to distinguish between statements of the participants and interpretation of the researcher, thus increasing the reliability and generalization of the study. Some of the questions asked in the reflection meeting and interviews were close ended. This is seen as a consequence of being an inexperienced researcher, and pose as a possible threat to the reliability of the study.

Findings and discussion

First reflection meeting

In this first meeting, it seemed like all the participants felt they were attending the meeting to help me, and did not really see how they might benefit from attending it themselves.

> *P3: You just have to get the answers you need. We don't have to sit here and just talk. If you are going to use it in your thesis, you have to ask*

This impression was strengthened at the end of the meeting when one of the participants joked about wasting time that could have been used to process compensation claims. Nevertheless, they started to discuss the "good enough" standard, and how to decide that the work is sufficiently carried out. The newcomer said she was thinking quite a lot about how to work according to this norm, while the more experienced participants explained that it turned into a more tacit form of knowledge after some time;

> *P4: But with regards to "good enough" as a norm, we do not sit and think about whether it is good enough or not - eventually it also becomes an automatic reflex. Not a conscious thought, but more "now I have what it takes to reach a decision".*

The team leaders decides what is, and what is not handled well enough in cases where there is professional disagreement between employees, as well as in cases where a new employee must reach a satisfactory level. Moreover, they expressed that after working in the organization for a while, they got increasingly independent, and did not feel comfortable at the thought of letting others know how they carry out their work and to evaluate and correct it. Feedback directed specifically at oneself is possibly frustrating and difficult to handle.

> *P4: What happens after working here for a while, you get into your own habits and you also work within your tunnel, but it rarely gets rectified – you just float on the strength of one's own competencies (...) we are not used to being monitored - we are mostly used to sit and be autonomous and one can feel more vulnerable when everybody constantly can see what you are doing.*

This was expressed in relation to a new project that is about to start in one of the departments. Now, each employee is responsible for a certain amount of compensation claims given to them, but in the new project, a team of employees are going to have shared responsibility for claims. Despite the discomfort of getting feedback from others, the participants who are going to be a part of this project express excitement, and think it will have great learning effects and ensure common practice amongst employees in terms of eliciting more discussions, and adjusting one's own course of action. Others are more skeptical to this change, and change in general;

> *P2: We can ask ourselves the question regarding that, though – in theory, it is positive, but if all the disagreements result in a lot of additional work, substantially more discussions, a larger number of reports, on cases that might be [good enough].*

> *P2: I can only speak on my behalf, and my weekdays work very good the way things are now, when I determine everything myself, yes, with regards to both quality and production which is the way it is supposed to be, so, yes.. I am therefore a bit skeptical, but also open to (...) and somewhat fundamentally against changes.*

They get into a discussion about small claims and the usefulness of discussion about these cases. While one participant point to the purpose of the organization as an administrative agency as a reason for why the organization needs to sufficiently investigate small claims, some participants view extensive discussion regarding the outcomes of such cases as waste of time and resources. The division into specialized departments gets blamed for these inefficient discussions.

> *P3: So, I actually miss those cases, and to spare the time it takes through two sections, two team leaders and to leaders. It is not useful at all.*

During the meeting, one of the participants started talking about how a current practice in the organization intended to make employees learn to work more efficiently usually is executed;

> *P1: What we usually do when we construct cases is that we look at the claim, we look at the statement from the treatment center, and then we look at the questions that have been asked and the answers from the specialist. And if the aim is to learn something from it, and choose the*

> *right path and work efficiently, then it's useful to see if it's good enough or*
> *could it have been better?*
>
> *P3: First, we turn page by page so that we get to read some, and then say*
> *what you think, and then you read some more…*

Several participants express that these discussions improve their work practices and that the discussions anticipated from the new project will have similar effects.

Summing up, the meeting educed mostly information about their work practices. Participants referred to their experience when asked to reflect upon how they had arrived at the decision to perform their tasks the way they do. A result of working independently seems to be a lack of awareness of what employees in other departments were doing. Seeking or sharing knowledge was mainly initiated by the need for more information or knowledge in order to solve a case, and the value of discussion to collectively reflect upon a case was not always acknowledged.

Second reflection meeting

A prevailing theme in this meeting was the challenge of dealing with conflicting demands and different conceptions regarding what are sufficient work. The core of this issue is whether to stop investigating and come to a conclusion, or investigate further. The management's demand for efficiency is high, while the staff specialized in legal issues places more emphasis on the demands of the Norwegian Public Administration Act regarding the assessment of the case. Participants particularly feel that the legal staff shows too little consideration concerning employees' responsibility to comply with demands for efficiency. Moreover, employees feel that management does not accept the fact that efficiency and quality are to some extent irreconcilable;

> *P7: There is some inconsistency from the management in terms of what is*
> *good enough. (…) one emphasizes efficiency, at the same time I feel that*
> *one should be very thorough, and that doesn't always comply, or it's very*
> *difficult to manage…*
>
> *E1: In a way, it's never good enough. (…) it's up to the practitioner to fix*
> *it. You are told to work efficiently and ensure high quality, and then it's up*
> *to you to figure out how to solve it, so they do not take responsibility for*
> *that either.*

Participants express that experience makes them better equipped to deal with these irreconcilable demands. Similar to the newcomer in the first meeting, the newcomer in this meeting have doubts regarding this balance between conflicting demands;

> N2: *being relatively new, one notices that one is much more insecure of whether it is good enough, that is relative to, is one thoroughly enough and one has understood everything that the patient complaints about and is there possibly something one has forgotten there. In relation to getting the cases done since it is unfortunate to see that it takes a long time. (…) it was quite demanding to get au fait with what was good enough, since, from my background, like most jurists, one wants it to be correct, one does certainly not like to miss something (…) so one wants to be sure that one does it correctly, and then it might be more committed to know whether it is good enough.*

As a result of having specialized departments, each with different agendas, working according to a good enough standard has different meanings depending on where one work in the organization. A participant state that discussions are often kept within departments, between colleagues with similar competence, and raises the issue of the lack of knowledge regarding the way in which employees in other departments work, leading to a discussion of the different conceptions of the "good enough" standard. Before, they were organized in mixed departments, making it easier to share different competence within the department. After organizing employees into specialized departments, several employees express difficulties in deciding when a case is investigated sufficiently regarding responsibilities in order for the next department to make a calculation of the compensation the patient is entitled to.

> P6: *it might be some of the price we have to pay for dividing the practitioners to some working only with the calculation and some working only with responsibility, I who only work with responsibility am often in doubt as so whether you will think that it is well resolved, and we are committed to settle a case good enough in order for it to be possible for you to measure it out without having to obtain more declarations and assessing the case, that one does not shove/push questions that we need to get answered anyway, however it is hard, and you also have a lot of*

pressure on you to get cases through, how far should you get entangled in hypothetical questions about if she had gotten that treatment, therefore you have gotten rather good answers, rather good clarifications, however it can be that there are some eventualities that have not been investigated yet, there are many hypothetical questions that the case managers have to answer for us, but how deep should you dig and when should the line be drawn? (..) But we should perhaps be better at asking the calculation department.

The constant time pressure to reach a decision in cases to reach their monthly goal set by management and a fear of interrupting others in their work is put forth as reasons for not discussing with each other. Moreover, a participant claims that the attitude towards communication in the organization have not changed in accordance with the change in how departments are composed.

E2: An interesting aspect to this is how one communicates within NPE. I have the impression of it being a very high threshold for people to go to Section 6 to ask for advice, I do not know why this is the case, maybe they are distant and seem intimidating, but I actually think that it has most to do with the general communication culture one has in NPE, that one has a rigid stance to communication, one should follow the line as it is called in public business, if you have an errand you should go to your boss, who should go to the boss of the one who should be talked to, and then that boss should talk to the case manager, and that is how it goes. (...) when you have a big organization like NPE, which grows and grows, then it ends up as a system where the need for controlling the communication is a lot bigger than the communication itself and what stimulates the communication, I think NPE has a job to do there, one has not completely managed to foresee that specializing and dividing the organization also requires that one should have some attitudes to communication that are different from the one that one has [today].

A participant agrees to this, criticizes the culture for being too servile and rule-bound, and calls for more informal communication channels and initiatives from top management to change this culture beyond simply stating an "open door" policy.

The lack of understanding from management of a practitioner's daily challenges causes employees to ignore the demands placed upon them from management to a certain degree. Thus, learning activities initiated by management were seen as just another demand in an otherwise hectic workday. They express a need for discussing specific cases, but stress the importance of involvement in deciding the type of case to be discussed, and active participation in discussing it. Employees call for more training in how to be an effective practitioner and dealing with these conflicting demands;

> *P6: that is what people often find difficult,(…) and you have to learn methods that allow you to handle the workday, without being to stressed, and that might be the biggest challenge for many, and I wonder why one should not get help with that, because it has to do with methodology, and it also has to do with thinking well enough, and that one could had good courses with concrete examples that makes you get it under your skin, and of course one needs to have experience, and the best way of learning is to work with the cases, and to get through many cases, but…*

Adding to this, in order to learn the newcomer point out the importance of relevant feedback explaining why a case should be solved in that particular way. One of the experienced sums up the discussion about what and how to learn;

> E2: *But the impression I get when I hear you talk is that it is through the interaction between people that one actually gets the most important information and gets the best development, and gets some of the experiential learning, for example when it comes to conducting proceedings, how you prioritize, how you handle all the stacks of different types of priority, and so on. So that is in a way the glue in the organization, right, that is, in a big organization like NPE, one has large piles of routine letters and guidelines for different things, and one has a large computer system that is supposed to communicate all types of messages and information, but when it comes to a certain point, that system also has its limitations, and at least in terms of transferring experience.*

Summing up this meeting, the prevailing theme was conflicting demands and conceptions related to how they work caused by the way the organization is organized into specialized department and by elements in the organizational

culture. They reflected upon these issues; however the learning outcomes are rather unclear. One participant illustrates this by stating;

> P7: *I do not think that one comes any further only by case managers discussing with each other what actually 'good enough' means. It only gives vent to frustration, that one may no know what actually 'good enough' means, however one does not get any more answer to it.*

Their statements throughout the meeting indicate that important conditions for learning are participation, social interaction, and involvement in all aspects from planning to implementation in the learning process. These conditions are not irreconcilable with collective reflection, but the meeting did not seem to trigger learning.

Third reflection meeting

One of the first issues to be touched upon is the conflicting demands of delivering high quality efficiently. Employees constantly have to comply with the demands of the Norwegian Public Administration Act regarding the assessment of the case and balance it against the demand for efficiency by top management. Just as in the two preceding meetings the newcomer expresses difficulties in dealing with the balance between efficiency and quality;

> N3: *I do not know exactly where the line goes, I feel really insecure of that.*

The experienced participant elaborates on the conflicting demands in the organization, and thinks that this not necessarily is difficult to deal with only for the newcomers in the organization;

> E3: The Norwegian Public Administration Act *says something about the obligation of investigation for Public Administration, and how far does it go, it may perhaps sometimes go across 'good enough', because it might be that we have enough information to answer the patient's submission, but it can be something in a case that still is not quite right that the patient do not have the possibility to see, and then it always is a discussion of how far we should go (…) I think that discussion no matter what will be hard,*

even though you have been here for many years, and there I think you will
get different answers too.

These issues of conflicting demands and different conceptions of what it means to work in accordance with a "good enough" standard have been discussed in all three meetings, supporting an implication of this being a common perception throughout the organization. In this meeting, lack of knowledge of the fields of employees in other departments is suggested as one reason for these differences in conceptions. There has been made changes to the education and training plan of the organization to try to counteract this issue. However, the challenge is to transform knowledge learned in formal education into practice. One participant states that even though these courses are important, the most effective learning is to solve cases, i.e. participate in practice. A participant feels that the conception of "good enough" changes with increasing experience;

> P9: *I have significant more medical knowledge, and I have more*
> *experience in writing decisions, therefore I see mistakes that I have done*
> *previously, that I do not do anymore, so what I perceived as good enough*
> *in the past, I do not think is good enough today.*

By sharing experiences, especially those in which mistakes have been made, people can reflect upon and learn from each other's mistakes, and possibly achieve a satisfactory level of competence sooner than if they have to make their own mistakes along the way. Discussing issues such as those discussed in the meeting is proposed as another way to ensure common practice. They mention the practice of solving fictive cases as one such practice in which helpful and reflective discussions are held. However, they feel that they do too little of this in their daily work. Physical location and lack of common areas in which they can meet is seen as one reason for this lack of sharing and reflection amongst colleagues. Moreover, despite expressing a perception of the organization as open and accepting, the choice of words such as avoid "bothering" others, or "interfere" in their work creates the impression that there is a certain fear of interrupting others. Participants feel that it is easier to contact those whom you already know supporting what has been said in the second meeting regarding contacting people within the same department. Adding to this, those starting at the same time as oneself are in this meeting pointed to as possible connection points between departments. One of the participants remembers a previous employee specifically

competent in the medical issues of cases she used to work on, and says she learned a lot talking to him. However, he is not working in the organization any longer;

> P9: *I used him much then, but now we do not have a person with that particular competence, so I am left to myself, however I have his drawings, which I still use.*

Based on impressions from the second meeting, the participants in this meeting were asked about the perceived attitude in the organization towards making mistakes. The question elicits some insecurity as to what to answer indicating that this possibly is a controversial issue. Participants are unsure of how mistakes are dealt with internally and can only refer to rumors on this topic. The experienced participant shares her view on this topic and at the same time elaborates on the issue of dealing with conflicting demands;

> E3: *It is alright to work with the 'good enough' expression in general, that is my opinion, but not in each particular case, because each individual case is supposed to be perfect. It's kind of incorporated in the way we do things around here. My opinion is that in the management, there is not much accept of one making mistakes, however, at the same time, one is quite concerned that one should work good enough, and then one has to accept that there is a risk, so that is kind of how it is, for me there are some double signals that are hard to handle, where is the line drawn then? And then the definition of 'good enough' becomes a bit problematic. Because then it really is not good enough before it is perfect, because it should be able to spread it on the front page of VG without that being wrong.*

The frustration of dealing with these demands is further highlighted later on in the meeting;

> P8: *There is little focus on the quality, how often does one get feedback that this decision was good? One experience praise when a department reaches enough decisions during one month, however, nothing is said about its contents, which I believe is something to think about*

Thus, conflicting demands and different conceptions of the "good enough" standard dominated the discussion. Experience make employees better equipped

to deal with the issue of conflicting demands. Specialized departments and lack of knowledge of each other's fields are reasons for the differences in conceptions. Moreover, employees call for more opportunities to share knowledge and reflect upon challenging cases.

Implications gained from the reflection meetings

The main theme in the meetings and issue to be dealt with in employees' work day was the conflicting demands of efficiency versus quality. When asked, the employees had difficulties expressing accurately how they deal with this balance. To handle the balance is obviously not a step by step, explicit procedure easily to be explained, but rather an example of tacit "know-how" needed to solve tasks that can only be shared through participation the social practice (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). The newcomers all said that they constantly searched for this balance and expressed difficulties in deciding when to stop investigating the case and come to a conclusion. The other participants said that they did not think notably about this balance, and referred to it as a subconscious gut feeling or spinal reflex. Theory states that when certain types of situations are encountered repeatedly, and intuitive, spontaneous performance yields the results expected for it we tend not to think about it (Elkjaer, 2004). Thus, this could implicate that employees stop to reflect on their work practices as they become more experienced.

The goal of learning in the organization seems to be to reach a satisfactory level of knowing how to do the job, in order to be able to work independently. This suggest that the emphasis in the organization is on "teaching people what to do" instead of "helping people to learn" (Rigano & Edwards, 1998).

Participants seem to believe that different conceptions of what working sufficiently imply existing on between individuals, across departments and across hierarchical levels in the organization is inevitable and impossible to change. Schön (1983) states that the various constants practitioners bring into their process of reflection, such as language, world views and role frames, affect the scope and direction of reflection. This means that working independently and not share and reflect upon practices collectively is likely to lead to individual practices. A discrepancy in employees' practices could result in discrepancies in the conclusions reached in individual cases. According to Schön (1983), agreement

about different opinions can be reached through reflection with others, and action produced from this process tends to be more coordinated as a result of engaging everyone in the process.

Participants express a lack of knowledge of the work practices of employees in other departments. This is a potential problem when a profession divides into subspecialties (Schön, 1983) To contact other employees in the organization, participants feel they need to know the person, and report that when they do contact others, they for the most part contact the person in the office next to theirs, other colleagues within the division, or their group leader. People within departments often hold similar competence, thus only sharing knowledge within specialized departments potentially limits the number of perspectives included in the process of reflecting (Schön, 1983).

Research suggest that both interpersonal relationships and trust are required for sharing of tacit knowledge and reduces levels of risk and uncertainty that are associated with tacit knowledge sharing (Holste & Fields, 2010). The data gathered from the meetings indicate fear of interrupting others, lack of trust, and a formal and hierarchical approach to seek knowledge and share practice. This could restrain the potential learning benefits gained from collective reflection.

Reflection meetings to help people to learn

When attempting to understand how reflective practices such as the one implemented in this study can or cannot affect learning in the organization, the material from the meetings was supplemented with participants' thoughts regarding the learning benefits from the meeting elaborated on through in-depth interviews with five of the participants.

In the reflection meetings, the participants are sharing information and talking about challenges in their work life, and how they deal with them. The conversations evolved around common conceptions in the organization, and the participants were mainly agreeing with each other's statements. Their conversations consist mainly of descriptions of experiences and actions, which rarely were questioned. To characterize something as reflection, the person must engage in a process of stepping back from an experience to assess how or why we have perceived, thought, felt or acted (Daudelin, 1996). The participants are for

the most part not really assessing how or why they perceive, think, feel or act. Thus, it can be argued that the meeting did not elicit reflection to a large degree.

If one is to argue that they do reflect in the meetings, it would be in the form of more critical reflection, in which the social, cultural and political context is assessed and particular attention is paid to the analysis of power relations (Reynolds, 1998; Vince, 2002). Participants discussed how top management, organizational structure and elements in the organizational culture influenced routines and procedures in the organization. According to Reynolds (1998), critical reflection involves questioning these issues. However, as stated in relation to reflection, the participants were describing and explaining more than they were questioning.

When interviewed, the participants did not have any clear opinions when asked whether they felt that the meeting was suited to trigger reflections suggesting that they are somewhat unfamiliar with the term reflection. They express that the meeting increased awareness of challenges at work and confirmed that people to a large part have the same understanding regarding these challenges. Adding to this, both the newcomer and the experienced participant interviewed expressed that it was a nice opportunity to talk to others in the organization that they normally do not talk to for such a long period of time. This suggests that sharing experiences are useful, regardless of amount of experience. However, the newcomer and the experienced employee differ when they talk about their role in these meetings. They explain;

> *N3: I might have been a bit quiet during the meeting, but that was because I did not feel any relation to the topics discussed yet. But I felt that I got to think things over and said how I perceive the issues in the system so far.*

> *E2: In retrospect, as an older coworker, one tend to become a bit - what can I say - dominant and it's easier to just rant about all the problems one has encountered, okay, so it would probably be better if I had kept my mouth.*

This illustrates a possible difference in the learning process for newcomers and experienced employees. The experienced employees have a larger pool of experiences to choose from possibly making it easier for them to contribute in the meeting. It might be easier for experienced employees to be actively involved by

sharing experiences, while newcomers seemingly observe and listens. If newcomers mainly observe and listen, one can argue that they are not really engaging in collective reflection. However, by the newcomer's statement, one might infer that she engages in individual reflection based on that she sees and hears. This indicate that newcomers might struggle somewhat to participate actively in collective reflection. However, since only one newcomer is interviewed one cannot conclude that this is the case for all newcomers. It might also be a result of this person's personality and individual preferences or elements in the context in which she is embedded.

Nevertheless, most of them did not feel that they learned something by participating in the meeting. One participant explains;

> P7: I did not feel that I learned anything new, as we did not look into each person's routines and how each one of us performs our work. We got some insight in how each division works. And at least I knew that already. So I did not feel that I acquired any new learning, but it is always good to - sometimes it's good just to discuss -or talk about what works and does not work at least.

This supports the impression of a meeting lacking reflections. Moreover, participants saw limited learning potential in reflecting critically. One of the interviewed participants says;

> P9: To a certain extent, but you cannot expect to turn stone into gold to put it that way.

Two others points to the importance of addressing the issues in adequate forums, and argue that the management needs to be involved in such processes in order for change to occur. Furthermore, participants highlight the importance of meeting frequently in order to have learning benefits from it and not regress to old behaviors and routines;

> P7: I think it should be something that should be brought up periodically. It's one thing to say something once, you think It over then and there, but then you fall back into old routines. So I think it's something you need to repeat several times to get people to actually do it.

In other words, participants did not see an immediate learning effect from the meeting.

The completion of these reflection meetings and the material gathered through in-depth interviews indicates that a reflective practice designed in this manner might not be the best way to learn. Adding to this, Hardimos Tsoukas (2006) states that tacit knowledge is difficult, if not impossible to make explicit. Consequently, conducting a meeting where participants are to talk about experiences might not be a suited method for learning. Moreover, this meeting targets peoples' reflection-on-action, i.e. after the fact, by having them reflect upon how they perform their work. The results might suggest that people need to be closer to the experience than what was the case here, for instance by reflection-in-action. However, just because the meeting did not bring forth reflections does not necessarily mean that the employees do not reflect in other settings at work.

Current reflective practices at work

A reflective practice facilitating collective reflection in the organization is the practice in which employees solve fictive cases. These were spoken of in the reflection meetings only in positive terms. The same goes when they are talked about in the interviews. The case assignments are viewed as facilitative for learning and participants expressed a wish for more of these case assignments and similar reflection practices. One participant says;

> *P7: I think a lot of us calls for more meetings where specific issues are discussed, ala case studies or where you solve one specific case, but it could be that one is responsible for that specific case and present it, and how he or she solved it and feedback that person has received in terms of whether it was the right way to solve it or if it could have been done in another way. And you can - you sit and listen, and can contribute with your own cases. By doing so, I feel that you learn the absolutely best way.*

However, the degree of lasting change as a result of such practices and other collective reflection practices are questioned. A participant illustrates this when talking about the lean-project in the organization;

> *P5: We just had a lean-project, which focused on improve processes and work more efficiently and better and so on. And it is such processes that initiate thinking on - well. How we work and how we are. (…). The idea is very good. Improvements and becoming more aware of what you do and*

such, but very often with projects like that it seems very positive in the beginning, and then it just ends in smoke eventually. Slips out of its frames. So, I think the challenge is to stay focused and keep the intensity over time.

This problem of regressing to old routines could be a consequence of not arranging meetings frequently and systematically enough to learn new routines. Several participants express the need for time, repetition and practice to reflect upon and internalize tacit knowledge shared in collective reflection.

The statements from the interviewees underpin the impression from the reflection meetings. Collective practices seem to be given a lower priority than action in the organization, despite the fact that employees find them useful for learning and want more of such practices. With seemingly insufficient formal collective reflective practices in the organization there is a question of whether the employees in the organization have stopped to reflect, or if they reflect individually instead.

Informal reflection at work

When asked about their use of reflection in daily activities at work, the interviewed participants brought up their own office, at lunch, and informal meetings as examples of other settings in which they reflected. Moreover, they describe reflection as an ongoing process in which they were consciously and unconsciously involved to reach a conclusion on a certain matter. The interviewees express that they often prefer a combination of individual and collective reflection, and explain that they often first reflect individually, and if no solution comes to mind they discuss the case with others. Several interviewees supported the perception developed from the reflection meeting of the knowledge sharing culture in the organization, leading people to share with their colleagues closest to them.

Readiness to reflect

The context in which the employees are embedded seems to influence how reflective practices affect learning in the organization, and one can maybe argue of a need for a certain readiness to reflect in order for collective reflection to

affect learning. Both in the reflection meetings and in the interviews, participants express a need for arenas to meet to exchange knowledge and get to know their colleagues. A participant in the meeting says;

> *P6: One could picture that someone created arenas where one actually changed information or that it just becomes easier to ask questions and consult with each other, because right now it's kind of watertight in a way.*

A prerequisite for collective reflection is sharing of tacit knowledge amongst employees. Without sharing, employees do not have common practices available to reflect within. However, the availability of arenas to share is not sufficient for sharing.

Research shows that trust and interpersonal relationships are important to facilitate sharing of tacit knowledge (Holste & Fields, 2010). These issues are touched upon in the meetings and further elaborated on in interviews. Several participants pointed to the importance of trust in order to share experiences.

When talking about the preference of individual or collective reflection in relation to the type of issue reflected upon, one interviewee says;

> *P5: It depends on what it's about. But for example, if you just had a difficult conversation on the phone, then there is no need to discuss it with others, even though it would probably have been wise.*

This statement illustrate that people prefer to keep uncomfortable experiences to themselves. However, there is often a great deal of learning potential inherent these experiences, and reflection is often triggered by these experiences (Reynolds, 1998). The same participant said that he was surprised of how well the meeting went considering that people really did not know each other that much, while another pointed to the fact that the meeting was anonymous as facilitative for reflection;

> *P9: The fact that it is anonymous makes it possible to say what you really mean, without any risk.*

These and other similar statements throughout the meetings and interviews indicate a lack of trust, not only towards colleagues but also towards the top management in the organization. They are experiencing a top management that supposedly listens to them, but is not taking any action when it comes to dealing with the issues reported from their employees. Suggestions for change that is

contradictory to the current view in top management are perceived as negative criticism, and not appreciated. Top management put forth irreconcilable demands of being efficient, and at the same time not tolerating any mistakes. As a consequence, employees lose trust in their leaders and fear retaliation instead. The insufficient communication between employees and their lack of arenas to meet inhibits the development of interpersonal relations in the organization.

Furthermore, the unfamiliarity amongst the participants with the term reflection support the notion that the organization emphasis "teaching people what to do" instead of "helping people to learn". The organization seems to place a higher value on action than reflection, and this attitude towards reflective practices influence the way people work. The organization's current practice and attitude towards collective reflection could stop people from reflecting, and instead just do what they have always done. In the rapid changing environment of today, the organization is likely to suffer from these soon to be outdated routines at some point. Another consequence of the organization's attitude is development of discrepancies in individuals work practice through individual reflection. Moreover, employees are likely to develop informal sharing practices in the organization, limiting management's control over the knowledge shared, and possibly increase the tendency of sharing knowledge only within departments.

Participants do not feel that they have any influence on how the organization is organized, especially the focus of the organization, the goals set for them, and how they are being evaluated.

Limitations

Yin (1994) pinpoints that case study research is remarkably hard, and according to Corbin and Strauss (2008), qualitative analysis is something that can only be learned by doing. Thus, the fact that the study is carried out by a relatively inexperienced researcher might possibly influence the findings. As an inexperienced researcher, I felt it challenging to be able to ask the "correct" questions "on the spot" to elicit the aspects of the topics being discussed relevant for the research question.

Despite the fact that an employee in the organization helped designing the case, it might not have been as useful as intended. Through the process of conducting the

reflection meetings it became apparent that the case the participants received in advance was not specific enough to trigger the kind of reflection on work practices initially intended. The participants spoke in more general terms about their work practices and how they would go about solving the case assuming certain conditions.

A third possible limitation is the risk that people's true opinions are concealed of various reasons for the rest of the group. It could be that people are only expressing attitudes and opinions consistent with the values expressed by the top management in the organization because of lack of trust in colleagues and/or researcher and fear of retaliation. Another risk is that the participants make assumptions regarding what the researcher wants to hear, and/or which issues are relevant to discuss in relation to the study. If this is the case, the results from the study might only reveal some participants opinions, and not reflect the overall situation in the organization.

Conclusions and implications for further research

Based on the insights from this case study, some implications regarding how reflection affects organizational learning can be drawn. The reflection meetings did increase employees' awareness of work practices; however, it seemed to have limited learning effects. Current reflection practices in the organization, such as solving case assignments, were reported to be useful. The difference between the one conducted in the study and the one currently existing in the organization was to be found in how the case assignments were presented, suggesting that case assignments rich in information and details might be better at triggering reflection. Participants expressed that his process of reflection in order to reach a solution was a combination of individual and collective reflection. They often preferred to ponder the problem on their own at first, and come up with some tentative solutions before consulting others. Discussing with others was triggered when uncertain situations emerged that they did not manage to solve on their own. This indicates that organizations should strive to combine the individual and collective reflection processes to make the most out of the learning potential inherent in reflection.

During the meetings, they got into discussions about the social, cultural and political context in which they are embedded, and the prevailing perception amongst the participants was that there were too few opportunities to share experiences and collectively reflect and little contact between colleagues across departments. The culture of the organization is blamed for this. When the interviewed participants were asked about the usefulness of such critical reflection, all of them felt that it was mainly useful in the sense that it felt good to release some frustrations once in a while, but such discussions did not lead to learning or change in the organization.

However, one should not dismiss the usefulness of reflection based on this. A lack of forums to share their practices, together with a lack of trust in colleagues and management may have contributed to the lack of perceived usefulness. Moreover, it might be that employees need to practice collective reflection. If so, such practices need to be conducted several times in order for it to affect learning. Lack of collective reflection in the organization is potentially problematic, especially in light of the organization's purpose. Lack of collective reflection might result in discrepancies in individual's practices. Such discrepancies in employees' practices are likely to result in discrepancies in the conclusions reached in individual cases. The outcome of the case becomes dependent on the employee in charge of it, which contradicts the principle of equal treatment in the Norwegian public sector. Research should be conducted to further investigate how reflective practices can affect learning in the organization. Additionally, further research should investigate how the context in which reflection is embedded influence its affect on learning in the organization.

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Sak til diskusjon

I februar 2007 går ei 54 år gammel dame til lege på grunn av plager med løs mage, forstoppelse, blod i avføring, og hun forteller at hun i 2005 har tatt CT undersøkelse av magen. Plagene blir oppfattet som mest sannsynlig utløst av betennelse i magen og behandles deretter.

I november 2007 henvises hun til CT undersøkelse hvor hun får påvist muskelknuter i livmoren. I april 2008 ble hun innlagt på sykehus på grunn av magesmerter, og det ble påvist akutt betennelse, stor kreftsvulst i nedre del av tykktarmen og abcess/byll som lå i nærheten av svulsten. Hun ble innlagt flere ganger våren/sommeren 2008 grunnet flere betennelser samt bivirkninger av stråle- og cellegift behandlinger.

Da hun ble operert i august 2008 ble det oppdaget perforert tarm tilknyttet byllen. Hun fikk midlertidig utlagt avlastende tynntarm stomi, og fikk senere avløpsproblemer med høyre nyre som måtte behandles. Hun mener at det foreligger manglende funn og dermed forsinket diagnostisering av svulst i underlivet, og at svulsten burde vært oppdaget under CT undersøkelsen i 2007.

Journaler og uttalelser fra behandlingsstedene blir innhentet, og det blir bedt om spesialisterklæring.

Sakkyndiges vurdering av saken

I desember 2009 foreligger den første spesialisterklæringen. Spesialisten konkluderer med at så langt har det ikke oppstått sekveler på grunn av forsinket diagnose, men pasienten fikk perforasjon av tarmen grunnet kreftsykdommen med forlenget sykehusopphold og behov for behandling av avklemt/arrinndratt høyre urinleder som resultat.

Først etter flere års oppfølging blir det avklart om hun får tilbakefall av kreftsykdommen og eventuelt tilbakefall av avløpshinder fra høyre urinleder som da vil være assosiert med og sett som komplikasjoner etter forsinket diagnose. Han legger også til at CT undersøkelsen i 2005 bør undersøkes nærmere, og mener det ikke vil være uventet om man retrospektivt vil finne unormalt tarmavsnitt også på dette tidspunktet.

Tilleggsinformasjon om undersøkelsen i 2005 blir innhentet og saken sendt til ny medisinsk vurdering. Denne foreligger i februar 2010. Sakkyndig konkluderer med at det er funn av suspekt tarmavsnitt allerede her, og dersom det hadde vært utført supplerende rekto-sigmoideskopi og koloskopi hadde pasienten med stor sannsynlighet fått stilt kreftdiagnosen i løpet av november/desember 2005. Pasienten har hatt en betydelig forsinkelse på 2,5 år i diagnostikken. Sprukken tarm og påfølgende komplikasjoner må tilskrives forsinket diagnostikk, og risikoen for lokalt tilbakefall eller utvikling av dattersvulster øker.

I oktober 2010 ble det sendt forespørsel om spesialistuttalelse om eventuelle stråleskader. Denne foreligger i november 2010 og konkluderer med at pasienten ikke har en vedvarende behandlingsskade for øyeblikket, og man er enig i konklusjonen i den første spesialisterklæringen fra desember 2009.

I mars 2011 blir det sendt ut nok en forespørsel om tilleggsvurdering til spesialisterklæring. Her blir det bedt om en nærmere vurdering av hva forsinkelsen kan ha medført av nevnte plager, samt eventuelt prognosetap.

Her får man til svar at det ikke foreligger noen varig skade, men forsinkelsen har medført skader/plager av forbigående art. Det er overveiende sannsynlighet for at forsinkelsen har vært årsaken til sprukken tarm, akutt infeksjon, utlagt tynntarm, avklemt urinleder med påfølgende stentinnleggelse i urinleder, større arr, økt risiko for mageplager etter operasjonen og forlengede sykehusopphold. På grunn av forsinkelsen har pasienten mest sannsynlig måttet gjennomgå mer omfattende behandling enn ellers. Ved tidligere diagnose ville hun med overveiende sannsynlighet ha unngått strålebehandling, cellegift og stentbehandling.

På grunn av perforasjonen er prognosen på sikt dårligere. I kreftregisteret er prognosen 90% overlevelse ved lokalisert sykdom og 70% overlevelse ved regional sykdom. Pasienten har skjønnsmessig fått et prognosetap på 20-30% grunnet den forsinkede diagnosen.

I juni 2011 blir det fattet et vedtak.

Tema for refleksjonsmøte: Begrepet "godt nok"

Velkommen! Dette møtet varer i ca 2 timer, og det blir tatt opp på lydopptaker. Opptaket og utskriften av det skal kun behandles av meg og min veileder, Cathrine Filstad. Først tar vi en introduksjonsrunde, så skal jeg fortelle litt hva jeg er ute etter, før vi tar for oss caset.

Introduksjonsrunde

Navn, alder, seksjon, utdanningsbakgrunn, antall år i NPE (evt. Annen lignende erfaring)

Introduksjon

Dette prosjektet handler om erfaringsbasert kunnskap, det blir også kalt kompetanse eller taus kunnskap. Taus kunnskap er eksempelvis vite hva som er "godt nok", eller det at man har en slags ryggmarksrefleks, eller magefølelse når man jobber. Jeg vet at disse tingene er vanskelig å beskrive med ord, men målet er å prøve å få til dette, og dele erfaringer og slik kunnskap med hverandre. Det jeg ønsker å få tak i er deres refleksjoner rundt saksbehandlingsprosessen. Hvilke tanker og avveininger ligger bak valgene og beslutningene som tas. Jeg er klar over at det kan være mangelfull informasjon i caset. Caset er kun ment som et eksempel man kan ta utgangspunkt i, men dersom dere mener det ikke fungerer så godt, eller har andre erfaringer som kanskje er mer kjent og relevant, og enklere å reflektere rundt, så er det ingenting i veien for å snakke om disse erfaringene også.

- Jeg kommer til å stille noen spørsmål, men målet i dette møtet er at dere skal snakke og diskutere med hverandre.
- Jeg er interessert i å høre om deres egne erfaringer, meninger og tanker.
- Alle tanker og meninger like viktige, og alle er like ok, det finnes ikke riktige eller feil svar.
- Nå kan dere lese igjennom caset.

Diskusjon

Spørsmål til diskusjon

Hva tenker dere om prosessen i denne saken?

Hvilke tanker har dere rundt avveining mellom kvalitet/grundighet og effektivitet?

Hvordan vurderer dere saken i lys av godt nok-prinsippet?

Hvilke elementer ligger til grunn for å komme frem til at dette er godt nok?

Legger man vekt på forskjellige ting når man gjør en vurdering?

I caset er jo medisinsk stab brukt, men hvorfor er ikke juridisk stab trukket inn?

Er det alltid klart? Hvis ikke, hvordan avgjør du at det er godt nok?

Innhold

Det virker som om begrepet/prinsippet "godt nok" er godt innarbeidet her i NPE, kan dere si noe om hva som ligger i begrepet "godt nok"?

Hva dreier diskusjonene rundt begrepet seg oftest om?

Hva skal være på plass for at dere mener det er "godt nok"?

Når er det ikke godt nok?

Kan det være for godt?

Hva er oftest problemet, at det ikke er godt nok, eller at det er for godt?

Hva skjer når det oppstår uenighet om "godt nok" prinsippet?

Finnes det riktige og gale oppfatninger av begrepet?

Episode

Konkret eksempel på en episode hvor det var forskjellige oppfatninger om hva "godt nok" betyr

I dette konkrete tilfellet, Hvilke elementer lå til grunn for å komme frem til at dette var godt nok?

Hva tenkte du rundt din egen vurdering?

Man snakker ofte om en magefølelse man har, er dette noe dere kjenner dere igjen i? Kan dere prøve å sette ord på hva som ligger i denne magefølelsen?

Opprinnelse

Hva tror dere danner grunnlaget for forståelsen av begrepet? (utdanning, erfaring, personlighet, sosial samhandling, opplæring, verdier, plassering i organisasjonen (seksjon/posisjon))

Hvor har dere lært begrepet? Jeg vet det er en del av opplæringsplanen, føler dere at det er samsvar mellom opplæring og praksis?

Utvikling

Endrer innholdet i begrepet seg over tid?

Hvilke tanker gjør dere rundt avveining mellom kvalitet/grundighet og effektivitet?

Har dere opparbeidet dere en egen "sjekkliste" for å avgjøre om det er "godt nok"?

Avslutning

Avslutningsvis, hva synes dere om dette møtet?

Hjelper det å diskutere temaet?

Hva oppnår dere ved å diskutere dette prinsippet?

Er det kommet frem nye innspill, eller er det stort sett repetisjon av tidligere diskusjoner?

Er det noe administrativt jeg bør tenke på til neste gang?

Tema	Intervjuspørsmål
Refleksjon	Sånn innledningsvis, hvis du tenker tilbake på møtet vi hadde, hva opplever du at du sitter igjen med etter møtet? Refleksjon innebærer å gjøre en vurdering av hvordan og hvorfor vi har tenkt, følt og handlet. Hvordan synes du et sånt type møte egnet seg til det? Hvis du tenker på de ulike settingene du er i jobbsammenheng, opplever du at at du reflekterer i noen av disse settingene? Når?
Kritisk refleksjon	Refleksjon kan man gjøre alene, eller sammen med andre, hva liker du best? Hvorfor? Hvorfor foretrekker du ikke det andre? På møtet snakket vi litt om bl.a. at det var et høyt produksjonskrav som står i kontrast til kravet om kvalitet, og holdninger til å gjøre feil i NPE. Tanken er at ved å se på hvordan NPE er organisert vil man kunne blir mer bevisst på hvilke antagelser som ligger til grunn for hvordan man jobber og muligens oppdage andre og bedre måter å organisere på. Synes du dette stemmer i praksis? Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke? I hvilken grad snakker dere noe om slike ting ellers? Kan refleksjon være et middel for å i større grad nå målene som er satt? I hvor stor grad føler du at dere saksbehandlere har noe å si, at dere har innflytelse, når det kommer til disse tingene, og eventuelt andre ting?
Deling av ny innsikt	Ved å reflektere i fellesskap kan man klare å sette ord på hvorfor og hvordan man handlet, og bli mer bevisst kunnskapen som ligger til grunn for handlingene. Denne kunnskapen er gjerne en del av magefølelsen vi snakket om når det gjelder hva som er godt nok. Tenk tilbake på møtet vi hadde, hvordan synes du møtet fungerte ifht å dele slik taus kunnskap? Ut fra dine egne erfaringer med refleksjon i jobbsammenheng, hva synes du om denne metoden å dele taus kunnskap på? Er det noen settinger du tenker er typiske og gode fora for deling av taus kunnskap?
Lærings-utbytte	Hvis du tenker tilbake på møtet, og evt andre møter du har hatt der man har reflektert rundt ting, I hvilken grad synes du at du lærte noe nytt og nyttig? Tror du andre i gruppen lærte noe? Hvilken betydning tror du erfaring har for læringsutbyttet? Opplever du at refleksjon i felleskap kan føre til endringer i organisasjonen? I følge deg, hva må være tilstede for at refleksjon skal føre til læring/endring i organisasjonen?

BI – Norwegian Business School

Preliminary Thesis Report

Managing tacit knowledge in multidisciplinary teams/projects

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Supervisor:
Cathrine Filstad

Content

Summary

This paper look at the theory of Organizational knowledge and Organisational learning with the aim of gaining insight into how tacit knowledge can be shared in multidisciplinary teams or project groups. Tacit knowledge cannot be communicated in the same way as explicit knowledge, and require different methods of sharing knowledge. One possible way of sharing tacit knowledge, is through reflection, which is an important prerequisite for learning. This paper suggests that the level of reflection required is dependent on the experience of participants. To gain insight into this issue, the paper suggest using focus groups consisting of individuals with little experience as well as experienced individuals from the same organization, who participate in the same learning context at work, thus creating experiences together.

Introduction

The environment in which the majority of organizations operate is increasingly dynamic, knowledge-intensive and globalized, and organizations need to respond rapidly to these environments. Managing knowledge work and knowledge workers is the single most important challenge facing all types of organizations (Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough, & Swan, 2009). Knowledge work is complex work, but complexity creates uncertainty about outcomes, therefore, both theoretical models and practical management have attempted to reduce complexity (Schneider, 2007). However, knowledge is a loose and ambiguous concept pointing in many directions simultaneously, making it difficult to organize, co-ordinate and control (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001). Thus, managing knowledge in the twenty-first century is less about direct control and capture of knowledge in machines or systems, and more about providing an enabling context that supports the process and practices of applying knowledge for specific tasks and purposes (Newell et al., 2009). Such enabling contexts facilitate tacit knowledge sharing. There is no doubt about the importance of tacit knowledge in organizations. The acquisition of experience depends upon it, it is the source of competitive advantage, and it is critical to daily management activities (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). Moreover, people's tacit knowledge will differ depending on their profession, thus, members in multidisciplinary teams/project groups will benefit from being able to share tacit knowledge amongst each other, possibly resulting in innovative thinking and problem solving.

It is fruitful to look to theory within the field of Organizational Learning to gain further insight into how to facilitate tacit knowledge sharing in multidisciplinary teams/project groups. Making room for reflection in the organization connects the individuals' acquisition of knowledge with organizational life and work practice, and can possibly enable tacit knowledge sharing.

Research question

People know more than they can tell (Polanyi, 1966). Since tacit knowledge is based on individual experiences, context-dependent, and anchored in practical work (Newell et al., 2009), tacit knowledge cannot be communicated in the same way as explicit knowledge, and require different methods of sharing knowledge (Filstad, 2010). One possible way of sharing tacit knowledge, is through reflection, which is an important prerequisite for learning (Filstad, 2010). This paper suggests that the level of reflection required is dependent on the experience of participants. Both type and amount of experience can impact the ability to share tacit knowledge. It is tempting to assume that a multidisciplinary team/project group consisting of members with little experience will require reflection on a different level than members in a multidisciplinary team/project group consisting of highly experienced members. Research shows that sharing across specialist functions or disciplines within an organization is complicated because it is too difficult to change ones current practices possibly leading to inability to apply others' knowledge (Newell et al., 2009). However, it might be that experienced members have been exposed to various situations in diverse contexts, and, thus, have a larger knowledge base, resulting in an ability to combine new elements with existing ones, in other words, having the ability to apply tacit knowledge shared by team/group members from another discipline. By looking at experienced and inexperienced team/group members in context that require different levels of reflection, the paper aims to get insights into one of the following research questions;

How can sharing/transfer of tacit knowledge be facilitated in multidisciplinary teams/project groups?
What level of reflection is required to enable tacit knowledge sharing/transfer in multidisciplinary teams/project groups?

Organisational Knowledge

Knowledge concerns peoples' various ways of understanding and making sense of where they are and what they are doing in particular social situations (Newell et al., 2009). Thus, knowledge can be defined as "the individual ability to draw discriminations within a collective domain of action, based on appreciation of context or theory or both"(Haridimos Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). Organizational knowledge is "a learned set of norms, shared understandings and practices that integrates actors and artifacts to produce valued outcomes within a specific social and organizational context" (Scarbrough, 2008), and can be reflected in what people say and do, or in the technologies, routines and systems that they use (Newell et al., 2009). The terms information and knowledge are often used interchangeably in the literature, but there is a clear distinction between them. Information is processed data that can be transformed to knowledge by being combined with experience, context, interpretation, and reflection, and affects knowledge by adding something to it or restructuring it (Nonaka, Toyama, & Byosiere, 2003).

There are two main epistemologies on knowledge, "knowledge as possession" and "knowledge as practice", and these underlying assumptions about what knowledge is influence the tactics, strategies and analytical tools used when attempting to manage knowledge work more effectively (Newell et al., 2009). The "knowledge as possession" view treat knowledge as a mental capacity or resource, that can be developed, applied and used to improve effectiveness in the workplace, while the "knowledge as practice" treats knowledge as constructed and negotiated through social interactions (Newell et al., 2009). Some advocates of the "epistemology of practice" prefer to use the term "knowing" rather than knowledge to underpin the active, processual and social nature of knowledge (Newell et al., 2009).

Furthermore, three perspectives on knowledge have developed; structural perspectives, adopting the "knowledge as a possession" view, and process and practice perspectives adopting the "knowledge as practice" view (Newell et al., 2009). The structural perspectives, with the "knowledge as a possession" view,

focus on identifying different types, or forms, of knowledge people have. A common practice by researchers on knowledge is to differentiate between tacit and explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is systematic, universal and transparent, and can be written down, encoded, stored, and reused (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). It can be communicated and explained to anyone with some basic understanding of the topic and is available to everyone who desires it (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). Tacit knowledge is not formally taught and often cannot be explained in words (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). It includes know-how, and is highly personalized, based on individual experiences, context-dependent, and anchored in practical work (Newell et al., 2009). The structural perspective have been criticized for failing to take account of the more subjective, equivocal and dynamic nature of knowledge, and that the separation between tacit and explicit knowledge has been overstated (Newell et al., 2009).

The process and practice perspectives postulate that knowing is a social activity and it is impossible to separate knowledge from practice. Practice can be defined as "socially recognized forms of activity, done on the basis of what members learn from others, and capable of being done well or badly, correctly or incorrectly" (Barnes, 2000, p. 27). The perspectives propose that knowledge is difficult to share where peoples' practices are also not shared (Newell et al., 2009). Moreover, the perspective take into account that knowledge work takes place in a broader institutional contexts and interconnected sets of practices, meaning that change in one area of practice potentially disrupts a wide range of other practices (Newell et al., 2009).

Tacit knowledge
The tacit dimensions of individuals' knowledge base make them especially valuable contributors to group projects and perspectives based on such knowledge cannot be obtained any other way except socialization taking place through interactions with other members of the social practice (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001).

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) divide tacit knowledge into technical and cognitive types. Technical tacit knowledge is created by or through an individual's actions

and direct experience in here and now, and can be acquired by "learning by doing" that does not require the use of language. Cognitive tacit knowledge is transmitted through language and involves social activity and informal discussions of work problems (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) tacit and explicit knowledge are mutually complementary entities, and they have developed the socialization – externalization – combination – internalization (SECI) – model in which an interaction, called a knowledge conversion process, takes place. In their view, organizational knowledge creation is a spiral process in which the interaction takes place repeatedly. The externalization phase of this SECI-model includes making tacit knowledge explicit to make it understandable to others. However, Tsoukas (2006) argue that they have misinterpreted the concept of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge cannot be "captured", "translated", or "converted" into explicit knowledge as Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue, but only displayed, manifested, in what we do. Tsoukas (2006) claims that even the most explicit kind of knowledge is underlain by tacit knowledge, and that new knowledge comes about not when the tacit becomes explicit, but when our skilled performance is combined in new ways through social interaction (Tsoukas, 2006).

According to Polanyi (1962) people are only aware of certain aspects of their knowledge at particular points in time, and by attending to something and making it explicit, people automatically push other things into the background, or into tacitness. Tacit knowledge forms a triangle with focal awareness, *subsidiary awareness*, and *the knower* in each of the corners (Filstad, 2010). The subsidiary particulars and the focal target represent two different types of awareness in exercising a skill and are mutually exclusive (Polanyi, 1962; Tsoukas, 2006). The target of the focal awareness concerns the actual exercise of the skill, while the actor is subsidiary aware of the particulars – clues or tools –needed to be able to exercise the skill (Polanyi, 1962). Linking the particulars to the focal target does not happen automatically, but is a result of the act of the knower (Tsoukas, 2006). The integration of the subsidiaries to the focal target is essentially tacit and irreversible, and in the context of carrying out a specific task, we come to

know a set of particulars without being able to identify them (Tsoukas, 2006).

Thus, we get things done and achieve competence, by becoming unaware of how we do so. We know the particulars by relying on our awareness of them for attending to something else, and if they are separated from the focus and examined independently their meaning will be lost (Tsoukas, 2006). This means that any explicit, codified knowledge will always be incomplete or partial, and tasks can only be accomplished by combining explicit knowledge with tacit knowledge developed through experience (Newell et al., 2009).

The decrease of consciousness of certain things enables expansion of consciousness of other things, and given a certain context, we assimilate, interiorize and instrumentalize certain things in order to concentrate – focus – on others (Tsoukas, 2006). In another context, and at another level of analysis, we can open up some of the previously assimilated, interiorized and instrumentalized issues and focus our attention to them (Tsoukas, 2006).

Multidiciplinary teams/project groups

In order to create new knowledge necessary to be able to develop new products, services or organizational processes, different knowledge bases must be brought together (Newell et al., 2009). Thus, knowledge creation is typically the result of bringing together a number of individuals from different professional and disciplinary backgrounds in collaborative efforts of some kind (Newell et al., 2009). Multidisciplinary teams and project groups are examples of such. Teams and project groups are similar in the sense that they involve multiple individuals working together to achieve some kind of objective, but they also differ in some ways, which may result in encountering different challenges.

When the members of multidisciplinary teams are required to interact and work closely together, the possibility of achieving innovative solutions increases, but at the same time the collaboration gets more challenging (Newell et al., 2009). Perhaps one of the most prominent challenges is knowledge in itself. Carlile (2004) argues that there are three types of knowledge boundaries, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic, and to overcome these, knowledge must be transferred, translated and transformed respectively. Boundary objects that can

be used to provide a common frame of reference for communication across different knowledge and practice domains can facilitate sharing (Newell et al., 2009). In project groups individuals are brought together to work in ways that help them to overcome knowledge boundaries, however, they might encounter learning boundaries (Newell et al., 2009). While knowledge boundaries reflects divisions in practice and knowledge between specialized groups, learning boundaries arise between the project group and the organization because of a new shared practice in the project group that differs considerably from the practices in the rest of the organization (Newell et al., 2009).

Sharing tacit knowledge

van den Hooff and de Ridder (2004, p. 118) define knowledge sharing as "the process where individuals mutually exchange their (implicit and explicit) knowledge and jointly create new knowledge." There are primarily two goals when sharing knowledge. One is to create new knowledge by differently combining existing knowledge, and the other is to improve the exploitation of existing knowledge (Christensen, 2007). Tacit knowledge resides only in the minds of people and its availability and use depends upon individual decisions and relationships (Holste & Fields, 2010). Thus, while technology may facilitate the storage of explicit knowledge, it is not an appropriate channel for sharing tacit knowledge. Research suggests that sharing knowledge interpersonally rather than with a database is preferred by employees (Bordia, Irmer, & Abusah, 2006). However, if Tsoukas' (2006) perspective on tacit knowledge is adopted, namely that tacit knowledge is not possible to be made explicit, how is tacit knowledge shared in the organization?

Knowledge Sharing within Knowledge Management
The field of Knowledge Management is concerned with the development of concepts that illuminate or enhance the application of explicit strategies, tools and practices that seek to make knowledge a resource for the organisation (Newell et al., 2009). Knowledge Management have traditionally adopted the assumption of knowledge as a possession and tended to concentrate on freeing

knowledge from the individual and make it widely available as an organizational resource developing information and communication technologies (ICTs) or guidelines and recipes to facilitate sharing of explicit knowledge, and more or less neglected the task of facilitating tacit knowledge (Holste & Fields, 2010). Using information management tools and concepts to design knowledge management systems is the great trap in knowledge management (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001), and Knowledge Management initiatives based solely on the assumption that knowledge is a possession have often failed, leading to a shift in focus from "knowledge" as a thing to "knowing" as a social and organizational activity (Newell et al., 2009). When adopting the assumption that knowledge is about what people do ("knowledge as practice"), the major challenge related to managing knowledge work becomes less about converting, capturing and transferring different forms of knowledge, and more about building an enabling context that connects different social groups and interests, identities and perspectives to accomplish specific tasks or purposes is to provide an enabling context that allows people to do and say things differently and, hopefully, better (Newell et al., 2009). Communities of Practice (CoPs) and social networks are examples of such enabling contexts. Whether or not knowledge or knowing leads to improvement depends on how tasks, actors and contexts come together (Newell et al., 2009). Then, managing knowledge becomes a process where unreflective practice is turned into a reflective one "by elucidating the rules guiding the activities of the practice, by helping give a particular shape to collective understandings, and by facilitating the emergence of heuristic knowledge" (Haridimos Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001). When adopting this perspective, it is useful to look to the theory on organisational learning to gain further insight into how to share tacit knowledge.

Organisational Learning

In the field of Organizational Learning, there can be said to be two main approaches, the individual cognitive approach based on an acquisition metaphor and the social and cultural approach, based on the participation metaphor (Filstad & Blåka, 2007; Sfard, 1998). The individual cognitive approach focus on

learning as an individual process and adopts the "knowledge as possession" view (Filstad, 2010). Learning is a process of information delivery from a knowledge source resulting in storing of new knowledge in the individual's memory for future use (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). Organizational learning is the efficient procedure for the processing, interpretation and improvement of representations of reality, also known as knowledge, and takes place through the members of the organization, or by supposing that the organization has the same cognitive processes as its members (Chiva & Alegre, 2005). The social and cultural understanding of learning adopts the "knowledge as practice" view, and tries to capture the dynamic between the individual and the social context and see learning as a situated and distributed process (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). Learning is moved from the individual mind and formal education settings into the everyday organizational life and work. Organizational learning is a way of being in the world where social context, cultural artifacts, collective group actions and participation play an essential role (Chiva & Alegre, 2005). Sfard (1998) argue that each of the metaphors of learning has something to offer that the other cannot provide, and an adequate combination of the two would highlight their respective advantages. In line with this, a third approach have developed, which look at organizational learning as development of experience and knowledge by reflective thinking in social worlds held together by commitment (Elkjaer, 2004). This perspective combines the two main perspectives and use the concepts "experience" and "reflective thinking" to shed light on what happens in the meeting between learner(s) and the organizational life and work practice (Elkjaer, 2004). By including experience as a factor in organizational learning, it highlights the importance of emotion, body and intuition, and engaging in reflective thinking creates experiences and is a step on the road to becoming knowledgeable (Elkjaer, 2004). This third way focus on the relation between the individual and the organization as a continuous and mutual formation, and opens up for an understanding of the organization as a social world held together by commitment to organizational situations and events which can be traced in time and space. This approach acknowledges that both thinking and participation is necessary in learning and that learning is a social process. Thus, one should focus on events and situations, rather than individuals

or organizations when looking at why individuals and groups acts or do not act, and why organizations react or do not react (Elkjaer, 2004).

Tacit knowledge sharing through reflection

Reflection is applied to resolve an uncertain situation that has arisen (Elkjaer, 2004). It is a mental activity aimed at assessing how or why we have perceived, thought, felt or acted (Mezirow, 1990, p. 6). Critical reflection questions the contextual taken-for-granted aspects – social, cultural and political – within which the task or problem is situated (Reynolds, 1998). Schön (1983;1987 in Filstad & Blåka, 2007) differentiate between three levels of reflection; knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action. Knowing-in-action is a form of know-how revealed through the exercise of a skill, and is referring to the tacit knowledge level (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). Reflection-in-action is the way different professionals deal with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict (Høyrup, 2006). It is an on-the-spot process of surfacing, testing and evaluating intuitive understandings initiated when something does not go according to expectations (Høyrup, 2006). Reflection-on-action on the other hand, is to reflect on an action in retrospect, and has no immediate connection to the actual action (Filstad & Blåka, 2007).

Method

Research design

To investigate the role of reflection in tacit knowledge sharing in multidisciplinary teams/project groups, the use of focus groups is considered suitable. The pool of respondents will consist of individuals with little experience as well as experienced individuals. Moreover, the respondents should come from the same organization, and participate in the same learning context, thus creating experiences together. At the same time, the respondents should have different professional backgrounds, implying differences in tacit knowledge.

The research will be conducted in two stages. First, the respondents will be divided into two groups based on level of experience. Further, each of the two groups will be divided in three smaller groups. These groups are based on the

respondents' responsibilities and assignments at work. Ideally, each small group consists of four to six people who participate in the same action at work at one point in time. This action should be ambiguous and uncertain by challenging the respondents' values. The groups will be assigned to different conditions. One group is going to be in the same situation and resolving it together. In the second group, only a few members are going to participate in the situation. Ideally, the situation is videotaped, and the group is to meet to discuss and reflect on the action. The third group is presented with a case and the members have to discuss and agree on the appropriate response in that situation.

In the second stage of the research, all three of the small groups will come together in two focus groups. One consisting of the respondents with little experience, and the other consisting of the experienced individuals. In this focus group, the respondents are going to reflect on their experience and talk about what they learned through the experience. The objective is to gain some insight into how tacit knowledge sharing happens. It might reveal some differences between experienced and inexperienced respondents when it comes to the need for participation in action in order to be able to reflect on action, understand tacit knowledge shared by other individuals and apply it to future situations.

Industry sectors interesting to investigate

As stated in the introduction, managing knowledge work and knowledge workers is the single most important challenge facing all types of organizations. Thus, there are many sectors relevant to investigate. A lot of research is done on consultancy firms, which is understandable, since they are knowledge-intensive organizations. This is also one of the reasons why it is an alternative in regards to the research in question in this paper. The consultancy business is already quite good at managing the explicit knowledge, and by focusing on the tacit dimension they could get even better at managing their organizational knowledge. Moreover, their work is often project-based, with project members consisting of individuals from different disciplines and different departments in the organization. On the other hand, it could be interesting to look at a sector known for being a lot less organized than consultancy firms, such as the media sector. In this sector tacit knowledge might play a central role in how individuals perform

their job, and doing research here could potentially lead to enlightening insights into the research question. Other sectors of particular interest are the oil and gas and health sector. In both of these sectors, the collaboration is highly multidisciplinary.

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Progression plan

	March		April		May		June		July		August	
Preliminary Thesis Report	▓											
Method Develpoment		▓	▓									
Get respondents			▓									
Data collection				▓	▓							
Analyze and interpret							▓	▓				
Review of theoretical concepts	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓
First complete draft									▓		▓	

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