

Chapter 18

Intuitive Knowledge Generation in Post-Bureaucratic Organizations

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ABSTRACT

To address the need for more suitable cognitive mechanisms in post-bureaucratic organizations, this chapter explores how the use of intuition can enhance organizational decision making and information sharing, and thus contribute to knowledge generation in fast-paced, high-pressured environments. In the context of film production teams, as an example of such environment, it identifies three distinct categories that are in frequent use: intuitive expertise, intuitive creation, and intuitive foresight. The findings suggest that the employment of intuition in dynamic settings is indeed common but, contrary to previous beliefs, it is much more nuanced. Not only do various professional groups utilize different kinds of intuition, they also adjust its use to the specific type of activity. A distinction has been detected in particular between approaches to task-related versus people-related activities. The understanding which organizational player and under which conditions relies on intuition, provides new insights into knowledge generation in modern organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Post-bureaucratic organizations are a product of the 21st century business environment that is characterized by complexity and continuous change (Heckscher, 1994; Mitleton-Kelly, 2003). In order to function successfully, organizations have gradually embraced new approaches to knowledge generation that help them survive. Resilience under such conditions requires, among other considerations, different decision-making and information-sharing mechanisms that enhance productivity and innovation. This opened willingness to explore previously ignored cognitive processes that foster imagination and creativity (Gill, Levine, & Pitt, 1998), and enable efficiency in fast-paced, high-pressured environments that render traditional models obsolete (Burke & Miller, 1999; Hayashi, 2001). In this reinvented organizational space

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(Nonaka, von Krogh, & Voelpel, 2006), the cognitive and social contexts facilitate knowing through personal interactions and influence rather than positional power (Heckscher, 1994). The ensuing shifts in the interpersonal dynamic are therefore often subtle and rapid. Naturally, the increased speed and implicit nature of such environment require new ways to absorb information.

This new kind of fluidity is needed to sustain and effectively manage emergent change (Maimone & Sinclair, 2014) that in post-bureaucratic organizations acts as conduit to new ways of thinking and behavior, encouraging individual initiative and personalized approaches to decision making and information sharing (Gill et al., 1998). It requires a smooth interaction of all facets of organizational space (Nonaka et al., 2006), be it physical, virtual, mental or emotional, designed to nurture creative and entrepreneurial thinking channelled into innovation as an inherent ingredient of survival. Such interaction of organizational players could be likened to an improvised dance (Maimone & Sinclair, 2014) that is guided by consensual principles rather than rigid rules, thus allowing for “flexibility and intelligent response to changing circumstances” (Heckscher, 1994, p. 26). It is no surprise that for such individualized engagement, traditional information processing methods, designed for stable business environment of bureaucratic organizations, do not suffice. Research from fast-paced and high-pressured environments, characteristic for post-bureaucratic organizations, suggests that organizational players often combine or supplement rational methods with more visceral approaches to information (Khatri & Ng, 2000; Wally & Baum, 1994). One would therefore assume that such expansion of ‘information-processing repertoire’ will have an impact on knowledge generated in the organizational space. One of the commonly mentioned alternatives is intuition, understood as “direct knowing without any use of conscious reasoning” (Sinclair & Ashkanasy, 2005).

This chapter will first outline the existing thinking about the role of intuition in organizations and the key conditions under which it thrives. It will then contrast its dynamics in task-related versus people-related activities, and set the scene for intuitive use in film making where the reported study was conducted. It will introduce the three types of intuition used to categorize the results and provide details about study design. Finally, it will interpret the findings and propose areas for future research.

BACKGROUND

Intuition and Organizational Decision Making

The usefulness of intuition, as a way to augment rational decision making, has been established especially in a fast-paced, high-pressured and ambiguous organizational space that does not provide sufficient information and/or time to process it (Behling & Eckel, 1991; Burke & Miller, 1999). This is exactly the type of environment in which many modern organizations are immersed. Unable to conduct an all-encompassing analysis or construe a ‘bulletproof’ argument, they are grudgingly paying heed to less conscious information processing conveyed through emotions, intuitions and from them resulting insights (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Isenberg, 1984; Langley, Mintzberg, Pitcher, Posada, & Saint-Macary, 1995). So far, acceptance has been confined mostly to strategic decision making (Duggan, 2007; Isenberg, 1984) and other management areas of the so-called expert intuition (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Klein, 2003) where experts arrive at judgements by super-fast, non-linear retrieval and/or recombination of stored memory patterns (Sinclair & Ashkanasy, 2005). This decision-making method is not meant to replace rational approaches to planning and problem solving but rather serve as supplement when these cannot

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