Chapter XV

Transforming Organizational Culture to the Ideal Inquiring Organization: Hopes and Hurdles

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Abstract

This chapter reports on the finding of the research into social learning at the Australian Defence Organization (ADO). The research aim was to identify factors that enable knowledge generation and transfer in organizations and contribute to creation of organizational culture that supports continuous learning. These factors are described in this chapter and include common identity, morale, problem solving, team building, performance management, workplace design, organizational culture, records keeping, information exchange, IT infrastructure, professional training, and induction and

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enculturation. The chapter concludes with description and suggested application of the Cynefin model which offers a pragmatic and conceptual alternative to the orthodoxy of scientific management.

Introduction

It has been suggested that an inquiring systems approach in organizations can be implemented quickly and easily to leverage knowledge assets and to successfully bring about organizational change (Kienholz, 1999). Furthermore, if organizations integrate their business objectives and intellectual capital and embed them in moral and ethical standards, then inquiring organizations that achieve this will meet business objectives, provide a safe, satisfying and enriching workplace for employees, and have a positive impact on their environment and society in general. While an inquiring system approach can be implemented quickly, the cultural change underlying organizational transformation is notoriously slow.

It is the authors’ contention, based on several years research in this area, that ideally, an inquiring organization that aspires to wisdom should have an organizational culture that:

- is ever mindful of its ethical and social obligations;
- is attuned to its customers’ requirements;
- is constantly looking for ways of improving its services;
- is network centric in philosophy and structure;
- practices unbounded systems thinking;
- values and trusts its employees and maintains a family friendly and flexible workplace;
- supports employees with sufficient resources, the latest in technology and collaborative work systems; and
- encourages reflection and innovation, allows employees to learn from their own mistakes and celebrates achievements.

While some organizations may be close to this ethos, for many more, the transformation pathway is unclear. Much of the research discussed in this chapter addresses this dilemma, and the Cynefin model is introduced as a possible transformation pathway. However, this chapter also poses another question: What is a realistic expectation for the near future and what are the hopes and hurdles that currently face inquiring organizations in a less than ideal environment?
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