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**KNOWLEDGE IN KNOWLEDGE INTENSIVE
ORGANIZATIONS**

The case of Crime Investigation and Consulting Firms

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Abstract

The importance of knowledge is increasingly critical to competitive advantage in today's organizational environment. In the following research a comparison between two kinds of knowledge intensive organizations is carried out, namely consulting firms on one side and crime investigation departments on the other. The purpose is to point out differences and similarities in their way of organizing knowledge, and then investigate whether they are learning organizations.

The study opens with an analysis of knowledge sharing, where four processes are pinpointed: teaching, coaching, systematizing and training. The analysis deepens then to investigate the three levels of learning: the individual level, the group level and the organizational level. Within the group level particular emphasis is put on communities of practice. The study continues examining the learning organization and the most diffused barriers to learning, the ego-defenses.

What was originally believed about the two organizations turned out to be quite different from reality.

Keywords: Knowledge, learning, knowledge-sharing, ego-defenses, communities of practice, crime investigation, consultant, learning organization, police

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1. Introduction

A newspaper advertisement for selling correspondence courses, dated 1919, was titled “Don’t Wait for the Dead Men’s Shoes”. The subtitle said “secure promotion through the value of specialized knowledge”, and further on “a man barter his knowledge as surely as a merchant sells his wares” (Finerty, 1999). Fad or not, the importance of the value of knowledge is certainly not a new concept! As we leave the industrial era and enter the time of information, knowledge is becoming a burning question. As new technologies are invented, industries are redefined, global competition intensifies, and the rate at which an organization can learn and spread its knowledge is becoming the issue. We need to know what knowledge is in order to be able to structure it, save it and share it.

Some authors believe that “knowledge is the firm’s most important resource because it represents intangible assets, operational routines, and creative processes that are hard to imitate” (McLure and Faraj, 2000). Success is then obtained and sustained by developing a distinctive set of organizational capabilities, rather than through traditional strategic tools such as positioning. Due to the fact that the pace and intensity of change has rendered very vulnerable traditional strategies, based on narrow focus on products and markets, the need is for the development of a broad set of capabilities that go beyond products and markets. (Liedtka, 1999)

Organizations possess numerous resources, but it is the resources that are unique, inimitable, and valuable that are central to gaining competitive advantage on the market, the organization’s knowledge base is one of them. Firms are increasingly relying on building and creating knowledge as a necessary condition to survive. They need to manage their core competences into competitive advantage. Continual improvement is only accomplished if the firm is capable of bringing in or creating new knowledge.

1.1 Problem Area

The basic concepts of knowledge have been widely discussed in recent years, many words have been used to differentiate knowledge from information, and sadly too many people still use them interchangeably. Many words and ink have also been spent on Knowledge Management, seeking to define it, sometimes as

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IT systems, sometimes as more human oriented approaches. What we believe is important now is to move the step further to investigate whether the undoubtedly attractive theories are applied with success. Models of tacit versus explicit knowledge are fascinating concepts, however what really matters is the capacity to deliver real benefits to the organization.

1.1.1 Choosing the Problem

We wanted to write about Knowledge Management for a long time, it is undoubtedly a fascinating subject since many disputes are still open. Still, we thought that the limit of the literature lies in the fact that either one finds highly abstract theoretical models on the matter, or too technical ones. Our purpose was to refer to the practice of knowledge intensive companies and seek how they approach the matter (if they do). Yet, we also wanted to write about something new and interesting, in order to render our work a bit more exciting. We were focused on the consultants as examples of companies where Knowledge Management is a crucial issue, still many papers have already been written on them, and we did not want to be boring.

The choice for such, apparently different types of organizations, came in a brain storming session where our supervisor, Torbjörn Stjernberg, amazed us with great creativity. While trying to associate the concept of knowledge and problem solving, all of the sudden “crime investigation” popped into our minds. In crime investigation each new case presents *unique* sets of facts and potential solutions, requiring a varying degree of skills and manpower. The input to solve the crime consists primarily of knowledge with little physical capital used. On the other hand, the consultants work under great pressure and the main task is problem solving, so why not study them in parallel?

1.1.2 The Problem Question

The two sorts of organizations seem so different, at the same time they have many apparent similarities. Hence, it seemed to be interesting to analyze them deeper. Both are knowledge intensive organizations, they both solve problems and they are in need of knowledge sharing and learning. Yet they are functioning in areas

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that have few resemblances, the organizational structures are so different and the cultures do not seem to have anything in common. The consultants know all the theories about knowledge sharing, knowledge management and learning, the police are not so aware of this. How do they share and create their knowledge? And are they both effective in performing these tasks? Further on in our investigation we slightly shifted our attention by focusing on the learning issues. Hence, our journey starts by investigating how the two organizations organize their knowledge to then move a step deeper to investigate whether they are learning organizations.

1.1.3 Limitations

To study these phenomena, we decided to not look into the whole police force but to focus on crime investigators. Yet, we soon realized that if we talk about “rookies”, we have none of those in these in the area of investigators, since most police officers start out patrolling. This is why we, when talking about newcomers to the police, mean people coming directly from the academy and therefore not being on a higher level in the hierarchy within the police. On all other occasions we are talking about criminal inspectors, i.e. investigators working with more advanced crimes than patrolling the streets to assure safety for the community.

When coming to crime investigation, we realize that the organization operates in a project-oriented attitude, and relies heavily on team work. Depending on the nature of the crime, they are classified into three types: *operational*, *investigation*, and *serious crime* they are handled in different ways; the *operational* is usually taken within the boundaries of each district, *investigations* regard the whole department, and so do *serious crimes*, often requiring a collaboration among several departments, or international. Often teams are assembled with the number and background of its members dependent on the nature of the crime, resulting in a rather flexible organization characterized by decentralization and fluid supervisory functions. A strong similarity with what in management studies is called “cross-functional teams”. We concentrate mostly on the investigation of serious crimes, as that is the one we view as most knowledge intensive.

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On the consultant side we choose two very similar consultancy firms. They both deal with management issues (not exclusively, but that is a main part of their expertise), they are both international and two of the bigger ones operating in Sweden. Their work within knowledge management and the issues we are studying are very much alike, they are aware of the theoretical framework for enhancing knowledge sharing and creating in an organization and try their best to follow these directions. One of the firms has a slightly extreme attitude and harsher cultural approach than the other. We decided to treat them as “the consultants” as long as their attitudes go in the same direction. However we did not consider it would have been fair to them (and correct to the authenticity of study) to treat them as a single entity when relevant differences appeared in their approaches. Therefore, when these differences are relevant, we will point them out specifying that there is disagreement, without mentioning the company name or the persons we interviewed. They did not ask for this, but we do not see any reasons why we should publish their names, since that has no relevance for the outcome of our work.

1.1.4 Definitions

For our problem area we say that we wanted to study knowledge management in knowledge intensive organizations. This might seem obvious in its meaning, but to clear up our view of the terminology we want to define what those wordings mean to us and what we mean while using them in our thesis.

1.1.4.1 Knowledge Management

The definitions of knowledge management are, as said previously, too many. In this thesis we choose not to involve ourselves in the discussion among the various definitions and only use this term for the collected efforts that are used from management to control, structure or help knowledge sharing and organizational learning.

1.1.4.2 Knowledge Intensive Organizations

We will be talking about knowledge intensive organizations and Starbuck (1992) defines them as a organization in which “knowledge has more importance than

other inputs”. A knowledge intensive firm can also be defined by being an organization with an unstable and unpredictable flow of project-based work and then choosing not to emphasise formal structures. We will define them as a combination of these two; “an organization with an unsteady and irregular flow of project-based work where knowledge is more central than other inputs”.

1.2 Methodology

In deciding how to conduct our research we relied on the precious suggestions included in Yin “Case Study Research, Design and Methods” (1994). It was not our intention to demonstrate any theory or statement, our aim was rather to investigate what really happens regarding knowledge and learning in the companies under exam. According to Yin’s classification, we would call it an exploratory case study (Yin, 1994, p.21). Subject of the exploration being the consultants and police departments, and the purpose being to verify whether the abstract theories on knowledge and learning can be actually found in real practice, or if instead, they remain only on paper.

Before beginning with the case study, we made sure that we were acquainted with the most relevant body of knowledge on the matter. To consider only one case would have been, we thought, too restraining in respect of the reliability of the findings. We then decided on a multiple case, on one hand we have two among the world leading consulting firms, on the other two of the biggest police departments in Sweden.

We looked upon the organizations as a whole without considering each component or sub-system. As we already explained in the limitations we will treat the consultants as a whole entity when the findings allow this, and we will separate them when we consider appropriate because of discrepancies, that are far from being contradictory, mostly differing in intensity.

1.2.1 Empirical Data

In order to gather as many elements as possible for our analysis we relied on a differentiated pool of empirical data, as follows.

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Documentation. Both in the forms of internal documents to the organization (presentation and briefing for newcomers on the concept of Knowledge Management -KM- for the company, new Knowledge Management system etc.), and formal studies conducted on the matter of the same “site under study” and publications on professional literature.

Interviews. We conducted a first set of open-ended interviews with standard general questions for all the organizations involved. We were pointing at the main issues but also open to any sort of comment or idea the person could have on the matter. Lately we went back to the same persons with more specific, deep, and definitive questions in order to refine the concepts that were first discussed in the open-ended interviews.

Direct Observation. The interviews were all conducted in the “case study sites” with the exception of two of them; they were carried out on the phone since the person was in London. Hence, even though we did not directly participate in any project, we had the possibility to examine the working environment, perceive the atmosphere, how the working area is organized, and what sort of attitude people have and so forth. These might not be considered reliable sources of information, yet we believe that since the investigation is so heavily dependent on issues such as corporate culture and working climate, these details could be useful in picturing the company’s orientation.

The use of multiple sources allowed us to monitor many different viewpoints, such as what is the official position of the company on the matter, what message do they want to send to external people and newcomers, what does the professional specialized literature think about it, how is it in every day life, what atmosphere do we perceive when we go into the field. Does this all match with what they want us to think about them?

1.2.2 Use of Theory

We first review the main theories useful for our investigation in order to create a framework of investigation; we tried to keep them simple in order for them to be

clear to the reader. We decided to stick only to the theories that were actively used later in the analysis, and we based our work on them while preparing the questions for the interviews. The findings regarding the empirical data are then evaluated on the basis of the stated theories, firstly to check whether there is any sort of match between them, and secondly to go the step further with deeper analysis.

1.2.3 Analysis

The analysis will be developed at the same time as presenting the empirical findings. We aspire to make the reading more enjoyable by showing what happens in reality and how it is related to the theory. We thought this would have been a more “alive” way to conduct our analysis, as it was not our wish to describe all the empirical data first, and then have to repeat them in the next chapter, since we think it might be boring and just a cheap way of adding pages.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The structure of the thesis is quite traditional. We start out with presenting the theories we will use for the analysis in order to build a theoretical framework. These theories are divided into two main areas dedicated to, respectively, knowledge sharing and learning. The logic underlying this is that we believe it is necessary to have knowledge sharing to allow learning at an organizational level. We also believe that the learning is a deeper issue more closely linked to human beings. Our purpose was then to start with the most general and ground base concept in order to go deeper and more explicitly in the next section.

This path will, of course, also be followed when presenting and analysing the empirical data in the following chapter. At the same time as they are presented they will be analysed, discussed, and compared. We will first analyse how knowledge contributes as a support of crime investigation and as a support to consulting activity. Then we will move to the deeper level of learning. In the end we will present our conclusions and some additional discussions on the matter.

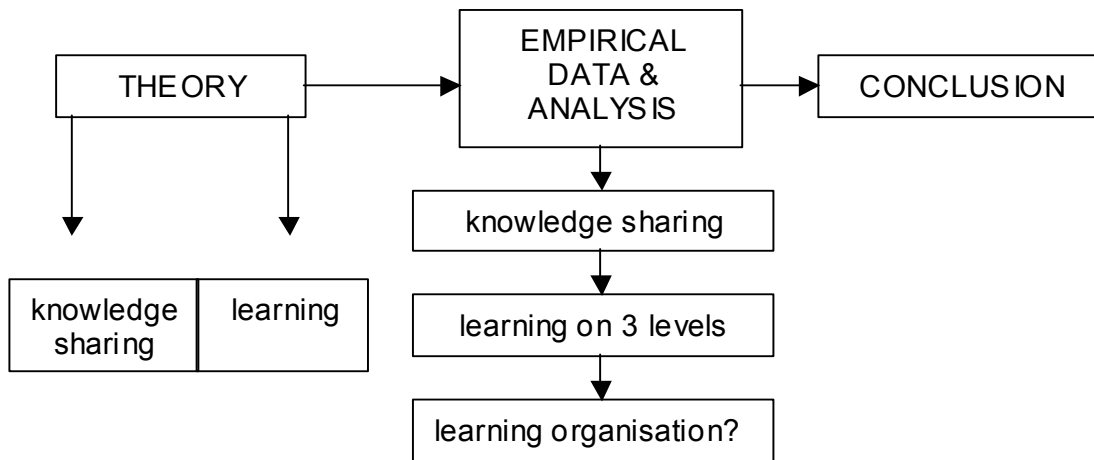


Figure 1: Structure of the thesis

1.4 Scene

When we first started to think about this subject we were quite focused on the differences in the two organizations. Of course the consultants would be better at knowledge management. Everybody has heard about how hopelessly out of date the police department is. People told us: “Are you going to study the police? I hope it is not a modern issue since the police are always the last to bring in new ideas”. Somehow we expected a very old, traditional organisation that was very slow, inflexible and impossible to push in any direction. To us it was hard to imagine that they would be able to be flexible and open enough to have an organisation that, if not a learning organization, then at least an organization willing to learn.

On the other hand we had read a lot about the consultants, therefore we were looking at them as the professionals in this area. They know what to do and we were prepared to find out that they actually do it. Knowledge is so prominent to them that we assumed they were sharing it very naturally and efficiently. They were to us the representation of new organisations built to be flexible, with a

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rather high turnover of employees. They also mainly employed young people that by nature are more flexible, more curious and more willing to challenge and learn new things.

We started to doubt our assumptions when we first entered the police buildings. Long corridors and big closed doors, yes, typical of functional bureaucratic, and old-fashioned organizations; so inappropriate and boring in the new economy era! Most surprisingly, we also found warm smiles, coffee smells, family pictures on the desk, and souvenirs from other police departments (i.e. a bobby's cap, Scotland Yard's.). In short, images of people who have a life and share it with their colleagues. However, let us leave this idyllic description of a cozy workplace to check what is to come on the other side.

On the consulting front, other and different surprises were waiting for us. Starting with the environment in the companies, it is open spaced and roomy, indeed, however not really friendly and cozy, as we expected in organizations well known for emphasizing so badly the importance of personal relationships among their employees. Rather, it was pretty sterile and cold, particularly in one of the firms under examination. Moreover, we went through some security checks at the reception where two very snobbish receptionists provided us with a badge that classified us as "visitors", and we were kindly introduced into a stylish meeting room. It felt rather hilarious, since we had just left the Police building where we had expected to be carefully controlled, and ended up being treated as "guests". Did the world, all of the sudden, turn upside-down? It would be unfair not to specify here that this sort of attitude was more emphasized in one of the consulting firms investigated, while the other had no such extreme attitude, and proved to have friendlier receptionists and a softer and warmer climate.

So, we started this work by facing a paradox; what was supposed to look and work as a traditional and old-fashioned company was showing unexpected flexibility, while the one who had the reputation of being very innovative and flexible seemed to have more traditional characteristics than expected. In the following

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chapters we will illustrate our findings. Will the paradox widen even more? Did our prejudice find solid ground or were we proven wrong?

2. Knowledge and Learning

We will start this thesis by introducing the theoretical framework that we have chosen. It starts from the concept of knowledge to the development of learning.

2.1 About the Concept of Knowledge

There are many views on what knowledge is and how to define it and understand it. Some people even ask if knowledge even exists, nobody has ever seen knowledge, only actions that are considered to prove the existence of knowledge. We will not go into every aspect of this issue, but keep a rather general approach to the concept and by that show the reference frame we will be using in our view of knowledge.

In the dictionary, knowledge is defined as follows “the information, understanding and skills that people gain through education and experience”, the word understanding is the key of this definition as it links together, in a synergy, the information and skills. Through the action of thinking (therefore understanding), knowledge is generated.

Knowledge creation is a work-in-progress and cannot be separated by its very human component, otherwise it will be only information, which is critically important to the knowledge creation process, but ought not to be confused with knowledge itself. Information can be codified, stored, retrieved and easily expressed to others than the individual who generates it; without the interaction with the tacit side it will not generate knowledge. “Knowing is a human act, to know a subject does not only mean to possess information about it; it generates from the very human ability to use that information” (McDermott, 1999:2).

2.1.1 Constructivist Perspective

There are two major theoretical approaches engaged to define the nature of knowledge: on one side we have the “Cognitivist perspective” and, on the other, the “Constructivist perspective”. Within the cognitivist approach, knowledge is an object belonging to the outside world and task of the brain (or any other cognitive system) is to build representations that are as close as possible to the object. Understanding is not implied in the process, there is no human act other than

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replication and everybody will arrive at mere copies of one representation. We chose to follow the constructivist approach as it is based on the critical importance of human understanding in relating to the outside world.

Constructionism: it is based on new insights in neurobiology, cognitive science and philosophy and it views cognition not as a representation, but as creation and construction. According to the constructionists, knowledge resides in our bodies and it is closely tied with our senses and experiences. We will come to create the world in ways that are unique to ourselves (Roseneau, 1992). Knowledge is not universal, because it depends on each person's way of relating herself to the event.

Under the constructivist perspective, knowledge is prone to be perceived as a system of functions: individual A applies different categories than B, they arrive at different understandings, and the two together create a flow of knowledge, a movement, a process. Moreover, the environment is continuously changing, so are personal experience and insights, hence the same individual would perceive the same event in different ways, depending on the context.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1994) claim that knowledge is not a representation, but a justified true belief. Its truthfulness is justified by observation of the world depending on personal sense-making and individual experience. When we create new knowledge we make sense out of a new situation by holding justified beliefs, committing ourselves to this new situation and by enhancing our potential to act in a new situation. (Von Krogh, 1998)

Moreover, the acquisition of knowledge occurs also through non-conscious processes, therefore, not only we know more than we can tell, but often we even know more than we realize. We know how to play golf, however it is rather difficult for us to tell someone else how to play golf. Moreover there are things that we are not aware of knowing and we will eventually just do them if required. Hence, an effort to rationalize and explain non-conscious behavior may be futile and even counterproductive. "Knowledge acquired from implicit learning procedures is always ahead of the capability of its possessor to explicate it" (Reber,

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1993:229). This discussion leads us to the core distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge.

2.1.1.1 Tacit and Explicit

There are two kinds of knowledge: explicit and tacit. According to Polanyi (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998:7) explicit knowledge (knowledge as object) is “structured, capable of being codified and accessible to other than the individual originating it”. We could call it a positivist approach, or neo-Kantian. Nonaka (1995) defines this sort of knowledge as “justified true belief”.

The second dimension, the tacit (knowledge as embedded in people), represents knowledge as not easily separable from its human actor. It resides in the minds of individuals, who are the only ones that can “know” and convert “knowing” into action. Tacit knowledge is embedded in cognition, it produces insights, intuition, and decisions based on “gut feelings” (Reber, 1993). The act of thinking can transform information into knowledge and create new knowledge. Moreover, people know much more than they can articulate, this tacit component is deeply rooted in “action, commitment and involvement in a specific context” (McLure and Faraj, 2000)

2.2 Knowledge Sharing

We have now reached the first of the two main parts of our thesis. We are now going to present the basic theories of knowledge sharing that will then be followed by the most relevant thought about learning. As we already pointed out the purpose is to follow a “broad to narrow” orientation.

2.2.1 The Knowledge Sharing Process

“Knowledge is the only resource that expands if it is shared”, is a quote commonly used. And this is true. What good is a lot of knowledge to a person if that person does not share it? Knowledge is the only resource that grows more, the more it is shared.

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2.2.1.1 Four Knowledge Sharing Processes

When describing the different ways knowledge can be shared, we have chosen to follow Arun and Scott-Morgans' (1997) model because we see it as simple to understand as well as showing all the directions that knowledge sharing can take in a way that makes them easily understood. We are very much aware of the theories that develop and are based on many more categories than just explicit and tacit; still we are not concentrating our study on these issues. Rather we need to explain and investigate how knowledge is shared as a means to analyzing the learning, hence we decided to illustrate a simple and clear theory of how knowledge can be shared within the organization.

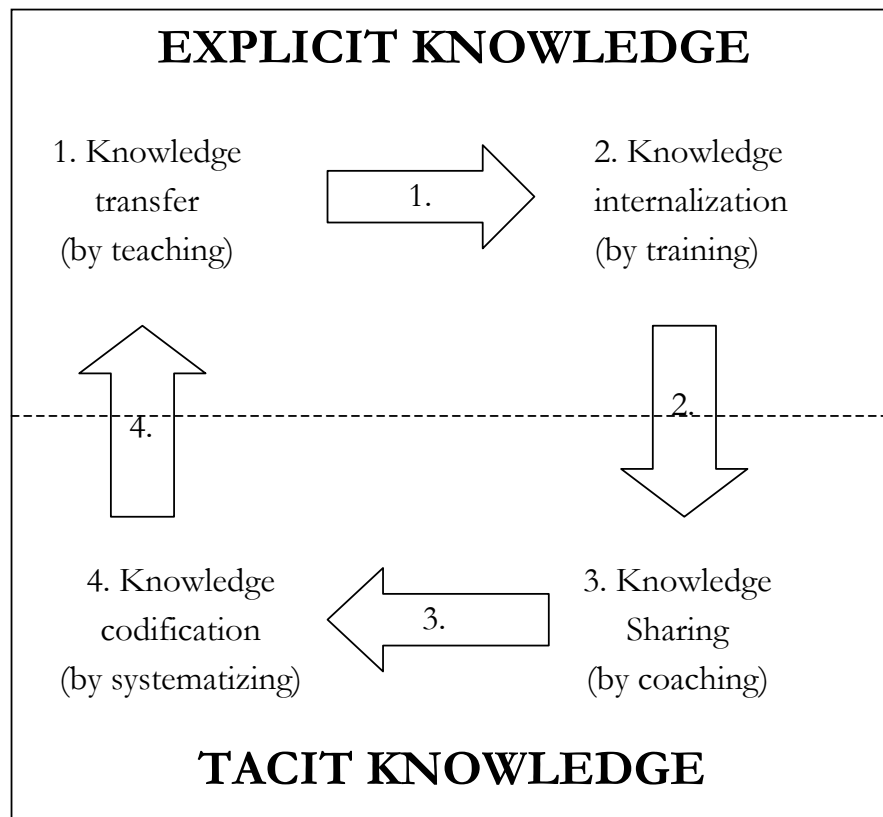


Figure 2: The four knowledge sharing processes (Arun, M. & Scott-Morgans, P. 1997:34 “The accelerating organization”)

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The model consists of four stages: 1) Knowledge transfer by teaching, (explicit to explicit) 2) Knowledge internalization by training, (explicit to tacit) 3) Knowledge sharing by coaching (tacit to tacit) and 4) Knowledge codification by systematizing (tacit to explicit)

Explicit to explicit - A reader who learns a name or a year from a book is replicating the explicit knowledge in that book; this is the first process, the knowledge transfer by teaching.

Explicit to tacit - When a reader instead practices the knowledge he has got from the book, this is knowledge internalization.

Tacit to tacit - Some sorts of knowledge are hard to turn into explicit knowledge and therefore often stay tacit. It is the most critical stage that involves the most critical type of knowledge, that is the hardest to share. When we try to translate tacit knowledge into explicit (codification), we will lose many deep insights that, due to their implicit nature, are not possible to codify. The only way to transfer this dimension is through socialization, the human contact. By spending time together and socializing people get to share tacit to tacit knowledge.

Tacit to explicit - When a book is written, the tacit knowledge is turned into explicit knowledge in knowledge codification by systemizing.

2.2.2 Culture and Knowledge Sharing

Culture is an issue that is very important in the question of both knowledge sharing and the willingness of the organization to learn. The culture of an organization permeates everything that happens in the organization and will therefore play a relevant role in whether the organization acts upon knowledge sharing principles and whether it leaves space for its members to interact, socialize and share knowledge.

Schein (1992:12) defines culture as: “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integration, that

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has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” Deal and Kennedy (1982:4) have a shorter, more to the point definition: “the way we do things around here”. According to Bolman and Deal (1997) culture is both a product and a process. As a product it contains the wisdom from them who came before us and as a process it is continually renewed and re-created as newcomers come into the organization, learn the old ways and eventually become the teachers.

Every organization develops beliefs and patterns that are specific for that organization. Many of these are unconscious or taken for granted, but will be reflected in the myths, fairy tales, rituals, ceremonies and other forms of symbolism. All these symbols are double edged. They give people stability and help them to understand their environment and their correct way to respond, which helps to reduce anxiety, uncertainty and confusion. On the other hand they justify the past and are a matter of pride, which gives the organization difficulties in changing. The culture will also influence the kind of leader it chooses, making it hard to change unless something drastic happens and the survival of the organization depends on the change. (Bolman & Deal 1997)

The organizational culture influences its members by the development of values that are acceptable in that organization. Jung and Avolio (1999), state that a commonly perceived culture will result in fewer conflicts and more interaction between the members of the organization.

When entering a new organization a person will try to make sense out of its environment, try to find out what the organization likes and dislikes, what is rewarded and what is punished. They need to understand why things happen. By seeking out behavior examples in the organization the newcomers see what behavior is expected, appreciated and rewarded (Ritchie, 2000). One part of the rituals in cultures is the initiation ritual for newcomers. In an organizational perspective this is often focused on the clash between the established veteran and a new arrival. Only a weak culture will accept a newcomer without any initial

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ritual, the stronger the culture is, the stronger is the message that “you are not one of us yet”. There is always a price that has to be paid by the outsider to be able to join the group and it is usually higher for a person that is different or questions the values, norms and patterns that exist in the group. Newcomers are expected to bring in new ideas to the organization, while the veterans act as the stability and wisdom of the past that pass along values and practices. If newcomers submit to the historical traditions the organization runs a risk of decaying. At the same time, if the old-timers fail to induct the newcomer into the corporate culture, the organization might experience chaos and confusion. (Bolman & Deal 1997)

As time goes by the new members will, as they become accepted in the organization, start to look upon the organizational values in a positive light and embrace them as their own. Internalization is when the organizational values and acceptable behavior have become a part of the individual’s own values. As the internalization process precedes the new member in the organization will find that the difference between the individual values and the organizational values are decreasing. They will experience a higher job-satisfaction as they will be rewarded extrinsically by pay or other external rewards as well as they will experience internal rewards in the form of satisfaction of ”doing right”. In this way the commitment to the organization will increase and so will the attachment to the organization as members start to subordinate their own goals in favor of the organizational goals. The internalization will create a belief in the organizational values and also a commitment to the organization. Jung and Avolio (in Ritchie 2000) also think that internalized individuals will have more long-term relationships with the organizations as well as tending to value interpersonal skills and relationships higher in the struggle for success than specific task skills. (Ritchie, 2000)

When the members of the organization, because of the reward system, behave in the same way, their sense of a shared mindset increases and so does the effectiveness of the personal interaction (Louis in Ritchie 2000). The shared mindset will also work as a reference point from which the members collect and evaluate information from their environment, and will increase the likelihood of

the members sharing that information with each other (Stasser & Stewart in Ritchie 2000). Chatman et al (in Ritchie 2000) think that the more difference a person feels between their own values and the values of the organization, the less willing that person of interacting is. That means, if we turn it around, that a shared understanding gives a higher degree of interaction and a higher probability of accomplishing objectives and goals (Krackhardt 1992 in Ritchie 2000).

Yukl (1994) states that cultures in young organizations usually are very strong, simply because the assumptions have been internalized by current members and passed on to new members as well as the presence of the founder who still can symbolize and strengthen the culture. As the organization matures and consists of other people than the original members and founders, the culture will become more unconscious and less standardized.

2.3 Learning

After showing the main ways to share knowledge and what important role is played by the organizational values and beliefs, we are now moving towards the concept of learning. Learning is closely related to human issues, not only as regards care and sense of belonging but it also involves the more complicated issue of self-image, as we will see. However, what we think is important to point out is that we do not treat the processes of knowledge sharing and learning as consequent in time. Rather as being at different levels of depth. We can eventually learn alone as individuals, but we need to share knowledge to learn at an organizational level. And much more...

"There is no learning without action and no action without learning" (Revan in Ho, 1999) As with all experience in this world, learning cannot happen in a vacuum. Learning happens in relation to an environment. Knowledge creation is "a dynamic group process of seeking meaning and testing beliefs" (Brown & Duguid, 1991) and "Knowledge value resides more in discovering relationships among distinctive ideas than in embracing sameness" (Cohen, 1998). A similar approach is suggested by Dorothy Leonard since she concentrates on processes between and among people, rather than individual knowledge, and underlines that

sharing tacit knowledge is a social process and an essential feature in a knowledge creating environment. (Leonard, 1995)

These concepts anticipate the core issues that we are going to discuss in the next chapter. We will start by distinguishing among the individual, group and organizational level of learning. Within the group level, more emphasis will be placed on the concept of Communities of Practice, since we believe them to be the only setting where true learning (and sharing) is possible. After exploring all these three levels, we will focus on Argyris and Schon (1996) theory in order to define what our requirements are to say that there is actual learning. We will then get to the concept of Learning Organization, what it is and what its characteristics are. Finally we will show what are the major restraining forces to having a learning organization with the help of psychodynamic theories.

2.3.1 Three Levels of Learning

In order to learn, it is necessary that the organization explores new ways while at the same time acting according to the ones that have already been learned. This process should regard the whole organization rather than only the individual or group level. Learning requires a step further compared to the traditional theories of knowledge creation and sharing. While these theories focus mainly on the cognitive level, learning requires combining cognition and action in an ongoing cycle of action taking and knowledge acquisition. It is commonly thought that ideas and innovations come to individuals rather than to organizations, however the knowledge generated by individuals does not get to be organizational independently, it requires that “ideas are shared, action is taken, and common meaning developed” (Argyris and Schon in Crossan, Lane, White, 1999 organizational learning: from intuition to institution). Organizations are more than a mere collection of individuals, relationships are structured, and shared understandings that are developed at group level become institutionalized. Hence, a theory of organizational learning needs to consider the individual, group, and organizational level to which the processes of intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalizing correspond.

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2.3.1.1 Individual Level

Intuiting it is a uniquely individual process, organizations do not intuit. It is defined as “the pre-conscious recognition of the pattern and/or possibilities inherent in a personal stream of experience” (Weick in Crossan Lane and White 1999). Even though learning is usually considered as a conscious and analytical process it is much more complicated and invests the sub-conscious sphere that proves to be critical. In particular regarding intuition sub-conscious processes are of great importance. We follow here the “expert view” on intuition as expertise plays a big role in both crime investigation and consulting being focused on pattern recognition, as opposed to the “entrepreneurial view” that focuses on innovation and change.

As we also illustrate in the pyramid discussed in the next paragraph, by building on a basis of explicit knowledge and internalized routines, through experience we get to intuition drawing a complicated map that enables the expert to see things hidden from the novice. “Prietula and Simon suggest that becoming an expert takes 10 years and requires the acquisition of 50,000 chunks of knowledge” (Crossan Lane and White 1999). We could use the example of chess Masters; one ought to play a lot, reflect on past experiences, and learn about great moves, and this is not enough to become a master. But when expertise is acquired what once required conscious and explicit thought no longer does, the expert does not need to think consciously about action, he can recognize the patterns from his experience and, spontaneously, know what to do. What has been learned becomes tacit knowledge. (Crossan Lane and White 1999). If asked to explain his actions, the expert might be unable to do it, since the pattern is familiar and so are the consequent actions that they become almost unconscious. This is the reason why expertise can not be transferred from one another, because it is so deeply rooted into the individual’s experience, and so difficult to analyze and explain.

While *intuition* focuses on sub-conscious processes, *interpreting* is the next step that brings them to a conscious level, and to explaining them through words or action to one’s self or to others. What makes this level interesting to us is the critical importance of language at this stage since it leads to the group level and the

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creation of a shared understanding. By sharing observations and the use of a common grammar ambiguity is reduced and individuals are grouped around a shared meaning.

The Knowledge Pyramid

Robin Teigland (1997) developed a knowledge pyramid (see figure 3) to describe the work of a criminal investigator, and we consider it to be just as useful to show how knowledge is created on a general basis, no matter in what organization the individual works. The model has been slightly altered to suit our purposes. On the bottom level of the pyramid are the databases (explicit knowledge), routines, law, and scientific theory, the most explicit sort of knowledge. Continuing up the pyramid towards tacit knowledge, experience is reached on the second level, divided into vicarious and personal experience. The highest level of tacit knowledge is intuition, which can be found at the top of the pyramid.

Experience can be divided into two components: vicarious and personal experience. Vicarious experience is that which another individual has had, most likely a colleague, and it is gained through coffee table and storytelling. It is considered more tacit; even though it is articulated into explicit through speech, the intuition of the storyteller is intrinsic to the story. Personal experience is, on the other hand, the one of the individual, both within his job and outside. This sort of experience builds the person's individual database and is a base for intuition.

Intuition is based both on personal experience and the other levels of the pyramid, it is described as "the accumulated practical skill or expertise that allows one to do something smoothly and efficiently" von Hippel (1988, in Teigland 1997). The emphasis is not on experience, rather on accumulated skills or expertise. This

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means that two persons with the same level of experience can reach different levels of intuition. (Teigland, 1997)

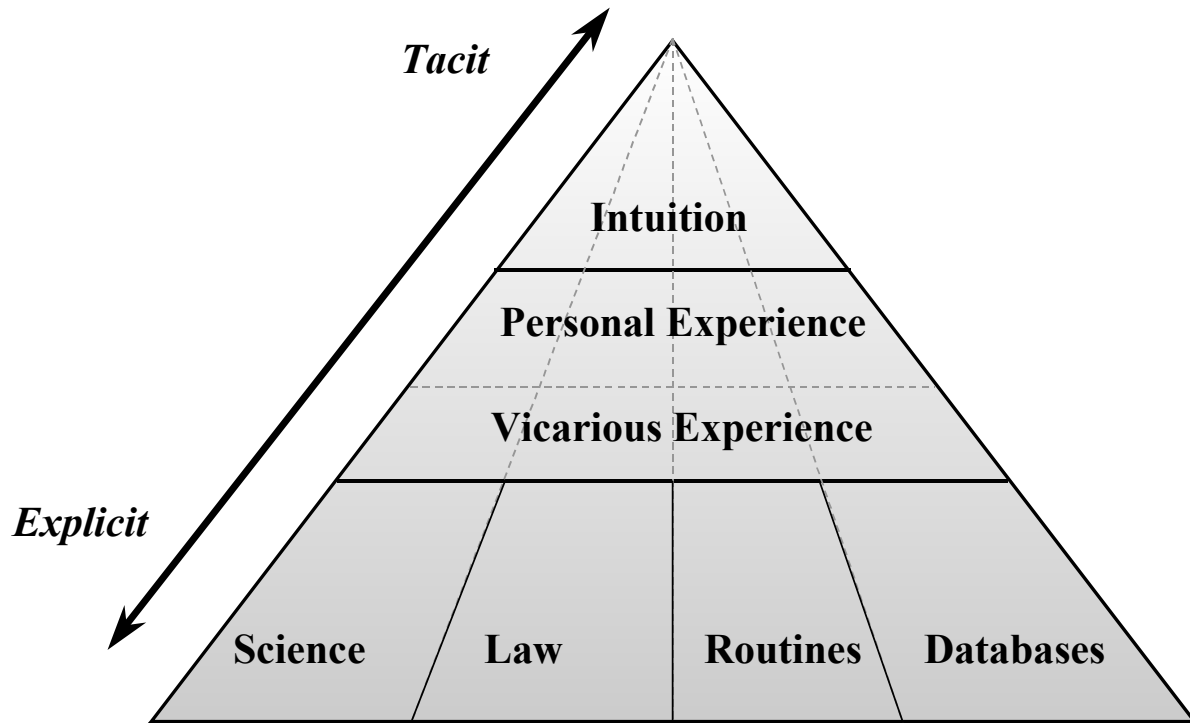


Figure 3: The knowledge pyramid. (Work upon from a original by Robin Teigland 1997:8, “Case of Whodunnit: An Analysis of Criminal Investigators”)

2.3.1.2 Group Level

Integrating it is the process of developing a shared understanding and of taking mutual action at a group level. The process is firstly informal but, if recurring, it will be institutionalized. The focus here shifts from individual level to group level, from individual action to group action in order to develop coherence. This can be done only through building a shared understanding, “it is through the continuing conversation among members of the community and through shared practice that shared understanding develops and mutual adjustment and negotiated action take place“ (Brown in Crossan Lane and White 1999). Furthermore “The distinctive feature.... is sharing” (Crossan Lane and White 1999).

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Language not only helps learning but also preserves what has already been learned; for an organization to learn and renew, its language must evolve, conversation is used to share established meaning but also to create new ones. Not all conversational styles are the same though, in order to develop shared understanding as follows is Isaacs suggestion “dialogue is a discipline of collective thinking and inquiry, a process for transforming the quality of conversation and, in particular the thinking that lies beneath it” (Isaacs in Crossan Lane White, 1999).

The context surrounding the integrating process is vital, as pointed out by Brown and Duguid (1991) when developing the concept of Communities of Practice. Through their ethnographic research on workplace practice they came to the conclusion that “actual practice is not what specified in manuals or necessarily what is taught in classrooms. Rather it is captured and promulgated by stories told by the community members. Storytelling is a significant part of the learning process. Stories reflect the complexity of actual practice rather than the abstraction taught in classrooms. As stories evolve, richer understanding of the phenomenon is developed, and new integrated approaches to solving problems are created. Stories themselves become the repository of wisdom- part of the collective mind/memory” (Weick & Roberts in Crossan, Lane & White, 1999:8).

Communities of Practice

Referring to the group level, we decided to focus deeper on Communities of Practice, as we believe them to be of critical importance to learning. Etienne Wenger states that learning is as much a part of human nature as eating or sleeping and it is, in its essence, “*a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature of human beings capable of knowing. As we engage in various enterprises, we interact with other people and the environment, forming “communities of practice” through which we learn, change and grow*” (Wenger, 1998:4).

“An activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what that means in their lives and for the community. Thus, they are united in

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both action and in the meaning that that action has, both for themselves and for the larger collectives” (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98).

McLure and Faraj (2000) view this as the third knowledge category, following tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge. They refer to it as knowledge embedded in community. Schultze (McLure and Faraj, 2000) defines this sort of knowledge as “the social practice of knowing”, he emphasizes that the activity of learning is strictly related to human activity and linked to practice. This perspective asserts that knowledge is embedded into the community, it is beyond individuals, it resides in the context; hence it is in routines rather than in individual minds (Wenger, 1998).

Lave and Wenger (1998) also assert that this definition does not imply co-presence, an identifiable group or visible social boundaries. People have different interests, they hold diverse viewpoints and they make varied contributions to activity. The community of practice is about relations; i.e. between persons, activities and other communities of practice. It is in the social interaction in the community that its practice exists and evolves, not in the head of individuals or hands of producing members. As Liedtka stated: “Communities of practice evolve, they are not created” (Liedtka 1999:7).

Characteristics of Communities of Practice

Communities require: 1) participation in doing, 2) sharing of perspectives and 3) mutual development of the individuals, as well as the, collective capabilities. (Lave and Wenger, 1991)

Participation

It is one of the most important aspects when it comes to learning in communities of practice. It is not only important in the actual learning of the different tasks, but also to learn the culture of the community and to let the community get knowledge from the newcomer.

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Sharing

It might happen both through showing and participating, but also through dialogue. There is a difference between talking about a practice from the outside and from within (Lave & Wenger 1991). A person that enters a new setting or community has to learn how to talk in that community before that person can be a full participant. Usually the verbal instructions only provide the person with words they have to use referring to the outside.

Mutual Development

It has to occur both on an individual and group level. Organizational learning and development must connect with and be based on personal development and vision. Working together can be developing both for the individual and the group process.

Liedtka (1999) has, in her research, identified a special set of qualities that she sees as characteristics for a community of practice. A shared meaning and purpose is essential and it should flow from the personal to the organizational instead of being a top-down perspective. The emphasis should be on business processes rather than hierarchy and structure boundaries. Furthermore, the decision-making should be placed in the hands of those with the perspective and information.

People working under those conditions are not motivated by self-interest and do not see their self-interest as conflicting with the interests of the community. They will also tend to see their work as personal with meaningful relations and personal contact with specific individuals. A sense of commitment and ownership among the members of the organization will develop trust and optimism about their relationship, generating commitment to the purpose and to each other.

For the organization to evolve into a community of practice the working climate is of utmost importance. The community needs to allow its members to express and develop their preferences as the evolution progresses both for the individual and the community as a whole. A morally good community consists of exit, voice and loyalty. This means that it has to exist a possibility to leave, broad freedom to

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speak and participate and a preference for rather speak than leave, which derives from emotional attachment. (Hartman in Liedtka 1999)

Senge's (1990) discussion about openness adds to Hartman's theory. He asserts that people want to contribute to something they consider important and to an environment that is not selfish. There should be space for the both kinds of openness; the freedom to speak and the willingness to challenge one's thinking. This is also a way to stimulate the ability to use conflict productivity and to look for new solutions, rather than debating existing alternatives. (Liedtka 1999)

2.3.1.3 Organizational Level

This brings us to the next level, the organizational. The process of *institutionalization* sets organizational learning apart from the individual or group learning, the organization is more than simply a collection of individuals and organizational learning is different than the simple sum of the learning of its members. Even though individuals come and go, some learning remains embedded in the organizational routines, structures, and practices.

For new organizations there are very few established practices, few organizational memories. Based on open communication and common interests, they are dominated by individual and group learning. As the organization matures, patterns in communication and interaction start to be built and the organization tends to formalize them. Then institutionalization is a means for the organization to leverage the learning of individual members while structures and procedures provide a context for interaction. With time, the individual and group learning levels become less emphasized as it becomes embedded in the organization and begins to guide the actions and learning of the members. (Simon, 1994)

Usually what becomes institutionalized has received a certain degree of consensus among the influential members of the organization, after that it usually endures for a period of time. Changes in routines and structures occur relatively seldom, that is why the three previous processes are more fluid while institutionalization is more "staccato", and this is also why organizational change is usually considered

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transformational rather than incremental. However the underlying processes on which it is based are continuous.

Institutionalized learning cannot capture all the ongoing learning on individual and group levels, as it takes time to transfer it along in the organization. As the environment changes, the learning that had been institutionalized might not fit the context any longer, generating a gap between what the organization has learned and what it needs to learn. As the gap widens the organization places more emphasis on the individual and group learning. The challenge is then to manage the tension between the institutionalized learning from the past, that enables it to exploit learning, and the new learning that must occur to move forward.

Organizational learning is a dynamic process, not only as it occurs through time and different levels, but also because it is generated from the tension between assimilating new learning and using what has already been learned. New ideas and actions flow through individuals to groups to the organizational level, and, at the same time, what has already been learned goes back from the organization to the groups to the individual affecting the way they act and think. To move from the individual to the group learning entails taking personally constructed cognitive maps and integrating them in order to develop a shared understanding.

Another problematic interaction deals with intuiting and institutionalizing. Intuiting in organizations with high degree of institutionalized learning requires what Schumpeter (1959) called “creative destruction” which means setting aside the institutional order to allow intuitive insights and action. This is difficult because the logic and the language that form the collective organizational mindset present an amazing fortress of physical and cognitive barriers to change. The institutionalized learning impedes the new learning, still it is necessary to reap the benefits of what has already been learned. (Crossan, Lane and White 1999)

2.3.2 The Learning Organization

The spirit of the learning organization is founded on the learning processes of the individuals in the organization; it starts from the individual level with intuition and

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moves up to the organizational level through group learning. However, this does not necessarily mean that it will automatically lead to organizational learning. A learning organization exists when the individuals in the organization continually learn not only to realize efficiency in the work role but also to develop as individuals and be creative in the organization as it pursues its unknown future. (Morgan, 1997).

2.3.2.1 *A Proactive and Holistic View*

Pedler et al (1991) have defined the learning organization as "an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future". It is not enough only to learn to survive; one must also enhance one's capacity to create, Senge (1990) calls it "generative learning". Although many authors writing about the learning organization see the human as a whole person, they have focused more on the cognitive level of learning than on the "whole" person level (Revans, 1982). The "holistic" way may be emphasized as a philosophical statement but, when it comes to practice, it tends to veer towards only one aspect of the whole. This means: do not simply focus on cognition, but also on emotional, physical and spiritual levels of life-long learning. Senge (1990) attempted to provide through his work "The fifth Discipline", this indivisible wholeness, by emphasizing core disciplines in what he calls "the mental model":

- *System thinking*, to see the whole system and recognize interdependence within the system
- *Personal Mastery*, being concerned with personal vision and growth
- *Mental Models*, being able to balance enquiry and advocacy models
- *Building a Shared Vision*, find "commonality of purpose" for each individual's personal vision
- *Team Learning*, create collective intelligence by getting people to communicate with each other

"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (Clarkson and Mackewn in Ickeara, 1999). This implies that we shall not simply focus on cognition, but also on emotional, physical, and irrational levels of life-long learning. People go through life, even living at the same time and in the same place, as the research on twins

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suggests, interpreting situations subjectively and differently. It is by combining these differences that we can get to learning. (Ikeara, 1999)

2.3.2.2 Single and Double Loop Learning

As seen in the previous chapter having a holistic view approach and working on diversity is a stimulus to learning, however it is not enough. Core concept to learning is the difference between single and double loop that we are going to illustrate as follows.

As cybernetics (a discipline that originated in 1940 from the work of the MIT mathematician Norbert Wiener focused on studies of the dynamics of communication, and learning) points out, there are four key principles to describe a system: 1.systems must have the capacity to sense, monitor, and scan significant aspects of their environment; 2.they must to be able to relate this information to the operating norms that guide system behavior; 3.they must be able to detect significant deviations from these norms; 4.they must be able to initiate corrective action when discrepancies are detected. (Morgan, 1997)

If these conditions are satisfied, then the systems are operating in an intelligent manner, by monitoring changes and preparing appropriate responses. There is a limit though; the learning abilities of the system are limited by the operating norms and standards that guide it, if something happens outside this range of norms, the system breaks down. For example, a house thermostat is able to learn in the way that it can regulate itself on the basis of predetermined norms, but it cannot itself decide what temperature would be the best for the people in the room. More complex systems such as the human brain, or advanced computers, have this capability. “They are often able to detect and correct errors in operating norms and thus influence the standards that guide their detailed operations” (Morgan, 1997, p.86). This takes us to the difference between “single loop” and “double loop” learning, between learning and learning to learn.

The theory was developed by Chris Argyris at Harvard University and Donald Schon at MIT and investigates two distinctive learning processes that have been

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applied to organizations. The single loop learning (Bateson's O-I: error detection and correction) happens when an individual's action is not achieving the goal, and he/she learns how to readjust his/her action to increase the probability of achieving it.

1. sense, scan, and monitor the environment
2. compare this information against operating norms
3. initiate appropriate action

The double loop learning (Bateson's O-II: learning that changes the current way of operating and which involves deeper inquiry) happens when an individual is able to go out of the framework of his/her meaning making, goal seeking and come up with a new way of solving a particular problem or issue by challenging the existing norms:

1. Sense, scan, and monitor the environment
2. Compare this information against operating norms
 - 2a. Question whether the operating norms are appropriate
3. Initiate appropriate action

This, also, supports the point emphasized by Schön (1983) and Senge (1990) - that individual learning can benefit the organization when staff members participate as a whole team, positively affecting the learning processes and outcomes. The danger of the learning process in the learning organization is that it tends to give an impression that learning is the end rather than the means to the learning organization. Hawkins (1994) warns us that by focusing intensively on the learning itself in the organization, the new perspective may be seen as a tool rather than as a part of a relationship process.

2.3.2.3 Challenging the Existing Routines; Utopia?

From the work of Argyris and Schon at Harvard University and MIT, to Peter Senge's studies on "Learning Organisation", to Reg Revans' concept of "Action Learning", the idea of developing organizational learning became a priority among management studies.

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Many companies have become proficient at single-loop learning by carefully monitoring expenses, sales, and other performance measures. However, it is the ability to achieve double loop learning that makes a learning organization, and it has proved to be other than simple. As Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) have shown in their theory, learning goes beyond the acts of collecting and processing information, it must embrace the creation of insight and knowledge. Intelligent learning systems are effective at scanning the reality they operate in but also see the signals and tracks that can point to future possibilities or troubles. They imagine and anticipate the future and act in the present in order to influence the future. This skill is often not only cognitive but emotional, and intuitive.

Moreover, as the principle of double-loop learning points out, in order to learn the organization's members must have a clear picture of the norms and rules guiding the activity and be able to challenge them and change when necessary. In this way the organization is future-oriented rather than locked into the past. "Organizational members must challenge how they see and think about organizational reality, using different templates and mental models, to create new capacities through which the organization can create its future". (Senge in Morgan, 1997, p. 115) This requires being both specialized and generalized, break through the barriers of specialized functions by working in teams responsible for a whole project.

2.3.2.4 The Principle of Requisite Variety

It is impossible to get everybody to know everything, to become skilled in all possible tasks and activities. The answer is in the principle of requisite variety developed by the English cybernetician W. Ross Ashby. "All the elements of the organization should embody critical dimensions of the environment with which they have to deal so that they can self-organize to cope with the demands they are likely to face" (Morgan, 1997:113); in this way the organization can be developed in a cellular manner around multi-disciplined groups with the requested skills to deal with the environment in a holistic and integrated way. (Morgan, 1997)

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This principle has important implications on the design of the whole organization. Very often, the management reduces variety to achieve greater internal consensus. For instance, planning teams are often built around people who have the same mindset rather than around a varied set of stakeholders who could better represent the complexity and variety of the problems with which the team has to deal. If a team has to succeed with a complex task or in a turbulent environment, it is critical that it possesses enough internal complexity. The principle is applied in organizations where teams absorb people from more different functions.

2.3.2.5 Restraining Forces to the Learning Organization

Organizations and individuals are not really motivated to learn since learning provoke identity change, hence anxiety, by questioning existing self-concepts. Therefore they engage in learning activities in a conservative way in order to preserve the existing concept that they have of themselves, they are motivated to do this by their internal need for self-esteem. Learning is conceptualized, in the literature, as a “virtuous circle in which new information is used to challenge existing ideas and to develop new perspective on the future and new action routines through organizational dialogue” (Dixon in Brown and Starkey, 2000). The reasons individuated by the literature why organizations fail to learn are incomplete because they do not consider the role of psychodynamic factors in individual and organizational identity maintenance. The information that threatens the organizational self-concept is ignored, rejected, or hidden. As Albert states “organizational learning evolves through modifications, additions, and deletions of existing routines” (Brown and Starkey 2000)

It is not impossible for an organization to engage in learning that is comprised within the boundaries of the existing routines, hence supporting the organizational self-concept. Here we would stop at the single loop learning rather than go the whole way to double loop. Moreover, to act upon double loop does not necessarily mean a clear defiance of the organizational self-image. It might be that the ability to radically challenge core routines is embedded in the organization’s self-identity, which in this case would not be threatened (organizational identity would be, on the contrary, preserved). Let us explain this more clearly.

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“Organizational identity concerns those features of the organization that members perceive as ostensibly central, enduring, and distinctive in character that contribute to how they define the organization and their identification with it” (Gioia & Thomas in Brown and Starkey 2000:107). An overprotection of self-esteem, called ego defense, will reduce the organization’s ability to desire and search for ways that challenge the existing routines, in a healthy organization, on the contrary, the ego defenses operate to reduce doubt and increase self-confidence. More than forty- eight ego defenses have been identified, those relevant for us are as follows:

Rationalization it is an attempt to justify behavior that one finds unacceptable so that they become plausible and tolerable *Idealization* the process by which an object becomes “overvalued and stripped of any negative features”, it implies the exercise of unrealistic judgment and it results in the “creation” of a fantastic organization. An example is Freud’s (1949) theory on how groups idealize their leaders. This situation can seriously inhibit organizational learning and it has been described by De Board (1978) as “ a sort of corporate madness in which every member colludes”...”idealization of past success can fully explain why organizations are often unable to unlearn obsolete knowledge in spite of strong disconfirmations” (Brown and Starkey 2000:114)

Fantasy a kind of vivid daydream that affords substitutive satisfaction. They are expressed through linguistic and visual artifacts such as stories, myths, jokes, gossip, and nicknames.

We would like to develop more thoroughly the different types of fantasies since they play a major role in understanding organizations, in particular they will be very useful when analyzing the police.

Myths explain, express, maintain solidarity and cohesion, legitimize, communicate unconscious wishes and conflicts, mediate contradictions and provide narrative to anchor the present in the past. The positive side is that shared myths foster internal cohesion and a sense of direction while helping uphold confidence and the support of external constituencies. The downside is that they are stubbornly

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present and can, by blocking adaptation to change, induce people to choose not to see new information and new learning opportunities. (Bolman & Deal 1997)

Stories and fairytales comfort, reassure, and offers direction and hope. They also express information, morals, values and myths through keeping the historical heroes and heroines alive. Stories are used as a medium to communicate corporate myths, they also establish and keep up tradition as well as communicate the values and identity of the organization to both insiders and outsiders, and in that way build confidence and support. They are present both in formal meetings and informal coffee breaks. (Bolman & Deal 1997)

Rituals can be explained as “The holy in the daily; the sacred in the single act of living” (Fulghum in Bolman och Deal 1995:43). One part of the rituals in cultures is the initiation ritual for newcomers. In an organizational perspective this is often focused on the clash between the established veteran and a new arrival. Only a weak culture will accept a newcomer without any initial ritual, the stronger the culture is, the stronger is the message that “you are not one of us yet”. There is always a price that has to be paid by the outsider to be able to join the group and it is usually higher for a person that is different or questions the values, norms and patterns that exist in the group.

Ceremonies have four main tasks: to get people to socialize, to stabilize, reassure and to communicate a message to external interests. The distinction between a ritual and a ceremony is that the ceremony is bigger, more complicated and less frequent.

Metaphors, humor and play illustrate the “as if” quality of symbols. They are a way to tackle complex, mysterious or threatening issues that are too frightening to approach directly. Metaphors are used to make “the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (Bolman & Deal 1997:229), they help people to confine subtle subjects that ordinary language can overlook. Humor expresses skepticism, contributes to flexibility and adaptiveness as well as signaling status. Humor can socialize, include and convey membership. It can also create solidarity and help

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face-saving as well as being a way to clarify and break frames by showing that any definition of a situation is subjective. If play is looked upon as a state of mind, any activity can be playful. Play allows the rules to be relaxed to give opportunity to explore the alternatives. It encourages adaptiveness, flexibility and experimentation. (Bolman & Deal 1997)

All these symbols are double edged. They give people stability and help them to understand their environment and the correct way to respond, which helps to reduce anxiety, uncertainty and confusion. On the other hand they justify the past and are a matter of pride, which gives the organization difficulties in changing.

“Unitary cultures with too narrow a definition of their core identities that exclude the possibility of internal dissent run the risk of maladaptation to changing environments” (Brown and Starkey 2000:10). Moreover the organization could find itself entrapped in a stagnating attitude with a tendency to narcissism by creating a self-image very close to perfection where the fear for self-challenge is increased. It would be almost impossible for the organization to confront the inevitable gap between the rooted desire for a perfect self and the disappointment of not being able to reach this idea. “Is not Narcissus trying to screen out of such fears through his fixation on his own image?” (Epstein, 1995:5052 in Brown and Starkey 2000)

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework is based upon the constructivist concepts of knowledge as divided into tacit and explicit, and being closely tied to human components. Based on the distinction between tacit and explicit, four sharing processes are generated, the tacit-to-tacit is individuated as the most crucial to our investigation; the most insightful and the hardest to accomplish. It is possible only through socialization and if nurtured with values such as care and mutual development. This brings us to the concept of Communities of Practice, primary example of group learning and also emblematic vehicle of tacit knowledge. Learning is what we consider a step further from knowledge sharing, going deeper into the human aspects of knowledge and action. No matter if referred to

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individual, group or organizational level, learning always requires the presence of the human component from which is indivisible.

Moreover, we investigate the concept of the learning organization as the one that is capable of a self-challenging attitude, aimed at finding new and innovative solutions. Hence, creating its future. For this to happen double loop learning and variety are required. Furthermore, relating to the organization self concept, we individuate some barriers challenging the personal self-image. These barriers, called ego-defenses could be very hard to defy. We borrow some concepts from psychodynamic theories to identify and analyze them in an organizational perspective.

3. Analysis

We will now start analyzing our findings by exploring how knowledge is shared within the two types of organizations.

3.1 Four Knowledge Sharing Processes

Both the two consultancy firms and the police are continually using all four of the learning/sharing processes that are talked about in the model. As one police officer told us: *“In the police we first share knowledge (3) around the coffee table, at (1) seminars and conferences, where a special subject is talked about. We also have (2) training courses with a (4) book.”* And the same thing was said in one consultancy firm: *“We have processes to make explicit into tacit, individual into collective and the other way around. Some knowledge is harder to transmit than others. Some knowledge is impossible to transmit and you need to provide opportunity within the firm for experts by moving the expert to where the problem is.”*

3.1.1 Explicit to Explicit (Teaching)

This is of course the easiest knowledge to transfer. You read it and memorize it. In both the consultancy firms and the police department this kind of knowledge is mainly information that you learn or facts that you just use that once. For a police officer this could be the law, which you memorize, or how many guns of a certain type that have been reported stolen, a piece of information you do not have to memorize, but can still use for the investigation. For a consultant this is technical words and statistics.

3.1.1.1 Databases

The databases are the most obvious tool that both the consultants and the police use. In this section we are talking about the databases that consist of objective information, i.e. fingerprints or missing persons on one hand and market research or statistics on the other. One consultancy firm said: *“We are focused on structured information, the databases shall mirror the organizational structure which is important for the growth in knowledge.”* The other consultants we talked to had a recent acquisition to deal with. This meant double of all the databases and no common Intranet site.

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This turned out to be quite confusing and for now the databases were mostly used to gain names of persons that had experience in certain areas.

The police academy has foreseen the problem with information search and become better at teaching their student those skills. Also the police departments are trying to educate people in how to find the correct information. *“The problem is not accessing the information, the problem is information overload. It is hard to know what to pick out. In the old days there was a map with all the news and it took about 15-20 minutes to get the new information that was necessary for the work. Now, if a person should look into every new thing on the Intranet it would take two days.”* To avoid people ignoring the Intranet site, the site is organized in a way that makes it easier for each person to see whether the information concerns them or not, and therefore only have to bother about the parts that are necessary for their work.

The consultancy firms have a long history of keeping a close track on the different competences that come in to their organizations. The CV- databases are used frequently for finding people with special talents (languages, previous experience in some area), or to find people with the right competencies to build the teams. These databases are important for the consultants and it would be impossible to work on an international level, which they do, if they did not have access to this data of the collected competencies in the company. The police department is setting up a competence database, called COPS (Central Operative Police System). This will make it faster and easier to track down a person within the department that possesses a certain skill, which is the main use of the database. Used as a tool for building teams for investigations, it helps better allocate the necessary competence for investigations.

3.1.1.2 Education

At this stage we have the routines (how to conduct investigations- what is done first and so on), the law (country or just company rules) and science or scientific research in any area. For the police these areas are mainly the things that one learns at the police academy. In the consultancy firms you have some of this

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knowledge from your education, but he/she will probably have to learn these issues while internalizing the culture.

In both cases this kind of knowledge is also transferred by courses. The consultants usually buy their courses from outside their company. The police do this too for more general knowledge; however, the police mostly build their own courses based on the special needs of the organization.

3.1.2 Explicit to Tacit (Training)

In this category we have the courses and education that are more than just learning facts. This is when you read about it or people tell you about it and you start to make your own experiences to develop a skill within the area. It does not necessary have to do with action, but more with making the theory into reality in the mind.

3.1.2.1 Courses

One consultancy firm told us: *“We have all the training activities; people from different market units get to meet around a certain question.”* They also send people to courses or education programs whenever needed, as well as having experts talk to the staff. These courses are, as previously said, mostly bought from the outside.

In the police the training has three dimensions: (1) the police academy, which is a three-year long education that is developing towards becoming equal to a university education, (2) on a regional level and (3) on a local level for each department. On the first level, the academy, the training is general and basic. It handles the things that every police officer has to know and be able to handle. The regional level handles specific issues that are relevant for the whole area. This does not necessarily mean that everybody in the organization will be a part of the training. The local area handles the even more specific local needs. If a person needs training for a special job that is not something that all departments in the area have in common, i.e. a management course for a police officer that was recently promoted.

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The transfer between explicit into tacit knowledge is something that the police department handles quite well in the sense of them making their investigators turn their personal tacit knowledge into explicit, then another person takes out the objective parts that are useful for the department and makes it into a training course where the knowledge is turned back to tacit knowledge for other police officers. In this way the knowledge turned explicit is evaluated before it is transferred.

The police do not agree that their scarce financial resources (at least in comparison with the consultancy firms) are a hinder for them to train their people. They do however agree that the resources are not used in the best possible way. For example, in the infancy of computers they had 44 people and one computer. They started to train everyone, it took 6 years before everyone had their own computer, so the education was a waste. Another problem is that sometimes the right person is not considered, another person is sent to the course because it is cheaper or more comfortable to send that person then the one who would need the education.

3.1.3 Tacit to Tacit (Coaching)

The tacit to tacit transfer is the hardest one. The two main areas in transferring this kind of knowledge at both the consultancy firms and the police are socialization and mentoring.

3.1.3.1 Socialization

To stimulate socialization the office environment in the two consultancy firms we visited is very open and spacious. In neither one of them did the employees have steady working places, just an empty desk and their own laptop and mobile phone. In this way they can work wherever in the building and carry their “office” with them. They get opportunities to talk to different coworkers and in that way expand their social circle. It also has a more practical reason, the consultants often work outside the office and are therefore not in need of an office, that would be unoccupied for most of the time.

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Whether this “mobile working station” situation actually is stimulating socialization is questionable. The people in the office are much too busy to be able to talk; they are also in such different areas, working on different projects, which makes it hard to gain knowledge from each other in such limited time. Trust and care has no time to develop, as the mobility also breaks social relationships starting out.

In the two consultancy firms, the tacit to tacit knowledge was controlled, or at least they tried to make it easier for people to get to the state of wanting to share tacit knowledge. It is considered highly and worked for.

In the police, on the other hand, it is not controlled at all. The office environment is filled with long halls and closed doors. Still their main knowledge sharing process is actually in the socialization, they call it “the coffee-table-talk”. *“You gain experience by talking to more experienced police officers. They color your mindset for you to be more effective.”* In the buildings, in the long halls there are coffee rooms where people meet at least twice a day. One problem here is that people only meet the persons working the same shift as they do, not the others. These talks are deeply rooted in the culture and are not only considered as enjoyable, but also necessary for the work to be done. It is by telling “war stories” at the coffee table that the old culture is continued and the new ones learn the ropes. Even our own scarce experience of the police department tells us that cops love telling stories.

Time is an issue that has much to do with the knowledge sharing, and the tacit to tacit transfer. It is both time to socialize during the workday and the time totally spent in the same organization with the same people. It takes time for people to develop social relations and time seems to be something that the consultants lack. They usually work outside the office on projects, with new persons for each new project. This limits the time span for developing deeper social relations with co-workers. The consultants’ workday is also very hectic and does not leave much room for breaks and socializing. To this is added the fact that a person stays in the company for an average of five years.

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In the police this issue is almost reversed. An average policeman will stay within the organization for a longer time period, many stay for their whole working life. They tend to stay in the same position or same department for a long time and then also have the same people around them for many years. Even if a police officer spends a lot of time outside the office, he/she will join the others for coffee breaks at least two times a day. This is very important for them, and a part of that importance is the fact that the culture demands social interaction between the officers in order to make the organization run smoothly.

3.1.3.1 Mentoring

Mentoring and team working in the consultancy firms is important. This is learning by watching the others at the same time as you get to try it yourself. One of the consultancy firms hired newcomers to the clients as “backpacks”, just so they could learn without costing the client anything.

Also within the police the mentoring is crucial. You learn by doing and you learn by watching others. The official mentorship is only during six months for the people that come straight from the academy and have their internship before they start to work for real. After this there is no official mentorship, but it still exists unofficially. *“There is always an older colleague to rely on, have confidence in and believe in. This is the person is the one that “you” go to, to ask questions.”* The young ones turn to the older who is more experienced for guidance. Also this process is very much a part of the police culture has been part of the routine for ages and is such an influential role of the culture that it is never been questioned.

In police work, one has to differ between knowledge and other transformed components within the mentoring relationship. The more experienced person hands over knowledge by interacting, but it is not only knowledge, without realizing it he also hands over values and attitudes that can color the knowledge. Some knowledge is of diminishing value because it is captured with values and attitudes; it is sometimes hard to sort out what is knowledge in this and what are values and attitudes that the mentor has.

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We do not consider this as an equally big problem for the consultants. Mainly due to the facts that the consultants are dealing with clients and business operations, if they, because of prejudice, do not do the best job they can, the client will turn elsewhere for satisfaction. If a police officer, due to prejudice, misses out on evidence, it is harder to detect. For example, if a police officer has a prejudice that women abused by their husbands usually take back their charges he might not be so thorough in this investigation of the crime. He will give the newcomer the idea that there is no use in putting a lot of time in these issues since nothing will come out of them in the end. The newcomer does not, him-/herself possess the experience to make this judgment and does therefore as he/she is told. The prejudice of the veteran could have been valid at some point in time, but might not be anymore and will therefore affect people's lives. A consultant, on the other hand having prejudice against the client company he/she is working for might not be looking too closely into details of the job he/she is doing. It will be easy to see where the blame of the project failure should be cast and it will probably only lead to dismissal of that consultant.

This problem is, somewhat handled by the formal education for the persons who want to be instructors for "rookies". They have to apply and be selected and they get the training. This training will make them aware of the fact that they will pass colored knowledge over and it will also make them aware of where their knowledge is colored by personal objectives, attitudes and values. That would give the "rookie" a chance to faster pull out just the knowledge and gain tacit knowledge faster.

The culture depends on informal mentorship, but dealing with bad informal leaders is hard. These problems are hard to discover, they usually come up when something illegal has been done, and a persons says: "He told me to do it". If the formal leader is weak and the informal leader is strong it will be a big problem. In extreme cases the informal leader might actually be giving illegal advice. This have to be dealt with in a thorough way, the informal leader in that case has to be moved to a place where he cannot influence people. In the combat groups in Stockholm they had one group that always ended up in trouble. They were called

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“the baseball team”, because they were rumored to beat people up with baseball bats. They never brought anybody in to the station, but people were found wounded all over town and they always pointed out the same persons. The informal leader in this group was very strong and the formal leader could not handle that. They had to split up the group.

Lately there has been talk about starting some collaboration between the police department and organizations outside the police force, for example with private companies or public sector organizations. They would like to use that kind of collaboration to provide mentorship for middle level managers. They have courses in how to be a manager in the police department, but they need more support in just being a manager. Their profession is changing so much from having been “a front soldier” to being a manager. Their responsibility area has totally changed.

3.1.4 Tacit to Explicit (Codification)

In this knowledge transfer the experience is written down.

3.1.4.1 Knowledge Databases

The consultancy firms are usually very good at this kind of knowledge transfer. They document everything and look for information that others documented. For them this is a part of their job and they do it well. This knowledge sharing is very much controlled by management in the consultancy firms. In one of the two that we talked to they had people who decided what was “good knowledge” and was to be saved. This is of course necessary at some point since everything cannot be saved and should not be saved. Also in one of the consultancy firms the persons in the organization were measured partly by how many documents they created. That was one of the measures of how well a person shared knowledge.

For the police, this has until recently mainly consisted of memos and manuals to courses; now they are also trying to set up a knowledge database. The purpose of the database is to help the police in their work, “*Dealing with society, dealing with organizations to come up with long lasting solutions to problems*”. Everything goes into the database: projects, ordinary work, reports, research, course information and other

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issues that might interest several persons in the organization. New ideas are going to be put into the database and so are the results of the actions taken. In that way, police officers in other parts of the country can see what has been tried and consider the same or a similar solution in their own area.

The police are prepared for the fact that it can be hard to get the police officers to share their experiences over the Intranet. This does not depend on any unwillingness to share, but more on the fact that the personalization of the police culture is so strong. The arguments for getting people to contribute to the database are self gain and pride. You can check up on your own doings by seeing what you wrote in the database, as well as the one writing will be proud of seeing his own words on the Intranet where everybody can read about his/her accomplishments. From the using view, the police are quite confident that it will not be a problem to get the members of the organization to enter the database: *"We are very curious people. We always want to know what is happening behind the corner"*. With the coffee table talk culture they are confident that the interest for the database will increase. If one person reads something in the database, he/she will tell the others and this will make others willing to see what they can learn for themselves and share with others.

We see two main problems with this new database, one is the fact that everything will be put in the database. This will, after some time, mean that a lot of the same kind of knowledge will be on the Intranet, as well as knowledge that is not important for the future. This might make it harder to find the knowledge that is actually valuable. This problem could be solved by having somebody monitoring new entries on the Intranet site, but realizing that what was put on the site the day before suddenly is gone could disappoint the police officer making an effort writing the report. Since the police have little background in codifying knowledge they cannot not, at this point afford to do anything that would decrease the numbers of contributions to the database. The second problem is the automatic deletions of knowledge marked "target work". One person has the responsibility to make sure that the computer does not delete something important. This can only work if the person who wrote it down tells the maintenance officer that is in

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charge of the system. Then again it is hard for the person who did the work to realize how rare or useful the knowledge is.

3.1.4.2 IT

IT is a vital part of the codification knowledge transfer. With IT we can now store a lot of information in a way that makes it easy to access whenever it is needed. It can easily be accessed from different countries with small means- a computer and an Internet connection. The Information overload is a problem, but better organizing and monitoring of the information can solve that. As it is today, the consultancy firms are totally dependent on their computers and databases. The police use the computers, but are not dependent on them even though their importance is increasing. Yet, they do not totally rely on them, for example, the system for e-mail is not commonly used in some parts of the Swedish police department.

3.1.5 Knowledge Sharing Culture

The organizational culture is a big contributor to the members' willingness and ability to share knowledge. The culture in the police is much more socialization oriented, depending on coffee-table talks, war stories and social bounds. In the two consultancy firms, codification was considered more valuable, concentrating more on computer systems and databases.

The police officers tend to be more internalized with the cultural values and therefore value the personal relations higher, while the consultants tend to look at skills rather than personal traits. If this is a product of the amount of years the average policeman spends in the organization or if it is the other way around, the policeman stays for many years because he/she is internalized, is hard to say.

In the two consultancy firms the culture was highly competitive, *"we only hire the best"* and this turns out to be a double edge sword. On one hand they say that you have to share knowledge otherwise you should not be in the organization, on the other, as a former employee of one of the consultancy firms says, *"This business is so competitive so why should I let go of my competitive advantage, my knowledge. If everybody has*

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the same knowledge as I do, then what will make them keep me on the payroll". This makes it hard for the consultancy firms. One of the consultants we talked to represented a firm that has extreme values. They are very successful, but they make no secret out of them using their employees for all they are worth for a few years and then let them go. This attitude was also apparent from the employee point of view; they used the company for a few years to get money and experience in order to be able to get a job in a higher ranked firm.

This kind of two-sided usage was not something that could be detected in the police department. They were very proud of being police officers and even if they did agree to this being a hard and sometimes energy consuming job, they did not seem to think of their working place as a stepping stone towards another organization. Then again there is not that much money for the police as for the consultants, which makes it hard to use the police to gain wealth.

Since culture is something that goes all through the organizations and colors everything with its presence, we will have reason to return to it in the continuing analysis.

3.2 Learning

As we have illustrated above, both organizations share their knowledge rather efficiently whether because deeply rooted in the culture or because strongly recommended from the top. The step further is to investigate whether this shared knowledge works as a ground base on which to create new knowledge, as they both deal with rather turbulent environments it proves to be crucial that they act as proactive organizations, hence by anticipating their own future, rather than just reacting by adjusting themselves. New and innovative ways to solve problems, or to anticipate them, are heavily dependent on the capability of the organization to learn.

Our investigation will be following the three organizational levels shown in the theory: individual, group, and organizational. Something will be created by one person through his/her own experience, while the next level is the result of the

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sharing of several persons' collected knowledge and experience. Moreover, the knowledge created on a organizational level is not just dependent on the people within the organization, but also highly dependent on the structure and culture of the organization. As stated in the theory the three levels are interconnected and they feed each other with new input. The question here is, we have proved that the two organizations are sharing their knowledge, even though rather differently, but are they to be considered learning organizations?

3.2.1 Individual Level

In a policeman's work, everyday means creating new knowledge and new understanding. Every situation is different and must be handled in a different way. To their help they have a lot of explicit knowledge, like numerous databases, their routines, the law and ordinary findings in science and research. To this they add experience, both the kind of experience they have to gain themselves (personal) and the kind of experience they have been told (vicarious). A policeman without experience is on the lowest level in the hierarchy in the police organization. Even though this person has experience from other areas, it is worth nothing in this organizational structure. School is school, but it is not until you hit the streets that you learn what it is like to be a police officer." *You are a knowledgeable cop if you have many years of experience. It is not easy to be perceived as a person with knowledge if you don't have many years of experience from police work.*" If you do not have the hands on experience, you have nothing to contribute to the organization and you will be treated as totally unknowledgeable.

Together these two areas will eventually turn into something bigger, a "gut feeling", intuition. In the police this intuition is most commonly found when the policeman is interacting with another human. It was explained to us in this way: *"The databases, routines and so on are logical and can easily be understood by people outside the police and they can see how the facts are knitted together, while the intuitive part usually comes when you interact with people who in one way or another are of importance, victims, suspects, witnesses or others. You learn to recognize when something is fishy. That gut feeling comes from the outcome of meeting people. It is not like you sit and "eureka", but from interaction. With the facts in your back and adding experience it is easier to say that this is a likely approach. But*

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that is not very intuitive; rather it is more logical reasoning. You do need experience to be able to come to these conclusions, but it is more logical than experience.”

The intuitive part can also, as said, come about in the routines. As information is so easy to access, there is a constant threat of information overload, which can hinder the effective decision-making. Since there is always more information to be found, it can be paralyzing instead of inspirational. There is always another angle that can be looked into in the databases. This is why experience and especially the intuitive part are of growing importance. This is also a reason to why the loop through the pyramid has to go faster. *“The pyramid, that former might have been a 10-20 year approach, will soon with all these theories about how knowledge is generated, be faster; you rush through the academy, you get experience in half a year and in the next year you develop a intuitive feeling”*. It is so important for a cop today to have it that you cannot wait for 10 years, the process has to be speeded up. But is this really possible? Developing an intuitive feeling is something that takes time and does not only build on knowledge and experience, but also personality traits. Some people will get to the intuitive stage in a shorter time than others, and each one of them will develop different levels of intuition. To speed up someone’s learning process is impossible. Even if they give the newcomer as much information, knowledge and experience as possible in a short timeframe and hope that the person in question will get to the intuitive stage faster. Then again, the police do have time to let their people develop since they will stay in the organization for a long time.

Experience is regarded in a similar way among the consultants: *“As a consultant you are really not that much worth if you do not have experience. You need experience to be able to do your job right, and the more experience you gain, the better you get”*. After a few years they also talk about developing an intuitive feeling for the mission ahead. *“If you do not have the right people you can have all the databases in the world it is not going to help them. They cannot create use of the databases if they do not possess the mental capacity, the experience or the physical ability to make use of it”*. This intuitive feeling is not on the same level as the policeman’s. One of the reasons for this might be that the consultancy firms we talked to had many young people with no or little previous experience in consulting. They worked there for an average of five years, which is probably not

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enough time to be able to develop this kind of “gut feeling”. Another reason might be that the task changes more often for a consultant than a police officer. A murder is a murder no matter how it is committed, but there is a big difference in implementing Balanced Scorecard or a knowledge management system. Their experience is closely tied to the tool they work with and most organizational tools are fads with a limited survival timeframe. This means that the base in the pyramid will constantly change for a consultant, and they will start building experience in the new area. To get to the intuitive level takes time, the police might get to this stage after 10-20 years, and that is double the time that most consultants stay in the consultancy business. At the same time, the intuitive stage is more important for the police who have to deal with human issues to a much higher degree than the consultants, who mainly deal with tools and processes, not human emotions.

That experience is extremely important is constantly pointed out on both sides; newcomers have no valuable knowledge and clients do not want people without experience which makes it impossible for the inexperienced people in the consultancy firms to bring in money to the company. It takes about a year of experience and learning before a consultant will actually bring in money. To learn on an individual level you need to bring experience to the explicit knowledge you already possess. Both the police and consultants do this, of course, since experience is vital in both organizations. It is not possible to do that highly complicated work well without experience, and the more experience you gain, the better you will be at the job you are assigned to do.

3.2.2 Group Level

The group level is the one where the single individuals get together and create a shared understanding. Our purpose is to focus on Communities of Practice, ideal location of group learning and shared meaning creation. We will seek to point out whether our two organizations have Communities of Practice.

3.2.2.1 Shared Language

The language plays a major role in creating the shared context that is so often emphasized in the theory. In both crime investigation and consulting we found a

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very clear “organizational language”. In the case of the consultants it is created from the top, managers create an “organizational dictionary” and then introduce it into the organization with the double purpose of making the work easier through more clear communication on one hand, and to help build a shared context that enforces the sense of belonging to the company. As stated in one of the interviews *“someone from our company should more easily speak to someone else from this company than to anybody else”*. We reached similar findings regarding the police, for instance we had a very hard time to be understood when we were booking the interviews and were looking for someone who was in charge of knowledge sharing or knowledge management. Suddenly all doors opened to us as soon as we realized that the right word for them was “methodology”. A shared language is, of course, only one of the elements that shows whether there is shared meaning, and not one among the most important. It is crucial though in the interpreting phase that leads from the individual intuition, to the group level, as after having made conscious the individual intuition it is through language and communication that this is externalized and shared with the group. This is not enough though, as the theory teaches us, to create new knowledge.

3.2.2.2 Context and Shared Meaning

The real focus is on the context that by deriving from the Latin *cum texere* means woven together creating some sort of common net that is shared by the individuals in the community and that weaves them together. The theory individuates this context in the practice, and it seems that our two organizations share the same viewpoint; by tightly working together the context emerges.

The relations in the police force are very tight. You work in “double patrols” when you start out, you have the system with mentoring and coffee table talks that builds trust and care. The understanding of the organization, the willingness to help each other and share information does not have a top-down perspective, they are not done to satisfy each one’s self-esteem or because of some organizational reward. Rather the trigger is the strong sense of belonging to the organization, a sort of attachment that leads people to act for the “organization’s sake” or the greater good. This is enforced by the feeling of doing something that only people

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belonging to the organization can understand, the other people never could.” *I can't share my work or my experiences with people from the outside because they don't really know what it is about*”. This element strongly suggests a link to the communities of practice since only someone who is part of the community can really understand.

This sort of tight social relationship among colleagues is not advocated from the top, most certainly it is supported however it is spontaneously generating from the organization itself. For instance, the only occasions where the headquarters are in charge of organizing social activities are Christmas, the Police Day, and few others. The officers have many activities together outside the organization that are managed by themselves; examples being the International Police Association that organize activities for spare time and comfort and meetings for special events where the officers and their families are invited. These sorts of activities are totally separated from the control of top management.

More than the social activities is the practice that offers ground for building a context for shared understanding, to work side by side with common goals, to solve the crime by finding evidence. For certain crimes there are groups that are already formed and always work together (i.e. combat). They go through massive training sessions as well as special team building courses, spending most of their time with their partners in the team. This of course builds relationships and a shared understanding. Of even more intense nature is the relationship that is generated among members who investigate serious crimes. They might not spend as much time together as their colleagues in the combat teams do, however the pressure of solving the crime is common to all team members; it is not a task to exploit, rather it is a problem to solve, it requires cognition and action, thinking and doing, using existing knowledge and creating more.

A peculiar feature of the police force are the “implicit rules”, some things are done and some others are not and if an officer does not follow these rules he will be isolated at once from the rest. It will not happen because it is stated in any code or law or manual, neither because comprised in dispositions from the top. Rather it is an internal code of behavior that is part of the practice. An example could be the

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knowledge sharing that, as we previously discussed, is very spontaneous and embedded in the organizational practice. If an investigator goes against this practice and behaves selfish by trying to keep information to himself, he will be automatically excluded by the community, *“he will be left in the corner and ignored”* as an officer told us.

Another very emblematic practice is the one regarding covering each others backs. It is not something that is told or required, it is just something that investigators do, it is implicit and very natural. Rules of behavior are very clearly stated and followed, however experience might teach tricks on interrogation or similar. It is understood in the community that sometimes you will have to use extraordinary methods to get things done (still and always not crossing the border of the law), and that is, to some degree accepted in the community. If someone opposed this, the police officers will stand up for each other since they feel like they are the only ones who can understand and back each other up. (Robin Teigland, 1997)

This sense of strong belonging and pride is even more clear when talking to an officer about the new Knowledge Management system that is to be implemented; we asked why he was so sure that the investigators will contribute to it making their experiences available on the data base. We suggest some sort of reward or appreciation from the superior, but the answer is surprisingly different *“there is some pride in being an officer, you contribute for the good of the organization, that is also the good of the community (society) that we serve. Moreover, there is some kind of inborn curiosity for new things in our officers so I do not think that it will be a big issue to get people interested in the system, therefore use it”*. This organization is characterized by a tremendous emotional attachment of its people to their jobs.

On the consulting side we found a conceptual difference in the way the organizations consider communities of practice. One firm stated the distinction between “formal” and “informal” communities of practice, and we really appreciated that the two were kept separated rather than trying to convince us that the formal ones were mere and true communities of practice. As formal community we mean the ones that are set up by the management while informal

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are the ones that generate spontaneously, hence the real ones; it is more or less the same distinction as between formal and informal leadership.

To be honest one of the two firms talked about the two types indistinctly as the communities, while the other proved to be more realistic and made clear the distinction in the very first place. *“We need to separate between the communities that the management tries to build (they are mere project teams) from the “real” communities that generate spontaneously”*.

“The best care that management can give to help communities of practice to evolve is to take a step aside, not to get involved at all, and just let them do”. As it was stated by the knowledge manager of the cited consulting firm, communities do exist in reality and they are the only means to genuine tacit knowledge sharing and creation, however there is nothing that the management can do to help them evolve, it has to be a wholly spontaneous process. People can be put together in a team and they will work at a very high pace for a long time together. We can call this team community of practice, if we wish, and it will be most likely that people within the team will share a lot, however this is not enough for the team to evolve automatically into a community.

Even the massive efforts put by top management on creating occasions to socialize seem not to work so well. Dinners, special events, and trips are organized for consultants to spend time together and familiarize, however *“it is not from these “organized gatherings” that communities evolve. Eventually it will be the very hard working schedule, the pressure put on accomplishing the task in a limited time, and the fact of working side by side for infinite hours, no matters if physically in the same room or town, or if through the internet or teleconferencing”*. As the theory reminds us, the context where the community develops is not necessarily physical, it can be mental or virtual. What really matters is the care, the sense of belonging, the striving towards the same goal, and the shared meaning. These are features that, unfortunately or luckily, we still do not know, management cannot control at all.

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On the side of the other consulting firm, the issue was pictured as much easier: *“We have all the training activities; the community building activity, if you will- people from different market units get to meet around CRM. We have a fair amount of social activities that make people get to know each other and trust each other and then lower the costs of transferring knowledge.”* Put it this way it seems that we have been worrying for no reason, it seems it is enough to give people occasions to meet at dinners or parties and they will automatically develop those feelings of trust and belonging that are at the base of the communities. Moreover, it was stated, *“In theory they can only form voluntarily, but if you put them together letting them socialize they will form Communities of Practice. To help this along we have seminars, training, brown bag lunches, breakfast seminars and we invite speakers. More loosely and more structured ways in trying to transform knowledge.”* We agree in saying that these sorts of activities would certainly help the development of certain social relations among colleagues, however the idea that trust and care come from participating at seminars and parties, we find rather unlikely; it is not exactly what we intend when we talk about shared meaning.

Decision Making

Experience is the most valuable “asset” within this organization, the more experienced an investigator is, the more intuition he has developed, the more authority is invested in him by the community. It is not a matter of formal position in the hierarchy rather it seems like the community of investigators “promotes” the experienced one to be its leader, some sort of wise man who will guide them. It sounds undoubtedly very fascinating, the wise man will guide us all. Unfortunately, we think, it also has its disadvantages. The senior officer might but also might not be the one who has the best knowledge on the matter. Hence, he might, but also might not, have the possibility of making the right decision, or at least the best one according to the situation. The same person does not have the best knowledge in all areas, hence decisions should be made by different persons on the basis of the knowledge that is needed in the single case. This is not the case in the police, and it is probably the only restraining force to have true communities of practice.

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Regarding decision making in consulting firms on the other hand, here we find a knowledge based approach; the decisions are made by those who have the knowledge on the matter rather than those invested of the informal authority or formal position in the hierarchy. The emphasis is on the business process and the people working on the project take the decisions. *“You need to be mature enough in your knowledge, about the world and about the subject area that you can make a good decision. We are good at that, we give our people a lot of responsibility and a lot of freedom”*. In the project groups the hierarchy is strict and it is not always the person with the detailed knowledge that takes the decisions, but the one in charge of the whole project. However it is practice that the person in charge for the group will ask and listen to the opinion of the group member with most knowledge on the matter before making any decision.

3.2.3 Organizational Level

When investigating the police, we would say that the organization is highly institutionalized and routines and organizational norms are strongly rooted into the organization. This is even more enhanced, we think, by the strong will of the newcomers to be considered as “real cops”. There is in fact some pressure on those, who have not yet internalized the routines and norms and are considered “nothing” by the older ones because they have no experience, and as we know experience is everything, it is a source of trust, respect, and authority. The newcomers are so eager to be considered “good cops” that they look upon the more experienced in order to internalize those norms and routines as soon as possible. As one of the officers that we interviewed states *“To get knowledge you need hands on experience and to get this as fast as possible you start imitating the ones that are considered knowledgeable. In this way you get into the culture (that here is very strong), but you also get brainwashed to think, behave and be like the others. The supervisors show clearly that the newcomers know nothing and that it is in the real work that the real learning takes place. As a rookie you realize you don’t have any knowledge and you want to be looked upon as knowledgeable as the others”* This quote contains many insights that will be helpful later in a deeper analysis of the police as learning organization, we will then refer to it again.

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The police is a mature, rather old organization, therefore the organizational memory is strong and the main patterns of interaction and communication have been captured during the years and internalized, they now guide the actions of the members and we do not think that there is total awareness on this point. Many routines are so deeply rooted into “the walls” that are taken for granted, people act upon these routines not according to a decision but unconsciously according to practice.

Analyzing the situation of the police at this point in time we find out that they are exactly within the gap, what has been learned and internalized does not fit the context any longer. It takes time to go through all the organizational levels of learning, however, in the meantime the world has moved on and what has been institutionalized now is not appropriate any more. The organization is aware of the gap and they are trying to fill it by focusing on individual and group learning, shifting away from the internalized practices. This issue links very much to the learning organization that will be analyzed in the next chapter.

The consulting firms under study are both much younger organizations than the police, they have therefore little organizational memory. As most young organizations the emphasis in consultancy firms is on individual and group learning rather than on the organizational level of institutionalization. As we already illustrated when talking about communities of practice some behavior seems to occur not really because internalized by the organization or because of a sense of belonging, rather they are pushed from the top. The name of the company is continuously repeated during the interviews, as if we were talking about a third party up there. The investigators often refer to their organization as “us”. There are no tangible elements to prove what we are stating, rather it is a matter of getting the “shades” and different “tones” in the voice, in the working environment, there are many small imperceptible details that speak more than any official study. Very few routines get to the institutionalization stage, maybe due to the short time people usually spend within the company.

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At the same time, the fact that there do not seem to be highly internalized practices, could be considered as a positive issue in the consulting business. We might say that it helps to keep the organization from becoming entrapped in its institutionalized routines, hence more dynamic and flexible indeed, but also less stable.

3.2.3.1 Learning Organizations?

We have now discussed the different levels of learning and we came to the top, the organizational level. The next step is now to analyze whether the organizations are to be considered as learning organizations. Furthermore we will discuss what are the possible restraining forces and internal conflicts that have to be solved in order to be a learning organization.

Learning in Action

“There is no learning without action” seems to be a cornerstone concept within the police, to the point that experience is evaluated as almost the only important thing. One can get tools through training, seminars, and education but it is in the experience that the real learning resides. In the past the main goal for the police was to go after the thief, but that implies that the crime had already been committed. The aim is now to work with the issues behind the crime and work with a group from the society to look at the future and not allow the crime to happen. The police have now developed the awareness that it is through working together with the relevant parties within the society that crimes can be prevented. A dark parking lot offers the possibility for the thief, if the police work with the owner of the lot trying to come up with some idea and working together to put into practice, it should be easier to prevent. *“We have to deal with the society, and with organizations to come up with long lasting solutions to problems, to be proactive rather than reactive”.*

“Hands on experience is the way people learn and without experience they do not have very much for a customer to buy”. It seems that also on the consulting side learning is heavily associated with “doing”, one can and should have as much knowledge as possible but it is necessary to put it into action to learn. It is not enough to have studied

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many cases, something else is to work on a case within a team, dealing with other people who very often will challenge one's self-esteem, and last but not least, to deal with the client. As we have already talked about, mentoring is one of the core issues regarding newcomers, moreover the company tries to set a structure of tools and routines that can best support the work, however new ideas and innovation are welcome.

Single and Double Loop Learning

New ways of solving problems are regarded very positively. As we already mentioned, the police department is setting up a new Knowledge Management system where, together with information regarding past crimes, organizational issues and so forth, there will also be a special section dedicated to "projects". *"Target is what society expects from us, a project is to try something new that requires new resources, that could improve that way to get to the target."* *"A project is something that is not done in the ordinary work with the ordinary budget. For instance let us assume that we produce pens, but they easily slip out of the pocket. If someone wants to try to produce them with bigger caps because he thinks that it would solve the problem, that would be another way of creating the product, it's a project"*. The target has to be reachable and comprised within the responsibility area of the officer suggesting it. So, the purpose is to stimulate investigators to come up with ideas that are alternative compared to the way the problem has been handled so far. Additional resources might be available to experiment with the new solution, as it is in the definition of a project that it has to be a new and different way and it requires additional resources. *"The thought underlying this is that officers will get ideas from each other and the curiosity that is built into the police culture might contribute to the success of this idea"*.

The practice of self-challenging was already practiced, even though not formalized into a database, among project teams at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Starting from the beginning of the case and then continuing on a weekly basis, the teams have meetings where the members discuss and brainstorm not only on how the case could be solved, but also whether there could be alternative ways of doing it. By analyzing the way that case is being conducted and arguing against it, eventual new and improved viewpoints and possible ideas are

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developed. It is also a useful procedure to check how the work is proceeding, by testing it. *“Something you must do is to challenge the ordinary procedures, in these meetings we pop up with questions and ideas and each time we choose one member who has to be “the devil advocate”, as we call it, and he has to try to find the weaknesses in the way we are conducting the case”*. By challenging and criticizing the actual work, weaknesses are pointed out but also strengths are enhanced. The top management vigorously supports this attitude, it does not need to be pushed since it is an attitude that rose spontaneously within the team. We would say that the practice has been institutionalized.

Moreover, one of the departments is working on a project that will regard collaborations with organizations outside the police force, for example private companies such as Volvo and SKF or public sector organizations in order to provide suggestions and new ideas for the middle level managers. This attitude shows a will within the organization to improve through challenging its old practice and looking for new insights in management that could come mostly from successful private companies. This is also regarding the discussion that we will have in the next paragraphs about the principle of requisite variety.

These initiatives, both the new ones regarding “projects” and external advising on management, and the old practice of challenging the way an investigation into a crime is conducted, seem to individuate an organization whose first priority is to improve itself. Even though it is a very old organization with many institutionalized practices and routines, some being very useful and supportive and some others restraining development (as we will illustrate in the next paragraph dedicated to the restraining forces), the inner striving is always for doing the job right and in a better way. Whether it is actually learning or not, that is still to be proved, but we are quite sure that it really badly wants to learn and tries hard to do it. It seems contradictory at first sight that such a traditional organization with so deeply rooted values and practices wants to learn and find new ways. However it might prove to be not as contradictory as it seems, a mature organization such as this has developed values that go far beyond the everyday work regarding also values and principles that are applicable to everyday life. It is not so surprising

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then that this organization, feeling the pressure of its social responsibility wants to improve the way it answers to the requirements of the society. *“We do not want to stop at the target, that is what the society expects from us, the ordinary job. A project is something more, a new way to solve the problem or of preventing it”*

We tried to find out what sort of learning is actually present in the consulting firms, we also tried to find out to what extent real innovation is welcome, and by this we refer to the kind of innovation that is “dangerous” to the company, the one that challenges its established routines. It is our belief that, somehow, we were stopped from finding out to what extent challenging the organizational practice is welcome, rather we were given very diplomatic answers. *“Our consultants are, on the one hand supported with a set of methods and tools that the firm continuously tries to develop, and on the other hand, they are encouraged to be innovative. Within the company it is called “entrepreneurial spirit”.* According to the people we interviewed, innovative ideas are very much welcome when dealing with problems. Consultants are warmly suggested to come up with new ideas and solutions in both of the firms under examination.

However this does not answer our question, as it is one thing to say that innovation is welcome and rather a different thing is to assert that there is an open climate toward new ways of solving problems that challenge the organizational routines. In the former case we have learning indeed but of the single loop kind, the new ideas are comprised within the boundaries of existing organizational rules (just in the same way as the house thermostat that turns itself on when reaching the temperature it was programmed for). Double loop is required to talk about learning organizations, and this is the sort of new solution that challenges the organizational rules. It would be the case if the house thermostat turn itself on before reaching the programmed temperature because it understands that it is too cold for a human being and, by turning itself on in advance, less energy will be necessary to warm up the environment, hence generating saving in energy consumption.

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Within both of the consulting firms that we investigated room is left for innovation, still within the boundaries of organizational rules, challenging the mentioned rules is not under discussion. *“we provide methods and tools, and then we encourage our consultants to be innovative, still by using those methods and tools”*. Moreover *“innovation is very much appreciated at my company, still we have a parameter that we call quality standard, and new ideas have to be within its boundaries”*. Of course there has to be some rule and some sort of parameter in order to judge new ideas, otherwise everyone would be allowed to come up with the craziest proposal expecting to be taken seriously, however we think that by delineating strict limits, the potential to really be innovative is restrained. Innovation is warmly advocated and, at the same time, the proper settings for it to arise are not provided.

Recruitment

The changes in the horizon of the police force need to be supported by a flexible and open mindset. This is, we believe, the reason why there is a shift in the recruitment criteria. It is now commissioned to “plikverket”, the agency that also takes care of the recruitment for the military force. The aim is to build a more differentiated ground base made of more varied and individualistic people, with good studying academic skills, and an inner clock to always strive for development. The striving for development was pretty much the most emphasized during our interviews, perhaps to underlying the need to give a more dynamic orientation to the organization. By recruiting more individualistic and older persons, there will be a better resistance to the cultural influence, they will be stronger in upholding their own values and attitudes towards development, learning and education.

“This new recruiting policy is a crucial issue in the shift towards being a more organic organization, even though there might be some negative effects in bringing in more individualistic people, in order to become a more dynamic and flexible organization there is need for bringing in more dynamic and flexible people”. There is a certain degree of awareness, the new recruitment system is supposed to act as a support to the changes that we have been discussing; the

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purpose of this would be to help the organization to keep up with the changes that are on the horizon, to be more flexibly oriented.

In order to be able to act upon double loop it is not enough to have the ideas that challenge the organizational routines, it is also necessary to have the organizational support when the ideas are to be suggested and then actuated. To do this effectively there is need for more flexible thinking and organic organization, since if it is too focused on “the way it has always been” the new and alternative way has very few chances to see the light.

When it comes to the balance between having specialists and generalists, it depends on what crimes we are handling. As we already pointed out the organization seems sometimes to be divided into two rather different sub-organizations. Regarding ordinary “community policing” the preference is for generalists while when handling serious crimes then teams are built with very narrowly specialized investigators.

Regarding the consultants, when investigating whether the orientation is for diversity or rather homogeneity we need, again, to make a distinction between the two firms since there are consistent differences in their approaches. In one of them homogeneity is most definitely preferred to variety, *“we pick people that suit the company and the systems that suit those people. There is a limit to how much diversity people can tolerate, groups tend to expel people who don't fit in, who are too different. You need a common mindset, that is the reason why also the recruiting phase tends to be rather homogeneous”*. Homogeneity is heavily pursued by the company by recruiting people of the same age, mostly in their first job, coming from the same branch of studies.

By neutralizing the possibility of recruiting people with different backgrounds and experience, we believe, the company is neutralizing the possibility of being a true learning organization. This not only refers to the fact that people with different backgrounds carry with them different sorts and levels of knowledge, but also the fact that they would bring into the company different ways of approaching problems, hence different angles to look at in order to solve them. For instance,

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the way an engineer looks at a managerial problem will be rather different than the philosopher's approach, and even more from the mathematician. These are all differences that eventually create time consuming meetings, however ending up, hopefully, in good and really innovative solutions.

For a company whose core issue is problem solving, the core asset should be making sure that the best and most innovative solutions are offered. By basing on people of the same age, with the same background and experience, conflicts will most definitely be reduced, however we have doubts about the long lasting quality of this sort of approach. It might work for the clients, however within our framework of investigation on learning organizations, this sorts of environments and values are not supportive to learning.

When we raised these objections, by suggesting that this attitude could be counterproductive or restrain the future capabilities of the company we were answered: *“it is absolutely true, this is a way of seeing the matter. However, we have to make choices, and since people stay with us an average of 5 years or less we try to give them what we can and get from them what we can. It has worked perfectly so far”*

Regarding the other firm the approach seemed to be rather different. Previous working experience, particularly in other business areas, is very appreciated. The principle underlying this attitude is that *“someone who has been there might more extensively understands the problem and the client's viewpoint (and come up with better solutions) than someone who has always and only been a consultant”*. This being the principle underlying the recruitment criteria, the preference is for people of different ages and backgrounds, with this meaning not only educated in diversified areas but also coming from different types of jobs”. This allows having alternative approaches to problems, looking at different angles to find the best and longest lasting solution.

Principle of Requisite Variety

Analyzing the police organization according to the principle of requisite variety we would say that, if we base on the organization as it is right now, we believe that there are some elements that satisfy the principle. The idea of looking for advice

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from the outside and having civilian managers who previously worked in private companies is a step towards satisfying the principle of requisite variety, it is a way to look at another angle of the same problem. The same goes for the habit, largely practiced in CID teams, of getting the different people together and challenging the way the case is conducted from the different perspectives. Moreover the new recruiting criteria emphasize heavily that the aim is to recruit people with very different backgrounds, age, education, and previous working experience.

This will not only help render the culture more flexible and a little more individualistic, but also will stimulate coming up with new solutions because people with very different points of view will be working together challenging each other's ideas until agreement is reached. The same principle ruled in the old Greek democracy, through discussion among diverse opinions it is more likely to reach a good solution than discussing among people that embrace the same viewpoint and perspective on the issue.

As we just discussed, the new recruitment standards are in line with the principle of Requisite Variety. It will certainly create trouble by adopting new ways of thinking, and backgrounds to crush a strong and deeply rooted culture. However, these issues cannot be judged at this point in time since they have just started to take place in the organization and it will take some time to see their effects, whether they will be positive or negative. We believe that they are good preconditions to create a true learning organization, curious to find new and innovative solutions. It is stated in the theories that organizations learn through the learning processes of individuals among them. Through recruiting multi-skilled people with a strong inner quest for development and strong personality, the organization is assuring a ground base for a constructive diversified and self-challenging human capital.

Regarding the consulting firms, the principle has already been discussed within recruitment, since we needed to separate between the two different approaches adopted by the two firms. We would like to add here that we believe the principle

of requisite variety to be rather critical to the learning process raises our doubts on how a firm whose core asset is knowledge could afford to ignore this issue.

3.3 Restraining Forces to Learning

The self-concept is rather strong within the police, not in a narcissistic way though, rather in the way that keeps up strength and motivation. This is proved by the fact that among the ego defenses, fantasies are the prevalent type, with a preference for storytelling, myths, ceremonies, all issues that support deeply rooted values. In fact, the culture in the police department is known for being strong. It is a big and old organization that, at least in the past, has been quite closed for interaction with the outside. There are positive outcomes such as trust, reliance, motivation and also knowing how to act to be a good colleague; *“how should I wear up my uniform, how should I approach persons in front of other police officers to be relied upon as a trustworthy colleague”*. Unfortunately this attitude also restrains learning since it emphasizes the values and stories that are linked with “the past glories”, as witnessed by an officer *“the risk is that strong culture will restrain the learning”*, as we will discuss later.

The two consultancy firms under examination are both rather young organizations if compared to the police, as we already pointed out in one of the previous chapters. Our first impression was that they had very strong cultures due to the emphasis with which the values, and even the name of the company in one case, were repeated continuously, however of a different nature compared to the police. The ego defenses presented in the consulting firms are other than the ones that permeate the police; this is perhaps the first time that the two organizations have such different positions.

3.3.1 Ego Defenses

The self concept of the police organization is filled with almost all the categories that we found in the description of fantasies, that makes the situation harder for the learning process, as it is not part of the organization’s self-concept, as it is now, to be self-challenging and innovative. Therefore, having learning as the actual self-image will be jeopardized, which raises a reasonable doubt that learning,

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even though strongly pursued, will be very hard to achieve in the everyday reality of the organization. The self-ego defenses that we found in the consulting firms are mostly related to rationalization and idealization, very weakly linked to fantasies as storytelling, myths, and strong routines such as coffee-table talks. Of course, there are coffee meeting areas and the consultants most likely go there and meet their colleagues, however when talking about their job this practice does not seem to be “part of it”, it is something extra, just a break no more and no less. It is our opinion that ego defenses such as fantasies contribute to increase the sense of belonging and pride towards the organization while other types of ego defenses are more “dangerous” to the learning process as they *build* a self-image of the organization rather than enhancing past glories. Let us explain this concept; If we have war stories and myths it contributes to making the organization less flexible and perhaps too proud of itself, yet they are built on something genuine, they contain and represent the core values and beliefs of the people in the organization, only enhanced. Even taken to extremes such fantasies will eventually create organizational heroes whose figures would enforce the existing beliefs, which are still negative to learning as our purpose is to challenge them, still they contribute to enhancing the sense of belonging to the organization.

The other types of ego defenses do not build upon the “positive” core values to build heroes, rather they create an ideal picture of the company as it is convenient that the employees perceive it. When coming to *rationalization* we even assist in the legitimating of attitudes and behavior that are usually considered erroneous. However it is not our purpose to argue about the morale of the organizations under examination. Our purpose is to establish whether they act as learning organizations or not. Regarding this aspect, all types of ego defenses are restraining

3.3.1.1 Fantasies

Most of the myths in which the police organization is embedded probably originated from criminal novels and movies. Of course, the police officers themselves say that police work is nothing like the movies: “*It is impossible to get a DNA test in one hour. Even if you send it to Linköping it will take two weeks*”, but still

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they describe the officers on the street as *“frontline soldiers”*. Another very common myth is: *“I can’t share my work or my experiences with people from the outside because they don’t really know what it is about”*. This is of course true in the investigators’ minds, but is also a myth building on the self-image of doing something that is very special and important on a societal level, so different from any other job that nobody could really understand.

The “war stories” are also rather spread within the everyday practice; the officers stand with a cup of coffee telling each other about the day or the old times. The origin of this type of fantasy is rooted very far back in the old times and it is closely tied to the informal and very strong mentoring system that exists in the organization, the old and experienced take care of the newcomers, taking them under their protective wing”. Police officers love to tell stories, mostly during the so-called coffee table talks, all over the building there are coffee areas where the people meet at least twice a day and share their experiences and stories.

Investigators gladly tell stories both from their own and their colleagues’ experience. These stories of course bring up the question of the degree of truth in them; after telling the same story a few times you might start to improve it a little bit and then add a few more things as time passes and the memory fades. When telling a story that was not experienced first hand there is of course the danger of the “whispering game”. This means that the stories might not always be a 100 % true, but that is not the issue. They are meant to share values, attitudes and morals. By telling these stories the main information and knowledge gets through as well as the expected norms in the organization. They also comfort and reassure in the way of making someone know that they are not the only one who experienced a situation.

The organization is strongly dependant on rituals, and, as most old and mature ones, the initiation rituals are of utmost importance. He who is new is not “one of us” and he has to prove that he is worthy being one of us. The initiation ritual in the police has a lot to do with knowledge. The supervisors showed clearly that the newcomers know nothing and that it is in the real work that the REAL learning

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takes place. *“As a rookie you then realize that you do not have any knowledge and you want to be looked upon as knowledgeable as the others”*. Again, what is the organizational strength (belonging, strong attachment) is also its weakness since it heightens the barriers to learning. On the other hand though, it increases the degree of care and mutual development, critical to the communities of practice; the organization is very closed to newcomers but once one is accepted it is like being part of a family, the older take care of the youngsters and by teaching them tricks and telling them stories they help them develop. It was hard to be accepted in the beginning however it was worth it.

Humor is a good way to get rid of pressure. In an investigator’s day of work he will get into situations that are not always so easy to handle. To joke about it makes it easier, not just to understand, but to talk about the serious things in a not so serious way. They also make jokes about the image they have of themselves, like: *“We have 16200 entrepreneurs”* and *“Cops are just so curious, they will put their nose into anything”*.

3.3.1.2 Rationalization

When it comes to rationalization we ought to speak about consulting firms, particularly one of them. We could think about investigators legitimizing some harsh action for the sake of the case, however we do not think this is the real meaning of it. One thing is to justify a bad action for a greater good and another is simply to justify it because *“that is the way it is”*. Here is how we were answered when raising the hypothesis that the firm uses the employees to get as much as possible out of them before they leave *“... it is absolutely true, this is a way of seeing the matter. However, we have to make choices, and since people stay with us an average of 5 years, we try to give them what we can and get from them what we can. It has worked perfectly so far”*. Another accepted issue is that people work so hard that they do not have any time left for their family as witnessed *“most people here do not even remember what faces their wives and children have”*.

We do not argue the moral principle behind it, the company works in heavy competitive pressure and the priority is to win the competition game while the

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police can afford to be more focused on other types of values. Still, regarding learning this sort of approach does not help the organization to evolve. Moreover, it is precluding the possibility for care and it does not really seem to represent an organization that is willing to challenge itself to come up with new solutions.

3.3.1.3 Idealization

This ego defense can be found in both organizations; through storytelling and myths the police creates a “fantastic” self-image of past facts. In the same way consulting firms idealize themselves by building the image of the perfect company to work for. A slight difference can be found in the fact that within the police the ego defense is built upon past facts while in consulting it builds upon an image that is willingly created to motivate the people who work for the organization. This attitude is taken further in creating a narcissistic idea of self as perfect, *“I’m not easily impressed, but here I meet a lot of very smart people”*.

The absence of war stories within the consulting firms could be due to the different nature of the job, of course it is easier for investigators to have them, however consultants have a very high self-image but of a different nature to that of the police. The police idea of self is more romantic, more of a big family that you have to prove you are worthy to enter (rituals), and a family of values were the old take care and teach to the young, where people do a socially important job by fighting crime, therefore war stories that picture oneself as heroes. This is motivating, inspiring, and keeps up the pride to belong to the organization but is also a barrier to self-challenge, why would someone want to challenge a hero?

In the consultants, the self-image is not based on emotional soft values rather on hard ones, as its nature requires. The organization works in a competitive environment and has to win the competitive game, this affects the whole culture and internal environment. The police are fighting against crime but it is different than competing with other companies for the clients or keeping the employees. Still, the issues discussed here are studied, in the first place, as critical tools to win and keep competitive advantage; therefore, we think they should be taken more into consideration.

4. Conclusions

We started with a paradox; we expected the police to be a very traditional organization and it is when dealing with traditional crimes but it is also surprisingly more flexible and dynamic when dealing with serious crimes that are the focus of our investigation. Moreover, the relationships are very open and friendly, no matter the level in the hierarchy. The paradox widened when we found out that the consultants, taken as examples of openness, innovation, knowledge sharing, and flat organization are very hierarchical, and rely heavily on control and supervision. As much as we were positively surprised by the findings regarding investigators, the consultants' issue left us a little disappointed, we expected them to operate as experts in this field.

4.1 Personalization and Codification

When looking at knowledge sharing within the police and the consultancy firms we can easily see that they both use all the four knowledge-sharing processes, and share their knowledge rather efficiently, though they emphasize opposite issues. The police are more oriented to a personalized approach, mentoring and socialization are the crucial issues to their knowledge sharing. The consultants, on the other hand, rely heavily on codification; databases and written knowledge. The strengths of the police are the weaknesses of the consultants and vice versa, the police are focused on improving IT infrastructure and creating the settings for codification, while the consultants are trying to put into practice the management theories about care and mutual development. The way they share knowledge is very appropriate for the culture of the organization and suits their purposes very well. Still, they are aspiring to achieve greater capabilities in the areas they are deficient. But is this something that they should fight to accomplish and is it even suitable for their organizations? By diversifying in their ways of spreading knowledge, they might lose the competence they already possess, instead of gaining the opposite ability.

A study was conducted some years ago on the issue, published on the Harvard Business Review (Hansen et al, 1999), asserting that consulting firms are either personification or codification oriented and this has to be done with heavy preference for one of them, otherwise it will not work. The authors suggested that

it is worthless trying to keep a 50/50 balance between the two, rather focus on one approach and keep a 80/20 proportion. We found a percentage close to 80/20 in the police focused on personalization, and more balance in the consulting area, around 60/40 focused on codification. Still both are trying to reach a more 50/50 relation involving the two approaches. The police seem to be more concerned about adding some codification elements to their practice, shifting towards 50/50, than the consultants are in increasing personalization.

4.2 Learning

One needs experience to learn and experience is equally emphasized in both organizations. Again the findings led us to the time issue, investigators have more time than the consultants, time to socialize as well as the years spent within the same organization performing the same sort of task.

On the individual level, an investigator might or might not reach an intuitive state, depending on specific personality trades, but he/she can afford to give the process the time it requires, since the same persons are in the organization for a long time. The consultants do not work in the same situation, the time needed to reach the intuitive level is long and cannot be influenced by the outside, and their tasks are changing much faster- they just never get the time to go through the process.

We are willing to say that both organizations do have communities of practice, yet differently arranged. The problem is, again related to time. Time plays a relevant issue in the work of the consultants, particularly because of the short time spent in the office. This, added to the high pace and pressure of the type of work, complicates the possibilities to build solid and deep relationships. Pressure is indeed a strong element to build a shared context, however more is needed. The conditions and the context are more humanized and soft in the police, which stimulates the birth of communities of practice. The consultants try much harder to force the process, however it could end in more of a restraining action than a motivational one. These issues make it harder, but not impossible for communities of practice in their organizations to evolve.

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Even if we consider both organizations to be good at learning on both individual and group level, we do not think that it would be suitable for us to assume that they are learning organizations. We do not think that we can consider the police as a learning organization; they are indeed moving in the right direction, even though it is very slow. We need to wait and see what impact the change will bring about in the organization. We may say that there is a very strong will to be a learning organization. The new database and the projects will most definitely represent a step towards efficiency. We cannot conclude that they will be a part of a double loop learning, but we do however say that the purpose seems to be stimulating a double loop approach to problems.

Regarding the consulting we do not think they have the characteristics of a learning organization either, innovative perhaps, however not learning. As we have shown, it is clearly stated that diversity only creates conflict and waste of time, even though knowledge sharing is very effective. This is however not enough. As shown in the analysis, the principle of requisite variety is not satisfied and regarding the double loop there are some doubts as to whether the kind of innovations that are welcome are of the self-challenging type.

On the crime investigation side there is more will and awareness to take the risk that is implicit in moving towards being a learning organization. There is awareness and concern that perhaps the cultural cornerstones will be lost, and that the culture might become more individualistic. This is the price to pay for challenging one's self, however it is our impression that they really want to improve. This enthusiasm might, though, be a part of this being something new for the organization. The consultancy firms have been working on these issues for so long that they take the evolution more for granted and do not emphasize it that much. Yet, it does demand a total change of culture if the police want their organization to rely more on gaining knowledge through codified sources. The police work is based on action and building experience through participation, in that way their total mindset has to change for them to be able to appreciate the knowledge from computerized sources and to contribute to this knowledge

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spread. We think that the consultants might be constraining themselves by knowing the theory too well and trying to force the natural developments.

We suppose that the issue of being more personalization oriented must have been discussed deeply within consulting firms' boards and they have perhaps come to the same conclusion as we did, there is not much else that can be done, other than trying to give their people the tools to socialize and create a shared meaning. This sort of matter takes time to develop and cannot be influenced or speeded up, hence we believe that the firm that clearly states "this is the way it is, we cannot do otherwise" sounds harsh but is being honest. The insight is "we try to get the best out of the situation".

No matter how many times and from how many different angles we tried to view the problem, we always came to the same conclusion. The key issues are time and flexibility. The police do have the time to develop a learning organization, but they lack flexibility because of the strong cultural influence. The consultants on the other hand are very flexible, but they are deficient in time. It could also be that the time aspect is what is keeping the consultants so flexible, by being always on the move, both physically and mentally. The large quantity of time spent within the same organization makes the police able to be more rooted in their culture and internalize their values. That renders them more stagnant. We do not know whether a consultant would remain flexible in a police like environment.

In both styles of organizations, their strengths proved to be also their weaknesses.

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5.2 Interviews

Since the names of the organizations are kept anonymous we prefer not to publish the names of the persons we talked to. We will though write a list of their position in the organization.

Consultants:

The service officer manager for knowledge transformation service in U.K

Knowledge service manager U.K

Knowledge manager Swe

Knowledge manager Swe

Crime investigation department:

Superintendent, chief education unit

Criminal investigator

Criminal investigator