

Workplace Learning for Development and Change

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Scope of presentation



- Focuses on employee involvement in workplace innovation
- Explores relationships between workplace learning and 'employee-driven' innovation
- Argues for greater attention to be paid to the role of 'knowledgeable practice' in advancing workplace innovation



Employee-driven innovation refers to the 'generation and implementation of new ideas, products and processes originating from interaction of employees not assigned to this task' (Høyrup et al p.8).



Often generated by the need to 'work around' day to day problems and challenges

Drivers for innovation...*



- **Types of innovation-**
- **research driven**
- **user driven**
- **price driven**

- **What about employee driven innovation? – relatively overlooked in real -life organisational contexts**

Industry perspective:



- ***Interviewer: What arguments would you give to somebody who was trying to persuade a board that this was a good road to go on? If it's not going to produce instant returns, that can be quite a hard message to sell?***
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- ***Industry response: 'The power of high involvement innovation is about a lot of people contributing their little bits, every day, so it adds up. ...***

As long as you have got the alignment, as long as you have got the sense that everyone's pulling in the same direction and all so those innovations are adding up, it does contribute some significant strategic improvements at the bottom line of the kind that would interest a board. '

‘Employee –driven innovation’



- Includes the everyday remaking of jobs and organizational practices,
- described by Kesting and Ulhoi (2010) as part of a process that emerges co-incidentally among ordinary employees, often across the internal boundaries of organizations and across professions.
- Recognises that innovations are often generated by the need to ‘work-around’ day- to-day problems at work, finding solutions as resources, systems or tools do not match up to requirements of the immediate task.



Examples

Denmark a rich source of examples of EDI negotiated as part of social partnerships

See www.lo.dk

- **Glass wool production company** – employees experimented with ways of reusing waste glass wool in production process – resulting in recycling being adopted.
- **Danish railways** – water tank improvements as self-managing groups of workers identified a way to stop overflows. (Also many employee-identified improvements to passenger service.)
- **Zoo management – small and medium enterprise** – animal keeper role refocused on recording and proactively managing specific animal behaviour patterns.
- **Danish-Italian cross-cultural** worker exchanges – initiated by VESPA

In focusing on employee involvement, it is important to note that:



- fully-fledged EDI approaches are a rarity in most business and industry sectors. (eg Aasen in survey of 5 sectors found only one (chemical industry) providing significant examples of high level of employee involvement).
- research into the involvement of ‘ordinary workers’ in workplace innovation is under-developed.

Employee involvement in innovation and workplace learning:

- Workplace learning is found to be an important element (*see Evans, et al; Ellstrom et al; Høystrup et al.*)
- ‘*various types of support and resources for learning*’ are needed to be able to move from established ideas towards new ones in work contexts (*Ellstrom 2000, 35*).
- Yet the role of employee *knowledge* in the process of workplace innovation is often underplayed at the level of the ‘ordinary worker’.



Significance of Knowledgeable Practice

Organizations can utilise 'internal as well as 'external knowledge sources' (including workers' know-how and tacit knowledge) in ways that expand innovation capacity.

(Aasen 2012)

'Where the company sets out to promote innovation – the importance of employee knowledge rapidly becomes apparent & knowledgeable practice emerges as key feature'.

For example:



- Employees who participate in innovation contribute in different ways and at different stages of the process with ideas, knowledge, time and creativity
- These inputs stem not only from their present work roles, but are also rooted in their previous work experience and wider life experience.



In exploring innovative capability:



- Ramussen (2012) distinguishes between the STI (Science–Technology-Innovation) and DUI (Doing-Using-Interacting) modes
- innovation is often generated by practitioners with ‘strong knowledge of the specific trade and its markets or users.’
- This research also identifies the relative neglect of the DUI form. It attributes the privileging of the STI form to the higher status of scientific knowledge.
- Workplace learning integral to the DUI mode.

Innovation processes entail values - much more than dissemination or implementation of something new



- Wegener's public sector research shows how workers at the front line encounter 'the innovation imperative' –they have to interpret and modify the innovation concept to integrate it into their work.
- *they evaluate what constitutes desirable and undesirable change,*
- *They have views about what they should be striving to change or preserve.*
- *depends upon their own values and how they envision their professional practice.*

Developing knowledgeable practice



Knowledgeable practice develops through learning in and through the workplace itself:

- Through observation of others and peer learning.
- Through mentorship and coaching.
- By drawing on new ideas and experiences accessed through work.

These practices are fundamental to workers beginning to vary and modify existing workplace activities; or working with experienced others to change them – the starting point for workplace innovation.

Creative sector: Film and television



singapore media academy

A *MEDIACORP* Enterprise



MANDARIN
FILM



INNOVATIVE



STORYTELLER

freeflow
productions



filmmaking • marketing • production

Learning in action among 'freelance' film and TV workers – example from Singapore

- Camera operators learn about the latest technology by reading the relevant manuals as well as viewing demonstrations on 'you tube'.
- They also develop their sensitivity towards light and aperture through 'trial and error'.
- 'Helping each other out' on site provide opportunities for practice and learning about other roles (*e.g. lighting, key grip, sound*) as well as *watching and evaluating.*



Experimentation and improvisation.....



- For example, a ‘key grip’ described how his job entailed drawing on and adapting a knowledge of ‘physics’ in order to experiment with new camera angles (such as the suspension of the camera by a rope);

‘you need to know a lot about physics actually. Sometimes when producers or directors or cameramen, of course they want to get the best job possible but of course they always think safety first. So I have to put my physics knowledge into it,’

Mimicry and synthesis...



‘That’s the only way I learn, because I’d never got the opportunity to go and work as an assistant to Anil.... So the only other way I can learn is, okay [AK] shot this program, I go and watch the program. I sit down and watch and all that.. ...

[AK] has a certain style that I know and another friend of mine, because I’m very close with 2 cameramen. So both of them have their own individual style, and by watching these two, the good and the bad thing is, I have a mix of that 2 styles, I have a mix of that 2 styles.’ (Key grip)

The importance of keeping three scales of activity in view (Evans et al 2006 Improving Workplace Learning)





Establishing
strategic terrain
for development
and change
through
workplace
learning

Interviewer : *'how you move from having one-off events (like the ThinkUp laboratories in the Met Office) to embedding the processes of reflection, improvement, innovation in day to day working life?*

- **Industry response: *'That comes back to the role of senior managers as directors not as the ones who have to do the innovation but the ones who create the structures and give a sense of strategic direction within which people can do what they are naturally good at.'***

Beyond 'top-down' and 'bottom up'to bottom linked:



- Bottom-linked innovations are described as innovations created in dialogue and negotiations between management and employees.
- Bottom-linked innovations can be based on ideas posed and developed by managers or employees, or in collaboration between the two groups, and they equate to 'Second Order EDI' in Høyrup's typology (2012,10).

Conclusions



- The dynamics of organizations are crucial to employee involvement in innovation - *constitutive of the ways in which activities are structured and how employees act.*
- Workplace learning is an integral element - *innovation entails learning and learning opens up the possibilities of innovation.*
- Employee involvement in change and innovation rests on incentives - *for employees to learn new things, to do tasks in new ways and to vary and eventually change working practices, working with co-workers.*



Environments conducive to innovation

What features do they have in common?

- ‘constructive interplay’ in the ways that managements’ and workers’ roles are performed
- diversity in bringing together teams and in generating ideas, highly developed problem-solving capacities, and a general tolerance for failure.
- suitable tools, for ideas capture and knowledge exchange. (Aasen 2012)



**Policy
implication:**
Support for
intermediary
organisations

- The role of intermediary organisations is of key importance:
- **Sector bodies (eg Skills Councils)** can effectively promote these new ideas and approaches to companies.
- **Industry and business associations;** chambers of commerce are already active.
- **Trade Unions** working in frameworks of social partnership (eg Danish TU Federation-LO)
- **Organisations providing management training** – business schools, CIPD; Work organisation networks (e.g. UK WON – working to develop EU WIN).

Sources



- Thank you for your attention.
- Further reading: The Sage Handbook of Workplace Learning, 2011 (now in paperback version.)
- Special Journal Issue on Workplace Learning and Innovation: Lifelong Learning in Europe, 2012 – available on-line.
- *Employee-driven Innovation – a new approach*, Palgrave book published 2012.
- Book in press: ‘Sustainable Change and Development in Organizations’ compiled by Helix Centre, Sweden.