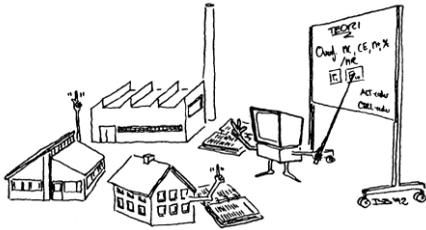# Organisational learning - how to turn it on in the "right" way?

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February 2 2012

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2

… and a quote…

"He had come to her as a teacher, but they had forgotten her lessons. Still, their first meeting, their first lesson was a moment of learning above any other, for when the girl happened to glance at her feet, before she pulled her stockings up over them, she noticed something she would never have paid attention to before: how filthy her feet were."
(Laxness: *Salka Valka*, 1934 [1966]: 74)

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Organisational learning (OL)

> A (still) growing field
>> Combination of economy & management (organisation) AND
>> Psychology and pedagogy (learning)

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WHY OL?

> Knowledge economy, innovation, changes as everyday practice, etc.
> Solve problems through learning, e.g. integrate new technologies, allow teams to work together, etc.
> Identity work, i.e. generate and satisfy desires for recognition, competence, participation and meaning

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Learning paradigms reflected in OL

> Behaviour, cognition, and social learning/practice
>> Behaviour, around 1960s, focus upon management' decision making, revision of a rational and 'economic man' perspective on organisations
>> How do people behave in enterprises?
>> 'Bounded rationality'
>> Disagreement about goals, negotiations and conflicts as part of organisational life

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Cognition – organisational development - intervention

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› From behaviour to cognition; from observation to 'inner processes'
› All organisations are learning – but can be unproductive
  › Assigning negative traits and motives rather than open testing hereof
  › Organisation as political unit; individuals act on behalf of organisations

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The practice-turn

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› 'Situated learning', social learning, learning as cultural processes, practice-based learning
  › Practice as institutionalised practice (dentist, having a seminar, giving a talk, brushing teeth)
  › To practice (embedded in institutionalised practice)

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Learning as 'movement'

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› Learning as legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice
› Learning as unfolding in participation
  › Access to participate (participation 'tracks' # motivation)
  › Transparency in the participation (e.g. ability to understand budgets)
› Learning as movement from peripheral to not-peripheral

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Principles

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› Inspired by Pragmatist philosophy
› Causality is transactional – mutual constituent (A influences B and B influences A)
  › Not just dynamics amongst humans and their actions but also transactions with rules, tools and texts, the cultural and material environments
› Refusals of dualisms (body-mind, factor-value, individual-organisation)
  › The analytical unit is practice, the situation, event

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Summing up

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› Behaviour and cognition – learning is a question about transfer and retention of knowledge from one person (often manager) to more (groups of employees)
› Practice – knowledge and procedures emerge and is changed in the performance of work
› How to transfer versus how do processes unfold

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Organisational learning as part of organisational practice

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› 'Back to work' and organisations as 'inhabited' rather than abstract definitions
› Innovative and social coherent learning environment – a mixture of 'disorder' and 'order'

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Politics and power, emotion and aesthetics

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› Who is excluded from the construction of knowledge?
› What hierarchical relations in the workplace reproduce processes of privilege and prejudice?
› Emotions and tensions – different positions, different stories of work and organisation
› Aesthetics – likes and dislikes

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'Gregarious animals' or 'mixed fruits'?

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Thank you for your attention!

Any questions and comments?

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15