Utilizing Tacit Knowledge Grids to Organize Informal Learning Instances

KEY FINDINGS: Group vs Individual: GRID 2

Through a constructivist Grounded Theory approach, six supervisors and 11 line staff from two different resorts in the northern province of La Union were interviewed. The primary purpose was to help them look back over their hospitality career and identify key informal learning instances that assisted in their career growth. The data was synthesized through three tacit knowledge grids that gave rise to five major informal learning categories: **Job skills**, **Career skills**, **Communication skills**, **Customer skills** & **Interpersonal skills.**

Grid 2

Individual vs. Group learning

This second grid was developed from a very interesting study by Berman, Down & Hill[4] concerning the nature of individual vs. group tacit knowledge within a sports team setting, specifically the National Basketball Association. Their initial premise was that 'tacit knowledge often lies at the core of sustainable competitive advantage." (p. 13).

They assert there are two types of tacit knowledge: individual and group or team-based. Their study first looked at what made a sports superstar separate from many others on the team. They attributed the exceptional ability of superstars to individual tacit knowledge (p. 14). I have long believed this is why great athletes don't make good coaches as they don't know how to teach what they naturally do in a game or match because of the tacit nature of their individual ability. Furthermore, I also believe this translates into the business world. Why is it two seemingly similar hospitality grads can end up as two very different employees – even when doing the same job in the same company?
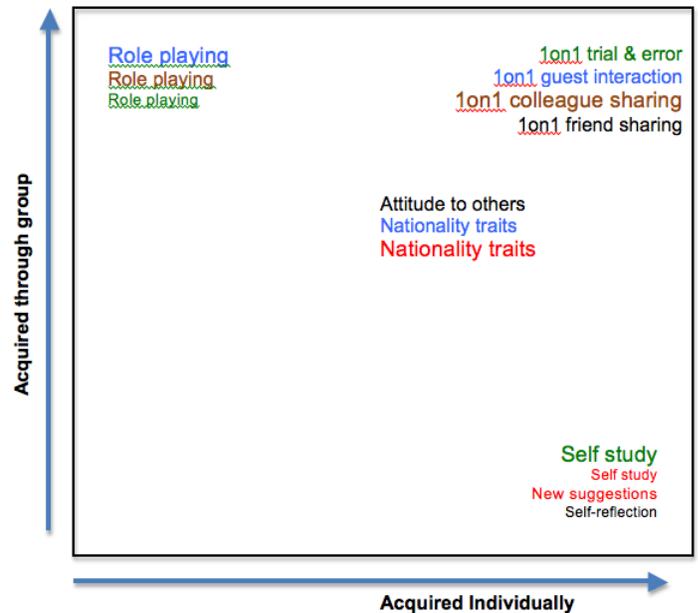
They also equate group or team-based tacit knowledge as akin to a 'collective mind' (p. 15). It is not enough to put five stars onto the court and expect them to instantly work as a team without a certain amount of practice, coaching and team learning.
"Thus just as knowledge embedded within an individual mind has a tacit component, so knowledge within a collective mind also has a tacit component." (p. 16).

This concept is mirrored in the 'self learning' vs. 'learning with' questions I posed to participants, which also led to the axis for this grid: acquired individually vs acquired through group participation.

The study concluded that a steady stream of informal learning among the staff takes place in these properties; that it augments whatever formal training happened at hiring; and that there is a vast amount of useful knowledge that is sitting dormant (or buried) in the minds of the staff.

Grid 2: Group vs, Individual learning
Color corresponds to skill group & font size represents frequency mentioned.

High group / Low individual (learning from & with)
Role playing – introduced through formal training, but modified on the job (confidence, irate customers, dealing with complaints, phone work)

High individual / Low group (self learning)
Self study – many followed up on specific areas of their job (drinks, HR trends, food shows)
New suggestions – (see grid 1)
Self reflection – when confronted by a manager or colleague (discipline or bad job), when motivated by a manager or colleague (change attitude cause of manager statement)

High group / High individual (learning with)
1 on 1
- Green- trial and error (new drinks)
- Blue- guest interaction (sharing specific info)
- Brown- how to approach other colleagues
- black- building friendships

Mid levels
Attitude to others – learn about 'others' attitude by asking other workers
Nationality traits – informal 'profiling' of certain nationalities (Muslim food preferences, etc.)

References
1. Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis.* Sage publications.
2. Eraut, M. (2004). Informal learning in the workplace**.** *Studies in Continuing Education.* Volume 26, Issue 2, Jan 2004, Pages 247 – 273.
3. Polanyi, M. (1966). *The Tacit Dimension.* Doubleday Anchor Book.
4. Berman, S., Down, J. & Hill, C. (2002). Tacit knowledge as a source of competitive advantage in the National basketball Association. *Academy of Management Journal.*