Utilizing Tacit Knowledge Grids to Organize Informal Learning Instances

KEY FINDINGS: Cognitive vs Technical: GRID 1

Through a constructivist Grounded Theory[1] 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[2] instances that assisted in their career growth. The data was synthesized through three tacit knowledge[3] grids that gave rise to five major informal learning categories: **Job skills**, **Career skills**, **Communication skills**, **Customer skills** & **Interpersonal skills**.
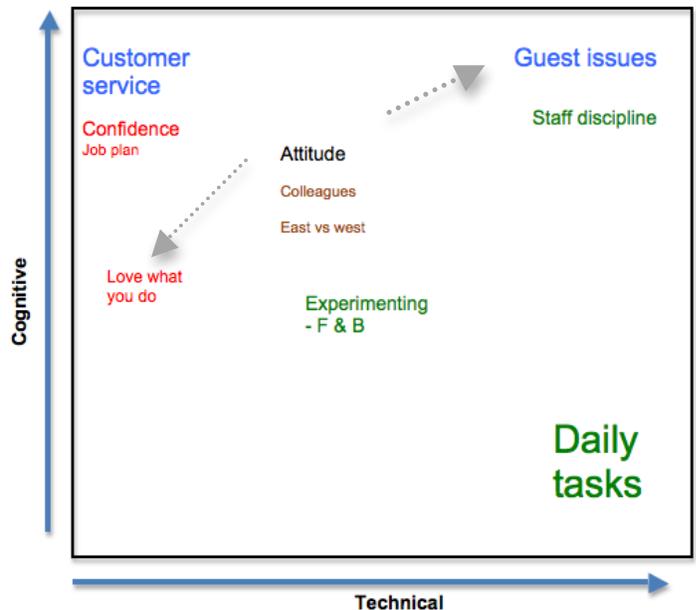
Grid 1

<u>Technical vs. Cognitive</u>

This grid represents the findings of Nonaka's early work on organizational knowledge creation within the workforce. As with any theory, Nonaka[4] believed is was important to focus on certain semantic aspects of information (p. 16). He started by making a distinction between information and knowledge. Furthermore, Nonaka went onto write that, "In short, information is a flow of messages, while knowledge is created by the very flow of information anchored on the commitment and beliefs of its holder." (p.15).

In other words, what makes the information a professor delivers quite often more important to one student than another? Or, what makes a piece of shared informal learning (like understanding the harsh accent of a German tourist) easier or more important for one server than another?

But I did agree with him when he said "tacit knowledge has a personal quality to it which makes it hard to formalize and communicate." (p. 16). It is precisely this idea of tacit knowledge that is broken down into cognitive and technical elements.
"At one level, tacit knowledge transfer involves a technical element that is a fundamental part of learning any culture; it occurs for example, when an apprentice learns from a master craftsman. But there is also cognitive aspects of tacit knowledge, concerned with how individuals constructs mental models to interpret their environment."[5]

The apprentice reference fits nicely with this projects focus on the three aspects of informal learning: learning from (observing); learning with; and self learning (experimentation).

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 1: Cognitive vs. Technical
Color corresponds to skill group & font size represents frequency mentioned.

High cognitive / Low technical
Customer service – focus on internalizing modified theory, individual and group schema
Confidence – developed from internalizing role plays
Job plan – formulate how their career will advance (50% had a definite plan)

High technical / Low cognitive
Daily tasks – encompasses things learned informally that are applicable & observable

High cognitive / High technical
Guest issues – practical implication of theory, modifying individual schema based on personal experiences
Staff discipline – formal approach to dealing with complaints

Mid level
Attitude:
Colleagues – balance between conceptual understanding that networking is important to career advancement, practical execution of developing and maintaining network with colleagues and specific guests (see grid 3)
East vs west – concept of employee **attitudes** (east management will bend to staff attitude / west management will expect employee to bend to company standard)
Love what you do – many saw this as a life / career philosophy (connection to degree, compare with others)
Experimenting - mental model of being able to experiment / technical side is actual experiment with food, bar drinks and specialty coffees

References
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