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The role of organisational memory for learning in project management using lessons learned

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Masters of Business Studies**

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Abstract

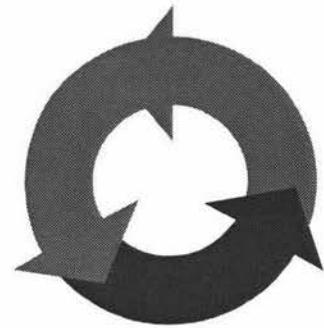
The notion of learning from experience framed as lessons learned (an output of project management practice) stored in organisational memory has been little discussed in the literature. Prolifically discussed is organisational learning to build capability through generative learning to achieve what an organisation desires. Organisational memory is the fundamental result of organisational learning to store the knowledge from the past that is 'brought to bear' on the activity to hand by means of acquisition, retention, search and retrieval processes. It is argued the storage of lessons learned in human memory and the sharing of lessons learned between projects significantly contributes to project success at the personal level, but not at the organisational level despite lessons learned shared generically. This argument is supported by the strong suggestions of systematic problem solving to get at the 'root' cause, continuous improvement embedded in practice through benchmarking, quality management, flexibility in using standardised tools, the moderate suggestion of an Organisational Memory Management System (OMIS), and project strategic support. These were the findings from a survey of 47 project practitioners at two Project Management Institute (PMI) meetings, and seven semi-structured interviews where participants perceived the organisation they worked in characterised organisational learning practices. These findings raise questions about the competitive advantages for the organisation by using lessons learned, a moderate to weak finding in this study, and the recent initiative by most participants to implement an OMIS system. It is recommended project practitioners make lessons learned an everyday project management practice to build capability to advance organisational learning, or else the lessons learned will be pushed aside by time constraints and the pressure to move onto new projects.

Key Concepts: Lessons learned, organisational learning, and organisational memory

Preface

MISSION STATEMENT FOR THE LEARNING ORGANISATION

The world changes and we cannot stop it, our products will change, our markets will change, our customers will change, and some of our employees will move on-we hope to greater things.



But these things will not change

We will learn faster than our competitors

We will learn across our organisation from each other, and from teams

We will learn externally from our suppliers and our customers

We will learn vertically from top to bottom of our organisation

We will ask the right questions; and use action learning

We will anticipate the future and create scenarios to learn from it

We will practice what we learn, and learn from practice

We will learn faster than our environment changes

We will learn where no man or woman has learned before

Therefore, we will survive and prosper

(Fulmer, Gibbs, & Keys, 1998, p. 1)

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I dedicate this learning to my son Ritchard Eli.

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