

# Round Table: The paradox of designing networked learning throughout the employee life cycle

Host Names: Simon Skårhøj

## Elevator pitch

How can organisations cultivate professional and social networks which accelerate knowledge sharing throughout the employee life cycle? The increasing complexity of the workplace environment and continuously changing processes makes it relevant for many organisations to invest in their social network structures, communities, and knowledge sharing. However, ultimately these social and relational processes are depended on the employees' personalities, interests, ownership, and motivation and which do not necessarily correspond with the organisation's strategy, priorities, timing, and resources. This constitutes a paradox between the strategic priority for networked learning and the employees' interest and motivation to participate in knowledge sharing. Both elements are true, interconnected and mutually exclusive elements and raise a paradox (Lüscher, 2019:8) for networked learning designers in organisations between intended design and uncertain evolution.

In this round table we shall explore the opportunities and limitations of designing networked learning throughout the employee life cycle in organisations:

- How can organisations cultivate professional and social networks that accelerate knowledge sharing throughout the employee's life cycle?
- If there is a paradox between organisational design for networked learning and the individual evolution of interactions and learning among employees, how can we understand it?
- How and when do social network and relations in a workplace environment lead to (applied) learning – or limit it?
- What are the potentials to assess and measure learning in social networks in organisations?
- How can we further conceptualise networked learning in a workplace environment?

## Background

The workplace is a unique learning environment with its conditions for learning. It is a place and space for networked learning with interactions between people and resources (Goodyear et al, 2004, p.1) and today often mediated by ICT. Workplace learning takes place in a dynamic relation between employee learning potentials and the production and community elements of the workplace environment (Illeris, 2011:30). All three elements; the employee, organisational/production environment and the community/culture are critical to consider when suggesting supporting designs for networked learning in organisations.

Professional connections in the workplace are often critical and a prerequisite for navigating organisational processes effectively and performing the required work assignments. The relevance, quality and development of connections vary throughout the employee's life cycle in the organisation. From onboarding to offboarding. The connections are important due to their informational benefits. This includes information related to (Waldstrøm2007:155):

- 1) *solutions* to e.g. a specific problem,
- 2) *meta-knowledge* which makes it possible to find the knowledge needed to solve the problem (e.g. who to ask),
- 3) *problem reformulation* to focus a problem or understand it better,
- 4) *validation* of the direction to solve a problem (e.g. consulting an expert) and
- 5) *legitimation*, e.g. a blueprint from an expert on an approach to solving a problem.

Compared to many other organisational elements, established connections have the potential to be consulted when the employee transition into a new organisation or workplace.

Similar to personal relations the interaction with organisational resources is relevant to consider. Codified organisational information in policies, documents on intranets etc. are only influencing practice

if the employees interact with it; first, by being read; second, by being interpreted; and third, by being practised.

The “employee life cycle of connections” in an organisation is evolving from onboarding to offboarding. Wenger’s (1998:154) five trajectories for communities can contribute to conceptualizing the life cycle of connections in organisations. *Inbound trajectories* where the new employees are entering the organisation and are invested in developing connections to other employees. The *insider trajectories* where the employee has established connections, but the evolution of connections continues. From an organisation point of view, the potential trajectories are many and can be limited and encouraged organisationally. Some connections will only need to be peripheral and may be developed over time. The organisation can support the employee in selecting the most relevant trajectories related to their work assignments but cannot force learning to take place. Boundary trajectories are connections across communities in the workplace or to other organisations. Lastly, the outbound trajectories end the life cycle which leads the employee out of the community, connections, and organisation.

Networked learning framed as social learning, communities of practice or network learning is increasingly explored in organisations as a response to lifelong learning and adaptation to constantly changing internal and external environments.

## Goal

The goal of the round table is to further conceptualise networked learning in the workplace throughout the employee life cycle and within and across organisational boundaries. In addition, explore the design challenges for strategically cultivating organisational design which supports networked learning.

## How to engage the participants into the discussion

The round table will be kicked off with 3 pitches related to networked and social learning in the workplace:

- Pitch one will focus on conceptual designs for networked learning throughout the employee life cycle
- Pitch two will take a practical perspective with practitioner voices from a workplace (video)
- Pitch three will focus on assessing and measuring the value of network and sharing

After the three pitches, the participants will go into an individual reflection process followed by sharing in pairs with a focus on their considerations and experiences in relation to the topic.

Following the reflection process, the discussion will continue into a plenum discussion with participants and the host. The session will end with summing up the key findings and potential areas to explore further.

## References

Goodyear, P., Banks, S., Hodgson, V., & McConnell, D. (Eds.). (2004). *Advances in Research on Networked Learning*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic.

Illeris, Knud, (2011) *The Fundamentals of Workplace Learning – Understanding How People Learn in Working Life*, Oxon: Routledge

Lüscher, S Lotte (2019) *Managing Leadership Paradoxes*, Oxon: Routledge

Waldstrøm, Christian (2007) *Ledelse af Netværk, Virksomhedens Skjulte Ressource*, Børsens Forlag

Wenger, Etienne, (1998) *Communities of Practice – Learning, Meaning and Identity*, UK: Cambridge University Press

## Host background

Simon Skårhøj holds a master in Global Studies and Psychology from Roskilde University with specialisation in leading organisational learning including innovation, community, and participation.

Practical experience from establishing and leading a Learning Lab in a larger Danish NGO with a focus on both analogue and digital learning, advancing the learning ecosystem among UNICEFs regions and established a learning collaboration and community among 30 NGOs and an extended network of 1.000 NGOs globally, Currently Capacity Development Advisor at Danida Fellowship Centre and independent consultant and researcher.