Teleological Pressures and Ateleological Possibilities on and for a Fragile Learning Community: Implications for Framing Lifelong Learning Futures for Australian University Academics

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Abstract

This paper applies the teleological–ateleological lens to the activities of a group of postgraduate and early career researchers at an Australian university. Given the tensions between organisational imperatives and individual aspirations, there are mixed signals about whether the group can be accurately and appropriately considered a learning community.

Overview of Presentation

- Introduction: focus and argument
- Conceptual framework
- A description of the group
- The group's teleological pressures
- The group's ateleological possibilities
- Possible implications for lifelong learning communities

Introduction: Focus and Argument

- Teleological–ateleological distinction (Introna, 1996) potentially useful conceptual lens for identifying pressures on and possibilities for a group of postgraduate and early career researchers at an Australian university

- Mixed signals whether this group can be seen as a lifelong learning community

- Possible implications for understanding and hopefully nurturing fragile learning communities

Conceptual Framework

Table 1 Teleological and ateleological development systems (Introna, 1996, p. 26, as cited in Jones, Luck, McConachie & Danaher, 2006, p. 58)

Attributes of the design process	Teleological development	Ateleological development
Ultimate purpose	Goal/purpose	Wholeness/harmony
Intermediate goals	Effectiveness/efficiency	Equilibrium/homeostasis
Design focus	Ends/result	Means/process
Designers	Explicit designer	Member/part
Design scope	Part	Whole
Design process	Creative problem solving	Local adaptation, reflection and learning
Design problems	Complexity and conflict	Time
Design management	Centralized	Decentralized
Design control	Direct intervention in line with a master plan	Indirect via rules and regulations

A Description of the Group

- Existed before 2005; focus here is since 2005
- Varied membership in relation to numbers, paradigms, methods and foci
- Strategies
  - fortnightly meetings
  - writing workshops
  - annual research symposia
  - edited publications
- Balancing acts
  - informal sharing and achieving outcomes
  - drawing on mentors and highlighting members' interests and voices

The Group's Teleological Pressures

- A debate about the term "early career researcher"
- A discussion of centrally mandated research plans
- Conflicting perceptions of the group's inclusiveness and/or exclusiveness
- Overall confusion and uncertainty about how to engage with the multiple requirements of contemporary academic work

The Group's Ateleological Possibilities

- Rotating chairpersons/caterers
- Collaborative writing projects as spaces for individuals achieving research outcomes within supportive and generative frameworks
- Writing workshops modelled on REACT process at Central Queensland University
- Research symposia growing interest across campuses and faculties/divisions
- Informal connections with two other groups (also potentially fragile learning communities)
- All these strategies posited on recognising diverse talents, enhancing mutual benefit and expanding social capital (all key elements of lifelong learning communities)

Possible Implications for Lifelong Learning Communities

- If the group is a lifelong learning community it is a fragile one

- On the one hand, group members "share a common purpose" and "collaborate to draw on individual strengths, respect a variety of perspectives, and actively promote learning opportunities" (Kilpatrick, Barrett & Jones, 2003, p. 11)

- On the other hand, less definitive establishment of "the creation of a vibrant, synergistic environment, enhanced potential for all members, and the possibility that new knowledge will be created" (Kilpatrick, Barrett & Jones, 2003, p. 11)

- Individual agency, empathy with others and diffuse and diverse notions of capital and power likely to remain unrealised aspirations in an environment of compliance and conformity

- Yet lifelong learning futures can change and transform theoretical imaginings and material realities if they are based on these and other foundations

References

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Thank you for participating!

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