Cognitive Work Analysis for Domain Analysis in an HR Firm:

Emergent Vocabulary to Domain Ontology

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BREIF ABSTRACT

Cognitive Work Analysis (CWA) is a promising qualitative empirical method for domain analysis (Fidel and Pejtersen 2004). In this lightning paper we report some of the results of a recent study of the organizational environment and knowledge organization structures of a boutique human resources consulting firm (Marchese 2012).

KEYWORDS

Cognitive Work Analysis, emergent vocabulary, domain ontology, knowledge organization structure.

INTRODUCTION

An organization's KOS is a reflection of its cultural and social contexts. The interpretive processes and their cultural and social contexts are determinative because an organization's universe of knowledge is culturally moderated (Mai 1999). Data were collected and analyzed via the CWA framework. One advantage of the ethnographic nature of CWA is the ability of the researcher to study the environment from inside. Common or frequently used vocabulary emerged from each session, and lists of these terms were collected from the narrative analysis. Table 1 consolidates the emergent vocabulary.

Articulate
Break-out groups
Broader audience
Buckets
Business skills
Characters/role play
Check-ins
Cleaner
Client's chart preference
Data

Descriptive
Developmental priorities
Diversity
Divisions, levels, products, job families, business units
Effective
Efficient
Employee levels
Executive development, Learning development,
Focus groups
Gap scores
Individual behavior
Interviews
Learning styles
Logs
My lead – meetings -> product , task
Organizational Behavior
Phone bank
Pipeline
Process
Report out
Results
Roll-up of data
Rotate
Share methodology
Step-back
Strong
Super days
Surveys

Team behavior
Thought process

TABLE 1 EMERGENT VOCABULARY

We see primarily objective knowledge, representing both internal and external assets, only partially codified, and rarely amenable to hierarchy.   In fact, this emergent vocabulary is the *work* vocabulary of the firm. Particularly notable is the sharpness of terms emerging as vocabulary. The consultants exhibit an intimate knowledge and high comfort level with advanced terminology. The team has a common vocabulary largely made up of identifiers, such as "behavior," tools, such as "interviews" and "break-out groups," and action terms such as "articulate, and "report-out." These terms represent the firm's work discipline. Ultimately, the emergent vocabulary is in part a language all its own, second nature to people working in the field of strategic management, more specifically consulting in strategic management. This also begins to further support their strategies for managing their knowledge. Recently Smiraglia (2012) has noted both the need for and dearth of qualitative empirical domain analytical studies. The present case demonstrates the value of CWA as a qualitative, empirical method for domain analysis of a work group.

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