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NSWC Lessons Learned Program (Continuation)

Gallup, Shelley P.

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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

NAVY SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND LESSONS LEARNED PROGRAM

Period of Performance: 10/15/2018–10/14/2019

Researchers:
Principal Investigator (PI): Associate Research Professor Shelley Gallup, Graduate School
Operational and Information Sciences (GSOIS), Department of Information Sciences

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Summary

This project is a continuation of the previous year's effort. In the previous year, an organizational diagnostic model (Congruence Model) was used to determine the primary system issues preventing the Naval Special Warfare Command's (NSWC's) Lessons Learned Program (LLP) from being effective at providing the knowledge needed at different layers of the organization. Those research "misfits" were used as a basis for further specific investigation into the processes, training, technology, and overall strategic vision for the system. Interviews with personnel were conducted, results were compiled, and further understanding of the LLP was gained, along with an analysis of knowledge flows within the system, including use of newly developed quantitative methods. These systemic issues are the subject of next year's final set of recommendations and implementation planning considerations.

Keywords: *after-action report. AAR, Knowledge Flow Theory, KFT, lessons learned, Navy Lessons Learned Program, NLLP, Naval Special Warfare Command, NSWC, Naval Warfare Development Center, NWDC, organizational congruence, knowledge flows, quantitative analysis of knowledge.*

Background

LLPs have been implemented in different forms across the US military for decades. The US Navy's version of the LLP was initiated in 1991, and developed through the 90s, with limited success. Oversight responsibility for the program was given to the newly commissioned Naval Warfare Development Center (NWDC) in 1998, when a formal instruction was created and distributed, mandating the program at the unit level and up. Since, there has been adaptation of lessons learned on multiple information technology platforms and focus on the specific and unique needs of navy organizations. In other words, the Navy Lessons Learned Program (NLLP) is less of a centralized repository and more a series of independent systems adapted to local needs; the NSWC is one such command.

Our working hypothesis was that improved performance of the LLP will create knowledge re-use from the past and add an operational dimension to the LLP that does not currently exist. As improvement in the access and quality of the knowledge occurs, users will be drawn to its usefulness. Shortly after its deployment by NWDC, the role of lessons learned in a learning organization was explored (Garvey, 2001) outlining the intended structure and management of the NLLP; findings indicated the organizational structure was in place, but was largely not used.

Findings and Conclusions

Our research employed a cross-organizational data collection survey for NSWC Lessons Learned improvement. We used outcomes of the most current (FY18) qualitative study to construct a NSWC-wide survey instrument. The project included creating that instrument, distributing it among contractors and

conducting interviews, analyzing the data gathered, and providing results back to the NSWC. In parallel, some research was conducted on a range of advanced technical means without a final recommendation, and will become part of the upcoming year's effort.

Interviews with potential user personnel indicated that the knowledge system embodied in lessons learned is more of an organizational requirement than a tool for re-use of knowledge. The current system is primarily for the use of after-action reports (AARs), required after training events. Therefore, the LLP is primarily seen as a means to document training and issues related to training, and less as the means by which lessons learned in actual operations are recorded. In addition, the organization of the LLP and knowledge management are largely detached. In both, if users have queries and want to know facts, they have to work through the knowledge manager and the LLP manager to conduct research related to the question. Other users are trained to do such work, however, the LLP system in particular is difficult to use, and requires access to Secure Internet Protocol Router. Therefore, results are usually in the form of multiple documents, requiring further research to address the question.

Addition of new information such as AARs into the LLP requires that they pass upwards through the chain of command. Only when approved by the commanding officer is the AAR returned to the LLP manager to be uploaded into the database. This centralization of effort at the staff level precludes full participation of the users at NSWC, whom are distributed globally and engaged in real world operations. Additionally, knowledge flows through the LLP is low power (Gallup & Jansen, 2018) primarily due to the time lag in the system. Knowledge flows through the informal system (e.g., turnovers between teams during relieving in-country) has very high power, but is limited in reach.

The results of this year's effort support the theory that, to be useful, lessons learned need to be spread across the organization. In terms of knowledge flow theory, this is a matter of increased "reach." Access to the information and the ability to add data are critical to a successful program. Without these functions and a centralized system where information is archived, disparate users have little incentive to use what is available or add new information.

This is a continuation project with one year left (2020), and is focused on making the LLP more useful throughout the NSWC community. This data is concurrent with a similar project with Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV N1) to improve knowledge management throughout its organization. Many of the issues and observations are the same, and a new addition of Knowledge Flow Theory is being applied to improve understanding of the system performance, and needs for improvement consistent with the desired objectives of the organization.

Recommendations for Further Research
As this is the second phase of a three-year project, developing recommendations is a bit premature, with the exception of having identified objectives and methods to employ in the upcoming third and final year of the project. We can say that knowledge conservation for reuse, such as knowledge management and

LLPs, are of increasing interest to organizations. Motivations include saving knowledge in spite of personnel turnover and knowledge loss (tacit knowledge), and improve competitive advantage. However, tools for archiving, exploring, and making knowledge useful in a current context are lagging, which is especially true in cases with time limitations. In this project, the use of organizational models assisted in understanding the intertwined nature of knowledge and organization; separation of these processes does not seem to support organizational goals, as it creates further distance between user and data.

As this project has continued, additional research initiatives have been launched by other organizations, which are essentially asking the same questions. Therefore, it is possible that we are entering an era in which lessons learned and general knowledge will be combined and made available through updated technology (e.g., articifical intelligence), so further exploration of this research aspect is recommended.

References

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Acronyms

AAR	after-action report
LLP	lessons learned program
NLLP	Naval Lessons Learned Program
NSWC	Naval Special Warfare Command
NWDC	Naval Warfare Development Command