**Colleague Virginia post to discussion 1 Week 6**

**PSY620, Week 6 Discussion: Professional Development: Learning in the Workplace**

As a self-described life learner, I take pride in my experiences but not too much pride that I convince myself there is nothing more to learn; nor to not take value in the knowledge and opinions of others less experienced. For this discussion I recount my experience from the Marine Corps through information derived from this week’s reading, and describe how my learning processes have changed from then to now. I then evaluate certain flaws in my educational experiences, and recommend strategies that the armed forces – and myself- should implement for a more successful and efficient learning experience.

The U.S. military utilizes both Organizational Learning, and Learning Organization methods. Service members undergo evaluations and assessments to monitor their personal and collective organizational learning through tests and performance evaluations. In learning organization, the military evaluates trends to assess how effective the various training processes are, and to identify ways to improve those processes in order to result in the collective improvement of military performance.  Basic training was also focused on Psychology and OD (Human development), Sociology and organization theory (Social structures), and cultural anthropology (meaning systems).  Human development training deals with hierarchical organization (like positions of rank), and formal ways of military conduct (context and dialogue). Sociology and Cultural anthropology dealt with learning the chain of command and military ideology or core values. While all disciplines of Organizational learning, in one form or another, exist within the Armed Forces, some are more prevalent than others based on job field.  As an all source analyst, my training focused on management science (Information Processing) and strategy (competitiveness).  Formal training for intelligence included the information processing; the intelligence cycle, information storage, etc. Strategy involves learning on the job and allowing that experience make you a better analyst (Ege, Esen, &AşikDizdar, 2017). However, my experience of learning as an active duty marine differs from more recent experiences.

While the armed forces make a valiant effort towards training, the processes involved - in my experience- are not as effective as they could be. “Organizations learn through efforts towards sustaining a balance between multiple tensions” (Ege, Esen, &AşikDizdar, 2017, pg. 455). Those tensions are balances between Soft (informal) and Hard (formal), technical and social, exploitatory (adaptive) and exploratory (proactive/progressive), and incremental (stepwise) and transformational (accelerated).  The balance of these tensions depend on specific job requirements.  In my experience, the axis was tilted towards soft learning, social, exploiatory, and incremental.  In my current position at MARSOC, these scales appear to be more balanced for the exploiatory/exploratory and incremental/transformational.  In fact, all Special Forces have taken a large step towards balancing all of these scales.  However, my specific position focuses on the more forward and strategic outcomes. Soft and social learning has not changed much, but I have the experience now to know where to seek relevant information.  One other main difference between then and now is the focus on learning organization. As an exercise designer, it falls to me to determine whether or not the learning programs are effective and how they can be improved. This processes uses double loop learning, and individual/group/organizational learning (Ege, Esen, &AşikDizdar, 2017).

In my career, I have had the opportunity of multiple intelligence roles and responsibilities from tactical to strategic levels.  Because much of the learning takes place as soft learning or on-the-job, these positions were opportunities to learn about how each role fits into the big picture; which unfortunately is not provided adequately in a formal setting – at least not in the Marines. This enabled me to recognize failings within the overall system, and make recommendations to repair them. These experiences have made me a more effective learner, without the need for formalized training. I am a self-starter who can identify a problem and then successfully navigate research to understand how to fix it. However, this took more time than it would have had more formalized training been available when I was just starting out. In fact, I noticed my comprehension of the military interworkings accelerate not long after I began classes at Ashford over four years ago.  I previously never thought of the concept of a life-long learner, but thus far that is what I have been and will continue to be.  There is no illusion about the intelligence profession – or psychology- that we are capable of learning all there is to know. Situations and the environment changes; sometimes rapidly.  Convincing oneself that they are an expert with no need of further learning on a given topic is an effectively quick way to fail.

In a military environment, there is much emphasis on hierarchy- even in situations where multiple perspectives (even lower ranking ones) would be valuable. In the intelligence community, collaboration is a defining feature for accurate and successful Intel operations.  However, the military tends to neglect this fact. It is a habit I must strive to unlearn.  Furthermore, E-learning is a prevalent avenue in today’s technological world. I consider myself adequately competent with E-learning tools and often embark on individual learning versus social learning.  However, personal self-regulated learning has made me feel burn out at times. As a recent study showed, personal self-regulated e-learning does not have a positive effect on learner satisfaction; which is crucial for continued life-long learning.  Social self-regulated learning strategies remedy this fact (Wan, Compeau, & Haggerty, 2012).  I can personally attest to finding inspiration after social interaction on any given topic that enlightens me to a new connection or way of thinking.  In regards to why learners prefer personal SRL is that “They might perceive that using social SR strategies such as seeking assistance and participating in online discussions are ‘shortcuts’ and less challenging” (Wan, Compeau, & Haggerty, 2012, pg. 331). This particular statement hit home. There should be a balance between personal and social SRL, and a willingness to take advantage of all learning opportunities in order to be a successful life-long learner. Furthermore, it is well known that individuals have different strengths and methods for learning.  As a mentor, I must be aware of that fact and not micro-manage individuals to perform tasks the precise way that I would do them.  This was something that hamstrung my learning progress during my active service, and it is one leadership habit I refuse to partake in.  From a psychological perspective, this habit harms those who endure it by undercutting their own professional creativity and ultimately defeating morale.

Being a life learner not only describes one’s pursuit of information, but the processes for how that information is obtained. The Marine Corps provided ample learning opportunities, of which I took advantage of.  However, experience and furthering my formal education has influence my views of both learning and teaching/professional counseling to recognize and put into context the flaws with how the Marine Corps and other armed forces conduct and regulate training.  Many of these flaws stem from an imbalance of organizational learning methods, and strict, overstated, uniformity. A life learner acknowledges that there is always more to learn; in data and in processes.

Resources:

Ege, T., Esen, A., &AşikDizdar, Ö. (2017). Organizational learning and learning organizations: an integrative framework. International Journal of Management Economics & Business, 13(2), 439-460.

Wan, Z., Compeau, D., & Haggerty, N. (2012). The effects of self-regulated learning processes on e-learning outcomes in organizational settings. Journal of Management Information Systems, 29(1), 307-339.