The Museum as a Memory Institution

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The Museum as a Memory Institution

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The Museum as a Memory Institution

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Overview

This sociological aspect of the ForgetIT project seeks to develop a conceptual framework for organisational memory. Based on interviews with curatorial and management staff in a national museum the research attempts to identify the range of memory and forgetting practices within the museum. An attempt is made to develop a taxonomy which can be tested with other organisations with the intention to explore the theoretical and practical value in using human memory as a metaphor for understanding organisational memory.

Organisational Forgetting

Managed forgetting has the potential support dynamic change. Knowledge of the past can become problematic from an organisational perspective when it:
- Presents a barrier to adopting new knowledge
- Supports outdated practices
- Is used to develop future strategies based on information which has been superseded
- Reinforces unproductive boundaries across teams and within an organisation
- Encourages the rejection of innovation and innovative practices

Organisational Memory

Research on organisational memory has largely taken a functional approach (D’Aderio, 2001; Feldman & Feldman, 2006; Spender, 1993, 1996, 1998). Memory is seen as:
- Data and information which is be stored in systems or individuals;
- A resource in need of management;
- A tool to support efficiency and streamline business activities;
- Supporting the firm as a system for generating revenue.

However, memory is not simply a process of storage and retrieval of veridical data but rather the synthesis of different sources of information. (Loftus & Palmer, 1974) We are interested in shared and negotiated processes of organisational memory, seeing memory work as practice and routines. Organisational memory is irreducibly embodied in a collective practice that underlies even individual knowledge and action (Hecker, 2012).

Documentality

- Accession Register
- Journal research
- Curator’s notes
- Display labels
- Web pages
- Photos of exhibitions

Procedurality

- Who adds to the records?
- What is the register based on?
- Who has access?
- How are exhibitions managed?
- Areas of responsibility – preservation, public engagement, research, learning, etc?

Physicality

- The stone itself
- Location of form
- Location of records
- Proximity to other items
- Cultural context
- Permanent exhibits?
- Archived/On loan?

Understanding

- Procedurality & history
- Public relics
- Scotland’s Christianity (Museum) headstones
- Garden ornament
- Famous exhibits
- ‘John’s specialty’

Current Operations

- Arranging meetings
- Answering queries
- Directing public

Active Passive

Organisational Memory

Doing Organisational Memory

- Documentality (Organisational Memory for Knowledge)
  - Externalisation of memory – writing, pictures, databases, etc.
- Procedurality (Organisational Procedural Memory)
  - Practices, routines and schedules routinely enacted
- Physicality (Organisational Action Memory)
  - Technological affordances, division & segmentation of space
- Understanding (Personal Memory of Organization Members)
  - Institutionalised values and beliefs, tacit knowledge
- Current Operations (Organisational Working Memory)

Curators trained to preserve everything. Management emphasise current practice.

References


Organisational memory: ‘stored information from an organization’s history that can be brought to bear on present decisions’. (Walsh & Ungson, 1991)