The Museum as a Memory Institution

Citation for published version:

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:
The Psychonomic Society Governing Board Edinburgh Symposium

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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 Memory

Research on organisational memory has largely taken a functional approach (D’Addario, 2001; Feldman & Feldman, 2006; Spender, 1993, 1996, 1998). Memory is seen as:

• Data and information which is to 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. (Lofthus & Palmer, 1974) We are interested in shared and negotiated processes of organisational memory, seeing memory work as practice and routines. Organisational memory is ‘irreducibly embedded in a collective practice that underlies even individual knowledge and action’ (Necher, 2012).

Problem

For an organisational key issues for managing organisational memory and forgetting include:

• Integrating key organisational memory across systems;
• Enabling shared processes for encoding and retrieving organisational memory;
• Developing a framework for managing staff’s tacit knowledge;
• Reflexively developing a strategy for what knowledge should be preserved or forgotten;
• Supporting change while preserving key organisational memory;

Organisational Forgetting

Managed forgetting has the potential to 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

References


Doing Organisational Memory

• Documentality (Organisational Memory for Knowledge)
• Procedurality (Organisational Procedural Memory)
• Physicality (Organisational Action Memory)
• Understandings (Organisational Understanding Members)
• Current Operations (Organisational Working Memory)

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

Curators trained to preserve everything. Management emphasise current practice.

The record becomes an artefact

Over time analogue records take on historical value.