The Museum as a Memory Institution

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The Museum as a Memory Institution

Jason Rutter, Cristina Alexandru, Elaine Niven, Maria Wolters & Robert Logie

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- Supports outdated practices
- Is used to develop future strategies based on information which has been superseded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 (O’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. (Lofus & 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’ (Neche, 2012).

Problem
For an organisation 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;

References