

Thesis Summary

My PhD, studied part time, is a qualitative research study about how informal communication among political party members contributes to organisational learning. The research design is being informed by literature from both organisational learning and information behaviour fields. The PhD will be due for submission in April, 2018.

Underpinning the methodology is the interweaving of organisational learning theory with certain areas of information behaviour theory. The thesis involves the exploration of the nature of knowledge and the role of information seeking and information sharing in knowledge creation, development and application in the organisational setting. An examination of the literature about the phenomenon of informal communication is carried out in generic terms, to better understand the nature of the learning situation being investigated. Aspects of social network analysis will also be applied in seeking contextual data about the network fields of the participants, the strengths and weaknesses of their various network ties and how this is reflected by their behaviour in informal communication activities.

The field study involves the collection of rich data from six participants involved in three different aspects of the selected political party, a left leaning party in the Republic of Ireland, which has not performed well in recent elections. The data collection involves four elements before the final presentation of the results. These are:

1. An initial interview to obtain contextual information about the participants prior to the second stage and to provide them with an aide memoire to help them with the next stage.
2. Self-observation in which the participants will be asked to note informal communication instances that have significance for them over a period of around ten days.
3. A longer interview in which participants recall as much as they can about at least one of the occasions of informal communication instances, to reflect on the experience.
4. A mini 'World Café' event, involving two groups of three participants in two rounds of conversation, with different combinations of people in each round, after which participants are brought back together as one group to reflect and feedback on their discussions. The question for the two conversations will be around organisational learning and information behaviour, as shown from the research conducted up to that point. After this participants will also be invited to reflect on what they have learned from the whole process and how they see that contributing to their roles in the political party.

Initially the focus was going to be on organisational learning theory, but as I was developing my methodology I found I couldn't put together a methodology that had a strong enough theoretical base from which to explore and analyse the participants' before, during and after behaviour, especially when trying to explore context and factors that could influence the participants' behaviour during these times. The literature on organisational learning informed me about types and levels of learning at individual, group and organisational level, and differences in ways that people learn. It was while I was teaching a module on knowledge management that I then realised with some excitement that here was the missing piece of my research jigsaw, which had been staring me in the face all along. The module not only had students exploring organisational learning concepts but also required them to understand the importance of information behaviour theory to understanding how

different people in organisations respond to and handle information in different situational contexts, and some of the factors that can influence their behaviour at certain times.

I then began to explore more deeply into this area and discovered Walton and Hepworth's (2011) reworking of Hepworth's (2004) information behaviour model. It was exactly what I was looking for as a framework to capture the before, during and after behaviour of my participants. Case's (2012) coverage of research in information behaviour has been instrumental in determining which of the theories best map onto my own area of research. I have identified further work to explore, in particular that of Savolainen about social constructionism (this also appears in organisational learning literature), on the role of emotions in online information seeking & sharing and the model of Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS); Dervin on sense-making; Kuhlthau on uncertainty and also the importance of emotion; Bryce Allen on how social relations influence information seeking; Sears & Freedman and Sairaned & Savolainen on information avoidance.

In looking at the themes of the conference, my PhD interests sit particularly in the first four themes as I will be using theories and models of information relating to the conceptualisation of the cognitive, affective, social and situational aspects of information needs, seeking, searching, use and sharing, in the specific context of a political party using informal communication as collaborative practice and I am taking an interpretative approach.

I am about to start developing my data collection tools and hope to have this completed along with the pilot having taken place and reflected upon by the end of August.

I would deeply appreciate having this unique opportunity to have the opinion of information behaviour experts, especially about my choices of which information behaviour theories to apply and whether I have omitted something crucial. I would be at a stage in my research where such insight would be extremely valuable and I would be able to incorporate any suggestions at a good point in the research. It would be invaluable also to have some feedback on the way I am applying and interweaving the organisational learning theory with information behaviour theory. Furthermore, advice from experienced researchers on how to handle the analysis of the field data would be greatly valued.

Case, D. O. (2012) *Looking for Information: a Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior*". 3rd Edition. Emerald: Library and Information Science.

Hepworth, M. (2004) 'A Framework for Understanding User Requirements for an Information Service: Defining the Needs of Informal Carers' in *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*. June 2004, 695-708.

Walton, G. and Hepworth, M. (2011) 'A longitudinal study of changes in learners' cognitive states during and following an information literacy teaching intervention' in *Journal of Documentation*, 67(3) 449-479

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Current Employment: from October, 2000: Senior Lecturer in Information Science; moved to a fractional contract in 2005, working 3.5 days a week, then from 2012, to working 3 days a week.

Qualifications: B.Comm. (University College Dublin, 1980), P.G.C.E. (Victoria University of Manchester, 1988) and M.Sc. in Information and Library Management (Northumbria University, 1996, CILIP prize winner in 1994 at completion of Postgraduate Diploma stage)

Previous Employment

- 1980-1987: Secretary, University College Dublin
- 1988-1989: Lecturer in Business, South Tyneside College of Further Education
- 1989-2000: Lecturer in Business, Newcastle College
- 2006-2007: year out to take care of my father (informal carer)
- 2006-2007: part-time Lecturer in Information Organisation and Retrieval at University College Dublin
- 2006-2009: part-time Associate Lecturer in Business for Open University, working with Irish prisoners.

Main teaching areas from 1988-2000 were 'Understanding Organisations', 'People in Organisations' and 'Business Information Systems' on courses ranging from GCSE level through to Higher Diploma level.

Current Teaching Areas: Undergraduate and postgraduate dissertation supervision, Knowledge Management, Social, Legal and Ethical Issues in Online Environments, Intercultural Communication and Diversity, and a new module in User Behaviour and Interaction Design to run from September, 2016.

Current Programme Leadership Role: Course Leader for BSc(Hons) in Librarianship

Recent Publication with supervised student: Fox, M. and Hanlon, S. (2015) "Barriers to Open Access uptake for researchers in Africa" in *Online Information Review*, 39(5).698-716

Current Research: PhD on about how informal communication among political party members contributes to organisational learning. Supervisors: Dr Julie McLeod, julie.mcleod@northumbria.ac.uk phone: +44 191 227 3764 and Dr Geoff Walton, geoff.walton@northumbria.ac.uk phone +44 191 243 7144 , Northumbria University, address as above under contact details.