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## Knowledge transfer requirements for the management of social enterprises and organisations

**Zbigniew Zontek\***, Faculty of Management and Transport, University of Bielsko-Biala, 43-300 Bielsko-Biala, Poland.

**Christopher Whitworth**, Leeds Beckett University, LS1 3HE Leeds, UK.

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### Abstract

The authors have extensively researched motivation and situated learning in social organisations and enterprises via qualitative processes. This was an original work in an under-researched area. The use of open interpretative phenomenological analysis allowed an in-depth study of over 30 individual's motivations and processes. Their findings clearly demonstrate the role of, and need for, knowledge acquisition, restructuring and transfer into new and evolving NGO's and similar not-for-profit ventures. Study of 10 very different organisations in two European countries revealed common mechanisms for gaining and utilising knowledge in new ways and for new applications. All were Communities of Practice (CoPs) with a well-defined purpose and rationale. Almost all those interviewed reported utilising their knowledge from earlier experiences, in new ways, and situations. This need for internal and external knowledge transfer was stressed by almost all participants, and how they solved it in their CoP forms a key outcome of the research.

**Keywords:** Management, social enterprise, knowledge transfer.

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\* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Zbigniew Zontek, Faculty of Management and Transport, University of Bielsko-Biala, 43-300 Bielsko-Biala, Poland.

E-mail address: [zzontek.ath@gmail.com](mailto:zzontek.ath@gmail.com)/Tel.: +48 33 827 93 50

## 1. Introduction

The primary purpose of the extensive and lengthy research underpinning this paper was to identify the motivations and knowledge processes required and used, in Communities of Practice (CoPs) operating in the voluntary sector. The hypothesis behind this was that a qualitative narrative analysis process could be used to reveal common knowledge transfer techniques across CoPs with widely differing technical purposes. Finally, 10 were chosen, in differing cultures and countries, so that common factors could be identified.

## 2. Design

This study and its final design evolved over more than 7 years through much reading and across two European countries. However, the underpinning driver from the start was motivation—an interest in why and how people did what they do. Behind this was the recognition that, to operate successfully, knowledge had to be acquired, situated and shared. An extensive literature search identified much research into industrial motivation, learning and knowledge transfer (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002), and much on the CoP concept, especially by Lave and Wenger (1991), but a very little study on what occurred in voluntary organisations was found.

However, the industrial research studied often identified CoPs as knowledge repositories. Lukasik (2014), Pavlin (2006), and Ruuska and Vartiainen (2005) and many others exemplify this. The concept of a CoP as a knowledge repository, usually with situated learning occurring (Greeno, 1998), leading to legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) and then maturing to full participation and eventually leadership or other specialisation, suggested a way forward (Feghali & El-Den, 2008). Therefore, CoPs were purposely selected to have widely varying purposes, then carefully identified as not being controlled by umbrella organisations, not limited by the external control in strategy or scope, and not receiving external training, which could limit their choices. This allowed independent choices of knowledge management techniques in these widely varying CoPs to be evaluated.

After studying the literature in great detail, it was clear that qualitative techniques were required. It was clear that a very detailed study was required, and that this should focus initially on individual motivations, and that this would then expose their resulting knowledge acquisition and transfer processes. Extensive research into the qualitative techniques available that would introduce minimal research bias suggested that some form of high-level narrative analysis should follow unprompted and lengthy interviews (Fairclough, 2003; Lyons & Coyle, 2016; Willig, 2008; Willing & Rogers, 2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the clear choice for the initial stage (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), with its outcomes further analysed in the second stage (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989; Fairclough, 2003; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). The underpinning literature is not reviewed in depth here, but other papers and a recent book by the authors document it in depth (Whitworth & Zontek, 2016; Whitworth & Zontek, 2017; Whitworth & Zontek, 2018).

## 3. Methodology

CoPs were needed that had widely varying technical purposes, to allow common features to emerge. Ten were found using snowball techniques. Thus, in the UK, a village festival CoP was found via an author's colleague. This CoP suggested a Victorian Heritage campaign CoP from the same village. A running club and an amateur theatre were also suggested. Fundraisers for the Yorkshire Air Ambulance were interviewed because another colleague was an active member, and he suggested a voluntary theatre group. In Poland, a local motorcycle CoP and theatre CoP also were known to the author and these led on to two other groups, including one which was building a home for disabled

children. Initially, 14 groups were shortlisted but exploratory interviews with four identified steering from above, in the form of umbrella groups setting strategy and process. These groups were excluded, leaving 10 that set their own strategies, goals and purposes. For example, the medical support group, although loosely associated with a national group, initially formed without knowing that the national group existed, with almost nothing coming down from above.

Another snowball process identified individuals to study once a CoP was chosen. In some cases, up to six members were met and interviewed, in others only one or two, where the initial interviews revealed significant information. This mix of wide and narrow focus provided sufficient depth and breath for firm conclusions to be drawn. Other interviews were undertaken but not analysed due to time constraints. A further book and other papers could emerge later.

The final result was substantial interviews with 31 people, from six CoPs in the UK and four in Poland. All individuals except one are anonymised, and similarly CoPs. They are only identified as 'M1', 'C3' etc. The sole exception was the Yorkshire Air Ambulance and its fundraiser because he specifically requested publicity for the group. He commented that any publicity for his cause was welcomed.

The interviews ranged from 20 to 45 minutes in length, each creating between 2,000 and 5,000 words of the transcript. In each case, the interviewee was almost totally unprompted, as recommended in most of the literature seen (Langridge, 2007; Robinson, 2002; Robbins & Aydede, 2008; Smith et al., 2009; Willig & Rogers, 2008). The general topic was introduced: 'tell me how and why you joined this group', 'how did you learn what to do' etc. Then, the interviewee was left to speak unprompted for as long as they wanted. This allowed the interviewee to set their own agenda and prioritise their responses.

IPA was then used to draw out key points as 'initial thoughts'. A further iteration produced common points or 'emergent themes'. Figure 1 documents the initial stages of the process.

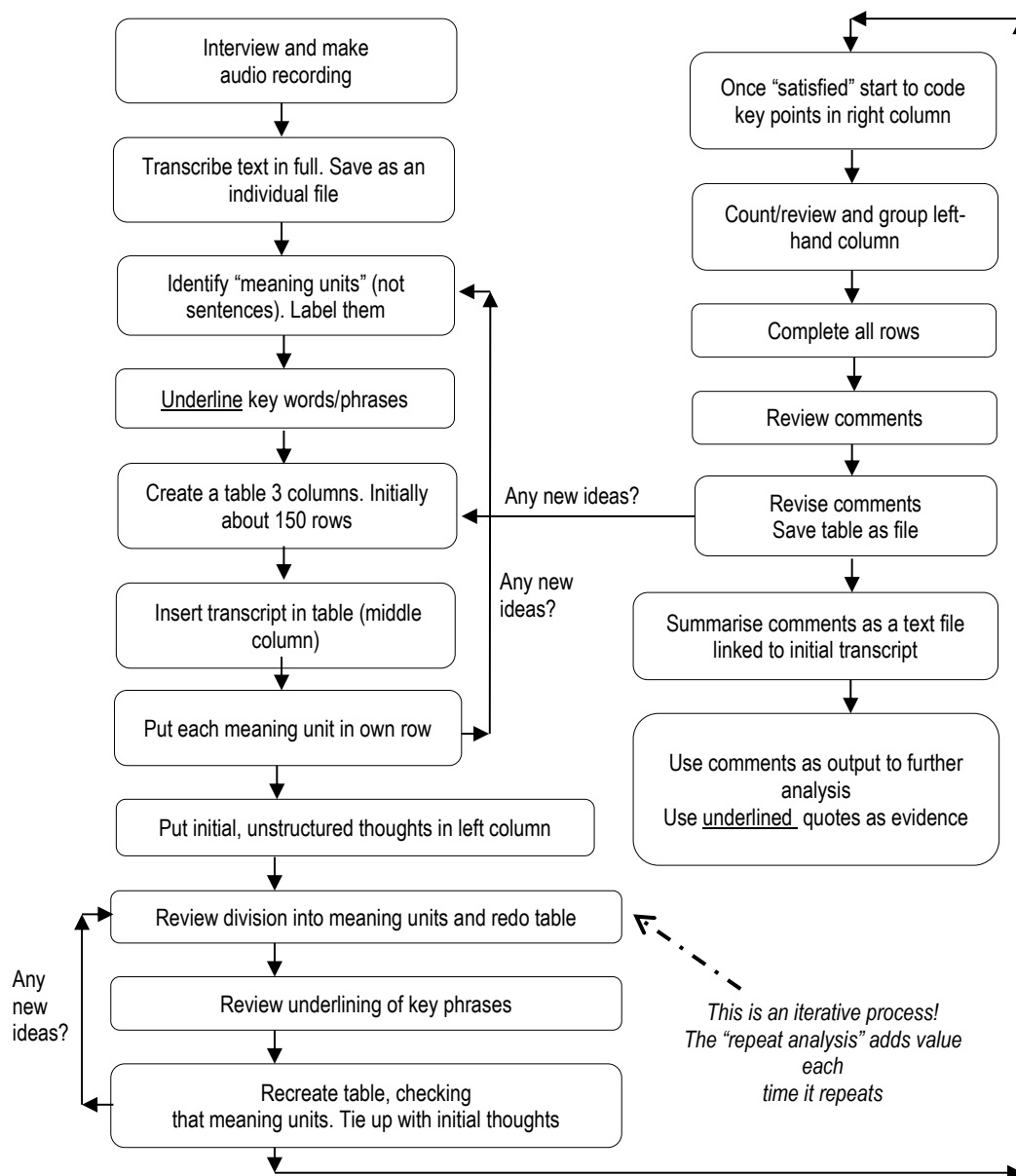


Figure 1. The IPA process

Table 1. A small sample of IPA from the transcript of interviewee L1 (A medical support CoP)

Initial thoughts	Interview L1	Emergent themes
Explanations/ motivation	'And in my personal experience ....my mother was a sufferer, and <u>seeing my mother go through life in absolute agony, day after day, 7 hours a day-er 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, is ...difficult</u> '.	Motivation
Explanation/ need for help	'And you just wish you could turn to somebody and <u>gain some knowledge of how to make that person's life a bit more liveable and help in any way you can</u> '.	Motivation

Clarification of strategic direction/ not fundraising	<u>'And therefore the L group was set up with that in mind'</u> . <u>'Not as a charitable existence as regarding um...to get, you know funds. That was never its intention'</u> .	Rationale
Rationale/driver	<u>'It was there as a support and to help these people'</u> .	Rationale / driver
Explanation	<u>'You know, they do have good days and they have bad days. And the majority of the time its bad days, you know there is no pain relief whatsoever'</u> .	Motivation
Memories	<u>'...and asking, in my experience of the lxxx group, coming on to that now'</u> (some transcript text not included here).	
Explanation and story	<u>'And um, because I hated to see her suffering every day she was alone, she was in the house all day, she was housebound, she couldn't get out, she was you know restricted'</u> .	Motivation Lack of knowledge
Solitude/ suffer alone	<u>'And she couldn't talk to anyone about it and I was at work, my father was at work, she was alone</u> but in constant pain all the time and she had no... nowhere to let that pain out, really basically'.	
Networking/ enjoyment (of membership)/ Increasing public awareness	<u>'So we went to the first Yorkshire Lxxx group meeting.... and we found, my mum enjoyed it, because it was a social event, it wasn't a meeting, it was held in a social capacity, in that, you know like was a coffee morning or you know it was a social event'</u> .	Networking and opportunity for situated learning
Increasing public awareness	<u>'Like for example making a social event as in people getting together, you know, like-minded people getting together and talking'</u> .	Networking CoP Knowledge transfer
Contributing	<u>'And so we got, we started getting involved'</u> .	CoP formation
Contributing/ motivation	<u>'And the first thing I did for lxxx was, I mean because I wanted...had the determination and I wanted to help so much'</u> .	Motivation
Public awareness	<u>'To get it pushed to the limelight that I helped in the first event which was that, um I wanted to um... help make the public aware'</u> .	Marketing, Knowledge transfer

Table 1 examples the process used. Thirty-one tables were created, totalling over 400 pages of text transcripts. The key statements or 'meaning units' are underlined.

**Table 2. CoP C (Village festival), frequencies of initial thoughts**

Initial thought	Frequency of use	Notes
Community/community spirit	65	Clearly one of the leading themes! This is the reason why the 'technical reason' for the CoP features so heavily. It clearly drove motivation, situated learning, knowledge transfer and the need for the CoP itself.
Motivation (to help others)	50	This was noted where a desire to help others was evident e.g., <u>'To try and encourage tourism, to try to bring people out of their</u>

		<u>shells and to try to bring other interest' (C2).</u>
Reflection/analysis/deep thought about issues	44	This suggests that the interviewee is thinking deeply about the CoP and their experiences as part of it. It is associated with motivation and learning.
Situated learning	43	Examples of people learning, inward knowledge transfer (not common), situated learning and sharing knowledge within their CoP (very common).
Need for group/ CoP	23	This is noted where the interviewee stated or discussed the need for sharing knowledge, experiences and ideas. Community spirit featured heavily. It is associated closely with situated learning and knowledge transfer, also with transitions from LPP to full, mature membership.
Knowledge sharing/ transfer outward	20	Situated learning was acquired within then shared outside the group.
Networking/socialisation	12	The ability to share experiences, make friends with people in similar situations and generally have contact with the world is clearly present.
Need for knowledge (inwards)/education/ finding out	12	Clear comment about external knowledge coming into CoP. So, knowledge transfer from an external source.
Marketing/public awareness	12	This reflects the desire to raise awareness of the festival and is often associated with motivation: <u>'Publicity is really, really important to us'</u> .
Explanation/storytelling/clarification	11	This notes that the interviewee felt the need to explain/tell some part of the history or story behind their involvement. Is it possibly indicates motivation?
Fundraising	8	Clearly a priority for the group: <u>I think if we made money I think we could use that money for the community good.</u>

Next tables were then mined for higher level common points and outcomes in every CoP. The frequencies are for illustrative purposes only. The focus is on the qualitative outcomes. A short sample is shown in Table 2.

The final stage, used as described by Langridge (2007), was to review the textual summaries of all 10 groups to extract common meanings. This required extensive referrals back to the original transcripts in their tables, and occasionally a further iteration. This formed the final output used, but there was a clear need to simplify and label the results to enable conclusions to be shared. Thus, the data were again mined but, from a standpoint of group rather than individual, to enable a further level of analysis. This was then used to compare the groups, and the countries they are based in.

The authors quickly identified a need to reduce the data collected from the initial 400 pages. Once 'meaning units' were identified, and 'initial thoughts' noted, there was a need to identify emergent themes, as recommended under the IPA section, mainly in: Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) and Langridge (2007). So, labels were sought, at least to begin to categorise the data. A very extensive literature review, of which only a small part can be referenced here, led to the selection of some classification labels to reduce the mass of IPA output, so the emergent themes were labelled using some of the concepts below. This final outcome allowed comparisons between CoPs and countries.

One useful tool was supplied by Collins, Brown and Newman (1989), who identified six features of a 'cognitive apprenticeship' that included: observation, coaching, scaffolding, modeling, fading and reflection. Their work advocated a 'master/apprentice' model, which has many parallels with the 'LPP to maturity' concept used by Lave and Wenger (1991), and this is acknowledged. The labels initially used to summarise the emergent themes were taken from the literature searches: rationale, situated learning (creation), situated learning (usage), motivation (for participation), CoP (initial creation), CoP joining, reward, LPP, observation, coaching, scaffolding, modelling, fading, reflection, emergence, recontextualisation, hegemony and operationalisation. Other useful concepts around knowledge and its transfer, specifically via CoPs, were supplied by Hildreth and Kimble (2004).

#### **4. Findings**

The analysis outcomes clearly demonstrate the role of, and need for knowledge acquisition, its situating and restructuring, and its transfer into new and evolving NGO's and similar not-for-profit ventures. Situated learning and knowledge management were clearly apparent in all CoPs. Knowledge transfer was evident, and a transition from LPP in a CoP to mature leadership was often seen. This was especially evident for management skills and their operationalisation in these organisations. Hougaard (2009) provided useful insights here, as did Haugh (2007).

The emergent themes and higher level analysis were tabulated and common points and themes identified. Some of the CoPs were focused on fundraising or otherwise providing money to achieve their technical purpose of creating a social good. These are labelled here as 'enterprises'. Others labelled as 'organisations' were focused on knowledge acquisition or dissemination, with fundraising taking a very secondary part.

Some of the CoPs talked about leadership and hegemony. Others either did not stress it or ignored it totally. The 'M' CoP exists to support a local orphanage. Leadership and hegemony are clearly evident and respected. Similarly, in CoP R both leadership and hegemony are seen clearly—this CoP has a leader with managerial, coaching skills. She created the organisation, she sets the direction of its development and can solve problems. Conversely, CoP AA exists to raise large sums of money to support the Air Ambulance. Knowledge of how to achieve this is mentioned but not stressed. Leadership also is only mentioned 'in passing'.

Surprisingly, situated learning and support were valued quite differently for knowledge transfer by some groups (Table 3). The Victorian heritage CoP (B) interviewee valued it, but this could be attributed to her statement (an 'initial thought' that 'I never done anything like this before'. The Polish CoPs were more 'middle of the road' in their valuation. It was stressed a lot in group T, where volunteers and LPP members are involved in activities to become mature members. Also, in group R, there is a visible system of new members involving themselves in organisational life.

**Table 3. Sample of IPA emergent theme frequency by CoP (C, L, M etc)**

<b>Initial thoughts</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>HH</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>T</b>
Fundraise/fundraising	5	9	0	5	12	1	3	3	15	3
Cash/money	1	15	1	3	5	7	3	2	9	4
Management aspects	5	21	4	6	11	1	7	3	4	5
Activity/action	31	43	48	26	7	22	33	17	21	15
Idea/ Invention/change	0	0	21	23	0	0	0	5	20	4
Help/helping	33	12	3	5	5	4	7	7	2	3
Chair/person/man	2	43	1	3	2	0	0	0	2	0
Transfer	3	6	3	4	1	0	2	3	4	
Member/membership	15	18	4	5	6	2	3	15	3	4
Know/knowledge	208	61	41	9	30	12	10	8	11	8
Community	3	24	4	6	4	1	1	11	2	24
Motive/motivation	6	1	25	24	1	0	3	9	23	10
Learn/learning	17	11	5	6	21	4	1	5	3	12
Participate/participation	1	4	2	3	0	0	1	7	5	4
Lead/leader/leadership	0	5	9	12	6	0	0	0	4	0
<b>Interviews</b>	5	4	3	4	1	1	1	1	3	2
<b>Total words</b>	11000	11000	6500	6000	4400	1700	2100	2600	5670	3160

Overall, there were many similarities between the Polish and UK organisations despite clear cultural differences. The country of operation and the ‘technical’ purposes of the organisations, although very different, did not greatly influence the mechanisms of knowledge management or transfer reported above. However, in social organisations, people behave quite similarly. Leadership was important to some, not others. It appears to be more a function of technical purpose, and possibly who chose to join, and less about national character. The reward was also quite similar, as reported by the interviewees. Knowledge transfer though was stressed very differently. The Polish interviewees seemed to feel a need to educate and campaign much more strongly than the UK groups (Table 4). The reasons for this are outside the scope of this book and may well relate to national character and history.

**Table 4. Knowledge transfer and coaching, compared between CoPs and countries**

<b>Scale of importance</b>	<b>CoP behaviour–knowledge transfer/ coaching</b>			
	<b>UK</b>		<b>Poland</b>	
High	L			
	C	A	V	M
			R	
Relative importance			T	
		H	B	
Low	AA			



Almost all interviewed reported utilising their knowledge from earlier experiences, in new ways, and situations, as is often reported in the literature seen, but in many other contexts. This need for internal and external knowledge transfer was stressed, and how they solved it in their CoP forms a key outcome of the research. This paper can only outline the findings and interested readers are referred to as much more detailed results in a recently published book by the authors.

## 5. Conclusions

Using qualitative, unstructured IPA processes and higher level analysis demonstrated that situated learning and active knowledge management occurred in all the CoPs studied. Interviewees often reported how they moved from LPP to maturity and sometimes leadership. Kolb provided useful insights here, as did Lave, and Lave and Wenger. They reported that expertise from earlier experiences was applied, and transferred, often becoming explicit. Managerial and governance skills were applied in new contexts.

All the CoPs were formed to meet the same need. A social good needed to happen, and the individuals who were sufficiently motivated to 'right the wrong', or provide the service, gathered people into a group to change the world. Quickly, two overall strategies to achieve this emerged from the analysis. Some groups focused on fundraising to do this—the UK Yorkshire Air Ambulance is a prime example, the M and R Polish groups too. Others chose awareness raising and other forms of knowledge transfer. The L medical help group and B heritage protection group sit at this end of the spectrum. For these, fundraising was clearly secondary and just a 'means to an end'.

The need for explicit focused knowledge runs through all the transcripts. Whether medical, financial or legal knowledge, there is considerable evidence of searches for it and processes to make tacit knowledge explicit enough to share. People need knowledge that is not biased by commercial or other pressures and the CoP acts as a repository for this. In some cases, it is transferred face-to-face, by meetings or presentations, or via phone calls and newsletters. The degree of formality varies greatly between groups, but the outcome is the same, an increase in explicit knowledge that can be shared. People are coached and helped; they observe others and create models of their situation.

Two forms of situated learning were seen. Firstly, the move from the fringes, or 'LPP', to maturity, as a result of new learning becoming embedded in the situation or context. Secondly, the application of prior learning to a new situation. The first type is well evidenced in the L group. Members were desperate for help, for themselves or their loved ones. They could not get effective help from their medical professionals (doctors, nurses and dentists were cited), so they turned to each other and shared what they had. This enabled them to move to maturity, and counsel others. The B CoP interview also evidences this, as does the M interview. The second form is best evidenced by A. He stated that he was recruited specifically for his financial skills. He transferred them into the CoP and moved from the edge to a key role. The V CoP also discussed this, using skills from animal husbandry and other prior experiences, to back up their campaign for a new way of living. Both these types of situated learning create 'scaffolding' and models, from which people gain support. Co-operation is inherent in a CoP (Lin and Beyerlein, 2006).

This work contributes by outlining the utility of a new application for IPA theories, used on non-profit making CoPs. An improved understanding of situated learning and motivation in these CoPs resulted from the study. The usage in differing languages and country of operation, and findings about mechanisms of knowledge management or transfer in these differing conditions demonstrate that the hypothesis has been proven, and the literature on social CoPs extended onto new ground by this novel usage of IPA.

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