

# A Study on Public Servants' Learning and Behavior Change — A Social Interaction Perspective

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## Abstract

A bureaucratic public sector is usually regarded by Taiwanese people as an inefficient organization. We question the notion that the sluggish environment can also cultivate useful learning. This study aims to re-conceptualize the key elements which trigger knowledge communities, with reference to the way public servants interact with their colleagues and their environment. It attempts to build on the view that individuals' learning in bureaucratic organizations can be triggered by social processes emanating from their mutual engagements and shared practices. This study leads to the conclusion that the public sector, as exemplified in this study, can nevertheless promote interactions favorable to learning. It may teach useful lessons for other sorts of organization.

The claim is supported by qualitative data associated with introducing and discussing the concept of communities of practice. In order to focus on particular issues and to explore further reality from varied angles, the semi-structured interview method was employed. 42 public servants in the central government

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in Taiwan were interviewed.

This research supports the view that learning is a social practice and that its motivation grows out of the interaction between interpersonal networks and daily sense-making activities. Based on this argument, the researchers trace 3 keys in relation to the leadership, the common value and the appropriate networks for learning. The argument is that learning is a by-product of social interactions. Considering the concept of social exchange, interpersonal networks, making comparisons with others and being accepted by the group, individuals are directed by the common value and are involved in learning processes.

**Keywords:** communities of practice, public servant, informal learning

## I. Introduction

A bureaucratic public sector is usually regarded by Taiwanese people as an inefficient organization. Traditionally, bureaucracy was thought to be a natural result when an organization was getting too large for the purpose of supervisor efficiency. According to Max Weber (1864-1920), employees in a bureaucratic organization are goal-oriented. Divisions are ordered by a hierarchical principle. Information delivery is always top down. All the operations in the organization are based on rational principles (Elwell, 2005). Weber identified some characteristics of bureaucracy, such as hierarchy, impersonality, explicit operation rules, division of labor and a clear promotion system. The public sector in Taiwan has similar characteristics to those Weber identified. It has also developed its own bureaucratic style, which may be far beyond what Weber could have imagined. However, most people in Taiwan argue that the efficiency of the public sector is always unsatisfactory and they even use the word “sluggish” to describe the bureaucratic environment in the Taiwanese public sector. Because some of the interviewees in this research also use this term to express their ideas about the general Taiwanese view toward the service provided by the public sector, we shall question the notion that a sluggish environment can also cultivate useful learning.

Knowles (1984) believed that adults’ learning motivation is always internal, while Tennant (1998) suggested that the internal motivation is sometimes triggered by adults’ social roles. In order to play the roles well, adults try to learn new skills to cope with the

problems derived from their tasks. In this situation, learners adopt utilitarian view of learning (Tennant, 1998) and individuals' learning motivation depends on the stimuli provided by the environment. Some scholars suggest that the bureaucratic organization is too routine to create new knowledge, while others suggest that the environment is so dull that the workers have less chance to stimulate their motivation to learn. The division of labor is so rigid that it makes each one's tasks simpler and easier. Employees in the environment have a sense of powerlessness for they have to follow the system's arrangements and have little influence over changing the contents of tasks (Courpasson, 2000). Most recruits (33 out of 42 interviewees) in this study felt powerless facing the tasks they dislike. 23 out of 42 interviewees felt that they had little achievement in the public sector because the tasks assigned to them were so fixed. Because the system does not allow its employees to change the established guidelines, public servants have little motivation to explore new methods to improve their performance. In addition, most employees (except temporary workers) in the public sector in Taiwan get their jobs through the civil service examination system, and their jobs are guaranteed by the government. They never worry whether their abilities could compete with others' or whether they are able to survive in the organization without additional learning. It seems to them that the employment security system supported by law or regulation can always protect them from the danger of unemployment, so that people in the environment have less motivation to learn things to sort out the problems derived from their work. Both the sense of powerlessness and the special job security system reduce public servants' desire to learn. However, is it true that the public servants in Taiwan learn nothing from their daily life? How can it be true that they gain nothing through their interactions with their colleagues, their tasks and the environment where they work? According to Wenger (1998), people who share common practices and interests may develop a common language to foster organizational learning and the contributions derived from its members. Learning can then be triggered by people's interactions. In other words, even in a bureaucratic organization such as the public sector in Taiwan people may still learn something from the "sluggish" environment, as long as they keep interacting with the stimuli provided by the environment. In order to explore how the public servants interact with the stimuli and how their learning is triggered by the interactions, this research employs the concept of Communities of Practice, which was coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), as a theoretical framework to reconceptualize the data collected from the field. The researchers attempt to answer the following questions:

- (1) How do public servants' interactions affect knowledge sharing and creation?

- (2) How are public servants' acquisition of knowledge and their engagement in learning in a bureaucratic organization motivated by their interactions?
- (3) What is the significance of those interactions revealed by fieldwork to the learning problems discovered in the public sector in Taiwan?

## II. The concept of communities of practice

The majority of research into the concept of CoPs is inspired by the concept of situated learning (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). According to Lave and Wenger (1991: 98), “*a community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage*”, but also because it conducts the transmission of tacit knowledge and of knowledge-in-action (Gherardi, Nicolini, & Odella, 1998). According to Allee (2000), people in communities pay more attention to understanding rather than blind performing (dealing with tasks without thinking). Some scholars, such as Bielaczyc and Collins (1999), suggest that if everyone in the organization is involved in a collective effort of understanding, the organization can be viewed as one that has a culture of learning. This suggestion presents a picture in which the responsibility for learning is shared among all the members of the group. On the other hand, Araujo (1998) argues that working, knowing, learning and innovating are blurred activities that are “*embedded in situated practices and are coextensive*”. Learning, knowledge and practice seem to be a triplicity with subtle relationships. Some viewpoints which are suggested by constructivist (e.g. Bednar, Cunningham, Duffy, & Perry, 1991; Jonassen 1991) and situated perspectives on learning (e.g. Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991) highlight dynamic angles of the knowledge process. Based on negotiable interactions, people build their own representations of knowledge and at the same time help other members in the group to understand the context, the content and the process of the knowledge. This viewpoint is echoed by scholars such as Roth (1996), Squire and Johnson (2000), and Barab and Duffy (2000). Knowledge is situated in experience, so that the focus of learning is on the interplay between the roles, tools and processes coming out of interactions.

Ideas such as the above reflect what Lave and Wenger (1991: 98) refer to as “*...a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping CoPs*”. Lave and Wenger's (1991) analysis seems to focus on the processes and influences of interactions. Engaging in interactions may lead to the result of gaining knowledge, and moreover the established knowledge can also trigger further

interactions. If we view situated learning as a means, by way of interactions, to acquire particular knowledge, the concept of CoPs is for the purpose of improving one's grasp of a particular field of knowledge and also exploring one's own view of the interactions. The essential feature of communities of practice is members' shared practices, which relate to their comprehension about some important interactions for themselves. Since it is based on members' participation rather than on official status, people's forms of interaction within the community are liberal. Although their practices may be inevitably affected by some official influences, such as organizational policies or regulations, members in the communities interact with these influences through their mutual practices and by themselves.

Lave and Wenger (1991) did research on groups which engaged in craft-related occupations, such as midwives, tailors, butchers, and so on. They then coined the concept and suggested that learning is embedded in the process of communities of practice. Through mixing newcomers with senior practitioners, associating individual experiences with the group's daily lives, marginal participators can not only be accepted as members, but also receive their knowledge from and contribute their knowledge to the community. This is what Lave and Wenger (1991: 56) refer to as "Legitimate Peripheral Participation" (LPP). Members engage in their practices and learn from old-timers, so that they move from peripheral to full involvement in the community (Hildreth, Kimble, & Wright, 2000). Through this, a newcomer will gradually be accepted by the group and acquire his or her identity in the social world (Brown & Duguid, 1998). Legitimation, peripherality and participation are indispensable elements and processes. Legitimation distinguishes insiders from outsiders, which highlights the formal or informal authority of the group (Stacey, 1996). Only when the newcomer is recognized as a member of the group can his or her participation become possible. Peripherality identifies members' degree of participating in the interactions (Brown & Duguid, 1998). Therefore, the process of participation includes, in Lave and Wenger's (1991) view, improving knowledge, authorizing power and integrating resources. For Lave and Wenger (1991), communities appear not only to be an effective way for organizations to share knowledge outside of the traditional structural boundaries, but also to understand what interactions are and what they mean for the community and outside of the community.

The concept of "community" in the term "communities of practice" seems to highlight a particular social structure which enables mutual engagements to be developed. In my opinion, this idea also implies that knowledge creation can happen in any type of organization as long as the particular social structure keeps working in the environment. In other words, communities of practice can be discovered everywhere, even in a bureau-

cratic organization such as the public sector in Taiwan. This idea provides, in my opinion, public servants' learning with a hope of revivification, even if most residents criticize the bureaucratic organization as sluggish (interviewees, such as Mr. J, Mr. X and Mr. S, held this opinion). We do not suggest that using these emotional words such as "sluggish" or "slothful" is a good way to judge the environment. However, most interviewees (38 out of 42) agreed that most residents in Taiwan view the public sector as a sluggish, slothful, lazy or lethargic organization, although most of the interviewees (31 out of 42) disliked this kind of generalization. Therefore, terms such as "sluggish" or "slothful" were not the conclusion of this research, but came directly from the data. Interviewees such as Mr. J, Mr. X, Mr. S, used the term "sluggish" to describe a general Taiwanese view about the public service, while Ms. A and Mr. U used the term "slothful" and "lethargic" to express their own feelings about the environment where they were working.

Learning includes, in this study, the change of one's cognition or behavior. Some scholars believe that human behavior is learned by observing others' performances. Through continuous reciprocal interactions between the individual's cognition, behaviors and the environment where he or she is, the individual is given a hint to adjust his or her future actions (Bandura, 1977). Some suggest that learning is situated and the social interaction is the key that leads the individual to become an insider. Different situations nurture different learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In terms of workplace learning, employers' leadership becomes important, because the leadership can usually influence the social interactions in an organization and also create varied situations for learning (Kirby, Knapper, Evans, Carty, & Gadula, 2003). Watkins and Marsick (1993) suggest that job design, external environmental conditions, reward systems and management policies should be considered when learning in the workplace is highlighted. Candy and Crebert (1991) argue that workplace learning is different from academic learning for it is contextualized by the nature of the organization, is involved in collaborative teamwork, and is about problem solving. In this research, we adopt the concepts of learning after Bandura, Lave and Wenger and suggest that learning within a workplace is situated and can be adjusted by way of observing social interactions.

Knowledge is, in this study, constructed by interactions, rather than attached to certain actors such as the individual or an organization. The knowledge that I gain may confirm that I have experienced a process of learning. Presenting my knowledge to others, however, does not necessarily imply that the other people experience the same process as mine. For them, my knowledge starts as a form of information and then may be converted into another knowledge combined with their cognitive structures and interacting with the

information I have supplied. So knowledge is, in this case, not an absolute concept but one that depends on whether or not, and how, the individual digests the information which he or she gains from interactions.

Such reasoning attempts to indicate that learning and knowledge are both concepts that include relativity and absoluteness. Interaction is the key which enables individuals to initiate their learning and knowledge process. In this research, we highlight some features of learning, discovered in the public sector, which echo the concept of CoPs. Examining these features, we try to create common ground for both situations (communities of practice as well as the learning situation in the public sector in Taiwan) and to reflect on our established understandings about both of them.

### **III. Research method**

As far as the research strategy is concerned, each organization has its unique characteristics which enable it to develop particular ways of operating. The influences of group dynamics on the public servants in Taiwan may be different from those of employees in the private sector. Even if people are in the same organization, their performances are varied because of different group influences. For this research, 9 departments in the central government in Taiwan were visited and 42 public servants were interviewed. Using a qualitative method, we actually gained rich raw data referring to different topics of stories through the process of field work. In order to find a comparative base to construct arguments and to avoid possible influences derived from different organizational culture, most viewpoints demonstrated in this study were from 2 similar departments including 12 interviewees. Using data analysis skills, we make 2 cases to highlight the relationships between the individuals, the interactions and the environment where the public servants work. This should give us a base against which similar interactions in other contexts can be compared. The research starts from the interactions between the leadership and the particular learning feature, such as “common value” or “tradition”, because the leadership plays, in general, an important role in influencing members' learning interactions in organizations. To make our analysis in depth, we adopt, in each department, a particular public servant's experiences of interacting with the environment to analyze the particular person's learning derived from varied interactions. Other colleagues' experiences referring to the particular learning features of each organization will also be used to clarify the context of the cases and to strengthen the arguments derived from data analysis. Other opinions gained from the interviews in the other 7 departments became useful clues

which enabled us to trace public servants' life in the particular area.

We do not intend to identify both cases as particular types of organization, even though some of the members in the group did use terms such as “learning organization” or “team” to name the groups. However, it is true that each group seems to represent a particular type of knowledge community. For his organization, Mr. J designed mechanisms to deal with the knowledge derived from interactions, and he identified the organization as a “Learning Organization”. Mr. W adopted the term “team” to describe the environment where he works. Accordingly, both of the cases seem to represent diverse types of organization, which have different features but, at the same time, share something in common. The findings may reflect the concept of CoPs and also point the way to some particular dimensions worthy of further study.

The research highlights the importance of one's informal learning within the context of an organization. We employed the semi-structured interview method and visited 42 public servants in the central government in Taiwan. According to Harvey, MacDonld and Hill (2000) the semi-structured interview method enables the focus of the research to be always on particular issues, and the method also allows researchers to explore further reality from different angles. In order to know more about how employees interact with their colleagues and how they conduct their day-to-day duties, we also observed particular workers' process of dealing with tasks, which included their interactions with their coworkers in the same department and with those who were in different organizations.

Initially time was spent in the personnel department developing discussions through informal conversations. According to Shipman (1981), informal conversations can probe deeper, can be adjusted to circumstances, and can increase rapport and cooperation. All the interviews were tape-recorded and were between 1 to 2 hours in duration. The data collected from the field work were transcribed before being categorized and subjected to analysis. The observations were conducted immediately after we finished the semi-structured interviews.

The process of data analysis implied ongoing interactions between raw data, our established knowledge and the literature about communities of practice. Firstly, we tried to summarize relevant data by using many labels, so that relevant data and their comparative bases should emerge. At the same time, we kept reviewing the literature in order to understand other researchers' work and to identify useful strategies to organize the labels. Table 1 is an example which shows the way we analyzed Mr. X's and Mr. W' words. In the interview, Mr. X was asked whether or not he felt busier than usual when he was as unpleasant tasks. Answering the question, he seemed to reveal his attitude to work and so mentioned a general working situation in the bureaucratic environment. According to Mr.

X, people's interactions in the group seemed to be directed by the individual's powerful desire to be accepted by the group, which may echo some concepts in the idea of communities of practice.

In Table 1, Mr. W was asked how he helped his colleagues, especially newcomers, learn the necessary skills. Because he attributed the good results of the organization to the individual's self-government, we wondered how people in the group could be so self-disciplined. His answer, given above, seemed to reflect Mr. X's description. Although different questions were asked, both answers referred to a common clue that there was a synergizing power in the group that made members' efforts cohere. When analyzing Mr. X's words, we used some labels such as "Self-expectation", "Self-discipline", "Mental model", "Motivation", "Common vision", "Value system", "Interpersonal networks", "Knowledge sharing", and "Shared attitude". These labels were used to compare and associate with other labels extracted from the individual's other stories or other interviewees' experiences. For example, the cases of Mr. X and Mr. W both elicited the labels "Self-expectation" and "Self-discipline", which are overlapping categories. The coincident labels become a bridge which relates the contents of different people's stories.

Comparing labels, which echoed the similarities of viewpoints derived from raw data and the literature, the highlighted significances within each context came to be the keys which enabled us to explain interviewees' experiences and justify our arguments. This process is similar to the process of engaging in a dialogue, where participants confirm or persuade each other depending on their intentions in the dialogue (Gudykunst, 1991). It also reflected the story line which we constructed and supported our interpretation of the findings.

The reason for using research methods such as the above is to explore how public servants in Taiwan are affected by the influences of group dynamics. Although the bureaucratic organization seems an inactive system (we use the term "inactive" after Mr. L's, one of the interviewees, expression "slothful and inactive", in order to highlight how people in the environment are not easily motivated), the following paragraphs will show, through two cases, how people are triggered to construct their knowledge community during their daily life in this bureaucratic environment. People's interactions can be a turning point which may lever some unsatisfactory situations into a positive position even though the degree of the influence has not been established in this study.

Table 1. A Sample of Data Analysis - Mr. X and Mr. W

Raw data	Reflecting on my understanding	Categories
Mr. X: <i>'We do not ask for overtime pay, even if it is necessary to work overtime.'</i>	This seems similar to the situation in the private sector, but this is not a general situation in the public sector in Taiwan. How does it come about that individuals in the group are so concerned with self-discipline? And can this motivation also be found in communities of practice?	Self-discipline
Mr. X: <i>'Other people will laugh at you if you do so, because it is your duty to complete the tasks.'</i>	In Mr. X.'s idea, it is the feeling of avoiding other people's mockery that motivates individuals in the group to give up asking for overtime pay. In these circumstances, Mr. X points out two elements: being accepted by the group and one's self-expectation.	Gaining group acceptance, self-expectation
Mr. X: <i>'You will feel ashamed if you need to work overtime, since you cannot finish your duty on time.'</i>	Mr. X highlighted the two elements. If the individual could not accomplish his or her responsibility, the individual should feel ashamed. It seems to me that the group values the taking of responsibilities. People cannot be accepted by the group if they cannot finish their duties.	Gaining group acceptance, self-expectation, responsibility
Mr. X: <i>'So, wouldn't you feel embarrassed if you asked for overtime pay?'</i>	The value of taking responsibilities and the importance of being accepted by the group are highlighted again.	Gaining group acceptance, self-expectation, responsibility
Mr. W: <i>'I found there is always a sense of "self-expectation" in the organization, even though the origins of this tradition are obscure.'</i>	Mr. W. thought that it was members' "self-expectation" which disciplines individuals to complete their tasks effectively and efficiently. There seemed to be a mysterious element, which kept motivating employees' self-expectation. So, the "self-expectation" should not be the tradition itself, but the result of the tradition. Because the term 'self-expectation' implies the expectation being triggered by one's mental status, how can an individual's mental model become a tradition to discipline other's performances? (Learning organization theories seem to suggest some ideas which enable varied mental models in the organization to be uni-	Self-expectation, self-discipline, mental model, motivation

Raw data	Reflecting on my understanding	Categories
	fied) The real meaning which Mr. W wanted to express should be that an obscure element motivated members' self-expectation so that the results of the group were always satisfactory.	
Mr. W: ‘ <i>“self-expectation” impels employees to strive upward</i> ’	A function of the “self-expectation” is to motivate the individual, and the result of the motivating can lead to a positive result. Mr. W seemed to make a general statement that the result is good for both the individual him or herself and the organization. It seems to imply that a subtle element bridges individuals' expectation with the common vision of the organization. Because Mr. W and Mr. X had similar attitudes to work, I am not sure whether or not their value systems have also been unified by this element.	Self-expectation Common vision Positive motivation Value system
Mr. W: ‘ <i>Through invisible networks or relationships in the organization, this concept is spread all over the department so that all the members share the same attitude</i> ’	So, Mr. W agreed with my reasoning that the element also affects members' attitudes to work. He also pointed out that the interpersonal network is a tool by which some tacit information is delivered. So, in his opinion, people in the group have shared attitudes, and the attitudes refer to members' self-expectation. How does it come about that different individuals' respective expectations result in shared attitudes? What is the role of the interpersonal network when people interact with each other? What does this imply in terms of learning?	Interpersonal networks, knowledge sharing, shared attitude

Source: Author.

## IV. The two cases

Two interpretative cases emerge from the data, through the analysis of the different types of power implied in the extracts. In case one, we highlight a “Common Value” in Mr. J’s department, while in another case the focus is on a “Tradition” in Mr. W’s team. Mr. J’s group clearly distinguishes the supervisor’s position from that of subordinates, so the supervisor’s power plays a major role in pushing the group to keep going. By contrast, Mr. W, the supervisor in case two, is one of the members who is affected by the group’s

tradition and also keeps it going.

In order to link the cases and highlight some important features of each instance, we demonstrate the cases by way of making comparisons. Thus, the next case is introduced through making a comparison with the previous one. This method may help us not only to understand the circumstances of each case but also to realize the interactions in each group in more dimensions.

### **A. Case 1: Building a common value to direct knowledge sharing and creation**

Mr. J's department was a personnel department, which provided employees with information or help in relation to using personnel regulations. Mr. J has been a department head for about 20 years. He has worked in varied organizations, including private companies, but always in a personnel department. Mr. R was the one who was used as an example by Mr. J to hold up as a "hero" to other employees. Mr. L thought that he did not play a big role in the organization, even though he was a specialist (his position was higher than that of basic employees), because he thought that Mr. J disliked him. Mr. L's best friend in the department was Mr. K, who was the first person we contacted in the department. Mr. K introduced us to Mr. L and also invited Mr. M to interviews for me. We wanted to include the views of women employees as well as those of men; unfortunately, only Ms. R was available for interview. Because the organization had a particular mechanism to integrate members' knowledge into the organization and Mr. J also had strategies to facilitate individuals' learning, we agreed with Mr. J's opinion that the organization was, in some ways, a learning organization. Table 2 shows interviewees' age, years of service and positions in Mr. J's learning organization.

Table 2. Interviewees in Mr. J's Department

Name	Age	Years of Service	Title of position
Mr. L	37	15	Subordinate
Mr. M	36	12	Subordinate
Ms. R	32	9	Subordinate
Mr. J	55	30	Supervisor
Mr. K	33	8	Subordinate
Mr. R	42	18	Subordinate

Source: Author.

Mr. J is the head of the department, which is named a “learning organization” by others and by Mr. J himself. He uses leadership to implement the concept of the learning organization. As Mr. J said:

*In order to create a Learning Organization it requires establishing a culture that values the communications and relationships in the organization and also values the individual. That requires leadership to express a new value system and a new leadership value system. (Mr. J).*

Accordingly, Mr. J believes that the essential way to form an organizational culture is to rebuild the values in the organization. He agrees that individuals are diverse. However, it may be necessary to direct individual values in order to achieve organizational purposes. He said, “*It is certain that each person has his or her own values. It is also unquestionable that the organization can run effectively when the varied personal values are unified into a common value*”. This idea is similar to Senge’s (1990: 205-207) “shared vision”.

Mr. J’s way to achieve the idea is, however, totally different from Senge’s. Senge suggests using conversation and dialogue, by which opinions are disseminated all over the organization without restraint so that each member’s vision will be revealed and known by others (Senge, 1990). Members can then negotiate with one another openly in order to establish a shared vision. Senge’s approach is obviously from bottom to top. The essential idea for doing this is to make employees feel comfortable that their visions are the same as and also part of the goals of the organization. This is what Senge (1990: 212) refers to as the “hologram”. He said,

*If you divide a hologram, each part shows the whole image...when a group of people come to share a vision for an organization, each person sees his own picture of the organization at its best. ...as the shared vision develops, it becomes both “my vision” and “our vision”.*

The individual might be motivated to seek the aims of the organization, because when the aims are fulfilled the individual’s vision can be achieved at the same time. By contrast, Mr. J’s method is from top to bottom. It is, in his view, extremely important to give employees an example to follow.

*At first, you have to make a hero in the organization so that your idea can be expressed by the hero’s behavior. You can see this as a form of hero worship. You can also see this as a way to highlight and to show the evaluation criteria in your mind to others. When the criteria are routed into employees’ minds,*

*good behaviors can then have a base to be encouraged and bad ones can be punished. Gradually, members will know the rules of the game. If you follow the rules, you will be very comfortable in the organization. If you break the rules, you will be condemned. (Mr. J).*

During the process of forming the common value, he kept disseminating up-to-date notions of management science, such as knowledge management, learning organization, and so on. The purpose for doing so is to let employees know that the criteria which they follow are reasonable, reliable and in accordance with the current thoughts of management science. He would like to let members in the organization know that he is not the only person to set the criteria for employees but that his ideas are consistent with mainstream management science. Mr. J said, “*Not only have I let them know what they should do, but they have also realized that what I am doing for them is the most advanced notion of management*”. Mr. J’s approach is, in my opinion, similar to the method which some types of Christianity adopts to persuade its followers.

According to my experiences of communicating with people from the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, the essential point for Christianity is not to argue where god is from or why god is omnipotent, but to make followers believe that god is reliable and believable. If you believe it, you are going to have eternal life. Christianity also gives many testimonies to persuade followers that if you believe you will then have a positive feedback in the end. There is a bible to publicize god’s rules. There are also some advocates to convince the public through testifying about their own experiences. This strategy is similar to what Mr. J has done. The vital point of his technique is not to question whether or not the values are true or false, but to choose the best value, which Mr. J himself believes. In order to make employees follow the values, he applies positive and negative reinforcement to strengthen the values. In this case, Mr. J also has his bible, which is some theories of management science. The theories of management science are not created by Mr. J, but are well known in the field of business management.

*“Because the organizational value comes from theories that are not strange to ordinary people, it can certainly establish a criterion which is relied on by all of the members” (Mr. J).* In this situation, Mr. J himself also follows the principle he sets. Situations such as the above make people in the organization believe that it is the principle that is in charge of the organization rather than Mr. J. Employees within the environment can foresee the results of their performance and can also master their own future, if they follow the principle. This is just like what Mr. J said:

*They can realize clearly whether or not their work can lead to a good result,*

*because they know the criteria. It is the employees themselves who decide and evaluate the results of the tasks. I, a head, am only a servant of the organizational value, because I can change nothing if you have followed the value. So it is you who examine your own work. It is also you who score your own annual appraisal. You will know the result and you can also master your future by yourself. I have no power at all but just follow the value like others. (Mr. J)*

Since the theories of management science are their “Bible”, Mr. J also takes on the role of amender and interpreter. According to Mr. J, many ideas for amending the principle derive from chatting with colleagues. When he gives some new notions to employees, he is also given some new ideas back by his colleagues.

### **Individuals' acquisition of knowledge within the environment**

Mr. R is one of the employees in Mr. J's department and Mr. J constantly referred to him as the “Hero”. This was a strategy to promote high standards and learning by putting forward one worker as an example to be imitated. Mr. R did feel that his potential had been developing under the supervision of the value system. He said,

*When things are going on and on, you can detect which sort of behavior may result in which outcomes. Just observing teaches you how to avoid a lot of mistakes. And you will automatically know an appropriate way to sort out the problems. (Mr. R.)*

This expression seems to echo Mr. J's intention of shaping the value system of his department. Mr. J also believed that the system could direct employees' behavior, because the system formed a rule which allowed only certain qualities of the results. Mr. J did not discipline employees' performances directly, but made them discipline themselves by way of the value system. Since employees' behavior has been directed by the system, it may be true that certain sorts of behavior will be acknowledged, certain kinds of knowledge may be produced and certain ways of learning can be encouraged.

In Mr. J's case, the importance of establishing a value system has been identified. Another department, Mr. W's team, had a “secret weapon” similar in function to the value system which governed Mr. J's group: this was tradition.

### **B. Case 2: Involving oneself in the organizational tradition to facilitate knowledge activities**

Mr. W's department was responsible for personnel policies. Compared to Mr. J's department, Mr. W's department made personnel policies, while Mr. J's department im-

plemented them. Mr. W was the head of the department, and he was introduced to us by Mr. N. Mr. N accepted my invitation, because he had just been awarded a Master's degree and he was interested in my way of doing the research. Ms. Q and Ms. O were chosen for interview in order to provide a female perspective on the activities of the department. This case shows a supervisor actively participating in organizational activities and so affecting the style of the group dynamic. Because Mr. W and Mr. N regarded the department as a team, we adopt this case as an example of team learning to explore how the individuals learn in the team. Table 3 provides information about the interviewees in this department.

Table 3. Interviewees in Mr. W's Department

Name	Age	Years of Service	Title of position
Mr. X	40	16	Subordinate
Ms. Q	28	6	Subordinate
Mr. W	43	20	Supervisor
Ms. O	34	9	Subordinate
Ms. P	44	19	Subordinate
Mr. N	41	18	Subordinate

Source: Author.

Mr. W, who is now the head of a department in the central government in Taiwan, describes the organization in which he works as a team. He said,

*It is probably the tradition that makes the organization run effectively...The tradition includes a lot of elements, which not only bind all the members together but also has the function of rewards and punishment. I don't know where the tradition is from. It is perhaps just because of employees' self-expectation. (Mr. W)*

Mr. W's description seems to suggest that the tradition has the power to unite and discipline employees, which is a bit different from Mr. J's "value system". Mr. J's system is dominated by Mr. J himself, even though he always manipulates things from behind the scenes. Mr. W's "tradition" cannot necessarily be controlled by the head, who is Mr. W himself. We are not sure if Mr. J's behavior is affected by the value system which is made by himself, yet it is clear that Mr. W, who is one of the team, is also affected by the "tradition". In addition, Mr. J's "value system" seems more rigid than Mr. W's "tradition", in

terms of individual performances. Within Mr. J's system, everything seems to have been settled and the system also provides several channels for knowledge sharing and creating. From the angle of knowledge management, Mr. J has also designed a sound mechanism to encourage the function of knowledge acquiring, storing, applying and recycling. Compared with Mr. J's deliberate design, Mr. W employed the method of participation to facilitate learning. Because he could hardly change the "tradition", following the "tradition" he put his heart and soul into tasks. Because he merged himself into the "tradition", his thoughts and behavior shared a part of the "tradition". Because he understood the "tradition" and played a large role in it, he had opportunities to influence it.

The influence of Mr. W's "tradition" on an individual's attitudes has been proved by Mr. N, an employee in the organization. He described the situation when one of the colleagues was absent and another one took on the absentee's duty. Mr. N said, "*The deputy would think: it is not often that I have a chance to help you. You need my help now. Your work is surely a top priority*".

Mr. N's description provided a clue to tracing the relationship between the "tradition" and his personal value system. It seemed to him that the tradition suggested cooperative interactions with highly moral qualities. The reason for my suggestion of the "highly moral qualities" is that their cooperation is not based on measurable exchanges, such as doing things for the purpose of getting the other one's feedback in return. Mr. N's description also shows that he quite enjoyed helping his colleagues. However, the "tradition" does not always work by way of encouragement, but sometimes by way of punishment.

*If all the members in the team work hard with an energetic attitude, the atmosphere will expel the one who tries to lie down on the job. Because other conscientious employees will point the finger at the truant one, lazy people will be uncomfortable within the situation. (Mr. W)*

The effect of this "tradition" seems similar to Mr. J's "value system". Neither situation requires supervisors to use management tools to punish lazy workers (We use the word "lazy" after Mr. W). The rules have been formed in each member's mind. When an employee does something wrong or bad, it also means that this kind of behavior is not compatible with other employees' criteria. Therefore, it is the power derived from the group which disciplines each employee. Mr. W named this the power of the public voice. He said,

*Within this environment, if you are the person who always fusses about your*

*work-load or always does something different from others, you will be corrected by others. Because your behavior will affect the reputation of the department, the invisible power will spontaneously trigger the power of the public voice to condemn the behavior. (Mr. W)*

The tradition seems not only to encourage collaboration, but also really to punish uncooperative behavior. The effect of punishment is similar to Mr. J's system. According to Mr. J, the organizational value system was commonly shared by employees so that the sluggish employee would become an outsider (Mr. J used the term "sluggish" in interviews). Since the outsider could not fit him- or herself in the value system, he or she might feel too uncomfortable to stay in the organization. The sluggish one would eventually leave the group by his or her own choice (Mr. J). Both Mr. J's and Mr. W's cases seem to identify the power of desiring to be accepted by the group.

Additionally, Mr. J believed that not every interaction was good for the organization, and it needed to be well directed. In Mr. J's organization, it was Mr. J who directed the whole system to become a "Learning Organization". On the other hand, Mr. W did not clearly understand the concepts of "learning organization" and "organizational learning". In his organization, he could not totally control the development of the "tradition". It seems to us that every member in the organization could contribute something to the "tradition" and Mr. W, the head, was only one of them.

### **C. Individuals' acquisition of knowledge within the environment**

From the angle of individual learning, Mr. W did not forcefully encourage employees to engage in learning activities. However, people's performance in his group was motivated by a sort of comparison. When Mr. N first got into the organization where he is working, he found all the colleagues around him were energetic and enthusiastic about writing articles for a competition. The writing competition was an annual activity that was held by the central government. The topics of the articles were always related to public administration and public policies. Not every employee in the public sector was interested in participating in the writing competition. After Mr. W's advocacy of it, the activity was getting popular in the group. People in the group were not only enthusiastic about participating in the annual writing competition, but also tried to put their articles in journals as much as they could. Mr. N described his feelings of entering the department and of facing the challenge of writing the competition essays: "*I was surprised and nervous because I had never been in such a situation before and I was afraid that I could not become one of them*". He also mentioned: "*I wanted to try even though I was the oldest em-*

*ployee in the department, because writing articles is a good thing. Not only could it improve my writing skills, which might help my work, but it also gave me a clue to really get into the organization.”*(Mr. N). As a result, Mr. N began to write like others in the office and produced many articles in the end.

This case does not show clearly how Mr. N learnt, yet it offers some clues for tracing the incentives for learning. At first, it seemed to Mr. N that gaining acceptance was an important key to triggering his learning. Because he was a new-comer at that moment and he had a strong desire to be one of the team, he tried his best to improve himself to become as capable as others in the group. Therefore, by way of making comparison, he discovered the differences between himself and other colleagues. Since he had a strong desire to be accepted by the group, a keenness to close the gap was developed. However, he had a problem with his age. Since the desire was so strong and he also believed that the result of the practice might bring him extra benefits, he ignored the barrier of age and finally achieved the desired outcomes. Accordingly, in Mr. N's case, it was the identity which pushed him to make a comparison and it was the comparison which started his learning journey. Gaining group acceptance and making comparisons are two keys which enable us to trace individuals' motivation to join the knowledge community.

Both Mr. J's and Mr. W's cases illustrate, within formal organizations, how individuals' learning is motivated. Mr. J uses management strategies to direct organizational activities. He also uses some mechanisms to acquire and store the knowledge derived from people's interactions, while Mr. W participates in group activities and influences the group dynamic. This situation is very different from the concept of CoPs, which is generally in relation to informal networks. The reason for using the two examples of formal organization is that the border between formal and informal networks is not absolute, especially when some encourage the establishment of informal communities within a formal organization. In this situation, the concept of CoPs seems to apply between formal and informal settings.

## **V. Discussion**

The concept of CoPs implies a group of people who share interests and voluntarily join the community. Not only do they engage in common practices, but they also tolerate differences. In these circumstances, one's value system becomes crucial, and determines whether or not particular interactions should keep developing or must be disciplined. The concept also implies whether the particular member can be accepted by the group or not.

Once the individual is recognized as a member of the group, his or her value system will gradually be integrated into the community by way of continuous practices. Cases in this study indicate that one's value system can be affected by some ongoing interactions in the organization, while shared practices can also be modified by key persons' leadership style, the organizational common value and the environment where the individual works.

### **A. Using the leadership to vivify the sluggish learning environment**

Although this study does not mainly focus on leadership, a key person's leadership style affects the development of the organization and members' mutual engagements so much. In order to facilitate public servants' learning, some leaders, such as Mr. J, use the concept of "learning organization" to try to revivify the sluggish learning situation, while others, such as Mr. W, try to merge themselves to organizational routines in order to find keys to improve the organizational traditions. Swan, Scarbrough and Robertson (2002) suggest that managers try to use communities of practice as a device to lever unsatisfactory situations into positive ones, even though they may not be able to direct the development of the communities. This implies that some ideas derived from the concept of CoPs may facilitate the development of the organization, which all depends on whether or not the key person knows how to manage varied interactions within the organization.

The key persons in the two cases demonstrated in this research bear their important values in mind. Mr. J concentrates on running the organization well, while Mr. W pays attention to dealing with official business smoothly. Mr. W seems to directly participate in the group dynamics and always to reflect a balanced and positive orientation toward members and tasks. In Masi and Cooke's (2000) view, a transformational leader keeps inspiring employees and helps employees to share visions and to obtain commitment and motivation through team activities. Mr. W's style of leadership echoes Masi and Cooke's idea of the transformational leadership behavior.

Mr. J, however, tries to hide himself from the common value and to establish a "Hero" in order to interact with the value system, which is also built by Mr. J himself. Through seeing the example of interaction, members can then realize that certain behaviors may lead to positive results while bad performances may invite discipline. The common value is designed to select good behavior and stop bad performance. The "Hero" exists to encourage members to realize that certain thinking and behavior may be applauded in the system.

Both the formal leaders have already established their team visions by way of interacting with members (Baines, 1997). No matter if the leaders participated in interactions directly or indirectly, they were dealing with the common value formed by varied interac-

tions. The situation is also similar to what Swan, Scarbrough and Robertson (2002) refer to as using CoPs to lever unsatisfactory situations into positive ones. Both cases express different styles of group dynamic. In terms of leadership, Mr. J uses strategies to build members' common value, so that the particular culture is established. He also employs management skills to manage the development of the group, while Mr. W enters into activities and influences interactions. In terms of communities of practice, neither case is an authentic community of practice, but they identify something in common in relation to people's interactions. People are thus consciously or unconsciously involved in the interactions between power and knowledge.

## **B. Establishing a common value for the organization**

Mr. J's case makes us think about the relationship between common practices and the common value in an organization. In the organization, the common value seems to affect individuals' value systems so as to produce shared methods, languages and practices. In Mr. W's team, the tradition of the team disciplined members to aspire to excellence in the way they do their work. In communities of practice, people join the community voluntarily and they also know what they aim at in the community. According to Millen and Muller (2001: 1), "*the members of a community of practice have common methods, procedures, and knowledge, and have a need to share information, resources, and expertise with one another*". Although people may have personal purposes in the beginning, they develop a common sense of purpose through community activities (Breu & Hemingway, 2002). The common practices in the communities of practice are formed by members' common requirement of acquiring knowledge (Rogers, 2000). In other words, the common ground that is established within a community of practice ranges from bottom to top and may facilitate the forming of common values for the organization. Based on the common value, individuals' criteria of judgment in the organization may be established, members' performances can be directed and employees' common sense of dealing with tasks will also be strengthened.

By the same token, Mr. J used organizational common value to direct members' behavior. The common value, which had been designed by Mr. J, guided members' performances in order to fit the requested criteria, determined which way members' interactions should go and how they conducted their tasks. The common value in Mr. J's case is similar to what the concept of CoPs refers to as having the function of forming members' criteria of judgment, directing performance and improving common ideas about dealing with tasks. So, apparently, the way of forming a community of practice is very different from Mr. J's way of making the learning organization, because people's learning in Mr. J's

organization is a little bit enforced rather than spontaneous. However, both of the ways seem to achieve similar effects.

By contrast, the interactions in Mr. W's group which highlight the importance of bottom-up communications are similar to the interactions in communities of practice. In Mr. W's group, people were affected by the organizational tradition so that they were used to writing essays for a competition. The tradition was not built by the leader but nurtured by members' interactions. Being involved in the tradition, Mr. N accepted the common value derived from the interactions and conducted similar practices. According to Carotenuto et al. (1999: 2), because the community organizes knowledge activities in relation to individuals' respective interests, people in the knowledge community develop common vocabularies and share common practices. The common ground, which enables members to share knowledge quickly, seems to result in a positive growth of knowledge management in the organization. Mr. N did not think the fact that he needed to adjust to the tradition was torture, but a sort of learning. He agreed that it was the tradition which bridged the individual capabilities with the organizational daily activities.

It seems to us that the bureaucratic system may not necessarily result in a sluggish learning environment. One of the important keys to direct individuals' behavior is the common value of the organization. Both of the cases demonstrate different ways through which the leader manages the common value and directs the development of the organization. Having a positive common value with a little competitive pressure may motivate public servants' learning.

### **C. Building an appropriate environment to cultivate knowledge networks**

The common value cannot be completed in itself. A value system in an organization is established by people's disseminating particular values, no matter whether or not the system is built consciously (Mr. J's case) or unconsciously (Mr. W's case). The networks, including formal and informal, become a useful resource on which members rely to deliver, to discuss and to create the common value.

In terms of communities of practice, Wenger's idea of sharing knowledge indicates that good communities of practice are groups that have well-knit networks. Wenger suggests that knowledge can be shared and developed in the community, which means that there are well-organized structures to share knowledge and there are also mechanisms to digest information. Ardichvili, Page, and Wentling (2003) also argue that the Knowledge Network System in Caterpillar provides its communities of practice with experts to integrate knowledge into the organization. Because it has tight networks and appropriate sup-

porting mechanisms, knowledge in the community can be managed well without disorder. Because of these developing networks, established knowledge can be shared easily without any obstacles.

Mr. J understood the importance of knowledge networks, so he tried to cultivate informal communities to support his “learning organization”. This idea echoes some scholars' suggestions about building communities of practice within a formal organization. However, in both cases, the experiences of having informal networks in an organization are very different. Although Mr. J's group had well-planned informal meetings so that people in the department could sort out problems fast by way of their weekly meetings, most interviewees did not agree with Mr. J's dominant leading. People in the environment were disciplined and bound by the criteria. They had learnt what the organization wanted them to learn. In order to deal with tasks, public servants in the environment developed their own networks and sharpened particular expertise. All the developments were well managed by the common value. The common value was manipulated by the leader.

By contrast, Mr. W's actively participating in activities and his friendly attitudes to colleagues seem to improve the relationship between supervisor and employee. People in the environment were also disciplined and encouraged by the group dynamics. The group dynamics created varied chances of formal and informal interactions to cultivate individuals' learning. However, the common value and even the manager cannot manage the developments, because the common value was not built by the manager but by the interactions derived from people's daily life activities. The leader participated in these activities and was also influenced by the common value.

Although both of the cases represent different group dynamics, people in the groups interact with their tasks, their colleagues, and the environment where they work, so that formal and informal networks are established. The function of networks seems to make knowledge sharing more possible. Some knowledge networks are constructed deliberately, others unconsciously. It seems to us that the networks in Mr. J's group were supported by the organization and they were so official that members might think that they were dealing with official tasks rather than communicating for themselves. However, it seemed just rigid enough to form the common value through which members' behaviors in the group were well directed. Mr. W's method made members feel that they were in the same boat. The network in Mr. W's case was formal but soft, which also allowed participants to form their common value and to construct their own learning in a common effort.

## D. Why can the common value work?

According to the above analysis, it seems that the common value in the organization is so crucial that members in the environment are affected by it. The common value triggers individuals' learning and also direct orientations of learning. However, why can the common value work? It seems to be something to do with the responses derived from interactions.

Each group has its own background, which leads to addressing the specific power of a group dynamic. For instance, the common value in Mr. J's group is distinguished. It provides members with clear criteria by which people in the group are able to identify their positions so as to adjust themselves to the group identity (Mr. L, Mr. K & Mr. R). Both Mr. L and Mr. R agreed that the criteria of evaluation were clear and members in the organization also knew how to achieve it. Mr. K suggested that in order to gain a good appraisal, individuals in the organization needed to keep disciplining themselves all the time to fit the criteria. On the other hand, the focus of Mr. W's case is on members' participation. Ms. Q suggested that it was the desire to keep up that encouraged her to keep moving, while Ms. O did not allow herself to fall behind the team. This seems to echo what Mr. N referred to as "*You might be behind one or two persons in the group, yet you could not fall behind your team*". It seems to us that both the common value in Mr. J's group and the tradition in Mr. W's case share a similar function through which members' actions in the both organizations are passively motivated. Because the tradition and the common value directed members' actions in the organization, the individual couldn't help adopting accepted ways to deal with things in order to fit organizational criteria and to survive in the organization. For the purpose of not being treated as an outsider, the individual tried to merge him or herself into the environment and not to fall behind the team. In other words, it was the desire to be accepted which triggered members' learning. In the fields of communities of practice and social networks, scholars such as Wenger (1998), Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) also discuss the individual's identification within a community network. People who have a desire to become members of the group will try their best to fit the group's criteria which derived from common values or particular traditions. The process of gaining group acceptance means a lot in terms of constructing a knowledge community. Not only may people learn professional knowledge through the process, but they can also know themselves more by way of identifying the differences between themselves and others.

The idea of not falling behind the team implies that people in the environment make comparisons with others. The gap between members' actual performance and that ex-

pected of them triggers possibilities of learning. In some cases of this study, the reason for people making efforts to learn is not that they would like to achieve a higher position but that they want to keep themselves progressing to avoid being behind. According to Abrams and Hogg (1999: 253), *“people have a fundamental need to feel certain about their world and their place within it – subjective certainty renders existence meaningful and thus gives one confidence about how to behave, and what to expect from the physical and social environment within which one finds oneself”*. In order to have control over their work, members in the groups make comparisons to check their cognition against physical and social reality to reduce uncertainty. In Mr. J's organization, people make comparisons between their actual performance and the established criteria, while people in Mr. W's team compare themselves with other colleagues. People strive for the certainty that is subjectively important to understand their positions in the organization by way of making comparisons (Kruglanski & Mayseless, 1990).

In order to cope with the stress derived from uncertainty, individuals try their best to perform as well as other members do. On one hand, they compare themselves with others so that particular learning actions are consciously or unconsciously triggered. On the other hand, during the process of resolving uncertainties individuals make comparisons between the new information and their established knowledge and try to integrate the new insights into their original knowledge structure. Pursuing group acceptance and making comparisons contribute to each other. In order to be recognized by the group, individuals identify differences between themselves and other members. Through making comparisons, people can then identify their positions in the organization. These mutual interactions do not necessarily close the gaps between the “self” and the acceptable “self”, but make people understand more about themselves and their views of the world.

In order to be accepted by the common value or the tradition, the concept of interpersonal network is also crucial. Not only may individuals adopt interpersonal networks to explore the “tradition”, the “common value” and particular criteria, but they also use the networks to gain resources including help, know-how and advice. Some scholars, such as Obstfeld (2002), Parker, Cross and Walsh (2001), believe that networking interpersonal relationships may create possibilities for the emergence of a ‘virtuous cycle’ of knowing. Obstfeld (2002) points out that interpersonal networks help individuals to obtain know-how quickly. Ms. R suggests that the fastest way to learn things is to ask experienced colleagues. *“It is very important if you can always keep in touch with colleagues, for they may help you a lot when you need help”* (Ms. R). When tasks are assigned, members gain chances to communicate with others. The more frequent the com-

munications are, the more strengthened the common value in the organization may become. Ms. O said, “*Ms. P was the person whom I always asked, when I needed help. I could usually get the answer from her. I hope that I can also help her in return one day*”. Through networking the interpersonal relations, the tradition (or the common value) of helping others seems to be strengthened and even more imbedded than before. The interpersonal network also helps individuals to gain know-how quickly. In Mr. J’s organization, he actually used interpersonal networks and marketing skills to sell his ideas. For example, Mr. J made a “Hero” to promote his ideas by way of interpersonal networks. Because the “Hero” had a good relationship with other colleagues, everything that happened to him was so visible that stories about the hero could be disseminated successfully. It is the strong interpersonal networks which make particular ideas pass quickly, so that the common value and the tradition can also be strengthened.

It seems to me that not only can information be disseminated fast through interpersonal networks, but also the interactions derived from the process of establishing the common value also strengthen interpersonal networks. It is these interpersonal networks that bring different knowledge domains together to create new understandings. It is also the process of networking that strengthens the common value to keep varied interactions developing.

Social exchange is generally regarded as one of the motivations by which interpersonal networks and relations are established, and this is also a theory that may be applied to interpret most social interactions. On one hand, a community of practice allows members to exchange their advice, help or knowledge, so that members can acquire solutions to sort out specific problems (Ardichvili, Page & Wentling, 2003: 65). On the other hand, varied exchanges that are regulated by common values provide members and the organization with abundant resources so that learning and knowing in the organization are developed (Araujo, 1998). In Mr. J’s organization, Mr. M. lent a hand to his colleagues, because he expected to gain some help in the future. Mr. K. and Mr. L. helped each other because they share similar suffering under Mr. J’s strict control. Under this sort of control, employees’ performance was effective, but the atmosphere of helping others seemed to be based on exchange. However, it is not always true that people will bring their personal motivation of exchange to interacting with others. Unlike the atmosphere in Mr. J’s group, most employees in Mr. W’s group were, according to Mr. W, Mr. N and Ms. O, affected by the tradition and were used to helping their colleagues. It seems that there is strong power which encourages the individual to give to and receive from his or her peers’ contributions. Dixon (1997) and Drucker (1999) highlight the importance of the

circumstances favorable to knowledge-exchanging and suggest that it may be necessary to merge routines and cultural norms into current organizational tasks to strengthen the binding glue of knowledge sharing. Engaging in exchanges, not only may individuals identify the gaps within their own knowledge, other colleagues' resources, and organizational common values, but also they strengthen interpersonal networks.

These interactions enable us to trace the reasons why people's learning is triggered, continuing or is stopped. Within the circumstances, people deliberately or unconsciously try new things, participate in activities or advance particular opinions and values, in order to gain group acceptance or engage in exchanges. Based on these interactions, an organizational culture and value system is gradually constructed and modified. Being accepted by the group and engaging in exchanges with others become stepping stones by which individuals in organizations are motivated to join group activities. Common values in an organization provide members with criteria to compare themselves with others, so that people may reflect on their established knowledge when they try to merge their individual system into the common values. During the process of gaining group acceptance, individuals interact with their colleagues and the environment so that their formal and informal networks are gradually established. Dealing with networks, people share their insights with each other. In some cases, this sort of exchange also explains how knowledge develops in a group.

Situations such as the above indicate four elements of constructing a knowledge community: gaining group acceptance, making comparisons, establishing networks and engaging in exchanges. Gaining group acceptance is a motivation triggering interactions. Making comparisons enables individuals to reflect on their experiences so as to enable them to acquire new understandings within these circumstances. Networks facilitate knowledge sharing and also reinforce some influences from interactions. The concept of exchange implies the power of the market, which affects the development of knowledge creation and sharing.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The cases that have been introduced in this study indicate that public servants' interactions may affect knowledge sharing and creation because of three keys: the leadership, the common value and the environment to cultivate knowledge networks. Discussing how each of the keys influences knowledge interactions, we have especially pointed out that forming a common value for the public sector is crucial, because it may trigger public

servants' conscious and unconscious learning.

The common value cannot be completed in itself, it needs responses derived from interactions to make it crucial. These responses include gaining the group's acceptance, making comparisons, establishing interpersonal networks and engaging in exchanges. Through these interactions, individuals gain new understandings not only to improve their professional knowledge, but also to comprehend the meaning of the world. In this situation, knowledge creation is a by-product of comprehending, while it is also the foundation and the result of one's daily sense-making activities.

This research indicates that a sluggish learning environment such as the public sector in Taiwan is not really hopeless in terms of learning. The process of employees' daily life interactions still implies the potential to break the power hierarchy of the bureaucracy so as to facilitate members' learning of organizational knowledge.

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# 公務人員學習與行爲改變之研究 —從社會互動角度

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## 《摘要》

一個官僚色彩濃厚的公部門組織經常被人詬病為效率不彰，然而研究者主張即使被認為是怠散的公部門組織環境，仍然能夠培養出有用的學習。本研究目的在探索公務人員與同事互動、與環境互動的學習因素，並將之重新概念化。這樣的論點主要築基於個人學習仰賴社會過程，而互動過程中參與者的相互投入與實務分享乃是啟動學習的契機。本研究指出公部門組織還是能激發出其各自獨特的學習，此發現對於其他類型組織的學習機制將有他山之石的效果。

本研究採用質性研究法，並以實務社群概念作為理論基礎。受訪公務人員計有 42 名，為中部辦公室員工，接受半結構式訪談。

本研究認為學習是一種社會實踐，隨著人際網絡以及特定的日常活動而逐漸被激發出來。研究者因此歸納出三大關鍵，包括領導、共同價值，以及學習網絡。而此三大關鍵以共同價值為核心，其與社會交換、人際網絡、相互比較、團隊認同交互運作，而使個人被捲入整個學習的歷程。

[關鍵詞]：實務社群、公務人員、非正式學習

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