Title: The Utility and Use of Ethnographic Principles and Techniques in Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) Learning From Experience (LFE) Practice.

Lessons learned in DE&S has a long history, the first LFE paper was produced by Jordan, Lee and Causley in 1988. That paper initiated a workstream that primarily directed that the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA), which was the precursor organisation the DE&S, put processes in place in order that mistakes in project management practice would be identified through Post Project Evaluation, and those mistakes would not be repeated. This paper describes firstly the history of LFE, its cycle of being started and then due to organisational changes, being stopped and then describes two primary organisational learning domains in DE&S, the project domain and the organisational domain. It then shows how ‘lessons’ are captured from data that is derived from real life business practice, using grounded theory as an approach within ‘brown paper and post-it notes’ workshops. The paper then shows how the ‘lesson’ as data is then analysed using a grounded theory approach where the data is clustered into themes, such as finance, commercial or project management. Those themes are then placed onto an impact/control matrix which will also be presented in order to assign ownership for taking management action and ownership of the lesson. Then if appropriate the themes that are identified from the data are acted on.

The paper takes the form of a teaching workshop, describing how to run a workshop. This material is used within DE&S to enable staff to learn how to facilitate a ‘Lessons Learned’ workshop in a consistent way in order to gain consistent lessons outcomes using a data driven, Issue Impact Lesson mantra.

The paper then critiques the utility and effectiveness of both these workshops and the current LFE practice and process, making suggestions for a greater and more explicit use of wider ethnographic techniques in order to improve the effectiveness of both the data gathering and analysis process, but also of the implementation of those lessons as process improvements within DE&S.

The paper shows the utility of ethnography and ethnographic principle and of taking a rigorous academic approach to data and its analysis in a government organisation in order to take an evidence based approach to decision making as opposed to an opinion based, or pre-conceived ideas approach.

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