

LET'S REALLY LEARN FROM PROJECTS

A Study on Learning
in Project-Based Organizations

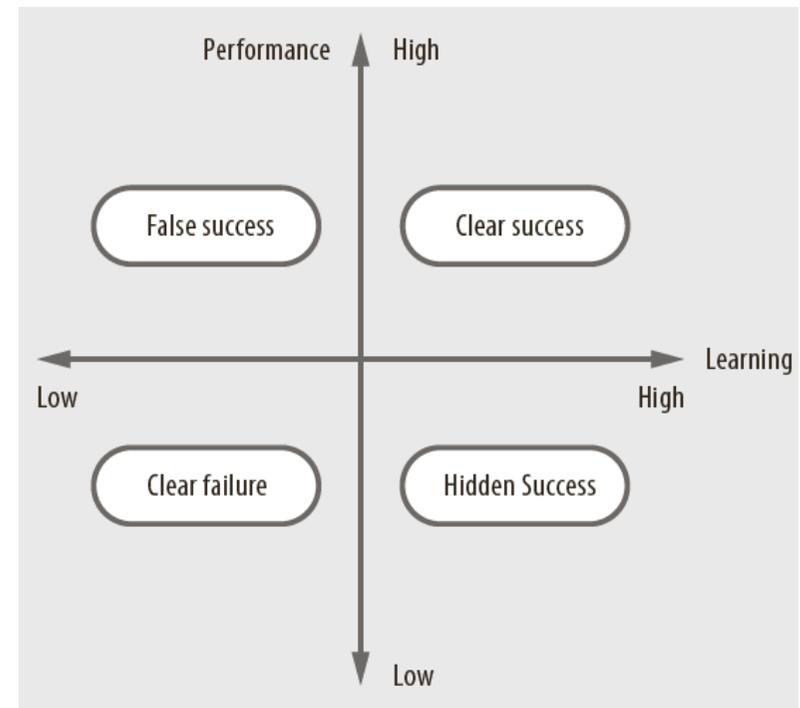
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Benefits of learning

- Learning is correlated with improved performance (Love et al. 2003).
- Avoid making the same mistakes (Brady and Davies 2004)
- Avoid the risk of experimentation (Shaw 2017).
- Organizational success (Cooke-Davies 2002)
- Improve project management processes (van Donk and Riezebos 2005).
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In reality

Our problem is not the mistakes we make during projects. Mistakes are useful because they help us to be aware of our shortcomings. The problem is the sense of the déjà vu we feel during each new project when we make more or less the same mistakes. It is frustrating to everyone.

What can we do?

Making sense of the problem

It's complicated...

Why it is complicated?

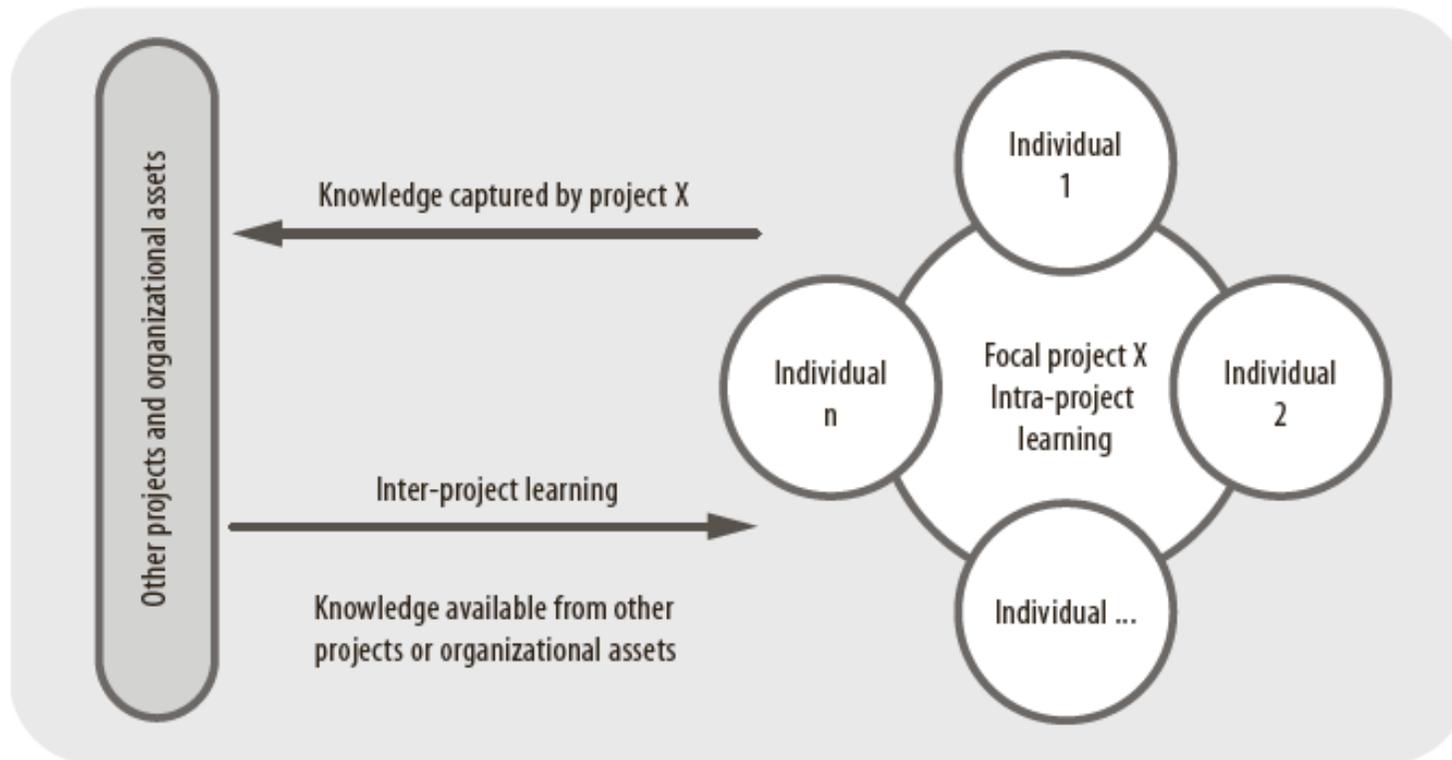
- Project execution model, is not made for learning
 - schedule pressure,
 - focus on delivery,
 - milestones,
 - contracts,
 - earned value and the likes.
 - Many individuals, units and even sub-cultures each with their own mental model of what works and what does not work.
 - Integration of knowledge is *demanding*
 - Project teams lives in splendid isolation due to autonomous nature of projects.
- What is needed in order to break the isolation, connect and integrate individuals' knowledge base for the common benefit?
 - Recognition that meeting performance goals requires attention to learning practices

Why it is complicated?

- Project nature: (every project is an island) duration, comprise a mix of people/organizational units, have unique goals, carried out within certain limits and specific context.
 - Relevance of experience to other projects
 - Availability of knowledge (cross organizational, temporary, use of consultants)
 - Lots of tacit procedural knowledge
 - Knowledge undergoes several transformations on its journey from the sender to the receiver
 - The sender: experimenting, reflect/think/discuss/confront, write/rewrite
 - The receiver: read-listen / discusses / adapt/ replicate

Encapsulating the problems

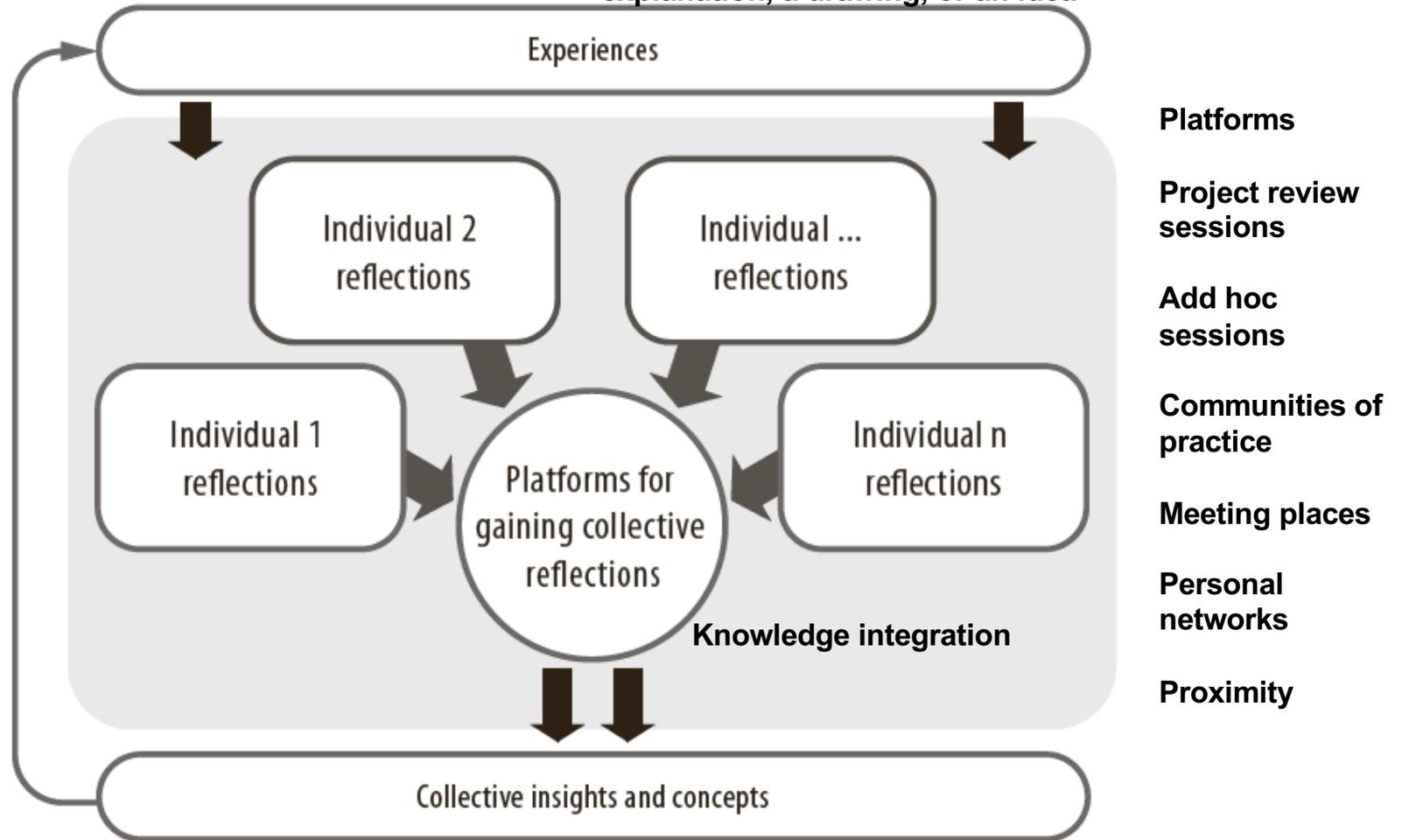
Figure 5 Framework of the study: Inter and Intra-project learning



Learning within projects (intra-project learning)
 Learning between projects (inter-project learning)

Learning within projects (intra-project learning)

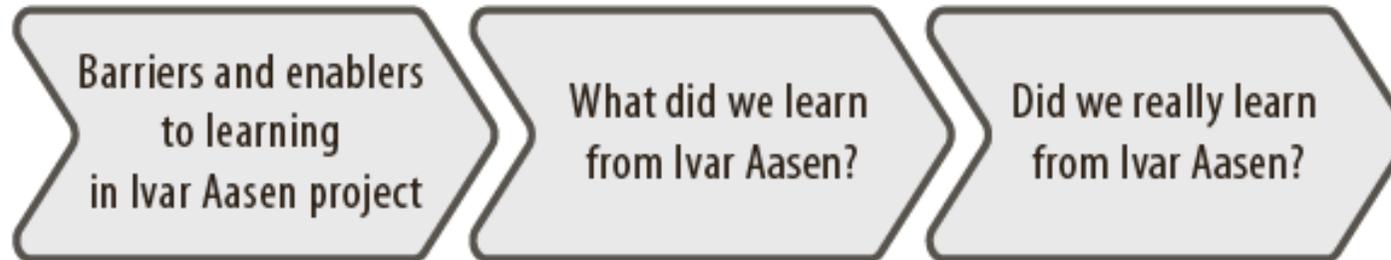
Figure 7 Intra-project learning summarized **New knowledge: a lesson learned, a story, an explanation, a drawing, or an idea**



Enablers of learning: (Connecting and integrating the individuals' knowledge base)

- Case study: Ivar Aasen
- The Ivar Aasen project is a NOK 28 billion oilfield development project that was successfully completed on December 2016. The project was structurally complex, with over 120 suppliers and vendors, and in total more than 5000 people contributed to the project.
- Ivar Aasen project is characterized by:
 - Fresh operator organization / (blank sheet organization)
 - Organizational success was dependent on project success
 - Continuous changes
 - Extreme time pressure,
 - Multiplicity of stakeholders
 - Tremendous financial impact
 - Market uncertainty
- These characteristics render the project particularly interesting for study purposes and as a source of insights.

Study stages



Objective

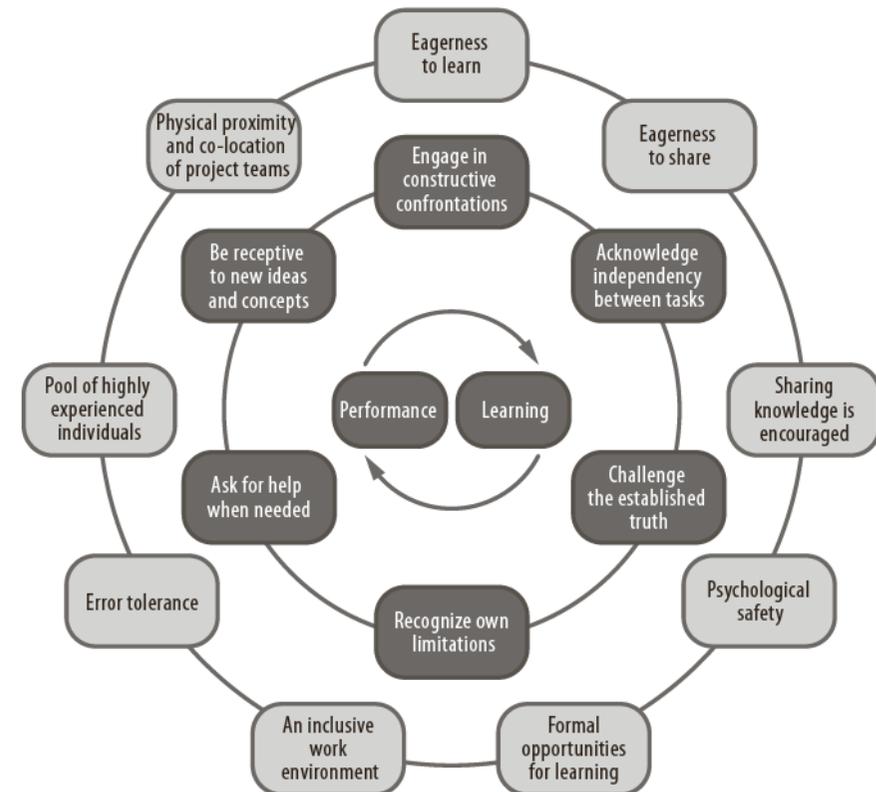
- Identification and elaboration of the means and attitudes needed to enable learning in complex and demanding project environment.

Findings

Connecting and integrating individual's knowledge requires far more attention to **attitudes** than a focus on establishing more procedures, routines, reports, project review sessions, systems or building knowledge repositories.

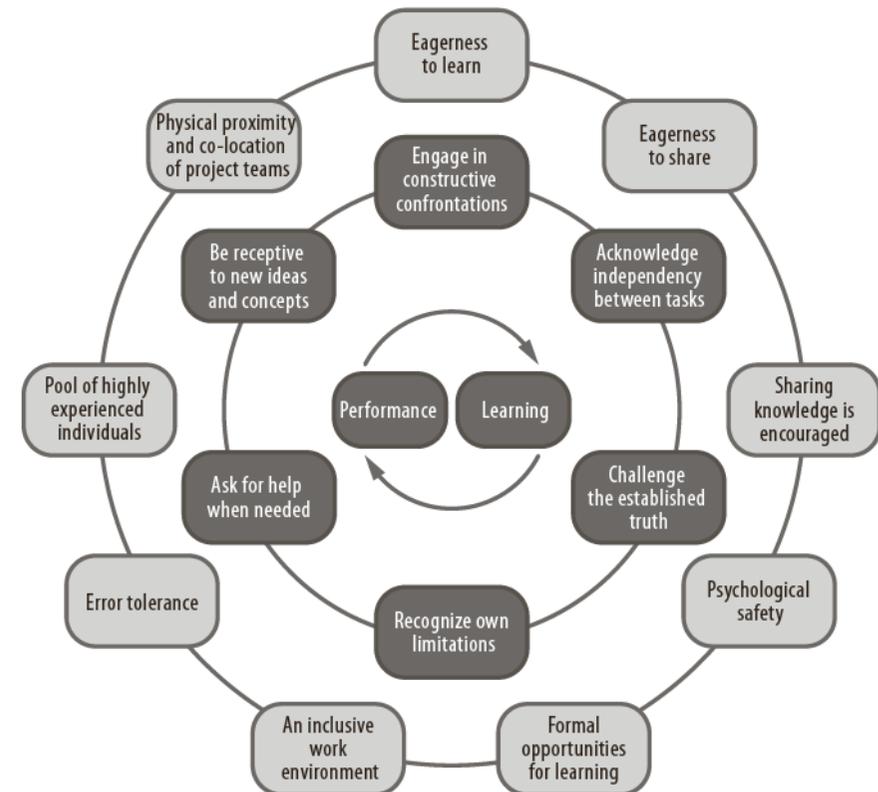
Findings Attitudes

- Encourage team members to recognize interdependency between their tasks
- Encourage team members to recognize their own limitations
- Encourage individuals and teams to seek and ask for help
- Encourage individuals to be open and receptive to new ideas and new concepts
- Encourage individuals to engage in discussions (constructive confrontations)
- Encourage individuals to challenge the established truths, norms and the rules



Findings (Contextual conditions)

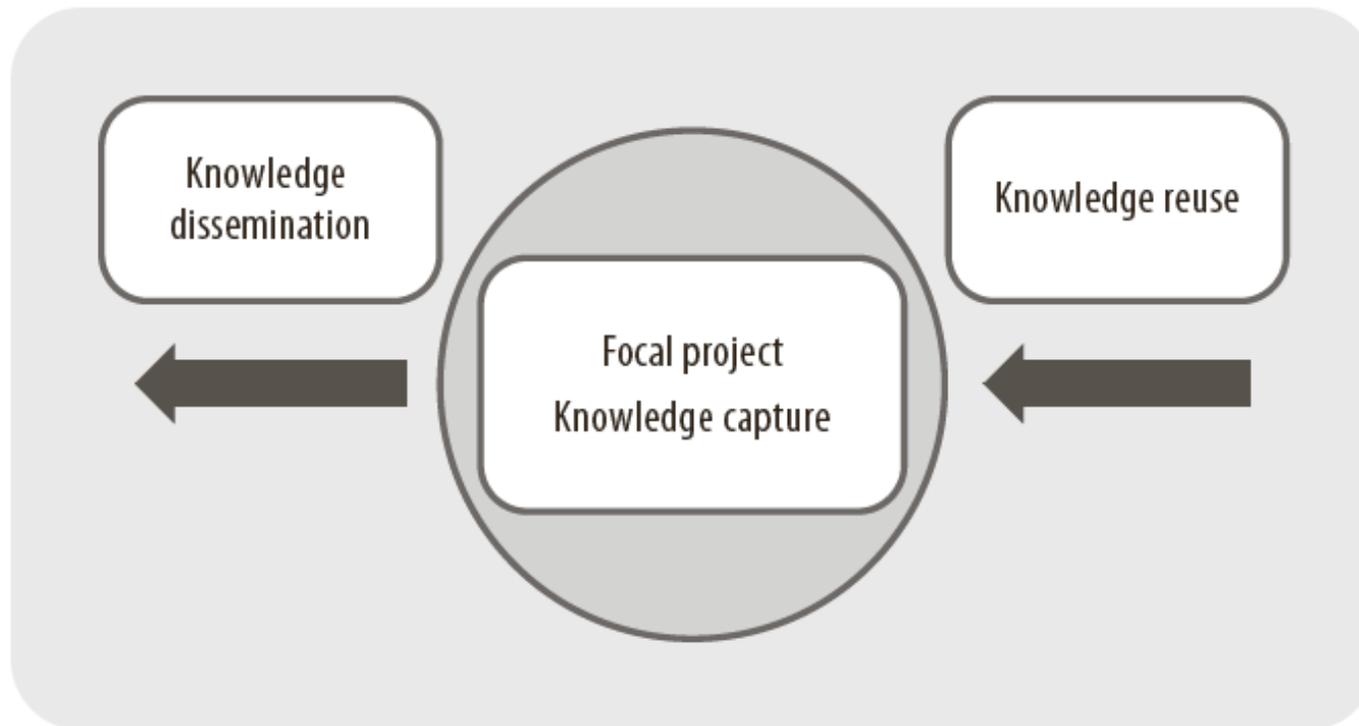
- Eagerness to learn and share
- Psychological safety ensured
- Provision formal opportunities for learning for individuals
- Established inclusive work environment
- Error tolerance
- Pool of highly experienced individuals
- Physical proximity and co-location of project teams.



Findings cont.

- Improving performance of the focal project depends on the project management ability to integrate and connect individuals' knowledge base.
- Improved performance contribute to more appreciation to the role of learning in projects

Inter-project learning



Inter-project learning is about making the knowledge gained from the focal project available for the next project and reusing effectively the available knowledge in the organization

To be Continued.