

COOKING UP A STORM: FLAVOURING ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING WITH POETRY.

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ABSTRACT

Day dawns through pink skies
Travelling curiosity
Savour the flavour[†]

The central discussion in this paper is that poetry can be used to create a fusion between tangible, rational and explicit knowledge and tacit or implicit knowledge, providing opportunities to access new organizational knowledge and understandings and learning. The paper takes the form of a case study of 60 middle and senior U.K. based public services managers from one local authority who worked together to explore how research into their experiences might help address some problematic issues facing public services and develop ideas about best practice. The challenge was to generate new knowledge about the organization and how members of the organization were responding to the current set of challenges facing them. Poetry in the form of haiku was used as a creative research method to access tacit knowledge, which, when combined with explicit knowledge and understanding, led to new insights and organizational learning.

1 INTRODUCTION

Fusion is described as the process of joining two or more things together to form a single entity. In terms of cooking, fusion is the term used for food, which incorporates both Eastern and Western cuisine. This approach requires experimentation with ingredients that may not have been combined before and creates a potential for exciting new dishes with unusual combinations of flavour and presentation. Great chefs such as Raymond Blanc, Gordon Ramsay, Nigel Slater, Heston Blumenthal etc. stress the importance of quality and freshness of ingredients, together with knowledge and skill in understanding how to combine flavours successfully.

In addition, my father, who knew a lot about these things, used to say, “You can’t cook well without a love of food and a passion for the process”. There is always a risk of disappointment in this sort of experimentation if the combinations don’t quite work, the mood isn’t right, or others with different tastes regard the final dish as messing up the original ingredients.

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It is in this spirit of experimentation, excitement and discovery that this paper – ‘Cooking up a Storm’ is proposed. The fusion introduced here relates to working with poetry, a personal passion, arguing that it can provide emotional richness, texture and flavoured nuance to organizational knowledge and learning. In particular, this paper provides an opportunity to further examine the claim that poetry when used as a creative research method, combined with processes of collaborative inquiry, facilitates new organizational knowledge, understanding and learning (Grisoni, forthcoming, Grisoni 2006). The place of poetry in organizational life has been acknowledged in a recent special edition of *Management Decision* (James and Weir, 2006), which focused explicitly on the relations between poetry, organization, emotions, management and enterprise. The particular form of haiku poetry selected for the focus of this paper provides a specific Eastern influence, to the fusion.

The case study for the paper is based on a group of 60 middle and senior managers from a single local authority. The context facing public services in the UK is one of continual change in the delivery of services driven centrally by the Labour government’s modernization agenda. Central to this strategy is the rhetoric of renewal through partnership and inclusion. For senior managers working in partnership on new initiatives in the management and delivery of public services, which need to demonstrate added value, is a significant challenge. The search for ways to account for the value of services provided has resulted in the rise of evidence-based management techniques. This has established a ‘performativity’ culture, which relies on explicit knowledge to identify tangible outputs that measure the added value of the work of these organizations. (Allee 2000, 2003). This ‘performativity’ culture is underpinned by a view of knowledge as cognitive acquisition - a commodity, as opposed to an alternative view, which argues that knowledge is socially constructed (Spender 1996). Von Krogh, G., Ichijo, J., Nonaka, I., Ichijo, K. (2000) highlight the limits of an evidence-based approach, and brings into sharper focus the value of accessing tacit organizational knowledge and intangible outputs (Sveiby 1997) as a way of influencing organizational effectiveness.

The discussion that unfolds in this paper concerns epistemological and ontological differences between approaches to explicit and tacit knowledge. The focus on tacit knowledge is taken forward into a discussion of the contribution of poetry as a creative research method to organizational knowledge creation and organizational learning. The integration of organizational knowledge and organizational learning follows the ‘social process perspective’ put forward by Chiva and Alegre (2005) and frames the description of the poetic process within a workshop intervention and the presentation and discussion of the haiku. Concluding remarks relate to the positive flavouring brought to the inclusion of haiku poetry to the fusion between organizational knowledge (including tacit and explicit knowledge) and organizational learning.

2 EXPLICIT AND TACIT ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

In a ‘knowledge society’ how organizations process knowledge and how they create new knowledge to meet the many competing challenges of organizational life are held as key issues. (Drucker 1968, Bell 1973, Toffler 1990). Knowledge creation is viewed as a source of competitive advantage (Von Krogh et al 2000). Nonaka (1994), drawing on Polanyi (1962), has proposed a model for managing the dynamic aspects of organizational knowledge which contains the central theme that organizational knowledge is created through a continuous dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge. Explicit or codified

knowledge refers to knowledge that is transmittable in formal, systematic language. Tacit knowledge has a personal quality, which makes it hard to formalize and communicate and is embedded in action, commitment and involvement in a specific context. The relation of explicit to tacit knowledge and explanations of conversion of one form to the other is problematic and has been criticized (Tsoukas 2003).

The standpoint adopted for understanding the nature of knowledge is critical to gaining clarity in relation to how knowledge is discussed and claims for the generation of new knowledge. This issue is explored fully in Chia (2003) as a dichotomy where he describes differences between ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ epistemological and ontological underpinnings that characterize the creation of knowledge. In western approaches knowledge is produced through the process of observation, reflection and reasoning, systematically articulated in written form through the medium of language. As a result, reasoning and knowing the cause of a thing is privileged over action. Documented knowledge precedes and therefore predetermines action and performance hence the focus on explicit knowledge. Eastern approaches contain an ontological commitment to flux and transformation, (this is an epistemological reversal to the western approach), where indirect, suggestive and symbolic meaning is privileged over literal meaning. Immediate engagement with tasks and lengthy apprenticeship through sustained experimental practice develops proficiency into mastery. The concept of ‘Being-in-the-world’ is important where:

“Such a view would privilege a directness of experiencing and it is this unmediated directness that encapsulates what we mean here by the broad term ‘eastern’.” (Chia, 2003:956)

The focus from this perspective concerns tacit forms of knowledge and the contribution tacit knowledge makes to organizational learning. Tsoukas (2003) develops further clarity into the nature of tacit knowledge arguing that it has been greatly misunderstood in that the essential ‘ineffability’ of tacit knowledge has been ignored. When viewed from this perspective tacit knowledge cannot be captured, translated, or converted in the way Nonaka (1994) originally proposed, but only displayed and manifested in what we do. He argues that new knowledge comes about not when the tacit becomes explicit, but when our skilled performance is punctuated in new ways through social interaction. Tsoukas argues that we need to focus instead on how we draw each other's attention to things - instructive forms of talk help us to re-orientate ourselves to how we relate to others and the world around us, thus enabling us to talk and act differently. Distinctions, which we had previously not noticed, and features, which had previously escaped our attention, may be brought forward. We cannot make tacit knowledge operational, but we can find new ways of talking, fresh forms of interacting and novel ways of distinguishing and connecting.

Sveiby (1997) makes an additional contribution here and describes four characteristics of knowledge, which include: tacit, action-oriented, supported by rules and constantly changing. All knowledge is either tacit or located in tacit knowledge which means it is rooted in practice and once assimilated, is usually taken for granted. Tacit knowledge is likened to a tool with a focus on a particular object or phenomenon without consciously thinking about the background knowledge brought from experience, enacted, for example, in something like ‘bicycling on the moon’ (Collins 2007). Knowledge from this perspective is action-oriented, meaning that there is a continuous processing and categorising of perceptions into existing theories, methods, feelings, values and skills, for future use. The

rules that support knowledge enable people to act skillfully without thinking and automatically filter all new knowledge through the rules already acquired. These rules are generally unknown to the person observing them since:

“skills retain an element of opacity and unspecificity; they cannot be fully accounted for in terms of their particulars, since their practitioners do not ordinarily know what those particulars are” (Tsoukas, 2005:145).

Developing the discussion further, Collins (2007) distinguishes two forms of tacit knowledge each with different causes and consequences. The first kind he calls ‘somatic-limit tacit knowledge’ has to do with the cognitive limitations of the human brain and body, the second ‘collective tacit knowledge’ he argues is ontological – being concerned with its location in the social collectivity. He argues that both forms are rarely distinguished because they are experienced and acquired in the same way; nevertheless, they have different causes and different consequences. The concept of ‘collective tacit knowledge’ is of most relevance to this paper in that it relates to the cultural, relational and situated nature of learning:

“This knowledge has to be known tacitly, because it is located in human collectivities and, therefore can never be the property of any one individual. The simplest way to see this is to note the changes in content of the knowledge belonging to communities is beyond the control of the individuals within the communities.” (Collins, 2007:260)

This proposition supports the view that knowledge is constantly changing. As soon as it is made explicit it becomes static and what is articulated is always less than what is tacitly known. Accessing tacit knowledge held by individuals’ lies at the heart of the knowledge creation process and finding ways to verbalise and share tacit knowledge is an important first step on the way to new organizational knowledge. In addition, Chia (2003) argues that the current preoccupation with explicit knowledge-creation and management may need to be balanced with an equally important emphasis on direct experimental action as a valuable source of meaning innovation and enhanced performance (2003:959). Effective knowledge creation depends on establishing an enabling context where emerging relationships can be fostered.

To this end, haiku poetry introduced as a creative form of expression within a workshop intervention, provides the conditions for new ways of working which surface emotions and learning through insights provoked by organizational experiences and thereby access tacit knowledge.

3 USING POETRY TO ACCESS TACIT ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND CONTRIBUTE TO ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING.

The power of poetry lies in its ability to focus not only on events but also on behavioral and affective elements embedded in the episode. Poetry has been used to reveal hidden aspects of organizational life where the essence of an event or episode opens up an opportunity for greater understanding as well as the potential for change in individuals and organizations (Grisoni and Kirk 2006). These tensions between organizational life and what Windle (2006) terms the ‘fuller life’ include:

“basic human yearnings – emotional needs and wider family, social and intellectual aspirations and relationships” (Windle, 2006:457).

Whyte’s (1994) exposition to turn to poetry extends Windle’s concept of the need to embrace the ‘fuller life’. Whyte does not offer easy answers on the way home life and work life, career and creativity, soul and seniority can be bought together. He argues that we live in a time when idealism is out of fashion, where there is an absence of compassion and a failing of imagination and that the experience the human condition can be more fully explored in poetry. Whyte speaks of, “the dangerous truth that is poetry’s special gift” (1994:xv).

Poetry can encapsulate the art of the unsayable and a good poem seems to occupy a space beyond mere words especially when it is used to explore the full range of life’s experience. A poem that can be completely understood or paraphrased is more like versified or emotive prose. According to Grisham:

“Poetry is by its nature a compressed communication of emotions and concepts, that the listener must decompress and interpret. By participating in the process the listener must complete portions of the message, and thereby internalize, absorb, and reconstruct the message.” (Grisham 2006:492).

The emphasis here is on understanding as it appears from within an individual’s own experience which on sharing becomes an example of organizational learning. Poems are also therefore an act of discovery, and require a degree of effort to write and to be understood. Poetry can cut through superficiality and help us to see the world differently. Kostera’s (1997) work develops the contribution of poetry to research the relationship between feelings and organizing. She argues that poetry, as an approach is well suited for expressing the ambivalence and volatility of the managerial experience. Its strength is that it does not ‘flatten out’ the domains of organizing or ‘translate them into rationality’ (1997:343). As a result she proposes that poetry can be used to understand more about organizational realities. Her aim in using poetry was to learn about the subversive and subjective experience of talking about management topics. She argues that poetry is particularly powerful in that it does not avoid passion and it is disruptive because it is inconclusive.

The conclusion to be drawn from this section is that organizational life is complex and multilayered as it involves acknowledgement of emotions and relationships. Choosing to work with poetry in the research process to explore these issues is a powerful medium as poetry captures both the richness of language and harnesses reflective processes that encourage expression of the complexity of organizational experience.

Introducing Haiku

The particular form of poetry selected for the purposes of this piece of research was haiku. This form was purposely chosen for its structure and brevity, which results in a focused and concentrated capturing of the essence of a situation. Haiku originated in Japan, around the 15th century. It is a specific form of poetry containing seventeen syllables, in three phrases of five-seven-five syllables. It usually presents a moment of heightened awareness in simple

imagery, originally using an image from nature. Traditional haiku required a long period of learning, practise and maturity. The mastery of this form exemplifies Chia’s (2003) discussion relating to eastern forms of knowledge creation and relates closely to approaches taken by many western artists and poets. Maxence Fermine (2001) in a short novel entitled ‘Snow’ captures the essence of haiku beautifully drawing on the work of one of the earliest Haiku writers, Matsuo Basho.

Frozen in the night
The water-jar cracks
Wakes me
(Matsuo Basho 1644-1694)

‘What is poetry?’ asked the monk.
‘It’s a mystery’, answered Yuko.

One morning a water jar cracks. A drop of poetry forms in the mind. Its beauty touches the soul. It is the moment of saying what cannot be said, of making a journey without taking a step. It is the moment of becoming a poet. Do not break the silence. Just watch and write. A few words. Seventeen syllables. A haiku. (Fermine, 2001:14)

The haiku form has been developed and experimented with over the years with different fashions so that there is no single way that dictates what is necessarily best. We may encounter literature that contains haiku that we admire and even try to model our own works on – but there are many variations, styles and techniques that can be used. Contemporary haiku is often regarded as an "instant" form of brief verse that can be written by anyone from schoolchildren to professionals. Many present-day writers have dropped traditional standards, emphasizing personal freedom and pursuing ongoing exploration in both form and subject matter. Due to the various views and practices today, it is impossible to single out any current style or format or subject matter as definitive haiku. The haiku is divided into two parts and often the last line is generally given a twist, a bit of satire and punch. The term has broadened greatly in modern usage to cover nearly any short verse. According to Pio:

“It is a way of calling the spirit of the thing named, with the eternal and momentary juxtaposed. It is considered the poetry of ahness, because it makes you say, ‘Aha, now I see it!’. ” (Pio 2004:16)

Here is another example, this time of an organizational haiku:

Three things are certain:
Death, taxes, and lost data.
Guess which has occurred.
(David Dixon)

4 CREATING A POETIC PROCESS

Working from a social-process perspective (Chiva and Alegre 2005) knowledge is viewed as a creative process, socially constructed (rather than something that people possess) and

learning is understood as the development of situated identities a way of ‘being in the world’ (Chia 2003, Gherardi 2000). Within this approach learning and knowing arise from social interactions and dialogue where sense-making (Weick 1991) is an interpretive process and emphasis is placed on the importance of exploring multiple meanings as they arise from the processes of engaging in working together on an issue. Ambiguities arise in both the historical situated character of the research focus as well as the constructed and interpreted nature of the data. A collaborative inquiry (Reason 2001) was adopted and is particularly suited to a research inquiry where the aim was to problematise the familiar and taken for granted.

The action research cycle (plan action, act thoughtfully, research action, and evaluate action) is combined with reflective and interpretive practice in a collaborative process working with participants as co-researchers. In this way the stories, recreated in poetic form, fits well with a social-process perspective to organizational knowledge and learning. The workshop approach developed for this research project provides an opportunity to explore organizational issues in a way that echoes Elkjaer’s (2004) call for the development of knowledge and experience by inquiry, ‘to work with situations and events as units of analysis in order to understand individuals and organizations as being mutually formed and forming’ (2004:419).

Facilitating a workshop designed to share experiences and create new energy for working with the challenges of the public services agenda was a priority for the co-designers as well as attempting to develop a contribution to the fusion of organizational knowledge and learning. The workshop could be described as an example of ‘researched action’ a particular form of action inquiry, planned as research rather than solely an improvement to practice where:

‘the main aim is to increase our knowledge about a problem or issue, so the action may be primarily an intervention designed to illuminate a research question’ (Tripp, 1996:17).

Two cycles of inquiry are simultaneously in operation, one in the field of practice and the other in the field of research. It was important to design a workshop that was both consistent with the principles of action research and was innovative in that it would experiment with processes which encouraged an interpretive frame creating the potential for developing new ways of thinking about and working with change issues.

A collaborative inquiry workshop for 60 middle and senior managers and staff in a UK county council and partner organizations was set up to think about contemporary developments in public services.

It is important to mention at this point that the organization concerned had been recently inspected and was officially rated as a successful ‘performing’ authority. The aim of the workshop was to provide an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to talk to each other in an exploratory way to see how current research and thinking might help address the problematic change issues they were facing and which were typical of many UK public service organizations.

In the early stages of planning the workshop there was a pull to design something that fitted existing ways of thinking about new policy implementation with an overriding concern that the workshop would offer value in terms of tangible outputs and plans. There was a concern to meet the client’s needs in a way that would be deemed acceptable to her organization. At the same time there was a need to introduce new ways of thinking and working that might break through some of the established patterns and behaviours in order to access new possibilities for working with change. This would help re-energise and re-vitalise participants who were characterized as exhausted by policy and initiative overload. Thus we wanted to develop an inquiry with what Reason (2001) has identified as a second aim for participatory research; working at a deeper level encouraging participants through the processes of constructing and using their own knowledge to “see through” the ways in which the establishment monopolizes the production and use of knowledge for the benefit of only some of its members.

A focus for the workshop involved the application of knowledge to work and an exploration of where that knowledge comes from. Von Krogh et al (2000:4) in the discussion of how managers need to support knowledge creation rather than controlling it identified three sets of related activities:

- Facilitating relationships and conversations
- Sharing local knowledge across an organization and across partnerships.
- Establishing a deeper sense of new emotional knowledge and care in organizational relationships.

The process which captures each of these activities was developed (see Appendix 1). In small groups of three, participants in the workshop were invited to tell each other stories of significant events from their recent organizational experiences. Listeners noted key words from these stories and together the small group developed short poems using the haiku poetic form. It is important to note that participants were encouraged to play with words rather than worry about whether the poems they created were good examples of poetry. (Mastery only comes through repeated practice!) The process of creating poems was new to most participants and this created anxiety in the group by removing tried and tested methods of exploring work related issues. In this way all were new to the process and needed reassuring – the element of being surprised by what was created was important as the new way of working and resulted in new conversations, understandings and insights. The structure for a haiku was useful in that it channeled anxiety into the need to count syllables and ensure that the haiku created met the numeric criteria set. The poems were then read back to the whole group and participants invited to capture the thoughts, feelings that emerged in the hearing and understanding of the new knowledge presented to them. Through this process of reflection a revised sense of the issues and priorities held in the organization were discovered and action plans identified.

5 EVERYONE HAS A STORY: PRESENTATION OF HAIKU.

The haiku developed by the managers can be grouped in many different ways; collectively they may be read as a *renga*[†]. Examples from the 25 haiku that were jointly created are

[†] Renga is a poem several poets create cooperatively and comprise a number (often up to 100) haiku.

shown below allocated to groupings according to Sveiby's (1997) categories for identifying intangible assets – in this way further light can be shed on the tacit and explicit knowledge pervading this particular organization. Intangible assets can be divided into three types: employee competence, internal structures and external structures. Employee competence involves the capacity to act in a wide variety of situations to create value. Internal structures include such things as processes; ways of working, new designs or models. External structures include relationships with customers and other stakeholders, reputation and image. All of these assets are based on the relationship between tacit and explicit knowledge.

• Employee Competence

The group acknowledged the extent of personal learning. Personal learning was identified as relating to periods of study on professional courses, achieving clarity around roles and different working patterns arising from an absence from work (e.g. maternity leave) or as a result of organisational restructuring. There were positive endings and a sense of achievement for many although there were other examples that were more ambiguous where particular challenges had been posed. Many participants referred to their own and other's enhanced competence, arising from acquisition of information, skills and experience and exploration of shared values. The importance of this enhanced competence described by Sveiby (2001) is the capacity to act in a variety of situations in order to add value to the organisation.

Son's nursery trial
Dumped apprehensive parents
No-cry, relief.

Out of date, away
briefing shouting discussion,
back now – enjoy!

Member of team
Develop role, career
Encouraged, valued.

This last example of a ‘one-line’ haiku illustrates a less positive outcome:

Meeting outside, plan next week, time, unsure, beyond skills, used, upset.

It is interesting to note in the examples above how the boundary between being in the organization and what goes on outside is referred to. Participants were surprised that they felt able to talk about the emotions involved, for example, in dropping their son at nursery – it's hard to tell whether its relief that the parents didn't cry or the child. In the second one the contrast between being out of the organisation for a period and out of date sits next to enjoyment of being back - the noise of discussion and shouting acts as a bridge to the two experiences. The third haiku catches the sense of being valued as a member of the team this was after a period of absence.

In all three cases the issue of being away from the organising and returning is a common theme with different details and a range of emotional expression. A focus on competence,

being up to date, coping well and performing pervades all four examples with the last one expressing more negative emotions.

• **Internal structures: Team Level and Organisational Issues**

The second grouping seemed to cohere around team level change issues where there were difficulties but achievement of a shared task and sense of working together seemed to be a focus. Pride in organizational achievement was identified as an important outcome of collaborative efforts and many noticed the positive ends in the last line of the haiku and use of positive words throughout the collected haiku. Losses and gains were evident in many of the examples perhaps pointing to ambivalence in relation to the pressures participants were experiencing in their efforts to make the organization successful which sits in contrast to the positive achievements and external validation the organization had recently realised. Internal structures referred to the complexity of change, restructuring and technological developments and finance is specifically mentioned as a disabling factor. Emotions and relationships figure significantly, both positively and negatively – feeling proud for others as a result of a positive outcome begs the question of how those expressing the pride might be feeling. As one participant commented, ‘Sometimes what’s not said but implied opens up new avenues for discussion’. The juxtaposition of brief words and phrases seemed to bring this hidden dimension to the fore.

Project completed
Feeling proud for others
Outcome positive

Understanding loss
Care to build relationships
Finance frustrates

Change risk move frightened
Thought safe, hidden fear revealed
Moved, sparkling sunshine

December, budgets
High expectations, service
No money, disappointments.

Power-mongers gathered
Eloquent, compliments, coup
Proud: top partnership

• **External Client Focus**

Examples of external structures, which were identified in the poems, include development of relationships and networks and reputation.

Fog pulling together
Positive partnership passion
Long way to go

Ongoing concern – always
People in need, a start
Towards positive change!

Gentleman, complaint, made safe
Confused, concerned, angry, resolved
Not what it seemed.

Strangers making time
Trust the process, insights
Carers listening

The sense of long term commitment to the client group is expressed in several of these haiku – ‘long way to go’, ‘a start’, ‘ongoing concern’, ‘carers listening’ which also indicate that whilst working in partnership and commitment to the clients is present there is still more to be done. This was problematic for participants as when combined with the frustrations of lack of finance and emotional exhaustion from change initiatives what participants wanted was some sense of scale and scope and ultimately sets of priorities on which to focus their depleted energy. This became an important action point from the workshop. At the same time there was an appreciation of what had been achieved and sense of mutual congratulation that spread through the group in a way that the news of the recent successful government inspection had failed to achieve. Participants resolved to maintain levels of appreciation of effort and acknowledgement of hard work and the emotional labour involved in working through multiple sets of change initiatives.

6 DISCUSSION

The integration of organizational knowledge and organizational learning from a social-process perspective (Chiva and Alegre 2005) is central to the discussion relating to the contribution of poetry to the fusion. The workshop was characterized by sharing stories that created an energized atmosphere where participants engaged in dialogue to explore problems and experiences. This shared process of sensemaking is an important part of knowledge generation and exchange between all participants. How this contributes to individual competence will depend on many things, such as the existing frames of reference of that individual and their experience and the context within which they work. This will also determine their capacity to act.

Key areas of knowing include knowledge of local community needs, of policy, of local infrastructure and context. The value of the diversity within the partnership is that it provides a range of people with different information, skills and experience to help the transition of information to knowledge. Perhaps an important role played by poetry is that of enabling knowledge creation for the benefit of the individuals who participate, their organizations and society. Linking this to Polanyi’s (1962) theory of how tacit knowing requires three dimensions: a focal target, subsidiary particulars and the knower or individual who links the two and who brings with them their experience of “the real world with all its messiness, imperfection and complexity”, which must be mediated through human judgment (Tsoukas 2005:126). For Polanyi, (1962) all knowledge is personal knowledge.

While Polanyi does not elaborate on the emotional aspects of how we encounter new information and transform it into knowledge, he allows for the possibility that it is more than a cognitive process.

As emphasised by Allee (2003), attempts to assign monetary value or other hard measures to intangible assets miss the point. If such a value could be attached to them, they would no longer be intangible. The point is not their current value or their ability to reflect past performance, but their potential for future value creation or in the context of public service, future contribution to the public good. In maximising the value of knowledge as an intangible asset, the main strategy must be one of enabling rather than controlling (Sveiby 2001). Such a strategy is aimed towards improving what Sveiby refers to, as people's capacity-to-act, either inside or outside the organization. All organizations are located in and interact with external communities where they act as organizational nodes in larger social systems, what Drucker refers to as a ‘society of organizations’ (Allee 2000, Drucker 1992), implying an interdependency between organizations and society.

At this point it seems possible to move to the dimension of organizational learning and understand it in terms that Clegg et al (2005) articulate:

“Here learning is not something that is done to organizations, nor is it something that an organization does; rather learning and organizing are seen as mutually constitutive and unstable, yet pragmatic constructs that might enable a dynamic appreciation of organizational life.” (2005:150)

Discussions in groups following the reading of all the haiku instigated a range of thoughts and ideas about the organisation. As a result of the workshop there was a realisation that everyone had a story to tell of their experiences and that the organisation is made up of living, breathing, feeling individuals who all have a voice and a view. This felt like a new realisation for many, brought into focus by the combination of using a form that requires brevity which one participant described as ‘cutting to the chase’. The significance of working on an unfamiliar task (creating haiku) helped to disturb established patterns of thinking, explaining and understanding, this allowed a different perspective to enter the interactions leading to ‘truly effective and insightful action’ (Chia 2003:956). Standing back to review the poems also gave a different perspective on the organisation to many enabling the celebration of success and as one participant commented, ‘Playfulness is possible in a contained way’. These comments seem to confirm that the conditions necessary for enabling new knowledge creation (Von Krogh et al 2000) had been met. Through a process of poetry creation conversations sharing local knowledge, understandings and experiences were facilitated and new relationships established. Stacey’s (2003) complexity view of organisational learning provides a useful explanation from which the reflective comments made by participants can be understood:

“(L)earning is the emerging transformation of inseparable individual and collective identities. Learning occurs in shifts in meaning and it is simultaneously individual and social. Learning is the activity of interdependent people and can only be understood in terms of self

organising communicative interaction and power relating in which identities are potentially transformed.” (2003:8)

It was noticed by the group that the use of poetry enabled a surfacing and discussion of emotions and emotional engagement with the organisation in a new and different - more accessible way. Clegg et al (2005) draws on work by Antonacopoulou and Gabriel (2001:48) to illustrate that organisational learning is full of a range of emotions involving an “inner world of passion, ambivalence and contradiction which may be experienced as repressed, expressed or controlled, diffused or diluted, but never actually obliterated” (2005:152). Elkjaer (2005) speaks of the development of experience and knowledge by inquiry and reflection, emphasising the place of intuition and emotion in the process. Anxiety arising from organisational change and the uncertainty challenging a previously held sense of security was identified by participants and discussed as an issue. Alongside this was a sense of hope for the organisation and pride in the achievements gained so far. A deeper sense of new emotional knowledge and care emerged from the poems highlighting a need to tend to how people treated each other. The process created was one of encouraging creativity and playfulness and would appear to have contributed to both knowledge creation and organisational learning.

7 CONCLUSION

The proposition in this paper was that the medium of poetry would provide a way of making tacit knowledge about current organizational challenges and experiences explicit and facilitate new organisational knowledge. An enabling process was adopted for the workshop and resulted in the development of new understandings about the organization and its priorities. The general level of appreciation of individual and organizational effort that was being made to demonstrate added value in order to meet performativity targets was high. As a consequence it was possible to identify a range of intangible values and assets, which supplement the explicit or tangible knowledge used to measure organizational performance and gain an understanding of an approach to organizational learning that emphasizes interdependence.

Working with poetry holds the potential to capture emotion and express the un-sayable with passion, truth and intensity. The choice about when to use poetry relates to whether the topic or issue to be researched requires a reflective space that taps into emotions and uncovers layers of thought and feelings. The haiku demonstrate an ability to explore the dark side of experience as well as the light and juxtapose the rational realm with the emotional. Creative forms of research, such as this, invite active engagement, where those who engage in the process become co-creators of meaning. Configuring and reconfiguring words in different ways, in poetic forms, enables us to understand and feel the world differently.

The fusion appears to have merit: working with haiku provides a zest to the organizational knowledge and learning debates. It provides a supportive underpinning to discussions relating to emotions, which form an important part of the organizational learning literature, surfacing and facilitating dialogue about these issues in a way that other processes may not access. Further research inquiry along these lines is recommended in order to develop this creative approach and its contribution to understandings and interpretations of organizational experiences, learning and knowledge.

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Appendix 1 Description of poetic process.

Poetic Process:

- 1. Individually think of a recent critical incident in relation to your work experience. (5 mins)**

These are things that have happened that you have experienced a reaction to e.g. are pleased about, concerned or confused about, have left you upset or angry.

- 2. In twos/threes select one incident for exploration. (10 mins)**

Presenter tells others in the group what happened and how it left you feeling.

Listeners note 10 –20 ‘key’ words used by the presenter, writing each word on a separate piece of paper.

- 3. Working together form the words into a ‘Haiku’. (30 mins)**

Capture the experience in three short lines (**5-7-5 syllables**) using the principles of **comparison, contrast, or association** between the words/images.

- 4. Presentation of poems to the group. (15 mins)**

Discuss and make a note of understandings about self, role, the situation and the organisation that arise from the poems.

- 5. In whole group identify key learning points, surprises, underlying messages, new thoughts about the organisation (30 mins)**