

A Hypothetical Model of Interactive Career Development in Communities of Practice: Extracting the Essence of Practice from the Danish “Efterskole”

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Abstract: In recent years, the social environment surrounding us has been changing rapidly due to globalization and advancement in technology. In addition, Career Self-Reliance has become an increasingly important aspect in an individual's career development, especially in these unprecedented times due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Related to this Career Self-Reliance, the importance of the communities of practice (hereinafter, called “CoPs”) has recently been gaining attention. CoPs are defined as “A group of people who have the interest or passion in something and who learn how to do it better by interacting regularly”. However, previous studies have not yet elucidated the details of the process by which participation in a CoP promotes individual career development. In addition, most of the previous research have been based on samples of working individuals and in organizations so there has been little accumulation of studies targeting young people. Therefore, this research aims to answer the following two questions based on a case study of a CoP called “Efterskole” with a sample group of young people especially in Denmark: (1) To clarify the impact of participation in CoPs on career development in youths. (2) To clarify the process of having the above mentioned impacts and construct a hypothetical model of interactive career development in communities of practice for young people. We conducted interviews and observational surveys in three Efterskoles during 2016-2017 and analysed the interview data using “Steps for Coding and Theorization”. As regards research question (1), there were three main impacts of participation in CoPs on young people's career development: (a) enhancing social skills, (b) acquisition of a sense of role fulfilment in a community and (c) obtaining opportunities for exploring new perspectives for career and further learning. In particular, (a) enhancing social skills was an effect not noted in previous studies targeting adults. As regards research question (2), a hypothetical model of the interaction process that brings about the three impacts was developed. In addition, it is revealed that the three impacts are brought about by single-loop learning and double-loop learning within the community.

Keywords: career development, communities of practice, Denmark, Efterskole, adolescence

Introduction

In recent years, the social environment surrounding us has been changing rapidly due to globalization and advancement in the technology. In addition, Career Self-Reliance will become increasingly important aspect in an individual's career development, especially in these unprecedented times that we are experiencing due to the covid-9 pandemic.

Related to this Career Self-Reliance, the importance of the communities of practice (hereinafter, called “CoPs”) has recently been gaining attention. CoPs are defined as “A group of people who has the interest or passion in something and who learn how to do it better by interacting regularly (Wenger et al., 2002)”. The concept of CoP has expanded from learning research to management research through major studies such as Brown & Duguid (1991), Wenger (1998), Wenger et al. (2002) and others. From there, it spread to research on the effects on career development as one of the perspectives on what outcomes a community of practice leads to in the context of management studies.

For instance, Arthur et al. (2005), who proposed boundaryless careers, point out that from the perspective of boundary less careers, support for an individual's career from colleagues, mentors, and supervisors within the same organization is not sufficient. Therefore, they pay attention to CoPs as communities that support individuals' careers by bringing in outsiders beyond the restrictive boundaries of the organization. Hall (1996), who advocated a protean career, also asserted that, in terms of new careers, there is limited value to be gained by developing growth-enhancing relationships in one organisation or domain. Therefore, he points out that growth-enhancing relationships outside work (GROWs; growth-enhancing relationships outside work) are an increasingly crucial opportunity for

career development and states that the real value of GROWs is the change they bring to self-perception and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, Tremblay (2003) noted that the new careers of the future, described as 'nomadic' or 'discontinuous', will trigger a rethinking of our vision of organisations and organisational theory, and that the new careers will base careers on informal communities. As mentioned above, it is predicted that, in place of ever-changing corporate and other organisations, communities of practice will become the focus of individual career development and career development support.

In Japan, research on CoPs and individual career development has been accumulating in the last few years. A series of studies by Araki (2007, 2009) is a major contribution to the relevant research area in Japan on this subject. Araki (2007, 2009) proposed suitable CoPs to enhance adult careers self-reliance, through questionnaires and interview surveys with Japanese businesspersons. However, Morita (2021) showed as a result of literature reviews that previous studies have not yet elucidated the details of the process by which participation in a CoP promotes individual career development. In addition, she stated that most of the previous research have been based on samples of working individuals and in organizations so that there has been little accumulation of studies targeted young people. Therefore, this research aims to the following two points based on a case study of a CoP called “Efterskole” attended traditionally by young people especially in Denmark:

- To clarify the impact of participation in CoPs on career development on youths
- To clarify the process of having the abovementioned impacts and constructs a hypothetical model of interactive career development in communities of practice for young people.

Theoretical basis

In this study, we use the model of social interaction (Kikuchi & Horike, 1994) in the field of social psychology as a theoretical framework (Figure 1). This model was developed based on the knowledge accumulated in the process of social skill research. According to Kikuchi & Horike (1994), the skills required for social interaction consist of encoding, decoding and control skills. They stated in his study that decoding skills control the process of operating the “person-situation schema” involved in the perception of the situation by selecting and discarding various cues provided by others and situations. The encoding skills govern the process of expressing the results of interpretation as actions. Based on the information processing theory in cognitive psychology, the flow of processing from decoding to encoding can be regarded as an automatic process. On the other hand, there is another processing flow in which cues such as novelty, similarity, attractiveness, and vigilance trigger the activation of a “control schema”. When this schema is activated, the encoding of emotions and needs are blocked, and the encoding is involved after the process. This study tried to reveal the process by which participation in CoPs promotes career development of youth by applying Kikuchi & Horike (1994)'s model to the interaction between newcomers and experienced members there.

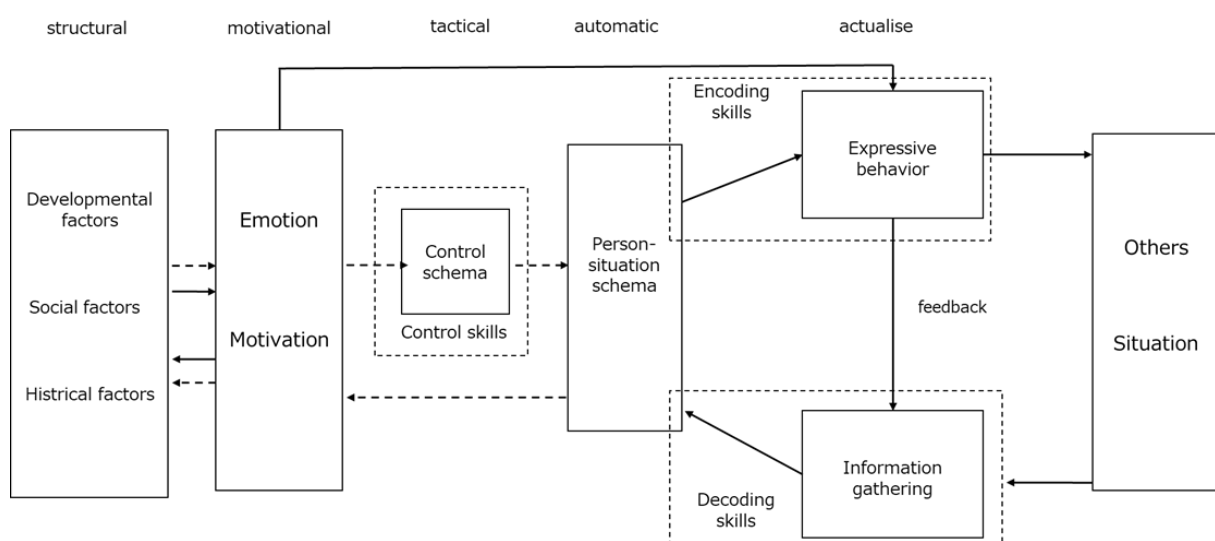


Figure 1. Model of Social Interaction (Kikuchi & Horike, 1994)

Methodology

As mentioned earlier, the research site for this study is Efterskole, a traditional community of practice attended by Danish youth. This section provides an overview of Eftaskole and why Eftaskole is a suitable site for this research. According to Fedorenko (2019), the first Efterskole was set up in 1851 by a Danish teacher Kold (1816–1870) who exploited the pedagogical ideas of the famous Danish poet and priest Grundtvig (1783– 1872) – a founder of the Danish folk high schools. Although Grundtvig considered the folk high school to be only for adults, Kold Kold believed that such education was also needed for young people under the age of 18. Inherited from this idea of Kold, Efterskole still offers a unique education for young people, aged 14-18. Danaher (n.d.) states that one of the characteristics of Efterskole is a residential institution. Although it is in many ways similar to the concept of boarding school, it has rather clear distinctions. The Danish Efterskole is based on the idea of combining academic learning with that of general ‘life-learning’ as a preparatory tool for all aspects of life, as well as facilitating an understanding of ‘the individual in a community’. The teacher is responsible for both teaching and supervision outside of school hours. This means that the teachers and students are together all day from the time the students wake up until they go to bed. This often opens up for a close, personal and nonformal relationship between students and teachers (Morita, 2018). Efterskoleforeningen (2015) states that the structured interaction which born because of the style of Efterskole’s a residential institution creates frameworks and trust to ensure that life at an Efterskole does not end in chaos and anarchy. Efterskoleforeningen (2015) points out another interaction, the educational interaction in Efterskole as follows:

At an efterskole teachers and students are part of a number of different social practices that constantly have to be worked with. Teachers guide students through conversation, by asking and encouraging them to consider both professional and practical contexts. The educational interaction at these schools unfolds in many different contexts and frameworks – both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers are not just teaching, they are also didactically present conducting serious and meaningful “learning” with knowledge, expertise and understanding from various viewpoints both inside and outside of the classroom. Through this educational interaction, pupils come to see that their lessons make sense; furthermore, they see a value in their lessons that they have not encountered before, which in turn creates authority and freedom.

As discussed above, community-based Efterskole, where continuous interaction between teachers and students or between students contributes to the acquisition of knowledge about their interests and to their personal development, is considered a suitable research site for this study.

We conducted interviews and observational surveys in three Efterskoles during 2016-2017. The interviewees are listed Table1. During the interviews, field notes were kept and the interviews were recorded on IC recorder with the permission of the interviewees. All interviewees approved that these contents may be published as academic conference, documents and papers.

Table 1

Data Collection Procedure			
Date	Institution	Interviewees (Title at that time)	Details of Observations
2016 November 14	Efterskole Association	Head of Communication	—
2017 September 14	Efterskole Association	Head of Communication Guidance consultant	—
September 18	Flakkebjerg Efterskole	Principal	- Observation "Global Line" class and lunch - Informal interviews with two teachers - Informal conversation with 3 students and Tour of the school
September 19	Haslev Idrætsefterskole	Principal Teacher§ Danish, English, crossfit and gymnastics§ Student 1 Student 2	- Observation during morning gathering and lunch - Tour of the school by the principal - Observation of dance and gymnastics classes
September 20-21	Midtsjællands Efterskole	Principal Student 3 Student 4 Teacher§ Danish, English, and Drama§ Teacher§ Religion, philosophy, drama, theater and English§	- Tour of the school by the principal - Observation of dinner and evening activities - Observation of morning walk, breakfast, and morning gathering - Observation of classes
September 21	Efterskole Association	Head of Communication Guidance consultant	—

We analyzed the interview data using “Steps for Coding and Theorization: SCAT (Otani, 2019)”. SCAT is a method of qualitative data analysis developed by a Japanese researcher. SCAT was developed drawing upon the analytical procedure of the grounded theory approach (GTA), and is consists of the main features of GTA, generative coding and theorization. The analytical procedure of SCAT consists of 4 steps in coding as follows;

- <1> Noteworthy words or phrases from the text
- <2> paraphrases of <1>
- <3> concepts from out of the text that account for <2>
- <4> themes, constructs in considerations of context

SCAT is also known for its analysis with all collected texts. It is said that the procedures of SCAT are clear and explicit and be suitable for analysis of small-scale data. Therefore, we believe that SCAT is appropriate for this study.

Results and Discussion

(1) The impact of participation in CoPs on career development on youths

The results indicated that there were three main impacts of participation in CoPs on young people's career development: (a) enhancing social skills, (b) acquisition of sense of role fulfillment in a community and (c) obtaining opportunities for exploring new perspectives for career and further learning. Two of these, “(b) acquisition of sense of role fulfillment in a community” and “(c) obtaining opportunities for exploring new perspectives for career and further learning” were shown to have similar effects in studies of adults. However, for “(a) enhancing social skills” was a unique effect found only for youth. The contrasting impact on adults from Araki (2021) and young people from this research is shown in Figure 2.

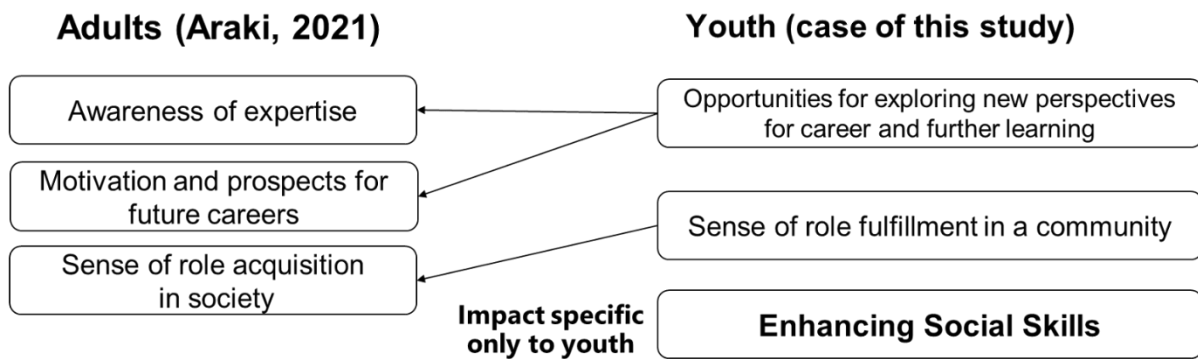


Figure 2. The impact of participation in CoPs on career development compared to adults and young people

Rani (2019) states that there are three social skills methods for developing social skills. They are Role playing, Modelling and Using Cooperative Learning Strategies. According to Rani (2019), role playing is a technique for engaging student interest and providing opportunities for practice and feedback. Modelling means that teachers can teach social skills by the behaviour they model. She also explains that using cooperative learning strategies that research has shown that cooperative learning techniques are effective for improving both academic and social skills of children and adolescents. The learning environment and pedagogy at Efterskole incorporate elements of the three methods identified by Rani (2019) and can be considered a suitable environment in which students can enhance their social skills.

(2) The process of having the abovementioned impacts and the hypothetical model of interactive career development in communities of practice for young people

The hypothetical model was constructed by applying Horike and Kikuchi's model to the concepts related to career development extracted from the SCAT analysis and making descriptive inferences (Figure 3).

The right half of this model can be explained using the “information processing model (hereafter referred to as IPM)” in cognitive psychology. IPM is a theoretical framework of how humans think, reason, and learn, views human cognitive functioning as analogous to the operation of a computer (Slate & Charlesworth, 1988) and maintain that consciousness is a centralized processor that we use when processing novel or complex stimuli (Hardcastle, 1995). The “input information” in IPM is considered to be three feedbacks in our model which are [Self-assessment], [Verbal response of others] and [Non-verbal response of others]. In IPM, the result is expressed as “output information”. In our model, it is expressed as [Role performance in a community] which means works assigned to each student for boarding life, such as cooking and cleaning and [Pursuit of interests] which is learning of elective courses called Line. The “schema” in cognitive psychology means a pattern when a person perceives reality or experience. Person recognizes, interprets and reacts to reality or experience guided by this pattern. Person-Situation Schema in our model is also considered as the systematic knowledge about the behavior of others in the situation surrounding the students, and the students recognize, interpret, and react based on it. It is thought that the action is repeated.

The concept we should focus on in this section is [Rich opportunities for self-disclosure]. Self-disclosure is the act of revealing details about ourselves to others and self-disclosure develops human relationships (Masaviru, 2016). Efterskole's boarding system provides students with frequent opportunities for self-disclosure. This is due to the situation that students do not only interact with other people while at school but also are constantly exposed to interactions with other people outside of school hours. When you make a self-disclosure, others around you recognize it and give a “self-disclosure return”. (In our model, this applies to the three feedback.) The higher the frequency of self-disclosure, the more self-disclosure returns, or feedback, from others. And this leads to the discovery or awareness of their own weaknesses and challenges that the students were previously unaware of.

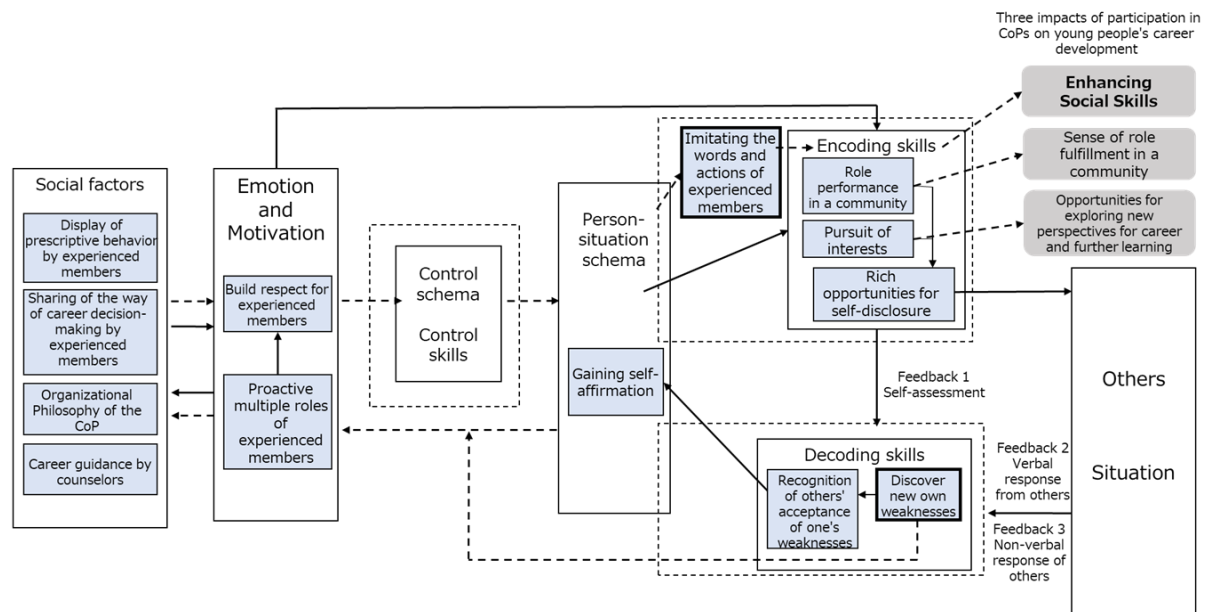


Figure 3. The hypothetical model of interactive career development in communities of practice for young people

Next, when students perceive that others have been accepting of their weaknesses, they gain a sense of self-affirmation. On the other hand, when others are not receptive to their weaknesses, students seek solutions by withholding the expression of their feelings and desires and by engaging in adjustment processing. The right half of our model can be thought of as “Single-loop learning” from the students' perspective, as it is an automatically repeated process. On the other hand, the left half of our model, which activates the control schema, is a “Double-loop learning” process for the students. Double-loop learning is a concept advocated by Argyris (1977). Single Loop Learning is about making adjustments to correct a mistake or a problem. It is focused on doing the things right. Causality might be observed but typically is not addressed. Double Loop Learning is identifying and understanding causality and then taking action to fix the problem. It is about doing the right things.

Experienced members, such as teachers and counselors, and the [Organizational philosophy of the community of practice] played an important role in this double-loop learning. They serve to present social norms to the students. In addition, the [Proactive multiple roles of experienced members] in which teachers took on various roles, not only as teachers, but also as temporary parents, big brother, big sister and role models of life, encouraged the referential behavior of young people. [Proactive multiple roles of experienced members] fosters respect for teachers and counselors among students, who in turn refer to and emulate their words and behavior in their own values and behavior change.

Prior research has suggested that double-loop learning occurs only when individuals participate in a community of practice beyond the formal organization. Therefore, the finding that double-loop learning can occur within a single community of practice is worth noting.

Conclusions

This research aims to the following two points based on a case study of a CoP called “Efterskole” attended traditionally by young people especially in Denmark:

1. To clarify the impact of participation in CoPs on career development on youths
2. To clarify the process of having the abovementioned impacts and constructs a hypothetical model of interactive career development in communities of practice for young people.

Regarding research question 1, it was found that participation in CoPs has three impacts on young people's career development: (a) enhancing social skills, (b) acquisition of sense of role fulfillment in a community and (c) obtaining opportunities for exploring new perspectives for career and further

learning. Two of these, “(b) acquisition of sense of role fulfilment in a community” and “(c) obtaining opportunities for exploring new perspectives for career and further learning” were shown to have similar effects in studies of adults. However, for “(a) enhancing social skills” was a unique effect found only for youth.

As regards research question 2, a hypothetical model of the interaction process that brings about the three impacts was developed. In addition, it is revealed that the three impacts are brought about by single-loop learning and double-loop learning within the community. [Rich opportunities for self-disclosure] was a key factor in promoting single-loop learning. On the other hand, [Proactive multiple roles of experienced members] are crucial for students to regard teachers and counselors as social norms and transform their values and behaviors in double-loop learning.

It is thought that this interactive career development model in Communities of Practice will be useful for teachers and career guidance practitioners to improve their daily activities. However, an investigating whether this hypothetical model can be applied to other communities of practice in other countries except for Denmark. It should also be included in a non-dormitory or an online community of practice.

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