

**Lave and Wenger's concept of Communities of
Practice and its contribution towards understanding
workplace learning in contemporary organisations:
a case study of organisations in the Malta Public Service**

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ABSTRACT

Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept projects learning as 'situated', occurring through and shaped by participative social interaction within CoPs, along a trajectory from legitimate peripheral participation to full participant position. Lave and Wenger advocate CoPs to be an appropriate vehicle for effective knowledge generation, re-creation and transfer.

Contemporary organisations, inundated by pressures such as globalisation, rapid technology advances and an ever-growing knowledge economy, have shaped themselves into dynamic structures, as well as are continually evolving into borderless and multinational formats. Indeed, this has brought forth the crucial need for transforming companies into learning organisations, whilst endorsing effective knowledge generation and management.

This research aims to see whether Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs is present within contemporary organisations, and to what extent this reality is relevant and helpful towards our understanding of workplace learning in contemporary organisations.

In order to achieve its aims, this study adopted a qualitative research approach, in the form of a case study involving Malta Public Service organisations, covering a wide spectrum of different and diverse service operations. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection, whereas results were mainly analysed utilising grounded theory techniques.

Research findings confirm the real presence of situated learning and CoPs. However, they expose that the CoPs concept was presented as 'too simplistic' by Lave and Wenger. Hence, this study shows how the concept should be moulded in order to reflect the evolving CoPs' formats, as well as human interaction complexities which do impact on the learning trajectory. Informed by research results, this study proposes an amended view of the CoPs concept, positing CoPs as the hub within learning organisations and acting as the ideal vehicles for nurturing expansive learning and knowledge generation and management, whilst insisting on strong leadership for the effective nurturing and operation of CoPs.

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Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Contents	iii
Chapter 1: <u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
1.1 Background to this research study	1
1.2 Research aims and questions	4
1.3 Scope and significance of this study	7
1.4 Analytical framework and methodology adopted for this study	8
1.5 Structure of thesis	8
1.6 Conclusion	10
Chapter 2: <u>LITERATURE REVIEW</u>	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Lave and Wenger's concept of Communities of Practice	12
2.3 Harnessing learning and managing knowledge	19
2.3.1 Learning, the learning organisation and managing knowledge	22
2.3.2 The reality of Communities of Practice	29
2.4 Contemporary age and emerging issues to organisations	33
2.4.1 Globalisation and contemporary organisations	34
2.4.2 MNCs/TNCs and cultural differences	36
2.5 Communities of Practice: further consideration and evolvement of concept	39
2.5.1 'Novice' and 'old timer': positioning and learning trajectories	40

2.5.2 An expansive approach to learning	46
2.5.3 Communities of Practice in 'distributed' format	48
2.5.4 Managing Cultural Differences	53
2.5.5 Communities of Practice and the need for Strong Leadership	55
2.6 The specific context of Public organisations: the Maltese setting	56
2.6.1 The distinctiveness of public service organisations	57
2.6.2 The Maltese context	59
2.7 Conclusion	62
Chapter 3: <u>METHODOLOGY</u>	64
3.1 Introduction	64
3.2 Research method and justification	65
3.3 Data source and collection	75
3.4 Ethical Considerations	86
3.5 Data Analysis and Coding	91
3.6 Conclusion	95
Chapter 4: <u>RESULTS AND DISCUSSION I</u>	
The real presence of the CoPs concept	97
Chapter 5: <u>RESULTS AND DISCUSSION II</u>	
The complexity of human interaction and CoPs	112
Chapter 6: <u>RESULTS AND DISCUSSION III</u>	
Proposed amendment of Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept	129

6.1 Conceptualisation evolvement of CoPs	131
6.2 The transformation of learning trajectories	149
6.3 A proposed amended view of the concept of CoPs	172
Chapter 7: <u>CONCLUSION</u>	204
7.1 Introduction	204
7.2 Reflections on the outcome of this research	206
7.3 Research Contributions	212
7.4 Scope for Future Research	214
7.5 Final thoughts and remarks	215
Appendices	
Appendix 1: List of Respondents and Jobs (categorized)	216
Appendix 2: Respondents Quota Thresholds	217
Appendix 3: Interview Questions Guide	218
Appendix 4: Raw Coding and Themes	220
Appendix 5: Refined Coding and Themes	221
Appendix 6: The quotes Notations system – explanatory note	222
Appendix 7: Informed Consent Form	223
Appendix 8: Extract from Interview Transcript – R32J1TL	224
Bibliography	226

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an introduction to this research study and is divided into six sections. The first section relates to the background for this research study. The second section presents the aims of this research study and the research questions that will be addressed in this thesis. The third section exposes the scope and significance of this study. This is followed by a short exposition of the analytical framework and methodology adopted for this study. The fifth section outlines the structure, chapter by chapter, of this thesis. The final section serves as the conclusion of this chapter.

1.1 Background to this research study

This research study will examine the contribution of Lave and Wenger's concept of Communities of Practice (CoP) towards understanding workplace learning in contemporary organisations. This thesis will conduct its research through a case study involving public service organisations, specifically within the Malta Public Service.

Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept (1991) emerged out of a rethink and paradigm shift on the existing concept of learning. Lave and Wenger project learning as something 'situated', based on the notion of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (LPP), which occurs through, and is shaped by, participation in the social practices of a community.

Indeed, CoPs are at the core of a 'learning organisation' (Snell 2002), where the entire firm's workforce is transformed into one learning community (Owenby 2002). Lave and Wenger conceptualise a CoP as "a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise" (Wenger and Snyder 2000: 139). For them, learning is a social process (Kimble and Hildreth, 2005), involving four interwoven aspects: "learning as doing (practice), learning as becoming (identity), learning as experience (meaning) and learning as belonging (community)" (Vrasidas and Zembylas 2004: 328). They regard CoPs to be an appropriate vehicle for effective knowledge creation, re-creation and transfer, where knowledge is socially constructed (McAdam and McCreedy 1999) and rooted within in a specific context (Ardichvili et al. 2006).

Organisations today are being so engulfed in such a turbulent economic environment (Nyhan et al. 2004), that they have to respond in order to be relevant and survive (Church and McMahan 1996), as well as offer the quality service that the ever demanding customers are expecting. Today one has to acknowledge that we are living in a world pressured by external forces, such as global economic shifts (McCracken and Wallace 2000) and accelerated advances in information technology (Slotte, Tynjala and Hytonen 2004). Indeed, the effect of globalisation has rendered organisations to act and "operate across space, national borders, cultural and linguistic barriers" (Joy-Matthews and Gladstone 2000: 24), where "the entire society is being transformed" (Krulis-Randa 1990: 134). Hence, this has induced contemporary organisations towards a rethink or 'renewal' of their operations

structure (Kalling 2007), a redefinition on "ways of doing things" (Lang 2001: 47) and developing learning paths (Ardichvili 2003). This is particularly so as the traditional concept of the workplace is also being constantly challenged by these global structural and technological pressures on world organisational fabric (Jones and McCann 2005). Although this speaks of developing and providing learning opportunities for skills development to the organisation's workers in order for the organisation to survive and maintain its competitive advantage, however one has to acknowledge that there also exist critical views on this aspect, claiming that skills development alone is not sufficient enough and that this does not apply to all the workforce (Keep & Mayhew 2010)

On speaking of organisations being affected and impacted upon by these issues, one has to include not only private sector companies but also public service organisations. Globalisation, rapid technological advances and the turbulent economic, social and political environment have equally affected worldwide Governments, their networking and public service organisations' delivery systems and operational structures.

This research study will adopt a qualitative approach. The research design will be in the form of a case study, involving a national public service organisation. Although there are other research studies on CoPs within a public sector environment or organisations (vide Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003; James 2004; Iaquinto et al. 2011; Holdaway 1983), this thesis will conduct its research on the Malta Public

Service (MPS) – the national and general organisation responsible for public services in Malta; incorporating within its fold a wide spectrum of organisations that are diverse and different but all aligned and directed in providing all the necessary government services to the country.

1.2 Research aims and questions

The aim of this thesis is to explore the extent of Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept's contribution towards understanding workplace learning in today's organisations. In consideration of the background presented in the preceding section, this research study will seek to examine the CoPs concept's relevance and contribution in relation to learning and knowledge generation at workplaces in contemporary organisations, whilst at the same time explore ways in which such a concept can be amended for maximising its contribution towards effective workplace learning in line with modern day pressures on organisations.

In this regard, the main theme to be addressed in this study, on a research data set involving MPS organisations, is: To what extent and in what form can Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs be relevant and helpful in our understanding of workplace learning in contemporary organisations?

The emerging research questions from this main theme include:

- To what extent are CoPs a reality and present at workplaces within contemporary organizations? Here, the thesis will address whether CoPs and the learning trajectory advocated by Lave and Wenger are indeed a reality within today's organisations. It will also explore on whether learning, as well as knowledge generation, do occur through, and are shaped by, participation in the social practices of a community, as professed so strongly in Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs.
- How does the complexity of human interaction and intervention impact on the concept of CoPs? The thesis will hence address the impact of issues that are inevitably brought about by social participation, such as disagreements, incompatibility, power play, etc., on the CoPs effectiveness within organisations
- In what way can Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs be amended, transformed and updated in order to reflect the context of contemporary organisations, as well as understanding and maximising effective learning, knowledge acquisition, generation, sustenance and re-creation within them? This question will engage this thesis in addressing several related themes, namely:

- Whether and how CoPs do exist in a framework involving simultaneous participation in multiple communities, as well as evolving in distributed formats induced by contemporary age? What can be said of related issues, such as communication tools and cultural differences, impacting on such CoPs formations?
- To what extent is the impact of the complexities of human intervention and interaction, as well as contextual factors and structure, on transforming and shaping learning trajectories within CoPs in contemporary organisations?
- Are informal learning and tacit knowledge so important, as advocated with such ferocity in Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs, that the role played by formal learning and explicit knowledge is to be discarded altogether?
- Does the knowledge generated within CoPs relate only to jobs skills or does it include other forms of knowledge?
- What is the relation of harnessing a learning organisation, managing knowledge and adopting strong leadership to fostering effective CoPs and workplace learning in contemporary organisations?

1.3 Scope and significance of this study

This thesis concerns a study on contemporary organisations within the MPS. The purpose of this study is to be able to identify in these organisations the presence, or otherwise, of CoPs as well as situated learning within and through them, including the learning process trajectory, as conceptualised and professed by Lave and Wenger. It will also seek to examine the impact of the complexity of human intervention and interaction on and within these CoPs. Furthermore, it will explore how Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept can be amended and modified in order to be formulated in line with both external and internal factors impacting on modern day organisations, as well as enhancing its positive impact on workplace learning, knowledge generation, sustenance and re-creation within them.

This study will be significant because to date no research has ever been conducted on Maltese organisations that relates to the presence of CoPs, their formations and different formats, as well as their relation to our understanding of workplace learning, knowledge generation, sustenance and re-creation. Its significance is even more so since this research study will focus only on Malta Public Service organisations, which will hopefully enable future research in this field, involving also Maltese private organisations as well as other public service organisations from different countries.

1.4 Analytical framework and methodology adopted for this study

A qualitative type of research strategy and design, framed on semi-structured interviews, will be adopted for this research study. The research will be conducted in the form of a case study involving MPS organisations. Research for this study will involve interviews with a set of MPS workers, using purposive selection in order to cover a balanced widespread mixture of skills, as well as diverse public service jobs. The main data capture area targeted by this research design will be 'the job' being performed by the worker and its attached 'workplace'. Hence, a data capture and analysis of each 'job' will be conducted in cases where workers may have performed different jobs at different workplaces along their public service careers. The interviewing research fieldwork will be designed to produce a data set of different and diverse public service 'jobs', categorised in a balanced matrix of high and low skilled, as well as clerical and technical/specialized grades, in order to enable results to be rich in content as regards the objectives earmarked for this thesis. Data analysis and coding will be conducted, in the main, using the techniques of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

1.5 Structure of thesis

The structure of this thesis will be presented in seven chapters. Following this introductory chapter, there will be the literature review, which will provide the

theoretical framework for this thesis. The third chapter will deal with an in-depth analytical framework and methodology adopted for this study. This will be followed by three distinct chapters in which data results, extracted from the research fieldwork conducted for this thesis, will be analysed and discussed whilst relating to the theory formation delineated in the literature review and to the research aims and questions being put forth in this research study.

The first of these results and discussion chapters will discuss the real presence of Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs, as well as the ensuing situated learning generated therefrom, at workplaces within organisations. The second chapter in this series will discuss the complexity of human interaction, including related interwoven issues, and its impact on the extent of learning taking place through CoPs in organisations. The third results and discussion chapter will discuss how Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept can be moulded, amended and transformed in order to reflect the context of contemporary organisations and for maximising effective learning, knowledge generation, sustenance and re-creation within them.

The final chapter will represent the conclusion to this thesis. This will include a reflection on the outcome of this research study as well as its contributions and scope for future research.

1.6 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has presented a background to this research study as well as this study's aims and subsequent research questions in consequence and consideration of this background. This chapter presented also the scope and significance of this study, as well as a short exposition of the analytical framework to be adopted for this research. The thesis will now move on to discuss the theoretical literature framing this research study.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This research study aims to explore to what extent and in what form can Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs be relevant and helpful in our understanding of workplace learning in contemporary organisations. It will seek to examine to what extent are CoPs, including situated learning and the learning process trajectory, as conceptualised by Lave and Wenger, a reality within contemporary workplaces and organisations. It will also examine the impact of the complexities relating to human intervention and interaction on and within these CoPs, as well as that of modern day ever-changing global organisational fabric, including communication and technological advancements, on contemporary organisations and their formations. This research study will explore the relations of harnessing a learning organisation, managing knowledge and adopting strong leadership to fostering effective CoPs and workplace learning in contemporary organisations. Furthermore, this study will endeavour to explore in what way the CoPs concept can be amended and transformed in order to reflect the context of contemporary organisations and maximise effective learning, knowledge acquisition, generation, sustenance and re-creation within them.

This chapter will discuss a literature review of Lave and Wenger's concepts of situated learning and CoPs, in relation to understanding workplace learning. This

chapter will first discuss the exposition of these concepts as laid out by Lave and Wenger. It will then expose how these concepts fit in with the importance of nurturing a learning organisation and managing knowledge, given modern day's pressures on contemporary organisations, as well as delineate the reality of CoPs in factual terms. This chapter will also thread along in positing the CoPs concept within the scenario of today's contemporary age, such as globalisation and the resultant transformation of modern day organisations into borderless and multinational entities, and the reality of cultural differences within such a 'global' world scenario. It will then discuss on how Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept is to be 'repackaged' within the realities of human involvement and interaction complexities, as well as in 'real' terms that are compatible with contemporary age, while, at the same time, moulding and evolving the concept in terms that can be truly effective in understanding workplace learning within modern day organisations. Since this research study's specific context relates to Maltese public service organisations, this chapter will conclude in discussing the distinctiveness of public service organisations vis-à-vis private ones, as well as the specific Maltese context and how this may impact on workplace learning and the development of CoPs.

2.2 Lave and Wenger's concept of Communities of Practice.

Lave and Wenger's book *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation* (1991) imbued a rethink of the existing concept of learning. Lave and Wenger

perceived learning as being situated and intrinsically related to social practice. They conceptualised this learning process as being conceived within a community of practice (CoP), where members move in centripetal direction from legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) towards full participation (FP), through which knowledge and identities are continually created.

For Lave and Wenger (1991: 49), learning “concerns the whole person acting in the world” and is indeed profoundly social and cultural, rather than simply “a cognitive phenomenon” (Bloomer and Hodkinson 2000: 73). This contrasts quite significantly with the standard paradigm or traditional theories of learning, which profess human beings as “cognitive systems” (Billett 2007: 55), perceived to be separate from the world and capable to “acquire (context-free) knowledge through instruction” (Fuller 2007: 19). It has been argued that this traditional perspective ignores the value of learning at the workplace (Billett, 2000). Indeed, Lave and Wenger’s ideas concur with the perspective that understands learning in social context (Hughes 2007), where learning arises “from engagement with the immediate and situated social experience” (Billett 2007: 55) and as “an inevitable aspect of all productive practices” (Engestrom 2007: 41). Sfard (1998) views such learning ‘by participation’ as being embedded within a particular context and emanating from the interaction with the world through participative action.

Lave and Wenger (1991: 35) introduced the concept that learning “is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in-world”. They were heavily influenced by

Vygotsky (1978) who viewed learning “as being mediated by others through social interaction” (Vygotsky 1978 in Mavin and Cavaleri 2004: 286). Lave and Wenger (1991: 51) equate learning with “the historical production, transformation and change of persons”. However, they conceptualise this not by separating “knowledge from practice”, but as “a social construction” (Brown and Duguid 1991: 47) – a construction undertaken by the social world (Betts and Holden 2003), where what is learned is intrinsically connected to where “it takes place” (Lopez, Peon and Ordas 2005: 228) and “the conditions in which it is learned” (Brown and Duguid 1991: 48). Lave and Wenger (1991: 31) view learning as “an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice”, which Wenger (1998: 96) later on appropriately labelled as “the engine of practice”. Social practice is perceived by Lave and Wenger (1991: 50-51) as emphasising “the inherently socially negotiated character of meaning and the interested, concerned character of the thought and action of persons-in-activity”; the latter viewed more as “an activity of interdependent people” (Stacey 2003: 326), where “the individual is the singular and the social is the plural of interdependent people” (Elias 1939 in Stacey 2003: 326).

Lave and Wenger (1991) regard learning as socially situated. For them, learning is a “socially constructed and socially dependent phenomenon” (Floren 2003: 204) where learning is integrally moulded with the physical and social context within which it takes place” (Wood 1995). Indeed, it is here argued that knowledge has no meaning if it is not applied and situated “in the lives of the persons and in the culture that makes it possible” (Lave and Wenger 1991: 34). Lave and Wenger (1991: 33) view

this *situatedness* of learning in terms of an interdependence between the “agent, activity and the (social) world”; hence, “co-constitutive” (Billett & Somerville, 2004: 310). Thus, here learning is being conceived as “more than acquiring facts and techniques”. It is rather held to occur “through participation in communities of knowledge by embodying their particular perspectives, prejudice and practices” (Lang 2001: 45); indeed, “a collective, relational and....a social process” (Fuller 2007: 19).

Situated learning posits learning as taking place in all aspects and places in everyday life, including workplaces (Fox 2000). Learning at the workplace is seen as being “practice-oriented, concrete, specific, informal” (Bottrup 2005: 509). Workplace learning is also intrinsically related to the interwoven relationship “between practical work activities, the cultural and social relations of the workplace and the experience and social world of the participants” (Collin 2006: 404). Hence, learning is hereby viewed as being “generated by and in the work situation” (Barnett 2000: 16) and in social interaction – a social construct (Brown and Duguid 1991). Lave and Wenger insist that to understand workplace learning and its situated nature, one has to focus on the formation and reproduction of CoPs in which work takes place (Brown and Duguid 1991: 41).

Lave and Wenger put forward the concept of CoPs based on the idea of LPP. They (1991: 98) define a CoP as “a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping CoP”. Learning in CoPs is

“seen as a social process” (Kimble and Hildreth, 2005: 103). Lave and Wenger (1991: 37) equate this social process with LPP, where an ‘apprentice’ or newcomer becomes a full member and participant within the CoP through “growing involvement”. Hence, in doing so, newcomers gain access to the necessary legitimation and full participation (FP) status that eventually make them belong to that CoP (Hildreth, Kimble and Wright 2000: 28). For Lave and Wenger (1991: 40), this is not a teaching technique, but “a way of understanding learning”. They (1991: 102) view access to practice as taking the form of “a mediating function” in order to help newcomers in their participation and involvement within the CoP. Lave and Wenger (1991: 115) argue that it is in this way that identities are developed, where identities are perceived to be “constructed, not given or found” (Lawy & Bloomer 2003: 25).

Within the social fabric and reproduction of CoPs, Lave and Wenger (1991: 57) assert that there may be prevalent “forces that support processes of learning and those that work against them”. They (1991: 36) claim that access towards or preventing participation can be empowering or disempowering, with legitimate peripherality seen itself as “a source of power or powerlessness”. Lave and Wenger (1991: 103) intimate towards an appropriate “organisation of access”. They claim that learning can be distorted in CoPs if newcomers are ‘exploited’ (Lave and Wenger 1991: 63-64) or undergo authoritarian instruction (*ibid.* 1991: 76), rather than being fully engaged toward full participation. Lave and Wenger (1991: 116) acknowledge also the continuity-displacement contradiction and the need of shared participation,

intimating a social process whereby the old-timers and newcomers “act out their differences and discover commonalities”.

As has been discussed here, Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept professes learning as occurring through and is shaped by participation in the social practice of a community. They postulate the idea of a 'community' more in the sense of a "symbolically constructed sense of belonging" (Jewson 2007), "a set of relations among persons" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98). However, one has to argue that Wenger in later years does extend this notion of 'just' a community into more concrete form in his framing of the CoP concept. Wenger (1998) does not distinguish the community from practice, but regards the CoP as 'one whole unit'. He conceptualised a CoP as “a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise” (Wenger and Snyder 2000: 139). Wenger (1998), in fact, identifies three dimensions in a CoP: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. For Wenger, “learning is an experience of identity (Wenger 1998: 215), where identities do form part and come about through social participation in "the practices of specific communities" (Wenger 1998: 151) and, in fact, he argues that the formation of communities of practice is essentially also “the negotiation of identities” (1998: 149).

Wenger expounded this concept of CoPs even further where one can safely argue that he “turned it into a toolkit for organisation design and knowledge management” (Engestrom 2007: 41). He also speaks of three characteristics inherent in a CoP:

domain – the area of knowledge discussed, reflected upon and studied by the community; community – the people concerned with the domain and willing to share experiences, develop best practices and create new ideas about the domain; and practice – “knowledge, stories, experiences that the community members share or develop” (Wenger 2004 in Rainsford and Murphy 2005: 461). Wenger sees learning as an inherent social process within a CoP in four interwoven aspects: “learning as doing (practice), learning as becoming (identity), learning as experience (meaning), and learning as belonging (community)” (Vrasidas and Zembylas 2004: 328). He regards traits, such as a shared perspective on a domain, trust, a communal identity, long standing relationships and an established practice, as what makes the CoP such an ideal structure for learning and managing knowledge (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002); a structure interwoven together with what has been called as “social glue” (Juriado and Gustafsson 2007: 58). Some critics claim that the CoPs concept’ status ventured into ambiguity between “presenting a model of how learning ‘actually is’ and an idealised projection of how learning ‘ought to be’” (Hughes 2007). These developments of the concept by Wenger seem to have vindicated this critique of the concept and postulated more the CoPs concept of being the ideal structure or model for facilitating and maximising learning and knowledge generation, transference and management for organisations.

This section has discussed how Lave and Wenger have professed learning as being situated, a social process and occurring through and is shaped by participative social interaction within CoPs, based on a learning trajectory involving LPP. This thesis

seeks to explore the presence of CoPs and their contribution to understanding workplace learning in contemporary organisations. It will aim to understand the learning processes and trajectories occurring within and among CoPs, but at the same time will seek to present an amended model of the CoPs concept that not only fits in real terms within contemporary organisational fabric, but also, and more importantly, serves as the ideal structure and hub for learning and managing knowledge (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002). In this regard, the following section will discuss how harnessing learning and managing knowledge are indeed crucial for contemporary organisations. It will then discuss how the CoPs concept fits within this scenario in 'real' terms.

2.3 Harnessing learning and managing knowledge.

Organisations today are being inundated with forces, such as technology and globalisation, which, coupled with the ever-growing knowledge economy, are seeking new ways “to reinvent themselves” (Rowley 1999: 416). Realising such global, unpredictable and ever-changing environment organisations are now shifting their nature of work from a deterministic outlook to idiosyncratic and contingent forms (Ardichvili 2003) and shaping themselves into dynamic structures, endorsing on-going change practices and craving for effective knowledge creation and management (Lopez, Peon and Ordas 2005). Organisational survival rests on the 'renewal' of the org (Kalling 2007: 65): “this new world involves a continuous redefinition of

organisational missions and objectives, as well as organisational ways of doing things” (Lang 2001: 47). Indeed, contemporary organisations are faced with “increasingly global competition and a more sophisticated consumer” (Gupta, Iyer and Aronson 2000: 17) and hence are continually striving for quality service and innovation (Bender and Fish 2000).

Today, within such a scenario, economies have become knowledge based (Civi 2000) and organisations are experiencing realities “where one source of competitive advantage is the ability and rate at which an organisation can learn and react more quickly than its competitors” (Stewart 2001: 141). Learning has been equated with the organisation’s performance, competitive advantage and knowledge management (Contu and Willmott 2003). Indeed, organisations, today, are geared towards knowledge generation (Leadbeater, 2000: 70). Being geared up to learn and acquiring the necessary knowledge faster than the competition can “be the only sustainable competitive advantage” (De Geus 1988: 7 in Lopez, Peon and Ordas 2005: 230) for the organisation, particularly if “a commitment to continuous learning” is undertaken (Gould 2000: 585).

For contemporary knowledge economy, “the capacity to leverage knowledge is critical” (Thomas and Allen 2006: 124). The firm’s competitive advantage is now geared on knowledge instead of information (Lang 2001). Knowledge is being seen as “a source of productivity, innovation and wealth” (Drucker 1993 in Scarbrough and Swan 2001: 4); as a “marketable commodity” (Kakabadse, Kakabadse and

Kouzman 2003: 76). Indeed, intellectual capital is displacing “land, physical labour and financial capital as the primary source of economic and social value” (O’Donnell et al. 2003: 80). Organisations need to “harness their knowledge; not just to stay competitive, but to become also innovative” (Gupta, Iyer and Aronson 2000: 20). Hence, the effective creation, transfer, and also integration of knowledge are the key for successfully increasing the organisation’s “global efficiency” (Rolland 2006: 897).

Notwithstanding such claims on the pivotal position that the need to develop and provide learning and knowledge generation opportunities has for contemporary organisations, there exist a critical view in positioning skills development in such high echelons, or more specifically as *the* determining factor for the organisation's 'survival' in contemporary age. In fact, some claim that skills development, albeit deemed as necessary, is not sufficient on its own; beyond skills there are other factors, such as "quality of work and employee relations" (Keep & Mayhew 2010: 573). It is held that skills are "only one element in a wider narrative" (Keep et al. 2006: 543). For instance, one has also to give due importance to, rather than skills, the "workers attitudes towards their job" (Keep 2000: 20). Moreover, it is also claimed that there exist numerous jobs that do not require any special kind of skill, let alone further improvement, which jobs do not seem to be on the decline (Keep & Mayhew 2010). Indeed, Keep (2000) claims that employers are reluctant to provide training opportunities for skills improvement to employees in lower occupational

groups due to disadvantages that they perceive, such as increased staff turnover and the raising of unrealistic expectations for these workers (Keep 2000).

However, the developments delineated in this section expose quite clearly how crucial learning and knowledge are for contemporary organisations. Such discourse brings about two emerging concepts: the learning organisation and knowledge management. It has already been discussed in the previous section of this chapter how learning and knowledge generation is intrinsically related to the social practice, through participative social interactions among community members, within the social and physical context of organisations (Lave and Wenger 1991). Moreover, it has also been argued how CoPs do serve as the ideal hub for nurturing learning and managing knowledge (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002). Hence, this thesis argues that understanding these two concepts will be crucial to acknowledging the effective role of the CoPs concept towards understanding workplace learning in contemporary organisations.

2.3.1 Learning, the learning organisation and managing knowledge

Learning is intrinsically related to the concept of the Learning Organisation (LO). For Kolb, “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb 1984 in Holmes 2004: 628). When speaking of a learning society, Donald Schon asserts that “our society and all of its institutions are

in continuous processes of transformation.....(hence) We must...become adept at learning” (Schon 1973: 28). Learning is conceived to take place in every location where individuals are “confronting everyday tasks” (Billett 1995: 22) and is indeed a continuous and lifelong activity and process (Evans 1998: 201; Lawy 2006: 328). Indeed, learning is held to be a “socially dependent phenomenon” (Floren 2003: 204), where learning occurs as “an integral part of the physical and social context within which learning takes place” (Wood 1995: 15); hence, embedded in “social and cultural contexts” (Resnick et al. 1991 in Cullen 1999: 45).

It is argued that learning taking place at workplaces in organisations is regarded as an “ubiquitous part of organisational life and work” (Elkjaer 2005: 534). Although, it is held that no learning occurs in an organisation without individual learning (Garavan 1997; Francis 1997), however, it is being argued that individual and collective learning are not distinct, but rather part and parcel of the same process, where “individual learning in organisations can be harnessed positively to produce collective learning” (Garavan 1997: 23). Indeed, organisational learning (OL) is developed through individual learning (Stewart 2001), involving an “activity of interdependent people (Stacey 2003: 331), where “members act as learning agents for the organisation” (Garavan 1997: 21).

The concept of the LO evolved from this idea of OL. The LO is said to be one which facilitates the learning and personal development of all its members (Beck 1989), whilst continuously transforming itself and its context (Pedlar et al: 1997). The LO

provides also the ambience where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured and where members of the organisation continually learn "how to learn together" (Senge 1990: 3).

Establishing a learning culture is fundamental for the LO (Storey and Barnett 2000; Driver 2002). In conceptualising culture, one refers to "past history and lessons, an interpreter for events and actions" (Lewis 2002: 282). Within the ambience of a LO, these are all geared towards continuous learning (Matthews 1999), where such learning takes form both collectively (Hughes 2001) and collaboratively (Garavan 1997), as well as involving continuous critical reflection (Gould 2000; Owenby 2002). Indeed, all this ongoing learning activity will enable such LOs to experience continuous improvement and transformation (Blackman and Henderson 2005), where change becomes "a continuous reality" (Gould 2000).

This learning culture within the LO has its focus on people, who are not only the architects for the ongoing transformation of the organisation (McHugh, Groves and Alker 1998), but also the prime stakeholders in the learning process taking place (Garavan, Gunnigle and Morley 2000). Such a culture enables learning through open interaction (Ortenblad 2001), whilst facilitating flexibility and responsiveness (Stewart 2001: 143). Realising this scenario is through exercising empowerment (Groves and Alker 1998), succeeding in instilling motivation (Evans 1998) and establishing mutual trust (Lopez, Peon and Ordas 2004; Call 2005) – which is ultimately the key for a binding relationship between the organisation and its

members, resulting in knowledge development (Boussouara and Deakins 2000) and "the development of new core competencies" (Pemberton and Stonehouse 2000: 188). Hence, it is argued that such a learning culture within the LO will imbue among every member of the organisation "a strong sense of community" (Lewis 2002: 282).

Indeed, the LO is all about transforming the entire firm's workforce into one learning community (Owenby 2002: 51), imbuing a learning climate (Pedlar, et al. (1997), where learning is promoted and the organisation itself "learns from that learning" (Evans 1998: 201). In a LO, "all employees commit themselves to its goals and simultaneously develop their capacity to learn (Gerber 1998: 170). Organisation's success is equated with the tapping of people's commitment and capacity to learn (Senge 1990: 3), whilst at the same time "setting free the individual members' ability in a cooperative and trusting environment" (Barker and Camarata 1998 in Driver 2002: 38).

All these LO characteristics are indeed quite resonant with the aspirations and traits discussed earlier in this chapter on the CoPs concept. It is being argued that "learning in organisations is frequently an interactive, social phenomenon" (Tyre and von Hippel 1997: 72), involving a whole-body activity (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and where "participants develop cognitive skills that require understanding of context and culture" (Jones and McCann 2005: 362). Such LO characteristics do in fact speak of workplace learning and a learning culture (Ortenblad 2004), together with the understanding of free flows of ideas and ongoing transformation and improvement

(Snell 2002). Furthermore, LOs enable, within their learning culture dictum, an open dialogue with “free exchange in, across and between” CoPs (Snell 2001: 320-3). The LO, while emphasising the development of peoples' competencies (Huzzard 2001), sums up this development more in terms of *generative* rather than *adaptive* learning; hence, in knowledge creation and innovation (Altman and Illes 1998).

Indeed, one affirms that knowledge is at the core of the LO (Garavan 1997). Knowledge, which is often equated with the organisations' "intellectual" (Scarborough and Swan 2001: 6) or “human” (Perez-Bustamante 1999: 7) capital, is indeed, for such companies, the main source of competitive advantage (Prusak, 1996) and transformational change (Blackman and Henderson 2005); it is said to have “ground truth....knowing what really works and what doesn't” (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 8). The conceptualisation of knowledge has come a long way since Plato's definition of “justified true belief” (Kakabadse et al. 2003: 76). Two modern perspectives equate knowledge with: “a fluid mix of framed experiences, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information” (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 5) and “the individual capability to draw distinctions, within a domain of action, based on an appreciation of context or theory, or both” (Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001: 983). Hence, knowledge can be conceptualised as something social and ingrained within human relationships that is in continuous transformation (CLMS M2, CU6: 10). Although, it is often held to be both an outcome and a process (Tsoukas and

Vladimirou 2001), it is indeed a “living system, growing and changing as it interacts with the environment” (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 10).

As discussed earlier here, the LO is intrinsically related to knowledge creation or generation (Garavan 1997: 27). Knowledge creation is conceived to be “in a continuous and dynamic interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge” (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995: 70), involving “personal participation” (Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001: 982). While explicit knowledge refers to that which is documented and, hence, easily codified, stored, transferred, expressed and shared, tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is the embedded know-how in people, which is personal, context-specific and difficult to formalise, capture, communicate and share (Serban and Luan 2002: 10). In fact, one can speak of tacit knowledge as “constructed from individuals’ own experience in the world and forms the basis for explicit knowledge” (Polanyi 1967 in Jasimuddin, Klein and Connell 2005: 103) and as a phenomenon which is “more complex and inaccessible...than the level of shared values, beliefs and norms” (Alvesson and Karreman 2001: 1006).

The crucial position of knowledge within contemporary organisations brought to the fore the concept of knowledge management (KM). KM is defined as “any process or practice of creating, acquiring, capturing, sharing and using knowledge, wherever it resides, to enhance learning and performance in organisations” (Swan et al. 1999 in Loermans 2002: 285). KM is conceptualised as “adding or creating value by more actively leveraging the know-how, experience and judgement resident within, and in many ways, outside the organisation” (Ruggles 1998: 80). The importance and aims of KM rest on a two-tier objective: “to protect and utilise existing knowledge

resources....and to facilitate the mobilisation and expansion of new knowledge resources” (Kreiner 2002: 122). One can safely argue that factors affecting KM processes include the organisational structure (good communication lines, low staff turnover, regular interaction facilities) and culture (learning-oriented culture) (Van Zolingen et al. 2001: 178-83).

Contemporary organisations are fully aware of the crucial need to address KM (Jasimuddin et al. 2005). In recognising knowledge as a “valuable resource”, companies are resorting to KM “for tapping into collective intelligence and skills of employees in order to create a greater organisational knowledge” (Bollinger and Smith 2001: 8). They are exercising KM in order to provide facilities for knowledge workers to “access the right information at the right time” (Serban and Luan 2002: 6) and aid these workers “to share and put information into action” (Kakabadse et al. 2003: 78), with a view “to create and maintain superior organisational routines that reproduce competitive advantage” (Kakabadse et al. 2003: 87). This is particularly so with the ever-increasing emergence of network businesses, “stretched across time and space” (Kakabadse et al. 2003: 5) and which rendered, in such global contexts, KM to be a “cross-cultural activity” (Holden 2001: 162). Hence, it is said that the key in KM is to improve “both individual and organisation knowledge” (Meyer and Sugiyama 2007: 19). Indeed, for a contemporary organisation, success relies on its capacity to “identify, value, create and evolve its knowledge assets” (Rowley 1999: 416) and to secure and safeguard the knowledge produced within it (Serban and Luan 2002: 7).

2.3.2 The reality of Communities of Practice

The LO and KM, in which, as has been argued in this chapter, learning and knowledge generation and management are an ongoing activity, do form the ideal hub in which CoPs are to be formed, cultivated and multiply into 'constellations'. Indeed, knowledge creation lies at the core of the CoPs' 'social process', which is so much present in a LO – “creating and applying knowledge need social processes” (Kakabadse et al. 2003: 86). Knowledge is “an ongoing phenomenon, being shaped by social practices of communities” (Boland and Tenkasi 1995 in Wickramasinghe 2003: 297) and, hence, knowledge cannot be separated from practice; it is retained actively and dynamically in CoPs (Kakabadse et al. 2003). The generation and transfer of knowledge is closely linked with CoPs (Adams and Freeman 2000), which has proved to be successful even in expansive settings (Davenport and Volpel 2001). CoPs are indeed “nodes for the exchange and interpretation of information” (Mittendorff et al. 2006: 300). Not only CoPs are ideal vehicles for knowledge creation (Pastoors 2007), but they “provide organisations with easier access to knowledge, quicker responses to problems, and decreased learning curves” (Garavan et al. 2007: 35).

CoPs are highly linked with tacit knowledge transfer. Knowledge within CoPs is “socially constructed” (McAdam and McCreedy 1999: 94), being “actively constructed in a social setting” (Adams and Freeman 2000: 39). This is largely in the form of tacit knowledge, also referred to ‘soft’ knowledge (Kimble and Hildreth

2005), which “is embedded in a specific context” (Ardichvili et al. 2006: 95). Tacit knowledge is construed as being “constructed from individuals own experience in the world” (Jasimuddin, Klein and Connell 2005: 103). Hence, it is being argued that tacit knowledge cannot be codified, “captured explicitly” (Bollinger and Smith 2001: 16) or articulated: “we know more than we can tell” (Bate and Robert 2002: 649). Indeed, CoPs, which by themselves imbue an activity involving social participative interaction between community members, where learning takes place through mutual sharing of experiences and knowledge, act as the ideal vehicle for the generation and creation of tacit knowledge (Munby et al. 2003: 97), which is so crucial for creativity and innovation (Christie and Sandelands 2000).

However, the success of knowledge creation, sharing and re-creation within CoPs is highly dependent on the levels of participation, interaction, as well as mutual trust, expressed by members within LOs or “communities of communities of practice” (Snell 2002: 550). Participation needs to be facilitated (Wang and Ahmed 2003), hence framed within a proper LO. It is fundamental for activating ‘learning’ (Ortenblad 2001) and to provoke “change in individuals’ understandings and capacities” (Billett 2004: 315). Participation and interaction, within the fabric of CoPs, are catalysts for change (Lawy 2000) and knowledge creation (Castro Laszlo and Laszlo 2002), since “it is this dialogue which drives the creation of innovative new ideas and concepts” (Bennett 1998: 594). Indeed, knowledge creation is intrinsically linked with participation, interaction and effective communication – “we communicate, *ergo*, we create” (O’Donnell et al. 2003: 86) – as well as the exercise

of mutual trust (Ashton and Sung 2002). It is hereby being affirmed that such interactions within CoPs are to be effected “in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect” (Bottrup 2005: 513). It is being argued that trust is the vehicle for mutual sharing and understanding, as well as for the transfer of knowledge (Garavan et al. 2007): “Trust is the glue which binds the members of a community in a sharing and cooperating manner” (Nichani 2001: 3). The presence of trust, in the social relations and engagement as found in CoPs, will “allow participants to take risks and explore new ways of negotiating meaning in a supportive environment” (Brosnan and Burgess 2003: 29). It is also held that the exercise of mutual trust is closely associated with the development of high-level skills in a community of workers (Ashton and Sung 2002).

However, it is to be affirmed here that apprehensions or barriers do exist not only for effective functioning of the LO and KM, but also for CoPs emergence, formations and participation. Indeed, in proposing a one ‘whole’ and unified organisation, geared up as a grand learning community in harmony, may sound to be oversimplified, as also is ignoring the fact that individuals may have different opinions and interpretations, where dominant factions may crop up (Hong 1999: 182-3): “what is considered to be valid knowledge may be determined by powerful people” (Flood 1998: 271) or by “a dominant coalition, who control the learning process” (Driver 2002: 41). Moreover, while organisations are inclined to support CoPs and even inclined to institutionalise them, however it is not just a question of “drawing (people) into an organisation chart; people must also identify with, and thus feel motivated to

contribute to, such communities in their everyday ‘bottom-up’ interactions” (Thompson 2005: 151). The crux here is to persuade the right people to mould themselves enthusiastically within these CoPs’ structures.

It is argued that power relations do act as barriers, not only to the LO and KM (Bollinger and Smith 2001; Owenby 2002), but also in relation to CoPs (Fuller and Unwin 2004). Power relations, which surface quite easily and naturally among ‘community’ of workers, and also between CoPs, may impact negatively on the effectiveness of CoPs (Fuller and Unwin 2004). One has to affirm that Lave and Wenger do not pronounce emphatically the significance of conflicts, struggles and power relations in their exposition of the CoPs concept (Fuller et al. 2005). Indeed “knowledge is power” (Castro Laszlo and Laszlo 2002: 400) and this may propagate insecurity and uncertainty in people who are in possession of this ‘power’ (Skok 2003), which might render them to be reluctant in relinquishing and sharing their knowledge (Boud and Middleton 2003). Beside unwilling to share, individuals may not like “to take on other people’s ideas” (Greengard 1998 in Bender and Fish 125: 134), as also may exercise defensive routines and mask their true feelings (Flood 1998) or find it painful to share with others their innermost knowledge and thoughts (Driver 2002).

However, one here has to assert that as much as power relations can impede, they can also facilitate learning processes within CoPs (Huzzard 2004: 353); “learning practices are shaped, enabled, and constrained within relations of power” (Contu and

Willmot 2003: 284). Fuller et al. (2005) argue that the power issue is significantly relevant to understanding the opportunities and inhibitions towards learning taking place within CoPs; an issue that, although acknowledged, was somewhat ignored by Lave and Wenger (1991).

Other barriers relating to CoPs' effectiveness, include: the incidence of not having people with the right disposition and attitude towards fostering workplace learning (Smith 2006: 167), as well as the transference or exchange of inappropriate habits (Slotte et al. 2004 in Tynjala and Hakkinen 2005: 321) or practices (Billett 2000: 273), and hence undesirable learning and participation (Billett 2004: 314). Indeed, all this will lead to learning outcomes that are inappropriate (Billett 1995: 24) that undoubtedly will dampen the effectiveness in CoPs in organisations.

2.4 Contemporary age and emerging issues to organisations

In order to understand the function and reality of Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept within modern day organisations and workplaces, one has to explore the contemporary age phenomena affecting organisations today and how these are shaping and transforming organisations and workplaces into borderless and multinational formats. Indeed, the reality of CoPs and their impact on workplace learning in organisations today is intrinsically linked to a proper understanding of contemporary age fabrics. Contemporary age is bringing about so many global

changes and related pressures onto organisations, rendering modern day organisations to extend their operations in expansive settings. Hence, this posits the whole activity within CoPs of social participative interaction, learning and knowledge creation, etc. within such an expansive, borderless and multinational setting. This section will be discussing two key related issues to this whole scenario: the effect of globalisation on contemporary organisations and the issue of cultural differences brought about by the emergence of multi- and trans- national companies (MNCs and TNCs).

2.4.1 Globalisation and contemporary organisations

One is witnessing a world that is continually being converted, becoming more coalesced and standardised (Bird and Stevens 2003), conceptualised increasingly as one ‘global village’ (McLuhan 1962), expanding past national borders and disintegrating distance; indeed, this is globalisation (Fulcher 2000). Globalisation has been defined as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 1990: 64). Globalisation is arguably the outcome of human need to unchain itself from all barriers inhibiting its freedom (Friedman 2000).

Globalisation brought about a new era, structure, as well as major challenges, for contemporary organisations. Organisations today are being inundated with such a

turbulent economic environment (Nyhan et al. 2004), that they have to respond in order to survive. Indeed, “the entire society is being transformed” (Krulis-Randa 1990: 134) and being unable to respond to this dynamic and unpredictable external environment would be devastating for modern organisations (Church and McMahan 1996). Pressured by external forces, such as “radical and widespread shifts in the global economy” (McCraken and Wallace 2000: 425), IT rapid development (Slotte, Tynjala and Hytonen 2004), fierce competition (Nyhan et al. 2004), which, coupled with the ever-growing knowledge economy, organisations are seeking new ways “to reinvent themselves” (Rowley 1999: 416).

Undoubtedly, the influx of new technologies, particularly new interactive communication technology (ICT) has instigated a plethora of changes all through society, culture and education (Houldsworth and Alexander 2005). This has also taken the form of what some call ‘techno-economic paradigm’ where learning, workers and together with the workplace are in dynamic relationship, geared up to improve work performance (O’Donoghue and Maguire 2005: 436). The traditional concept of the workplace as being a stable place is constantly being replaced by *global* organisations and *global* communication networks (Jones and McCann 2005). Such technological changes call for a reassessment and proper on-going alignment and changes in work practices. All this has prompted world-wide organisations to be proactive in formulating and designing their context (Svensson 2004: 494) and establish “new ways of organising learning experiences” (Ardichvili 2003: 5).

Indeed, the effect of globalisation has rendered organisations to act and “operate across space, national borders, cultural and linguistic barriers” (Joy-Matthews and Gladstone 2000: 24). While organisations used to be locked within boundaries; having their own organisational activity, processes and people (McCarthy, Garavan and O’Toole 2003), globalisation leveraged modern ‘surviving’ organisations into being *boundariless*, doing business not as isolated units in the markets (Chung 2001), but well on board the internalisation and global wagon (Slotte, Tynjala and Hytonen 2004). This has instigated the emergence of new forms of organisations: the multinational and transnational companies (MNCs and TNCs); which undoubtedly triggered the issue of cultural differences for consideration.

2.4.2 MNCs/TNCs and cultural differences

Globalisation has rendered contemporary organisations to operate as multinational and transnational companies (MNCs and TNCs) and threading their operations on a *global* setting. Indeed, for contemporary organisations, incorporating a multinational workforce and operating transnationally, a new challenge has been brought to the fore: the need to address cultural differences. This is also significant in discussing CoPs within the context and in relation to workplace learning in contemporary organisations since CoPs are intrinsically associated with social participative interaction among community members within these organisations – community members which may pertain to different cultural environments and backgrounds.

It is being argued that culture is indeed a major factor influencing learning (Sambrook and Stewart 2000: 213) and that the learning climate is influenced by national cultural differences (Poell et al. 2003): “culture, communication and learning are intertwined and interdependent” (Lum 2006: 113). It is held that “styles of communication differ among cultures” (Cox 1994 in King 2000: 14) and that “culture directly influences the quality of learning, interpretation of other’s behaviours, and determination of subsequent behaviours” (Graham and Muyia Nafukho 2007: 130).

Hofstede (1997) maintains that culture is not abstracted from the social world, but intrinsically related to it. Culture is closely related to social behaviour and is described as “one’s identification with the shared social construction or ‘sameness’ that is shared with others” (Wang 2001 in Lum 2006: 113). Culture is very much intertwined within the social interaction among communities of people; it is “the dynamic interplay between the experiences of people and the social structure at large; it is the individual perceptions of one’s societal situation” (Giroux 1997 in Lum 2006: 113).

Hofstede (1980) identifies four dimensions that reflect on national cultures. The first dimension concerns *power distance*: “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede 1991: 28). The second dimension speaks of *uncertainty avoidance*: “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain

or unknown situations” (Hofstede 1991: 113). The third dimension refers to *individualism versus collectivism*: “the extent to which individuals are integrated into groups” (Hofstede 1991: 51). The fourth dimension relates to *masculinity versus femininity*: a distinction between an orientation towards achievement, assertiveness, performance, competition, and success, as against an orientation towards nurturing, quality of life, warm personal relationships and service (Hofstede 1991: 82-3).

At the core of this debate on culture and cultural differences is the convergence versus divergence approaches. Convergence theorists claim that convergence of cultural values will gradually take place (McGuire et al. 2002) as the effect of national culture will become less over time (Kidger et al. 2004). In contrast, the advocates of the divergence approach insist that convergence is not possible “because of the diversity of cultural environments” (McGuire et al. 2002: 32)

However, one can arguably assert here that it is not so much as ‘whether’, but more ‘to what extent’ convergence is in play due to “the increasing communication across national boundaries and the continuing processes of industrialisation and globalisation” (CLMS M2, FU1: 9); to what extent is to be “‘localised’ to take account of specific cultural differences” (McGuire et al. 2002: 27). Hence, although an element of convergence is prevalent and does migrate, albeit not easily as the convergence theory claim, “the national culture has, and will continue to have, a major impact on the structure and management practices of organisations” (Jackson 2002 in Kidger et al. 2004: 502), including mechanisms such as CoPs, which

intrinsically involve situational learning and rest on human social interaction and participation. Indeed: “the cultural environment is not external to organisations but enters them” (Quintanilla 2000: 5). This is even more so in situations where, even though the organisation is localised within its country of origin, there may exist a multinational workforce; a reality that is so much prevalent in today’s competitive business world where craving for knowledge workers has imbued so much people movement across national borders. Hence, it is being argued that such cultural differences have to be addressed.

Now, after having discussed Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept and how this fits in with the importance of nurturing a LO and KM practices, as well as how contemporary organisations are being shaped and transformed through phenomena such as globalisation, imbuing related issues such as that of cultural differences, the next section will discuss how the CoPs concept can be conceptualised and evolved for the better understanding of workplace learning in contemporary organisations.

2.5 Communities of Practice: further consideration and evolvement of concept

In order to explore to what extent and in what form Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept is relevant and helpful in our understanding of workplace learning in contemporary organisations, this thesis has discussed along this chapter Lave and Wenger's

conceptualisation of CoPs, as well as how these CoPs relate to sustaining a LO and engage in KM practices. This thesis has also discussed how organisations are today being transformed into borderless entities and operate transnationally, involving related issues such as that of cultural differences. This last section will now discuss how Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept can be conceptualised in a repackaged format that will reflect and take into consideration the realities of the complexities related to human involvement and interaction, as well as those impacting on organisations in line with contemporary age. Hence, in this way, the CoPs concept will be amended, moulded and evolved in terms that can be truly effective in understanding workplace learning within contemporary organisations.

2.5.1 'Novice' and 'old timer': positioning and learning trajectories

In contemporary age, one no longer characterises with such distinction the 'newcomer/apprentice/novice' vis-à-vis the 'old-timer' worker (Fuller et al. 2005: Fuller and Unwin 2004). Besides that, it is being argued that one has to 'evolve' the idea of CoPs in terms of more focus on ongoing learning, developing skills throughout one's working life (Ashton and Sung 2002) rather than on 'apprenticeship' (Lave and Wenger 1991). Rather than professing a trajectory of novice to old-timer, CoPs can manifest among its members a trajectory of mutual learning through support and exchange of experiences (Beck 2007). In relation to CoPs and the participative social interactions between CoPs members – novices, old-

timers, or otherwise – from which learning and knowledge emerge, this section will discuss the following issues: contextual dimensions; struggles and conflicts; the importance of the individual; and the reality of peoples’ biographies. Indeed, this will provide a new dimension to the trajectory of the learning process occurring in reality within CoPs, which in itself will enlighten more the CoPs concept towards a more thorough understanding of workplace learning in contemporary organisations.

Contextual dimensions

One has to consider the context in which CoP operate at the workplace. Lave and Wenger do give credit to this context, intimating CoPs to be "histories of articulation with the rest of the world" (Wenger 1998: 103). However, the ‘full’ context is not elaborated in the texts. Contu and Willmott (2003) claim that Lave and Wenger ignore the impact of external pressures, contemporary organisations are inundated with, on the formation and reproduction of CoPs. Indeed, it is being argued that, for example, the texts do not “offer conceptual tools to theorise the social conditions” (Jewson 2007a: 79) in which CoPs or ‘constellations of CoPs’ operate, particularly in modern day organisational fabric where through phenomena, such as globalisation, the world is contracting into one ‘global’ village. In this day and age, CoPs “can be located in different space-time contexts, generating different and competing conceptions of the world within and between members” (James 2007: 132). ‘Full’ context is being conceptualised here in terms of “organisational, sectoral and wider social, economic and political dimensions”, all interdependent and “which all

influence the shape and character of the workplace as a learning environment” (Fuller 2007: 27).

Struggles and conflicts

Although the idea of ‘community’, depicted so prominently in Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept, transmits “connotations of harmony and stability” (Fuller 2007: 24) and “co-operation, unity and altruistic care for others” (Jewson 2007a: 70), however in reality this may not always be the case (Fuller et al. 2005). Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger's (1998) texts acknowledge the possibility of rivalry and forms of conflict within CoPs, but it is argued here that a further elaborative framework is needed other than the tension intimated in the texts between newcomers and old-timers (Jewson 2007a). Indeed, limiting the trajectory from newcomer to old-timer, with a predictable scenario's connotations in line with such a trajectory, is not fully compatible within the context of contemporary organisations (Eraut 2002). Members within CoPs exist in different ‘sectoral packages’; such as class, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, etc. which indeed shape “configurations of various categories of citizens in sharply contrasting ways” (Jewson 2007a: 79). Such configurations may result, even within CoPs, in “creating conflictual identities” (James 2007: 136) and also lead CoPs' members to “engage in different modes of participation and non-participation” (James 2007: 133).

The individual and the community

Even though Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept, promulgating concepts of participation and interdependence, is in symmetry "with a theoretical position that engages the personal within a social frame" (Billett 2007: 60), it has to be said that Lave and Wenger seem to downplay human agency in their concept of CoP, where learning and knowledge emerge not so much "from the deliberate intentions of particular individuals, but through the co-engagement of the practice community as a whole" (Owen-Pugh 2007: 83). It is being argued that one needs to give credit to "human capacities, consciousness and subjectivity" (Billett 2007: 62) within CoPs. Hence, in conceptualising the idea of CoPs, individuals' agency and conceptions as well as attitude to participate and learn, within and through their respective workplaces, should also be taken into consideration (Somerville 2002).

While Lave and Wenger conceive learning as emanating from social practice within CoPs, it is being hailed here the crucial role of the individual within this social practice and the relational aspect between "persons and the community of practice" (Billett 2007: 56). Hence, the "individual disposition and organisational context come together to create the dimensions of workplace learning, each impacting on and (re)shaping the other" (Fuller and Unwin 2004: 36); where, indeed, it has to be emphasised that the agency of both the social, as well as the individual, is "being enacted relationally in the immediate social experience of engagement in workplaces" (Billett 2007: 59). One has to acknowledge, as Billet proclaims, "the socially shaped nature of the person and personal.....(where) this arises and evolves through ongoing

negotiations between the individual and the social throughout individual's life histories or ontogenies and serves to mediate subsequent immediate experiences” (2007: 59)

The reality of peoples' biographies

Lave and Wenger's learning trajectory of novice/newcomer towards expert/old-timer is being challenged here in that CoPs' members, including novices or newcomers, do possess their own personal legacies that are formed from their own engagement with the social world throughout their life histories (Billett 2003). Hence, on entering a CoP, novices may have “already acquired different types of skill and also have higher levels of education than many of older workers” (Fuller and Unwin 2004: 41). In fact, one argues that there exist circumstances where it transpires that, comparable with old-timers, novices are “considerably more expert in some tasks” (Fuller 2007: 24).

One has to acknowledge that, indeed, “not all novices are the same and not all experts are the same” (Fuller 2007: 24). For example there may be novices to a CoP who are young people, entering work for the first time, and those who are not, but rather ‘migrating’ or ‘shifting’ from another CoP, in which they have already established themselves as full participant or ‘old-timer’. Young people entering as novices or newcomers may indeed, (as discussed earlier here) throughout their life histories, help others to learn and gain new knowledge (such as in fields as ICT, etc.), “a role

normally associated with experienced older workers” (Fuller and Unwin 2004: 40). However, it is being argued that “the roles young people play in the workplace are more complex than the ‘novice’ concept implies” (Fuller and Unwin 2004: 40-41). Goodwin claims that young workers within CoPs, through their social interaction with older workers, are engaged in learning of two types of behaviours: “the occupational behaviours and skills required to do the job and the behaviours appropriate to being an adult” (2007: 106). Indeed, it is argued that “the process of becoming actual persons takes place through individual transformation of social experience” (Harre 1995: 373). One needs to acknowledge that young people, on entering work and integrating into a CoP, “begin communicating with adults who are not family members and, as such, work becomes a site through which young workers can begin fully to engage with the sociocultural practices of adulthood” (Goodwin 2007: 99).

In this age of a ‘global world’ where ‘constellations’ of CoPs are being formed, members of CoPs ‘migrate’ from one CoP to another, or indeed become members in multiple CoPs at the same time – an instance also acknowledged by Lave and Wenger (1991: 105). Members may endure different old-time statuses throughout their career paths and the different routes they take, shifting their positions along the way (Jewson 2007a). In this way, it can be said that “newcomers may pose particular difficulties for established old-timers” due to the fact that their “imported expertise and experience may constitute a challenge to established orthodoxies” (James 2007: 139). It is also argued that innovation is more liable to be brought about “by the diverse

experiences and dispositions that new members bring to the community of practice” (Jewson 2007a: 79). Moreover, such newcomers do offer potential challenges to the CoP because “when they enter as novices...(they) have established old-timer credentials elsewhere” (James 2007a: 153).

2.5.2 An expansive approach to learning

It is being argued here that, in order for CoPs to perform effectively along the fast moving pace of today’s organisations, tacit knowledge, which is so inherent within the learning process fabric of the CoP, is to be complemented with explicit knowledge transfer and/or acquisition. In fact, one has to acknowledge that knowledge incorporates ‘both’ these components: “tacit and explicit knowledge should not be seen as two separate types of knowledge.....all knowledge has both tacit and explicit components” (Jasimuddin, Klein and Connell 2005: 104). It is further argued that both personal constructivism – where “knowledge is constructed in the head of the learner” emanating from personal experiences and formal instruction – and social constructivism – where “knowledge is constructed in CoP through social interaction” – are two knowledge construction views complementing each other: “knowledge is constructed through both social interaction and learner’s mind” (Vrasidas and Zembylas, 2004: 327). Eraut et al. (1998) speak of a continuum: one end being tacit knowledge, deposited in the mind of the individual; while at the other end is the organisational situated knowledge. Such views are somewhat ignored

in Lave and Wenger's account of learning (Fuller & Unwin 2003: 408). The learner has to be construed as a "holistic person" (Hodkinson 2005: 527).

Indeed, it is being argued that in contemporary age, new knowledge is being produced at such rapidity that informal learning alone will not suffice to "ensure that the knowledge and skills of organisations and people will keep up with it" (Slotte et al. 2004 in Tynjala and Hakkinen 2005: 321). Lave and Wenger were "overly dismissive" of this fact (Fuller et al. 2005: 67). Hence, an 'expansive' approach to learning, rather than the 'restrictive' view (Fuller and Unwin 2004) is being advocated. On speaking of an 'expansive-restrictive continuum', Fuller and Unwin insist that an expansive approach "will create a stronger and richer learning environment than that comprising features associated with the *restrictive* end of the continuum" (2003: 411-412). In this day and age, both "a learning curriculum and a teaching curriculum" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 97) are to complement each other in order to maximise the learning process within CoPs; hence, optimising the use of CoPs in providing positive outcomes for their organisations, which today are geared towards knowledge generation (Leadbeater, 2000), where "knowledge, its continual acquisition and sharing, and its existence in both a tacit as well as an explicit form, is becoming recognised as *the* competitive advantage for business" (Jones and McCann 2005: 359). This is particularly so in an environment where "the core economic activities are global – that is they have the capacity to work as a unit in real time...on a planetary scale" (Castells 2001: 52).

2.5.3 Communities of Practice in 'distributed' format

Today's environment renders organisations to look for "flexible arrangements, constant adaptation, and the savvy blending of expertise and credibility that requires crossing the boundaries of organisations" (Snyder, Wenger and de Sousa Briggs 2004: 17). Within such a scenario and expectations, "workers are now expected to think critically, reflectively and creatively" (Pillay et al. 2003: 95), because creativity and innovation is "arguably the most valuable resource in an information society" (Pyoria 2005: 121). This is very much so in the complexity of challenges and associated performance targets that organisations are witnessing today, which "requires a commensurate capacity for learning, innovation, and collaboration across diverse constituencies" (Snyder, Wenger and de Sousa Briggs 2004: 17). Hence, in line with the important need of "collaborative processes" (Tyre and von Hippel 1997: 72), CoPs, in the form of 'distributed', virtual or networks (Wenger et al. 2002), have become such a key element within contemporary complex organisations (Hildreth, Kimble and Wright 2000).

In capitalising on the technological advances of contemporary age, learning in organisations can be even more effective through the emergence and/or adoption of CoPs within them. CoPs are normally associated with co-located environments, however, external pressures such as globalisation, the need to distribute operations across national boundaries and to interact with other 'learning' communities dispersed all over the globe, have induced CoPs to function "in a technologically

mediated, distributed international environment” (Kimble and Hildreth 2005: 104) and where they “can be made effective across time zones, continents and multinational organisational units” (Jewson 2007b: 158). Indeed, “success in global markets depends on communities sharing knowledge across the globe” (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002: 7). Technological advances have made it possible today to communicate and exchange information online, together with providing multimedia interactive audio and video technical resources (Strommen 1994 in Rainsford and Murphy 2005: 458). One can observe how organisations today are utilising the growing interest in online communities to optimise ongoing and lifelong learning (Vrasidas and Zembylas 2004: 328). John Blackwell, Principal EMEA at IBM has been quoted as stating how “the internet is redefining social relationships” (Joy-Matthews and Gladstone 2000: 28). In fact, modern day organisations are providing support and assisting existing CoPs, where learning is indeed a social process (Lave and Wenger 1991: 31), “in using the online communities to increase the effectiveness of their work, by providing a unique space for knowledge generation and exchange, which goes beyond what is available in regular, face-to-face collaboration situations” (Ardichvili, Page and Wentling 2003: 74). It is here being contended that technology does indeed support “learning within a situated and social context” (Houldsworth and Alexander 2005: 212).

Distributed CoPs, which may take also the form of virtual communities and networks, can be construed as a springboard for “enabling learning and development within and across organisations” (Allan and Lewis 2006: 368), and more effectively so in an

expansive setting. As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, Fuller and Unwin viewed that adopting a more expansive, rather than a restrictive, approach to learning – hence, involving participation (taking) place in multiple CoPs, which include also those external to the workplace, and a shared tradition of development within the CoP (Fuller and Unwin 2004) – will bring forth a much stronger and enriched “learning environment...(and) opportunities” (Fuller and Unwin 2003: 412). Indeed, in today’s age where for many companies knowledge is such a vital asset for their survival, CoPs, as construed in this multiple and distributed form, are “the key to the challenge of the knowledge economy” (Wenger and Snyder 2000: 145).

Even though distributed CoPs do enhance KM (Jewson 2007b) and indeed have become such an important KM tool for many multinational organisations worldwide (Ardichvili, Page and Wentling 2003: 64), because they provide a much wider and broad world of opportunities for knowledge generation, sharing and innovation, it is being argued here that the effectiveness of these CoPs depend on two factors: the exercise of mutual respect, trust and openness between participants and also the need to include some element of face-to-face interaction in order to optimise the ‘social and cultural’ interaction involved in CoPs. As with ‘co-located’ CoPs, mutual trust and openness is a crucial element on which the learning process within distributed CoPs rests (Joy-Matthews and Gladstone 2000: 25). Hence, it is vital to develop this mutual respect, openness and trust, both knowledge-based as well as institution-based trust (Ardichvili, Page and Wentling 2003: 73-74), even more so between members of distributed or virtual CoPs (Jewson 2007b), in order to suppress any barriers to

participation in such distributed or virtual knowledge-sharing and -generating CoPs, since “one of the critical factors determining a virtual community’s success is its members' motivation to actively participate in community knowledge generation and sharing activities” (Ardichvili, Page and Wentling 2003: 64).

It is also being argued that the lack of face-to-face interaction has a definite impact on the the successful adoption of distributed or virtual CoPs (Jewson 2007b), which are so fundamental for the learning process within and among the conglomerate of CoPs in today’s organisations. Indeed, it is true that CoPs “can function in a distributed environment”, and are so much important in today’s world to do so, but “a face-to-face element is necessary to take the evolution of the community further more quickly” (Hildreth, Kimble and Wright 2000: 37). In a study conducted by Kimble and Hildreth, participants in their study commented that “(in) getting to know people through visits...(t)he members felt that face-to-face interaction was vital for developing personal relationships. Indeed, participants felt that the development of such relationships needed ‘that bit extra’” (2005: 109).

Even though communication and exchange of information can be extremely valuable and effective through modern technological use of online services, it is being argued here that some sort of physical interaction, albeit in only sporadic instances, is useful to uplift the learning process of CoPs to a higher level. One acknowledges the realities of KM in providing ICT tools, which are there to “replace face-to-face interaction” (Jewson 2007b) and arguably effective and reliable for “connecting

people” across borders or distances (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 18) and facilitating networking (Bollinger and Smith 2001); often taking form in online “free flow of ideas and know-how” (Snell 2002: 554), as well as processing rapidly the right information to “the right people at the right time” (Loan 2006: 131). However, it is being argued here that KM systems and tools are only “mechanistic in their treatment of knowledge” (Scarborough and Swan 2001: 4), capturing only data or/and information, but not ‘human’ knowledge (Rowley 2000: 14); hence, such KM systems are indeed very good for sharing, but do not replace human “skill and judgement” (Seng, Zannes and Pace 2002: 141). Indeed, “IT based KM tools cannot substitute the rich human interaction which underlines the vital role of Cops.....for the creation of new knowledge and the sharing of tacit knowledge” (Kohlbacher and Mukai 2007: 17).

In distributed or virtual CoPs, the face-to-face factor can act to “turbo-boost existing relationships” (Kimble and Hildreth, 2005: 109); hence, vesting itself as a ‘refreshing activity’ in sustaining a sound personal relationship and interaction. One can arguably state that adopting online services for communication purposes augment rather than replace face-to-face interaction (Jones and Richardson 2002 in Jones and McCann 2005: 362): hence, it is argued that “virtual contacts should be supplemented by face-to-face interactions” (Jewson 2007b: 158).

2.5.4 Managing Cultural Differences

An organisation needs to imbue a LO mechanism that easily moulds itself in responding positively, with values of tolerance and acceptance, in front of the contemporary reality of a multicultural and diverse elements within its workforce, as well as when it is operating across borders in other culturally diverse countries, promptly adapting its corporate policies and arrangements (Marquardt and Engel 1993: 63 in Ya-Hui Lien and Mclean 2004: 74) “to fit the culture rather than doing it vice versa” (Abdou and Kliche 2004: 23). Indeed, when actively managed, “cultural differences can be an asset and a resource” (Iles and Kaur Hayers 1997: 106);

In order for CoPs to be truly effective, particularly vested as the hub for contextual and situated learning and where knowledge is continually generated and re-created through participative social interaction, it is crucial for companies “to be cross-culturally aware, sensitive and adaptive to local cultures” (Hutchings and Weir 2006: 272). In “negotiating cultural barriers” (McGuire et al. 2002: 26), an organisation has to ‘understand and adapt to “host country” ways of thinking and acting’ (McGuire et al. 2002: 26-27). Systems could be adjusted without having to change the manager’s or employee’s ideology or culture (Branine 2005: 464). In fact, organisations should not just take their *culture package* and just ‘get in there’: they need to “learn the culture...to slow down and (they) know kind of just quietly find (their) way” (Iles and Kaur Hayers 1997: 113). Indeed, “adopting Western models with Western-based values in developing countries without any modification and consideration of local

culture may be inappropriate” (Al-Hamadi, Budhwar and Shipton 2007: 112). For example, Asians are somewhat “introvert” in cross-cultural interaction settings: they often “suffer from verbal and speech anxiety” (King 2000: 14), where “critical thinking is discouraged” (Venter 2003: 188).

Besides succeeding to adapt to the cultural traits of the host country, organisations need to acknowledge, realise and maximise the benefits of having “a mix of national resources” (Quintanilla 2000: 2); reaping positive returns both in tangible (formal institutions, symbols, etc.) as well as intangible (shared values, common beliefs) forms (Quintanilla 2000: 2). In fact, it is argued that “if cultural differences are recognised, valued and used to the organisation’s advantage, greater synergy can result” (Iles and Kaur Hayers 1997: 106). Moreover, multi-cultural and diverse workforce, if properly managed, “is likely to lead to greater innovation and creativity” (*ibid.*: 106). One has to acknowledge that individuals coming from diverse and different cultures have and can offer “distinctive competencies” (McGuire et al. 2002: 31) and hence can ‘add value’ to the organisation. In fact, maximising the benefits of having a diverse workforce can result in a “greater understanding of diverse markets and customer preferences” (Iles and Kaur Hayers 1997: 106). Indeed, it is argued here that culture can be rendered as “potential source of competitive advantage” for the company, if it is “conceptualised as an opportunity, rather than as an obstacle” (McGuire et al. 2002: 31).

2.5.5 Communities of Practice and the need for Strong Leadership

Although knowledge in CoPs is “self-generating and perpetuating, and transfer is an intrinsic aspect of its functioning” (Adams and Freeman 2000: 39), CoPs are to be “cultivated” (Kavanagh and Kelly 2002 in Juriado and Gustafsson 2007: 53) within an effective learning community or organisation (Owenby 2002). It is being argued here that a strong transformational leadership presence, which can imbue effectively a learning culture, is fundamental for establishing a LO (Lewis 2002) and nurture effective CoPs that will generate the necessary learning and knowledge creation, transfer and management, so crucial today for organisations' ‘survival’. Change is intrinsically associated with CoPs, since “the demands of practice force the community to (continually) revise its relationship to its environment” (Brown and Duguid 1991: 50) and imbue the necessary “adaptations to the changing environment” in order to optimise the learning process (Mittendorff et al. 2006: 301). Indeed, leaders, who “symbolize unity” (Harung 1996: 24), can be crucial in facilitating learning and knowledge generation and processing (Loan 2006) by: creating appropriate *structures* – organic, flexible and dynamic (Harung 1996), “a grand horizontal learning community” (Owenby 2002: 53); establishing and ensuring adequate *systems* – allowing free flow, rapid, timely and openness exchanges; and addressing effectively *people management* issues – empowerment (Lewis 2002), emotions (Stewart 2001), motivation (Milne 2007), commitment (Evans 1998), learner-driven learning mechanisms (Owenby 2002).

It is argued here that only strong leadership will address fully the barriers that might inhibit learning and knowledge creation in CoPs, such as hoarding of knowledge, power relations, resistance to change, etc. True transformational leaders are indeed those who can, through their charismatic and innovational character and attitude, manage to raise the level of motivation, commitment and disposition in the organisation's members for knowledge sharing and creation. These are the people who can drive through the organisation and bring everyone on board for rewards/recognition schemes (Milne 2007), career development pathways (Byrne 2001), etc., as well as succeed in enabling learning and extracting knowledge out of power conflicts (Huzzard 2004) and increase knowledge creation potential through initiatives such as job rotations (Merx-Chermin and Nijhof 2005) and feedback 'loops' (Byrne 2001). Hence, it is held here that this strong leadership is the lynchpin that nurtures, cultivates and facilitates the learning culture, which will instil "a spirit of community at work" (Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001: 991) that is so much inherent in the concept of CoPs, as present, by necessity, within the LO.

2.6 The specific context of Public organisations: the Maltese setting

The aim of this research study is to explore the extent of Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept's contribution towards understanding workplace learning in contemporary organisations. Since this thesis will adopt a case study involving organisations within the MPS, one here has to address issues related to the context that are brought about

by these specific organisations. Issues that will be discussed in this section include: the distinctiveness of public service organisations vis-à-vis private ones, and how the Maltese context might impact on workplace learning and the development of CoPs.

2.6.1 The distinctiveness of public service organisations

Public and private organisations, although arguably having similar organisational set-ups, are aimed and exist for quite different niches. The distinctiveness of public services is evident in their pursuit of equity, justice and fairness, accountability and the enhancement of citizenship (Stewart and Ranson 1988). Public service organisations are normally defined as those "which exercise legitimate authority over populations" (Carroll and Steane 2000: 37). They are often the instruments for the implementation of "the social goals of government" (Rose 1999: 63). A clear distinction between public and private organisations concerns the principal of the organisation and financing. Whereas for public organisations, the principal is the citizen and financing is in the main through taxes, on the other hand, for private companies the owner is the principal while financing is through sales (Collin and Hansson 2000)

While a private company's sole and primary aim is to maximise shareholders' wealth (Pike and Neale 1999), the public organisation "is determined by the legislative body and is ultimately accountable to the public or the legislative body that created it"

(Haksever et al. 2000: 422). Public services organisations have politically defined goals, whereas private ones are more directed by free market forces (Doherty and Horne 2002). Indeed, it is claimed that public service organisations are there to: provide public goods, control externalities (that is, the outcomes that impact third parties, such as social cost, benefits, etc.), preserve equity, and provide a framework for law and order and economic stability (Haksever et al. 2000). Public service organisations are also distinctive "in the provision of public services due to the failure of the market economy to provide them" (Rose 1999: 64). Besides efficiency and effectiveness, which are also so prominent in private organisations, public service organisations have other important goals, such as responsiveness to the public, to the affected clientele, and political rewards for the executive, which often act also in conflict with each other. (Haksever et al. 2000; Rose 1999). Moreover, they have to cater for instances where "outcomes only appear after a long period of time" (Rouse 1997: 78). One also has to affirm that public organisations operate in continuous monitoring and "under intense public pressure" (Haksever et al. 2000: 423). Indeed, public service organisations are subjected to high degrees of external controls, "with multiple stakeholders having an interest in the processes and outputs of those services" (Rose 1999: 73), including public scrutiny and also political interventions.

One has to acknowledge that the distinctive divide between public and private organisations has been somewhat bridged lately, at least in the western world. A major wave of reforms is being witnessed in public organisations induced mainly by the threat of globalisation and the high expectation of the citizen (Rose 1999), as well

as that of privatisation and competitive markets (Mitchell and Harrison 1991). Public service organisations used to be labelled as having their own ethos in being obsessed with rules, where "risk, innovation and change were stifled" (Edwards 1999: 287). However, now the public sector is claiming a move from being a public administration towards being public management, emphasising goals and objectives achievements (Osborne and Gaebler 1993); professing: new structural forms of accountability, continuous erosion of bureaucratic rules, and fragmenting organisations into business units, acting in competition (Rose 1999). In fact, it is being claimed that such reforms in public service organisations have induced a more 'business-like' way of doing things, in being more efficient and cost-conscious (Mitchell and Harrison 1991), as well as urge for a performance culture, driven "by vision, learning, empowerment and a results driven customer orientation" (Rouse 1997: 76).

2.6.2 The Maltese context

The MPS is a public service organisation, which incorporates within its fold a multitude of organisations, all aligned and directed to provide their specific service to the country and its citizens. Indeed, Malta and its public service organisations are right in the midst of undergoing major reforms, both in structures and operations. These reforms were the outcome following the setting up of the Public Service Reform Commission (PSRC) in 1988, and subsequently the Operations Review (OR)

in 1991, which eventually transformed and directed the MPS towards public management rather than its 'old' public administration structures and operations mechanisms. Indeed, massive investment in ICT investments, which has placed Malta in the frontline as regards e-government services (MITA 2011), the enactment of the Public Service Act (DOI 2009), and the setting up of the quality service charters (Charter Support Unit 2011) and the Centre for Development, Research and Training (CDRT 2011) are hallmarks of these ongoing reforms in the MPS.

One has to say that this ongoing transformation within the MPS came about not only because Malta had to respond to the globalisation challenges, like any other nation (Pirota 2005), but even more so because Malta and essentially its public service have to align their organisational structures, policies and operations due to Malta's recent EU membership (Malta was endorsed as an EU member state on 1st May, 2004). Hence, this speaks not only of the nation's need to undergo major reforms in its structures and public service delivery in order to be in line with EU standards, but also to sustain this position by continually implementing, as with all the other EU member states, ongoing changes and organisational transformations the EU, as an organisation itself, is enduring within today's world global fabric.

While this affirms and posits the MPS in line with modern contemporary public organisations, one has still to explore the particular 'Maltese' characteristics of the MPS. Malta is a small island state and hence geographically isolated, yet claims to be the most densely populated state in Europe, with circa 400,000 inhabitants crammed

within an area of 316 sq. km (Pirota 2005). Such claims speak out of a sense of fellowship and community among the Maltese (Baldacchino 2002). Malta has been described as a "small, parochial and cosseted society" (Warrington 2000: 47). Malta has been 'inspired' by Britain (Baldacchino 2003) in framing its system of government and administration, based on the Westminster/Whitehall model (Pirota 2000). Now with EU membership, even though Malta is becoming increasingly 'Europeanised' (Baldacchino 2003) and having a "cosmopolitan and polyglot population" (Baldacchino 2002: 195), one affirms that the Maltese still retain traditional value systems, like the family, church and religion (Abela 1994), which are still deeply ingrained within Maltese society and workplaces (Mifsud 2003). Moreover, it is claimed that the Maltese worker still cherishes and retains traditional traits related to moral fibre, as well as to propensity for change (Abela 1994). This applies also in relation to the Maltese traditional work ethic of being thrift and industrious (Mifsud 2003) and portraying undivided loyalty to superiors (Baldacchino 2003). Indeed, although contemporary MPS organisations are becoming increasingly 'Europeanised' and engaged within the 'global' community, with the inevitable consequences of infiltrations of foreign cultures and absorption of new identities that these bring about, MPS workers still cherish and retain such traditional moral and work ethics.

The CoPs concept involves key factors, such as social participative interaction, a sense of belonging to a 'community' and communal identity, and mutual sharing of ideas, practices and ways of doing things (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002). It

has been argued here in this thesis that trust gels all this social practice together, engaging CoP members "in a sharing and cooperative manner" (Nichani 2001: 3), which enables effective learning to take place within CoPs. The MPS organisations can claim to be contemporary organisations that are riding the crest of globalisation, as well as undergoing reforms effectively towards being on a par with private organisations' 'business-like' approach of doing things, as driven by efficient, customer focus and cost and performance conscious mechanisms. Moreover, the Maltese worker has indeed a traditional work ethic that complies quite well with the development of CoPs and workplace learning occurring therein.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, this thesis discussed and examined the theoretical literature which provided a conceptual framework in relation to the research problem of this research study; that is, to explore to what extent and in what form can Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs be relevant and helpful in our understanding of workplace learning in contemporary organisations. This chapter discussed first the exposition, as laid out by Lave and Wenger's, of the CoPs concept, as rooted within their concept of situated learning. The discussion then threaded along in exposing how these concepts fit in within the need of nurturing a LO and managing knowledge, and following this process, in what way CoPs are conceptualised in reality. Following this discussion on the CoPs functioning in real terms, this chapter then discussed and examined the

workplaces or organisations in which these CoPs operate; specifically, how contemporary age, through such phenomena as globalisation, is transforming such organisations into borderless and multinational entities, leading into the discussion the emergent issue of cultural difference. This chapter discussed also how the CoPs concept of Lave and Wenger ought to be 'repackaged' in order to reflect the realities of human involvement and interaction complexities, as well as be amended, moulded and evolved in terms that can be truly effective for our understanding of workplace learning within contemporary organisations. Finally, this chapter concluded in discussing the distinctiveness of public service organisations, as well as the specific Maltese context and how this may impact on workplace learning and the development of CoPs.

The following chapter will discuss the research methodology adopted for this research study. This will consist of a detailed examination of the research method and design, as well as the data collection, analysis and coding process used for this study, together with claims for their justification. The chapter will also discuss and expose the ethical considerations addressed during the research process.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The central theme of enquiry set out for this thesis is to what extent Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs is relevant and helpful in understanding workplace learning in contemporary organisations. This research study will evolve around a case study setup, involving contemporary organisations within the MPS. The first chapter of this thesis exposed the background to this study, the research aims, scope and significance of this research study. This was followed by a review of the literature which provided a theoretical framework for this research. Now, this third chapter will describe the research methodology and design adopted for this study.

This chapter will be sectorised into five parts. After this introduction, there will be a discussion on the research method adopted for this study, as well as its justification. The third section will concern the data source and collection process. This will be followed by the ethical considerations attended to during the research process. The final section will give an exposition of the coding adopted on data collation and analysis, as well as details on the quotes notation system used for this research study.

3.2 Research method and justification

The research strategy and design adopted for this thesis is entirely qualitative. The subject under enquiry in this study is exploring the extent of the CoPs concept in its contribution towards understanding workplace learning in contemporary organisations. The CoPs concept speaks about workplace learning and knowledge creation that occurs through participative social interaction by CoPs members. In order to achieve its aims, this thesis adopts a research strategy and design that involves examining the individual experiences of CoPs members within organisations. This places this research study within a qualitative methodological framework, posited on interpretivism (Bryman 2004). This qualitative research approach has been also adopted in past studies on human complexities involving CoPs in public service settings (vide Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003; James 2004; Iaquinto et al. 2011; Holdaway 1983).

One speaks of two research paradigms, both distinct and different in their epistemological positions; one is phenomenological and the other is positivism (Hussey and Hussey 1997). These two paradigms are posited along a continuum from two ontological end positions; objectivism and subjectivism (Morgan and Smircich 1980). From its position, positivism seeks objective causal explanations in relation to social phenomena, hence excluding subjectivism and appropriation of meaning in research (Denzin 1989). On the other hand, from its ontological position, subjectivism view social phenomena and their meaning as "continually being

accomplished by social actors", where individuals take an active and crucial role "in the social construction of social reality" (Bryman 2004: 17). This research study upholds this latter view; hence, considering the phenomenological or interpretive paradigm to be the most appropriate research approach for this study.

Qualitative research is rooted epistemologically as *interpretivist*; emphasising the ways on how the social world is interpreted, experienced, understood, or produced by individuals (Bryman 2004: 20). It involves: a data collection or, more appropriately, *generation* process (Mason 2006: 16) which is to be "flexible and contextual", that is, sensitive to the changing social context where the data is being produced; and, the ability to produce and provide explanations, based upon methodological forms of logic and analysis (Mason 2006: 7-8). Qualitative research is viewed as providing meaningful insights into the experiences of the ones being researched and their perceptions of the subject under research (Shah 2006: 217). Indeed, the subject under enquiry in this thesis demands such an approach, since human involvement and interaction complexities are involved. Hence, by adopting this approach, social reality is viewed as something formulated by individuals, which is incessantly shifting and growing (Bryman 2004: 20).

From its ontological position, qualitative research is concerned more with *constructing* theory (Bryman 2004: 266), rather than *excavating* which is so prevalent in quantitative research (Mason 2006: 64). Indeed, the results sought out in this thesis in order to arrive at its aims had to involve constructs and explorations, to be deduced

from personal experiences of individual workers in organisations. Hence, rather than ‘subjects’ or some sort of objects on whom experiments will be conducted (as arguably is the case in quantitative research), the qualitative approach in this regard views the respondents more as *partners* who are actively involved in their research process (Westmarland 2001: 7). In fact, here, the control over this process is *shared* between the researcher and the researched, rather than being imposed by the researcher (Fields 2000: 2); indeed, a *shared exploration journey* (Marshall 1995: 27).

This research study indeed relates to complex human social interactions and “how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, 13); a subject matter which finds its realm in the qualitative research approach which emphasises the ‘why’, which is so much neglected in the quantitative research process (Miller *et al.* 2002: 1). In line with what is being sought in this thesis, qualitative research involves a process of discovery, focusing on “what people actually say and do in specific places” (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002: 35), the motivations and reasoning employed by the researched (Miller *et al.* 2002: 1), that is how social things, happenings and/or occurrences “develop in social and temporal context” (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002: 36).

The research design adopted for this thesis is in the form of a case study. Case study research is purposely associated with theory building, rather than theory testing (Eisenhardt 1989); hence, an appropriate vehicle for qualitative research approach

adopted in this thesis. This line of thought and justification is also enforced by past researchers on CoPs within public service organisations, where Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003) and James (2004) chose a case study on school and university teachers respectively, Iaquinto et al. (2011) adopted a case study research on state government department, and Holdaway (1983) chose his own police department.

This research study undertook an instrumental case study (Stake 1995) of a single organisation – the Malta Public Service (MPS). Although the MPS is regarded here as a single organisation, it is indeed a national and unique organisation for a given nation (in this study's case, the country is Malta), which embodies within it a conglomerate of organisations and units, all different and diverse in scope, service delivery and operations (Malta Public Service Annual Reports of Government Departments 2009). Hence, the case study adopted for this research study can be said to be 'embedded' (Yin 1994), involving multiple individual organisations or 'cases', which eventually enabled data capture from these different and diverse organisations and a 'cross-data' analysis across organisations within the MPS. The MPS was specifically selected as the case study for this research since, acknowledging that this thesis' researcher has been a MPS official for over 35 years, the MPS as an organisation was "easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry" (Stake 1995: 4), and also because it provided "a suitable context" for the research problem to be answered (Bryman 2004: 51).

Case study research seeks to understand the dynamics present within a particular setting (Eisenhardt 1989); an empirical inquiry focussing on "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (Yin 1994: 13). The main objective here is to seek the "deep understanding of the actors, interactions, sentiments, and behaviours occurring for a specific process through time" (Woodside and Wilson 2003: 497). In this instance, questions in the form of 'why' and 'how', as also the *exploratory* 'what' (Yin 1994; Stake 1995), in terms of 'what is happening out there?', form the enquiry and are particularly suited for case research study. This is particularly in line with what is being sought by this research study; that is, seeking to gain an in-depth insight into the social interactions involving human beings at different and diverse work places and situations.

The advantage of adopting a case study research is in enabling the 'closing in' on real-life situations and examining views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice (Flyvbjerg 2006). Indeed, this speaks intrinsically of a context-dependent knowledge, which Flyvbjerg describes as "concrete, practical knowledge" (2006: 224). Qualitative researchers, by making themselves as close as possible "to the actual phenomena that they are trying to understand" (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002: 36), will be able to access the *cultural world* of the researched (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002: 42). In order to succeed, the qualitative researcher has to understand these phenomena "contextually or holistically" (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002: 36). The study of human beings, their social interactions and relations, as indeed are the key ingredients of the research problem of this thesis, is intrinsically linked to

context-dependent knowledge and "the case study is especially suited to produce this knowledge" (Flyvbjerg 2006: 223). In seeking results which were to be wholly focused on human involvement and interaction complexities and hence maximising the richness and quality of data capture and analysis, this thesis had to endorse this qualitative research design.

Notwithstanding this position, this research study does contend that there are drawbacks in this qualitative research approach that need attention. Indeed, one has to acknowledge that an element of bias is prevalent in such a type of research, involving *closeness* and interaction between the researcher and the researched. Though, one can argue here that such an element of bias is arguably present in all research (Shah 2006) since, as Eisner (1993) contends, researchers cannot attain full objectivity and detachment in and from their research.

It is being argued that the relationship, established between the researcher and the researched in qualitative research, is inevitable. It is intrinsically part of the data collection or, better still, *generation* (Mason 2006: 16, 52) process. Indeed, it is held here that it is a requisite or *demand*ed from the qualitative research methods or/and techniques themselves. Since the main tenet driving the qualitative research process is 'understanding', a rapport between the researcher and the researched has to be established in order to reach this goal: "it is paramount that the researcher establishes a rapport with the respondents....(where) the researcher must be able to take the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their viewpoint, rather than

superimpose his or her world of academia and preconceptions upon them” (Fontana and Frey 2003: 78). Indeed, the more this rapport is built on sound foundations and developed in the rightful way, the richer the ‘understanding’ captured by the qualitative research is.

In this way, qualitative research produces extremely elaborate and rich data, many times involving “rich descriptions...of cultural, emotional and social life” (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002: 35). It is about “seeing through the eyes of the people being studied” (Bryman 2004: 279). This ultimately speaks of and necessitates *close involvement* on the part of the researcher with the people being researched (Bryman 2004: 287); an involvement which is often expressed in “a deep feeling and emotional closeness to the persons studied” (Westmarland 2001: 7). Hence, it is quite evident that a relationship develops between the researcher and the researched. Indeed, the interaction and relationship that develops between them “adds richness and texture to the experience of conducting research” (Hannabuss 2000, 100).

Although, from the ontological position of qualitative research, the researcher and the researched are to corroborate ‘in partnership’, through the development of this sound relationship between them, in order to ‘construct’ a valid and authentic theory, this study maintains that the researcher still has to avoid *excessive* involvement in the data generating process and should maintain a ‘threshold’ of objectivity in order to truly validate his study. In conducting this research study, the researcher adopted a cautious outlook of not compromising objectivity by being *too much involved*

(Goodwin and Horowitz 2002: 40). This was even more so when considering that the researcher was an MPS employee, as also were the persons being researched. In fact, the researcher in this study sought continually to exercise reflexivity (Mason 2006, Bryman 2004) in order to meticulously strike a balance on how intense and close the interaction and 'partnership' is to be; hence, minimising subjectivity/bias and preserving a 'threshold' of objectivity.

Other challenges facing this research study, in adopting its qualitative strategy and design approaches, include issues relating to validity and reliability (Bryman 2004). Indeed, some view qualitative research as simply illustrative and practised in casual and unsystematic ways (Mason 2006) or as relating to fiction rather than science (Denzin and Lincoln 2003) and, hence, falling short in rendering such research as valid and reliable. However, one has to claim a research to be valid and reliable not in terms of 'measurability', that is according to 'traditional' quantitative "scientific criteriology" (Mason 2006: 38), but more in terms of the "integrity of the conclusions" emanating from it (Bryman 2004: 28).

Indeed, this research study endeavoured to endorse this integrity throughout the whole research process, in adopting a rigorous and systematic approach (Mason 2006: 7), whilst engaging continually in reflexivity. Reflexivity relates to the researcher as reflecting back on himself as a researcher (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000). Mason speaks on reflexivity in terms of "thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognising the

extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see." (Mason 2006: 5). In fact, along this research study, the researcher engaged in several instances of self-questioning, mostly on his role in the research (CLMS M1, U4: 25), as well as the implications of the research methods being used and critically challenging any biases that cropped up (Bryman 2004). Indeed, the researcher of this study was aware of his 'privileged' position as researcher, considering him being also a MPS employee and so in the same MPS as the ones being researched, and the power relations this may bring with it (CLMS M1, U4: 25). Hence, the researcher of this study was sensitive to his social and cultural context (Bryman 2004) and sought to be critically aware of his own perspective (Marshall 1995); constantly challenging and asking "why" he is "getting the answers" he is getting (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002: 40).

Indeed, this study sought to construct validity by adopting proper measures during the research (Yin 1994). One such measure concerned the procurement of "respondent validation", which Bryman endorses as a means for internal validity (2004: 274). With a view of further endorsing internal validity, this research study sought to search for the 'why' behind relationships (Eisenhardt 1989) during interviews as well as the use of both probing questions (Van Maanern 1979) and asking the same questions to different people (Yin 1994). In the next section, it will be discussed how interviewees, in line with respondent validation measures suggested by Bryman (2004) and Yin (1994), were in fact given the transcripts of their own interview in

order to validate what they had actually said, as well as how interviews were conducted.

External validity is closely related to generalisations issues (Bryman 2004; Eisenhardt 1989). A common critique of qualitative research, particularly adopting a case study design, is in "failing to examine a sufficient number of cases for building solid generalisations" (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002: 36). Even though some claim that "formal generalisation is overvalued as a source of scientific development" (Flyvbjerg 2006: 228), this thesis still endeavoured to address generalisation issues. In fact, the next section will also show how this research study adopted a sampling process that included purposive and quota sampling, hence selecting a "specified population" (Eisenhardt 1989: 533), as well as discuss how a matrix was established for this research data-set in order to maximise such representation. Hence, this study, whilst engaging on a case study research design, sought to produce results and arguments that are not idiosyncratic but rather somewhat generalisable and "have some demonstrable wider resonance" (Mason 2006: 8). As a matter of fact, the research data-set included different and diverse jobs from all sectors within the MPS organisations; which organisations cover such a wide range of operations and services. However, notwithstanding these measures to address generalisations issues, one still has to acknowledge that, since this thesis adopted a case study involving only organisations within the MPS, findings in this study can safely assume 'generalisability' to MPS organisations but not necessarily to all 'contemporary organisations'.

3.3 Data source and collection

As intimated in the introduction of this chapter, a case study on MPS contemporary organisations will form the data source framework for this research study. The MPS is a 'grand' organisation, which, being Malta's central and only public civil service administrative organ, typically incorporates a whole spectrum of diverse service organisations. In this sense, this is quite unique since, apart from being a public organisation, it is also rather distinctively different from a private one; it possesses inevitable particularities, such as a whole spectrum of diverse and different organisations within it, which will provide an interesting and rich data for this research.

The data targeted in this research study were the diverse and different public service jobs as experienced by MPS workers, rather than individual MPS workers themselves. Hence, although the data capture technique had to be adopted through *communication* with the workers, the data sought for this study was that 'constructed' on 'recounting of experiences' regarding social interaction and participation, community formations and belonging, etc. by the MPS workers, not in general terms, but in relation to a specific job/jobs and work environment attached to that particular job/jobs throughout the worker's public service career. In this way, the research fieldwork could be conducted in a sustained way; physically accessing and communicating with a feasible number of individual workers, whilst acquiring data on public service jobs that far exceeds the number of participants. Indeed,

participants in this study had been MPS employees for a number of years (vide Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 for participants' list and years of service) and had performed more than one job; hence entering and participating as CoP members at different workplaces throughout their career. This has rendered data to be much more enhanced in richness and quality due to the diversity of jobs and subsequent 'extensive' sample.

Identifying the presence of CoPs was based on criteria intimated in Lave and Wenger's exposition of the CoPs concept. Lave and Wenger (1991) speak of participative social interaction where learning occurs 'situated' through this social practice within a community and among communities of workers. Wenger (1998) identifies three dimensions that encapsulate a CoP: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. Moreover, Wenger (1998) also maintains that there are three characteristics that identify the presence of a CoP: the domain - the area of knowledge discussed; the community - the people concerned with the domain and who engage in social interaction and sharing of experiences and practices; and practice - the sharing of experiences, knowledge, practices, etc. that the community of people exchange among themselves. Hence, the criteria used for identifying the presence of CoPs was the presence of a community of workers where social interaction and the sharing of ideas and practices occurred in a social and informal way.

The data collection method adopted in this research, in line with the ontological and epistemological positioning discussed in the previous section of this chapter, is qualitative interviewing in the form of semi-structured interviews. On considering previous research studies related to CoPs in public service organisations, semi-structured interviewing was a preferred choice for many on conducting their research. James (2004) and Iaquinto et al. (2011) adopted semi-structured interviewing as their research data collection method, whilst Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003) adopted a combination of semi-structured interviewing with personal observation and Holdaway (1983) adopted ethnography or personal observation. Ethnography and personal observation enable the study to be in real time and provide an in-depth account of personal behaviour and motives over a period of time (Jorgenson 1989).

This research study chose to adopt qualitative interviewing in the form of semi-structured interviews rather than engaging personal observation or ethnography for three reasons. Firstly, this research was restricted in time for data collection fieldwork and, hence, could not afford, even if it were its preferred choice, to allocate a period of say 2 to 3 years of personal observation fieldwork – Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003), for example, took this amount of time to perform their personal observation research along with interviewing. Secondly, since this research study, although endorsing a qualitative approach, had a pre-defined clear research question and focus (Silverman 1993), it was found to be more appropriate to use interviewing rather than observation (Bryman 2004). Lastly, as Bryman (2004: 339) observes, a research study which will involve a reconstruction of past events, since participants in

this study had to recall on past experience of CoP membership in other jobs/workplaces, is much more suited to interviewing rather than participant observation.

The effectiveness of qualitative interviewing is based on: how intense the relationship developed between the researcher and researched is; how essential is that this relationship is built on mutual trust and respect; and how *empathy* and *identification* come into play. The interview is indeed the tool on and/or from which the relationship is founded and developed between the researcher and the researched. Qualitative research, indeed, demands that interviewing be contextual. The interview in qualitative research should be viewed from an epistemological and ontological position of interpreting and constructing theory, on where and how people understand, view, reason, perceive, think of things in given situations (Mason 2006: 63-64). Its main focus is for “the construction of contextual knowledge” (Mason 2006: 64).

In contrast with the structured format used in quantitative interviewing methods, qualitative interviews include prompts and follow-up questions by the interviewer (Bryman 2004: 320-324) and, hence, conducting such interviewing provides the researcher with a powerful tool in order to really *get to know* the interviewees “beneath their rational facades” (Fontana and Frey 2003: 91). In fact, one can say that, in qualitative research, the researcher is concerned that there is a person you want to get to know, to empathise with, and to understand and share his/her thoughts

and perspectives (Hermanowicz 2002: 482). Indeed, this research study affirms the view that qualitative interviewing is a *negotiated accomplishment* of both the researcher and the researched, where “questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent” (Fontana and Frey 2003: 91). In order to ensure the development of a sound relationship between the researcher and the researched, interviews should involve, rather than simple abstract questioning, questions prompting respondents to divulge situations and occurrences that they experienced in their lives, given in an environment of mutual trust and in a ‘free flow’ ambience of interaction (Mason 2006: 64).

In conducting this research study, the researcher engaged in semi-structured in-depth interviews on a sample that was composed of 32 individual MPS workers, involving a data set of 74 distinct 'jobs' that covered a widespread and diverse public service operations. In order to ensure the right mix of diversity of jobs coming from all public service sectors, a combination of purposive, quota and snowball sampling techniques were adopted.

This research study, although emphatically positioned itself on the epistemological interpretivism stance of qualitative interviewing, was from the outset geared to achieve a wide representative sample as much as possible. However, it was decided to adopt non-probability or random techniques in order to avoid the possibility of becoming "vulnerable to added layers of meaning, biases, and interpretations" (Fontana and Frey, 2003). Hence, quota sampling was first adopted, with the

intention of "producing representative samples without a random selection" (De Vaus 2002: 90), according to a "quota target list" (Mason 2006: 140), aimed towards achieving an acceptable representation of the empirical population targeted for this research study.

With a view of achieving this representation, this research study classified the 'targeted' MPS 'jobs' into four categories of public service workers: clerical, technical/specialised, low-skilled and high-skilled. The technical/specialised category includes jobs such as: teachers, nurses, police officers, inspectors, messengers, security guards, etc. Medical doctors, architects and lawyers, although falling under the technical/specialised category, were specifically excluded from this research study, since it was deemed by the researcher that their highly specialised skills or professional status was, by default, acquired through formal university degrees or academic structures to which warrants/licences are inevitably attached in order for them to practise their profession, as well as their probability of practising private work that may skew the results of this research. The determination of which jobs are low- or high- skilled was done in terms of the level of skills needed to perform the job. High-skilled jobs include: managers, highly technical/specialised jobs and clerical jobs related to 'technical' Departments, such as the IRD, HR, Finance, etc. (vide Appendix 1 for complete list)

The following matrix gives a graphical representation of the data-set targeted for this research study:

		CLERICAL (C) Jobs			
LOW- SKILLED (L) jobs	<i>Clerks</i>		<i>High-Skilled Managers and Clerks</i>		HIGH- SKILLED (H) Jobs
	<i>Low-Skilled Technical officers</i>		<i>High-Skilled Technical and Specialised Managers and officers</i>		
		TECHNICAL/SPECIALISED (T) jobs			

The researcher, with a view of maximizing empirical representation, established percentage thresholds in the quota sampling list. Furthermore, a number of respondents in managerial positions – that is, in office positions that manage a number of people as subordinates – together with a related percentage threshold, was also established (vide Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).

Following this quota sampling and target list, purposive and snowball sampling were adopted. Purposive or theoretical sampling was introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and was deemed to be appropriate for this research study because it concerns interviewing only those "people who are relevant to the research questions" (Bryman 2004: 334). Hence, adopting this technique avoids the pitfall of selecting 'irrelevant' data; thus, selecting only that 'sample' which is indeed relevant and "meaningful theoretically and empirically, because it builds on certain characteristics or criteria which help to develop and test your theory or your argument" (Mason 2006: 124). Therefore, the basis for selection was not only to be the characteristics of the workers

(Patton 1990) that had to reflect the diversity of the data-set or sample. It was also, or rather, aimed to produce a sample that eventually enabled a thorough exploration of the research targeted aims and the emerging theoretical focus that transpired through simultaneous data collection and analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998) – a data analysis that is rooted in grounded theory, which will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter. The list of respondents was effectively achieved mainly through the snowball sampling technique, where the researcher made contact with a small number of identified MPS workers who were deemed to be "relevant to the research topic" and then these respondents were consulted in order to "establish contacts with others" (Bryman 2004: 334).

A total of 32 interviews were conducted for this research study, covering, as has already been intimated earlier here, a data population of 74 public service jobs, all distinct and rich in their diversity. The interviews' duration varied from around 45 minutes to one and a half hour. This amount of interviews was determined in line with the quota target list as well as when the researcher deemed that the amount of public service 'jobs', and particularly their diversity and representation value of data capture within them, had achieved "theoretical saturation" (Bryman 2004: 305). This 'theoretical saturation' is not something specified but is a state which the researcher reaches in 'constructing' through the 'interviewing stage' and, whilst engaged in close proximity to both data capture and its analysis, deems to be adequate and sufficient in meeting what the study seeks to achieve in its research enquiry (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Interviewing of respondents participating in this research study commenced only after a list of questions were carefully designed by the researcher. This list of questions was pilot tested with two purposively selected individual workers. Following this pilot testing stage, a refined set of questions was produced for the interviews, sectored into three parts. The first and third sections of this list concerned general or data enquiry related to the 'individual', whereas the second section, which incidentally contained the bulk of the questions for the interview, was specifically and directed for 'each and every job' the interviewee experienced throughout his/her public service career. The list of questions guiding the interviewing is at Appendix 3.

As has been intimated earlier here, the interview was a *negotiated accomplishment* where questions and replies along the interviewing were "jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent" (Fontana and Frey 2003: 91). Here, the researcher took care in encouraging respondents into 'opening up' and recounting their experiences, while at the same time ensuring the veracity, and hence not 'taking at face value', what was being recounted and claimed by the respondents being interviewed. Indeed, the researcher endeavoured in not only involving simple abstract questioning but rather in engaging on a heavy input of probing questions, encouraging respondents not only in 'opening up' and recounting their experiences but also endorsing veracity in their claims; hence, ensuring effective 'constructing' of high quality, rich and reliable data capture, particularly in line with the 'exploratory' nature of this research study. The researcher succeeded in doing this only after a sound relationship was

established between him and the interviewees. As with all human beings, the interviewees have different personality traits and the researcher used his experience and skill in managing to not only maximizing the participative level and 'openness' of these interviewees, but also unearthing honesty and truthfulness in their claims.

Moreover, it is being argued here that the fact that the researcher is also an MPS worker has rendered him in a better position to empathise and identify with the interviewees' situations and experiences. The researcher, himself sharing the same MPS work culture and experiences, having a more profound *understanding* of the problem and hence "no stranger" to the interviewees (Shah 2006: 215), 'enjoyed' a position of "epistemological privilege" (Stanley and Wise 1993: 227-228). This thesis affirms that this position enabled a much more sound relationship development, built on trust and respect, between the researcher and the researched, which in turn helped to "conduct effective social research"(Shah 2006: 217) by generating a much richer quality data (Shah 2006: 210). Still, one has to acknowledge here that there is arguably an element of *bias* in such situations, owing to the interviewer's subjectivity in *knowing* the subjects/areas under research. However, although this, from the epistemological position of qualitative research, may be considered positively as being beneficial for the generation and 'construction' of a sound theory, the researcher conducting this study was very cautious in handling such data. In fact, as has been discussed in the previous section of this chapter, in order to preserve the desired level of objectivity (Goodwin and Horowitz 2002, 40) and not "influence the process too extensively" (CLMS M1, U4; 29), the researcher meticulously and

continuously exercised effective reflexivity, 'de-contaminated' data from 'unwanted' subjectivity and preserved, within the essence/core of the 'data generating process', the objective elements necessary for the research's validity and authenticity.

The researcher was meticulous also during the interviewing process in preserving the 'tangibility' element of the data gathered from research fieldwork. All interviews were conducted in the preferred place chosen by the participants in this study (mostly at their offices or place of work) and were all audio-recorded, after all ethical considerations were taken into account– as will be explained in detail in the next section of this chapter. Due to the endeavour made by the researcher to establish a sound relationship between him and his interviewees and, hence encourage 'openness' recounting of experiences, rich of quality data, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, the interviews were conducted in the preferred language choice of the interviewee. In fact, these interviews were eventually in their main conducted in Maltese (the 'mother' language of the interviews) – the language that the interviewees were more comfortable with and at ease in recounting their experiences. Moreover, in order to 'internal validate' (Bryman 2004) the findings of this research study, the transcripts were made accessible to the interviewees for them to endorse the correctness of what they had actually said during the interview. In fact, there were two instances where the participants made amendments, albeit minor ones, to the transcripts that they were presented by the researcher of this study. This study felt that, in this way, it had taken appropriate measures to ensure validity (Bryman 2004; Yin 1994) of all data collected in this research.

Transcription of interviews poses by itself an element of limitation (Mason 2006: 77); a limitation that in the data collection process of this research study is even more aggravated by the 'translation' element of these same transcripts. In order to minimize this limitation factor as much as possible, the researcher took two bold steps. Firstly, the researcher undertook upon himself the whole task of conducting the interviewing, transcribing the interviews and also the translation of the transcripts. Secondly, the researcher committed himself to conducting this whole task in the shortest time possible. Hence, there were occasions when the interview (conducted in Maltese) was done in the morning and by the following day it was already transcribed and translated into English. Considering that interviews averaged more than 75 minutes each, this was indeed a time-consuming and arduous task for the researcher. However, the researcher of this study felt that this was the only way to ensure that such data transcriptions limitations are kept to a minimum.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

This study included research methods involving people and sensitive data; hence, this called for due consideration to ethical issues emanating from such a research study. Such a research has to speak in terms of "values in the research process" (Bryman 2004: 506), which is indeed also to be considered throughout the whole process of the research study (Kvale 1996). This research study endeavoured a strong commitment

in addressing such ethical issues, as guided and underlined by the British Sociological Association (BSA) ethical codes of conduct.

One of the first ethical considerations addressed in this study is that relating to accessibility (Silverman 2000; Bryman 2004). Being currently an officer within the MPS and with 35 public service years experience behind his back, the researcher was in a position of a relatively easy access to much data required for this research, including population details needed for the interviews to be conducted. Although, most of the participants in this study were easily accessible, with others, accessibility issues needed to be addressed. In fact, the researcher encountered instances where public officers were willing to participate in this study but needed to consult their Head of Section in order to do so. The few cases encountered in this regard did not actually involve an official endorsement to take part but more of a 'consultative' or 'moral obligation' rather than anything else. In these cases, the researcher communicated (and in some cases even called at their office) with these Heads, where the scope, methodology and the intended positive outcomes of the research project was clearly explained, particularly the project's intended benefits as regards the MPS, as well as the professional and objective way the research project would be conducted. In this way, 'accessibility' for these officers was successfully obtained.

Ethical considerations were also addressed in this study in relation to the direct dealing with participants intended for this research work. Although this research study and data collection process was overt in all its aspects, the researcher still had to

give due consideration to the informed consent of all respondents participating in this study (Mason 2006; Johnson 2002). Obtaining this informed consent was not only respecting a fundamental moral right of participants but also safeguarding the full integrity of the research project. The researcher informed the participants, both on initial contact over the phone, as well as on the day scheduled for and when the interview occurred, of what the scope of the research to be conducted was, what it would involve, how the data would be used and which groups of participants, and why, were targeted in this research. Before proceeding with the interview, the researcher ensured that participants were totally comfortable with their participation in this research study and gave their consent for their involvement in the research, freely and voluntarily. Endorsement of this consent was obtained through a pre-designed written declaration that all participants taking part in the research study, as well as the researcher himself, signed before interviewing commenced; a copy of which was also handed over to the research participants themselves (vide Appendix 7 for a copy of this Informed Consent Form).

Another ethical consideration related to the participants' voluntary consent for their involvement in this research, that indeed was given its due attention by the researcher of this study, was the 'power relation' issue (Mason 2006) – an issue which could have been brought up in the equation by the researcher's position as an MPS officer himself. The fact of the researcher being himself a public service officer within the same MPS organisation as the participants themselves taking part in this research study, undoubtedly raised ethical issues. In particular, here one has to mention

elements of possible bias and subjectivity, as well as that of 'social desirability' (Bryman 2004). The researcher, indeed, dedicated time, both during initial communication as well as on the day of the interview, to explain the aims, scope, his specific involvement as a pure researcher, and the clear intended outcome of this research study to all participants in this study. He also explained emphatically that the research results emerging from this study would in no way delineate or give any indication whatsoever to the participants individual positioning within their organisation or/and the MPS. Moreover, the researcher ensured that his position and any prior knowledge did not affect the research setting and serve in some way to coerce respondents towards participating in this research project (Silverman 2000).

Issues relating to confidentiality and anonymity of participants (Mason 2006; Johnson 2002) were also given their due attention by the researcher, even more so as the researcher was a 'colleague' public service officer within the MPS. The researcher acknowledged that preserving and guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity was not only a moral right vested upon this research participants, but ensured 'openness', trust and respect; indeed, crucial elements to provide the foundation base for the close relationship with the participants, targeted by the researcher, which would in turn provide the required high quality and rich data for this study. Due attention was given to the articulation of questions being put forth for the interview sessions (Mason 2006). During the interviewing session, the researcher attended meticulously to preserve an ambience in which "honesty and openness" flourished (Bridges 1989: 145). For every interview session, the researcher consulted with the participant to be

interviewed on an appropriate location and room for the interview, which allowed no possible eavesdropping and/or interruptions, as well as being adequate enough for sound recording (Mason 2006). The researcher ensured that the participants were fully comfortable about being audio-recorded before interviewing commenced and how the recording would proceed (Warren 2002). It was also made clear to the participants that pseudonyms would be used for recording of data; indeed, every audio-recorded interview commenced with the researcher introducing the participants with his pseudonym, for example: "The following interview is with respondent no. 15". The researcher encountered no objections from participants on these requests and the research study proceeded smoothly in this regard.

Indeed, the researcher was aware that such ethical dilemmas and considerations were closely related to how successful he was able to build and maintain a solid relationship with the participants, based on trust and security. The researcher took it upon himself to be frank and clear from the very first meeting with all participants about the scope of the research, the intended positive outcomes and the amount of commitment required from them (CLMS M1, U1: 46). Moreover, the researcher endeavoured to continually 'visibly' demonstrate honesty and integrity in all his actions, mannerisms, etc (Bryman 2004). In fact, this was successful, not only in building a relationship of mutual trust and respect, but also in eliminating any possible suspicions/scepticisms that could have arisen about the researcher's intentions and, subsequently, ensured the participants' full cooperation, and in many instances, even enthusiastically so, for this research project. Furthermore, the

researcher ensured that no unnecessary stress, risk or harm would be caused to the participants of this study (Bryman 2004). These participants were also duly informed beforehand that they would have access to the transcripts (including the Maltese transcript where the interview was conducted in Maltese) of their responses soon after the interviews, in order for them to do any amendments, if they so wished. In fact, all transcripts were acknowledged and endorsed as correct by participants, except for two, on which slight amendments were made by the interviewees concerned. The researcher also reassured the participants of this research study on the safety precautions regarding the research data storage, particularly due to its high sensitive and confidentiality status in being crucially related with the participants' own anonymity preservation (Mason 2006; Mann and Stewart 2000).

3.5 Data Analysis and Coding

Data analysis and coding in this research study was in the main using the techniques of grounded theory. In fact, apart from the first few analytical categories that were devised on existing theory, extracted from the list of interview questions guiding this study (vide Appendices 3 and 4), data was analysed and coded utilising grounded theory techniques. This approach of using grounded theory was also adopted by past research studies, already intimated in this chapter, concerning CoPs in public sector workplaces (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003; James 2004; Iaquinto et al. 2011).

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in order to proclaim that social science deals with a subject matter that is different from that dealt by natural science. Grounded theory is not used for testing theory or hypothesis (Suddaby 2006) but rather to "discover theory from data" (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 1). It involves a constant comparison process whereby concepts are generated from data (Glaser 2002). Grounded theory is there to formulate "statements about how actors interpret reality" (Suddaby 2006: 636); a reality that is indeed actively constructed through understanding patterned relationships and interaction between individuals (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and which reality will form an integrated framework whereby phenomena can be explained and predicted (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Grounded theory was deemed to be the appropriate method for this study due to the epistemological foundations of this research, which are intrinsically related to examining the complexities of human social interactions and experiences within communities of workers. Indeed, grounded theory is the ideal method "to understand the process by which actors construct meaning out of intersubjective experience.....(and) when you want to make knowledge claims about how individuals interpret reality" (Suddaby 2006: 634). One has to say here that, in using a case study research design, this has enabled this study to be grounded in the complexities of "concrete, context-dependent experience" (Flyvberg 2006: 223), which, on the other hand, limited subsequent comments by this research study on only those participants' narratives, situational accounts, biographies, etc. as they emanated from the data

(Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003). However, as has been argued in the previous sections of this study, the scope of this study was more in exploring meaning rather than survey (James 2004).

For the purpose of proper analysis, this research study handled data in a systematic way and coding was properly conducted. A manual coding process, in *lieu* of a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package such as NVivo, was adopted for this research study. The researcher of this study, while acknowledging the advantages of CAQDAS software programmes, such as facilitating data indexing and rendering "the coding and retrieval process faster" (Bryman 2004: 420), was rather sceptical in adopting such a software package due to the possibility of losing important data not captured for analysis by such programs (Fielding and Lee 1998). Moreover, the researcher of this study was quite confident that he could manually code the data since: the data population (74 public service jobs) as well as the amount of interviews (32) were deemed to be at acceptable levels that suffice careful and systematic manual coding, which this research study endeavoured to undertake.

This is even more so, since, as discussed earlier in this chapter, all research fieldwork tasks, such as interviewing, transcription from audio-recording device and subsequent translation writing (where necessary) of such transcripts, was planned and eventually conducted wholly by the researcher himself. Hence, doing all these tasks enabled the researcher to, not only acquire strong familiarization with the context and issues

raised in each interview, but obtain also, and more importantly so in this context, a clear idea and 'feel' of where the research directed itself and the relevant issues it raised in relation to the enquiry put forth by this thesis. Hence, this placed him not only to be in a more comfortable and sustainable position to manually analyze and code the data, but also enabled him to 'construct' a high quality and rich theory. Indeed, this 'construction' was viewed by the researcher as one 'holistic' process, involving 'data collection' and 'data analysis' – a process that ought to be 'felt' and wholly conducted and implemented manually by the researcher himself. Hence, in being achievable manually, there was no need for possibility risks of any 'disruptions', 'distortions' or even 'interference' by such elements as 'foreign' computer software packages.

In pursuing the grounded theory approach, rather than the three types of coding proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), that is open, axial and selective coding, this research study opted to engage in two forms of coding: open and selective (Charmaz (2004). This research study labelled these two coding stages as 'Raw' coding and 'Refined' coding. At the Raw coding stage, the researcher of this study maintained an open mind, looking for as many new ideas and codes as could possibly be generated (Bryman 2004). At this stage, themes were 'constructed', as based on the list of questions put forward at the interview as well as from data transpiring in transcripts or respondents responses, and coded in 'raw' form (vide Appendix 4 of this Raw coding list of themes). A total list of 749 quotes were extracted from the interview transcripts (vide Appendix 1 for the number of quotes extracted from each respondent

interview) and were thematised according to the 'raw' coding (some quotes overlapped on more than one theme). The Refined coding stage involved analysing the list of 'Raw' codes and then converging them into 'Refined' codes. The researcher did this, while continually interacted with his data and codes (Charmaz 2004), and through a process of emphasising the most common codes and those that expose more clearly the data (Bryman 2004) and, hence, deemed to be most relevant and properly address the research enquiry raised by this thesis (vide Appendix 5 for the Refined codes, embracing within them the previous 'raw' codes).

Following and, indeed, based on this Refined coding stage, the following Results and Discussion chapters were written utilizing a total of 179 quotes. These quotes were duly notated according to the public service job and its category. Appendix 6 provides a detailed explanatory note on the notations system being used in this thesis.

3.6 Conclusion

The main research question guiding this thesis is to what extent and in what form Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept is relevant and helpful in our understanding of workplace learning in contemporary organisations. This chapter has discussed and justified the methodology that was adopted for this research study. It has discussed the qualitative strategy used for this thesis, which is rooted epistemologically as interpretivism. Such a strategy was deemed to be the most appropriate for this

research since this study relates to complex human social participative interactions; hence involving constructs of theory from personal experiences of individuals acting in CoPs at workplaces in contemporary organisations. The research design adopted for this thesis was in the form of a case study, involving organisations within the MPS. In-depth semi-structured interviewing was used as research instrument, while data analysis and coding were in the main conducted using the techniques of grounded theory.

Following this methodology chapter are three chapters which will be labelled as 'Results and Discussion' chapters. These chapters will present a thorough discussion in addressing the central theme under inquiry in this thesis, as informed by the findings of this research study and also in relation to the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review chapter. Chapter 4 will discuss whether CoPs and situated learning are present and a reality within MPS organisations. Chapter 5 will examine the complexities of human intervention and its impact on the extent of learning taking place through CoPs in organisations. Finally, chapter 6 will discuss how Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept can be moulded, amended and transformed in order to reflect the context of contemporary organisations and for maximising effective learning, knowledge creation and management within them.

Chapter 4: RESULTS and DISCUSSION 1

The real presence of the CoPs concept

This first chapter, in relation to the analysis of results emanating from this research study, will discuss whether Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs is indeed evident and a reality among contemporary organisations within the MPS. Here it will be discussed and established whether there is evidence within these organisations of crucial elements for CoP formation, such as social interaction, participation and trust, as well as LPP and the centripetal participation process. This chapter will also discuss whether research results expose learning and knowledge generation and creation as taking place through CoPs in MPS organizations.

Indeed, Lave and Wenger have rejected the 'standard paradigm' (Beckett & Hager 2002) of learning, which is independent of context, acquired as content and then transported within us to be applied in new situations (Sfard 1998: 5-6). Instead, they viewed learning as being situated and occurring through social interaction and participation in CoPs (Lave and Wenger, 1991). For Lave and Wenger (1991: 31), learning is "an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice", where learning in CoPs takes the form of a social process (Kimble and Hildreth, 2005). This idea of social process was further developed by Wenger as incorporating four interwoven aspects; namely, practice, identity, experience and community (Vrasidas and Zembylas 2004: 328). Wenger conceptualised the 'community' as a group of people

who are engaged together informally "by a shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise" (Wenger and Snyder 2000: 139). It was professed that three components form a CoP: the knowledge being discussed, shared, etc. (domain); the social practice; and the community of people belonging to the CoP (Wenger 2004 in Rainsford and Murphy 2005). Moreover, the CoP is seen to be bound together through mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire (Wenger 1998: 72-85).

Results in this research study show clearly that CoPs are indeed a reality within MPS contemporary organisations. Data results indicate that in almost all instances (except for only two out of seventy four) respondents participating in this research, on entering new jobs, were accepted and integrated with no difficulty into a CoP within their new job:

I was accepted from day one.....

(001-R27J3THM, Head of School)

I clicked with them immediately but after all I am a person that is easy to get along with and so I had no problems.

(002-R14J1TL, Street Sweeper)

Several reasons were voiced by respondents as vouching for their attachment to their respective CoP. For example, here a respondent encapsulates several tags that

contributed to the formation and attachment to the CoPs in which he belongs, such as being all new, same age, having same interests, being in a small unit and belonging to a football team:

The job made me part of the group, even the fact that we were new, and even we five that were new were very close and we used to share our experiences of school, since we had just finished school, and of our job now and music. Not that we did not talk with others but there was that something that made us belong to that group. And with the rest of the staff, the fact that we were working at the Cash office and there were only twenty in our unit.... and the fact that we had our own football team at the Cash office, we had a strong sense of belonging with this section. We used to get along very well together and we even used to go out together and organize dinners and BBQs, even inviting our families, even though we were young and the others were older, we had become very good friends and that factor helped us a lot and bound us together. That formed our group.

(003-R28J1CL, Clerk)

Many of the respondents view their attachment to a community of practice at their workplace due to their work and working environment, as can be displayed here from selected comments across all categories:

Working for the same department....

(004-R1J1CL, Clerk)

....what brings us together is...having to work in the same school.

(005-R22J4TH, Teacher)

I became close to my colleague through work.....nothing more. We do not live or come from the same town, etc.....

(006-R31J1TL, Telephone Operator)

However, there were other themes or reasons indicated as vouching for CoP attachment, such as respondents' competence:

...the group or community of co-workers.....mechanics, at the garage where we used to work.....It is job.....and also the fact that we worked together in our garage that bonded us together in this community of workers.

(007-R23J1TH, Mechanic)

Here the respondents mentions 'his type of people:

You know...the type like me...

(008-R7J3TL, Fuel Attendant)

The following respondents identify the fact of entering a new job:

We were ten in all and we started bonding immediately because we were on a new job.....

(009-R15J3TH, Fisheries Inspector)

Learning is held by Lave and Wenger to be conceived in social interaction – a social construct (Brown and Duguid 1991). Indeed, inherent within CoPs are social interaction and participation, which are “central to the evolution of a community” (Kimble, Hildreth and Wright 2001: 231). One has to speak of a dynamic relationship between members in a CoP and their participation within it (Chao 2005: 22). Learning is equated with participation (Ortenblad 2001: 131). It occurs as participation in workplace activities “incites change in individuals’ understandings and capacities” (Billett 2004: 315).

As regards the presence of social interaction and participation, results emanating from this research study clearly show that these elements, so crucial for a CoP, occur consistently all across organisations within the MPS. The main theme mentioned in relation to the social interaction taking place at the various workplaces was the fact that social interaction brings colleagues within communities at work (CoPs) more closer, bonded together 'like a family':

We really had more than just a 'work relationship'....much more.....we really were like a family.....We socially interacted a lot, organised very regular outings to meals, drink evenings, etc.....We do all participate fully in interactions. I am quite active.....it is my nature you know to be active in things I am normally attached do.

(010-R21J1CL, Clerk)

As I said before...we are like a family here...we continually share experiences....even problems...we all share with each other...We basically are quite in the same level here...same class of workers....working families....ordinary and simple workers and family members...Yes, I am quite an active participant.... I do talk a lot ...I kind of a 'joker'.

(011-R7J3TL, Fuel Attendant)

Interesting research findings were those relating to social interaction's presence at the workplace among respondents who are vested in a managerial role and their subordinates:

I have a unit of workers under my wing. We are about fifteen in all. I have groomed them to be running like a team, a sort of a family. In fact, I encourage social interaction a lot. I even have delegated one of them.....you know, the one more inclined for organising social events....the one who normally makes things happen, you know.....so this guy, organises a lot of

social events. In fact, almost once a month, we all go out together for a pizza, meal, etc....We really work like a family here...Yes, I do participate in such interactions.

(012-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

At first they see you a little odd since you have a higher ranking but if you go down to their level, they start trusting you and you become friends and they ask you if they have any questions and I share my experiences with them because in our work there is always something new that occurs.....

(013-R11J1THM, Police Sergeant)

Such results expose clearly the importance of trust within such social interactions. Trust is seen as a fundamental element within a CoP (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002) that acts as the vehicle for mutual sharing among members of the CoP (Garavan, Carbery and Murphy 2007). Indeed, trust is "the glue which binds the members of a community" (Nichani, 2001:3) in this mutual sharing, cooperating, participating and social interacting.

Results emanating from this research study expose the importance of trust, which effectively gels together the CoP members in participative social interaction within their community:

Yes I do relate with my colleagues.....Even informally, we sometimes went out and discussed problems we had with each other. I told them my problems and they told me theirs.....We trust and help each other.

(014-R1J1CL, Clerk)

Moreover, results in this study show that communication within CoPs takes place mainly face to face, but other forms, such as phone and electronic means, are also used:

We use face to face a lot.....We communicate over the phone as well, through emails and chatting networks. I use all of them...I believe sharing of experiences is effective in both doing it electronically and face-to-face.

(015-R4J1CHM, Director)

Though, many respondents still exalted on the importance of face-to-face communication:

I don't use email or chat. I only interacted face to face and by phone. I find though that face to face is the best way to really communicate and show all the feeling you have and to look at the other person in order to see for yourself how he or she is reacting.

(016-R26J3CL, Security Guard)

Further to these results in showing CoPs as being indeed a reality within MPS contemporary organisations, findings in this research study expose clearly the real presence of learning taking place through such CoPs. The following are selected comments by respondents, from all across categories of jobs researched in this study, intimating active learning as taking place within their CoPs towards enhancing job skills at their respective workplaces

...I do believe that with this participation (in social interaction) it helps you to learn your way through your job..... As I said I had no formal training but I learned my way through asking questions, through friends and even through these interactions you know because you discuss problems and exchange solutions so we basically help each other and even with my colleagues in other department. When we exchange ideas and solutions and ask about our problems with each other we actually learn. I do learn a lot from this kind of thing...I do believe that so much learning....effective learning....is done in this way....through social interaction, exchanging experiences, solutions to problems, etc.

(017-R4JICHM, Director)

Yes...through sharing our experiences, problems...I learn from others on how problems are solved and they also learn from me.... When you interact socially, you learn a lot....you communicate better. You even clarify certain

things because a person might have understood something in a particular way and another person might have done that in a different way

(018-R1J1CL, Clerk)

Yes, of course, we used to learn from each other, because I will tell you what I know and you tell me what you know..... we exchanged ideas....

(019-R12J3TL, Coxswain)

...problem sharing occurs in which everyone knows each other's problems...we discuss the problem and through this sharing, we learn

(020-R6J2TH, H&S Officer)

As discussed earlier in this section, Lave and Wenger (1991) view learning as a social process, occurring in the form of social interaction and participation within CoPs. They equate this social process to LPP. For them, the LPP is the "process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice" (1991: 29). Lave and Wenger maintain that crucial to the LPP is "access by newcomers to the community of practice and all that membership entails" (1991: 100). As discussed earlier here in this chapter, almost all respondents found no difficulty in being accepted into a CoP once they entered their new job.

Indeed, according to Lave and Wenger, newcomers master knowledgeable skills within this social process by moving in centripetal participation toward and become

full participants in the CoP, through "growing involvement" (1991:37) with the old-timers. Lave and Wenger maintain that here identities are developed (1991: 115) as access to social practice within a CoP is mediated (1991: 102); hence, aiding newcomers in their centripetal process from LPP towards full participation. This centripetal process, as professed by Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept, featured in findings of this study as being quite evident in MPS organisations. Indeed, as the following comments show, respondents taking part in this research study, on entering a CoP as newcomers, experienced help and learning from the old-timers within the CoP:

I was assigned with an experienced mechanic and we used to work as a pair and I can say that I learned my way into the job through this partner...if you are still young on your job, you rely immensely on what your experienced partner advise....you know, he has years of experience on how to handle such jobs.

(021-R23J1TH, Mechanic)

There was a colleague in my office with a lot of experience and he used to help and teach me a lot.

(022-R20J1CL, Clerk Revenue)

...it helps that there are experienced persons especially with new employees since they are watchful and the newly recruits may be over enthusiastic.

Because when you are new you want to do new things and on the other side, the experienced employee is there to calm you down because you may do mistakes.

(023-R16J1CL, Clerk Data Input)

I went to the office where I was posted and they had a system where in every room there would be an experienced employee, in fact there were four in the office and he was the oldest....He helped me a lot when I arrived because he used to teach me a lot and when I encountered any difficulties I used to ask him since we were in the same room....Even the others, but we used to look up to him since he was the most experienced.

(024-R28J2CH, Tax Assessor)

Furthermore, results of this research study show that, on becoming full participants, respondents did provide help and learning to the newcomers in the CoP:

.....when new employees were posted with me, I worked with them helped them learn.

(025-R12J1TL, Sweeper Supervisor)

Yes, they (the newcomers).....were younger than me..... I used to help them and show them things....we used to get along with each other.

(026-R15J1CL, Clerk)

Indeed, this centripetal participation process was even more exposed in this study when a respondent, now one of the old-timers and full participants within her CoP, ended up providing learning not only to novice colleagues at work but also, in some instances, to her newly appointed head of section – also a 'newcomer' to the CoP:

At the office we always remained the same people, there were two or three newly recruits and we used to teach them.... when a new section head arrived... he used to ask us as well... there were the technical staff too and they used to help him too.

(027-R19J2CL, Clerk HR)

Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs (1991) involves, at its core, learning and particularly knowledge generation and creation. Indeed, Lave and Wenger claim that learning can be equated to a process of transformation and change (1991: 51), where change is “a continuous reality” (Gould 2000: 586). In line with the CoPs concept, learning is not “just picking up existing knowledge but creating new knowledge” (Young and Guile 1997: 209). Hence, it is here held that knowledge “derives from minds at work” (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 5), geared towards “driving innovation” (Dilnutt 2003: 76). In line with this view, results in this research study portray quite emphatically that knowledge generation and re-creation is indeed a reality within CoPs in MPS organizations. The following are selected comments in this regard by respondents taking part in this research study:

...just imagine how much I then learned when you know that you are a close friend with your partner at work...well with all of them in the garage...You feel as one in asking, querying, suggesting a solution, discuss line of action, joke about your work while at the same time improve the way we work, tackle certain complications, etc., etc.....we all genuinely were there to share all our experiences, queries, solutions, practices, mistakes, etc....we all did this very openly....and....did this to help each other and all of us together to do a better job.....For example, excitement used to hit us when a new vehicle....enters the garage for the first time. We used to group together.... examine the manual, discuss the engine together.....We were all genuinely at heart enthused at cars, engines and really fully engaged in seeing through an engine work and running as it should be.

(028-R23J1TH, Mechanic)

We used to relate a lot between us.... we used to meet all together and exchange... and if we are working on a job we used to to discuss together to see if we could change something to make the job faster.

(029-R25J2CH, Ministry Secretariat Clerk)

...there is a lot of social interaction.... because of this people open up more and we share experiences freely... for example cases that we meet and are complicated, difficult etc... and how we are solving them... or how we can solve them better, treat certain cases better.... sometimes even change route...

change the way we act... we learn from mistakes or see that if we do things differently we will be more efficient.

(030-R28J3CHM, Unit Manager)

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the issue on whether Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs is indeed a reality within organisations. It discussed the results emanating from this research study in the light of how these same results demonstrate clear evidence of the incidence of the CoPs concept within the MPS organisations. Furthermore, it showed that crucial elements within this CoPs concept, that is social interaction, participation, its centripetal participation process, as well as the learning and knowledge generated and re-created within these same CoPs, are indeed so much present and alive in the MPS organisations under review in this research study.

Chapter 5: RESULTS and DISCUSSION II

The complexity of human interaction and CoPs

The discussion ensuing in this chapter will relate to the fact that human interaction is a complex activity and in which several and diverse issues occur. Indeed, this has to be acknowledged and taken into consideration when talking about communities or group of individuals participating socially interacting with each other – an activity that is at the core or the 'engine room' of Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs. In fact, on acknowledging and analyzing this fact, one can safely claim that Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept is presented as 'too simplistic', assuming human interactions in a sort of utopian way, without giving adequate attention to disagreements, intrigues, piques and exclusionary reactions that social interaction among and between human beings inevitably brings about from time to time. Indeed, these issues that surface out in such social interactions do impact on the extent of participation and learning taking place through and within CoPs in organisations.

In their exposition of the CoPs concept, Lave and Wenger (1991) seem to denote participative social interactions within a cooperative community of members; though, both Lave and Wenger (1991), as well as Wenger in later work (1998, 2004), acknowledged the presence of some distortions in this participative social human activity.

Indeed, Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs does imbue "connotations of harmony and stability" (Fuller 2007: 24). However, they do acknowledge that there may be occasions where "conflict is experienced" within CoPs (1991: 116) and there are situations within such social interactions that work against learning processes that are supposed to occur within CoPs (1991: 57). Lave and Wenger also acknowledge that newcomers may be exploited (1991: 63-64) or undergo authoritarian instruction (1991: 76), as well as the continuity-displacement contradiction (1991: 114) which may disrupt a mutual shared participative experience; all this is inevitable due to "human frailties" (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002: 140). Indeed, Wenger (1998) acknowledges that social interaction and participation within CoP does not always encapsulate harmony and cooperation, but at times it may generate rivalry, conflicts and struggles.

Notwithstanding these excerpts on acknowledging such 'mishaps' in the 'harmony and stability' projection surrounding their CoPs concept, Lave and Wenger fall short in examining in depth processes such as conflicts and power relations (Fuller et al. 2005), as well as exclusion, discrimination and oppression that occur and surface where a group or community of people interact together (Jewson 2007a). One has also to acknowledge that CoPs, being intrinsically related to social interactions and human relationships, inevitably experience, in some way or another, "processes of disagreement, conflict and struggle, as well as those of exclusion, discrimination and oppression (Jewson 2007a: 69); resulting sometimes in some members "to feel marginalised" (James 2007: 135). Indeed, such a scenario induce members within

CoPs to hamper or limit their participation in these social interactions; engaging themselves at different levels and modes "of participation and non-participation" (James 2007: 133). This will undoubtedly impact on the extent and level of learning taking place through CoPs in organisations.

Data captured in this research study confirms this stance and amply shows that there exist several and diverse barriers to full participation in social interactions within CoPs among MPS organizations. In fact, from a dataset of 32 respondents and involving 74 public service jobs, a total of 179 instances were extrapolated from this research study that intimated issues which marred full participation in social interaction within CoPs. The following is a table depicting the barrier issues as well as the number of times each barrier issue emerged throughout this research study.

Barrier Issues	Number	%
Character	47	26
Power Play	22	12
Age difference	22	12
Gender	14	8
Classes	9	5
Social orientation	9	5
Dominance in CoP	8	4
Same interests	5	3
Peers	5	3
Barriers relating to being a Manager	4	2
Envy and jealousy	4	2
Impact of work environment and logistics	4	2
Aptitude problem – being frustrated and hating the job	4	2
Compatibility	3	2
Cultural	3	2
Lack of Trust	3	2

Others (number of times for each is indicated in bracket): Language [2]; Work-Life balance (personal commitments) [2]; Fear of losing Overtime work/pay [2]; Being competent in job than the others [1]; Due to complicated and specialized work [1]; Make enemies after criticizing openly [1] Type of leader [1]; Prejudice [1]; Being promoted in same unit [1]; Work culture [1].	13	8
Total:	179	

The following selected texts relate to respondents' comments delineating several issues, featuring in the above-captioned table, impending full participation in CoPs:

Well, at first, being new, we were sort of laid back in joining in such interactions....the mechanics we found there were older than us two...we were in our early twenties and most of the guys we found there were 30s, 40s, and 50s near retirement. So, most of them were experienced...sort of experts in their job, not like us.....near them we felt we knew nothing on mechanical work compared to them...we really felt very sort of juniors compared to them. Well, this obviously showed in the social interaction, where we hardly interacted during the first weeks.....though we used to social interact together we two young ones.....in fact, we used to hang around a lot together...during the weekends.

(031-R23J1TH, Mechanic)

Then there is the age difference which can work both ways, sometimes the young ones refrain from talking, thinking that they are too new to talk, so the old and more experienced take over.....At other times the newly instated members would be so young, excited and vibrant that they take over, depending on their character usually. There are those who take over immediately as they would be born leaders and sometimes don't allow others to talk.....(in the CoP) I share with whoever shows that he is eager to listen. I don't open my mouth if I suspect that a person thinks too highly of herself....

(032-R22J3TL, Sports Officer)

I couldn't get used to the fact that everybody was older than me and I wasn't compatible with them. When I went there I ended up in a room with eight people all older than me and very serious looking. I got the feeling that they hadn't accepted me and nobody helped me 100% and everybody held back...when I went on the first day all that I saw was ugly faces staring at me....There was the 'grade' aspect...I was still a clerk and most of them were AOs (senior officers)...its like they were really big headed....and they said who does he think he is, he is still young how can he think to do our job.

(033-R28J2CH, Tax Assessor)

Indeed results in this research showed how character issues come into play in impacting participation in social interaction within CoPs:

There are those people that come to speak to you spontaneously, and there are those that take longer to get used to, there are those who are a bit strange in the beginning, there are those that you have to be on the look out with because you tell them something and everyone will get to know about it. I met a variety of people.

(034-R16J1CL, Clerk Data Input)

The majority of the people help me 100%, however, there are those that hesitate in doing so because they are lazy, indifferent, or try to avoid your problems and keep themselves out of the whole situation.

(035-R6J1CH, Clerk Accounts)

This also applies for personal traits such as low-self esteem, shyness, etc.:

...I spent some time absorbing everything I saw but I didn't ask because I felt uncomfortable because I used to think that I might disturb people so I was very laid back...

(036-R20J1CL, Clerk Revenue)

The age difference also featured as a prominent barrier to participation within CoPs in this research study:

....the difference in age affected.....because if you start your work at 18 years and there is a difference in ages. You need to learn to adapt. Maybe because they saw me a little young and I lacked experienced at work, I used to feel a little excluded. I wasn't a full participant in the group.

(037-R15J1CL, Clerk)

Hindering such participation are also gender issues:

I am also experiencing social interaction with this section also.....though I have to admit that is not as intense as those before this job. You have to understand that here we are only two females Security Guards among around fifty or so men. I, being an outspoken person and am quite a tomboy sort of girl....helped me to integrate with and be accepted as one of them with these men and I honestly do interact, even socially, a lot. But still not intense enough like in the other groups or communities. The men still prefer the men to really open up....i mean talk the man talk with man....jokes, etc....you know. It seems there are so many men as Security Guards....where we two female Security Guards seem to be a bit marginalised....sort of left outside...from the talk or social interaction that takes place.

(038-R26J3TL, Security Guard)

I think I had an advantage being a woman, they helped me more. Once, I needed some help from the consuls and I noticed that the male consuls gave

me their feedback immediately whereas the females didn't respond. I don't know if this was the issue....It is more an intuition from my part but.... I think that being a woman, men talk to me more.

(039-R18J3TH, Visa Officer)

Research findings show that there are instances where peers may hinder full participation within CoPs by grouping together, as also in other instances where the more experienced members in a CoP feature more active in participation than the newcomers:

Speaking of young workers, sometimes you do feel that these do group to each other at times. I believe having the same 'youngish' interests.....you know, the type of hang-outs, tastes, environment, music, etc....have a large say in this. You have to know that you will not expect a group of workers interacting socially in the same mode, when some are 40, 50 year olds, fathers, etc. with others who are young to be their sons, daughters..... (Moreover) I find for example that the so called experienced persons talk and participate much more vociferously than the young or newcomers. This can be understandably so.....since the experienced ones seem to be much more comfortable about the subject or problem being encountered or discussed.

(040-R4J1CHM, Director)

The following comments show that the issue of classes hampers full participation within CoPs, as transpired in this study:

(I am)...the direct superior of these workers...So, there is some sort of barrier between me and them...there is a sort of slight apprehension of 'opening up' to you fully from the subordinate workers...it is different if you are at their level....that barrier, I do still feel it...for some is more intense than others who are more open and close to me.....though I work consistently to at least minimise this barrier as much as possible

(041-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

Here, I was considered fully as a clerk, not like the other job, where I was a messenger....some difference in treatment is experienced...you know...social interaction and the like among staff is not all the same where there are messengers and clerical staff...i mean there is a difference.....you can feel and sense in the interaction that occur that the status of a messenger is lower.....i mean, a different class than that of a clerk, etc. So, here, being considered as a clerk, I found myself more as one of them.....i mean, completely treated as a clerk.

(042-R26J2CL, Registry Clerk)

This study found that sexual orientation can also feature as a stumbling block in the engagement of full participation within a CoP:

I personally did encounter some issues about my sexual orientation. I mean I am a lesbian, and am openly about this.... Although, many accept me as I am, there were instances during my work, when....I did feel people within these groups or communities of co-workers who somewhat hold back when it comes to converse and interact with me...and this I sensed it because of my sexual orientation...In fact, there were instances where blunt vibes were uttered....and was practically marginalised during the conversations, etc....you get hurt.....you have to be me to know how hurt it feels...my relation with these blokes is somewhat 'cold' because I know deep in their hearts they see me differently.

(043-R26J3TL, Security Guard)

The following comments indicate issues related to ethnicity, cultural, religion and language as forms of barriers to full participation in social interaction:

...I find that ethnicity, religion, and especially culturally differences do have a say in the type or intensity of the social interaction that takes place within the group of colleagues.

(044-R4J1CHM, Director)

The openness can depend on a language barrier....(for me) the greatest barrier was language.

(045-R25J3CH, Clerk Brussels)

Indeed, these aforementioned findings expose how very complex is the activity of participative social interaction within and among communities of people and work colleagues. This contrasts sharply with Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger's (1998, 2004) 'simplistic' exposition of the CoPs concept and their scant references to social interaction 'mishaps'. Furthermore, this human interaction complexity was even more pronounced in three more cases featured in this research study.

The first case relates to a manager and member within a CoP, where he acting in his managerial position can hinder/interrupt participative social interaction from a subordinate following a disciplinary action:

Those that ended up not talking to me where those that I sometimes scolded someone...but its up to him to talk to me or not. I talk to him just the same.

(046-R24J6THM, Principal Public Cleansing Officer)

Results in this research study exposed another interesting feature in that there may be instances where work is so much complicated and specialised that full participation in social interaction within a CoP is indeed impeded by this same fact:

The major difficulty we are facing today is that there are so much particular issues.....we became totally secluded, every one of us has their own work and for example, who is concerned with regulations etc. and fisheries.....when you start going into the specific rules, some know this rule, others don't and so we

ended up, from 10, 7 of us abroad. Some are abroad for this reason and others for another reason etc. Afterwards we have to hold a meeting between us to see what regulations are new...There is social interaction but the work is so complicated that we ended up working only for ourselves.

(047-R15J3TH, Fisheries Inspector)

Finally, findings in this study exposed how a worker may not engage in learning and commitment at work. One has to acknowledge that it seems to be very hard dismissing an employee due to lack of commitment at work within the MPS. In fact, during these last three years, none of a total of around 1800 disciplinary actions taken by Heads of Departments, involving non-criminal cases, led to a dismissal (Public Service Commission 2011). Cases emerged in this study where an employee may simply refrain from actively participating in social interaction in order to learn, improve his skills and performance, or even simply find ways to avoid doing the 'work' or job he/she is supposed to do:

There was one that nothing interested him....He was arrogant and he didn't know anything....If he worked with the private sector he would be fired.

(048-R13J1TH, Mechanic)

There are those lazy people that all they want is to do nothing and always oppose your decisions.

(049-R24J4THM, Technical Officer)

In line with arguments on the extent of power relations and their negative impact on participative social interaction within CoPs (Fuller and Unwin, 2004; Fuller et al. 2005), power play featured quite prominently in this regard throughout this research study. Respondents' comments on the negative effect of power play were diverse and across all categories of data subjects:

From five, four will help you...you always find someone that is not genuine...as if to get rid of you and not show you. As if...what is it for me if I show him.

(050-R12J2TL, Maintenance worker)

...I did encounter instances that for some reason or other help was not fully given or even ignored. For example, there were instances that people, who I do consider friends and part of a group I frequent in outings, social events and also chatting networks, where to whom I sought help but sensed that my plea was being ignored or had 'cold' responses, maybe because of 'holding to valuable knowledge'as if someone does not want you to know as much as he or she does....you know, knowledge is power and sometimes people tend to hold on to it as if it is a precious thing and is not there to give it freely.

(051-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

...foremen that were aiming for a promotion and now that I had the same grade as them was an issue...I needed their help and I noticed that they weren't helping me and I had to get to know things on my own.

(052-R24J6THM, Principal Public Cleansing Officer)

However, notwithstanding this negative connotation, power play may also prove to be beneficial and imbue participation in social interaction. Specialised knowledge or/ position within the organisation is what mostly constitutes that 'power' to individuals which, more often than not, makes them clutch to that 'power' and hold back in interactions rather than release themselves fully in 'honest' mutual sharing of knowledge, experiences, etc for the 'benefit' of all members within the CoP. But, it is argued here that the possession of this 'power' within a community may act out positively due to a possible emergence of balancing out "opposing pressures within social relations" (Jewson 2007a: 72). Here, in situations of power relations, CoPs members may, instead of holding back on their participative level of knowledge sharing, actively seek out to participate in 'exchanging' this knowledge or 'power' with other similar 'knowledge equipped' members. The same rivalry that such 'possession of power' creates is what may induce individuals to interact and cooperate for their mutual benefit and knowledge generation and re-creation within their CoP. Indeed, power play or relations may enable people to react positively and cooperate with each other; hence, entailing "contest or conflict at the same time as they entail cooperation and co-ordination" (Jewson 2007a: 72).

Results emanating from this research study confirm this positive effect of power play on participation in social interaction within CoPs. The following are selected texts in this regard. The following relates to a manager who experiences fellow CoP members, participating and helping him in his learning, more because of his position (as manager) than anything else:

Sometimes, you find people that try to help more in order to impress you.

(053-R24J4THM, Technical Officer)

The following quotes refer to cases where CoP members are knowledgeable on some field, which vests them with 'power' that entices other CoP members to intensify participative social interaction with them:

From the new ones then there were those who had already started the ACCA.... Even the experienced ones sometimes ended up going to those who had knowledge about ACCA. Because these experienced ones know the law generally and not in the same way those who had studied the ACCA did.

(054-R15J2CH, Audit Officer IRD)

There were two (from the newcomers) that have a degree in European Affairs so wherever there are queries regarding relationships with other countries we sometimes end up asking them.

(055-R18J3TH, Visa Officer)

Findings in this study also expose cases of individuals who are CoP members while being at the same time specialized or experts in their own field of work – a fact which imbue participative social interaction within the CoP in a particular trajectory of learning from each other 'expertise', as well as the social practice experienced within the CoP:

....we were a small committee.... there was a representative from every entity...I learned a lot from these people since they were technical and I'm not...Everyone was an expert in his sector and everyone started learning from each other.

(056-R9J1THM, Operations Manager)

We were ten in all and we started bonding immediately because we were on a new job, even though there were two who were experienced in fishing. We used to ask them questions because only they knew certain technical things

(057-R15J3TH, Fisheries Inspector)

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the complexity of participative social interaction among human beings; involving several and diverse issues. This has put to test Lave and

Wenger's exposition of the CoPs concept in terms of its assumption of harmony and stability within such communities and deemed such an exposition as 'too simplistic'. It has exposed, on being informed by findings in this research study, how much more complex and diverse, conflicts, rivalries, etc. surface out within such communities than that portrayed by Lave and Wenger. Indeed, this chapter has argued that participation in social interaction within CoPs, which ultimately is crucial for all learning occurring within such communities, rests heavily on a myriad of complexities and issues relating to the fact that the 'actors' within this learning "generative process in the lived-in-world" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 35) are human beings and not some 'stereo-type' beings or robots.

Chapter 6: RESULTS and DISCUSSION III

Proposed amendment of Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept

In this final chapter relating to this research study's results and analysis, this thesis will discuss how findings, in this research study, endorse a new and amended conceptualisation of Lave and Wenger' concept of CoPs. This study has already shown, in the preceding two chapters, that the CoPs concept is indeed a reality within contemporary organisations; a reality which is nonetheless burdened with issues hampering its very core of social participative interaction due to human involvement. In this chapter, the discussion will now focus on how Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept can be amended, moulded and transformed in order to reflect the context of modern day organizations, as well as maximizing effective learning, knowledge creation and management within them.

Modern day's organisations, surrounded with such an unpredicted and ever-changing economic, political and social environment, demanding rapid and ongoing changes within all their structures, systems and work processes with a view for acquiring and/or sustaining a competitive advantage, optimise knowledge management and creation, through dynamic and proactive workers in the form of learning communities stretched out in an expansive setting. The CoPs are indeed the linchpin which will gel together this scenario into a successful outcome for these organisations. This is

even more so as organisations are growing “in size, geographical scope and complexity” (Lesser and Storck 2001: 831).

However, this does not necessarily speak of the CoPs concept as laid out by Lave and Wenger but more in terms of being amended in order to acknowledge and reflect the realities of contemporary world scenario and also the realities of the complexities of human interaction and resultant issues, as discussed in the preceding chapter. Indeed, this is even more so in today's world, where through globalisation, in which the global world has been 'shrunk' into one 'global village', and technological advances, has rendered human issues as being more diverse and convergent at the same time.

This chapter, relating to the amendment of Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs, will be discussed in three distinct, though interrelated, dimensions. The first relates to the conceptualisation evolution of CoPs into forms that are resonant with contemporary organisation fabric. Secondly, this thesis will look at the transformation of learning trajectories professed by Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept, whilst projecting the importance of the individual, as well as contexts, within such trajectories. Finally, this study will discuss and propose an amended view of the CoPs concept, with the sole view of maximizing effective workplace learning, involving a different perspective on knowledge generation and sustenance, as ingrained within the 'realities' of the LO and KM, bound and gelled together by, what this paper holds to be indeed a crucial element in all this, strong effective leadership.

6.1 Conceptualisation evolution of CoPs

The concept of CoPs cannot be conceptualised as one distinct community, acting within a spatial boundary of a located workplace, where participative social interactions and learning occur among its members and constrained within such spatial boundary. The workplace features prominently, in Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs, as the place in which participation in social practice takes place (1991); for it is the work situation that provides the fertile land and is instrumental for the generation of learning (Barnett 2000). Workplaces afford an environment wherein individuals have opportunities for learning through their engagement and interaction with others and their participation in the workplace (Billett 2004: 312). In fact, one affirms that “knowledge cannot exist in a vacuum...(it) is always contextual” (Jakubik 2007: 10) and authenticated through its utility within the workplace (Barnett 2000: 16-17).

However, workplaces are not to be viewed as if they are located, co-located or 'fixed' in all circumstances. This seems to have been ignored by Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs. They may vary in their logistic and spatial content, as well as any sort of boundaries that may be conceptualised around them. Indeed, this also applies and directly affects the CoPs that are formed within them.

This situation was exposed in this research study. Findings showed that there exist jobs for which workplaces are not located in one fixed place. These jobs relate to

different and diverse work scenarios and context. For example, workplaces for jobs such as watchman and security guard were explained in this way:

Basically, I...receive a call in late afternoon from the Watchman Time Keeper or Supervisor on where I had to go for work. I...go for say a couple of weeks there, normally until work on that site finishes...my workplace was not fixed.....My workplace was where my Supervisor sent me to work the night.
(058-R32J1TL, Watchman)

I did not have a fixed work place. I go to work where the Security officer or sometimes the Principal himself send me to work. For example, sometimes he send me to attend to the *Ghammieri* building for say two weeks, then to *Marsa*, or to *Floriana*, etc. So, I cannot say that I have one workplace.
(059-R26J3TL, Security Guard)

On the other hand, a nurse trainee comments:

I was assigned to a different ward every time so you would meet different staff every time....This was a very mobile kind of job but most of the time within the same hospital.
(060-R22J1TH, Nurse)

A respondent recounts on his type of workplace as a beach cleaner in this way:

Although I am assigned with the North Area, I cannot say that my workplace is at some fixed beach per se....we all regularly switch around from beach to beach whilst cleaning those areas in the North of Malta. However, in summer, it is more fixed since the workload is much heavier in those three months. During summer, I am normally assigned to work on one beach.

(061-R32J2TL, Beach Cleaner)

This is even more enhanced by the fact that the idea of a 'workplace', in terms of being the hub in which learning and knowledge generation occur, has acquired new and expansive dimensions: transcending from the spatial, co-located formats into a complexity of 'places', which may also be devoid of any kinds of borders and vested or moulded within the global and 'virtual' world enhanced by today's technological advances. In this context, this thesis will now discuss the realities of multiple CoPs and CoPs in MNC/TNCs scenario and distributed formats.

Multiple CoPs

It is being argued that in today's world organisational fabric, contemporary organisations "consist of 'constellations' of communities of practice" (Brannan 2007: 121). In fact a reality that has been discussed in this thesis' literature review is that participants in CoPs are, more often than not, members in multiple, often interconnected, 'constellations' of CoPs at the same time. This reality was also

acknowledged by Wenger (1998) as ‘constellations of practices’, where he claims that one can be participative in “multiple communities of practice at once” (1998: 105).

This reality of multiple CoPs was affirmed by the findings in this research study. Furthermore, these findings endorsed the view that CoPs function in a more effective way when members within them are participants in multiple CoPs at the same time, as knowledge and learning migrate and hop from one CoP to another, rendering participants to become even more skilled and knowledgeable through such interconnectivity and multiple participations. Hence, this speaks of having CoPs “to which individuals belong multiply in number and become more specialised” (Jewson 2007a: 78). In fact, results in this research study expose these realities, as these selected comments show:

I belong to the school community in general so I share common things with the teachers and staff of my school, I also belong to the community of assistant heads of our college (a group of schools headed by a principal) in which case our job is the common factor. I also belong to the SMT (the Acting head and myself) and when all schools meet we stick together as one.
(062-R22J5TH, Assistant Head of School)

.....I have a network of group of colleagues....or communities of work colleagues.....I continually discuss with them my problems and share work experiences and even solutions in order learn from each other...where we

exchange ideas and help each other in our work and we do make outings sometimes....

(063-R4J1CHM, Director)

I must also say that I formed part of other groups of colleagues where we also shared and exchanged ideas, problems, solutions, best practices, etc.

(064-R4J2CHM, Assistant Director Finance)

This respondent shows instances of multiple CoPs and exchange of learning amongst them, also involving CoPs outside the Public Service:

(in our social interaction) ...we used to hang around a lot together ...at Hal Far, most of the car enthusiasts meet there...see 'made up' cars, discuss the 'how' and 'what' about all things related to cars, engines, etc....and attend to occasional races, like drag racing, etc.

(065-R23J1TH, Mechanic)

In fact, findings in this research study also affirm that within multiple CoPs, effective learning occurs in an expansive form, where individual lives and CoPs' social and organisational practices are continually transformed as CoP members "learn new forms of activities not yet there, but which (they) are creating (themselves) through learning" (Engestrom, 2001: 138) and where organisations "linked together in value chains or networks, learn from each other" (Juriado and Gustafsson 2007: 52).

Indeed, results in this research study show how learning and knowledge creation occurs within this multiple CoP scenario also through the fact of having a different and new perspective to things by simply viewing, reflecting, discussing, etc. at problems within a CoP from another different and independent CoP. For example, here a respondent in this research intimate such a scenario and how this helped him to learn and garner 'new' knowledge in unlocking problem situations:

(on his membership and contact with a CoP at a workplace that he has left)
Yes we still talk....usually on the phone. I mean, not with all of them, but I kept quite a close contact with three of them. In fact, we are friends on facebook as well, and we do chat quite regularly.....we do exchange all kind of experiences, including work situations and problems. Indeed, there were times where I did manage to break up deadlocks in problems at work....through their help. Sometimes I find that it is a person from the 'outside' of a work situation that can see a solution or at least put some 'light' into breaking the deadlock of what appears from 'the inside' a complicated and insurmountable problem or situation. So, yes, it helps to have this kind of 'social networking of group of friends' from outside your job or indeed your whole organisation.

(066-R21J1CL, Clerk)

MNC/TNCs and CoPs in Distributed format

Such 'constellations' of CoPs and the generation of learning and knowledge therein are even more pronounced when viewed within the reality of today's world global fabric in which CoPs may take form in distributed formats, as well as in MNCs/TNCs scenarios. One affirms that globalisation has in many cases transformed the way contemporary organisations are operating: in a state beyond national borders, space and cultural barriers (Joy-Matthews and Gladstone 2000: 24), conducting their business boundaryless and not anymore as isolated units (Chung 2001), and where 'co-located' workplaces are disappearing and the 'workplace' is being absorbed within global communication networks or groups (Jones and McCann 2005: 360). This is even more so as organisations are growing “in size, geographical scope and complexity” (Lesser and Storck 2001: 831).

Indeed, findings in this research study have shown such transformations within workplaces at contemporary MPS organisations, not only due to the ever-changing world global economic, political and social scenario impacting Malta as with other nations, but also, and particularly so, with Malta's recent EU membership and the global networks and obligations that such membership brings with it:

I work at an office. However, my job takes me abroad as well and on a regular basis....I have to travel around twice and even more a month. I travel very regularly to Brussels, because as Malta is now at the EU, we as unit form

part of a bigger unit within the EU, where we have Brussels as our EU base. However, I travel also to many countries because we have our own, or if not our own, but at least accessibility to, offices all over. Hence, you can say that my office is wherever I go that is work related, with different work colleagues, even multinational, all the time.

(067-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

...in Brussels....It was secretarial work...on a daily basis we worked with Maltese colleagues but every so often there used to be meetings where we are in a large room full of translators and secretaries from various countries.

(068-R25J3CH, Clerk Brussels)

Furthermore, within this world global fabric in which contemporary organisations have to operate, one also speaks of CoPs as existing in 'virtual' mode. This is also a reality that was exposed in this research study on contemporary MPS organisations, as these selected texts show:

I became friends (and social interact) with other people...with whom I communicate only using the telephone but I never saw them.

(069-R6J1CH, Clerk Accounts)

.....there were people that I made friends with by telephone and even if I don't know them in person I still learn from them.... even with foreigners I built up

a relationship, and when they came to Malta we showed them around. Most of them you would have made social interaction with them for a long time and you would know them only electronically.

(070-R16J2CH, EU Fund Officer)

CoPs can indeed be crucial, in relation to their valid contribution of acting as hubs for learning and knowledge generation, to contemporary organisations, more so as organisations are now becoming ever more complex and operating in a “distributed, international environment” (Hildreth, Kimble and Wright 2000: 29). One affirms that Wenger acknowledged such a scenario of ‘distributed communities of practice’ (Wenger et al. 2002). Indeed, in this cross-boundary interaction, the participants within these distributed CoPs, where their participation is always “contextualised in real time and space” (Jewson 2007b: 161), act as “both learners and experts on their own experience that they bring in” (Bottrup 2005: 513). Findings in this research study expose quite clearly, not only the reality of CoPs in a scenario of MNCs/TNCs, but also their crucial position in acting as hubs for the generation of learning and knowledge. In fact, here are selected comments put forward by respondents, participating in this study, pronouncing the incidence of CoPs and learning trajectories taking place in a MNC/TNC working environment within the MPS scenario:

Yes, we do meet with officers like ourselves, attaches and apart from meeting them, we keep contact through emails...There are officers from all over the

European Union and we get along mostly with the Italians, Spanish, the sector that has got to do with the Mediterranean. These are protection officers, inspectors, *guardia costiere* and we help each other and even share experiences. We sometimes go there, they come here, we show each other what we are doing and we all learn.

(071-R15J3TH, Fisheries Inspector)

I form part of a network of group work colleagues abroad.....for example a group of public service colleagues from all over the world that we came to know each other during a seminar...this happened a lot of times...and so I now form part of many groups like that. We continually discuss, besides families, etc.....our work problems, exchanging work experiences and solutions, etc. Obviously, interaction in some of these groups is more intense, social and informal than others.....it really depends on how the rapport developed over the time...and kept strong all this time...with that individual or group of individuals....we do learn immensely from each others experiences, solutions to problems, etc.....because, although I share with some of them similar job situations, we live in very different environments...different cultures, work ethic, mentality, etc.....and in this way we do learn a lot from each others' experiences.

(072-R4J1CHM, Director)

I also form part of a network of colleagues who are spread all over offices throughout many foreign countries...We do loads of communication....sharing experiences, queries, best solutions, etc.....this is mostly done through means such as email, phone...skype....even facebook with some of them....and occasionally do face to face as well when I'm in a trip to their country, as part of my job....in many cases, all my colleagues within these communities are very helpful and they do actively participate in sharing openly their experiences, providing help and advice for solutions and better practices, etc.

(073-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

Hence, on viewing such findings, one has to affirm that CoPs, vested in forms of distributed and virtual formats, have become a crucial element and source for learning, knowledge generation and re-creation within contemporary complex and MNCs/TNCs organisations (Hildreth, Kimble and Wright 2000: 29).

This evolvement and transformation of the concept of CoPs in relation to contemporary world fabric, imbued by pressures such as globalization and technological advances, have undoubtedly instilled related issues that need attention in order to render modern day CoPs to function to their full potential in generating learning and knowledge creation. Two issues identified which will be discussed here are those relating to: the communication tools used for participation in social

interaction with such CoPs; and, the cultural difference that surface out within these social interactions.

As being intimated here in this chapter, distributed CoPs operating across MNCs/TNCs have become so crucial for learning and knowledge creation and management for contemporary organisations (Ardichvili, Page and Wentling 2003: 64). One has to affirm that the use of online services, within and among CoPs, including that of email and electronic chat and social network groups "have facilitated the development of CoP whose members are not co-located" (Lesser and Storck 2001: 832). Such a scenario, indeed, enables CoPs to promulgate virtual communications that "are instantaneous, stretch across great distances and transcend spatial and temporal contexts" (Jewson 2007b: 160); hence freeing CoPs members from "many constraints of time and space" (Jewson 2007b: 159). However, the effectiveness of CoPs' full functioning in this regard rests on the level of participation in social interaction that occurs between CoP members, actively separately and intertwined within a scenario that may include a whole conglomerate of CoPs, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Such level of participation is highly dependent on the extent of mutual trust, respect and openness that is present among and between CoP members (Joy-Matthews and Gladstone 2000: 25). Findings in this research study, as already exposed earlier in this section, show that CoPs operating in such a scenario are indeed a reality. However, results emanating from this research study also show the importance of physical communication over 'virtual' and electronic means.

In fact, in this regard, one has to underpin the importance of face-to-face communication for trust building between CoPs members (Kimble and Hildreth, 2005: 109), as well as its vital role “for sharing tacit knowledge (socialisation) and explicating it (externalisation)” (Kohlbacher and Mukai 2007: 17) and for "developing personal relationships" (Kimble and Hildreth, 2005: 109). Research results confirm this view in many ways and forms. Indeed, these results claim that, even though electronic tools do facilitate communication and interaction between CoP members, some sort of physical interaction, albeit even if in very limited instances, is of much help to enhance bonding, 'accelerating' trust and mutual respect building within CoPs, which in turn enables full effectiveness of CoP's functioning:

ICT has indeed facilitated the sharing of information, experiences, etc.....particularly if distance is involved and you need fast communication, responses, etc. However, I do feel that ICT has become so convenient that at times substitute personal and face to face interaction unnecessarily.....because communicating in a personal way....such as face to face.....in my opinion...has a tremendous impact on the intensity of the bonding or rapport that builds up between persons or colleagues....email, chatting, etc is quite helpful if communication is long distance...such electronic means can serve to unlock barriers related to personal or face to face communication, such a shyness, low self esteem, etc.

(074-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

We communicate over the phone as well, through emails and chatting networks....I believe sharing of experiences is effective in both doing it electronically and face-to-face. Sometimes sharing through email, etc. is quite effective....(avoiding) the tendency to forget something or some detail that may result important.....it is quite effective to share things with someone through email if you are reserved or feel shy or embarrassed to tell it in person or face to face. However, on the other hand, sharing your experiences, discussing problems, etc. with someone or group face to face is so much helpful to see and 'feel' the other person or persons.....that is, see their expressions, emotions, etc.

(075-R4J1CHM, Director)

Another issue related to CoPs operating in distributed format, particularly in a scenario involving MNCs/TNCs, is that of cultural differences. The issue of cultural differences and its impact on modern organisations was thoroughly discussed in the literature review of this study. Indeed, culture is the “modifying factor” by which such a community express itself and interact (Hofstede 1997: 5). It is held here that an organisation needs to easily mould itself in responding positively, with values of tolerance and acceptance, in front of the contemporary reality of multicultural and diverse elements within its workforce, as well as when it is operating across borders in other culturally diverse countries, promptly adapting its corporate policies and arrangements (Marquardt and Engel 1993: 63 in Ya-Hui Lien and Mclean 2004: 74)

“to fit the culture rather than doing it vice versa” (Abdou and Kliche 2004: 23). Companies need “to be cross-culturally aware, sensitive and adaptive to local cultures” (Hutchings and Weir 2006: 272). In “negotiating cultural barriers” (McGuire et al. 2002: 26), an organisation has to ‘understand and adapt to “host country’ ways of thinking and acting” (McGuire et al. 2002: 26-27). Hence, organisations are not to take their *culture package* and just ‘get in there’: they need to “learn the culture...to slow down and (they) know kind of just quietly find (their) way” (Iles and Kaur Hayers 1997: 113). Understanding such cultural differences will help to minimize the barriers to participation in social interaction within CoPs that these undoubtedly provide. This was amply shown in research results emanating in this study:

There are certain people, of certain cultures, who are laid back, for example Eastern countries... but then they open up.... but in the beginning they were a bit laid back. People from the south of Europe and the English are more similar to us, they interact quickly. But in the end everybody finds the same problems and issues... but you find out that everybody interacts how he can and at the same time learn from each others experience.

(076-R16J2CH, EU Fund Officer)

As I said I form part of many groups involving foreigners from different countries. You do feel that, for example, the westerners do project a much open mind to things than the easterners...I mean they tend to speak their mind

much more openly, are more impulsive, actively begin a conversation, challenge things and proactive to change than the East....say, those from Malaysia, Singapore, India, etc...and even from those of the Eastern European countries. For example, in a group I am in, where we interact very often.....those participants in the chat networks and which we tend to be more openly active, etc. is quite evident....my friends from England, Greece, Italy, Belgium, etc.....much more than the ones from Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, etc. I have colleagues from Nigeria also who seem not to be very open and active...as also with individuals from Malaysia, Singapore, etc., I do sense that religion and ethnicity does have a say in affecting the 'openness' levels of our interaction.

(077-R4JICHM, Director)

....cultural traits do play a part in the level and quality of social interaction for such group or community members...For example you will not find an official coming from an Easter European country to be so much open as one coming from say the UK or Italy...he or she may eventually open up in time, but surely not in the first sessions....Then, dealing with people from North African states...other characteristics come into play, which are quite evident when social interacting with them....at least with most of them...such as, beside a sense of 'cautiousness', a sense of lethargy.....while subjects such as religion and family ties fills profoundly the air in which informal and social interaction takes place.

(078-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

Serbian culture is a bit different from ours. We are more open as Maltese, the Spanish maybe a bit less and the Serbs a bit less.... It's like you know that they come from an eastern European country... I used to notice the difference. They are not Mediterranean, they are more cautious.

(079-R18J3TH, Visa Officer)

Findings in this research study also portrayed the cultural divide in mentality between Maltese and Gozitans and the need to address this cultural difference. (Both sets of people belong to the same Maltese nation, albeit residing in two distinct islands where Gozo is much smaller than Malta and where many Gozitans do in fact work in Malta; hence, also within MPS Departments based in Malta):

Then a Gozitan came to our office and she did not integrate.

(080-R19J2CL, Clerk HR)

There may be Gozitans that hold back.

(081-R24J2TL, Apprentice (Construction))

Indeed, it is being argued here that, if properly attended to, individuals from different cultures, who one has to acknowledge that they do also offer “distinctive competencies” (McGuire et al. 2002: 31), may not only refrain from subduing

participation in social interaction within CoPs, but enhance it. This claim is supported by findings in the research study, as the following selected comments show:

...I also have other groups or communities in which I form part because of my job status. These refer to fora and committees abroad where we members share the same jobs and belong to these fora and committees in order, and specifically, to set agendas, policies, as well sharing our experiences, practices, solution to problems.....we do social interact we members of these fora and committees..... Most of these members...do actively participate in sharing openly their experiences, providing help and advice for solutions and better practices, etc...Indeed, it helps us to learn new ways of doing things all the time...and being in a multi-country environment, since I partake and actively participate in such communities as well, problems crop up in so many different facets that surely is of great help on seeing them in so much different perspectives.....it is as if you hear them out, being aided by people coming from different countries, cultural background, etc., in not a 'straight way' but in so many different angles, say horizontal, vertical, etc. The trick is being open and in a trustworthy mode with each other.....and this is quite easily attained in a social and informal setting.....that is why social interaction with such groups or communities is such a valuable tool for such sharing and learning.

(082-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

Say, from my colleagues abroad....some of my colleagues are specialised in certain areas and for me, interacting with them, has been indeed a knowledge fountain that continually help me out in doing a better job and also develop even more my personality and position as a manager within the Civil Service.

(083-R4J1CHM, Director)

6.2 The transformation of learning trajectories

Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs needs to evolve, not only in acknowledging formats of multiple and distributed CoPs, but also in transforming learning trajectories away from the 'simplistic' exposition presented by Lave and Wenger (1991) and be in full cognizance of all the complex issues that human activity, intervention and interaction bring with it. This research study has already exposed how participation in social interaction among or between CoP members, which lies at the core of the concept of CoPs, cannot be simply 'assumed' or viewed in 'simplistic' terms. Indeed, such human participation and interaction involves a myriad of complexities and issues – a fact that has somewhat been ignored or not given enough attention by Lave and Wenger. This thesis will argue in this section, as supported by results emanating in this research study, that these 'human complexities', as well as their posited contexts, impact heavily on conceptualising proper learning process trajectories occurring within CoPs in contemporary organisations.

Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs (1991) 'assumes', in its main, a stable 'community' acting in harmony, where, through a 'simple' centripetal trajectory of novice-to-oldtimer, learning and knowledge generation occurs; a process through which the novice moves from an LPP to full participant (FP). Indeed, research findings in this study show that while such CoPs, as well as this professed learning process trajectories do exist within MPS contemporary organisations (vide discussion in Chapter 4), however results in this study also claim that such learning trajectories, as well as CoP formations, are not to be conceptualised in such 'simplistic' ways as projected by Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept (Fuller et al. 2005).

For example, although this thesis has already intimated (vide Chapter 4) that research results showed that acceptance and integration into a CoP occurred in almost all instances without any difficulty, however data results in this regard also exposed the 'complexity' of human intervention that should not be ignored in conceptualising such an important 'event' in one's CoP experience; that is, one's CoP entry. In fact, data emanating from this research study show that the very high 'acceptance without any difficulty into a CoP' tag brings with it some 'human involvement complexity' history with it:

...from the day I entered the unit, I was accepted as one of them instantly. In hindsight, I think this was so...because they, including the Head of Section, were such a nice bunch of people to be around and work with....our unit

leader was a sort of 'one of us' and fully encouraged this 'camaraderie' attitude. It brought us really close together.

(084-R21J1CL, Clerk)

Furthermore, this also applies to the two instances (out of the seventy four responses in this regard) where respondents in this research claim they were not accepted within a CoP at their new workplace:

When I went there I ended up in a room with 8 people who were older than me and very serious looking and I knew that I was not accepted.... all I encountered were ugly faces looking at me.

(085-R28J2CH, Tax Assessor)

My new colleagues do not make much effort to make me feel at ease and integrate me in their group.

(086-R10J1TH, Teacher)

This argument, in favour of how human complexities do impact on members' acceptance within a CoP at the workplace, is clearly supported by the following data results emanating in this research study. For example, these respondents participating in this study claim they found no difficulty in being accepted within their CoP due to knowing already an acquaintance within the CoP they were about to enter:

I was accepted immediately and we clicked immediately too since I already knew them through Registry.

(087-R29J2CH, Clerk Accounts)

There was a person that I knew already and he was in the same office as me and he helped a lot in order that I am accepted immediately.

(088-R18J1CL, Clerk Data Input)

Others mention the common attribute of being peers or the same age:

We were accepted with no problems...we were all young....we used to go out together even after office hours and during break....like that we were part of a group not just individuals.

(089-R25J1CL, Clerk)

They accept you.....not many of my subordinates were older.... It was easier to integrate with them because the age gap was smaller.

(090-R24J4THM, Technical Officer)

This respondent portrays how having known each other from the same Department and all entering a new job contributed positively in bonding them into a CoP:

(Once given the job) we began helping each other immediately....we trust each other....and even the fact that we were friends before (ex public registry employees) helps.

(091-R21J1CL, Clerk Public Registry)

Data findings also suggested that, whilst claiming that acceptance into a CoP was endured without any problem, such a 'smooth' acceptance may be due to the relief in work pressure at their new workplaces that their recruitment will bring:

They accepted me immediately....(when) somebody new comes along....the members of the group will be glad that you came along so that they may give you some of their work to do.

(092-R24J3TH, Draughtsman)

Moreover, findings in this research study also portrayed that there were cases where although acceptance and integration within a CoP did occur, however this happened not instantaneously but endorsed over time:

I was promoted....At first I wasn't accepted at all...I think it was because they knew that I was not a mechanic and had gone there only because of the promotion.... I had an idea of how vehicles worked and even though I wasn't accepted I would go and make sure I knew what was happening around...when I started to let them know that I knew what an engine was,

(then) they started to accept me because (I showed them that) I knew the trade....

(093-R24J5THM, Manager Vehicles)

This same argument applies to the 'biographies' that individuals bring along with them, ingrained inherently within them as a whole 'package', when they 'act' towards entry and, once accepted, along the ongoing activity in the social practice of participation and interaction within CoPs. One has to acknowledge that upon entering a CoP, newcomers are individual human beings that have "been shaped by their prior life experience" (Fuller and Unwin 2004: 41); hence, possessing experiences and may even be in some level of 'expertise' that are not yet present in the CoP old-timers, or presumably full participants within the CoP.

Indeed, this argument is supported by results emanating in this research study, which clearly show that such realities are amply present within MPS organisations. In fact, respondents participating in this study refer to their personal 'imported' biographies on 'entering' their CoPs within MPS organisations:

Yes it helped. The fact that I had already worked in an office environment and also having dealt with customers helped me a lot

(094-RIJICL, Clerk)

Before I started working with the public service, I worked for some time with a contractor so I had a little idea of work.

(095-R12J2TL, Maintenance Worker)

Here, a respondent recounts how the job before entering the MPS introduced her to the 'working' world prior to entering any MPS CoPs:

...I entered as a waitress when I was 16 years old...I was surrounded by all kind of co-workers that were much older than me and it was obvious that I learned all the ware that adults crave for during those days. I really matured quite quickly because of that. So when I entered the Public Service, I believe I was mature enough to handle the work environment I was posted to.....I was put within the messengers pool, there were no female messengers there....I was the only one.....and all the other messengers were all older than me....all over 35, etc....while I was only 26 years when I entered the Service.

(096-R26J1TL, Messenger)

Other respondents participating in this research relate on how past experience, acquired throughout there public service career, impacted upon their entry into a new CoP within an MPS organisation:

Yes it helped because when it comes to facing people, my friends themselves choose me to be first due to the simple reason that I had that experience at the

IRD. Even if a person comes along with certain anger or with a certain character, I know how to handle this person because in the IRD, nobody used to come with a smile on their face.

(097-R15J3TH, Fisheries Inspector)

The skills acquired (during my career before coming here) were audits and investigation skills and techniques.....The other skill was dealing with various types of people and also dealing with complex issues because throughout my career I have encountered various complex issues....these helped a lot and they are at the core of my development in my current position.....Most of the time I am an active participant (in CoPs) and I consider myself as a person with a lot of knowledge even from past experiences and I can exchange this knowledge with my colleagues and friends.

(098-R4J1CHM, Director)

Results in this research study also show that such individual biographies may also include a 'preconceived mindset' which impacts on the level of social participation within CoPs:

..... Not only did the female qualified nurses not teach me or help me cope, but they made sure I was given the filthiest jobs around.....When I went to the Water Works Dept it was my colleagues, *luckily all men*, who went out of

their way to help me.....I must admit I feel much more comfortable working with a male than with a female.

(099-R22J2CL, Clerk)

Moreover, findings in this research study also expose how the role of the one who is supposed to help and provide learning and knowledge to the other CoP members, a role normally synonymous with the "experienced older worker" (Fuller and Unwin 2004: 40), was adopted, in certain instances, by the CoP newcomers or novice workers due to their respective 'expertise' or competencies being brought with them, as part of their biographies, into their new CoP. The following are selected comments by participants in this research who experienced this phenomenon:

I learn a lot from the new recruits especially regarding technology since nowadays we have new accounting packages for example I learnt SAGE from new recruits....

(100-R28J3CHM, Unit Manager)

But one cannot say that solutions to problems and the way we learn within the group of work colleagues come from only the 'experienced' workers. In fact, I have also experienced cases when solutions to problems came from the newbies in the group.....particularly when it comes to something involving technology advances, IT, computers, etc. It is quite interesting...experiencing a group of experienced workers or experts in their line of work, being literally

lectured on how to do the job better by using some kind of technology gadget, software, etc. whom neither of us have the knowledge or at least the depth of knowledge that these young workers or newbies have. And this applies not only to technology advances, but even when one newbie to the group brings with him specialised knowledge.....say, having completed a post graduate University course or attended a highly specialised knowledge seminar or course, etc. This is of immense beneficial for the whole group in learning new things from these young workers.

(101-R4J1CHM, Director)

From the new ones....those who had already started the ACCA...Even the experienced ones sometimes ended up going to those who had knowledge about ACCA.

(102-R15J2CH, Audit Officer IRD)

The following is an experience, recounted by a respondent, exposing how, on entering a CoP, he realised he was better skilled than the other 'old' members of the CoP:

Those that were there were not qualified mechanics, they learnt by trail and error and than received promotions and became mechanics..... they used an old method to work..... I was qualified and I knew better methods.

(103-R13J1TH, Mechanic)

There were also comments by respondents on experiencing a CoP where all members are experts in their own field:

Everybody had his job.... For example there is a mason that worked on arches and that was his sole work, working on arches. We were scattered on the place of work but everybody on his job....there used to be exchanges and sometimes we even talked informally about problems we used to encounter and we used to help each other

(104-R24J1THM, Mason)

....we were a small committee.... there was a representative from every entity.....I learned a lot from these people since they were technical...Everyone was an expert in his sector and everyone started learning from each other.

(105-R9J1THM, Operations Manager)

The following are respondents' comments showing how the learning trajectory within the CoP is not necessarily in the centripetal form but transmitted through members with relevant competencies:

I can say that most of my technical issues that I personally learned here have come from the workers, there are those who are masons, mechanics,

electricians.. When you are working and you encounter these problems, these people bring all their experiences to the workplace.

(106-R9J1THM, Operations Manager)

Hence, these results emanating in this research study support the argument being put forward here that at any moment in one's career and in his/her ongoing learning process within CoPs, an individual can be an LPP and FP at the same time, both within and across CoPs. Newcomers or novices to a CoP can be experts or skilled in some field and bring new ideas which can also "catalyse innovation" (Lesser and Storck 2001: 832), but still "lack, however, specific knowing and knowledge about the new working environment" (Schulz 2005: 497). This will posit these newcomers to be in a concurrent status of LPP and FP within the CoP, albeit in distinct activity within the interwoven multiple activities that shape up the learning process within that CoP. On the other hand, experienced workers indeed do learn from their engagement with newcomers (Fuller et al. 2005: 14). 'Old-timers' can also be in a position of LPP when faced with new knowledge/skill brought forward into 'activity' within the CoP by a 'newcomer', whilst at the same time still assumed to be FP due their fields of expertise, experience and accumulated knowledge.

This same situation is also prevalent across multiple CoPs. Today one speaks of "overlapping communities of practice" (James 2007) and, in some cases, even in a 'continuum' of CoPs (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2004); indeed, a whole conglomerate of CoPs, involving intertwining trajectories of learning within them.

James also speaks of the potential shifting, within today's dynamic fabric of emerging multiple CoPs, of identifications and the "diversity learning trajectories of old-timers" (2007: 139). In fact, due to incidence within today's organisational fabric of so many 'skilled newcomers' and 'outdated old-timers', it is being argued here that CoPs in contemporary organisations have participants in multiple peripheral and core participating positions within CoPs and across other CoPs at the same time. Members in one CoP may act as LPP in one CoP and FP in another or/and LPP and FP at the same time in any CoP or in both; and this is not necessarily by being simply a 'newcomer' but also according to the knowledge/skill/specialised experience within him/her (James 2007; Fuller and Unwin 2004). Findings in this research study, in fact, do expose these realities in trajectories of learning within multiple CoPs, as these selected comments show:

I have a network of group of colleagues....or communities of work colleagues.....I continually discuss with them my problems and share work experiences and even solutions in order learn from each other. These colleagues include my staff at work, within the various sections that fall within my remit....where I consider myself as part of the different groups from which the section of workers come. I am also part of the community of Directors within the same Ministry. I also form part of the community of DCSs...spread out within the various Ministries...Yes there is social interaction...where we exchange ideas and help each other in our work.

(107-R4J1CHM, Director)

I must also say that I formed part of other groups of colleagues where we also shared and exchanged ideas, problems, solutions, best practices, etc. These were basically a network of friends I had generated over time, working in other Ministries and that basically did a similar job to mine...I benefitted a lot through such interactions with these colleagues because I even introduced things in my section following such exchanges.

(108-R4J2CHM, Assistant Director Finance)

Moreover, results emanating from this research study also show instances of CoP members acquiring 'expertise' from other 'learning' environment or/and 'communities', privately or/and at home. Such skills do form part of their biographies and, indeed, do impact on the CoP at their workplace, even though acquired outside and independent of it:

...we (my work gang at the Water Works) used to do minor plumbing works.....at offices, mustering rooms.....From experience gained at home, I came to know how much more easier it is working with Acorn pipesthese are plastic pipes that resist heat and are very easy to handle and fix together.....and not like the steel plumbing pipes we used to have at work.....I discussed these pipes...with the experienced guys...I used to take some samples with me at work....from some loose pipes and fittings we had at our garage at home....and used to show my workmates...eventually, these pipes

were indeed used at our work jobs... Yes, I feel some pride that I was one to insist how good and easy to work with these pipes were.

(109-R7J1TL, General Hand)

I work privately as a mechanic after work and obviously my part time job helps me to learn more and I become a more skilled mechanic and this reflects on my full time job as well.

(110-R13J1TH, Mechanic)

Furthermore, one has to affirm that CoP members in contemporary organisations do exist in different 'sectoral packages', which indeed impact and shape “configurations of various categories of citizens” in distinctive ways (Jewson 2007a: 79). In fact, findings in this study expose various instances in this regard. For example, here a respondent refers to being new and in the same age group:

Since it was a new department... we were all of the same age.... and new job.... we used to help each other a lot and the head of section and director were very nice too.

(111-R19J2CL, Clerk HR)

In this instance, respondent intimates 'his type of people':

You know...the type like myself.....of the lower type and not those of offices or 'high up' types.....

(112-R7J3TL, Fuel Attendant)

There were respondents who claim their common cause endured at the workplace for their CoP 'membership'. This selected comment in this regard refers to how a respondent's community were bonded towards promoting the science subject among schools:

I used to visit different primary schools teaching only science to pupils from year 1 up to year 6..... We were 3 new females and there were already 12 other males and females. We were accepted because it was in their nature that they loved science...they used to love to improve the subject so they were used to help us so that everyone would be good in the team and nobody would fall back.... we used to meet once a week as a team at the science centre, give feedback, discussing problems and how to solve them.

(113-R27J2TH, Peripatetic (Roaming) Teacher)

Whereas in this case, a respondent claims that their bonding was incited by common frustration times at work:

Everybody was fed up and we were very close.....

(114-R29J1CL, Clerk Registry)

These findings, therefore, affirm that learning trajectories occurring within CoPs have to be conceptualised in consideration of contextual factors affecting and moulded within these same CoPs and organisations in which they are generated. The context in which contemporary organisations are posited is not fully compatible with limiting a 'simple' learning trajectory of newcomer to old-timer (Eraut 2002). Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept seems to be devoid of any depth analysis on such context or, for example, "social conditions" (Jewson 2007: 79) in which CoPs are formed and operate, as well as how this is impacting on the social practice, participation and interaction of the CoP members. As the above-presented selected comments from respondents participating in this research study portray, indeed, the 'full' context in which CoPs operate is to be acknowledged and considered when analysing learning trajectories within CoPs. Moreover, it has to be said and acknowledged, as the following selected respondents' comments show, that members in CoPs may have their roles "shaped by institutional and societal contexts over which they have little or no control" (James 2007: 131):

...starting to work as a mechanic there was as if learning the trade from scratch for me.....the true time when I learned my job as a mechanic was not at school but during the time while working on actual vehicles at the Marsa garage.

(115-R23JITH, Mechanic)

The work was totally different from what we had learnt in the Academy. We used to patrol the country.....It didn't have to do with (what we learned in) the Academy.

(116-R11J2TL, Police Constable)

The officer in charge spent about an hour or two explaining my duties. However, I really got grips of what I had to do once I got to do the job along my messengers colleagues....how to do it in the right way, and how to get along with the work. *(117-R26J1TL, Messenger)*

Indeed, through the globalisation phenomenon, CoP members can be posited within MNC/TNC scenarios and, hence, operate “in different space-time contexts, generating different and competing conceptions of the world within and between members” (James 2007: 132). Findings in this research study, as also discussed earlier in this chapter (vide Section 6.1), affirm this phenomenon:

After four months in the Unit, they sent me to Serbia for 6 months at the Spanish Embassy...I had an office only for me but I used to meet the Spanish all the time. The Spanish helped me a lot and they made me feel at ease being alone in a country that I had never been to and I had a very good social interaction with them.... Everyday at 10am the Spanish staff at the visa unit would call me to go to their section for a coffee. And we used to share our problems...they always helped me.... and sometimes in the evening I used to

go out with the Spanish.... It really helped that I had this interaction with the Spanish....there were also Serbs with whom I socially interacted in the Spanish Embassy where I worked.... for me they were the same as the Spanish and they helped a lot too... and since they were Serbs I got to learn how Serbs were...I also interacted with consuls from different countries...sometimes these consuls would organize receptions and I would be invited.....

(118-R18J3TH, Visa Officer)

An interesting and significant data emerging in this research study relates to how the level of learning generated within a CoP does not necessarily correlate to the level of intensity or/and frequency of social interaction and participation among its members. Here are comments in this regard by a respondent participating in this study:

I mean, sometimes it is not how close or intense you socially interact with your colleague, it is the fact that that colleague may be doing a specialised job from which all of us within the same group can learn from his or her experience...

(119-R4J1CHM, Director)

This phenomenon surfaced even more emphatically in scenarios involving distributed CoPs. The very context of global interaction within such CoPs has rendered extended levels of specialisation to particular CoP members – owing to social, cultural, etc.

positioning and the fact of looking for problem solutions, aired by other CoP members 'trans-nationally' from across the globe, from a 'different' perspective and mindset – which, knowing that social interaction in such CoPs is not as intense and frequent as that of other concurrent local workplace CoPs, learning intensity levels may not correlate to the level of intensity in social participation and interaction in such scenario:

....sometimes it is not how close or intense you socially interact with your colleague, it is the fact that that colleague may be doing a specialised job from which all of us within the same group can learn from his or her experience...indeed I did experience such instances. Say, from colleagues abroad...

(120-R4J1CHM, Director)

...I also have other groups or communities in which I form part because of my job status. These refer to fora and committees abroad where we members share the same jobs.....since our operations are indeed similar and following the same policies set out mostly by our EU membership...we do social interact....Most of these members...are very open and helpful...sharing openly their experiences, providing help and advice for solutions and better practices, etc...Indeed, it helps us to learn new ways of doing things all the time.

(121-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

Hence, these study findings affirm the view, threading along this section of the thesis, relating to the importance of the individual, together with his/her biographies and competencies, in shaping up the whole process of learning trajectories occurring within CoPs.

Now, this brings us to the last piece of the jigsaw in this section of the discussion; namely, that pertaining to how this importance of the individual, as discussed in the foregoing paragraphs, fare against the role that the 'structure' may have in shaping the learning process trajectories occurring within CoPs in contemporary organisations. Whilst for Lave and Wenger (1991) learning comes alive through participation in social interaction within CoPs, and hence, “outside the individual’s mind” (Felstead et al. 2005: 364), on the other hand, they also maintain that learning incorporates, in its situatedness, a whole interdependent activity of the agent and the social world where "agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 33). Billett contends that workplace learning within CoPs needs "to be understood through the psychological processes comprising engagement between situational contributions...(which) may well reflect cultural practices and other social factors and individual conceptions and agency which are personally socially derived" (2007: 64). Indeed, it is argued that the content or nature of members’ participation is also determined by their individual subjectivity or agency (Billett 2004). Billet in fact insists that “both the individual and social contributions should be reconciled”,

where learning emanates “through a relational interdependence between individual and social world” (2007: 59).

Findings in this research study affirm such claims as presented by Billett. In fact, this study has already discussed how the individual, acting as an 'agent' vested with human complexities, biographies, pre-conceived mindsets, as well as contextual, institutional and societal contexts do shape up the learning trajectory intensity and formation within CoPs. However, in some instances, results in this study do also show how 'work' itself plays also an important part in the learning process within the CoP, as portrayed in this selected response:

From the registry I used to learn a lot because I used to read letters from other sections, so you would learn what these sections' roles are from these letters. Even the mail we used to open for example if it was an invoice we would send it to the accounts section, if an enquiry we would open a file and send it to the right office. We used to learn from behind the scenes.

(122-R29J1CL, Clerk Registry)

Still, findings in this research study, in many other instances, clearly affirm the important role of the human agency in 'learning from own experience':

It was only experience that taught me how to be a nurse, ok the theory lessons are obviously important in this regard but there is a big difference between what you learn at school and what you encounter in the wards.

(123-R22J1TH, Nurse)

...when there is bad weather as you gain more and more experience, and also when there is the barge and we would go....making the anchor a bit low to avoid the propeller, and you take it in the direction given by the person in charge of the barge.

(124-R12J3TL, Coxswain)

However, I learned a lot from my own experience on how I used to do things...

(125-R9J1THM, Operations Manager)

Moreover, results in this study endorsed human agency as also posited outside the social practice activity inherent within CoPs. In fact, here are respondents' claims of 'learning by themselves':

you start learning how to solve certain things by yourself

(126-R11J2TL, Police Constable)

I needed their help (my work colleagues) and I noticed that they were not helping me and certain things I had to discover on my own.

(127-R24J6THM, Principal Public Cleansing Officer)

As well as through trial and error:

There are things that you learn on your own.... And you learn from your own mistakes.

(128-R14J2TL, Heavy Plant Driver)

And self-reflection:

In these cases I learned more on self reflection, from what I observed.

(129-R27J2TH, Peripatetic (Roaming) Teacher)

6.3 A proposed amended view of the concept of CoPs

In this last section of this chapter, this thesis will discuss and propose an amended view of the concept of CoPs, aimed at maximising effective workplace learning, knowledge creation, sustenance and transference in contemporary organisations. This thesis has exposed in earlier sections and chapters of these discussion chapters how Lave and Wenger's exposition of the CoPs concept was 'too simplistic'. It is the view

of this thesis that the CoPs concept should be amended, both in terms of addressing the gaps that Lave and Wenger somewhat ignored or/and failed to consider in their exposition of the concept, as well as reconceptualising the CoPs concept within the realms and in consideration of contemporary age impacting organisations today.

This section will argue that the concept of CoPs takes its real form more so when vested within the realities of the LO and KM; hence, harnessing learning and managing knowledge in organisations posited and formed as 'learning communities' (Owenby 2002), where knowledge is generated, re-created and sustained within and through effective CoPs. Indeed, CoPs are the hub within LOs for knowledge generation, sharing, application and eventual re-creation; they are indeed “the building blocks of LOs” (Snell 2002: 550). Similarly, CoPs are also the ideal vehicles for KM (Zarraga-Oberty and De Saa-Perez 2006: 61), through which knowledge is sustained and transferred across the organisation. This section will also discuss different perspectives on knowledge generation and acquisition trajectories that can be acted out within the confines of CoPs. Finally, it will be argued here that crucial for conceptualising proper and full operational effective CoPs is adopting strong leadership, which is considered by this thesis to be fundamental in nurturing effective LOs and CoPs within them, whilst ensuring that CoPs act out its proper KM function.

As delineated in the literature review of this study, scepticism sometimes crops up in questioning the reality status of the LO. The idea of the LO is seen as “too idealistic

in practice” (Driver 2002: 38). Sceptics maintain that advocates of the LO have presented it as a ‘workplace paradise’: “a positive ideal – a workplace paradise for employees resulting in phenomenal organisational performance and success” (Driver 2002: 34). They argue that, in reality, this equates to a “superhuman collective achievement” (Snell 2002: 55), and hence, an impossible ideal: “it is an idealistic state which may never be attained” (Garavan 1997: 26).

Results in this research study show that the MPS, as a central or general organisation, is projecting itself as an organisation that is actively promoting ongoing learning:

Yes I do feel the Public Service is making headway in encouraging continuous learning and development of staff. There are several courses being organised on a regular basis from the SDO, which is the agency for the development and training of Public Service staff. There is also now a Centre for Training and Development that has just been set up to enhance this issue.

(130-R4J1CHM, Director)

Though, as this respondent's comments suggest, the learning initiatives in this regard seem to be limited to formal training activities:

Yes I do believe this (ongoing learning initiatives by MPS) is so. However, I believe the effort in this regard is wholly focused on formal training.

(131-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

However, findings in this research study also expose several instances among Departments, sections, and/or units, which, although forming part of the MPS, such Departments managed to groom themselves into organisations where a learning culture is present and learning activities are being encouraged and activated. Indeed, this fact featured across all categories of respondents in this research study – sample quotes include the following:

Yes, meetings used to be held and I used to attend too and used to learn a lot since everyone would narrate their different experiences and views so everybody learns from each other.

(132-R18J2CH, Secretary to Director)

In the unit that I head, I see that we meet frequently and there is a lot of social interaction. I strongly believe that thanks to this people open up more easily so that we can share our experiences freely....

(133-R28J3CHM, Unit Manager)

These results speak of a learning culture and the encouragement and presence of learning activities. Although falling short of evidencing a 'full blown' LO, as defined in the terms of 'organisational transformation' (vide Pedlar et al. 1997; Senge 1990), these results clearly show that key elements in conceptualising the formation, presence and reality of a LO, in particular and specifically as perceived to be as a

“grand learning community” (Owenby 2002: 51), are present in MPS organisations - if not in the MPS as a central or general organisation, but at least in distinct departments/units within the MPS.

Indeed, the LO, as perceived in terms of a 'grand learning community', is achievable in practice and can act so much positively in contemporary organisations, particularly serving as the springboard for CoPs formation and effective operation. This thesis has already discussed and shown in chapter four how CoPs are so very present in MPS organisations, as well as the learning and knowledge creation occurring within CoPs. Indeed, all this effective 'learning' activity through CoPs comes about along with the presence of LOs or 'grand learning communities'.

CoPs do serve as hubs within LOs; much as they are the ideal vehicles for effective KM (Zarraga-Oberty and De Saa-Perez 2006: 61). Indeed the LO is “inextricably linked” to KM (Loermans 2002: 285), where KM is not to be construed as ‘an outcome of’, but rather, “divergence from” (Scarbrough and Swan 2001: 7) the LO concept. Here it is being argued that CoPs act as the mechanism in which both the LO and KM are synchronised for effective workplace learning in contemporary organisations. This is particularly so as CoPs act, at workplaces within organisations, as an effective dynamic source for knowledge generation, dissemination, sustenance and re-creation.

Through their help...experiences, practices shared during our social rendezvous and interaction with these community members, I sometimes even unlock problems at my current work to the tune of designing and implementing a 'new' way of handling things....all this through some kind of idea that cropped up through such social dialogue, interaction, chatting, etc. Indeed, it helps us to learn new ways of doing things all the time.....because problems always crop up.....

(134-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

We socially interacted a lot and our conversations and discussions were always on how to improve our work. In fact, these were very fruitful because, believe me, we bettered our practices every week, if not daily, during my one and half years there.

(135-R9J2CH, Ministry Secretariat)

However, one here has to posit knowledge, its creation and 'management' in its true perspective. Knowledge is held to be a “skilful accomplishment, an art” (Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001: 982), “the icon of the new economy” (Kreiner 2002: 112), “a precious global resource” (Shariq 1997: 75). Indeed, knowledge possesses a “dynamic character” (Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001: 974): implying “development and growth” (Kakabadse et al. 2003: 77). Though knowledge is to be recognised and treated as a valuable asset (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 12), which undoubtedly “increases with use” (Bollinger and Smith 2001: 9) and has “unlimited potential for

growth” (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 17), this thesis affirms the view that knowledge is not a product or resource; it is rather a process “socially constructed” (McAdam and McCreeedy 1999: 94), which is “embedded in human relationships that is continually transforming over time” (CLMS M2, CU6: 10), as results in this research study confirmed:

...there is a lot of social interaction....we share experiences freely... for example cases that we meet and are complicated, difficult etc...and how we are solving them... or how we can solve them better, treat certain cases better....sometimes even change route... change the way we act... we learn from mistakes or see that if we do things differently we will be more efficient. In fact because of this we changed our practices in order to meliorate our investigating system that we do. These new practices were a result of these exchanges of ideas and from the discussions we do in our social interaction...in our offices as well as activities that...are purely social. For example, during break we go for a coffee and a snack at a cafeteria in Valletta and God only knows how many ideas are formed.... practices changed...from discussions held in this cafeteria.

(136-R28J3CHM, Unit Manager)

Indeed, knowledge is to be labelled as a ‘complex process of complexities’ – incorporating information meaning, interpretation and judgement, as well as contexts, culture, rituals, symbols, attitudes, dispositions and perceptions. Knowledge is

“situational” (Ortenblad 2001: 131) and “intrinsically related to context” (Bollinger and Smith 2001: 12); “shaped by culture and society” (Barnett 2000: 16). Moreover, knowledge is “profoundly human” (CLMS M2, CU8: 7) and “exists within people, part and parcel of human complexity and unpredictability” (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 5). Knowledge is distinctively different from data or/and information (Lang 2001: 43-44): it is “broader, deeper and richer” (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 5) and incorporates information combined with experience and judgement (Serban and Luan 2002: 9). Unlike information, knowledge relates to commitment (Davenport and Prusak 1998: 12), values and beliefs (Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001: 976).

Results in this research affirm that, in contrast to some KM literature claiming otherwise (vide, for example, Seng, Zannes and Pace 2002: 140), knowledge, unlike ‘data’ and ‘information’, *cannot* be captured and stored within a system. It can only be captured by people (Call 2005: 20-21), “stored in the person’s mind” (Seng, Zannes and Pace 2002: 139) and developed, re-created, transmitted, sustained and managed through the participative interaction in social practice in CoPs within organisations, acting themselves as ‘grand learning communities’. The following comment by a respondent participating in this research study typifies this claim:

I whole-heartedly believe that you learn a lot...Becoming close in a team unit, participation in informal ways....that is outside formal settings, which sometimes create inhibitions and lack of proper and effective participation and communication, is, in my opinion, so much crucial. Workers encounter on a

daily basis work problems, find solutions to their problems, do practices at work that may be so innovative to others or, for that matter, result in unexpected bad results, etc. Such social interaction provides the platform for these workers to share problems and going-ons, seek solutions, enthuse, laugh about, etc. their experiences, which all this is in itself actual learning...I do organise a session between workers where everybody sort of share experiences with others....and a 'think tank' sort of attitude is also instigated by myself in order to 'unload' anything that may have cropped up and be of valuable help to all of us.

(137-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

Further to this exposition about knowledge as the core asset which blooms out of the realities of the LO and KM and ingrained within, and by which its very own self gives meaning to the existence of, the CoP itself, this thesis will now posit the argument that both tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge constitute the 'full and complete' knowledge that has to be generated, moulded within and, in doing so, enable a richer creation and recreation of knowledge within the CoP's 'complex mechanism' of learning process trajectories. This argument has been amply endorsed in the results as emanating from this research study. In fact, as discussed earlier in these results and discussion chapters of this thesis, findings in this research study affirmed the view of how much informal learning through participative social interaction takes place through which tacit knowledge is generated and re-created within all forms of CoPs present within MPS organisations under review. However,

findings in this research study further claim how learning in explicit form is indeed also beneficial for grasping effectively a 'fuller' knowledge on and by which a 'richer' knowledge can be re-created, as moulded within all the complex learning trajectories taking place within all forms of CoPs at contemporary workplaces.

In fact, results in this research study expose that formal training was given on entering a new job at an MPS organisation and, in the main, was beneficial. The following data refer to typical responses on how newly recruits are detailed on training in order to perform properly and efficiently on their new job:

Here, I took a handover from the officer in charge of discipline...from the day after I started working, he took me with him board.

(138-R8J2CH, Clerk HR)

....after my brief with my superiors about the general idea of the scope behind setting up this unit, I attended a formal training on the job programme of about 2 weeks

(139-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

I started working in the Foreign Affairs...the Principal taught me with a lot of patience. He taught me everything, even how to welcome the delegation.....

(140-R8J3CH, Foreign Office desk officer)

...we were all new at the Cash Office and each of us had a person with him with experience....to teach us how to issue receipts, how to use the computer...Every new employee was paired with an experienced one.

(141-R28J1CL, Clerk)

Indeed, although formal training is provided, one can also possess as part of his/her 'biography' – a topic discussed earlier here - experiences that will help out for garnering the skills needed for the new job, as is displayed here by R20 in her comments on taking her job as Customer Care, wherein she exposes her previous experience within the Public Service that was related to her new job:

Afterwards I was posted at the Customer Care....I already had worked with people and had worked for 10 years with the Public Works (Department). The other new person and I were given training on how to answer the telephone, how to speak with the public and how to handle complaints. I had already worked with the general public when I used to work at the Cash office (at the Public Works).

(142-R20J2CL, Customer Care Officer)

The following selected comments refer to some form of training given in a work scenario where the job did not require any special skills:

I came to know my work by my supervisor here in first showing me how to use the pump. Well, to be honest.....there is nothing special to learn to do this.

(143-R7J3TL, Fuel Attendant)

When I got the appointment, an official from the HR Dept brought me here to this room. He introduced me to the telephone operators here.....there were two in place, but one of them was being transferred to another Dept and she had to give me the hand-over.....(she) showed me how to operate the switchboard and how to answer calls. There was nothing special to learn.....I knew what to do within an hour, to tell you the truth.

(144-R31J1TL, Telephone Operator)

Still, findings in this study, at the same time, claim that this formal training received was not enough for them to learn properly and fully their job:

Formal training is indeed of great help...and is fundamental to really get the initial grip on something new. However, the true learning still comes when such new things are being applied in practice. Applying them in practice, deal with instances, queries, problems as they crop, finding solutions, sharing all and exploring the 'why, what and how' of such instances, etc. with fellow co-workers, etc. is where the true learning takes place in my opinion.

(145-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

...I don't even remember what was said during the course...I really learned when I started working on the job.

(146-R17J1CL, Clerk Registry)

As a Clerk.....Upon arrival (as a new recruit) we underwent an induction course organized by the SDO...this gives you an overall idea of Government Service, etc. It doesn't teach you all the details you would encounter in each particular section.

(147-R23J2CL, Data Input Clerk)

No, it (formal training) was not enough. They gave us sort of a manual and we could refer to it when the need arises.

(148-R2J1CL, Clerk Publig Registry)

However, results in this research study do affirm that formal learning and training is still relevant for an employee in order to get a firm grasp on the skills required for the job to be undertaken, such as the following comments in this study portray:

...I once had a course on management in construction that helped me a lot in construction works....at that time, we used to work on construction and although nowadays we don't work as much on it, it still helps me make certain decisions on management on site, time frames, how to organise the workers,

what the production needs to be etc. It has been valuable because it taught me a lot of technical things.

(149-R9J1THM, Operations Manager)

I attended a formal training on the job programme of about two weeks...Indeed this training programme helped me a lot in knowing and learning my new job. .

(150-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

They also affirm that formal learning and training is to complement and run parallel to the informal or tacit learning that is garnered through participation in social interaction at the workplace within CoPs:

Even though, one learns a lot informally, I think that there needs to be formal training for certain things....I believe that there has to be formal training.....for example, time management, team building and other courses that are done by the SDO throughout a week. I learned a lot from them.

(151-R5J1CHM, Assistant Director Finance)

You always learn (from formal training courses) and then you go back and share your experience with your friends and we learn from each other.

(152-R16J2CH, EU Fund Officer)

Respondents participating in this research study even show specific ways in how this is helpful. Here are selected comments in this regard referring to updating or/and refreshing your job skills through formal training; something which cannot be done if not 'outside' the CoP:

However, I must say here that updating your knowledge through formal training, seminars, workshops, etc. is equally important (to that of informal learning at the workplace). I say this because, in my view, such interaction between group or communities of workers may not be enough to truly learn the best way to do the job properly. For example, you may learn to do the job, from experiences interacted from your work group of colleagues, not in the best way or even in the 'wrong' way.....because you and the whole group may lack the expertise knowledge that only experts in the field can give.

(153-R4J1CHM, Director)

I believe that you need formal training.... (refresher courses should be done) definitively in a formal way.... So there would be ongoing professional training.

(154-R27J1TH, Teacher)

Here, in relation to helping towards eliminating any possible 'bad' practices that may have cropped up in time at the workplace:

It would be a good idea to have a refresher course...This is so because you can develop wrong practices from other colleagues....and you think you are doing the right thing.

(155-R6J1CH, Clerk Accounts)

As well as, in moving away from the workplace and undergo formal training sessions may enable 'networking' and, in turn triggers, 'membership' in other CoPs:

I appreciate the most, from the SDO (formal training courses), apart from all that I learned as knowledge, is the networking.....The one who is teaching would be introducing groups of the same grade [because SDO courses are usually tailor-made for employees in the same grades].

(156-R8J1CHM, Assistant Director HR)

Moreover, findings in this research study also portray how formal training is 'inevitable' in cases when new systems are introduced at workplaces:

After SAGE, we changed to another system and we did more training. Some of us went to the company from where the package was bought and the accountant had received intensive training so that we could ask her and she became an expert.

(157-R29J2CH, Clerk Accounts)

Hence, this thesis argues that although CoPs are the ideal mechanism for tacit knowledge transfer, cultivation and creation, however, such knowledge needs to be complemented with explicit knowledge in order to address today's organisational needs. Indeed, CoPs are the appropriate vehicle for "the acquisition of tacit knowledge" (Munby et al. 2003: 97) and to preserve and retain such knowledge, being themselves acting as "repositories of accumulated wisdom" (Brown and Duguid 1991: 45). It can also be argued that tacit knowledge is more valuable than the explicit or formal form of knowledge (McKinlay 2002: 85), since one acclaims that learning incorporates not only the grasp of skills, but also insights and realisations (Rae 2003). However, CoPs are conceptualised in terms of helping to develop individual capabilities, which although this is certainly "a fundamentally social process" (Chandon and Nadler 2000: 128), such capabilities encapsulate not only "skills and knowledge for today's work...(but also) preparedness to grow and develop for future needs" (Bryson 2006: 281). Indeed, as findings in this research results have shown, tacit knowledge alone may not be enough to address future needs.

As was amply shown in the research results quoted above, the ideal scenario in this day and age speaks of the combination of both types of knowledge (Adams and Freeman 2000: 39). Though tacit knowledge, as it has been expounded in the literature review of this study, is so beneficial to organisations because of its "immobility and inimitability" (Ambrosini and Bowman 2001: 826 in Jasimuddin, Klein and Connell 2005: 105), it is being here contended that formal or explicit training, instruction or/and mentoring is important to fill up any gaps that might result

in limiting oneself only to implicit knowledge transfer. Since there may be “absence of expertise” (Billett 1995: 24), creating learning through “participation at work alone may not be sufficient for developing the requirements for expertise at work.” (Billett 2000: 273). Indeed, it is being argued here that learning should be encouraged “off-the-job as well as on-the-job” (Fuller and Unwin 2004: 35). One has to affirm that external pressures, as discussed earlier in this chapter, such as globalisation and rapid technological advances, have a major say in inducing “ongoing evolution” of CoPs (Fuller et al. 2005: 14) that has also to function on ‘updated’ knowledge, which may not be addressed by the ‘outdated’ members of the organisation’s CoPs (Ashton and Sung 2002: 98) but by explicit forms of knowledge transfer. One has to conceptualise knowledge generation, creation and re-creation to be “in a continuous and dynamic interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge” (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995: 70), achieved through active “participation” (Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001: 982) as moulded within the confines of LOs and in all formats of CoPs, as has been discussed in this chapter.

Hence, this thesis has been discussing themes in relation to the LO and knowledge creation and management, which provide the ideal base in conceptualising the proper positioning of effective operational CoPs; an evolvement of Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs, but still highly and intrinsically concerned on learning and knowledge creation as taking place through participation in social practice.

On having given this exposition of knowledge, its full richness in all its forms, and the appropriate vehicles and mechanisms for its effective acquisition, creation, sustenance and recreation, this thesis will now argue that the knowledge acquired or generated within CoPs is not limited to 'job skills' but to other forms of knowledge. Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept, as delineated in their presentation of the centripetal learning process or trajectory, subsumes "the learning of knowledgeable skills" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29). Findings in this research study show quite clearly that there are several instances within the learning trajectories occurring within CoPs in contemporary MPS organisations where the knowledge generated through social practice and participation by CoP members was not wholly and exclusively related to 'knowledgeable skills' but to other forms, such as that of personal development and growth

In fact, respondents participating in this research study expressed how there were instances where such learning generated through CoPs was related to personal development and making the work environment more pleasurable through the strong bonding an effective CoP brings with it. The following selected texts typify responses found in this study in this regard:

...we at work develop ourselves as persons as well...and it is this that this kind of interaction helps the most...it helps you develop yourself as a person.....as a worker.....a better worker.

(158-R7J3TL, Fuel Attendant)

Yes, a lot of interaction takes place between us work colleagues.....we chat, crack jokes, and gossip about everything on earth during our job...it's that how you kill off time whilst picking rubbish, raking the sand, etc. It's not...about learning to do the job, etc..... it's more of a chit chat in making time pass by quickly.....It builds a sort of teamwork between us.....a bonding that we belong to the same work unit....it definitely makes work much more relaxed and easier to do....We are really like a family in this unit. And yes, it really makes you more comfortable and helps you do your job with more positive attitude in the presence of such friends.

(159-R32J2TL, Beach Cleaner)

Moreover, a theme discussed in the literature review of this study was that related to the engagement in social interaction of 'young' novice workers with 'older' old-timers within CoPs. Indeed, such engagement does not only speak of learning job skills, but also of learning related "behaviours appropriate to being an adult" (Goodwin 2007: 106). On entering a job for the first time, young workers are being not only faced with the challenge of 'learning their way into the new job' as regards job skills knowledge, but also of knowledge relating to a 'new' life among the adult working world, with all the habitual and human relationships this brings with it. Indeed, this is a social process that does take place effectively in CoPs, though not only in terms of the 'simplistic' novice-oldtimer learning trajectory professed by Lave and Wenger, but in terms of individual transformation and development through social experience

at the workplace (Harre 1995). This claim was indeed endorsed by results in this research study, exposing how participation in social interaction within CoPs impacted positively on young CoPs members' personal growth and adult transition. For example, the following depicts a comment by a respondent, who is a manager, on how within her CoP she took also the task in giving advice on life issues:

My biggest success there, for me, was when there was a person younger than myself who didn't talk to her parents for a long time, she was in our group, I sort of took the role as her mother and managed to make her convert, to turn to her parents since a lot of problems were building up as she wasn't having any support from her mother and father. And with the group of the Salaries Section, since most of them were young I frequently gave them pieces of advice on life and they asked me a lot on the workplace due to my experience.

(160-R5J1CHM, Assistant Director Finance)

Here are more selected texts typifying similar responses in this regard, as found in this research:

There was the section head and another two that were like a father and mother because they used to take care of me and teach me.... I was very sheltered because they used to take care of me....They even used to teach me what work really was because I had started that job exactly after school. I used to go with them during break too...I was young and they were all married but we

used to talk a lot... I clicked with them and they used to help me because at that time I was about to get married and they used to give me their views.

(161-R19J1CL, Clerk)

...hence (for the first time, I now) experienced a work environment.....working with adults, interaction with work colleagues....you know, being no more in the company of students your age only.....but now...(having) work colleagues that two of them were the age of my dad and having kids, etc. This undoubtedly helped me to sort of grow up in the world of work and as a person into being an adult, living the world of adults, with all the good and bad that comes with it.

(162-R21J1CL, Clerk)

The final argument put forward in this discussion relates to the key role of a strong leadership for the effective functioning and operation of CoPs. This chapter has exposed how findings in this research support the need to amend and expand the Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept to be in line with modern realities affecting organisations and learning trajectories within and, in occasions, beyond them. It is being argued here that the adoption of a proper and strong leadership is crucial for effectively gelling together this amended concept of CoPs, as moulded and posited within the realities of the LOs and KM, whilst operating in different forms and involving complex and several combinations of learning trajectories, where through the full

richness of knowledge acquired, generated, created and recreated within it, impacts in such a positive way on workplace learning in contemporary organisations.

Indeed, contemporary age speaks of organisations that have to react positively to changes around them (Moilanen 2005), including the ever increasing competition and demanding sophisticated consumer (Gupta, Iyer and Aronson 2000). Hence, organisations are today faced with the challenge of continually striving for service quality, value and innovation (Bender and Fish 2000). This can only be achieved through a strong commitment to continuous learning and knowledge creation (Gould 2000). Indeed, MPS contemporary organisations are no different in this regard. This study has shown that MPS organisations are moving forward and enduring ongoing transformations and structural changes, particularly with Malta's recent inclusion within the EU.

Results in this research study spoke of how MPS organisations are projecting themselves as committed for continuous learning, as the following selected comments show:

Yes I do feel the Public Service is making headway in encouraging continuous learning and development of staff.

(163-R4JICHM, Director)

Yes I do believe this (ongoing learning initiatives by MPS) is so.

(164-R21J2THM, Security Manager)

However, findings in this research study also exposed gaps in the provision of effective learning within the MPS as a general organisation, as well as within its individual Departments, units or organisations. In fact, there were instances in this research study of respondents claiming that their 'learning' is detached from the MPS, as the general organisation responsible from the Public Service:

I was employed in June but the induction course was held 9 months after and I already had got to know my job really well.

(165-R16J2CH, EU Fund Officer)

I don't know. From here I really don't know what they are doing up there.....

(166-R31J1TL, Telephone Operator)

Other respondents exclaim that no form of job training was provided by the MPS on entering their jobs as new MPS recruits:

I learned only through my experience....I didn't have a handover there and I learned by trial and error.

(167-R5J3CL, Clerk)

...when I first took the job at the Water Works, I was put within a 'gang'I was the younger one...and...we used to do small minor handyman works...I used to observe a lot what was being done...I guess, I learned that way.

(168-R7J1TL, General Hand)

It also transpired in this research study of two instances (albeit only two out of a dataset of seventy four responses in this regard) where respondents claim there was no social interaction at their workplace:

Well, I used to work as watchman...but there I practically had no work colleagues, except for the ones to hand over the keys to.

(169-R7J2TL, Watchman)

What is happening in my job in Gozo is that I have nobody to ask, to relate to, to talk to, interact...It's very frustrating and it has an impact on me.

(170-R5J2CH, Assistant Director EU)

Whereas, it was exposed how much social interaction impacts positively on one's integration and resultant performance at work:

I can see a difference in the school I used to work and the school I work in now. In my old school we used to meet and go out after school more than in

this school and in fact in my previous school I integrated quicker than in this one....there was a lot of trust.

(171-R10J1TH, Teacher)

It is being argued here, that a clear direction through strong leadership is a requisite in addressing these gaps. Indeed, it was discussed in this section how important it is to nurture a LO and sustain proper knowledge management for an effective functioning of CoPs, in all their formats, within contemporary organisations. This thesis argues that it is precisely this key role that emphatically claims for a strong and effective leadership.

This need for strong leadership has been in fact endorsed by this research study. Findings in this study indeed show in an emphatic way that having a Head of Department or unit that truly acts as a leader will impact positively towards imbuing effective continuous learning and development of staff. Here are selected comments typifying this stance:

In my opinion if the Head of Department is willing to get to know his staff, their capabilities as well as their short comings, if he is willing to go beyond the grades and certificates but instead get to know the person and give opportunities to learn and advance accordingly, if he is that kind of person, then my answer is yes. It does make a difference.

(172-R3J1CL, Clerk)

For me, a good leader is key for learning at the workplace...if you truly love your work you would speak about...your experiences, ask for solutions or share with colleagues how problems were solved..... however having a good Head (of Section) is fundamental, he may be key to create the necessary atmosphere in order that these exchanges do happen and frequently.... to see that there is time for that.... find the right people to organise social activities etc... apart from that a good Head must involve himself in these informal exchanges..... gets at par with his subordinates and interacts with them.... and becomes one with his employees....and with that.....he sees that the practices and ideas being adopted are truly for the best of the organisation and can be applied in that particular government department....Because sometimes one may find solutions or ideas that seem really good but do not conform with the law or are unethical...he must give directions and see that the practices proposed, attractive as they may be but knowing that are not ethically correct, are not used.

(173-R28J3CHM, Unit Manager)

Its very important. A good Head helps. He unites the team. Work is done better like that.

(174-R12J1TL, Sweeper Supervisor)

I think it would be good to have a Head of Department that really knows the staff, knows their potential and sees that they are trained and developed as they should be.

(175-R7J3TL, Fuel Attendant)

Moreover, 'no job skills' workplace scenarios have transpired in this research study, which also demand strong leadership in nurturing effective CoPs. This incidence of a 'no job skills to learn' scenario cropped up in research results of this study as can be seen by the following comments from respondents who are engaged in such jobs:

When I got the job, I went to the official in charge of the watchmen. He introduced to me to the watchmen Time-Keeper. Both of them explained to me 'the drill'....you know, what was expected from me...the responsibility I had to see that nothing happens to the equipment, etc...Basically, that is all I had to learn. I mean, you don't have to go to school or university to learn to be a watchman....my first day was kind of nightmare....nervous, scary at night alone, etc. But, that was only the first day, because as from the second day, I was already ok with my job.

(176-R32J1TL, Watchman)

There is no special skill to learn....other than be polite with the callers and keep concentration in order to direct the call to the proper official.

(177-R31J1TL, Telephone Operator)

No (no job skill learning needed) because the work is almost the same.

(178-R14J1TL, Street Sweeper)

However, as discussed earlier in this section, knowledge is much more intense than being limited to learning only 'job skills'; it may also involve CoP members' personal development, enhanced by motivational clout, as expressed in this respondent's comment:

...it (social interaction) really helps to build a very close bond between us. As I said, it is not so much to improve the work as such, because work is there to do and it is not complicated....i mean, the job we messengers do. But such social interaction helps to make the environment....the place at work....much more enjoyable to be in.....it makes you go to work much more freely and willingly...making the ambience much more friendly and makes you more happy to do the job...i guess it helps you to do the job better in the sense that you will have more enthusiasm to go to work and do a decent job once you are happy surrounded by nice people to be with at work.

(179-R26J1TL, Messenger)

Hence, in such cases, strong leadership can provide the needed direction towards pulling up together units into learning communities of workers, acting through CoPs for sharing of experiences in social practice, where knowledge, in all its form, is

generated and re-created. As discussed earlier in this section, people do come and continually act in CoPs 'packaged' with their personal 'biographies' as well; hence, sharing in social practice may not only involve experiences from their workplace situations but also 'elsewhere'. This all shapes up 'learning' trajectories taking place within CoPs, involving knowledge, not limited only to job skills, but conceptualised in all its richness and complexities. Indeed, strong leadership does also transform such 'no job skills' scenarios into hubs of learning and development through effective nurturing of CoPs.

Hence, it has been argued here that imbuing strong leadership can be catalyst for effective CoPs in contemporary organisations. It not only provides crucial elements for CoP functioning, such as "direction and purpose" (Milne 2007: 31) and workers' empowerment (Evans 1998: 202), but leaders, who by nature and action are transformational, "design" (Baines 1997: 204) and steer throughout the organization, and among all workers, the necessary change or transformation (Cullen 1999: 46) and shared vision (Baines 1997: 204), traits so much ingrained within the LO. In this regard, strong leadership is the crucial element in moulding an organic structure that, not only complements, but proactively induce the implementation of a learning culture and the formation and sustenance of effective operational CoPs, in all formats and within the confines of a properly sustained and dynamic LO.

Conclusion

In this chapter, this research study has discussed how Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs can be moulded, amended and transformed in order to reflect the context of contemporary organisations and for maximising effective learning and knowledge creation and management within them. This chapter has exposed how findings in this research inform us on realities beyond the 'simplistic' exposition put forth by Lave and Wenger's for their CoPs concept.

The discussion in this chapter threaded along three dimensions. First, it discussed the conceptualisation evolution of CoPs into forms that are resonant with contemporary organisation fabric. It has shown how the CoPs concept cannot be conceptualised as a one distinct community acting within a spatial boundary of a located workplace. Indeed, CoPs, can take form in multiple or 'constellations' of CoPs, as well as, through contemporary age phenomena such as globalisation and ICT advancements, transcend into MNCs/TNCs and acting in distributed and expansive formats.

Secondly, this thesis discussed how Lave and Wenger's concept of the learning trajectory within the mechanisms of CoPs was too 'simplistic' in its exposition. It needed to be amended and be fully cognizant of all the complexities brought about by human activity, intervention and interaction acting within and among CoPs. Here, it was exposed how individual biographies, pre-conceived mindsets, dispositions and aptitude, together with contextual factors do shape up the learning trajectory

formation and intensity within CoPs. Indeed, this study argued how CoP members may actually be concurrently in multiple participating positions of LPP and FB, both within and across multiple CoPs.

Finally, this chapter discussed and proposed an amended view of the CoPs concept, aiming at positing the CoPs in a position where they truly act towards maximising effective workplace learning. Here it was argued that the CoPs concept takes its real form when CoPs are conceptualised as the hubs within LOs and the ideal vehicles for KM. Indeed, in this way, learning and knowledge creation can be properly nurtured, while knowledge, in both tacit and explicit forms, can also be sustained, disseminated and re-created. It was finally argued that strong leadership is the catalyst for the effective nurturing and operation of CoPs, whereby CoPs may then act as the mechanism in which the LO and KM are synchronised for effective workplace learning in contemporary organisations.

Chapter 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

The aims sought by this research study were to explore whether Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs is indeed a reality and present within contemporary organisations, and to what extent is this reality helpful towards our understanding of workplace learning in contemporary organisations.

Lave and Wenger (1991) conceptualisation of CoPs was capped out along a paradigm shift on viewing learning not so much as 'acquisition' and 'context-free' (Fuller 2007) but more as ingrained within a particular context (Sfard 1998) and 'constructed' through its intrinsic involvement with the situated social experience and practice (Billet 2007). Lave and Wenger posited this learning to be 'situated', occurring and shaped by participation in the social practices of a community, along a trajectory from LPP to full participant position.

In order to achieve its aims and results, this research study adopted a methodology, utilising a qualitative research method and design, epistemologically rooted in interpretivism. The research design was in the form of a case study, whereas the data collection method adopted was qualitative interviewing, in the form of in-depth semi-structured interviews. The research findings of this study were analysed and coded

utilising, in the main, the techniques of grounded theory. Informed by these findings, the researcher of this study then embarked on discussing these results with a view of providing a valid answer, as well as to contribute to further knowledge on the subject under enquiry in this study.

This research embarked on a case study involving the Malta Public Service (MPS). The MPS is one general and national organisation responsible for all the public service of Malta, incorporating within its fold different and diverse individual organisations/units that cover all the public services of the country. Indeed, the MPS provided an ideal platform for such a research, not only in terms of constructing results from communities of workers engaged in such a wide spectrum of different and diverse service operations, but it provided also the 'contemporary' element of dynamism and ongoing change, since Malta and its public service organisations are right in the midst of undergoing drastic and major changes, both in structures and operations, due to the country's recent entry into the EU.

This chapter will proceed, following this introduction, to present some reflections on the outcome of this research. This will be followed by outlining the contributions put forth by this research. The next section will pen down the scope and recommendations for future research. Concluding remarks will close this thesis.

7.2 Reflections on the outcome of this research

The findings of this research study were thoroughly discussed in the previous three chapters. The discussion provided an insight into the real presence of CoPs, the impact the human interaction complexities have on learning taking place in CoPs, and how the concept of CoPs can be moulded, amended and transformed into a reality for maximizing effective learning and knowledge creation and sustenance within contemporary organisations.

It was established that research results provide tangible evidence that Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs is present in all its forms within MPS organisations. This study exposed how acceptance and integration in CoPs within these organisations was quite a trouble-free and easy process on entering a new job, citing various reasons vouching for such attachment, such as: the type of work, the work environment, all being new entrants, being of the same age group, having the same interests and being of the same type of people. Findings of this study showed also in real terms the presence of social interaction and participation within these CoPs, displaying the importance of trust as that which gels together CoP members in participating effectively in social interaction more 'like a family'.

Moreover, findings in this research study, conducted within MPS organisations, endorsed a crucial element within the CoPs concept: that of situated learning. Indeed, core traits of the CoPs concept, as professed by Lave and Wenger, such as situated

learning at workplaces through participation and social interaction within a 'community', the centripetal learning process trajectory, as well as the learning and knowledge generated and created within these CoPs, were found to be a reality and experienced within MPS contemporary organisations.

However, this study exposed also how any discourse of such participative action in social interaction and practice have to face up to the reality that such an action involves human involvement; an involvement, which as this research study exposed, has a decisive impact on how one should conceptualise the whole concept of CoPs. In fact, this research has confirmed the critical views of the CoPs' concept in this regard, discussed in the literature review, and argued that the exposition put forth by Lave and Wenger on the concept of CoPs was indeed 'too simplistic'. This research affirmed that participation in social practice, so much venerated by Lave and Wenger, is impacted heavily by a multitude of complexities and issues brought about by human involvement moulding up this generative learning process. In fact, findings in this study exposed how, for example, individual characteristic traits, power play, age difference, gender, classes and social orientation do play their part in disrupting or inhibiting social participative interaction within CoPs; although, it was also argued that in some instances, results showed how power play can act positively in imbuing social interaction and participation rather than otherwise. Hence, although CoPs do indeed exist and act within contemporary organisations, however one should not assume that such 'communities' are in all instances fully operating in harmony and stability, where trust and respect are in abundance among the community members

and where all members, freely and willingly, participate in an unreserved and uninhibited fashion in social interaction and practice within such CoPs.

This thesis, informed by the findings emanating from this research study, affirms that in order to maximize effective learning and knowledge creation, one has to conceptualise the concept of CoPs away from the 'simplistic' threads adorned by Lave and Wenger, but rather as being moulded, amended and transformed in realities that are consonant and compatible with and within the contextual framework of contemporary organisations. This research study on MPS organisations showed how workplace learning is not necessarily located within a spatial boundary; it can extend and expand into multiple and 'constellations' of CoPs. Indeed, findings in this study have exposed how CoPs in contemporary organisations function in a more effective way when members within them are participants in simultaneous multiple CoPs, as knowledge and learning migrates and hops from one CoP to another, rendering participants to become even more skilled and knowledgeable. This is even more pronounced, as findings in this research study have also endorsed, as organisations have evolved and groomed by phenomena, such as globalisation and ICT advancements, into MNCs/TNCs, which in turn has impacted on extending CoPs in distributed and expansive formats; hence, bringing to the fore the need to address effectively subsequent related issues such as those related to social interaction communication and cultural differences.

Furthermore, this research study exposed how the learning trajectories put forward by Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept are to be transformed in order to reflect the importance of the 'individual' as well as 'contexts'. It has already been argued here about the impact of human involvement complexities on participative social interaction in CoPs. This is even more pronounced in this day and age of globalisation and ICT advancements, which impacted on and imbued, as discussed earlier here, the evolvement of organisations and CoPs into 'constellations of CoPs, as well as in distributed and expansive formats.

Research results in this study have shown how 'human complexities', such as individual biographies, acquired skills, pre-conceived mind-sets, dispositions and aptitudes, together with contextual, institutional and societal contexts, do indeed shape up the learning trajectory formation and intensity occurring within CoPs. This imparts a new and amended view of the learning trajectory occurring with CoPs, as professed by Lave and Wenger. This amended view conceptualises a proper learning trajectory within CoPs where CoP members may actually be concurrently in multiple social participative 'positions', that is LPP and FP, within a CoP and across other 'constellations' of CoPs, while at the same time the importance of the 'individual' enters into a "relational interdependence" with the "social world" (Billet 2007: 59). Findings in this research study have indeed exposed how CoPs members may exist in different 'sectoral packages' (for example: groupings, common causes, etc.) that will eventually shape up alignments and resultant participative social interaction within

CoPs, as well as how contextual factors, such as 'work itself', do play their part in the learning process within the CoP.

An interesting and significant finding in this study relates to how the level of learning within CoPs may not correlate to the intensity and frequency of social interaction and participation taking place among CoP members. Research results exposed cases where there was a high level and intensity in the learning and knowledge generated within a CoP, even though social interaction and participation may not have been that intense and frequent among CoP members. This was mainly due to CoP members being engaged in specialised jobs and sources of intensive learning and knowledge, particularly involving distributed CoPs and global interaction,

Finally, this research study proposed an amended view of the CoPs concept in concert with a different perspective on knowledge generated and sustained within the realities of the LO and KM, groomed into place as a true effective workplace learning hub by strong leadership. Research results demonstrated the presence of LOs within the scenario of contemporary MPS, as well as active CoPs, operating at workplaces within these LOs, that are providing an effective dynamic source for knowledge generation, dissemination, sustenance and re-creation. However, this research study provided how knowledge generation is a "complex process of complexities" (Ortenblad 2001: 131) which should involve in the mix not only tacit knowledge but also explicit knowledge. Hence, this study concluded that formal learning and the acquisition of explicit knowledge should complement the richness of tacit learning

and knowledge creation occurring through participation in social practice at the workplace within CoPs. This is particularly so in contemporary age of ongoing evolution of organisations and where CoPs acting within them that have also to function on a continuous flow of 'updated' knowledge (Ashton and Sung 2002: 98). Furthermore, research results demonstrated how knowledge generated within the realms of CoPs is not wholly and exclusively limited to 'job skills' but involves also other realms of knowledge, such as personal development and growth, including adulthood transition.

Indeed, featuring also in this study was the reality of a 'no job skills to learn' scenario', in which CoPs took up an effective function in terms of 'motivational drivers'. Furthermore, there were instances of MPS workers that simply refrained from taking interest in their work and hence learning or improving their job skills. It has been argued that such findings in this study may have cropped up due to the particularity of researching 'public' service organisations and not private ones, where the latter are, unlike 'public' organisations which are also regulated by national social and political realities, wholly geared up and scrupulously rigid on the performance-profit equation and increasing their shareholders wealth.

This research study concluded that it is strong leadership that wraps up and gels together this proposed amended view of the CoPs' concept. Indeed, research results showed quite clearly the crucial position a strong leader has in impacting positively

towards effective CoPs functioning in nurturing continuous learning and development, and knowledge creation, sustenance and transference.

7.3 Research Contributions

Research contributions can be said to be fourfold. Firstly, this research involved a case study of a *national* public service organisation (the MPS), which incorporates within its fold public organisations/units that are bound by their office to provide a whole wide spectrum of public services. Hence, unlike other research studies that have been conducted on CoPs within public service organisations, where the focus of study was on one specific public service job – for example: school teachers (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003); university teachers (James 2004); police (Holdaway 1983); department of land resources (Jaquinto et al. 2011) – this research study covered a vast range of diverse public service jobs. Indeed, researching the MPS, as a national public service organisation, enabled this study to conceptualise a 'holistic' and macro view of the 'organisation', encapsulating diverse service jobs, within a matrix stretching out both vertically (high to very low class jobs) and horizontally (high skilled to low skilled jobs). This provided a rich analysis of the Lave and Wenger's concept of CoPs and its contribution on workplace learning in contemporary organisations, since the 'organisation' element was viewed in a much wider sense than focussing on a specific type of public service organisation.

Secondly, this thesis involved researching Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept within workplaces pertaining to Maltese public organisations. This was the first research study involving the CoPs concept on Maltese organisations, let alone public service ones. Indeed, this research did in fact endorse not only the presence of Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept and their professed learning trajectories, but also all the apprehensions that call for an evolvement of the concept, within these Maltese public organisations.

Thirdly, this thesis, informed by results emanating from this research study, proposed an amended view of the CoPs concept. This research has endorsed the crucial position of CoPs for effective workplace learning in contemporary organisations, but at the same time exposed issues that need to be addressed and moulded within the CoPs concept; such as: human intervention 'complexities', complex learning trajectories involving multiple participation statuses (LPP, FP or both at the same time), cultural differences, the need of updated knowledge, knowledge management, personal development, 'no job skills to learn' scenarios, etc. Indeed, further to addressing such issues, this research has positioned the CoPs within the realities of LOs and KM. But more significantly, this research study has vouched for strong leadership, which will eventually serve as the catalyst in grooming CoPs to act as proper and effective hubs for true effective workplace learning, knowledge transference, generation and recreation.

Finally a significant finding in this research study was the fact that the level of learning occurring and generated within CoPs does not necessarily correlate to the level of intensity and frequency of social interaction and participation among CoP members. In fact, research findings in this study exposed this phenomenon. Indeed, there were instances in this regard where CoP members, engaged in specialised jobs, were sources of intensive learning outcomes and knowledge generation taking place within a CoP among its members, even though social interaction and participation was not that intense or frequent. This emerged quite particularly in cases involving distributed CoPs where global interaction may generate a high level of learning and knowledge exchanges and creation whereas social interaction and participation among CoP members is often limited in its intensity and not that frequent when compared with other concurrent local workplace CoPs.

7.4 Scope for Future Research

This research study is the first one of its kind in researching the concept of Lave and Wenger's CoPs concept within Maltese organisations. Researching in this regard was also conducted solely within the parameters of the MPS, albeit incorporating within its fold different and diverse public service organisations and units. Hence, this study will hopefully be significant in serving as a platform for further study on CoPs by positing the research, as informed by this study on Malta public service organisations, on contemporary organisations hailing from the Malta private sector. This will be

quite significant in scope in finding out how CoPs' contribution to contemporary organisations differ or otherwise, as well as the extent of this variation, if any, between local public service and private organisations. Further research proposed, which can be also significant in scope in this same regard, is in researching another national public service organisation, which can or may not be in line with similar characteristics to Malta (such as size, region, etc.).

7.5 Final thoughts and remarks

Concluding this thesis are some thoughts and remarks being put forth here by the researcher. This study has been quite extensive; incorporated reading a wide range of books and journals on the subject, extensive 'thinking' time on how to design this research and methodology, long months of fieldwork research and then several months of transcribing, analyzing heaps of transcript texts and writing this paper. It was hard work, but at the same time very exciting. Indeed, for the researcher, this was an 'exploratory journey', not only in terms of being a tremendously fulfilling learning and knowledge generating process, but also as a personal uplifting and life changing experience.

Appendix 1: List of Respondents and Jobs (categorised)

Res	Gen	Age	MPS Yrs	Qts	Job Categories (CL: Clerical Low-Skilled; CH: Clerical High-Skilled; TL: Technical/Specialised Low-Skilled; TH: Technical/Specialised (High-Skilled); M: Managing People)	Jobs	TH	TL	CH	CL	M
R1	F	24	2	15	[1] Clerk (CL)	1				1	
R2	F	36	20	15	[1] Clerk Public Registry (CL)	1				1	
R3	M	40	21	14	[1] Clerk (CL)	1				1	
R4	M	52	32	45	[1] Director (CHM); [2] Assistant Director Finance (CHM)	2			2		2
R5	F	41	22	34	[1] Assistant Director Finance (CHM); [2] Assistant Director EU (CH); [3] Clerk (CL)	3			2	1	1
R6	M	32	14	32	[1] Clerk Accounts (CH); [2] H&S officer (TH)	2	1		1		
R7	M	56	34	26	[1] General Hand (TL); [2] Watchman (TL); [3] Fuel Attendant (TL)	3		3			
R8	F	52	30	19	[1] Assistant Director HR (CHM); [2] Clerk HR (CH); [3] Foreign Office desk officer (CH)	3			3		1
R9	M	37	18	24	[1] Operations Manager (THM); [2] Ministry Secretariat (CH); [3] Clerk (CL)	3	1		1	1	1
R10	F	27	5	29	[1] Teacher (TH)	1	1				
R11	M	50	25	18	[1] Police Sergeant (THM); [1] Police Constable (TL)	2	1	1			1
R12	M	58	40	13	[1] Sweeper Supervisor (TL); [2] Maintenance worker (TL); [3] Coxswain (TL)	3		3			
R13	M	52	35	22	[1] Mechanic (TH)	1	1				
R14	M	43	22	18	[1] Sweeper (TL); [2] HPD (TL)	2		2			
R15	M	30	12	31	[1] Clerk (CL); [2] Audit Officer IRD (CH); [3] Fisheries Inspector (TH)	3	1		1	1	
R16	M	29	6	29	[1] Clerk Data Input (CL); [2] EU Fund Officer (CH)	2			1	1	
R17	F	23	4	11	[1] Clerk Registry (CL)	1				1	
R18	F	30	10	32	[1] Clerk Data Input (CL); [2] Secretary to Director (CH); [3] Visa Officer (TH)	3	1		1	1	
R19	F	46	28	20	[1] Clerk (CL); [2] Clerk HR (CL)	2				2	
R20	F	37	17	14	[1] Clerk Revenue (CL); [2] Customer Care Officer (CL)	2				2	
R21	M	49	18	27	[1] Clerk (CL); [2] Security Manager (THM)	2	1			1	1
R22	F	52	33	42	[1] Nurse (TH); [2] Clerk (CL); [3] Sports Officer (TL); [3] Teacher (TH); [4] Assistant Head of School (TH)	5	3	1		1	
R23	M	54	34	20	[1] Mechanic (TH); [2] Data input Clerk (CL)	2	1			1	
R24	M	51	30	26	[1] Mason (THM); [2] Apprentice (Construction) (TL); [3] Draughtsman (TH); [3] Technical Officer (THM); [4] Manager Vehicles (THM); [5] PPCO (THM)	6	5	1			4
R25	F	36	18	25	[1] Clerk (CL); [2] Ministry Secretariat Clerk (CH); [3] Clerk Brussels (CH)	3			2	1	
R26	F	49	23	27	[1] Messenger (TL); [2] Registry Clerk (CL); [3] Security Guard (TL)	3		2		1	
R27	F	42	19	29	[1] Teacher (TH); [2] Peripatetic (Roaming) Teacher (TH); [3] Head of School (THM)	3	3				1
R28	M	50	32	26	[1] Clerk (CL); [2] Tax Assessor (CH); [3] Unit Manager (CHM)	3			2	1	1
R29	F	41	23	25	[1] Clerk Registry (CL); [2] Clerk Accounts (CH)	2			1	1	
R30	M	36	18	23	[1] Clerk Accounts (CH)	1			1		
R31	F	37	16	6	[1] Telephone Operator (TL)	1		1			
R32	M	48	28	12	[1] Watchman (TL); [2] Beach Cleaner (TL)	2		2			
Total Quotes						74	20	16	18	20	13

Appendix 2: Respondents Quota Thresholds

[A] Respondents Jobs Category Thresholds

Total Respondents Jobs: **74**

Thresholds: (1) At least 40% for Clerical (C) and Technical/Specialised (T) Cat. (2) At least 40% for High (H) and Low (L) Skilled Cat. (3) At least 10% but not more than 20% for Managing People (M) Cat.						
	Jobs	TH	TL	CH	CL	M
TECHNICAL/SPECIALISED vs CLERICAL	74	20	16	18	20	13
		36		38		
	%	27	22	24	27	
		49 %		51 %		18 %
HIGH-SKILLED vs LOW-SKILLED	Jobs	TH	CH	TL	CL	
	74	20	18	16	20	
		38		36		
	%	27	24	22	27	
		51 %		49 %		

[B] Respondents Threshold

Total Respondents **32**

Thresholds: (1) Gender: at least 40% for each Category (Male; Female) (2) Age: at least 15% for each Category (18-30; 31-40; 41-50; 51-60) (3) Years in Service: at least 40% for each Category (up to 20yrs; over 20 yrs)	
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<u>Gender</u>	Males	17	53%
	Females	15	47%
<u>Age</u>	18-30 years	6	19%
	31-40 years	8	25%
	41-50 years	10	31%
	51-60 years	8	25%
<u>Years in Service</u>	up to 20 years	15	47%
	21 years and more	17	53%

Appendix 3: Interview Questions Guide

1. Age? Gender? Qualifications?
2. Job history and skills acquired before entering Public Service?
3. How long have you been in the Public Service?
4. Did you receive any induction course, etc. on entering the Public Service?

These captioned questions apply to every Respondent's Public Service Job.

Work position or job:

5. Which Department? Job function/position? Workplace? (Type)
6. Does your work bring you in contact with colleagues of different nationalities (eg EU members)?

Learning your job as Novice worker:

7. Learning the job you were detailed to do: How?
8. Formal training or structure?
9. Were experience and acquired skills from previous job/jobs and your academic background helpful to your learning?

Social Interaction at the workplace:

10. Social interaction among colleagues at the workplace? Face-to-face, phone; emails, chat networks, etc?
11. Your participation (listener or active participant)?
12. Does such interaction and participation help you learn your way through your job at work?

'Community' of workers at the workplace:

13. Are you part of a group/community of workers? Sharing, discussing your work or other experiences in an informal and social way?
14. How did such a 'community' come about and still holds together?
15. Solving problems at work: seek help? From community members? Is this given? Wholly, partially?
16. Are you asked for help at work? From community members? You give it freely?
17. Form part of more than one 'community' of workers? (current and past workplaces, other work contact groups/fora, both locally or abroad, etc.)

Interaction and learning within the 'Community' of 'Communities' of workers:

18. Within CoPs, is there sharing of work experiences, exchanging of new skills and knowledge on how problems have been solved, learning new ways of doing things, etc.? Do all members participate? Wholly or partially? Why?
19. Does being part of a CoP help you develop more knowledge and skills on how to do your job?
20. Does the Department/Unit acknowledge such informal learning and the formation of CoPs?

Learning new things within your Department

21. How was learning provided when new things were introduced in your Department/Unit?

'Sharing' Tools:

22. Do technological advances/ICT tools facilitate or hinder this sharing process?
23. Most effective communication tool in CoPs: face to face or electronic means?

Ongoing learning and your Department

24. Is the MPS in general and/or your Department/Unit an organisation that encourages continuous learning and development of staff?
 25. Does the type of Head of Department impact in this regard?
-

Appendix 4: Raw Coding and Themes

			<i>number of pages with quotes</i>
RW	1	History before Public Service entry	1
RW	2	Workplace: fixed?	1
RW	3	MNC/TNC	1
RW	4	Learning as novice (FT, FT on the job, etc.)	6
RW	5	FT learning enough?	3
RW	6	Previous skills help?...Biographies	15
RW	7	There is SI, P, in CoPs?	11
RW	8	How CoP came about?	4
RW	9	Barriers	26
RW	10	SI, P, and CoP aid learning?	17
RW	11	Learning from experienced workers	9
RW	12	Learning from novice workers	6
RW	13	Provide learning as experienced worker	3
RW	13.2	Exit in CoP?	2
RW	13.3	Improvement by FT?	1
RW	13.4	ICT: yes or no?	1
RW	14	Communication by F2F, IT, etc? Preference?	5
RW	15	Dept is LO?	5
RW	16	Leadership?	6
RW	17	Learning for 'adult'	3
RW	18	KM and Knowledge creation	5
RW	19	CoP+P; but nothing changes	1
RW	20	Multi CoPs	3
RW	21	Learning in Multi CoPs	7
RW	22	Location effect on CoPs	2
RW	23	Learning because willing to Learn	3
RW	24	First try to solve it; then CoP	1
RW	25	CoP=Learning, but not directly for job	5
RW	26	In career, FT help? Is it enough?	1
RW	27	SI at different levels	4
RW	28	Learning in MNC/TNC	5
RW	29	Levels of SI/P not always = levels of Learning	1
RW	30	Culture issues	3
RW	31	Virtual CoPs	2
RW	32	Need of FT	6
RW	33	Benefit of Multi CoPs in Public Service	1
RW	34	You learn from work itself	1
RW	35	Lack of FT; you have to turn to CoP	1
RW	36	Learn by myself	3
RW	37	Learn in CoP: all experts in own field	1
RW	38	Learning by structure itself	1
RW	39	Learning from own experience	2
RW	40	CoP not by default	1
RW	41	Seek CoP outside workplace	1
RW	42	In Job: being qualified more than colleagues	1
RW	43	Accepted in CoP	6
RW	44	Experience' not of help in CoP	1
RW	45	In CoP, but not in workplace	1
RW	46	All members are new in CoP	1
RW	47	Job is too simple to learn more	4
RW	48	Importance of Workplace Learning (vs FT not in Workplace)	1
RW	49	Learning from competent people in CoP	3
RW	50	No colleagues at work	1

Appendix 5: Refined Coding and Themes

REFINED CODES		THEMES	RAW CODES					
RF	1.1	Job history before public service	RW1					
RF	2.1	Type of workplace	RW2					
RF	3.1	The formal training process adopted	RW4					
RF	3.2	Formal training and learning is not enough	RW5	RW13.3	RW26	RW48		
RF	4.1	CoP formation	RW8	RW40	RW41	RW45	RW50	
RF	4.2	CoP entry and the presence of SI and participation	RW43	RW7	RW46			
RF	4.3	Social interaction and communication tools	RW13.4	RW14				
RF	4.4	CoP exit	RW13.2					
RF	5.1	LO: the presence and implications to the Cop	RW15					
RF	5.2	Leadership: the presence and implications to the Cop	RW16					
RF	6.1	CoP: an aid to learning skills for your job	RW10					
RF	6.2	CoP: the centrepedal process of learning	RW11	RW13	RW46			
RF	6.3	CoP: learning from newcomers	RW12					
RF	6.4	Knowledge Creation within CoPS	RW18	RW19				
RF	6.5	CoP within a 'no job skills to learn' scenario	RW47					
RF	7.1	The reality of Cops within MNC and TNC	RW3					
RF	7.2	Learning through Cops within MNC and TNC	RW28					
RF	7.3	Cultural issues	RW30					
RF	8.1	The reality of Multi CoPs	RW20					
RF	8.2	Learning through Multi CoPs	RW21	RW33	RW35			
RF	8.3	The reality of Virtual Cops	RW31					
RF	9.1	Individual Biographies and their implications on Cops	RW6					
RF	9.2	Individual Competencies and the CoP process	RW12	RW29	RW37	RW42	RW49	RW44
RF	9.3	Individual Attitude towards learning	RW23					
RF	10.1	CoP: learning not related to job but for personal development	RW25					
RF	10.2	CoP: its mark on personal growth and adulthood transition	RW17					
RF	11.1	BARRIERS (all)	RW9	RW22				
RF	11.2	BARRIERIS cultural issues	RW30					
RF	11.3	SI at different levels	RW27					
RF	12.1	Need for Formal Training and Learning	RW32					
RF	13.1	Learning by structure/work itself	RW38	RW34				
RF	13.2	Learning from own experience	RW39	RW24				
RF	13.3	Learn by myself	RW36					

Appendix 6: The quotes Notations system – explanatory note

Every quote will have a 3-digit unique number and respondents are notated according to a 3-part system: (1) Respondent Number; (2) Job Number; (3) Category.

Categories: CL (Clerical; Low-Skilled)
CH (Clerical; High-Skilled)
M (Manager – Managing People)

TL (Technical/Specialised; Low-Skilled)
TH (Technical/Specialised; High-Skilled)

Jobs	Res	Jb	Cat.
	NOTATION		
Clerk	R1	J1	C L
Clerk Public Registry	R2	J1	C L
Clerk	R3	J1	C L
Director	R4	J1	C H M
Assistant Director Finance	R4	J2	C H M
Assistant Director Finance	R5	J1	C H M
Assistant Director EU	R5	J2	C H
Clerk	R5	J3	C L
Clerk Accounts	R6	J1	C H
H&S officer	R6	J2	T H
General Hand	R7	J1	T L
Watchman	R7	J2	T L
Fuel Attendant	R7	J3	T L
Assistant Director HR	R8	J1	C H M
Clerk HR	R8	J2	C H
Foreign Office desk officer	R8	J3	C H
Operations Manager	R9	J1	T H M
Ministry Secretariat	R9	J2	C H
Clerk	R9	J3	C L
Teacher	R10	J1	T H
Police Sergeant	R11	J1	T H M
Police Constable	R11	J2	T L
Sweeper Supervisor	R12	J1	T L
Maintenance worker	R12	J2	T L
Coxswain	R12	J3	T L
Mechanic	R13	J1	T H
Street Sweeper	R14	J1	T L
Heavy Plant Driver	R14	J2	T L
Clerk	R15	J1	C L
Audit Officer IRD	R15	J2	C H
Fisheries Inspector	R15	J3	T H
Clerk Data Input	R16	J1	C L
EU Fund Officer	R16	J2	C H
Clerk Registry	R17	J1	C L
Clerk Data Input	R18	J1	C L
Secretary to Director	R18	J2	C H
Visa Officer	R18	J3	T H

Jobs	Res	Jb	Cat.
	NOTATION		
Clerk	R19	J1	C L
Clerk HR	R19	J2	C L
Clerk Revenue	R20	J1	C L
Customer Care Officer	R20	J2	C L
Clerk	R21	J1	C L
Security Manager	R21	J2	T H M
Nurse	R22	J1	T H
Clerk	R22	J2	C L
Sports Officer	R22	J3	T L
Teacher	R22	J4	T H
Assistant Head of School	R22	J5	T H
Mechanic	R23	J1	T H
Data Input Clerk	R23	J2	C L
Mason	R24	J1	T H M
Apprentice (Construction)	R24	J2	T L
Draughtsman	R24	J3	T H
Technical Officer	R24	J4	T H M
Manager Vehicles	R24	J5	T H M
PPC Officer	R24	J6	T H M
Clerk	R25	J1	C L
Ministry Secretariat Clerk	R25	J2	C H
Clerk Brussels	R25	J3	C H
Messenger	R26	J1	T L
Registry Clerk	R26	J2	C L
Security Guard	R26	J3	T L
Teacher	R27	J1	T H
Peripatetic (Roaming) Teacher	R27	J2	T H
Head of School	R27	J3	T H M
Clerk	R28	J1	C L
Tax Assessor	R28	J2	C H
Unit Manager	R28	J3	C H M
Clerk Registry	R29	J1	C L
Clerk Accounts	R29	J2	C H
Clerk Accounts	R30	J1	C H
Telephone Operator	R31	J1	T L
Watchman	R32	J1	T L
Beach Cleaner	R32	J2	T L

Examples of Notations:

(001-R7J1TL, General Hand)

(121-R16J2CH, EU Fund Officer)

(147-R4J1CHM, Director)

Quote 001; Respondent 7; Job 1; Technical/Specialised (Low-Skilled)

Quote 121; Respondent 16; Job 2; Clerical (High-Skilled)

Quote 147; Respondent 4; Job 1; Clerical (High-Skilled) & Manager

Appendix 7: Consent Form

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION / INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that I agree to participate in this audio digitally recorded interview for the study to be carried out by researcher Mario Rodgers entitled:

Lave and Wenger's concept of Communities of Practice and its contribution towards understanding workplace learning in contemporary organisations: a case study of organisations within the Malta Public Service.

I further declare that I understand the purpose of the research, that it will be used as part of a Doctorate programme, being undertaken by researcher Mario Rodgers at the University of Leicester, that it will be stored and accessed solely by the researcher and that it will not be disclosed. I also understand that it can be used for research output based on such research and that my anonymity will be guaranteed.

By making this declaration, I understand that I am allowing the researcher to use the information I am providing him for the purpose of this research and its output and I am also aware that I can pull out of the research at any time.

Name	
Signature	
Date	

Researcher
Signature:

--

Appendix 8: Extract from Interview Transcript - R32J1TL

Q. Can you please tell me how you entered the job.... I mean, how you were posted at the Department and how you eventually learned the job you had to do?

A. When I got the job, I went to the official in charge of the watchmen. He introduced to me to the watchmen Time-Keeper. Both of them explained to me 'the drill'....you know, what was expected from me during the night that I had to work.....i mean, how to do the hand-over...that is, how to take the keys, check the things and then give then give the keys the morning after, etc, etc, the responsibility I had to see that nothing happens to the equipment, etc.....that I had to stroll around and keep a watchful eye on if I suspect something is not in place, etc. I had to call immediately headquarters.....that is my Time Keeper.....in order to report the matter immediately.

Q. That's all?...I mean that is all the learning?

A. Basically, that is all I had to learn. I mean, you don't have to go to school or university to learn to be a watchman. They explained to me what to do and from that same night I began working. I do work alone.....so my first day was kind of nightmare....nervous, scary at night alone, etc. But, that was only the first day, because as from the second day, I was already ok with my job....and as I said I was quite happy doing those watchman duties there.

Q. So, you did not receive any training whatsoever?

A. No. The training I received was only that first day when my Time Keeper and the Official in charge of the watchmen explained to me what I had to do.

Q. Can you tell me if there is any social interaction at work....well, you know, having a group of friends you group together at work and talk, discuss things, about work, about things in life?

A. I always worked alone when I was a watchman. So there was no social interaction with no one. I basically had no work colleagues, except perhaps with the Time Keeper with whom I contacted regularly, mostly on where I was to be detailed for work.....and occasionally.....though very rarely it happened.....when something happened during my night shift work. But my relation with the Time Keeper, except perhaps on teasing about football teams, football results, etc., was solely on work....where I had to work....or on some issues that occasionally happen during my work...such as keys not working, and small issues like that.....nothing else.

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