

‘Casing the joint’: explorations by the insider-researcher preparing for
work -based projects.

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Purpose

The factors that impinge upon the ‘insider-researcher’ (IR) when undertaking a work based learning project are explored, resulting in the creation of a context analysis framework to be used as an investigative tool prior to initiating a work based project.

Methodology

A qualitative, interpretative approach with the IR as central to the research process, together with data from students work based projects, research literature and texts, and an academic advisers’ focus group.

Findings

Themes of benefits and constraints identified the organisation, the clients and co-workers and the IR benefiting from work based projects. The positionality and personal attributes of the IR may be a constraint. Of major consideration are ethical issues arising from the project process. Academics’ concerns include student supervision, the impact on the IR, and factors affecting change and project processes.

Limitations

A small study constrained by the researcher being central to the data and therefore introducing potential bias to the interpretation.

Practical applications

The creation of a context analysis framework as tool to assist the work based student, the academic and the workplace in preparing to implement a work based project.

Originality

No similar analysis tool has been published. This can contribute significantly to the work based curriculum. The issues that concern researchers, academic practitioners and work based students during a work based project have not been previously investigated. A good practice guide for projects can result from this.

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Introduction

This small scale study was undertaken to explore the experiences of the insider - researcher (IR) within work based projects whilst undertaking a project as part of their Work Based Learning (WBL) academic studies leading towards a degree or post graduate award. WBL studies at Middlesex University is defined as a ‘field’ of study as well as a ‘mode’ of learning, (Portwood 2000), and therefore work is the curriculum (Boud et al 2001), and the knowledge gained in, through, and for work is usually trans-disciplinary and multi-dimensional (Garnett et al 2004). Consequently the WBL curriculum must facilitate the revelation of these many layers of learning from work and integrate them with academic knowledge into the project. The project component in the curriculum has been identified as having its own characteristics which distinguish it from traditional dissertations. These characteristics include the dual role of the worker as researcher, the organisational context and culture including the knowledge held within the organisation and by its individuals, and the ethical values underpinning working practice (Armsby & Costley 2000).

These work based projects are usually undertaken as the final component in the undergraduate or postgraduate programme and are typically practitioner led, small scale, collaborative, pragmatic and expedient, (Armsby 2000). The projects are driven by the research and development of real, work based project activities that the student/worker may already be undertaking at work. The academic advisors’ aim in the work based learning project process is to facilitate the students’ development of critical awareness of research issues and practical competence in applying them within the work situation.

One way to do this is to create a framework to aid analysis of the complexities of an organisation and identify project needs prior to commencing the project. An analytical framework would enable the work based learner to anticipate major issues that could be encountered during the project, and provide the opportunity to plan effective strategies prior to commencement to ensure project success. These aspects of the organisational context together with the dual role of the worker as researcher were explored within this study. The academic advisor must also develop her own awareness of potential barriers to the smooth running of the project, even though she is not in the students’ workplace, but must draw upon her own experience to alert the student to potential issues that must be accounted for. This paper highlights some of the IR issues that were uncovered during the research and demonstrates how some factors are parallel issues for both advisor and student.

Insider researcher

The IR has a dual position within the organisation which is inevitably influenced by the organisational context and the project inquiry process. The role may be referred to as; ‘the insider researcher’, (Smyth & Holian 1999, van Heugten 2004) or ‘practitioner researcher’ (Robson 2002) or ‘worker researcher’ (Armsby & Costley 2000:68), although the term appears to be virtually interchangeable. Armsby and Costley (2000) comment that worker researchers have practical experience and insider

knowledge and have greater awareness of the range of variables that impact on their chosen research problem. Robson (2002: 534) describes a practitioner researcher as 'someone who holds down a job in some particular area and is, at the same time, involved in carrying out systematic enquiry which is of relevance to the job', and as such being an insider researcher has some distinct advantages and disadvantages. Bell (1999) indicates that the IR has a privileged role in terms of organisational knowledge and access to information, and that additional considerations concerning ethical issues are paramount in an IR project.

The role is often associated with action research; the underlying assumption being that the research is undertaken within an organisation as a means of improving practice (McNiff with Whitehead 2002), whether that be an individuals' or that of the organisation. Alternatively, Edwards (1999) sees the IR as a participant observer with ethnographic inclinations. The researcher is required to be part of the organisation under study, and the occupants of the organisation are under scrutiny and observation for an extended period. Additionally the IR includes a component of self-interpretation in the change of role relationships with other members of the organisation and a relationship of rapport and trust must develop, together with an understanding of the organisational history and culture in order to fully understand the context. This variety of IR positions is reflected within the wide range of work status that the WBS student presents when they commence project activity within their organisation.

Smyth and Holian (1999) consider that IR is worthwhile because it helps to solve practical problems and enables the inquiry process to change and enhance both the organisation and researcher. In addition, they also consider that the IR role includes that of participant observer because the nature of the enquiry places the researcher in a subjective role that cannot change and become objective as the role of the worker switches from worker to researcher. The bias that is then inherent within an IR role immediately challenges the positivist stance that research must be undertaken objectively. They go further in that they argue that the IR themselves may become part of the data, thus encroaching into ethnographic territory and risking the inevitable criticisms of 'going native' and therefore losing objectivity completely, which may compromise validity (Rooney 2005). This may be mitigated by the IR collecting reflective personal data during the project to assist in recognition of bias as intrusive and where values, beliefs and personal interests should be recognised and challenged (van Heugten 2004). This is particularly pertinent to this study where the researcher herself became a source of data as knowledge of the project process informed the research (van Heugten 2004).

Coghlan & Brannick (2005) offer a model of four modes of IR within Action Research methodology which range from no reflective self study by either the researcher or the system through to both the researcher and the system being engaged in reflective self study. If this model is also applied to a participant observation approach it suggests that all levels of enquiry ranging from superficial to deep IR, can be active within an organisation at a variety of levels of engagement. The IR role is retained but recognition of the subjectivity/ objectivity bias should be accounted for within the project process. Academic advisors should be aware of this when advising students on preparing for their WBL projects as the student may be required to challenge some of the internally held beliefs either within the organisation, in

themselves and/ or by their colleagues, and their IR position may cloud their judgement.

The WBL project activity at Middlesex expects the IR to reflect upon his/her organisation with some subjectivity and objectivity during the process which is then recounted as part of the project report. WBL academic advisors are concerned with the extent of influence in that organisational context and the positionality of the IR and recognise that context is central to the project process. Hence there is a need to develop skills of analysis in a context in which the IR may be overly familiar due to his/ her position. Consequently the development of an analytical framework would contribute a useful tool to the work based learning students' academic capabilities if used prior to the project itself. An additional benefit would be to the WBL curriculum as it could become a structured preparation for project activity. It would alert the WBL student to factors present within their organisation that they may not otherwise be aware of and thus extend their organisational knowledge. For example, if they are in a senior role the ability to see a bigger picture and the interconnecting parts increasingly becomes an essential part of their work and research role. If the IR is relatively junior this will provide the opportunity to extend his/her knowledge of the organisation, its' structures and processes.

Situation or context analysis

A situation analysis is usually used as a scoping exercise and analysis of the broad context or external environment in which projects operate (IUCN 2004). It is a process of reconstructing the component parts of a situation in an ordered and logical way by considering the influence of a variety of factors in which that situation occurs. Current uses of the model can be found in the business world and Aid agencies in project planning (IUCN 2004) and Multi-Stakeholder processes (IAC/Wageningen UR 2004) and may also be called a context analysis (IUCN 2004). Situation analysis has been described as 'a process of gathering and analysing information to guide planning and action' (Family Health International 2005) and can be an exploration of a workplace or a geographical location. If a potential change is being investigated it is important to understand the context in which the current situation is operating, and hence it may also be referred to as a context analysis (Changing minds 2002). The focus of WBL projects is the application of research and development techniques towards implementing change in practice. The context is acknowledged as being highly relevant and therefore the construction of a context analysis framework drawing upon a variety of models offers a possible structure from which to build an analytical tool.

Research questions

In order to explore the IR role in relation to the work contexts the research questions that led the enquiry process were:

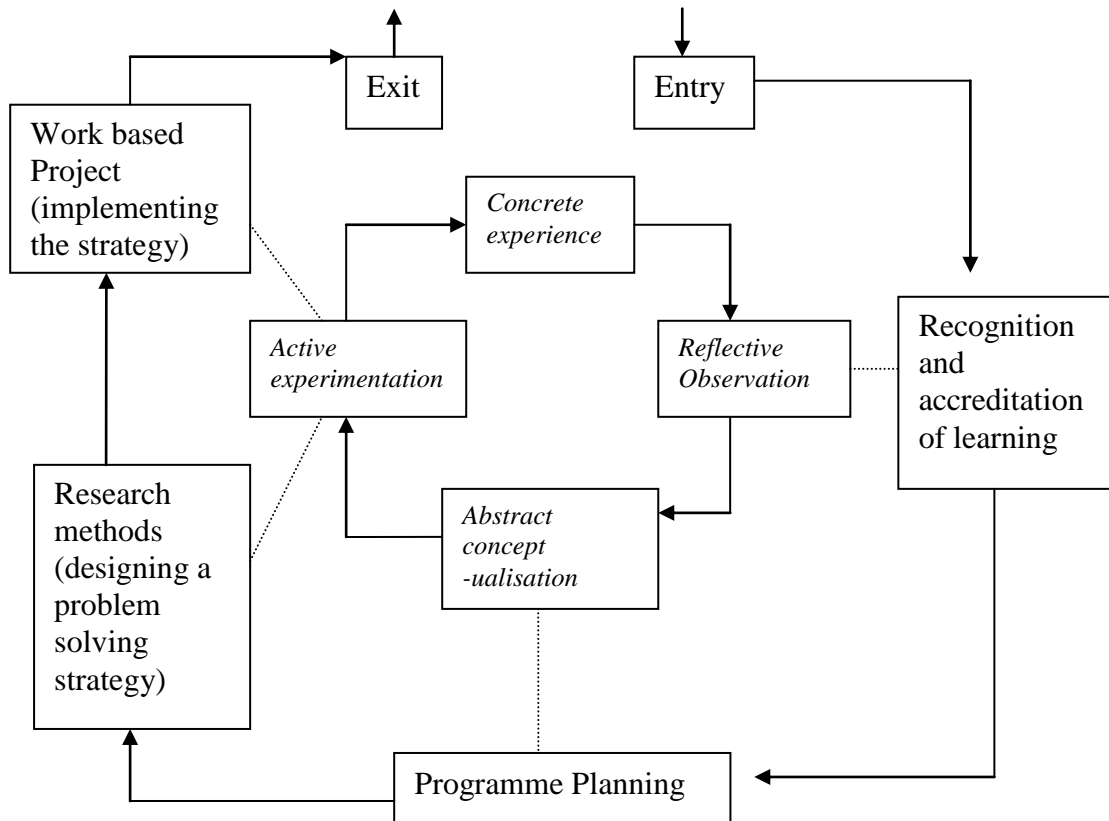
1. In what ways do insider researchers consider their role influences the research process in WBL projects?
2. What factors within a work context impinge upon the insider researcher project activity?
3. Do the insider researchers' experiences of being an employee and/ or practitioner researcher contribute to their understanding of the organisational context?

4. What key features could be extracted from these findings to be used to interrogate a work context prior to starting a project

Research approach

A qualitative interpretative research approach of flexible design was taken in order to gain the experience of the participants (Cohen et al 2000) and to gain understanding of a complex multi-faceted role. The researcher herself was included as an IR and contributed to the data as well as conducting the project, thus meeting the criteria for mode four of insider researcher activity in that both the researcher and the system are engaged in the study (Coghlan and Brannick 2005). This also acknowledges the position of the researcher undertaking the project as being a source of data, and exploiting it as part of the research process (van Heugten 2004). The pedagogic context reflected Kolb's (1984) learning cycle which supports the WBL Studies curriculum framework by promoting the interaction between Kolb's active experimentation phase with that of the WBL research design and project implementation stage of the curriculum. (Figure 1). The research process also reflected the learning cycle; reflection upon data lead to abstract conceptualisation as the context analysis framework developed, and resulted in active experimentation with the conclusions from the data.

Figure 1. Kolbs' (1984) Learning cycle as overlaid upon the WBLS curriculum framework.



Key

Inner boxes represent Kolbs' experiential learning cycle

Outer boxes represent Work Based Learning studies core modules

Links between elements of Kolbs' cycle and specific core modules shown by broken lines

Data collection

Data were collected from four sources:

1. Analysis of undergraduate and postgraduate projects reports of the insider researcher experiences (8 of each)
2. A focus group of experienced advisors (10 participants)
3. Tacit knowledge from the researcher supported by literature from research texts and articles focusing on the insider-researcher
4. Short questionnaire from experienced advisors (2) unable to attend the focus group

Project data

These data collection strands were deliberately chosen for expediency and flexibility and were intended to draw on data that were easily accessible to expedite the project process. The data were drawn from documentary evidence, including a literature search of research texts that explored the role of practitioner or insider researcher. This was supplemented by the researcher herself who deliberately explored her own knowledge and experience by writing and interpreting her own experiences (Murray and Lawrence 2000) both as an academic advisor and as an IR within the project itself in order to contribute 'insider' knowledge and understanding of the culture (van Heugten 2004).

The WBL students' reflections of being an IR were extracted and analysed from the project reports and impinging factors were identified. Ten undergraduate and ten post graduate projects were chosen initially from the latest academic year, based on their final grade of being 'good' or 'excellent', although two of each did not present adequate IR comments and were therefore excluded from the study. The projects ranged across different research methodologies and different subject areas, but all were within a work based situation. The initial extraction and analysis was undertaken by a newly appointed research assistant who was unfamiliar with the curriculum, and so was able to read with new eyes and identify relevant data. Due to her additional role as academic advisor and consequent familiarity with the project process, the researcher could have been overly familiar with the data and less aware of anomalies, and hence not recognise the unusual IR factors written in the projects. The initial identification of data were however, revisited by the researcher in order to corroborate the preliminary findings. The initial analysis focused on seeking themes around benefits and constraints of being an IR during the project process.

Factors impinging on work contexts

The data were interpreted using themes of 'benefits' and 'constraints'. Benefits included three themes of; the organisation; co-workers/ clients/ customers, and personal benefits, such as knowing the organisation and its dynamics, (Figure 2). Examples from undergraduate projects included more predictable and repetitive findings than the post graduate projects and were probably the result of the IRs' comparatively lower status and influence within the organisation. Constraints were identified as being; the position within the organisation, the organisation itself; personal limitations, and ethical issues, (Figure 3). These included factors such as

role conflict between being a manager and a researcher, or coping with work demands and fitting the project around it. A lack of research understanding and personal knowledge of the subject was identified by undergraduates and addressed with varying degrees of success during the projects. However postgraduate projects had a far wider range of factors impinging upon the project process which reflected the students' higher status, position and wider influence within organisations. The implications for this is that the work-based student needs to be facilitated to widen their subject and research based knowledge during the project process so that they can develop a critical perspective apposite to graduate study.

The most compelling category in the constraints was that of ethical issues, which revealed that often the position of the IR was not necessarily a comfortable place and that relationships with colleagues were coloured by the demands of the project in terms of time and data contributions. The goodwill of colleagues was essential to a successful project and the nature and extent of support from the organisation could make or break the success of the project. Cooperation was essential to project outcomes, but the fact that colleagues are being studied may have a direct Hawthorne effect on the data that are collected (Polit & Hungler 1997). Exposure of colleagues within small groups was also identified as an issue when attempting to maintain confidentiality and this indicates that the use of pseudonyms or other similar disguising factors were important when aiming to protect colleagues' actions, and organisational positions. Some IR's recognised personal internal conflict when considering what actions they should take if findings proved controversial or exposed unethical behaviour or activity. These issues may also contribute significantly to the feelings of discomfort when exploration of the organisation and its' ethos reveals issues that may not align themselves with the insider researchers own moral code.

Focus Group

The focus group was undertaken with ten academics associated with the Centre for Excellence in work based learning (CEWBL) research group. This is a mix of academics involved in work-based learning programmes, although at least half of group were involved exclusively with the Doctorate programme rather than the WBL programme. This added a layer of richness to the data as doctoral candidates are, by definition within the programme, positioned at a higher and more influential level within their organisations, and thus have additional challenges and opportunities within their final projects. Verbal consent to participate in the study was gained from the group at the beginning of the focus group. Notes were taken by the researcher and research assistant, and a tape recording of the discussion was taken to supplement the written notes which were then used to support accurate transcription of the oral data. A few weeks later findings were shared with the research group, thus providing an opportunity to further validate the data from the source (Robson 2002). Key findings identified four areas: supervision, change, impact on IR and project processes (Figure 4).

Supervision

The role of the advisor evoked discussion around the differences between supervision of a PhD and Doctorate in professional studies. There was consensus that the advisor took a facilitator/ coaching approach to enable the IR to cope with the challenges of a WBL project. As one respondent commented; this might even include coaching them out of that job role because the dissonance that the student felt as the project

progressed made them reconsider their position within the organisation and their responsibilities towards their employer. This was not reflected in the sample of projects, possibly because they were all at a lower academic level and therefore the level of influence was lower, but anecdotal evidence later from other supervisors indicates that similar challenges have confronted them when supervising students at WBL Masters level. These challenges often related to ethical considerations, such as what to do with findings that suggested something criminal had been exposed, or unprofessional practices had been uncovered.

Change and impact on IR

The factors concerning change were interesting in that they suggested that the motives for doing the project often stemmed from the IR wishing to change or improve work practices, but frequently resulted in the individual themselves undergoing change through the project process, resulting in the need to reconstruct their world view of the organisation and of their own role. This impacted individuals in different ways, not least bringing them into role conflict between being a colleague and therefore supporting their colleagues, or being a researcher and having to take action because of project findings. These dilemmas and dissonances between roles are very pertinent when preparing for a work-based project and may not be apparent to the IR when they are about to embark on a project. The advisor therefore has a role to play in directing WBL students towards project strategies and activities that involve colleagues and may require the student to think of alternative data collection methods that are more objective, less invasive and which require less reciprocation from collegial relationships. Reliance on colleagues to obtain data and introduce change implies that the IR must have a relationship of trust and rapport with their colleagues (Edwards 1999), but this data demonstrates that it is not guaranteed to result in the desired project outcomes.

Project Processes

Discussions about the practicalities of preparing two reports; one for the organisation and one for the university also highlighted the difficulties that IRs' may face when having to share their findings which may not be congruent with current organisational practices. New advisors may not have had much experience of these dilemmas and information about the practicalities of preparing the student to undertake the project can be extracted from the findings. The opportunity to capture the tacit knowledge of the focus group to aid the construction of good practice guidelines for future advisors of WBL projects was recognised as being a serendipity of this research.

Understanding organisational contexts as researcher workers

The researcher has experience of advising many undergraduate and postgraduate students during their WBL projects. To capture this data generated through experience the researcher used retrospective reflection (Jarvis 1999) and recorded in written form an extensive range of factors that have a bearing of the IR position within an organisational project. Drawing on a range of research writings and theory texts, key words were identified as being representative of these factors, initially to translate them into an analytical framework. Additional factors such as preparation activities to introduce change were also included such as SWOT or SCOT (Strengths, weaknesses or constraints, opportunities and threats,) and STEPELI (sociological, technological, environmental, political, ethical, legal and institutional) analyses as these are standard processes used in a variety of disciplines when preparing to introduce change into a

situation (Iles & Sutherland 2001). Initially these key words were constructed into a mnemonic: WORK PRACTICE CONTEXTS (see Figure 5). Although there are duplicated letters within it, it provided a starting point to develop a model of analysis. While the mnemonic had the merit of being explicit and orderly it did not rank activities in order of importance and could limit the insider researchers' analysis by precluding alternative or additional categories, or become formulaic, although that might be an advantage to undergraduate students as it could provide boundaries. However, it provided a checklist for the researcher to use when comparing the mnemonic with different context analysis frameworks later to ensure that all potential factors could be accounted for under broader categories.

Key features of work contexts

The findings indicate that the IR's position presents conflicts of conscience and dilemmas in practice. The ethical problems of retaining confidentiality and good working relationships with colleagues can mean they either have to champion their project or deliver their work responsibilities, possibly to the detriment of their project. This is accentuated by the extent of power that the IR has in the organisation. Being an IR offers many benefits such as access to data and organisational knowledge sources thus enabling them to function more effectively in their role. Other factors include the extent of their organisational knowledge and the projects' contribution to organisational aims and purpose, especially when it affects clients or co-workers and provides an opportunity to improve or refine work practice. Constraints include the restrictions that the organisation may impose upon the worker, such as access to data, or constraining the extent or impact of the project activity. Ethical issues are noted to have a particularly powerful force impinging upon a project. The process of undertaking a WBL project appears to increase the IRs' comprehension of contextual issues such as organisational culture, internal networks, role boundaries and demands, all of which could benefit from a formalised and structured exploration before the project starts.

Limitations of the study

This was a very small study and although the findings resonated with colleagues there has not yet been an opportunity to develop the implications of the study further. As it is a piece of insider research itself, the validity of the findings might be questioned as having limited transferability, although there has been corroboration from research texts. As a qualitative study which stated the positionality of the researcher at the outset any bias in the data is recognised and acknowledged (Murray & Lawrence 2000) and measures taken to reduce the impact of bias included the use of reflection, a learning log and sharing of findings with others.

Constructing an analytical framework

The creation of a Context Analysis Framework (CAF) seeks to develop analytical skills and comprehension of strategic influences at work. Exploration of both library and internet sources produced several situation and context analysis frameworks. By reflecting on the original WORK PRACTICE CONTEXTS which summarised the key words from the findings, together with categories from other data a logical structure for a CAF was formulated (Figure 6).

This construction of a CAF to assist the insider researcher in analysing work situations prior to launching WBL projects was recognised as an opportunity to make

a significant contribution to the WBL curriculum. The lack of any previously published suitable frameworks suggests that any such model should be tried and tested before being implemented into the curriculum. Due to word limit restrictions detailed discussion of the CAF is not possible here, but it contains broad categories that can be applied to a number of work contexts. This project is still a work in progress and will continue to be refined following further feedback from colleagues and subsequently students. The outcomes of the research and practical application of the project findings have been used to inform developments within the WBL curriculum.

Conclusion

The implications of this study for those involved in work based learning, either as student or academic, are focused on the context and situation of the worker/ researcher. The IR needs to broaden his/her knowledge of the organisation and its' contextual features, as well as develop knowledge of research methods and the subject under study, thus facilitating a sound WBL project and benefiting the organisation and the worker. Understanding the context of an organisation needs to be facilitated by the academic so that the student can develop analytical skills, and consequently the use of a structured approach will sharpen the students learning and critical capabilities. The place of ethical considerations within a WBL project cannot be underestimated, and the advisor needs to be aware of the variety of potential obstructions that could impede the smooth progression of a project. Learning activities which facilitate the understanding of the complexities and nuances of the workplace can benefit the work based student in their role of worker, researcher and learner.

Figure 2 Benefits of being an insider researcher (IR)	
Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of organisation and culture/ colleagues/ clients/ information/ working norms/ networks and language • Project design reflects organisations needs and methodological choice. • Contributes to organisations' aims 	Co-workers/ clients/customers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve practice, efficiency and cost effectiveness • Involve others –gives clients a voice, positive impact through involvement in project • Access key informants – purposive sample, established working relationships.
To IR personally: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practitioner insights and role duality in the project provides additional benefits such as reflection upon different aspects of their role • Synergy between worker and researcher • Knowledge of organisation, problem, depth & breadth extended • Personal knowledge and experience contributed to the organisation • Choice of methodology to suit situation • Improve own capabilities and skills • Develop autonomy and can champion project and choose key informants <p>Choose own support systems, e.g. mentor</p>	

Figure 4 Themes from focus group	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision <p>-role of supervisor more a coaching style different from PhD, (DProf/PG/UG), use of facilitation model</p> <p>-ethical issues re: confidentiality; exposure of organisational issues and informants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change <p>-organisation</p> <p>-self</p> <p>-Complexity and disorder from project</p> <p>-reconstruction of own world</p> <p>-reflective learning</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on IR <p>- Power - responsibility or lack of power influencing the projects' progress</p> <p>- Role conflict</p> <p>- Dilemmas of outcomes – handling difficult findings</p> <p>- Dissonance; confrontation with organisational ethos challenging personal values</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project processes <p>- Preparation for project practicalities</p> <p>- Data collection strategies</p> <p>- Personal support identified</p> <p>- Interface with organisation</p> <p>- Product & report = real story versus executive summary</p>

Figure 3
Constraints to IR

<p>Position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodology may be pre-determined by organisation • Dual role can be misunderstood as ‘spy’ or manager • Conflict of interests and role dilemmas e.g manager as researcher • Project boundaries and size dictated by position • Power and sphere of influence may be insufficient to effect change/ introduce findings 	<p>Organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May dictate project focus • Work demands and priorities may dictate outcomes • Threat to organisational norms will impact implementation • Networks & sponsor may limit sphere of project • Responsibility to uphold integrity of organisation & stakeholder interests
<p>Self/ personal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own limited knowledge of research or subject may not be enlarged • Prior assumptions/ pre-understanding colours activities, or anticipation of findings may limit project • Covert manipulation possible to achieve desired results • Role conflict/ identity dilemma causing personal discomfort • Bias –lack of objectivity/ subjectivity biggest criticism of project process • Time frame inhibited by both University, personal and organisational demands • Frustration with others who don’t understand the project 	<p>Ethics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data is value laden and could be misused • Difficulty in maintaining confidentiality of small group members • Who to share controversial findings with? • Informed consent –how possible as project is dynamic • Access and permission reliant on others, requires time and input from colleagues and may raise expectations • Gaining and maintaining trust of others • Revelation of organisational ethos may become incongruent with researchers own values • Hawthorn effect on colleagues work and being investigated

Figure 5		
WORK	PRACTICE	CONTEXTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work – type/ focus • Weaknesses • Opportunities • Objectivity • Reflection • Role -worker, practitioner/ manager/insider/ researcher • Knowledge –whose? Subject/ organisational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional boundaries • Practitioner – influence? • Political- local, national drivers • Problem scope • Resources- what? • Research approach? • Access to information • Culture – organisational • Theories? Subject knowledge • Internal- drivers • Individual- qualities/skills • Colleagues – who to involve? • Confidentiality – how? • Ethics- access? dilemmas • Ethos- organisational values? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change – model/ agent? • Organisation – type? Public/ private/ voluntary? • Objective? • Networks-who's available? • Threats to change? • Training – any required? • Environment - location? • eXternal – drivers? • Technology – required? • Strengths or project or organisation? • Strategies – what change to introduce? • Sociological – work teams? • Subjectivity

Figure 6
Outline for Work Based Context Analysis Framework

1. **State problems and issues to address** – including the problem/ issues to be explored in the project, workers current role and relation to the problem
2. **Defining the scope and boundaries of the project** – determine the aim, time frame professional and organisational boundaries. SCOT/SWOT analysis
3. **Identify the vision and available opportunities** – what will the outcomes be, what power and influence will the project leader have? Identify a champion.
4. **Undertake a Stakeholder analysis** – who are the key stakeholders, how will the ethical issues be addressed, e.g. confidentiality and anonymity, participation or intended collaboration strategies
5. **Organisation(s) - What sort involved?** Public, private? Voluntary? What kind of management structure? What current trends or drivers are at work? Communication systems? Organisational ethos? Undertake a force field analysis
6. **Environment** – location, accommodation, equipment, budget, staffing? Undertake a STEPELI analysis
7. **Resources** - investigate available resources such as funds, people, key informants, subject knowledge and organisational knowledge, management support
8. **Legal issues, policies and documents** – what laws should be considered, e.g. Data protection act, or government policies driving change? What local policies should be referred to? Where located?
9. **Monitoring and adapting to change** – what are the baseline measurements from which to monitor and evaluate change? What sort of data will be collected? What is appropriate data to collect?
10. **Summary of findings and recommendations for project** – what conclusions have been drawn? How will they feed into the project? What kind of research approach would suit the proposed project? Has the initial understanding of the problem changed? How will the project be conducted in the light of this?

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