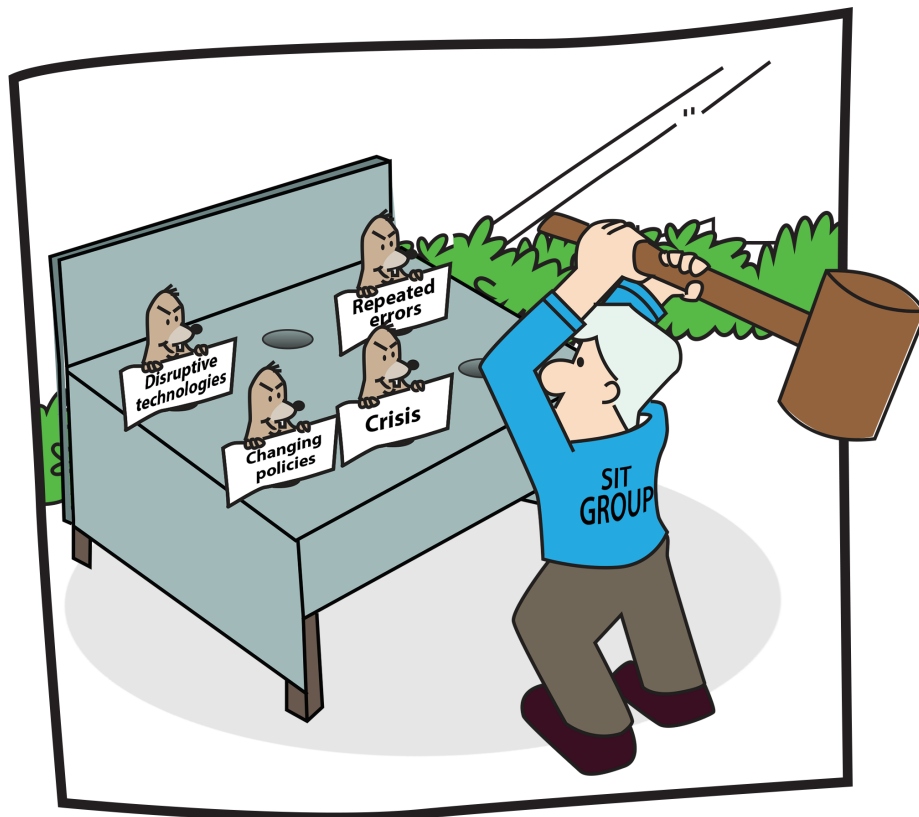# Workflow Learning

"WELCOME TO WHACK-A-MOLE!"

Workflow Learning Implementation Using SitGroups

Vignettes Learning

If you've been in a video arcade in the last few years, you've probably run across the game of Whack-a-Mole. It's the one where there's a table in front of you with a bunch of holes. Little plastic moles pop up at random and you must whack the moles with a soft mallet. It can be fun and frustrating at the same time. You never know when and where those pesky moles might pop up!

Now, imagine it's Monday morning. You start your work week with a plan and purpose. So far, so good, right? Then, an issue with the equipment pops up. Next, someone calls in sick. And, there's an email that needs your attention and so on. Welcome to Whack-a-Mole!

In a way, Workflow Learning is like the game. Its purpose is to help workers fix, solve and improve work issues that can pop up anywhere at any time. Workflow Learning is fast and responsive – it is the "soft mallet" in the game providing the just-in-time resources to "whack" those pesky work issues.

In our previous articles, "*Figure it out!*" and "*Did it work?*" we discussed the practical nature of Workflow Learning and how it drives real-world solutions and knowledge sharing among workers. Workflow Learning is how workers analyze, fix, solve and improve on work issues and learning along the way. It helps "whack the moles."

Key Elements of Workflow Learning:

- Deal with real-work situations
- Think through the issues
- Analyze and formulate solutions to the issues
- Use expertise and technologies to find answers

As a result, workers:

- Make better decisions
- Take appropriate actions
- Grow into self-reliant learners

Workflow Learning works best when workers are in the process of doing work. Workers organize themselves into "trusted networks," or "SitGroups" (Situation Groups).

Members share common issues and interest areas. SitGroups follow a thinking process from analysis, solutions generations, sense-making, and reporting impacts to results. These critical steps transform the quality of the results from a conversation into useful and tested solutions.

SitGroups:

- Small, 2-4 or more people
- No fixed start or end date
- Their aim is to fix, solve and improve work issues
- Members may come from one or many departments
- They share experiences, tools, and knowledge
- Problems discussed are typically not routine issues

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SitGroups tackle work issues. Here are 10 areas of opportunities to implement Workflow Learning using SitGroups.

10 "Whack-a-Mole" SitGroup Opportunities
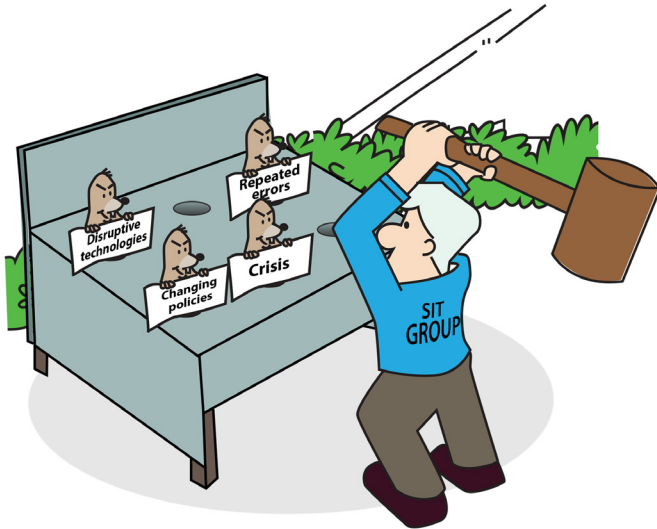
1. Dealing with uncertainty and continuously changing work situations

There are work situations where the answer is unknown, the problem is rare, or it is the first time workers experience them. Workflow Learning helps by encouraging workers to organize a SitGroup for this purpose.

2. High knowledge change and obsolescence

Your company may have policies, products, services or processes that are constantly subject to change. A SitGroup helps by working closely to share knowledge and resources so that the members can respond quickly to changing information.

3. Launching a product

In launching a new product, a lot of things can go wrong. There are possible issues that may come up due to reasons unknown earlier or your company has not tested enough in other areas. A SitGroup is best used to organize, to prepare and anticipate product launches, and changing information.

4. Changing policies, procedures, and processes

Changes in policies may have huge impacts on organizations. A change in pricing or supplier standards has ripple effects. They are issues that need specific exceptions, workarounds or sample adjustments. A SitGroup can provide response time or action to mitigate impacts in the organization.

5. Repeated error and high-risk areas

There are areas in operations, sales, support or admin that may show repeated errors or where problems persist. The risk is high and impacts efficiency and profitability. A SitGroup can address the issues and work through the analysis, solutions, and pattern discovery process.

6. Deep learning for complex and difficult tasks

Deep learning is an immersive way to get workers to have intimate knowledge of a process or solution. Part of the SitGroup issues cover the "what if" scenarios. This training can be in tandem with "diagnostic" and "problem-solving" conversations. This allows further, deeper learning of the process or solution.

7. Harnessing rapid growth of expertise knowledge and experience

Expertise and experience are an organization's intellectual assets. Ongoing SitGroup activities help in collecting the experiences and expertise by a discussion of real-life work issues. Capturing the conversations, notes, specific problems, and solutions is essential. By working through a real problem, the collection of experiences and expertise is a reliable way of testing and validating expertise. A SitGroup follows a thinking process that adds structure to the richness of experiences and expertise being shared.

8. Rapid introduction of disruptive technologies

Processes, such as implementing robotics in an assembly line, are opportunities where Workflow Learning happens. Through SitGroups, workers can jointly assess situations and learn from each other while solving problems.

9. Compliance

Compliance issues are not only solved by training programs. Oftentimes, the compliance issues are operational in nature. They are happening at work. Workflow Learning through SitGroups allows compliance learning activities by reviewing the incident and safety implications.

Anticipating and preparing for crisis situations are opportunities for Workflow Learning. When the large Indonesian tsunami devastated cities and killed thousands of people, leaders, and staff of the NGOs scrambled to find solutions from lessons learned. According to one top leader of an NGO, they were fixing and solving issues while learning on the job. SitGroups facilitated ongoing conversations to exchange ideas and decide the viable options.

Concluding thoughts

Much like the game of "Whack-a-Mole," work issues pop up anywhere at any time. This can disrupt even the best prepared workers. However, using SitGroups to "pop up" and address these issues, creates an environment of mutual learning and testing of real-world results. In addition, there is the opportunity to capture and share the learnings from the SitGroups with the workforce. So, instead of heading for the video arcade, start implementing and supporting Workflow Learning in your organization.