

Journal Club – An alternative method for delivering professional development sessions

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1. Introduction

Continuing professional development is important for developing and maintaining member competencies, networking with colleagues, attracting new members and maintaining existing members. Australia's population is relatively small yet widely distributed over a large land mass. This is a challenge for the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society of Australia (HFESA) because some members face logistical difficulties attending face-to-face professional development meetings. Alternative ways of presenting professional development sessions are required to assist HFESA members meet their ongoing competency requirements.

2. Practice innovation

This paper describes the implementation of Journal Club as a way for HFESA members to meet their professional development requirements. Several different formats have been trialled: face-to-face dinner or workplace meetings, dial-in teleconferences and Skype meetings.

The process for Journal Club is: (1) the initiator of the session selects a published article for discussion and declares a meeting date and venue (2) members respond indicating if they are interested in attending (3) attendees are required to read the article prior to attending the meeting (4) the moderator leads discussion during the meeting e.g. with pre-prepared questions or comments which are presented to the group for discussion (5) the group discusses the article.

3. Findings

Since September 2013 more than twenty Journal Club professional development sessions have been held across Australia. These have been organised by both State Branches and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) of the HFESA. Attendance has ranged between 3 and 25 participants per session. The format selected has varied between sessions. For example:

- Face-to-face meetings have been held by both SIGs and State Branches when members are located geographically near each other. In some cases a face-to-face session has been repeated in a number of regional areas, significantly broadening access to continuing professional development for members.
- Teleconferences have been primarily held by SIGs because they have a national membership which makes regular face-to-face meetings difficult due to the distances involved.
- Skype meetings have been held when there are only a small number of attendees who prefer to see each other during the discussion.

This new approach to professional development has been very well received by HFESA members since they are easy to organise with minimal preparation for the session leader and they can be held anywhere using a variety of communication modalities.

4. Discussion

Journal Club professional development sessions have provided a new avenue for members to network and meet their professional development requirements. Research indicates that human factors and ergonomics (HFE) practitioners are not avid readers of peer-reviewed journal articles (Chung & Shorrock, 2011; Chung, Williamson, & Shorrock, 2014). Journal Club provides a mechanism for members to access and read HFE articles which they may not otherwise have read. It also enables group members to hear different perspectives on topical issues.

There have been three main issues which have arisen since the inception of Journal Club.

Not all members have library access to peer-reviewed journals. Therefore, open access journal articles have been used to avoid copyright infringement. To start the program, a number of articles were suggested to members from *Ergonomics Australia*, the online, open access journal of the HFESA. These covered physical, organisational and cognitive ergonomics topics. An unexpected benefit of using *Ergonomics Australia* articles was that it made members aware of the HFESA's publication and assisted them to locate the journal on the HFESA website.

There are conflicting opinions whether the author of the journal article should be present at the meeting. On some occasions it has stifled discussion. On the other hand, attendees can benefit from more in-depth discussion of the topic, and authors can benefit from interacting with practitioners and gaining insight into how their research might be applied to practice.

The location of face-to-face meetings has proved a challenge, particularly in restaurants, as these environments are not always conducive to having a meeting. For example, ambient noise can make it difficult for attendees to hear and participate in the conversation, and wait-staff serving meals and drinks can interrupt the flow of discussion.

Overall, Journal Club has been beneficial for the HFESA as it meets member requests for Society-run professional development events. It has also enabled members to meet their ongoing competency requirements while socialising with colleagues and it has widened and strengthened professional networks around Australia.

References

- Chung, A., & Shorrock, S. 2011. "The research-practice relationship in ergonomics and human factors - Surveying and bridging the gap". *Ergonomics*, 54(5), 413-429.
- Chung, A., Williamson, A., & Shorrock, S. 2014. "What do human factors and ergonomics professionals value in research publications? Re-examining the research-practice gap." *Ergonomics*, 57(4), 490-502.