

Communicating Humanistic Knowledge - Knowing the Knowing?

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In both knowledge communication and practice theory, knowledge theorizing has received increased attention. However, the concept of knowledge needs further exploration. It has been claimed that knowledge in organizational practice is socially and processually created among organization members in communities of practice (CoPs) as a place for knowledge creation and knowledge communication. Following this outline, the study seeks to link the knowledge concepts from organizational knowledge communication and practice theory. As empirical contributions for expansion of this knowledge theorizing have been called for, the current paper conducts a case study to scrutinize if and how organization members with different educational backgrounds communicate knowledge in CoPs. The case is an IT software company employing a humanistic academic and mainly IT professionals. The case organization has real-world relevance, since humanistic graduates currently suffer from high unemployment rates. The study finds that no attempts are made to communicate knowledge from the humanistic education. Rather, the humanistic academic is socialized into a practice through a commitment to learn the existing practice of the HR department, which further seems to be a practice placed in a lower hierarchy than the practice of the IT professionals. Interestingly though, knowledge from the humanistic education is called for by the IT professionals. These findings pave the way to inform both knowledge theorizing and the real-world problem by discussing how organization members engage in fundamentally new knowledge communication and scaffold new knowing. Thus, the study discusses implications related to how organization members come to know their own knowing and the knowings of others.

Keywords: organizational knowledge communication; practice theory; communities of practice; knowing; case study; humanistic academic.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the realm of organizational knowledge communication, the question of the transferability of knowledge has been much debated. For instance, Kastberg (2011) presents a dichotomy of knowledge as either transferable (as suggested by Shannon and Weaver (1949)) or interactional communicative (as suggested by Tomasello (2008)). However, only few attempts (e.g. Greve 2015, Greve 2016) have been made to apply the organizational knowledge communication perspective to real-world or organizational problems. Thus, more real-world studies are needed to inform the theory. This real-world perspective is Kastberg's (2016) Dewey-inspired criteria for formulating a research question when studying organizational knowledge communication. To explore the very knowledge communication perspective in organizational practice, the concept of practice theory is applied (Schatzki 2001, Nicolini 2012). In practice theory, the question of knowledge is much debated, and the conceptualizations of knowledge as knowing and knowledgeability (Wenger 1998, Orlikowski 2002, Nicolini 2011) are needed to expand the understanding of the concept of knowing in practice theory. Linking the two realms is done through the community of practice approach (Wenger 1998).

To do this, a case study is conducted. The case is an IT software company employing mainly IT professionals and one HR assistant with a humanistic bachelor's degree in design and cultural economics. With this as a stance, the activities, i.e. 'doings' and 'sayings' (Schatzki 2005) and 'interactions' (Kastberg 2011) of organization members are studied over six months. With the study's special interest to the case of humanities academic, research attention was especially paid to the role of the humanities academic in organizational practice(s). However, as the study ends, so does the employment of the humanistic academic. Consequently, the current paper examines how and why knowledge between the humanistic academic and other organization members was not communicated to an extent that would have enabled knowledge interaction in organizational practices and thus for the humanistic graduate to continue employment in the company.

The relevance of the case reaches beyond this paper, as the study aims at informing a real-world problem, as called for (Kastberg 2016). The humanities and the social sciences are said to have a crucial role to play in the creative economy moving away from a single focus on hard sciences such as engineering and technology (Peters and Besley 2009). In the same vein, it has been stated that knowledge from the humanities is expected to contribute with knowledge in closer collaboration with the technical field (Johnson 2010). Furthermore, the Danish educational think tank DEA, part of the Danish Society for Education and Business, points to a potential for academics from the humanities and social sciences to contribute to the economic development of small and medium-sized enterprises in Denmark by adding new knowledge and competencies to this kind of business (DEA 2007); however, exactly how is yet to be explored. Further, and in a global perspective, it has been claimed that the world faces a new growing class of people with unstable jobs and chronic uncertainty, the so-called precariat. For instance, up to 40% of Spanish university students still do not have jobs matching their level of qualification one year after graduation (Standing 2011). Thus, more needs to be learned about how academics in general and especially from the humanities and social sciences can be employed in businesses that have not previously employed people with this educational background.

Thus, the aim of the paper is twofold. First, it seeks to develop knowledge theorizing in the realms of organizational knowledge communication and practice theory. Second, it seeks to provide new insights into an issue relevant to both scholars for further research in this socially relevant topic and to practitioners to develop organizational practice.

This is done through the answering of the following three research questions:

- RQ1: How does an academic graduate from the humanities communicate knowledge and scaffold knowing from the humanistic education in communities of practice in the case of an IT software company?
- RQ2: How may these insights inform knowledge theorizing in the realms of organizational knowledge communication and practice theory?
- RQ3: How may these insights inform the real-world problem of high unemployment among university graduates from especially the humanities?

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: KNOWLEDGE THEORIZING IN ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE COMMUNICATION AND PRACTICE THEORY

Theoretical elements from organizational knowledge communication and practice theory are incorporated in the study, and this theoretical framework enables analysis and discussion of knowledge in the realms of organizational knowledge communication and practice theory.

2.1 Knowledge in organizational knowledge communication

Scholars in the realm of organizational knowledge communication have pointed to three different “generations of knowledge theory” (Greve 2016) or “trends in the history of knowledge management” (Kastberg 2014) that in combination can be outlined as follows to shine light on the concept of knowledge from an organizational knowledge communicative perspective.

1. Knowledge as a pre-existing phenomenon as either tacit or explicit that is shared in a process of conversion (Polanyi 1958/1962, Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, Choo 1998, Nonaka and von Krogh 2009).
2. Knowledge as either data, information, knowledge, or wisdom to be communicated in a community of practice approach (Davenport and Prusak 1998).
3. Knowledge as the process of empowering employees to adapt to complex situations (Qvortrup 2004, Kastberg 2014, Greve 2016).

According to Greve (2016), the first generation’s scope is knowledge as a human process, whereas the second generation considers knowledge as a physical object. Following that point, the main difference between the second and third generation is whether the focus is on knowledge or the knower. Nevertheless, in the community of practice approach by Wenger (1998), knowledge is very much about being a knower in a given context. Following this second knowledge generation, the knowledge creation process is initiated by letting organization members do things together.

In continuation of this, a much-debated question regarding the concept of knowledge is what verb relates to the noun “knowledge”, as knowledge can, for example, be shared and conversed (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995), used (Qvortrup 2004), co-created (Greve 2016), or communicated (Davenport and Prusak 1998, Kastberg 2011). Furthermore, “communicated”, in this sense, can be divided into “transfer and exchange of messages” as suggested by Shannon and Weaver (Shannon and Weaver 1949) or as “interaction” which considers communication as a meaning-making endeavor (Tomasello 2008, Kastberg 2011). The first knowledge theory generation, knowledge management, considers knowledge transfer as a process of exchanging information in the way suggested by Shannon and Weaver (Sun 2009, Kastberg 2011), whereas the second and third generation resemble knowledge creation as communicative interaction rather than knowledge transfer. Therefore, knowledge is, being communication in the original sense, “togetherness”. This bears resemblance to Wenger’s (1998) outline of knowledge being created by organization members doing things together. With this as a stance, in the current paper, knowledge communication is knowledge

interaction. However, the concepts of knowledge and interaction are not further unpacked in the realm of organizational knowledge communication. Thus, to both apply and expand the concept of knowledge interaction, a more in-depth and practice-informed view on this interaction in organizational context is used. In doing so, practice theory and the community of practice approach is applied to study the degree of knowledge communication and interaction in the activities that are part of the organizational practice.

2.2 Knowledge in practice theory

Informing the need for knowledge theorizing in organizational knowledge communication is done through the lenses of practice theory and, specifically, knowledge theorizing in practice theory.

As stated above, in knowledge communication, knowledge is human interaction. If this is so, then the study of it must pay attention to human interaction in organizational practice such as doings and sayings rather than, for example, structure and meaning. To practice theory scholars (e.g. Schatzki 2002, Nicolini 2012), the works of Giddens (1976) and Bourdieu (1977) have established practice theory, paving the way to study this very human activity and human action in practice and its connectedness with structure, the so-called structuration. Further, practice theory was introduced as a practice turn in contemporary theory (Schatzki 2001), with the application of which researchers are enabled to study the very practice (i.e. activities as doings and sayings in organizational practice) rather than structures and systems.

2.2.1 Where to know – the sites of knowing

Taking the stance of Practice theory implies a site ontology (Schatzki 2002, Schatzki 2005). Sites are “where things exist and events happen” (Schatzki 2002: 63), and studying the practice from a site ontology paves the way to study the context in which human action takes place and to which it is tied. Following the point from organizational knowledge communication that knowledge is communicated in knowledge interaction, the site ontology enables the present study to explore how and where (not) knowledge interaction takes place, i.e. activities or “events” where knowledge from the humanities education is communicated in interaction with organization members.

The site ontology’s view that things occur in and are constituting parts of context influences knowledge theorizing in practice theory, as practice is said to be the site of knowing (Nicolini 2011). Hence, knowing is knowing in a specific context, and thus, what counts as an object of knowledge and knowing subject depends on the given context (Nicolini 2011). This question, I argue, resembles the questions of what is legitimate knowledge and knowers (Lave and Wenger 1991), and, how to become a knower in a community of practice where meanings and, thus, the character of knowledge is negotiated in a community of practice (Wenger 1998). Consequently, the current study focuses on how the humanistic academic is becoming a knower in an organizational practice and how knowledge from the humanistic education is communicated to become a knower and, thus, to become knowing in practice.

2.2.2 How to know – scaffolding knowing and knowledgeability

Where knowledge exists, and occurs is one point; how it exists and occurs follows from that. In the realm of practice theory, the assumption that knowledge is not a fixed, objective tool cognitively stored and transferable seems widely acknowledged (e.g. Orlikowski 2002, Nicolini 2011, Nicolini 2012). Thus, practice theory scholars distance themselves from the knowledge view in the so-called sender–receiver communication theories such as Shannon and Weaver’s (1949). This resembles the outlining of the communication theories considering knowledge to be a meaning-making interaction, such as Kastberg (2011). Likewise, practice theory scholars consider knowledge both dynamic and social (Wenger 1998,

Orlikowski 2006, Nicolini 2011). Thus, underlining this processual perspective and the interdependent relationship of knowledge and practice, practice theory scholars instead conceptualize knowledge as scaffolding knowing or knowledgeability (Orlikowski 2002, Nicolini 2011).

However promising, exactly how knowing and knowledgeability differ is not agreed upon among practice theory scholars. For instance, Nicolini (2011) points to knowing as a practical accomplishment and knowledgeability as manifested in practice. To Orlikowski (Orlikowski 2002, 2006), the concept of knowing is underlined as emergent, embodied, and embedded. The concept of knowledgeability arises when adding a material dimension to knowing, and knowing in practice is thus scaffolded culturally and materially (Orlikowski 2002, Orlikowski 2006). The current study is more on line with Orlikowski's definition for two reasons. First, "scaffolding culturally and materially" somehow implies interaction, which resembles the knowledge view from communication theory. Second, the outlining of constituting elements in this scaffolding, such as codes, language, norms, culturally; and physical objects, biological structures, spatial contexts, and technological artifacts materially concretize the concept in a way to better apply it to the study of practice. However, this outline is so manifold that it needs focus and adaptation in each study. To combine the insights from both Nicolini and Orlikowski, the current study thus conceptualizes knowledge as "scaffolding knowing": Scaffolding, as knowing is scaffolded both culturally and materially, and knowing, as scaffolding it is processual in practice.

2.2.3 Scaffolding knowing in knowledge communicative interactions in communities of practice

The above outline to some extent resembles the concept of knowledge in the community of practice approach by Wenger (1998), focusing on knowledge as processual, contextual, and social. Linking knowledge theorizing in practice theory and organizational knowledge communication is thus established through the CoP approach by Wenger (1998), as CoP is said to be one knowledge communicative take on knowledge theorizing (Kastberg 2014, Greve 2016).

Defining a CoP is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, not any social configuration is a CoP, and, on the other hand, a too strict definition is not fruitful to the concept (Wenger 1998). However, CoPs "are groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for joint enterprise" (Wenger and Snyder 2006: 259). A CoP consists of joint enterprise (i.e. negotiated enterprise, mutual accountability, interpretations, rhythms, local response), mutual engagement (e.g. engaged diversity, doing things together, relationships, social complexity, community maintenance), and shared repertoire (e.g. stories, styles, artifacts, stories, tools, actions, discourses, historical events, concepts) (Wenger 1998). With this attention to human, social, and material characteristics, the concept of a CoP thus bears a resemblance to Orlikowski's (2002) scaffolding of knowledgeability culturally and materially. One may say that CoP deepens what could be meant by "culturally and materially", as Orlikowski elaborates very little on this question. On the other hand, Wenger's manifold outline of the constituting elements of CoP may limit a focused and strict analysis. However, the constituting elements of CoP add and underline knowing as participatory in a nexus of people and materiality and offer a wide range of perspectives that an analysis can help to limit to what is of special interest in each study.

Further, in their initial works, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that newcomers are socialized into practices through legitimate peripheral participation and learning the existing practice thus considering a newcomer to be an apprentice in a given practice. Wenger (1998) seems to continue this outline of newcomer socialization into CoPs. On the other hand, a CoP as by Wenger (1998) also implies a certain degree of heterogeneity and complexity. Thus, a newcomer being socialized into a CoP might re-form this CoP bringing in new experiences and knowledge for instance. These practice theoretical knowledge conceptualizations enable the current study to examine if and how a newcomer with at significantly different educational background than other organization members is either socialized into CoP(s) by taking over 'sayings' and 'doings', or, if and how attempts are made to communicate knowledge from the humanistic education in CoPs as a way to apply a humanistic education to create new knowledge in an organization.

3 METHODOLOGY: A PRACTICE-BASED CASE STUDY

Despite the growing conceptualization of organizational knowledge communication, there is no overarching method to apply to a study (Kastberg 2016). Thus, various methodologies have been applied by scholars (e.g. Greve 2015, Greve 2016). An attempt to develop a theoretical and methodological framework to study knowledge communication has been made by Kastberg (2016), who calls for a flexible and situational methodology rather than a fixed one. Likewise, Reckwitz (2002) points out that many practice theories lack systematic analytic frameworks.

A case study (Stake 2005, Yin 2014) is conducted for two reasons. First, conducting a case study allows an answering of “how” questions (Yin 2014), as in the current paper. Second, the study of organizational practices and the phenomenon of knowledge, knowing, and knowledgeability are highly complex, and case studies make it possible to grasp complexity (Yin 2014). The current case study is a longitudinal study allowing the researcher to follow the organization over time and do follow-up observations and interviews. Consequently, the data has helped defining the initial theoretical propositions (Yin 2014) and an abductive analysis (Dubios and Gadde 2002) has been the pursued method of analysis. Practice theorizing and the CoP approach form the theoretical propositions for the current case study.

The CoP theorizing is applied methodologically using the constituting elements of a CoP being joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire (Wenger 1998) as analytical scope in order to examine who, basically, are doing things together, with whom, and with what materiality (Orlikowski 2002). In doing so, the process of being socialized into a practice, primarily focusing on the humanistic academic as a newcomer is studied, first. Second, attention is paid to how the newcomer is scaffolding knowing in the practice and, to what extent this might be constituted as a CoP. Third, the analysis points to where CoPs may be integrated through knowledge communication by the humanistic academic.

As the practice theory calls for data other than surveys and interviews (Schatzki 2002), the empirical sources of this study consist of interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009), participatory observation (Spradley 1980, Bøllingtoft 2007, Yin 2014), and various written texts in the form of documents from the organization. The main source is participant observation (Spradley 1980, Bøllingtoft 2007), spending twelve days in the organization attending various meetings in order to understand how the organization members work with one another and the customers to create and communicate knowledge or scaffold knowing. As the point of departure, I spent time with the humanistic academic. I also spent time just sitting near the coffee machine, in the canteen, or in the open-plan office environment to observe the activities of the organization members and to be able to join other activities for observation whenever they might occur (Bøllingtoft 2007). Notes were written down by hand and added to the case report note sampling (Spradley 1980, Yin 2014). Furthermore, to enable an answering of the research question, six semi-structured interviews were conducted in order gain insights on organization members’ ‘sayings’ (Schatzki 2005) about their practice(s) and thus to know more about the role of the humanities academic in scaffolding knowing in organizational practice(s). The interviews were transcribed with the aim of analyzing them using an interpretive approach (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

The interviews are:

- One interview with the humanistic academic
- One interview with the humanistic academic and the HR manager (two months after the first interview with the humanistic academic)
- One interview with the managing partner (CEO)
- One interview with a senior consultant partner (ERP consultant)
- Two interviews with the development architect partner (with six months’ interval)

The basis for looking for data vignettes for interpretive analysis was formed by systematic coding with the codes joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire from Wenger (1998) in an iterative

process (Miles, Huberman et al. 2014). This was done in order to attempt to grasp part of the complexity of the organizational practice(s) by searching, analyzing and elaborating on the CoPs in the case and how the organization members scaffold knowing in these.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Case introduction

The case organization is an IT software company that has a license to sell and implement (through adaptation) a software in terms of an ERP system from a North American corporation to companies in Denmark in competition with other companies. The company employs approximately 40 people, mainly IT professionals that divide into two groups: developers and consultants. The consultants are the ones to service the customers and understand their needs regarding the ERP system, and the developers are to do the technical programming in dialogue with the consultants. Further, the company employs a human resource (HR) and marketing manager, a HR and marketing assistant (the humanistic academic), and two service assistants (“the fairy” and “the elf”), one on each company location.

The overall goal (the “company philosophy”) of the company is to “make all ERP customers happier”, and the company states on their webpage, in documents, and in roll-ups presented in the offices that “it is about the ERP, but mostly about people”. To the case organization thus, implementing and adapting ERP systems seems much a question of being able to understand the human dimension of IT, as a successful implementation and in the end customer relation depend on the interpersonal relation between consultant and customer. Thus, it is important to the case organization to attract and recruit staff with the right both technical and personal qualifications. As competition is hard, one of the key tasks of the HR manager and HR assistant is to recruit the qualified employees and to make sure that they have and maintain the right professional and personal qualifications.

When I first arrive at the organization, the humanistic graduate is working as a human resource (HR) assistant employed as an hourly worker, though working full time most weeks. Before that, she was working as a student assistant in the HR department while finishing her bachelor’s degree. Even before that, she entered the organization as part of an innovation course (elective) during her university studies, in which a lecturer had invited the company to present a challenge for the students to solve as an assignment during the course. In the case, I consider this person to be a newcomer, as understood by Lave and Wenger (1991), even though she has worked there for six months by the time of my arrival. This is done both because, after this time, the humanistic academic has still not obtained permanent employment and because she holds an academic degree from the humanities – a field unique to the organization.

4.2 Being socialized into the human resource practice and obtaining a legitimate position through commitment rather than education

Being a newcomer means being a member of and engaging in a practice and learning to become a part of this (Lave and Wenger 1991). In the current case, the humanistic academic was socialized into a practice with the HR manager, as the HR manager states:

We [the HR assistant and the HR manager] started out with Jane [the HR assistant] sitting next to me and looked at how I worked, and then, after a while she started taking over some of my tasks. [...] Her education was not 100% on HR, so I did not know what she could do; I only knew she was committed to do it. After a while, I got to know more about what she knew, for example she knows a lot about design and thus, about many of our customers, which could help us make them happier, but that has not happened yet. (Interview quote HR manager)

From this quote, several characteristics about the socializing of the humanistic academic into the HR practice and about scaffolding knowing in their practice become evident. First, the aim is for the humanistic academic to be socialized into a HR department and a HR practice that has so far been practiced solely by the HR manager. The process of socializing greatly resembles the socializing perspective by Lave and Wenger (1991), as the HR manager is trying to teach the humanistic academic the existing HR practice in order for the HR assistant to learn the practice and obtain a legitimate peripheral position in the company. Second, and regarding the educational background of the humanistic academic, by stating that the education of the humanistic academic is “not 100% on HR”, it seems evident that this disqualifies the humanistic academic from starting with performing other tasks and responsibilities independently. Thus, the HR practice is dependent on knowing existing practices, and this requires an education within HR to be adapted to the actual practice. However, thirdly, a way to both obtain a legitimate position and become socialized into the HR practice, despite the lack of an HR education, is commitment. Thus, the concept of commitment is crucial to being a legitimate knower and scaffolding knowing in this HR practice if not having the same educational experience. One may even say that commitment is even more legitimating in the HR practice than the right HR education. Fourth, the process of socializing is characterized by scaffolding knowing in the practice by working together physically (i.e. “sitting next to one another”), enabling close collaboration to socialize the humanistic academic into the right doings and sayings of the practice. In doing so, the humanistic academic is by the HR manager considered a newcomer as an apprentice resembling the newcomer socialization suggested by Lave and Wenger (1991). The newcomer is socialized into the HR practice, which the humanistic academic over time will learn assisting the HR manager doing the tasks hitherto done merely by the HR manager. Fifth, after some time, it seems that the HR manager has spotted a potential for the humanistic academic to contribute to the organizational practice with the humanistic academic’s knowledge about the customers in the design business. Thus, along with a process of socializing into the HR practice, a potential for new socialization has been identified. From this last point follows that the HR manager, after the humanistic academic has been socialized into the HR practice over time, has identified a possible new way for the humanistic academic to use her education to scaffold knowing in the ERP practice. This, in turn, points to a lack of initiative from the humanistic academic to communicate knowledge from the educational background and to spot new possible practices or knowings with potential new CoPs evolving.

4.3 Scaffolding knowing in the CoP by personal exchange and filling out the frame

If the humanistic knowledge is not communicated, what doings and sayings are then characteristically enacted in the practice, into which the humanistic graduate is socialized? And, how does the humanistic academic then scaffold knowing, and what constitutes the attempts to engage in the HR practice, and to what extent does the HR practice constitute a CoP?

The humanistic academic is doing a variety of tasks within HR and marketing, outlined in a so-called HR mind map and a marketing mind map. From the HR mind map, it is evident that a crucial activity is to recruit and to do job interviews. A part of that is to plan and conduct job interviews. Attempts to learn the doing of this practice are made when the humanistic graduate observes how the HR manager conducts job interviews. Besides recruitment, doing the HR practice involves planning of social events for the employees, buying them presents on certain occasions, and securing perks such as a massage. In continuation, the practice is enacted by processing employee data related to both personal information, educational information, and data about employees’ children.

From this extract of activities in the HR practice, it seems evident that the practice is to a great extent occupied with both ensuring the proper staff and ensuring their well-being, in the sense of them “not needing anything” in their everyday practice, as well as establishing social bonds not only with employees but also with their families. Thus, the HR practice is very much related to recruitment and ensuring employee satisfaction. This practice is historically developed and is caused by hard competition on recruiting the right IT staff, and thus, in this context, it seems that becoming socialized to maintain this

practice calls for something else or more than the right education.

Further, the practice of the HR assistant is doing a practice in which activities are considered overlapping with marketing and HR as interrelated practices, which is exemplified by doing the task of running for the national competition “great place to work” (GPTW): To the HR practice of the case company, GPTW is both a marketing tool for new potential customers and employees, and it is also an HR tool to ensure proper recruitment, employee satisfaction, and less staff turnover. Consequently, when enacting the practice of GPTW, a crucial part of the HR practice is enacted by the humanities graduate.

Grasping more about the doings and sayings of the HR practice and how knowing is scaffolded is done by focusing on the specific HR practice of completing and submitting the application for the company to enter the GPTW competition. With the current paper’s stance in defining knowledge as scaffolding knowing in communities of practice, the doings and sayings that are part of scaffolding knowing are observed through the lenses of the constituting elements of a CoP; mutual engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprise.

The following is a vignette from my observation notes:

Jane (the HR assistant), Tamara (the HR manager) and Mick (a marketing intern) meet in the meeting room named “the ball”. It is around 9 am, and it seems to be their first working task on that day. In the middle of the room, there is a round table with chairs around it. Jane and Mike have a seat and both put a laptop and a bottle of water on the table. Tamara walks around the room, asks us if we would like some fresh air and opens one of the windows, walks back to a moveable white board and moves it closer to the table where Jane and Mick are sitting. They are looking at her. She utters some cheering comments and questions, asking if they are ready and if they need anything, for instance something to drink. She starts giving a talk about the plan for the day, where she and Jane are to work with the GPTW in order to finish and hand it in by the end of the week.

Jane and Tamara are sitting next to each other at the table working on each of their laptops. Jane reads anonymous answers from a survey among employees as a preparation to fill out the so-called cultural profile of the company handed in to the competition GPTW. Jane chooses some of the answers from the survey and puts them into the cultural profile template categories. As Jane reads, she pays special attention to a very positive employee quote in the survey, and she tells Tamara about the quote and her being convinced about who is the person behind the quote and if she can ask this employee to de-anonymize as Jane expects that to strengthen the positive value of the quote, which she says, makes her delighted. Tamara responds with a “no”, underlining the anonymousness but says that she, however, does understand that Jane asks this question. Besides regular question posing from Jane with Tamara answering, several times this morning they do “small-talk” and talk about their social and personal life both inside and outside of the company.

Their mutual engagement in doing the task of GPTW is especially constituted by them doing it together by working together, sitting next to each other, and talking about the task with Jane asking questions and Tamara answering. Further, the engagement is highly social and personal, and not only related to the HR practice and the actual HR task, as the vignette above shows that many of their sayings are related to their interpersonal well-being. In the above paragraph, commitment to do a task was said to be of importance to the HR practice; from this description of their mutual engagement follows that also being committed to personal exchange is crucial to when doing the task. A full participation in practice depends exactly on the very personal exchanges, as described by Wenger (1998). A limitation to the mutual engagement and thus to consider the practice a CoP is the questionable diversity in them scaffolding knowledge: Wenger (1998) suggests that competencies in a CoP might overlap and that this very diversity and knowing how to complement one another is a resource to a CoP. The HR assistant and HR manager are diverse in having different educational backgrounds: The HR assistant is a humanistic graduate having her first job in the company; the HR manager is female craftsman by education, initially, holding supplementary

HR course diplomas and a long-year experience within HR in both the IT sector and as a self-employed independent consultant. However, these seem less important to scaffolding knowing in the practice of doing the GPTW. Merely, the findings point to, knowing how to socialize and thus how to become mutual engaged interpersonally in the practice is thus found of importance for them when scaffolding knowing.

In the same vein, concerning the shared repertoire as a resource for meaning negotiating in the community (Wenger 1998), their core repertoire is especially the sharing of personal stories and stories about organizational life exchanged while working. Further, the “feel-good ambience” that occurs through their attention to the personal needs for having whatever makes them feel comfortable form part of their practice and may point to them developing a CoP, as the shared repertoire as a concept includes for instance stories and historical events (Wenger, 1998). Also, the doings in the above vignette point to them having the GPTW frame as a tool and, thus, shared repertoire, for doing the HR and marketing task of running for the competition GPTW. In this case thus, their shared repertoire is identified as being mainly personal stories and a tool provided by a competition provider. No shared repertoire from the humanistic education was observed introduced into the practice.

The joint enterprise is conceptually a result of negotiation in a collective process, underlining the mutual engagement (Wenger 1998). However, as stated above, the question is whether their practice is characterized by the “negotiation” of complexity in knowledge and competencies, or rather by the humanistic academic learning how to fit into the HR practice in this specific organization. The indigenous enterprise (Wenger 1998), thus, is evident in the form of the GPTW setting a framework for fulfilling certain criteria, which then influences their HR practice, as this seems to be aimed at the GPTW criteria. Consequently, they are in the practice – as stated by Wenger (1998) – under influence from both the system that employs them and a much broader system both in- and outside the company, which brings them to constitute a HR practice aimed at recruitment and maintenance of the wealth of employees as a practice with back-office status. This seems to downplay complexity regarding prior education, which may limit the development of a practice or a CoP in which new knowledge can be communicated as part of new ways of scaffolding knowing.

4.4 The humanistic part of scaffolding knowing about the ERP

The question is, though, if and how complexity could be increased by communicating humanistic knowledge from the humanistic education and having it part of scaffolding knowing in the organization? In the above paragraph 4.2, the paper found that, after a process of the humanistic academic being socialized into the HR practice, the HR manager came to know more about the possibility for the humanistic knowledge to become part of scaffolding knowing about their customers, as the humanistic academic was found to know about many of the company’s customers in the design industry. In continuation, about the possibility of communicating knowledge from the humanistic education, the humanistic academic states:

Through my way of thinking of design, I see people and know how to talk to them. That is what designers do. [...] I would know how to handle challenges with customers. To me, marketing is to know consumers and people. And, that is difficult to adapt to ERP. (Interview quote humanistic academic)

On the one hand, the humanistic academic outlines how to make the educational background part of scaffolding knowing in the organizational practice of working with customers, which was also stated by the HR manager. On the other hand, no interactions with knowledge communication from the educational background were observed nor were any attempts to do so. In the quote, the humanistic academic points such knowledge communication as difficult due to the knowledge not being adaptable to the ERP, which holds the humanistic knowledge back from being communicated in knowledge interaction. From the point of view of humanistic knowledge holding a knowledge creating potential in combination with the technical field (Johnson 2010), a such knowledge communication may pave the

way to scaffold new knowings or practices combining the humanities education with, for example, ERP practice.

From a management view, scaffolding knowing about the ERP system at a given customer is depicted to also involve a human aspect, which is expressed in the so-called “company philosophy” claiming that: “it is about the ERP, but mostly about people”. Following this perspective into touching upon the practice of an ERP consultant, knowing how to handle such interpersonal challenges with the customers is part of scaffolding knowing about the ERP system, which is evident from an interview with an ERP consultant as a follow-up on a day of observation, having attended a meeting with him working with a customer:

Interviewer: Last week, when I attended the meeting with the customer, the Danish company with a Danish IT Manager and her Chinese representative, you told me you did not like the way they handled their relation. How did you cope with that?

Consultant: I just tried to talk directly to the Chinese guy, when his boss tried to put him down. The important thing was to give him knowledge about the ERP and I tried to do so. He was slow, yes, and his Danish boss is under pressure from all levels in her organization, so I tried to help him to do his job. My colleague did so too and was good at it. In general, I try to be diplomatic. (Interview quote ERP consultant. Follow-up after having observed him on a day working with a customer.)

From the interview quote follows that the practice of adapting an ERP system includes doings and sayings related to interpersonal challenges and, thus, in the current case, it involves knowing how to handle a challenging interpersonal relation among the customer and the customer’s representative. Consequently, when scaffolding knowing about the ERP system with the customer, knowing how to talk to people, in this case “the Chinese guy”, and being “diplomatic” in a way to enable the customers to use the ERP system are important elements. He and most of his IT colleagues hold degrees within IT, and, thus, knowing about the ERP counts as an object of knowledge (Nicolini 2011), whereas knowing how to handle interpersonal issues depends on personal competence such as being diplomatic. However, this competence to handle challenges with the customers is what the humanistic academic utters as an important part of her humanistic education, as stated above.

That this knowing about adapting the ERP system may be scaffolded with more knowing about handling the situations with interpersonal challenges follows from the quote below from another consultant:

my next level of development would be something about human communication. (Interview quote ERP consultant.)

In the ERP practice, scaffolding knowing is so far carried out primarily with knowing the ERP as a professional competence and knowing about customers and communication as a personal competence. Despite the company outline of focusing more on people than the ERP in practice, the above findings point to a missing link between practices and even a hierarchy of practices. A hierarchy, in which the HR practice serve as a provider of people and services to ensure the professional and personal well-being of the IT professionals in order for them to continue the ERP practice, in which knowing the ERP is most important. The study finds, though, that this may point to what has been uttered by the HR manager and HR assistant as a potentially new start for communicating humanistic knowledge when it being part of scaffolding knowing about, in the current case, adaption of an IT software system as for instance an ERP system.

5 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FURTHER RESEARCH POTENTIAL

At this point, the question of transferability of knowledge is raised again. In the practice theory-based knowledge conceptualization of the current paper, knowledge cannot be transferred. Also, knowledge theorizing in organizational knowledge communication moved away from the stance that knowledge

can be transferred, as knowledge is communicated in interaction. Further, if knowledge is considered scaffolding knowing in interactions, then how can knowing and knowledgeability be transferred? Thus, if knowing and scaffolding knowledgeability are manifested in practice, the question would instead be whether and how practices can be transferred. As practices consist mainly of context-dependent doings and sayings, a transfer of a practice seems infeasible, since the one-to-one transfer in the sense of communication transfer, as suggested by Shannon and Weaver (1949), only enables transfer of sayings as context-independent messages. Thus, practices are not transferable, as knowing is scaffolded in practice.

This points to some ontological implications regarding the concept of knowledge in both practice theory and organizational knowledge communication as follows. Regarding practice theory, we are returning to the theoretical question of knowing how and where to know. To Nicolini (2011), knowing about other knowings is important. Based on the current study, one may say that knowing about one's own knowing is equally important. Adding to this, knowing about other knowings may form the basis for how the combination of knowings may result in scaffolding new knowings. Taking Wenger's stance on this, knowing one's own CoP(s) and the CoP(s) of others might form the basis for new CoPs. Scholars (Wenger, McDermott et al. 2002) have pointed to ways of cultivating CoPs, and how organizations can be inspired to be designed in a way for CoPs and new knowledge to be fostered. A study of the organizational design in the current case may reveal new insights regarding the very organizational design and its role for the lack of knowledge communication in and across practices.

Shining light on this very ontological question from a knowledge communicative point of view, the question of how to know how and where to engage in knowledge communicative interactions entails room for further research. Communicating knowledge from the humanistic academic's educational background could not be identified. But, how would one come to identify the opportunity to communicate knowledge as found in the present study if not having done this study? From an ontological perspective, the attention would be paid to the question of how to identify knowledge not yet communicated and with whom to interact to communicate is. Therefore, research attention may instead be directed at the pre-conditions for knowledge communicative interaction rather than the interaction itself, as it seems widely acknowledged that knowledge will be communicated in this interaction as a meaning-making endeavor (Kastberg 2011) or negotiated in a hyper-individual interaction (Greve 2016).

Returning to the perspective that the humanities and the technical sciences hold a knowledge creating potential, the study has pointed to a room for the integration of, or, at least, combination of practices. Or, with the words from knowledge theorizing in the current paper, both the humanities and the technical sciences may become part of scaffolding knowing in the practices of one another when combining elements from the practices of humanities and the technical science. However promising, starting this new endeavor entails certain practical implications, as this complexity might be attempted reduced in organizations. In the same vein, to university graduates, that are facing high unemployment rates, these insights underline the need to know about both one's own knowing and the knowing of others and how this may pave the way to new knowings, new practices, and new sites to communicate knowledge. Again, graduates may face practical implications on this issue. First, it has been questioned whether the humanities have a willingness to talk to this new audience (Janik 2010). Second, the question is whether the educational system is adapted to this reality where it seems graduates are required to not transfer their education but to learn how their education may "fit" into practice(s) in an organizational setup with a mutual questionable knowing of how to make a newcomer part of scaffolding new knowing. Even more so, the study found that elements other than a specific education, e.g. commitment, are part of scaffolding knowing in organizational practice. Other studies need to be carried out to gain more insights on further elements other than the specific education.

6 CONCLUSION

The paper introduced a discussion on the conceptualizing of knowledge in organizational knowledge communication and practice theory, and it aimed to bridge this theory and use it as a basis for a study of

a real-world problem. Empirically, the study found that the humanistic academic did not attempt to communicate knowledge from the education, as well as this was not asked for by the organization. Instead, the humanistic academic was attempted to become socialized into an existing practice by mainly taking the doings and sayings of this very practice. Thus, the study found that knowledge theorizing needs further attention concerning especially the pre-conditions for knowledge communication and scaffolding knowing in CoPs. Scrutinizing these questions, however, entails certain ontological implications which the study has pointed to. Further, considering the empirical dimension of the current study, the answering of these questions challenges the complexity-reducing practice that was found in the study. This complexity reducing practice in knowledge in organizations is a hurdle to the real-world problem of high unemployment rates among humanistic graduates and the real-world potential of scaffolding knowing with the humanities and the technical sciences. However, acknowledging one's own knowings and those of others as a basis for challenging existing knowings through knowledge communication may be a starting point for scaffolding new knowings. This could be a way to humanistic graduates and to organizations in general to explore new knowledge creation. Both scholars and practitioners are encouraged to examine this issue of high relevance to both theory and practice.

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