

AARE VÄRK

Practice-based
exploration of knowledge, knowing
and knowledge management



DISSERTATIONES RERUM OECONOMICARUM
UNIVERSITATIS TARTUENSIS

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School of Economics and Business Administration, University of Tartu, Estonia

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INTRODUCTION

List of author's publications and conference presentations

Original studies

Värk, A. and Reino, A. (2018), "Meaningful solutions for the unemployed or their counsellors? The role of case managers' conceptions of their work", *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, Vol. 46 No. 1, pp. 12–26.

Värk, A. and Kindsiko, E. (2018), "Knowing in Journalistic Practice: Ethnography in a public broadcasting company", *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 298–313.

Värk, A. and Reino, A. (2020), "Practice ecology of knowledge management—connecting the formal, informal and personal", *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 77 No. 1, pp. 163–180.

Conference presentations

Värk, A. Emergent practices of knowledge management in a small industrial design company. Organisational learning, knowledge and capabilities conference; Liverpool, Great Britain; 26–27 April 2018.

Motivation, aim and research tasks of the thesis

One of the fundamental issues in the study of knowledge in organisations is the relationship between individual and collective knowledge. Knowledge is individual in the sense that it involves a cognitive dimension and is embodied in skills, habits and senses, and develops through the experience of individuals. Knowledge is also collective – created, shared and legitimised within groups, embedded in organisational routines and materiality, and made explicit through rules, guides and manuals. These two sides, individual and collective, are mutually constituting. The development of knowledge in individuals depends on interaction with the collective knowledge that is shared or embedded in their socio-material context, and collective knowledge develops through being challenged by the learning experiences of individuals (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Nevertheless, these two never completely overlap because what individuals are willing to absorb and what they are willing to share is always limited (Tywoniak, 2007).

Individual and collective knowledge can be thought of as two different types of knowledge. Or, they can be considered as two dimensions of the same phenomenon. This choice is a profound one and demarcates two very different approaches in the study of knowledge in organisations – one influenced by the resource-based view of the firm (Grant, 1996; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Teece, 1998), the other grounded in practice theory (Cook and Brown, 1999; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Orlikowski, 2002). In the first case, knowledge is seen as a thing. It exists in various distinct forms but can be converted and transferred. This opens up the possibility for strategically managing knowledge to gain competitive advantage. This has been called a taxonomic approach (Tsoukas, 1996) and is the main premise that grounds the field of knowledge management to this day:

‘researchers developing classifications of knowledge and then using these to examine the various strategies, routines, and techniques through which different types of knowledge are created, codified, converted, transferred, and exchanged’ (Orlikowski, 2002, p. 250).

A different way to approach this complexity is to acknowledge that the distinctions within the concepts of knowledge cannot ‘sensibly be conceived as separate from one another’ (Blackler, 1995, p. 1032). Rather, these should be considered as interconnected dimensions of the same phenomenon. For example, when Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), in their famous knowledge spiral model, propose a conversion mechanism for making individuals’ tacit knowledge explicit in an organisation, Polanyi (1969, 1983) maintains that there is a tacit dimension in all knowledge without which human understanding would not be possible. In this second way of thinking, knowledge is multi-faceted, dynamic, relational and emergent as its different dimensions interact to enable competent action in particular circumstances. For example, knowing how to complete a task may link together the personal understanding of context and task, embodied skills, collective expectations about how the task should be accomplished, knowledge embedded

in computer software or other tools, explicit guidance from manuals and advice from selected colleagues. And this needs to be accomplished each time the task is performed. This second understanding is characteristic of the ‘practice theory approach’ to knowledge (Nicolini et al., 2003), underlying the current dissertation.

Closely related to knowledge is the concept of knowledge management (KM) – activities aimed at making better use of knowledge and sustaining a successful accomplishment of work practices. Mirroring the distinction between individual and collective knowledge, there are also different ways of managing knowledge. By far the most researched approach is formal KM. This means making better use of knowledge as an organisational resource to gain competitive advantage, and it is part of formal management processes (Heisig, 2009; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Teece, 1998). However, studies of knowledge processes in small and medium-sized companies have demonstrated that KM does not necessarily have to be formal. Instead, these activities may be initiated by employees themselves informally to support accomplishing their work tasks (Coyte et al., 2012; Hutchinson and Quintas, 2008; Nunes et al., 2006). In addition, managing knowledge does not have to follow exclusively from organisational concerns but may be centred on supporting a person’s career and development more generally (Cheong and Tsui, 2011; Pauleen, 2009; Wright, 2005).

Formal, informal and personal KM clearly share a domain and are bound to intersect. However, research about their co-existence is unfortunately scarce. There have been studies concluding that informal KM can exist without formal KM (Hutchinson and Quintas, 2008), or that informal KM can transform into formal KM (Zieba et al., 2016). Some researchers have called for locating the individual practices of knowledge workers at the centre, while subordinating the formal organisation to ‘support a wide variety of self-directed knowledge work and learning experiences within and beyond the organisational boundaries and across different contexts’ (Chatti, 2012, p. 841). Others have argued for a more balanced co-existence of personal and formal KM by supporting the individual quest for knowledge while aligning formal KM strategies with them (Gorman and Pauleen, 2011). Still, what is missing is a systematic in-depth empirical investigation of how all the different ways of managing knowledge co-exist in practice. This is the research gap addressed by the thesis.

KM does not make sense without the concept of knowledge. And this means that the co-existence and interactions between different kinds of KM are inevitably grounded in the dynamics between individual and collective knowledge. In recognising this connection, it becomes clear that an in-depth exploration of the coexistence of different kinds of KM requires a multidisciplinary approach thematising also individual knowledge and interactions between individual and collective knowledge.

Therefore, the current dissertation aims to **explore the connections between individual and collective knowledge and knowing, and formal, informal and personal knowledge management**. This is accomplished through three research articles positioned in different fields of research, but **grounded in the unifying perspective of practice theory** (see Table 1):

- Study 1: Variety in individuals' understandings that guide their work practices (employee competence).
- Study 2: The relationship between individual and collective knowledge (communities of practice).
- Study 3: Variety in (KM) practices and their relationships to knowledge and knowing in work practices (knowledge management).

This is an important topic to study because the world of professional work is becoming increasingly diverse and individualist. The way people work for their organisations in terms of time, place and working arrangements is becoming more flexible (Spreitzer et al., 2017). In addition, pursuing individual goals and benefits is becoming more important compared to pursuing collective goals and benefits (Santos et al., 2017). In this situation, understanding the part that informal and personal knowledge processes play in an organisation's functioning becomes highly relevant.

The following research tasks have been set for the thesis:

1. Build a conceptual framework for studying the individual and collective dimensions in knowledge, knowing and knowledge management in organisations.
2. Present an overview of practice theory as a social ontology.
3. Present an overview of practice theory's conceptualisation of knowledge and knowing.
4. Present an overview of the specific theories that are used in this dissertation.
5. Design a methodology and explain the ethical principles underlying the thesis.
6. Conduct and present empirical studies that contribute to the aim of the thesis.
7. Discuss and summarise the findings.

Conceptual framework and studies

This thesis is grounded in the theoretical perspective of practice theory. In this line of theorising, social life transpires through a texture of interconnected practices, which are conceived as 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organised around shared practical understanding (Schatzki, 2001, p. 11)'. In the most general sense, practices are socially recognisable ways of achieving particular ends; for example, cooking breakfast, voting in an election, holding a management meeting, etc. Practices are normative in the sense that they involve a collectively developed and contested understanding of the proper organisation of ends and activities – what should be achieved and how (Rouse, 2014). Practices also organise materiality around us in a way that would be conducive to performing the practices. In this way, practices prefigure social action without having an absolute deterministic influence (Schatzki, 2001).

In practice theory's processual ontology, social phenomena are created, sustained and transformed through the 'real-time accomplishments of ordinary

activities' (Nicolini and Monteiro, 2017, p. 110). A real-time accomplishment of these ordinary activities necessitates a real-time accomplishment of knowing how to perform them. While knowledge is something that is possessed, knowing is something that is an inseparable part of action (Cook and Brown, 1999). For practice theory, this is a crucial distinction.

Practice theory is chosen because its conceptual language grounds all the phenomena addressed in this dissertation. It offers a broad and processual view of knowledge and knowing (Gherardi, 2018; Nicolini, 2011; Nicolini et al., 2003; Orlikowski, 2002) that recognises both the individual and collective dynamics (Cook and Brown, 1999; Pyrko et al., 2019; Wenger, 1998, 2003) as well as the emergent and representational dimensions of knowledge (Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015). Practice is an organising principle for knowledge and knowing, but also a basic building block of social life (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2001). Seeing social phenomena as transpiring from interconnected practices allows us to step back from reified labels to the concrete, actual, everyday activities from which they emerge. This processual and relational ontology (Kemmis et al., 2012; Nicolini, 2017) is necessary for studying connections and transformations within KM, as it makes translating formal, informal and personal KM possible from different kinds of phenomena to different textures of essentially similar elements. Practice theory as an approach to explaining social life is outlined in more detail in the first chapter of the thesis.

The main concepts of this thesis, how they relate to the subject and each other, and the focal points of the studies are shown in Figure 1 below.

Knowledge is what is possessed by individuals and collectives (Cook and Brown, 1999) as representations, or embedded in procedures and artefacts. Knowledge enables knowing in practice but because of its static nature, knowledge alone is not enough for the successful accomplishment of work practices. It needs to be used skilfully in the process of knowing.

Knowing in practice is epistemic work that is inseparable from action (Cook and Brown, 1999) and it is necessary for the successful accomplishment of work tasks. Knowing in practice entails linking together knowledge in its various dimensions and locations in a way that enables a competent response to a particular situation at hand. It is the ongoing work of combination, creation and adaption necessary to successfully relate to the ever-changing circumstances around us.

Knowledge management practices are organised activities that aim to contribute to the knowledge and knowing that sustains the successful accomplishment of work practices. Knowledge management practices can be part of an organisation's formal management (Heisig, 2009; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Teece, 1998), or performed by employees informally in organisations (Coyte et al., 2012; Hutchinson and Quintas, 2008; Nunes et al., 2006). They may also be personal – performed by people outside of their role as employees with their own means and resources (Cheong and Tsui, 2010; Pauleen, 2009; Wright, 2005).

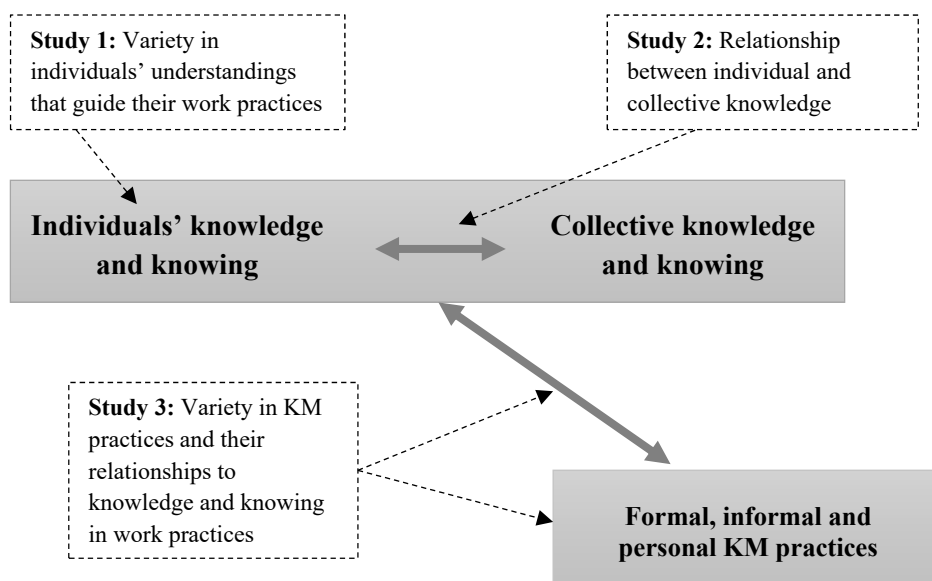


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the thesis

Source: Created by author.

Note: Bold lines and grey boxes indicate concepts and relationships between them. Dashed lines and boxes indicate the focus topics of studies in this thesis.

Table 1 below summarises the three studies by indicating their title, focus of inquiry, specific theories that guide them and methodology.

Table 1. Studies in this thesis

Study	Focus	Theory		Methodology
1. Meaningful solutions for the unemployed or their counsellors? The role of case managers' conceptions of their work	Individuals' understandings guiding work practices	Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998, 2003)	Bridged epistemologies (Cook & Brown, 1999)	Phenomenography
2. Knowing in Journalistic Practice	Interactions between individual and collective knowledge in guiding the work practices			Ethnography
3. Practice ecology of knowledge management – connecting the formal, informal and personal	Co-existence of formal, informal and personal KM practices	Ecology of practices (Kemmis et. al. 2012)		Ethnography

Source: Created by author.

Contribution of individual authors

Study 1 was co-authored with Anne Reino, PhD. The author of the thesis formulated the aim of the study, conducted the interviews and data analysis. The literature review and writing the article was done together with the second author.

Study 2 was co-authored with Eneli Kindsiko, PhD. The author of the thesis formulated the aim of the study, did the literature review, data analysis and most of the writing. Observations and interviews were conducted by both authors in equal share and the methodology section was written together.

Study 3 was co-authored with Anne Reino, PhD. The author of the thesis formulated the aim of the study, composed the literature review, conducted the observations and interviews, data analysis and writing. The second author reviewed and offered suggestions throughout the process.

Summary of the studies and thesis

Summary of Study 1

The first study thematises variation in the ways that employees accomplish their work and asks – are there persistent differences that are explained by reference to personal characteristics? How to understand and develop human competence at work is an important managerial problem. One dominant way of addressing this issue is proposed by the competency modelling approach (Stevens, 2013). Although differences in definitions abound, the core idea of competency modelling is to describe a set of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics or behaviours that are linked to high performance in particular roles or jobs. McClelland, one of the early advocates of this approach, argued that it makes more sense to test for particular behavioural competences that are directly relevant for success in a job rather than for more general traits or intelligence (McClelland, 1973). Although specific to the role, the competency approach has been criticised for its universalist assumption that a common mix of competencies applies, regardless of the particular task, situation or people involved (Bolden and Gosling, 2006). It is possible to achieve similar results through different approaches and successful employees do not necessarily exhibit the same behaviours.

Going even further, Sandberg has argued that understanding competence as a set of attributes is seriously limited because ‘such descriptions demonstrate neither whether the workers use these attributes, nor how do they use them in accomplishing their work’ (Sandberg, 2000, p. 11). Instead, Sandberg suggests, human competence should be understood as an understanding of work. The particular way that a person conceives of work is what defines the essential attributes and how they are used in practice, and necessitates their development (Sandberg, 2000). In other words, human understanding is the crucial link between knowledge and the practical accomplishment of work.

The first article of the thesis carries this line of research further with a phenomenographic study of a sample of case managers. Phenomenographic studies

of competence often compare different understandings in terms of their complexity with the assumption that a more complex understanding equates with a better performance (Kaminsky et al., n.d.; Kjellström et al., 2020; O’Leary and Sandberg, 2017). The current study contributes to this line of research by showing that for case managers, different understandings were not related to different performance, and that variation in the ways that people accomplish their work is grounded in the individuals’ beliefs and values more generally.

As part of the thesis, this study makes an important contribution by showing that competence, rooted in human understanding, is not only instrumental to achieving results but it is also concerned with relating to the world in a personally meaningful way. Therefore, the individual dimension of knowledge is always present in organisations.

Summary of Study 2

The second study focuses on the relationship between individual and collective knowledge. If the knowledge of how to perform work is individual in the sense described above, then it is necessary to have an account of its relationship to the knowledge of groups, departments, or organisations. The most influential explanation for how this occurs, is the SECI knowledge spiral (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). According to this line of theorising, individuals in organisations possess tacit, unarticulated knowledge that could be highly valuable for the organisation. For this to become an organisational resource, tacit knowledge needs to be converted into an explicit form, communicated within the organisation and internalised by other people who would benefit from it. This involves four processes: socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation. This process then repeats in a spiral-like manner. The problem with the SECI model lies in the assumed possibility of conversion from tacit knowledge to explicit and back. This idea has been criticised by scholars who have argued that explicit knowledge is comprehensible only when there is underlying tacit knowledge, resulting from a practical experience of the world (Cook and Brown, 1999; Gourlay, 2006; Tsoukas, 2003). As expressed by Polanyi:

‘While tacit knowledge can be possessed by itself, explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied. Hence, all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge. A wholly explicit knowledge is unthinkable.’ (Polanyi, 1969, p. 144)

The second study of the paper approaches the question of the relationship between individual and collective knowledge from an alternative theoretical perspective that places a shared domain of action at the centre – communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Pyrko et al., 2019; Wenger, 1998). In the SECI model, it is assumed that knowledge is possessed by individuals and remains tacit until converted and communicated explicitly in an organisation through deliberately managed processes. In the communities of practice approach, knowledge is seen

already as a collective accomplishment of people engaged in a shared or similar activity. Although people exercise judgement in performing their work often individually and through this acquire tacit knowledge, they also draw on ‘collective understandings and standards of appropriateness’ developed in the organisation (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001, p. 979). In this sense, collective knowledge has a normative dimension that enables but also constrains individual agency.

The second study contributes to a field of research interested in ways that communities of practice hold together in different types of settings (Amin and Roberts, 2008; Beane, 2019; Kellogg et al., 2021; Pyrko et al., 2017). Through an ethnographic study in a media organisation, the second article demonstrates that while there exists a shared understanding of the way journalistic work should be accomplished, and every member can participate in shaping this understanding, it is mostly unarticulated and there remains considerable freedom for how to make use of it in their individual work. Still, employees need to manage the tension between the normative expectations set by collective knowledge and their own meaningful action.

As part of the thesis, this study shows that the individual and collective dimensions of knowledge are in close interaction, but are intentionally seen as separate by employees.

Summary of Study 3

While the first two studies focus on individual and collective knowledge and knowing, the third study focuses on practices that take knowledge and knowing as its object – knowledge management. More precisely, the study thematises the co-existence of formal, informal and personal knowledge management practices.

As a field of research and practice, organisational knowledge management is founded on the premise that organisations, by paying attention to managing knowledge as a critical resource, gain competitive advantage over those that do not (Heisig, 2009; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Swan and Scarbrough, 2001; Teece, 1998). In this line of research, knowledge management is understood as a part of the formal organisation with its specialised policies, plans, initiatives, roles and budgets. However, what is neglected by the main thrust of this literature is that knowledge is not being managed exclusively through the formal initiatives of organisations. There is more to knowledge management. Practices aimed at improving knowledge and knowing in organisations may also be informal – invented and performed by employees themselves without any formality (Coyte et al., 2012; Hutchinson and Quintas, 2008; Nunes et al., 2006). Furthermore, knowledge management practices may be personal in the sense that this is something people do on their own time with their own means and resources to aid their professional development more generally (Cheong and Tsui, 2010; Pauleen, 2009; Wright, 2005). Personal KM practices are not limited to the concerns of any particular organisation.

The third paper aims to explore these different kinds of KM practices and asks – what kind of coexistence do they have? Is this harmonic or conflictual, complementary or unconnected? The main finding from the ethnographic study in a small engineering and design company is that formal, informal and personal KM practices are all relevant and interconnected in supporting everyday work in the organisation. However, while these practices can be mutually beneficial, they may also compete with each other when performing similar functions and employees may prefer personal practices over organisational ones. Overall, this suggests a shift from understanding KM as an organisational approach to an ecology, shaped by multiple actors and concerns and extending over formal/informal as well as organisational/personal divides.

As part of the thesis, this study shows that people in organisations engage in a particular mix of formal, informal and personal KM practices and this is influenced by the degree to which they see their individual knowledge as distinct from collective knowledge.

Summary of the thesis as a whole

This thesis has focused on the interaction between individual and collective dimensions of knowledge and knowing in organisations and studied its manifestation across several fields in organisational research – employee competence, communities of practice, and knowledge management – while being grounded in a unifying theoretical perspective of practice theory. The contribution of this thesis as a whole is twofold. First, the thesis carries forward the tradition of thinking about knowledge as emerging from practical engagement with the world. In-depth qualitative research conducted within the theoretical framework of practice theory strengthens the empirical foundation of the field and advances practice-theoretical conceptualisations of phenomena like employee competence and knowledge management.

Second, the current thesis connects the notions of employee competence, communities of practice and knowledge management and demonstrates how the interaction between individual and collective dimensions is a relevant, viable and essential part in each of these. Starting with employee competence at work, it involves a personal dimension in the sense that competence is not only about getting the work done, but getting the work done in a way that sustains a personally meaningful relationship between the individual and the world. What is to be achieved and how is at least to some extent a matter of interpretation and choice on the part of individuals, connected to their sense of self that takes shape through all their social interactions.

Knowledge that individuals possess may overlap to varying degrees with collective knowledge in their communities of practice, but this does not mean that the individual dimension itself is dissolved. Individuals also benefit from the collective knowledge embedded in their socio-material context while managing

the tension that arises when they choose to diverge from the normative expectations that follow from it. Moreover, the development of collective knowledge itself depends on there being individual counterpoints against which views held either individually or collectively become visible, challenged and their synthesis becomes possible.

Founded on this duality of individual and collective knowledge, are parallel textures of knowledge management practices. These are organised by the individual or collective dimension of knowledge and knowing. Knowledge may be managed within organisations collectively, either through formal or informal practices. But people also have knowledge management practices that they consider their own and that are separate from organisational practices. Through sustaining the individual or collective dimension of knowledge and knowing, both enable the competent performance of work tasks within organisations. However, their mutual relationships are not necessarily harmonious or complementary, but may involve conflict and competition.

Therefore, the value of this thesis lies in arguing that the field of KM research sees only the formal third of the knowledge processes relevant for the functioning of organisations and it therefore also highlights informal and personal KM practices. This thesis has explained how informal and personal KM are rooted in the individual dimension of knowledge and cannot be ignored, as they are vital for knowledge processes in organisations. This thesis has also offered a practice-ecological perspective for analysing all forms of KM – their emergence, coexistence, interactions, conflicts and transformations – in a single framework.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organised as follows. Part one offers an overview of practice theory as the theoretical foundation of the thesis, methodology and data. It begins with practice theory being situated among other social ontologies and its core ideas explained as a general approach. Then, the unique understanding of knowledge within practice theory is explained and contrasted against classical formulations. After explaining the central ideas that different approaches in the practice theory ‘family’ share, specific theories underlying the three studies are reviewed. Subsequently, an overview of the methodology is presented, including the organisations studied, methods used and data gathered. In part two, the main findings of the empirical studies are presented. Part three provides a summary, discussion and synthesis of the findings.

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1. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Foundations of practice theory

What does the social world consist of? What should the basic unit of analysis be to explain social phenomena? Why is the social world around us arranged in particular ways? The field of social ontology has proposed a variety of different answers to these questions. Some of these accounts of the social world prioritise pre-social individuals, who, through their mentality, behaviour and mutual connections constitute all social phenomena. Well-known examples in this line of thinking are rational choice theory (Coleman and Fararo, 1992; Elster, 1986) and methodological individualism (Udehn, 2002; Weber, 1977). Others place social ‘wholes’ before individuals and postulate invisible structural forces or a hidden system-ness that is enacted through individuals (Parsons, 1951). Perhaps more fundamentally, social ontologies differ in terms of the significance ascribed to processes versus entities (Langley et al., 2013; Van De Ven and Poole, 2005). According to the entitative view, ‘reality is essentially discrete, substantial and enduring (Chia, 1999, p. 215)’. Process theories on the other hand maintain that everything in the world is always in a state of becoming, and entities, as we ‘identify’ them, are just temporary manifestations of ongoing processes (Bakken and Hernes, 2006; Whitehead, 1929).

Practice theory contributes to our understanding of the nature of the social world by offering a processual ontology distinctive for its basic unit of analysis – practices. In this line of theorising, social life transpires through a texture of interconnected practices, which are conceived as ‘embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding (Schatzki, 2001, p. 11)’. In placing practice theories within social theory in general, Reckwitz explains there are two classical explanations for social action and order:

‘The model of the homo economicus explains action by having recourse to individual purposes, intentions and interests; social order is then a product of the combination of single interests. The model of the homo sociologicus explains action by pointing to collective norms and values, i.e. to rules which express a social ‘ought’; social order is then guaranteed by a normative consensus.’ (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 245)

Between these two opposing lines of reasoning are cultural theories that explain social action with recourse to ‘symbolic structures of knowledge which enable and constrain the agents to interpret the world according to certain forms, and to behave in corresponding ways’ (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 245–246). This collectively shared knowledge structure informs agents on ‘which desires are regarded as desirable and which norms are considered to be legitimate’ (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 246). Practice theories, as particular kinds of cultural theories, situate this knowledge structure within practices as socially recognisable ways of achieving particular ends that define the space of mutually intelligible action.

Therefore, instead of assuming either psychological or metaphysical determination, this approach maintains that knowledge and social phenomena are created, sustained and transformed through the ‘real-time accomplishments of ordinary activities’ (Nicolini and Monteiro, 2017, p. 110). In organization studies, practice theory has significantly contributed to the ‘process turn’ where the focus has shifted from ‘organisations as already-constituted entities with predefined properties waiting to be discovered (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017, p. 2)’ to organising as an emergent and open-ended social process.

There is no one single unified practice theory. Instead, the label refers to a family of approaches that share some essential features. Notable practice theorists include Anthony Giddens (Giddens, 1984), Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977), Harold Garfinkel (Garfinkel, 1967), Theodore Schatzki (Schatzki, 2002), Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Lave and Wenger, 1991), Andreas Reckwitz (Reckwitz, 2002) and Yrjö Engeström (Engeström, 1987). The shared features among practice theories are explained in the following paragraphs.

Practices consist of smaller units of activities that are organised towards particular ends. For example, the practice of teaching a class involves speaking, asking questions, gesturing, listening, showing materials on the screen, writing on the blackboard, disciplining students and so forth, with the end of developing student familiarity with particular subjects and their ability to reason.

Being part of a practice’s organization gives particular meaning to the actions that it consists of. For example, the gesture of raising one’s hand within the practice of teaching a class carries a meaning of ‘indicating a desire to ask a question or speak’. In a different practice, like voting in a meeting, the same gesture means expressing one’s choice on a matter. And, raising one’s hand in a town square is unintelligible because people passing by do not participate in a shared practice where this gesture would be meaningful. As such, shared understandings of practices create mutual intelligibility between people and enable making sense of each other’s actions (Rouse, 2007).

Practices form various kinds of connections with other practices. For example, practices of research and publishing create books and articles that become resources for the practice of teaching. A university’s practice of student enrolment defines who will be in the classrooms. The practice of scheduling classes by faculty administrators ascribes particular times for teaching practices to occur and the practice of establishing university teaching guidelines has a governing influence on the way classes are taught. In addition to there being co-dependent or governing relationships, practices may be connected simply by sharing time and place. For example, participating in social media or engaging in online group-chats with fellow students during a class are practices that compete and interfere with the practice of teaching. The relationships between practices are not necessarily stable, harmonious and functional. They may involve interference, tension, competition over resources or direct conflict. Because of this, practices and their connections are emergent and dynamic phenomena.

Many practice theorists espouse a flat, relational ontology (Gherardi, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2012; Schatzki, 2002), advancing the idea that ‘large social phenomena emerge from the interconnection of social and material practices’ (Nicolini, 2017, p. 103). From this perspective, teams, departments, universities or higher education, are constituted in a similar way – they emerge from the constellation of interconnected practices that support and constrain one-another. There is no ontological difference between a small organization and a multinational corporation. What matters is how many connected practices there are. So, the practices that themselves consist of smaller activities, form bundles, larger constellations and in the broadest sense, are part of the total nexus of connected practices.

Practices necessarily involve materiality. They are performed within a place, usually with some kinds of artefacts and tools. For example, the practice of teaching a class necessitates the existence and layout of rooms, tables and chairs, computers, and so on, that enable, but also constrain the performance of a practice. The relationship is two-way. Material arrangements are set up by people, having in mind particular practices these should cohere with. However, once that is done, the material arrangements have an enabling/constraining influence on how the practice can be performed. For example, a typical classroom set-up with desks facing the blackboard is conducive to listening, writing down notes and one-on-one interactions with the lecturer, but not for having discussions involving all the participants. The latter would occur better in a circular layout.

Practices are not simply whatever people do. They are collectively recognisable ways of doing and achieving particular ends. Practices are normative in the sense that they involve a collectively developed and contested understanding of the proper organisation of ends and activities – what should be achieved and how. For example, conducting a class as a silent meditation on the subject would probably not be considered a ‘good practice’ in most universities by either students or faculty. Practices organise people’s social activities, but ‘they never possess the *sui generis* existence and near omnipotence sometimes attributed to structural and wholist phenomena’ (Schatzki, 2001, p. 14). As such, practices can be seen as ‘temporally extended patterns of performance (Rouse, 2014, p. 31)’. The past patterns establish normativity that has a bearing on the present and future, but they are never beyond intervention and change by individuals. Some practices have lost their ground considerably, for example, verbal face-to-face exams. Yet others, like online teaching, have become increasingly popular. Some practices, however, may be strongly institutionalised and extremely difficult to change.

The normativity of practices does not diminish their performative nature – practices are instantiated in the occurrences when they are performed. There is always a need to adapt to the particular circumstances when and where the practice is performed and the room for individual creativity, self-expression and resistance to old ways of practising. Practices do not deny individual agency. They are created and re-created by people, and they may break down or expire completely when people are no longer willing to perform them. Also, individuals can invent new practices and work towards these becoming collectively shared.

However, most of the time, people follow or carry already existing and familiar practices because much like the natural landscape makes certain paths easier to follow, the total nexus of practices defines the space for mutually intelligible action. So, what practices do is *prefigure* individual agency by making some courses of action more feasible and easier to follow than others (Schatzki, 2002). Whenever people wish to step out or steer towards the periphery of this space of intelligibility, there are difficulties to be dealt with, both material and social. For example, a lecturer who wants to use cushions instead of standard classroom furniture encounters not only the challenge of finding them, but also needs to figure out what to do with the existing furniture that gets in the way. Similarly, students willing to participate in a class may change their mind and leave when the lecturer tries to stretch a two-hour class to four hours. This might also create conflict with other practices that were supposed to follow the lecture, say, a lunch break.

To summarise, practice theory offers a unique perspective for studying the social world that is neither individualist nor wholist. This approach overcomes the problematic dualism between agency and structure, seeing these as mutually constituted – practices prefigure the human agency that creates and sustains them. In this line of thinking, social influence bearing on human activity does not have an independent existence as abstract structures or hidden systems. Practices as normative patterns of organised activity emerge through human agency. However, this is not the agency of pre-social atomistic individuals, but of people who always already find themselves enmeshed within a nexus of practices that have shaped their identity, beliefs and knowledge and prefigure their courses of action.

Knowledge in practice theory

In addition to defining the space of mutual intelligibility, practices also serve as an organising principle for knowledge. The conceptualisation of knowledge in practice theory, however, is considerably different from the classical formulation of ‘justified true belief’ that underlies much of the theorising in organisational knowledge and knowledge management (e.g. Nonaka, 1994). Philosophical discussions around the classical formulation of knowledge, dating back to Plato, have focused largely on the question of under what conditions, if at all, is knowledge humanly possible. Understanding knowledge as absolute certainty, however, detaches it from the conduct of everyday life. For example, according to Locke, the scope of our knowledge is very narrow and in everyday life we do not rely on certainty, but probability – a reasonable expectation that a claim is likely true (Lowe, 2011, p. 694). Moreover, sceptics argue that absolute certainty is beyond human capacity altogether, yet somehow this does not leave people paralysed in constant doubt. So, there is a difference between possessing knowledge as absolute certainty and knowing how to proceed in one’s life. Practice theory thematises the latter.

Instead of understanding knowledge as objective, universal, propositional truth, in practice theory, knowledge becomes knowing how to perform practices. Coherent with pragmatism, this approach moves away from emphasizing truthfulness and certainty, towards appreciating the practical value and outcomes of knowledge in use, or knowing. For pragmatists, to understand something is to understand its practical consequences (Misak, 2011). Human knowledge is treated as fallibilist in the sense that ‘none of our beliefs provide us with a certain foundation for knowledge’ (Misak, 2011, p. 861). Then again, certainty is not necessary for coping in everyday life. For example, Dewey, one of the central figures in pragmatism, has argued that aiming for certainty in practical problem-solving is fruitless and not what people do. Instead, people aim for security – ‘a reliable solution to the problem at hand’ (Misak, 2011, p. 868). This mid-way position between scepticism and dogmatism (Dougherty, 2011) maintains that knowledge arises out of our daily practices and is always open to revision and improvement.

Practice theory’s view of knowledge as practical mastery involves three crucial points of distinction compared to the classical formulation of knowledge. First, knowledge is dynamic. The concept of ‘knowledge’ needs to be complemented or in some accounts even replaced by the concept of ‘knowing’ (Nicolini, 2011). As using a verb instead of a noun suggests, ‘knowing’ is not something that we have, but something that we do. The practice approach is inherently processual – social phenomena are being created and sustained through the open-ended flow of organised activities. But a processual understanding of the social world cannot get by with an entitative view of knowledge as something fixed and stable. Practices are performative. They need to be accomplished at different times, places and circumstances. When conceptualising knowledge as a response to the challenges in performing practices in always shifting circumstances, it needs to be understood as a dynamic phenomenon as well. Therefore, knowing how to proceed when performing a practice is an ongoing accomplishment, inseparable from the actual performance of a practice. It cannot be fully known in advance. Even a highly skilled expert might find him/herself within a practice not ‘knowing’ what to do. For example, a violinist trying to come up with the ‘right’ interpretation of a musical composition when practising for a concert, or a journalist aiming to find the most suitable guest for the next talk-show, or a professor now knowing how to explain a difficult concept to undergraduate students in a way that they can comprehend.

Second, knowledge is collective. In classical formulation, for a proposition to count as knowledge, it needs to be true. However, as argued by pragmatists, the conduct of our everyday life is not guided by absolute certainty, but our belief in reliable solutions. We know how to treat influenza or reduce unemployment, but we might also find better ways to do these things in the future. Knowledge, in this fallibilist sense, is a collectively developed best understanding of how to perform different practices. It is acquired through participation, continually reproduced and negotiated, always dynamic and provisional (Nicolini et al., 2003). What counts as knowledge, as opposed to mere belief, is what the participants of a

practice come to agree upon. It is in this sense that practices serve as an organising principle for human knowledge. Consider, for example, the practice of assisting childbirth. A few decades ago, it was a rule that fathers were not allowed into the maternity hospital, and mothers were separated from their new-borns, except for breastfeeding. Nowadays, this would be unthinkable even though the former practice was also shaped and sustained by the collective agreement of experts in the field.

Third, practical engagement in the world takes primacy over articulated knowledge. Much of modern epistemology is founded on the idea of representationalism – that we know the world only through the mental representations or beliefs that we have in the mind (Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015). This dominant view is countered by what Dreyfus and Taylor term *contact theories*. Their central claim is that our explicit depictions of reality are ‘inseparable from our activity as the kind of embodied, social, and cultural beings we are’ (Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015, p. 18).

‘[T]his original contact provides the sense-making context for all their knowledge constructions, which, however much they are based on mediating depictions, rely for their meaning on this primordial and indissoluble involvement in the surrounding reality (Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015, p. 18–19)’.

In other words, knowledge as an entity that people or organisations may possess emerges from knowing as a process. Memories and understandings, texts and manuals – all kinds of representations rely on practical engagement with the world for their meaning, creation and comprehension. Within the field of organisation studies, this insight is known especially through the work of Michael Polanyi and his distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge. According to Polanyi, all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit and the only source of tacit knowledge is practical experience (Polanyi, 1969). To an extent, our minds can transcribe the flow of our everyday life into more or less stable entitative knowledge, but never completely.

To conclude, practice theory offers a view of knowledge as a collectively negotiated and dynamic knowing how to perform practices. It is embodied in actors, embedded in materiality (tools and text) involved in the practice and always in the re-making. It emphasises outcomes rather than absolute certainty and is only partially explicit in talk or text.

Theories used in the current dissertation

Practice theories do not form a coherent theoretical system. Rather, the different accounts within this line of theorising can be used to guide empirical research into various topics. So far, practice theory has been discussed as a general approach to social ontology and knowledge. Next, specific theories from the ‘practice family’ that ground this dissertation are reviewed. These were also

mentioned in Table 1. The concept of communities of practice outlined by Lave and Wenger (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2003) explain the parallel existence and dynamics between individual and collective knowledge. Their work grounds the first study focusing on the differences in individuals' understandings of their work, and the second study, focusing on the interactions between individual and collective knowledge. The concept of an ecology of practices posited by Kemmis et al. underlies the third study focusing on the co-existence of formal, informal and personal KM practices (Kemmis et al., 2012). Cook and Brown's bridged account of epistemologies serves as an understanding of knowledge/knowing throughout this dissertation (Cook and Brown, 1999).

Communities of practice

The communities of practice (CoP) approach offers an account of the social nature of knowledge and practices. It explains how individuals and groups interact in defining knowledge in a given social and historical context. The central element within this approach is a particular kind of social group – a community of practice. It was originally defined by Lave and Wenger as:

‘a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretative support necessary for making sense of its heritage (1991, 98)’.

In other words, a CoP is a group of people joined together by a shared practice. This community negotiates among its members the right way of practising in a given context and what it takes to be considered a competent member of the group by peers. This approach emphasizes that knowledge requires participation in collective sense-making and learning occurs through socialisation within a CoP.

In Wenger's later work, three defining features that create coherence within a CoP were outlined – joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998):

- Joint enterprise means that there is a collectively negotiated agreement regarding what their community is about, and participants hold each other accountable to this understanding.
- Mutual engagement means that participants in the CoP have regular practice-related interactions among themselves.
- Shared repertoire means a pool of various resources that participants have developed over time to perform their practices more effectively. For example, ‘language, routines, sensibilities, artefacts, tools, stories, styles and so forth’ (Wenger, 2003, p. 80).

An important dynamic for learning to occur within a CoP is the interplay between competence and experience. As Wenger explains, competence is what CoPs establish over time. It reflects a shared understanding of what the community is about, how to display trustworthiness and use the repertoire or resources that have been built up over the history of the community in performing the practice. In other words, this is the shared knowledge of the group. Participants' experience in performing the practice, however, is personal and is likely to differ at least in some part from the shared knowledge and established standards of competence within the group. The competence of a CoP and the individuals' experiences can be in various kinds of relationships. For example, when new members join the community, established competence helps them learn the practice. But, when a person becomes a skilled practitioner, sharing individual experience helps develop the community's competence. For Wenger, learning requires a creative tension between shared competence and personal experience. This interplay brings about both a personal transformation as well as the evolution of social structures (Wenger 2003). Of course, there could be too much or too little tension between the community's competence and the individuals' experience, meaning that either there is not enough difference to induce learning or too much for people to understand each other.

Knowledge and knowing

In their influential article, Cook and Brown (1999) argue that research concerning knowledge in organisations is mostly grounded in what they term the 'epistemology of possession'. This means treating knowledge as something that resides in people's heads. In this cartesian view, knowledge is seen as explicit (can be formulated in statements) and individual. However, this narrow traditional epistemology limits research on 'epistemologically-relevant organisational themes' (Cook and Brown, 1999, p. 382) as it cannot account for the different kinds of epistemic work being done in organisational activities. In short, what Cook and Brown argue for is an equal recognition of different forms of knowledge and their mutually beneficial relationships.

There are three parts to their argument. First, knowledge possessed is not only individual and explicit. Knowledge can be held either individually or collectively and it can be tacit as well as explicit. While explicit knowledge is defined by what can be formulated as statements, tacit knowledge is know-how acquired through practical experience that cannot be adequately articulated by verbal means. A well-known example from Polanyi (1969, p. 141–142) to explain the concept is riding a bicycle – knowing how to keep balance does not mean that a person is able to provide an explanation of how to keep balance. However, these different forms of knowledge – tacit and explicit – can help in acquiring one another. Possessing a tacit skill and focusing on particular actions may help create an explicit description of what is involved. In addition, following an explicit description can guide one's activities to acquire tacit knowledge through practical

experience. But what happens is not a conversion, as suggested by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), but creation of one with the help of the other where practical engagement in an activity is a key mediator. Acquiring tacit knowledge simply by reading, without getting on a bicycle is not possible.

Cook and Brown (Cook and Brown, 1999) also suggest that collective knowledge (both tacit and explicit) represents a unique form that cannot be reduced as individual knowledge. The criteria for qualifying as collective knowledge is that the body of knowledge is held in common by the group. That is, explicit group knowledge is articulated statements that people in the group possess in a similar way, and tacit group knowledge is unarticulated understandings and know-how resulting from similar ways of engaging with the world. The significance of collective knowledge that distinguishes it from individual knowledge, is the normative dimension involved. Collective knowledge defines the 'correct' conduct of practices, against which individual performances are evaluated. This means that collective knowledge has consequences beyond that of individual knowledge.

Second, in addition to elaborating on the distinct forms of knowledge that are part of an 'epistemology of possession', Cook and Brown argue this to be complemented by an 'epistemology of practice'. In addition to knowledge that is possessed and used *in action*, there needs to be an account of knowing *as part of* action. What they claim is that a specific kind of epistemic work is an 'inextricable facet of human action itself (Cook and Brown, 1999, p. 386)'. They explain the conceptual gap for 'knowing' using the relationship between having tools and successfully completing a task. Having the tools is not enough. The right tools need to be used in a skilful way at the right time to achieve the desired results. As they put it: 'our fundamental understanding of the relationship between a body of knowledge and activities of a practice must change: we must see knowledge as *a tool at the service of knowing* not as something that, once possessed, is all that is needed to enable action or practice (Cook and Brown, 1999, p. 387–388)'.

Third, different kinds of knowledge/knowing are complementary, mutually enabling and often in a generative relationship. 'Each of the forms of knowledge is brought into play by knowing when knowledge is used as a tool in interaction with the world. Knowledge, meanwhile, gives shape and discipline to knowing' (Cook and Brown, 1999, p. 393). Acquiring new bits of knowledge may enable a different way of knowing and accomplishing a practice. But also, experimenting and trying to find a solution to a problem in practice may result in new knowledge that can be used to guide further practice. This interplay is the source of both new knowledge and knowing.

When synthesised with Wenger's account of communities of practice, Figure 2 depicts two essential dynamics involved in knowledge/knowing. First, between knowing as part of practice, and knowledge possessed that enables, but also is re(created) through practice. Second, between knowledge possessed by individuals that contributes to the shared knowledge of a community of practice, but also benefits from its resources and is subject to its normative influence.

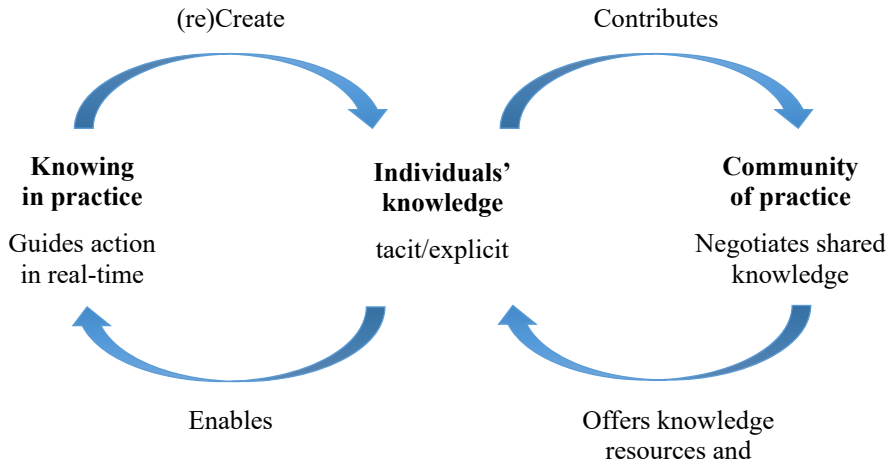


Figure 2. Relationships between individuals' knowledge, knowing and community of practice

Note. Practices may also be performed collectively. In this case, the community participates directly in knowing.

Source: Compiled by the author based on Cook & Brown (1999), Lave & Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998).

Ecology of practices

Practices are sustained by negotiations between individuals and groups about how to perform them (Wenger, 2003) and the dynamics between representational knowledge and knowing in action (Cook and Brown, 1999). Another crucial dimension that shapes the way practices are performed, is their connectivity with other practices. This topic is thematised by Kemmis, Edwards-Groves, Wilkinson and Hardy (2012).

According to them, practices do not exist in isolation but they are in various kinds of relationships:

‘Practices coexist and are connected with one another in *complexes* of practices in which each adapts and evolves in relation to the others [...] To understand practices in this way is to suggest the possibility that practices might be understood as *living things* connected to one another in ‘*ecologies of practices*’ (Kemmis et al., 2012, p. 36)’ (italics in original).

The ecological metaphor Kemmis et al. use leads to several principles, most important of which for the current dissertation are the following:

- Practices will derive their essential properties and their existence from their relationships with other practices.
- Different practices (understood as different species of practice) will be dependent on one another in ecologies of practices (understood as ecosystems).

- An ecology of practices will include many different practices with overlapping ecological functions that can partially replace one another. Particular sites will embrace different practices that coexist and overlap with one another (not always without contradiction or resistance).
- Practices and ecologies of practices will be seen to develop through stages.
- Ecologies of practices will regulate themselves through processes of self-organisation and (up to some breaking point) will maintain their continuity in relation to internal and outside pressures. (Kemmis et al., 2012, p. 40–45)

The work of Kemmis et al. sensitises empirical research to the issues regarding how practices hang together, form constellations, develop through mutual influences, cohere or conflict and give meaning and significance to each other.

Methodology

Designing methodology in qualitative research is different in significant ways compared to quantitative research. In the latter, the number of specific analysis techniques and statistical tests is considerably greater. Also, each statistical method comes with a clear set of criteria that determine when it can be used. When the data does not meet the requirements of the tests, the results are simply false. In qualitative analysis, the relationship between data and correct methods for analysing it is not so direct. It is possible to apply different analysis methods on a same dataset. For example, it is possible to study interview transcripts about people's work life experiences through critical discourse analysis (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 2010; Fairclough, 2005; Ziskin, 2019) to focus on the use of language and details of the conversation. It is possible to use narrative analysis techniques (Björninen et al., 2020; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008; Riessman, 2008) to study work life as situated in the wider context of a person's life trajectory. The same data could also be studied through thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun and Clarke, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017) to uncover themes and relationships between them in the organisation. These different approaches highlight different layers from the data and none of them can be considered false. Therefore, designing methodology in a qualitative research is most of all about achieving a good fit between the choices made in the study process. In this section, these choices are explained.

The first reference point for methodological choices in this thesis is the practice-theoretical perspective taken. Because practices are performed in real-time, the most suitable methods for their study generally involve close-up observations or participation (Nicolini, 2009). However, according to O'Leary and Sandberg (2016) and Rocha-Pinto et al. (2019), it is also possible to study practices through practical understandings of individuals, that guide their performances. For this, interview-based methods such as phenomenography can be used. Retrospective

interviews can shed light on the practices to the extent that these are institutionalised or stabilised through the personal styles and preferences of the participants or connections with other practices. Therefore, whenever acceptable for the study organisations, ethnographic methods involving the presence of the researchers in the field were preferred. This was possible for the second study in Estonian Public Broadcasting, and third study in an exhibition and industrial design company. Regarding the first study about the work of case managers, close-up observations were considered problematic because of the highly sensitive and personal information exchanged in counselling work. A summary of the methodology used in the studies is provided in Table 2. The methodological choices in the three studies are explained in the following sub-sections.

Table 2. Methodology of the studies in this dissertation

Study	Focus	Fieldwork	Data	Method of analysis
1	Individuals' understandings guiding the work practices	Phenomenographic interviews with case managers from the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund	11 interviews transcribed verbatim 101 pages of transcripts	Phenomenographic analysis (coded data) (Marton, 1986; Marton and Booth, 1997; Sjöström and Dahlgren, 2002)
2	Interactions between individual and collective knowledge in guiding the work practices	Ethnography in Estonian Public Broadcasting	53 hours of observations and 25 interviews transcribed verbatim 160 pages of interview transcripts and 141 pages of field notes	Constant comparison (coded data) (Strauss and Corbin, 1998)
3	Co-existence of formal, informal and personal KM practices	Ethnography in an industrial and exhibition design company	30 hours of observations and 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews transcribed verbatim 208 pages of interview transcripts and 26 pages of field notes	Combination of directed and open content analysis (coded data) (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005)

Study 1

The first study focused on the variety in individuals' understandings that guide their work practices. The empirical study of this topic required a study site where many different people would fill the same formal roles, but would have some degree of freedom about how exactly to perform their work. Overly formalised

work processes would have made it more difficult to notice the variety introduced by the employees. A study site matching these requirements was found in the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund. The goal of the case managers is to help the long-term unemployed back into the labour market by coordinating efforts from other potentially beneficial parties and institutions. These include social workers, local governments, family members, employers, family physicians, psychologists, and others. The variety of problems hindering employment, combined with the high number of potential participants and solutions put case managers in a complex field of options within which to find their way. It was a good setting for their personal understandings about the work of a case manager to develop and be realised, especially because the case managers understood that there are different ways of reaching different clients and recognising the variety among themselves makes finding good solutions more likely.

There were around 90 case managers working at this organisation at the time of the study. The sample of participants was chosen to have as much variety as possible. In selecting the respondents educational background, age, tenure, location and the size of the cities/towns they worked in was considered. Interviewing was halted when, after interviewing 11 people, the outcome space of description categories was detailed and complex enough to cover the understandings of additional interviewees.

To study case managers' understandings, a phenomenographic approach was adopted (Marton, 1986; Rocha-Pinto et al., 2019; Sjöström and Dahlgren, 2002). The core idea of phenomenography is to describe qualitatively different ways a phenomenon is perceived within a particular group. Therefore, it is not only about studying individuals' conceptions, but reaching a systematic generalisation of how these conceptions compare and vary.

As a method of data collection, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were chosen. Another alternative to consider was ethnographic interviews and observations at the workplace. However, as the working relationship between case managers and their clients is very delicate and private, researcher participation would have influenced this dynamic too much. The interviews took place in private rooms at the case managers' workplace and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The questions asked were intended to allow the interviewees to disclose case management work in the way that they experience it (e.g. What is the aim of a case manager's work? What is the meaning of case management for you? What do you do to help your clients?).

Analysis of the interview data began with coding all the utterances that described elements in the case managers' work – what is it that they do. Based on these codes, six main components of case managers' work were identified. Then, individual emphasis put on these six main components were analysed within each interview, together with the justifications – why they work in the way they do. As a final step, similar combinations of emphasis were grouped together and related in a visual outcome space as three qualitatively different ways of under-

standing the work of case managers. After this, it was possible to link these different understandings to performance indicators to demonstrate that there is no significant difference between them.

Study 2

The aim of the second study was to explore the relationship between individual and collective knowledge. As in the first study, this required the participants to have considerable creativity and freedom in their work but also a collectively developed understanding of what their work is about and how it should be done. These conditions were met at Estonian Public Broadcasting, where the independent authorship of individual journalists was complemented by the long history of the company and collective knowledge that had developed over time.

Fieldwork conducted in this organisation was part of a larger research project studying the learning culture in organisations. As learning in the most general sense can be understood as the acquisition of knowledge, then the rich descriptions obtained made it possible to pursue analysis in various directions. This includes the interplay between individual and collective knowledge in accomplishing everyday work. As the aim of the larger project was to study the culture, and the people in this organisation were very much accustomed to publicity, there was really no obstacle to applying ethnographic methods. Our focus in the fieldwork was kept intentionally broad to be able to notice patterns and similarities that are relevant across the organisation. We attended various kinds of weekly meetings of journalists in radio and television, as well as people in supportive and administrative roles like lawyers, marketers and company management. We observed how the understanding of how and what to do in journalistic work emerged through informal, ordinary conversations as well as brainstorming sessions, and more formal gatherings.

The data was analysed in two phases. First, during the fieldwork and after each observation day, the researchers discussed what they had noticed and what emerging themes they could pay attention to. These ideas were clearly distinguished in the field notes. For example, the shifting of different time frames in journalistic work (ranging from coming up with innovative solutions on the spot to making use of experience and past work dating back half a century) was one such theme. Also, the tensions between individual self-expression and the shared understanding of a station's identity, between the flow of ideas and the institutionalisation of principles. The second phase involved the final analysis after leaving the field, and followed the constant comparison method (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This involved open coding the interview transcripts and observation notes, developing categories, and writing up the main themes. Throughout this process, the second author reviewed and offered helpful suggestions to ensure validity.

Study 3

The aim of the third study was to explore the variety in KM practices and their relationships to knowledge and knowing in work practices. The most important criteria for being able to pursue this aim was that different kinds of KM practices would be present in the study organisation. This was the case in a small, growing, engineering and design company. Because the company was small, a significant part of its functioning was informal. This included informal practices for creating and sharing the knowledge they needed in their work. Because it was growing, developing and sharing professional knowledge, as well as how to function as a company, was important. In addition, to be able to cope with the increasing number of employees and more diversified functions, the company had begun formalising its processes, including knowledge management. Furthermore, since design and engineering are rapidly developing professions, the employees were also trying to keep in touch with the latest developments through personal means and resources outside of their role as employees.

The management of the company kindly agreed to an ethnographic study with the first author doing participant observations and interviews in the workplace. However, by the start of the fieldwork, the company was experiencing some financial difficulties and because of this, relationships between the employees and the management suffered. Therefore, despite being granted access to the workplace, some of the employees were quite suspicious of the researcher. In this situation, the researcher tried to be as non-invasive as possible, starting with spending time in public spaces like the kitchen, the lobby area, and going to lunch with employees while explaining the purpose of the study to everyone. The plan was to proceed with interviews to better develop contact with the employees and allow them to open up on their work life experiences in a more controlled setting. After this, moving closer to the actual performance of everyday work and observing the meetings was intended. Unfortunately, the company went bankrupt and in addition to preliminary observations and brief ethnographic interviews in the workplace, in-depth interviews were only conducted after this event with employees who were still willing to talk.

In discovering the elements and connections in the KM ecology, the fieldwork proceeded from two thematic entry points. First, focusing on the challenges in everyday work practices and discovering what kinds of KM practices they necessitate from the employees' perspective – in whichever form they may be. Second, proceeding from the management's formalising practices to understand the emergence and development of formal KM. How did the formal practices come to be?

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. As in the ethnography in the second study, the data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the fieldwork to identify relevant topics to follow more closely. However, the final analysis after the fieldwork combined a wider mix of methods. As our intention was to understand the co-existence of different kinds of KM practices, we started by mapping all the KM practices mentioned in our data. This was done

through directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) guided by three broad categories – formal, informal and personal KM. Then, to analyse how the formal KM practices were formalised and how the different KM practices connect, open content analysis was used. Another interesting approach to consider would have been narrative analysis – to approach knowledge and KM not only from the organisation’s point of view, but from the perspective of the career trajectories of the employees. However, due to the limits on the fieldwork, the data was not sufficient to pursue this in detail.

Ethical principles

The research in this thesis is not about a sensitive topic and does not involve participants in vulnerable positions. Therefore, the approval of the Research Ethics Committee was not necessary. Still, the conduct of the research within this thesis followed a careful consideration of ethical principles (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). Participation in all three studies was voluntary for all the participants. No one was persuaded or coerced; no rewards were offered. The voluntary nature of the studies was emphasised when asking people to participate and also re-emphasised at the beginning of every interview. The participation being voluntary was evidenced for example in the third study when after the bankruptcy of the company, only about half of the employees agreed to be interviewed.

The purpose of the studies was made clear for all the participants. There were no concealed research agendas, or undisclosed observations. Informed consent was reached with the management of the organisations studied as well as with every individual participant. As part of the informed consent, recording the interviews and participant confidentiality were agreed upon. The informed consent was signed as a formal agreement whenever the participants preferred.

The principles of confidentiality were explained to all the participants – that because of the face-to-face interaction, they are not anonymous, but their identity will be known only to the researchers doing the fieldwork. In communicating the findings, they will be anonymous for the readers. In addition, all the notes and recordings will be kept private by the researchers and not disclosed to other parties. The names of the participants are kept separate from the recordings and transcripts. The confidentiality of the study organisations was agreed upon with the management.

Not harming the participants was a central concern. In addition to maintaining confidentiality, the participants were encouraged to indicate when the interviews reached topics that were too sensitive, or if they wanted some information not to be included in the subsequent analysis. There were such moments; for example, in the first study where the relationship between the case managers and their clients is highly confidential. The amount of background information given with each quotation is also limited, to avoid the possibility of the indirect identification of the participants.

In addition to avoiding any kind of negative consequence for the participants, the author of this thesis was also careful not to intervene in the inner workings of the organisations during the study process. The researchers consciously avoided making suggestions or offering solutions. For example, in the second study, some journalists wanted to involve the researchers in coming up with ideas for their shows. This invitation was politely declined. Also, in relation to the core activities observed, the researchers tried to position themselves on the periphery. For example, when observing meetings in the media organisation, the researchers sat not behind the table, but on chairs along the walls.

Another principle closely followed was staying true to the intentions and statements of the participants – to represent their thoughts as accurately as possible. This involves not only avoiding researcher bias, but also making sure their voice is heard and critical attitudes were not silenced.

In addition to the responsibility before the participants, ethical issues related to the academic community were also recognised. This involves most of all conducting high-quality research – being precise in referencing earlier works, not committing academic fraud in any way, being clear about the research process and making sure that all the claims in this thesis are substantiated in the empirical evidence.

There is no conflict of interest for the author of the thesis, or the co-authors of the three studies.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

Study 1: Variety in individuals' understandings guiding their work practices

The aim of the first study was to uncover the variety in the ways that case managers understand their work and how this affects their work processes. This study is positioned in the field of employee competence that has been strongly influenced by the modelling approach (Stevens, 2013). Historically, competency modelling began with the idea that to better predict success at work requires moving from testing general traits or intelligence towards testing for particular behavioural competences that are directly relevant in a particular job (Horton, 2000; McClelland, 1973). This represented a move closer to the actual performance of work. However, being more specific in terms of the attributes leading to success raised a critical question – does the same mix of competencies apply, regardless of a particular task, context or the personal characteristics of the people involved (Bolden and Gosling, 2006)? How can we accommodate the fact that it is often possible to achieve similar results through different approaches and successful employees do not necessarily exhibit the same behaviours?

One way to resolve these questions was offered by the interpretative approach to competence (Sandberg, 2000). This means situating competence not within a formal position, but within a human understanding. According to Sandberg (2000), the particular way that a person conceives of work is what defines essential knowledge and skills and how they are used in practice and necessitates their development. Whatever attributes are used in accomplishing the work, they are mediated through human understanding and interpretation. The development of ideas about competence are depicted in Figure 3.

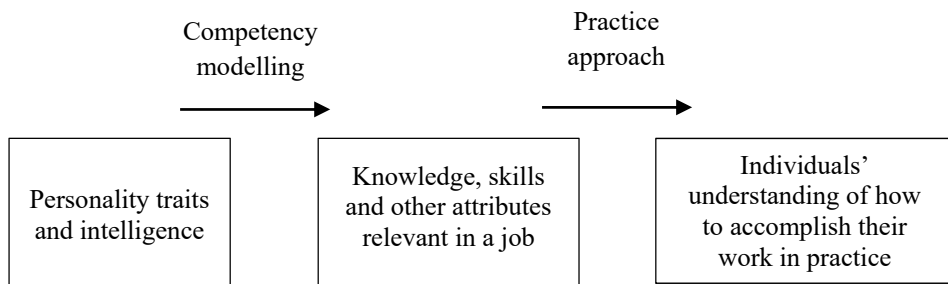


Figure 3. Development of conceptualising competence at work

Source: Created by author.

The most common methodological approach used in interpretative studies of competence is phenomenography (Marton, 1986; Sandberg, 2000; Sjöström and Dahlgren, 2002), which makes it possible to uncover qualitatively different ways a phenomenon is perceived among study participants. Phenomenographic studies often present different understandings in a hierarchical outcome space of increasing complexity (Kaminsky et al., n.d.; Kjellström et al., 2020; O’Leary and Sandberg, 2017). This is accompanied with the assumption that a more complex understanding of a phenomenon allows for a wider repertoire of actions and thereby leads to better results. Therefore, the development of competence occurs through a person’s understanding becoming more nuanced. However, the degree to which understandings of a phenomenon are personal and shaped through personal characteristics rather than a concern for effectiveness is a much less researched topic. It is through pursuing this line of inquiry that the current study contributes to the field of competence.

This study was conducted using a sample of case managers from the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund using the phenomenographic method. The purpose of case management is to help unemployed people with several problems to find work. These are difficult cases where success is not guaranteed as there is usually a mix of hindering circumstances. Case management can be considered a highly creative work with case managers having a lot of freedom in choosing how they try to help their clients and which potentially beneficial institutions they involve.

From this study, three qualitatively different understandings of case management work emerged, distinguished by different beliefs about the cause and solution to the problem of unemployment. Case managers were divided according to whether they considered unemployment to be the problem to be solved, or just a symptom of the problems to be solved. The latter group was further divided according to whether those deeper problems underlying unemployment were thought to be on the individual or societal level. This resulted in three understandings, emphasising either psychological counselling, applying pressure, or cooperation with employers and other institutions.

Case managers who placed emphasis on applying pressure on the client thought the best way to get people back into employment was through pushing them to try really hard and be persistent in their job search. They believed that everyone who really wants to work can find a job and the difficult situation their clients were in can be overcome through greater effort. They did not go into in-depth psychological counselling, nor did they expect any special favours from employers. Following from their beliefs it was meaningful for them to be strict and demanding to enhance the motivation of their clients, instead of being too soft and sympathetic.

Case managers who placed emphasis on counselling saw the underlying personal problems as the real issue. They believed that when the personal problems are solved, the unemployed are in a more equal position in the labour market and more capable of finding a job. To reach those deeper personal issues, they engaged

as much as possible in psychological counselling and avoided a strict and demanding style that could damage the trust in their relationships with the clients.

Case managers emphasising cooperation with employers and other institutions believed that their clients are generally not capable of competing on the labour market on their own, despite the counselling they receive or effort they put into it. They considered the long-term unemployment of their clients to be a problem emerging from society at large. Unlike the other two groups of case managers, it made sense for them to build strong cooperative relationships with different social institutions and employers and to facilitate their clients' communication with them as much as possible.

There are two significant conclusions from this study. First, case managers had different understandings of their work and the specific activities that these understandings necessitated were at times in direct contradiction. For example, being strict and demanding was necessary for those case managers that emphasized applying pressure, but it would have been detrimental to the results of those case managers who emphasized psychological counselling. Therefore, competence as a way of understanding and practising one's work, does not always proceed in a linear fashion from less to more complex. There could be very different but equally complex ways of accomplishing one's work. Also, the performance indicator of the number of people finding work did not differ between the different understandings of case management.

Second, the different understandings the case managers had about their work were coherent with their other beliefs; for example, inclining towards either more individualist or collectivist values. This suggests thinking about competence at work not only as an instrument for achieving results but also as sustaining a meaningful relationship between a person and the world. Therefore, this study contributes to the critique of the essentialist or normative understanding of competence that may alienate people from their organisations (Billsberry et al., 2019; Larsson et al., 2020).

Study 2: Relationships between individual and collective knowledge

The aim of the second study was to explore the relationship between individual and collective knowledge. How these two dimensions are related is a question that has captured the attention of researchers thinking about knowledge as a resource as well as those adopting a practice-based perspective. The theories proposed by these streams, however, are notably different. Most well-known within the first group is the knowledge spiral model, where through managing the processes of the socialisation, externalisation, communication and internalisation (SECI) of knowledge, organisations can turn individuals' tacit knowledge into an

organisational resource and benefit from its reuse in other parts of the organisation (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). In the practice-based perspective we find the concept of communities of practice and the idea that knowledge is already a collective achievement of people engaging together in similar activities (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2003). Within this view, sharing individual experiences, interpreting them within a collective and benefitting from the shared knowledge of the collective are natural processes that occur among groups of people engaged in a practice. Moreover, what makes this two-way sharing possible is the shared tacit knowledge acquired through common activities. As argued by Duguid, 'no text is able to determine the principles of its own interpretation' (Duguid, 2005, p. 112). Therefore, to be able to understand either verbal or textual communication about explicit knowledge, it is necessary to have a shared tacit understanding of the ground rules for making sense of it. And this tacit understanding is acquired through practice. A similar idea is expressed by Polanyi who argues that

'While tacit knowledge can be possessed by itself, explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied. Hence, all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge. A wholly explicit knowledge is unthinkable (Polanyi, 1969, p. 144)'.

Scholars sharing this view are critical of the knowledge spiral model precisely because it assumes that tacit knowledge can be converted into explicit and back again (Cook and Brown, 1999; Gourlay, 2006; Tsoukas, 2003).

In the study of communities of practice, there are two main lines of research. In the KM approach, communities of practice are seen as purposefully designed to create knowledge or facilitate knowledge sharing (Bolisani and Scarso, 2014; Nisar et al., 2019). In the social learning approach, the more spontaneous nature of communities of practice is emphasised. Research in this line focuses on how communities of practice hold together in different types of organisations or in facing different circumstances (Amin and Roberts, 2008; Beane, 2019; Kellogg et al., 2021; Pyrko et al., 2017). The second study in this thesis contributes to the latter stream of research by exploring knowledge and knowing in journalistic practice.

A year-long ethnographic study conducted at Estonian Public Broadcasting contributes to this thesis with three main findings. First, regarding the interplay between individual and collective knowledge, journalists regularly discuss their thoughts and experiences, feedback for their shows, listening statistics, and so on, and thereby sustain a collective understanding of what kind of programme suits their listeners. While benefitting from this collective knowledge, there remains considerable freedom in terms of how they make use of it in their individual work. Journalists need to manage the tension between the normative expectations inherent in collective knowledge and their own meaningful action but are not

constrained by this in a strong sense. Therefore, it cannot be presumed that collective knowledge will be automatically absorbed by individuals or that it will unproblematically enter their work processes.

Second, the shared understanding of how to perform journalistic work in the radio station is mostly unarticulated or tacit. It comes together in a piecemeal manner through contributions from individual members and bits of information from various sources but is never made fully explicit. This means that knowing how to produce a show that suits the listeners of this station cannot be achieved without being a member of the community.

Third, the shared understanding of how to perform journalistic work in the radio station is dynamic and future-oriented because journalistic practices are dependent on other practices that also change over time. Among these are practices that are covered or given voice to in the radio programmes, the journalistic practices of other organisations in other countries and the listening practices of the audience – how and to what they would want to listen. This means that journalists in the radio station are always either reacting to or anticipating the changes around them, giving evidence to the evolving nature of knowledge and knowing.

These findings are coherent with the first study in that there is an individual dimension of knowledge that is highly relevant in guiding the performances of work practices. What the second study adds to this picture, however, is the generative two-way relationship between individual and collective knowledge that makes them distinct but nevertheless inseparable. What is more, rather than being explicit and static, the collective knowledge can be very much dynamic and unarticulated.

Study 3: Relationships between formal, informal and personal KM

The third study adds yet another layer to understanding the knowledgeable performance of work practices in organisations by thematising the coexistence of formal, informal and personal KM practices. In the most general sense, knowledge management consists of activities that aim to make better use of knowledge and help people to know better how to accomplish their work. Following from the resource-based view of the firm, knowledge management started as a formal managerial initiative with the goal of developing competitive advantage for organisations through the effective management of knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Swan and Scarbrough, 2001; Teece, 1998). The formal approach to KM involves specialised policies, plans, initiatives, systems, roles and budgets. However, knowledge in organisations can also be managed informally through various activities that employees come up with themselves to help them in their work without any formal intervention (Coyte et al., 2012; Hutchinson and Quintas, 2008; Nunes et al., 2006). In addition to formal and informal KM within

organisations, people may also manage their knowledge through personal means and resources with the goal of supporting their work and professional development beyond any particular employment relationship (Cheong and Tsui, 2010; Pauleen, 2009; Wright, 2005). The aim of this study was to better understand how these different approaches coexist in a small, quickly growing, knowledge-intensive company.

In this task, the practice-ecological view (Kemmis et al., 2012) was adapted to knowledge management. This means understanding formal, informal and personal KM not as unique phenomena in themselves, but as summary labels for particular bundles of connected practices. It is from different relationships between work practices, KM practices and formalising practices that formal, informal and personal KM acquire their meaning. From this perspective, KM is formal when the activities aimed at knowledge and knowing are connected to everyday work practices and to formalising practices. For example, allocating resources, creating mandatory procedures, or identifying activities in official documents and policies, through which some part of organisational life is made formal. KM is informal when the activities aimed at knowledge and knowing are performed in connection to work practices but they are not connected to formalising practices. KM is personal when the activities aimed at knowledge and knowing are performed not with the organisations' but the individual's own means and resources. Also, personal KM practices are not tied exclusively to any one organisation but support an individual's professional work more generally.

The practice-ecological view of KM means that through making and un-making connections between practices, the meaning of KM changes. It is possible, for example, to make informal KM practices formal. It is also possible for employees to resist connecting formal knowledge management practices to their work practices, thereby leading to the extinction of the former. By conceptualising different forms of KM as consisting of essentially similar elements, the practice-ecological view demystifies the distinctions between the formal, informal and personal KM and offers a language for studying their coexistence as a unified field of research, instead of separate, unconnected branches as they are now. The main consequence of the practice-ecological view for the purposes of the third study comes from the realisation that formal, informal and personal KM practices are likely to have overlapping ecological functions, meaning that they can substitute and compete with each other as well as form complementary relationships.

The relevance of formal, informal and personal KM practices for each other and for work practices in the organisation was made clear by the findings in several ways. It was found that some of the formal KM practices started informally before they were connected to formalising practices. In addition, the results indicated considerable variety in how formalising practices connect to KM practices in terms of timing and direction of influence. Formalising may be prescriptive when it orders what employees should do or it may be supportive when it enables and legitimises self-directed employee activities. Formalising

may be initiated when formal KM starts as a plan to be implemented, or it may follow when the KM activities already exist informally.

In addition to the formal KM in the study organisations, the study identified a large number of informal KM practices. This is because informally emerging KM practices are not all necessarily visible to the management, and therefore cannot be formalised. In addition, employees may always come up with new informal KM practices to address their work-related needs that are not yet formalised. This means that a situation where only formal KM exists is unlikely.

In addition to formal and informal KM practices, employees had personal KM practices that they considered private and purposefully kept separate from organisational means, resources and information systems. However, they willingly used their personal KM practices to help accomplish their work or that of their colleagues in the study organisation.

So, all three categories of formal, informal and personal KM were viable and within each of these were practices that contributed to the accomplishment of work practices in a unique way with no obvious counterparts. At times the formal, informal and personal KM practices formed complementary relationships. For example, when employees shared knowledge stored on their personal accounts with their colleagues through formal or informal knowledge sharing practices. However, the relationships between formal, informal and personal KM could also be competitive. This was most evident with knowledge storing practices where employees preferred their personal approach to the organisation's folder system.

In summary, this study argues for a shift from understanding knowledge management as an organisational approach to an ecology of practices. This ecology is shaped by multiple actors and motives and extends over the formal/informal as well as organisational/personal divides. To represent the dynamic complexity and ever-present possibilities of transformation within this ecology, the conceptual language of practice theory is used. This allows us to move behind the static summary labels of formal, informal and personal KM to the deeper layer of the connected activities through which they transpire and transform. Managerial initiative and formalising practices have a versatile, albeit limited influence within this ecology. It is not possible to formalise what is beyond organisational boundaries or what is not visible to managers. This means that the continuity and connectedness of a KM ecology is in large part a result of a distributed effort involving also employees who perform these various practices.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Theoretical contribution of the thesis

The aim of this thesis was to explore the connections between individual and collective knowledge and knowing, and formal, informal and personal knowledge management. The exploration of this topic proceeded logically from individuals' understandings of their work to collective negotiations of knowledge in the workplace to an ecology of knowledge management practices that support knowledge and knowing in action. What this thesis has demonstrated is that:

- 1) There is an indissoluble individual dimension in knowledge in organisations because for employees, knowing in practice is not just instrumental to getting the work done, but also serves to offer them a personally meaningful engagement with the world.
- 2) The knowledge of individuals is in a generative two-way relationship with collectively shared knowledge in the sense that individuals both benefit from and contribute to shared knowledge. However, they are not completely overlapping and this leads to the creative tension necessary for the development of both.
- 3) The parallel and connected existence of individual and collective knowledge is sustained by parallel and connected textures of personal, informal and formal knowledge management practices. The possibilities for either mutually beneficial or conflictual relationships that were evident between individual and collective knowledge were also seen within the ecology of knowledge management.

As explained in the theoretical part of the thesis, practices as socially negotiated ways of achieving particular ends prefigure what individuals do. They organise social action both within and outside organisations. But, in doing this, they do not have a deterministic influence over individuals and leave room for creativity and resistance. However, the role of the agency of individuals should not be seen as just creating disruptions against the social order within practices, but as seeking coherence from another point of view – their own personal lives. This is aptly explained by Schatzki:

‘Actions are components of a practice by virtue of expressing elements of the practice’s organisation. Practice organisations are thus one organizing principle for action. Actions are also components of particular people’s lives. People are thus a second organizing principle for action. Practices and people are distinct ordering principles, neither of which can be reduced to the other. A given action is at once a component of some practice and a part of some life (Schatzki, 2017, p. 28)’.

The existence of these two distinct organising principles is evident in the first study about case management. The activities that make up case management practice vary within the understandings of different case managers. However, the different understandings themselves are internally coherent and meaningful for their practitioners. Particular actions are chosen and hang together because they fit into the lives of the case managers – what they have come to believe, value and know, and in what ways they want to engage with the world they are part of.

However, people do not only seek coherence with their lives within practices, but also between them. And this affects which practices they see as necessary to perform. It was shown in the third study that the ecology of KM is also shaped by two organising principles, albeit with a different reach. Two kinds of practices (formal and informal KM) make sense from the organisation's point of view. They address the organisation's concerns and contribute to its development. Personal KM practices, however, are organised to support the individual's quest for his or her own professional development more generally. They are not confined to the needs of any particular organisation but centre on the individual. After all, any given employment relationship is just one episode in a person's trajectory of development.

The parallel existence of these two organising principles might go unnoticed when the paths of individuals and their organisation are well-aligned and there are neutral or complementary relationships within the ecology of practices. In this case, the professional selves are expressed through organisational roles without much conflict and what people do personally for their knowledge also benefits the organisation. However, this need not be the case. There are several reasons for why these organising principles may become competing principles, resulting in employees preferring their own personal KM over organisational KM. For example, what could be at stake is the ownership of knowledge. Is it the organisation's or the employee's? Also, there is the issue of continuity – how does knowledge live on when the trajectories of the individual and the organisation part? There is also a question about effectiveness. From the employee point of view, personal ways of seeking and storing knowledge may be more familiar and accessible than organisational systems. But, more importantly, knowledge transpires from and is understandable in the context of a particular way of practising and this could be, as shown earlier, highly personal. Another issue is the type and length of employment relationships. When professionals are freelancers doing project-based work or work in several organisations at the same time or simply prefer to change jobs often, managing their knowledge personally might be considered a better option.

Therefore, a personally meaningful way of practising not only organises activities within work practices, but also brings to life a particular bundle of KM practices that sustains this way of practising. This bundle may include formal, informal as well as personal KM practices. However, personal and informal KM practices that emerge through a person's own initiative might achieve a better fit than formal KM practices introduced in a prescriptive way by the management.

In summary, **the main theoretical contribution of this thesis is to show how knowledge, knowing and knowledge management within organisations are connected and subject to two parallel organising principles: being part of the constellation of organisational practices, and being part of a person's life.** Approaching these as only organisational phenomena is bound to yield an incomplete picture.

Practical implications

As argued by Nicolini, good science makes us more articulate in perceiving the differences and connections in the world around us:

‘Being articulate (as opposed to inarticulate) means that we can make new and enlightening connections between things of the world. This in turn opens new opportunities for acting (or not acting) in a more informed way (Nicolini, 2012, p. 216)’ (parentheses in original).

The current thesis has aimed to help us better appreciate the relevant phenomena and connections that enable competent action in organisations. It has shown how the knowledgeable performance of work practices depends on individuals’ understandings, knowledge dynamics between individuals and collectives, and knowledge management practices that extend beyond the formal organisation. This means that these phenomena, relationships and processes that are essential for the functioning of organisations, are outside the scope of prescriptive managerial influence. Conducting work practices within organisations depends on individuals’ interpretations and their sense of self, which is broader than being an employee in any particular company. Generative and normative processes connecting individual and collective knowledge are in large part informal and self-regulatory. Knowledge management in its distinct but interconnected forms crosses the organisational boundary, transpires from the actions of many people and is only partially visible in the organisation.

Each of the three studies conclude with important implications for practitioners to consider. The first study demonstrated how people work and are successful in personally meaningful ways. This means that being overly prescriptive about how work should be accomplished may not only prevent them from finding the best possible solutions, given their personal characteristics and those of particular situations, but also create inner conflicts and a sense of alienation within their organisations. As shown in the study of case managers, although there is some common ground similar in all the approaches, important success factors were unique to a particular way of practising. Case managers with emphasis on psychological counselling could not succeed with a demanding style and applying pressure. Case managers with an emphasis on applying pressure could not succeed without it.

The second study showed the importance of processual, tacit and collective aspects of knowledge. Knowing how to be a journalist for a particular radio or TV station was a collective ongoing accomplishment of anticipating the future expectations of the audience, sustained by participation in discussions and connections with other practices. It was never a static, explicitly formulated set of statements to be followed or communicated. And as the journalists explained, it could not be, because 'stagnant radio is ridiculous'. This means that within particular kinds of work, the only way to share knowledge is through participating in its ongoing re-creation. Therefore, establishing connections and memberships should come before documenting explicit knowledge.

The third study demonstrated that KM practices that contribute to the successful accomplishment of work practices in an organisation are in significant part informal and personal. Moreover, their relationship to formal KM could be beneficial as well as competitive. This means that managers should be more attentive to the informal and personal dimensions in organising, and also more creative and selective in formalising how the organisation functions. Initiating and prescribing mandatory practices is one part of this. But, in addition to that, it is useful to allow for a reversal of the direction of influence. This means allowing time and resources for employee initiative to emerge and also offering support for informal practices that have already been initiated. For example, supporting and legitimising informal KM practices without subordinating them to managerial control. As argued through the practice-ecological metaphor, KM practices are useful only when they are connected to work practices. Informal KM practices that are initiated by employees as a response to their work-related needs have a much better chance of establishing this connection than top-down formal KM. This is evidenced by the difficulties in getting employees to contribute to and use formal KM systems. In other words, it is better to work as much as possible with practices and connections that are meaningful and necessary from the employees' point of view and be attentive to their emergence.

To summarise, managers are faced with a profound choice about how to relate to what is beyond the formal side of organising. At one end of the continuum, it is possible not to recognise anything outside of the formal organisation – to think about the organisation as a machine that consists of the prescribed behaviour of concrete and visible elements and their relationships. At the other end of the continuum, as argued in this thesis, it is possible to think of the formal organisation as organising some part of the emergent social fabric that pervades the organisation but is not designed by formal managerial initiative alone. Instead, this social fabric is being sustained by the total nexus of connected practices within and outside the organisation, and individuals who perform these practices in personally meaningful ways. The essence of organising in this latter view is not only inventing and prescribing formal structures and processes, but also managing the connections between formal and informal, collective and individual, personal and organisational.

It is not possible to manage these relationships in a prescriptive manner but it is possible to try to better understand and respect the life outside the formal,

including the desire of individuals for coherence between actions that are part of their lives. This invokes a metaphor of ‘a garden’ (Gherardi, 2006, p. 14), rather than a machine. The defining difference being that plants in a garden have a life of their own, they grow, and their viability depends on a complex web of inter-connections they seek to establish. In a similar way, people in organisations seek to fill their roles in personally meaningful ways and connect to others around them to have a balanced relationship with the world they are part of.

Limitations of the thesis

There are several limitations concerning the thesis as a whole and the individual studies. Although in different fields of activity, the study organisations in this thesis all involve a considerable degree of personal freedom and creativity for their employees. On the one hand it made the study of the relationships between the individual and collective dimensions of knowledge easier. On the other hand, the question remains – to what extent are the possibilities uncovered in this thesis relevant in organisations with more strictly regulated work processes.

Another limitation of the thesis as a whole is that the interrelated topics of individual and collective knowledge and knowledge management were studied in different organisations. Although the study organisations were well suited to addressing each topic, studying all these phenomena within a single site over a longer period of time would have given a more detailed, coherent and continuous picture – how exactly do individual understandings take shape in practice, how are they negotiated within a collective, and sustained through interactions between personal and organisational KM practices.

What is more, the three studies of this thesis were not initially planned as a single project. Different studies were conducted and related in an emergent way. As a single project, they could have been performed with greater congruence between each other. How it is possible to plan ahead while maintaining openness and sensibility towards possibilities in the field is perhaps the most important learning experience for the author of this thesis.

Regarding the individual studies, the first study was limited by having to rely on the interview method. Accounts obtained in this way inevitably rely on the memory of interviewees and reflect a self-understanding that has already taken shape. It is reasonable to expect that there is more variety in the actual performances of work practices than conveyed through interviews. Also, the interviews were separated from the work practices, meaning that the case managers’ memories could not have been helped by knowledge embedded in the materiality and real-life situation of the counselling process. Also, thinking back from this thesis to the first study, the influence of personal life and the experience of the performance of case management could have been more directly thematised.

In the second study, given its wide focus covering the entire organisation of 750 people, more time for the fieldwork would have benefitted the study. Although the presence of researchers was quickly accepted, and it seemed that people felt

at ease with us, it would have been helpful to observe some repeating events in more than just one instance (editorial meetings, morning greetings in the office, afternoon small-talk, celebrating birthdays, etc). This would have created more context against which to notice variation in relevant aspects of journalistic work. In addition, we did not directly observe any real conflict or heated dispute over how work should be accomplished, even though we knew from the interviews that these kinds of things happened.

The third study was in a most direct way limited by the bankruptcy of the study organisation and the conflicts among the participants that accompanied this. In terms of the nature of the work, the developing organisation, and access offered by the management, it all looked very promising. Furthermore, there was no clear end date imposed on the fieldwork. However, the planned observations had to be substituted for interviews, most of them conducted after the unfortunate event. In this difficult and conflictual situation, many employees were understandably suspicious and did not want to talk. Being the third study, and conducted with an awareness of the first two, all the topics of this thesis could have been empirically addressed in a connected way. This has to remain a suggestion for further study.

Suggestions for further research

As an exercise in qualitative research, this thesis has highlighted important connections and possibilities that deserve further scholarly attention. The main finding that knowledgeable performances of work practices within organisations depend on individual knowledge and personal KM mandate a better understanding of how these interact with collective knowledge and organisational knowledge management. Empirical research that focuses on these phenomena in a connected way is unfortunately scarce. However, this becomes more and more important with increases in individualism (Santos et al., 2017), meaning that people are generally becoming more self-directed, autonomous and separate, both, in their values as well as in the ways they conduct their lives. To manage the challenge ahead, it is necessary to continue unpacking the ‘black box’ of personal and informal sides of organising and study their effects on knowledge processes in a systematic way. As shown in this thesis, the conceptual language of practice theory offers a helpful tool in this task.

Regarding further research on the topic of this thesis, the author would like to make some thematic, theoretical as well as methodological suggestions. First of all, there is still very little empirical research about how different kinds of KM practices co-exist. The current thesis pursued this question in one particular organisation, but there are other kinds where these relationships could be quite different. Also, as personal and informal KM practices rely on individuals’ perceptions of their knowledge as something distinct from collective knowledge, studying KM ecology in relation to individual and collective knowledge processes would be no doubt insightful. Related to the recent interest in practice theory about the movement and spread of practices and their elements, studying

how KM practices transform and move from one kind of constellation to another, would make important contributions to this debate. Also, what influences the KM ecology and brings about significant changes in it, would be an interesting question to address.

Second, as this thesis demonstrated, the practice-theoretical approach to knowledge, knowing and action offers a helpful way to grasp individual and collective dimensions of knowledge, relationships between the dynamic and static characteristics of knowledge and different degrees of embodiment and articulation. Recent developments in practice theory also offer a conceptual language for studying movements and transformations in constellations of practices (Hui et al., 2017).

Third, studying organisational life and phenomena through a practice lens strongly favours ethnographic methods. However, to be also sensitive to the individual dimension, I would suggest combining a focus on organisational practices with approaches that thematise individual understandings and life trajectories. For example, combining organisational ethnography with an analysis of individual narratives would offer a rich and multi-dimensional understanding of both.

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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN – KOKKUVÕTE

Praktikateooria põhine uurimus teadmusest, teadmisest ja teadmusjuhtimisest

Aktuaalsus, motivatsioon ja eesmärk

Üks põhimõttelisemaid küsimusi teadmuse uurimisel organisatsioonis on seos individuaalse ja kollektiivse teadmuse vahel. Teadmus on individuaalne, hõlmates kognitiivset ja ihulist mõõdet. See väljendub oskustes, harjumustes, meelelises tajus ja areneb selle kaudu, kuidas inimene kogeb maailma. Teadmus on ka kollektiivne – loodud, jagatud ja vääriliseks tunnistatud gruppides. See on organisatsiooni tööpraktikatega läbi põimunud ja muudetud avalikuks tekstide, juhendite ja tegutsemispõhimõtete kaudu. Individuaalne teadmus areneb inimese kokkupuute kaudu kollektiivse teadmusega. Kollektiivne teadmus areneb indiviidide panustamise kaudu selsse. (Berger ja Luckmann, 1966) Aga see, mida inimesed on valmis jagama ja mida vastu võtma, on siiski alati piiratud.

Teadmuse mõistega on tihedalt seotud teadmusjuhtimine – tegevused, mis on orienteeritud teadmuse oskuslikumale ärakasutamisele ja seeläbi paremate tulemuste saavutamisele. Peegeldades erinevust individuaalse ja kollektiivse teadmuse vahel, on ka teadmusjuhtimiseks erinevaid võimalusi. Formaalne teadmusjuhtimine seab eesmärgiks teadmuse kui organisatsiooni ressursi tõhusama rakendamise suurema konkurentsieelise saavutamiseks ja on osa organisatsiooni ametlikest juhtimispraktikatest (Heisig, 2009; Nonaka ja Takeuchi, 1995; Teece, 1998). Teadmusjuhtimine võib olla mitteformaalne, hõlmates tegevusi, mille töötajad on ise algatanud, et oma tööalaste väljakutsetega paremini hakkama saada (Coyte *et al.*, 2012; Hutchinson ja Quintas, 2008; Nunes *et al.*, 2006). Lisaks ei pea teadmusjuhtimine lähtuma ainult organisatsiooni huvist, vaid võib olla suunatud ka inimese karjääri ja isikliku arengu toetamisele üldisemalt (Cheong ja Tsui, 2011; Pauleen, 2009; Wright, 2005).

Ehkki formaalne, mitteformaalne ja personaalne teadmusjuhtimine eksisteerivad tihedalt organisatsiooni tööpraktikatega seotuna ja seega jagavad ühist ruumi, on nende omavahelisi seoseid uuritud väga vähe. Käesolev doktoritöö keskendub sellele lüngale. Kuna teadmusjuhtimine toetub kontseptuaalselt teadmuse mõistele, siis dünaamika individuaalse ja kollektiivse teadmuse vahel mõjutab ka teadmusjuhtimise erinevate praktikate omavahelisi seoseid. Käesolevas doktoritöös käsitletakse neid seega koos.

Doktoritöö eesmärk on **uurida seoseid individuaalse ja kollektiivse teadmuse ning formaalse, mitteformaalse ja personaalse teadmusjuhtimise vahel**. See eesmärk saavutatakse kolme empiirilise uurimistöö põhjal avaldatud artikli kaudu, mis keskenduvad vastavalt tööalasele kompetentsusele, individuaalse ja kollektiivse teadmuse dünaamikale ning erinevate teadmusjuhtimise praktikate omavahelistele seostele. Neid kolme uurimistööd ühendab **praktikateooria** lähenemine:

- 1) Värk, A. ja Reino, A. (2018). „Meaningful solutions for the unemployed or their counsellors? The role of case managers’ conceptions of their work”, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 12–26.
- 2) Värk, A. ja Kindsiko, E. (2018). „Knowing in Journalistic Practice: Ethnography in a public broadcasting company”, *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 298–313.
- 3) Värk, A. ja Reino, A. (2020). „Practice ecology of knowledge management – connecting the formal, informal and personal”, *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 77, No. 1, pp. 163–180.

Antud teema on aktuaalne, sest professionaalse töö maailm muutub üha mitmekesisemaks ja individualistlikumaks. See, kuidas inimesed oma organisatsioonide heaks töötavad, muutub nii aja, koha kui töökorralduse mõistes paindlikumaks (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2017). Lisaks, individuaalsete hüvede ja eesmärkide poole püüdlemine muutub kollektiivsete hüvede ja eesmärkide poole püüdlemise kõrval järjest tähtsamaks (Santos *et al.*, 2017). Selles olukorras on kasulik mõista, mis rolli individuaalsed teadmised ja personaalsed teadmusjuhtimise praktikad organisatsiooni toimimise protsessides mängivad.

Uurimisülesanded

Doktoritöö uurimisülesanded on järgnevad:

1. Luua kontseptuaalne raamistik individuaalse ja kollektiivse teadmuse ja teadmusjuhtimise käsitlemiseks.
2. Anda ülevaade praktikateooriast.
3. Selgitada teadmuse käsitlust praktikateoorias.
4. Anda ülevaade konkreetsetest praktikateooria perekonda kuuluvatest teooriast, mida antud doktoritöös rakendatakse.
5. Kujundada metodoloogia ja selgitada uurimistöö eetilisi põhimõtteid.
6. Viia läbi uurimistööd.
7. Selgitada tulemusi.

Teoreetiline raamistik

Käesolev doktoritöö toetub praktikateooriale. See nimetus viitab teoreetilistele lähenemistele, mille kohaselt sotsiaalsed nähtused tulenevad ja on taasloomises omavahel seotud praktikate kaudu. Praktikad on määratletud kui „kehastunud ja materiaalselt vahendatud tegevuste kogumid, mis on organiseeritud ümber jagatud praktilise arusaama“ (Schatzki, 2001, p. 11). Lihtsamalt väljendudes, praktikad on kollektiivselt äratuntavad tegutsemise viisid teatud tulemusteni jõudmiseks. Näiteks, hommikusöögi valmistamine, valimistel hääletamine, juhtkonna koosoleku pidamine jne. Praktikad on normatiivsed, kuna hõlmavad kollektiivselt arendatud ja jagatud arusaama, kuidas üht või teist praktikat tuleks teostada (Rouse, 2014). Praktikate teostamise kaudu võtab ka materiaalsus meie ümber

kuju, mis toetab kindlal viisil praktiseerimist. Seega võib öelda, et sotsiaalselt äratuntavad ja materiaalselt võimaldatud praktikad suunavad inimeste käitumist, muutes teatud tegutsemise viisid lihtsamaks kui teised, aga neil ei ole siiski inimeste käitumise üle deterministlikku mõju (Schatzki, 2001).

Praktikateooria näeb maailma protsessuaalsena. See tähendab, et sotsiaalsed nähtused on pidevas loomises ja taasloomises tavaliste igapäevaste tegevuste kaudu, millega inimesed püüavad muutuvates oludes edukalt hakkama saada. Iga sooritus on uus, kuna arvesse peab võtma konkreetset konteksti, milles seda tehakse. Kuna praktikate sooritamine nõuab reaalses kohandatud sooritust, ei saa ka teadmus olla staatiline nähtus. Seega, praktikateoorias ei ole teadmus mõistatud kui põhjendatud tõene arvamus, vaid kui teadmine, kuidas edukalt praktiseerida. See teadmine ei ole lõplik universaalne ja objektiivne tõde, vaid parim arusaam, mis on pidevas arengus.

Praktikateooria lähenemisel teadmusele on kolm iseloomulikku joont. Esiteks, teadmus ei ole ainult staatiline, vaid hõlmab ka dünaamilist osa. Seda erinevust saab väljendada sõnadega „teadmus“, mis viitab millelegi, mida omatakse, ja „teadmine“, mis viitab millelegi, mida tehakse. Cooki ja Browni (1999) käsitluse järgi on teadmus ja teadmine teineteist taasloovas suhtes. Teadmus, mida inimene valdab, on nagu tööriist, mida kasutatakse teadmise kui tegevuse raames. Teadmine kui tegevus tähendab teadmuse loomist, kohandamist ja kombineerimist viisil, mis võimaldab konkreetsetes olukorras edukalt hakkama saada. Teadmus võimaldab teadmist praktikas. Teadmine praktikas taasloob teadmust.

Teiseks, teadmus on kollektiivne. Kuivõrd praktikad on olemuslikult kollektiivsed – jagatud arusaamad, kuidas tegutseda; on ka teadmine heast ja halvast, õigest ja valest praktiseerimisest kollektiivne saavutus. Praktiseerimiseks vajalikud teadmised omandatakse osalemise kaudu, need on pidevas taasloomises ja läbirääkimistes, alati muutlikud ja tinglikud (Nicolini *et al.*, 2003). Teadmusena kvalifitseerub see, milles praktikud omavahel kokku lepivad. Käesolevas doktoritöös on teadmuse kollektiivset iseloomu selgitatud praktikakogukonna käsitluse kaudu (Lave ja Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998, 2003).

Kolmandaks, praktiline seotus maailmaga on primaarsem kui kontseptuaalne/sõnaline teadmus. See tähendab, et teadmus, mida inimesed või organisatsioonid valdavad, tekib teadmise kui tegevuse kaudu (Dreyfus ja Taylor, 2015, p. 18). Mälestused ja arusaamad, tekstid ja juhendid – kõik representatsioonid omavad tähendust seotuna praktilise kogemusega. Organisatsiooniuringute valdkonnas on see idee tuntud ennekõike Michael Polanyi käsitluse kaudu väljendatavatest teadmistest ja vaiketeadmistest. Tema sõnul on kogu teadmine kas vaiketeadmise kujul või toetub vaiketeadmisele, ja ainus viis vaiketeadmise omandamiseks on praktiline kogemus (Polanyi, 1969). Teatud määrani suudavad meie meeled vormida igapäevase praktilise kogemuse enam-vähem stabiilseks teadmuseks, aga mitte kunagi täielikult.

Sotsiaalsed nähtused moodustuvad ja avalduvad omavahel ühendatud praktikate igapäevase sooritamise kaudu. Näiteks, organisatsioon praktikateooria vaatenurgast ei ole mitte iseseisev nähtus, vaid kogum üksteist vastastikku mõjutavaid

praktikaid. Kemmise ja tema kolleegide (2012) järgi on praktikad ja nende vahelised seosed mõistetavad ökoloogilise metafoori kaudu. Praktikad omandavad tähenduse vastastikuste seoste kaudu, nad moodustavad keerukaid kooslusi, arenevad üksteise mõjutamise kaudu ja võivad olla omavahel nii sümbiootilistes kui ka konkureerivates suhetes. Üks nende oluline mõte on see, et ökoloogilises süsteemis võivad samu funktsioone täita erinevad praktikad. Ehk siis: formaalsed, mitteformaalsed ja personaalsed teadmusjuhtimise praktikad saavad tõenäoliselt teatud määral üksteist asendada.

Metoodika

Kõik kolm uurimistööd rakendavad kvalitatiivset uurimisviisi. Kuna praktika-teooria keskne eeldus on see, et sotsiaalne elu on taasloomises igapäevaste tegevuste kaudu, eeldab selles võtmes tehtud uurimistöö uuritavatega võimalikult lähedast kontakti, mida võimaldavad vaatlused ja osalemine (Nicolini, 2009). Kui see ei ole võimalik, saab uurida praktikaid ka inimeste väljakujunenud praktiliste arusaamade kaudu (O’Leary ja Sandberg, 2016, Rocha-Pinto *et al.*, 2019). Selleks on võimalik kasutada meetodeid nagu näiteks fenomenograafia.

Esimese uurimuse fookuses oli variatiivsus inimeste arusaamades, mis suunavad nende igapäevast tööd. Uurimus tehti Eesti Töötukassa juhtumikorraldajate põhjal. Sellel ametikohal töötavast 90 inimesest kutsuti intervjuudele 11, lähtudes võimalikult suure variatiivsuse põhimõttest. Andmete kogumisel ja analüüsimisel rakendati fenomenograafilist meetodit, mille eesmärk on selgitada välja kvalitatiivselt erinevad viisid kindla nähtuse tajumiseks (Marton, 1986; Rocha-Pinto *et al.*, 2019; Sjöström and Dahlgren, 2002). Andmed koguti poolstruktureeritud intervjuude abil, mis tehti juhtumikorraldajate töökohal eraldatud ruumides. Kõik intervjuud salvestati ja transkribeeriti. Analüüsi käigus kodeeriti esmalt juhtumikorralduse töö komponendid – millist laadi tegevustest see koosneb. Seejärel analüüsiti, kuidas need komponendid erinevate juhtumikorraldajate tööpraktikas kombineeruvad ja miks. Selle põhjal eristus kolm peamist viisi, kuidas juhtumikorraldajad oma tööd mõistavad, ning oli võimalik võrrelda erinevate arusaamade tulemuslikkuse näitajaid.

Teine uurimus keskendus individuaalse ja kollektiivse teadmuse dünaamikale igapäevaste tööalaste väljakutsete lahendamisel. See uurimus tehti Eesti Rahvus-ringhäälingus. Kasutatavaks meetodiks oli etnograafia, mille tulemusel tehti 53 tundi vaatlusi ja intervjuud 25 inimesega. Kogutud andmete analüüs tehti kahes etapis. Esiteks, andmete kogumise ajal vahetasid uurijad pidevalt mõtteid esile kerkivate teemade ja huvitavamate tähelepanekute kohta, mis täpsustasid edasist fookust. Teiseks, peale välitööde lõpetamist analüüsiti andmeid pideva võrdlemise meetodi abil (Strauss ja Corbin, 1998). See hõlmas vaatlusmärkmete ja intervjuude ümberkirjutuste avatud kodeerimist, kategooriate moodustamist ja põhiteemade kirjeldamist.

Kolmas uurimus keskendus formaalsete, mitteformaalsete ja personaalsete teadmusjuhtimise praktikate koosseksisteerimisele. Uurimus tehti väikses, aga

kiiresti kasvavas näituse ja tööstusdisaini ettevõttes. Kasutatavateks meetoditeks olid taas etnograafilised vaatlused ja intervjuud. Kokku toimus 30 tundi vaatlusi ja 12 poolstruktureeritud intervjuud. Esmalt kasutati suunatud sisuanalüüsi (Hsieh ja Shannon, 2005), et kategoriseerida kõik leitud teadmusjuhtimise praktikad formaalse, mitteformaalse ja personaalse lähenemise vahel. Seejärel rakendati avatud sisuanalüüsi, et kirjeldada erinevaid viise, kuidas formaalsed teadmusjuhtimise praktikad saavad oma formaalse kuju, ning millised on erinevad viisid, kuidas eri tüüpi teadmusjuhtimise praktikad omavahel suhestuvad.

Uurimistöös jälgiti hoolikalt eetilisi põhimõtteid (Hammersley ja Traianou, 2012). Osalemine oli kõigile vabatahtlik. Kedagi ei meelitatud ega sunnitud, mingeid tasusid ei pakutud. Uurimistööde eesmärki selgitati kõigile osalejatele, varjatud eesmärgid ega andmete kogumist ei olnud. Kui osalejad soovisid, allkirjastati informeeritud nõusoleku kokkulepe ka paberil. Selle abil selgitati konfidentsiaalsuse põhimõtteid kõigile osalejatele ja uurimistöö käigus julgustati osalejaid otsustama iseseisvalt, millest nad on valmis rääkima ja millest mitte. Uurimistöö tegijad püüdsid uuritavate organisatsioonide sisesse toimimisse sekkuda võimalikult vähe ja andsid oma parima, et anda uuritavate mõtteid võimalikult täpselt edasi. Samuti teadvustati kohustusi akadeemilise kogukonna ees, mis tähendab kõrge kvaliteediga uurimistöö tegemist, korrektset viitamist, igasuguse akadeemilise pettuse vältimist ja kõigi väidete põhistamist empiirilistel andmetel. Ei doktoritöö autoril ega ühelgi uurimistöös osalenud kaasautoril ei ole huvide konflikti.

Tulemuste kokkuvõte

Esimene uurimistöö keskendub inimestevahelisele variatiivsusele tööalases kompetentsuses ja küsib, kuidas erinevad lähenemised oma töö tegemisele seotud nende isikuomadustega. See uurimistöö annab panuse tööalase kompetentsuse uurimisvaldkonda, kus domineerivaks on kompetentsimudelite lähenemine (Stevens, 2013). Selle lähenemise keskne idee on kirjeldada teadmisi, oskusi ja muid omadusi, mis toetavad kõrgel tasemel sooritust kindlas rollis (McClelland, 1973). Kompetentsimudelite lähenemist on kritiseeritud selles tehava eelduse tõttu, et üks universaalne kompetentside komplekt on piisav, sõltumata ülesandest, olukorrast või konkreetsetest inimestest (Bolden ja Gosling, 2006). Häid tulemusi on võimalik saavutada erinevaid teid pidi ja kõik edukad töötajad ei tegutses ühtemoodi.

Sandberg on väitnud, et tööalase kompetentsuse käsitlemine kompetentside loeteluna on piiratud, kuna see ei selgita, kuidas või kas üldse inimesed neid kompetentse oma töös rakendavad (Sandberg, 2000). Selle asemel tuleks tema sõnul mõista kompetentsust kui inimese arusaama oma tööst, mis määratleb tema jaoks, milliseid kompetentse ta oma töös vajab, kasutab ja arendab. Inimese praktiline arusaam on see, mis ühendab teadmisi ja konkreetset tööalast situatsiooni.

Käesolev uurimistöö arendab inimese arusaamast lähtuvat kompetentsuse käsitlemist edasi. Fenomenograafilised kompetentsuse uurimused võrreldavad sageli

erinevate arusaamade kompleksust, eeldades, et mida keerukam on arusaamine tööst, seda mitmekülgsem on tegutsemine ja seda parem on sooritus (Kaminsky *et al.*, *n.d.*; Kjellström *et al.*, 2020; O’Leary ja Sandberg, 2017). Käesolev uurimus näitab esiteks, et juhtumikorraldajate töö mõistmise viisid ei paikne sujuval skaalal lihtsamast keerukamani, vaid hõlmavad kohati täiesti vastandlikke elemente. Teiseks, töötajate arusaam oma tööst on seotud nende üldisemate veendumuste ja väärtushinnangutega. Kolmandaks, arusaama keerukus ei ole seotud töö tulemuslikkusega, kuna töötamise viisil ja konteksti sobivusel on suur tähtsus. Esimene uurimistöö panustab doktoritöösse, näidates, et tööalase kompetentsuse eesmärk ei ole mitte ainult kõrgel tasemel töösooritus, vaid ka inimese ühendamine maailmaga talle tähendusrikkal viisil.

Teine uurimistöö keskendub individuaalse ja kollektiivse teadmuse omavahelisele seotusele. Kui tööalasel kompetentsusel on individuaalne mõõde, nagu näitas esimene uurimistöö, siis kuidas on see seotud teadmuse kollektiivse mõõtmega organisatsioonis? See on küsimus, millele on lähenetud erinevatest teoreetilistest lähtepunktidest. Vast kõige tuntum selgitus pärineb Nonakalt ja Takeuchilt (1995), kes kirjeldasid spiraalset protsessi, mille käigus individuaalne vaike-teadmine konverteeritakse sõnalisele kujule, kommunikeeritakse organisatsioonis ja taas internaliseeritakse ja rakendatakse teiste töötajate poolt. Sellel protsessil on neli etappi: sotsialiseerimine, eksternaliseerimine, kombineerimine ja internaliseerimine. Teadmiste spiraali mudelit on kritiseeritud eelduse pärast, et vaike-teadmist on võimalik viia väljendatavale kujule ja tagasi (Cook ja Brown, 1999; Gourlay, 2006; Tsoukas, 2003). Nagu on selgitatud teooriaosas, on praktikateooria vaatenurgast sõnaline teadmus mõistetav ainult siis, kui seda toetav vaiketeadmine on juba olemas. Sõnalist teadmist ei saa konverteerida vaiketeadmiseks. Ainus võimalus selle omandamiseks on praktiline kogemus.

Antud töös lähenetakse individuaalse ja kollektiivse teadmuse küsimusele alternatiivse käsitluse kaudu, mis asetab jagatud praktilise kogemuse keskele kohale – praktikakogukonnad (Lave ja Wenger, 1991; Pyrko *et al.*, 2019; Wenger, 1998). See tähendab, et teadmust vaadeldakse nende inimeste kollektiivse saavutusena, kes on seotud selle aluseks oleva praktikaga. Ehkki inimesed teevad oma töös otsuseid sageli üksinda ja õpivad selle kaudu, tuginevad nad ka „kollektiivsetele arusaamadele ja korrektse käitumise standarditele“, mis on organisatsioonis kujunenud (Tsoukas ja Vladimirov, 2001, p. 979). Teine uurimistöö keskendub uurimisvaldkonnale, mis on huvitatud, kuidas praktikakogukonnad erinevates eluvaldkondades toimivad ja koos püsivad (Amin ja Roberts, 2008; Beane, 2019; Kellogg *et al.*, 2021; Pyrko *et al.*, 2017).

Etnograafiline uurimus Eesti Rahvusringhäälingus näitas, et ehkki toimetustes eksisteerib jagatud arusaam, kuidas ajakirjanduslikku tööd tuleks teha ja igal liigmel on võimalik selle arusaama kujundamisel osaleda, jääb see enamasti vaiketeadmise kujule, mida sõnades väljendada on raske. Lisaks, igale ajakirjanikule jääb arvestatav vabadus, kas ja kuidas seda kollektiivset arusaama oma töös rakendada. Siiski, kollektiivsetest normidest ja ootustest kõrvale kaldumisest tekib pinge, millega ajakirjanikud peavad oma personaalselt tähendusrikkaid tööalaseid valikuid tehes arvestama.

Selle uurimistöö panus doktoritöösse on näidata, et ehkki individuaalne ja kollektiivne teadmus mõjutavad teineteist tihedalt, jäävad nad inimeste tunnetuses siiski eraldiseisvateks.

Kolmanda uurimistöö fookuses on formaalsete, mitteformaalsete ja personaalsete teadmusjuhtimise praktikate koosseksisteerimine. Kahtlemata on neist kõige enam tähelepanu saanud formaalne teadmusjuhtimine, mille keskmes on idee, et teadmuse kui ressursi oskuslik juhtimine annab ettevõtetele suurema konkurentsieelise (Heisig, 2009; Nonaka ja Takeuchi, 1995; Swan ja Scarbrough, 2001; Teece, 1998). Selle lähenemise kontekstis on teadmusjuhtimine osa organisatsiooni formaalsest juhtimisest koos tegevuspoliitika, plaanide, rollide ja eelarvetega. Siiski, teadmusjuhtimine ei pea olema tingimata formaalne, vaid võib olla ka mitteformaalne, lähtudes töötajate enda initsiatiivist ja soovist oma töös paremini hakkama saada (Coyte *et al.*, 2012; Hutchinson ja Quintas, 2008; Nunes *et al.*, 2006). Teadmusjuhtimine ei pea ka lähtuma ainult organisatsiooni huvist, vaid võib olla suunatud inimese karjääri ja isikliku arengu toetamisele üldisemalt (Cheong ja Tsui, 2011; Pauleen, 2009; Wright, 2005). Viimase puhul ei kasutata teadmusjuhtimiseks organisatsiooni, vaid oma personaalseid vahendeid.

Kolmanda uurimistöö eesmärk on selgitada, milline on erinevat laadi teadmusjuhtimise praktikate kokkupuude. Kas see on harmooniline või konfliktne, vastastikku täiendav või ei puutu need üldse kokku? Väikses, kasvavas näituse ja tööstusdisaini ettevõttes tehtud etnograafiline uurimus näitas, et kõik erinevat liiki teadmusjuhtimise praktikad on olulised ja leiavad oma tee igapäevaste tööprotsesside toetamiseni. Need praktikad saavad olla vastastikku komplementaarsetes suhetes, näiteks, kui personaalselt otsitud ja talletatud erialast kirjandust jagatakse kolleegidega teadmuse jagamise mitteformaalsete praktikate kaudu. Samas, sarnaseid funktsioone täitvad praktikad võivad olla ka konkureerivad, näiteks, kui ettevõtte teadmuse talletamise süsteemide asemel kasutavad inimesed enda personaalseid lahendusi. Kokkuvõttes, antud uurimistöö viitab vajadusele mõelda teadmusjuhtimisest mitte kui kitsalt organisatsioonilisest tegevusest, vaid kui ökosüsteemist, mida kujundavad nii juhid kui töötajad ja mis ulatub üle formaalse ja mitteformaalse, organisatsioonilise ja personaalse mõõtme.

Osana doktoritööst näitab see uurimistöö, et inimesed organisatsioonis viivad ellu teatud komplekti teadmusjuhtimise praktikaid ja on seotud sellega, kuivõrd nad tajuvad oma individuaalset teadmust erinevana kollektiivsest teadmusest.

Teoreetiline ja praktiline väärtus

Dokoritöö eesmärk oli uurida seoseid individuaalse ja kollektiivse teadmuse ning formaalse, mitteformaalse ja personaalse teadmusjuhtimise vahel. Tulemused võib kokku võtta järgnevalt:

- 1) Töölases kompetentsuses on alati individuaalne mõõde, sest töötajate jaoks ei ole kompetentsus ainult vahend tööalaste eesmärkide saavutamiseks, vaid see on ka aluseks personaalselt tähendusrikkale viisile maailmaga suhestuda.

- 2) Individuaalne teadmus areneb kollektiivse teadmuse toel, ja kollektiivne teadmus areneb individuaalsete panuste kaudu. Aga individuaalne ja kollektiivne ei ole kunagi täielikult kattuvad ja see võimaldab hoida arengu eelduseks olevat loomingulist pinget.
- 3) Individuaalse ja kollektiivse teadmuse paralleelset ja ühendatud kooseksisteerimist toetab erinevate teadmusjuhtimise praktikate paralleelne ja ühendatud kooseksisteerimine. Võimalused toetavateks või konfliktseteks suheteks on nii teadmuse erinevate mõõdete vahel kui teadmusjuhtimise ökosüsteemis.

Doktoritöö peamine teoreetiline panus on näidata, kuidas teadmus, teadmine ja teadmusjuhtimine on omavahel ühendatud ning neid mõjutab samaaegselt kaks erinevat organiseerivat printsiipi: kuulumine organisatsiooniliste praktikate võrgustikku ja kuulumine inimese individuaalsesse ellu.

Teadmusjuhtimise valdkonnas keskendutakse enamasti vaid formaalsele kolmandikule olulistest tegevustest, millest organisatsiooni toimimine sõltub. Käesolev doktoritöö on näidanud ka mitteformaalsete ja personaalsete teadmusjuhtimise praktikate olulisust, selgitanud, kuidas need toetuvad teadmuse individuaalsele mõõtmele ja on organisatsiooni teadmuse protsessides eluliselt tähtsad. Doktoritöö pakub ka praktikateooriast lähtuvat ökoloogilist lähenemist, mille abil on võimalik ühtses raamistikus süsteemselt käsitleda nii formaalseid, mitteformaalseid kui personaalseid teadmusjuhtimise praktikaid – nende tekkimist, kooseksisteerimist, interaktsioone, konflikte ja transformatsioone.

Peamised soovitud praktikutele on järgnevad. Esiteks, kuivõrd teadmus ja teadmine hõlmavad individuaalset mõõdet ja inimesed leiavad sageli oma personaalse viisi, kuidas ülesannetega kõige paremini hakkama saada, võivad organisatsiooni liigsed ettekirjutused töötamise viisides tuua pigem kahju kui kasu. See ei vähenda mitte ainult võimalust leida paindlikult parimaid lahendusi, vaid võib töötajates tekitada ka sisemisi konflikte ja organisatsioonist võõrandumise tunnet. Teiseks, kuivõrd teadmus ja teadmine hõlmavad kollektiivset mõõdet, on pidevas arengus ja mitte alati sõnades väljendatud, on teatud liiki tööde puhul ainus võimalus teadmuse jagamiseks osalemine selle pidevas taasloomises. See tähendab, et inimestevaheliste ühenduste loomine on olulisem kui dokumenteerimine. Kolmandaks, kuna teadmusjuhtimise ökoloogia hõlmab mitteformaalseid ja personaalseid elemente, mis ei ole formaalsele juhtimisele allutatavad, on oluline mõelda, kuidas luua formaalse, mitteformaalse ja personaalse vahel vastastikku toetavaid ühendusi. Üks võimalus selleks on olla tähelepanelik töötajate initsiatiivil kujunevate lahenduste suhtes ja formaalse kontrollimise asemel pakkuda tuge ja vahendeid.

Piirangud ja soovitus edasiseks uurimistööks

Kõik käesoleva doktoritöö uurimistööd tehti organisatsioonides ja ametikohtadel, mille töötajatel on küllalt palju tööalast autonoomiat. Sarnase ülesandepüstitusega uurimistöö, aga rangemalt formaliseeritud töökorraldusega organisatsioonides annaks väärtuslikku uut teadmist. Lisaks, individuaalset ja kollektiivset teadmust ja teadmusjuhtimist käsitlevad uurimistööd tehti küll teatud mõttes sarnastes, aga siiski eraldiseisvates organisatsioonides. Nende teemade koos käsitlemine ühes organisatsioonis aitaks paremini mõista omavahelisi seoseid – kuidas individuaalsed arusaamad võtavad oma kuju, on kollektiivis läbi räägitud ja toetatud erinevate teadmusjuhtimise praktikatega. Nagu doktoritöö näitas, on praktika-teooria sellise teemavaliku ja ülesandepüstitusega uurimistöö jaoks väga sobilik. Praktika-teooria hiljutisemad arengud toetavad uurimistööd ka selles suunas, kuidas praktikad ja selle elemendid muutuvad ning sotsiaalsetes kooslustes liiguvad. Teadmusjuhtimise praktikate puhul oleks huvitav uurida, kuidas need liiguvad formaalse, mitteformaalse ja personaalse vormi vahel. Kuivõrd teadmus, teadmine ja teadmusjuhtimine on samaaegselt mõjutatud nii personaalsest elust kui organisatsiooni toimimisest, oleks kasulik kõrvutada organisatsioonilise etnograafia vaadet indiviidist lähtuva narratiivi analüüsiga. See annaks mitmetahulise ja sügavama arusaama mõlemast.

PUBLICATIONS

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2003–2006 Bachelor’s studies, Sociology (BA), University of Tartu, School of Social Sciences.

Professional experience

2020–... Estonian Tax and Customs Board, human resources consultant.
2016–... Rizoom Consulting OÜ, founder and analyst.
2008–2015 Tripod Grupp OÜ, survey specialist.
2006–2008 Statistics Estonia, labour market analyst.

Research and development work

Main fields of research:

Employee competence, communities of practice, knowledge and knowing in organisation, knowledge management.

A list of publications:

Värk, A. and Reino, A. (2018), “Meaningful solutions for the unemployed or their counsellors? The role of case managers’ conceptions of their work”, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, Vol. 46 No. 1, pp. 12–26.
Värk, A. and Kindsiko, E. (2018), “Knowing in Journalistic Practice: Ethnography in a public broadcasting company”, *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 298–313.
Värk, A. and Reino, A. (2020), “Practice ecology of knowledge management—connecting the formal, informal and personal”, *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 77 No. 1, pp. 163–180.

Other academic activities

Supervisor and reviewer for bachelor’s and master’s theses in University of Tartu, School of Economics and Business Administration.

Languages: Estonian (native), English (fluent), Russian (basic).

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Haridus

2015–2021 Doktoriõpe, Tartu Ülikooli Majandusteaduskond.
2010–2012 Magistriõpe, Ärijuhtimine (MBA, *cum laude*), Tartu Ülikooli Majandusteaduskond.
2003–2006 Bakalaureuseõpe, sotsioloogia (BA), Tartu Ülikooli Sotsiaalteaduskond.

Töökogemus

2020–... Maksu- ja Tolliamet, personalikonsultant.
2016–... Rizoom Consulting OÜ, asutaja ja analüütik.
2008–2015 Tripod Grupp OÜ, uuringute spetsialist.
2006–2008 Statistikaamet, töö valdkonna analüütik.

Teaduslik ja arendustegevus

Peamised uurimisvaldkonnad:

Tööalane kompetentsus, praktikakogukonnad, teadmus ja teadmine organisatsioonis, teadmusjuhtimine.

Publikatsioonide loetelu:

Värk, A. ja Reino, A. (2018), “Meaningful solutions for the unemployed or their counsellors? The role of case managers’ conceptions of their work”, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, Vol. 46 No. 1, pp. 12–26.
Värk, A. ja Kindsiko, E. (2018), “Knowing in Journalistic Practice: Ethnography in a public broadcasting company”, *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 298–313.
Värk, A. ja Reino, A. (2020), “Practice ecology of knowledge management – connecting the formal, informal and personal”, *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 77 No. 1, pp. 163–180.

Muu akadeemiline tegevus

Bakalaureuse- ja magistritööde juhendamine ja retsenseerimine Tartu Ülikooli Majandusteaduskonnas.

Keelteoskus: eesti (emakeel), inglise (kõrgtase), vene (algtase).

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ratory study of relationship aspects. Tartu, 2002. Kaitstud 18.11.2002.
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