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KNOWLEDGE AND DISCOURSE  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This work draws on the discipline of Discursive Psychology for a theory of language, shown to be all but absent in the organizational knowledge management literature, and a methodology for the study of discourse. Organizational knowledge sharing is selected as the topic of primary research for its accessibility to analysis, and because it is considered to be an underpinning action to new knowledge creation. The research approaches discourse as action-orientated and locally situated, as constructed and constructive, with function and consequence for speakers. Indicative research questions are concerned with the discursively accomplished phenomena of trust, risk, identity and context, how these are accomplished in rhetorical interaction and with what effect on organizationally situated knowledge sharing.

Recordings of organizations' everyday knowledge sharing meetings, as well as an online discussion forum, are analysed focusing on these four themes. Findings show them to be accomplished as speakers' live concerns in knowledge sharing talk. It is claimed that trust, risk and identity, as contexts displayed and oriented to by speakers themselves, are tacitly and collaboratively accomplished actions, shown to be co-relational and influential to knowledge sharing scope and directions. A further claim is that the analysis of discourse for what contexts in general speakers invoke displays speakers' orienting to trust, risk and identity. Limitations of the present study are discussed, along with speculated implications for knowledge management and future directions for research.

This work aims to contribute to the field of knowledge management in three ways. First, in extending the directions that some scholars and practitioners are already indicating through focusing the interest of study on organizational discourse. Secondly, the study seeks to understand how tacit knowing, as a phenomenon invoked by speakers themselves, is accomplished and how it influences the scope and directions of knowledge sharing actions, and with what effect. Finally, it is claimed that the research provides some support for those theorists in the knowledge management field who promote the knowing how-knowing that formulation, and those who are critical of conventional knowledge management's heavy reliance on technology to deliver its objectives.

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## **Introduction and study aim**

### **Knowledge management and the challenges**

The academic domain and professional discipline of knowledge management (KM) is immense, complicated and endlessly evolving. Few objects of practice and academic inquiry attract such a breadth and scope of theory and points of debate. It is further complicated in that theories in KM, more often than not, draw on other disciplines of study: for instance, the science of complexity (Snowden, 2002), social psychology (Bock, Zmud, Kim and Lee, 2005), cognitive psychology (Virtanen, 2011), organizational theory (Spender, 2002) and philosophy (Nonaka, 1994). There is a very real sense of a discipline that knows no boundaries.

KM's debates take many directions: issues over the role and dominance of technology, questions over ethics, the complexities rising from cultural differences, competing prescriptions for motivating employees to share knowledge, and a great deal of competing theory. Despres and Chauvel (2002) suggest there are too many theories and this, combined with what McFarlane (2011) calls a lack of a 'unifying framework' on the near horizon, presents perhaps one of the greatest challenges for KM. Such panoply of diverse theory can be seen as indicative of definitional difficulties, particularly with the concept of knowledge itself (Quintane, Casselman, Reiche and Nylund, 2011). Bouthillier and Shearer (2002), like many before and since, describe this definitional problem as a significant issue and KM as an ill-defined field which none-the-less makes substantial claims. Lambe (2011) questions how such a 'poorly executed' field with such reportedly high rates of failure can survive in the corporate world. Debates themed around KM failure remain topical (e.g., Jimes and Lucardie, 2003; Akhavan, Jafari and Fathian, 2005; Grant and Qureshi, 2006; Prusak and Weiss, 2007; Weber, 2007; Garcia-Perez and Ayres, 2010; Virtanen, 2011; Burford, Kennedy, Ferguson and Blackman, 2011; Ragab and Arisha, 2013) despite what is described as KM's thriving literature (Hislop, 2010; Ragab and Arisha). To conclude, as Jimes and Lucardie do, that the 'management of knowledge remains a major challenge' for organizations could be interpreted as an understatement.

Organizations today face challenges from at least three directions. First, the unyielding pace of technological development (Bontis, 2002) requires both agility and adaptability. Firms are

seen as ‘complex systems’ operating in demanding, equally complex environments (Snowden and Boone, 2002): a recent study of corporate Chief Executive Officers, for instance, identifies the gap between organizational readiness and the growth in complexity of the business environment as representing the greatest challenge (Madsbjerg and Rasmussen, 2014). Second, there are growing concerns over the now on-going retirement of the ‘baby boomer’ generation characterised as a mass exodus, not just of people but also of knowledge, from the workplace. Third, they face an explosion in information. As reported in Forbes in 2012, “(S)cientists have worked out exactly how much data is sent to a typical person in the course of a year – the equivalent of every person in the world reading 174 newspapers every single day,” (Derbyshire, 2011; as cited in Quast, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, not all of this information can be trusted: IBM predicts that around 80% of corporate data will be ‘untrustworthy’ by 2015 (Easton, 2012). In other words the management of knowledge has become an important priority in the organizational world.

### **One theory dominates**

In general, theories in KM can be positioned on two bisecting continua: *organizational vs. personal knowledge*, and *objectification of knowledge vs. knowledge as social action*. Arguably, the theory which has had the greatest impact and influence is Nonaka’s (e.g., 1994) theory of the knowledge creating firm. This theory conceptualises knowledge as consisting of two types – tacit and explicit – with the former held to be the most valuable, and describes the managed process by which one can be converted to the other as the pre-requisite to the generation of new knowledge in the organizational context. This mandate to convert knowledge combined with the theory’s focus on knowledge at the organizational level results in its being positioned on the organizational knowledge – objectification of knowledge continua. Despite being the target of considerable criticism (e.g., Blackler, 1995; Thompson and Walsham, 2004; Boisot, 2002; Grant, 2002; Virtanen, 2011), this framework and its agenda remain the most influential and contentious in the field, and the most unproblematically adopted (e.g., Rai, 2011).

Competing perspectives are seen in those theories which are classified as approaching knowledge as or embedded in social action, and which include the ‘knowing how – knowing

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.forbes.com> Why Knowledge Management is important to the success of your company. [Online] Accessed 21.10.12

that' formulation promoted by Duguid (e.g., 2005), amongst others. This particular perspective approaches knowledge as comprising two principle elements which are fundamentally prerequisite one to the other: 'knowing how' (equivalent to tacit knowledge) makes 'knowing that' (equated to explicit knowledge) actionable. This proves to have particular salience for the ideas investigated here.

In spite of all these debates, there is one aspect of KM about which most if not all practitioners, theorists and researchers agree on and that is that knowledge is a prime – if not *the* prime – resource of the modern organization.

### **A view of knowledge**

Logically whichever view of knowledge is subscribed to will influence the nature of theory, practice, research methods and focus. According to McFarlane (2011), Nonaka was the first to introduce the concepts of tacit and explicit knowledge to KM, and the trace of these can be seen in a majority of theories in the field. However, it can be shown that Nonaka was not the first to use these concepts in relation to KM. Wagner and Sternberg, for example, were investigating tacit knowledge and its role in intellectual competence as early as 1985. Spender (1996) accredits Nelson and Winter as the first to introduce the tacit/explicit distinction to the management literature in 1982. Nonaka himself openly draws on the work of Michael Polanyi (e.g., 1962) for these terms. This transpired as one of the most significant developments in KM with both scholars – not just Nonaka – becoming the most cited in the field, and the debate over the interpretation of Polanyi's work virtually a topic in its own right. The question of what constitutes the nature of knowledge is perhaps one of the most fundamental and contested in the literature.

If, as indicated by many in the field, knowledge is important to organizational well-being, development and accomplishment then it logically follows that harnessing this through controlling, leveraging and applying it will enhance an organization's opportunities to achieve success. The organizational management of knowledge is not merely a passing fad (Hislop, 2010; Chourides, Longbottom and Murphy, 2003). But if the phenomenon is not well understood or comprehensively specified then, logically, it cannot be harnessed to any degree of predictable effect. While it is noted that the tacit/explicit structural definition of knowledge is widely subscribed to, there is a strong impression that there are as many

variations, versions and extensions to this as there are theories. The question of what constitutes the nature of knowledge is so contested that, with the exception of a brief summary account, it is beyond the scope of the present work to engage with these debates in any detail.

### **An approach that focuses on discourse**

A key finding of the literature review is that whereas many KM theorists, researchers and practitioners agree that ‘knowledge work’ is largely accomplished in interactional social discourse, few if any have located theory, research or practice in this site. The present study speculates that Discursive Psychology (DP) can provide both the theoretical framework and research methodology within which to approach organizational knowledge work, thus extending the directions indicated by many in the KM field since the early 1990s.

From the DP perspective, knowledge is not an object to be captured, stored and passed around. Rather, knowledge is an accomplishment of social interaction with others: knowledge is constructed and shared in talk and text in interaction (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Many existing KM theories take this general direction emphasising the action-orientation of knowledge, and the importance of language (e.g., Thompson and Walsham, 2004; Blackler, 1993; Burford *et al.*, 2011), although in almost all cases, there is a near absence of a theory of language (one exception being Nonaka’s (e.g., 1994) reference to Searle’s (1969) *Speech acts*). DP would take these ideas one step further by foregrounding a theory of language, and in focusing the enquiry on *how* knowledge work is accomplished in talk interaction, with *what* discursive resources and consequences. The DP perspective on knowledge and knowledge work has some synergy with the modern organizational theory and practice of ‘sense-making’, which is concerned with how people experience life, and how they perceive experience (Madsbjerg and Rasmussen, 2014).

The research and analysis reported here focuses on organizational knowledge sharing actions in the context of everyday organizational interactions. Alongside the nature of knowledge, knowledge sharing is arguably one of the most fundamental, complex and problematic topics on KM’s agenda. Drawing on KM research and theory, four thematic categories of knowledge sharing are identified, and which form the focus of research: identity, trust, risk and context. What the findings show is that not only are these four themes present in the data

as linguistically constructed by speakers and (discussion forum) contributors, they are also co-relational and influencing on the scope and directions of knowledge sharing actions. A key conclusion is that trust, risk and identity are themselves contextual phenomena invoked in knowledge sharing actions. This is shown to be corroborated when the analytic focus investigates what contexts *per se* speakers invoke in their knowledge sharing discourse, with these three contextual phenomena shown to be present. A principle claim made is that the present research and findings provide some empirical support for the ‘knowing how-knowing that’ formulation in KM and, in particular, display the influential properties of knowing how on the actions of sharing knowledge.

### **Thesis structure**

The thesis is presented in two parts: Part One comprises the literature review, with Part Two presenting the analysis and findings from primary research.

#### *Part One*

Chapter One discusses some of the principle and current themes and debates in the KM literature arguing that these are largely rooted in the complexities and confusion over the definition of knowledge. Chapter Two asks, if KM is the object of such debate what of its theories? A review of theories in KM reveals a sharply divided field, but one which is dominated by one theory despite considerable criticism. Proceeding from there, Chapter 3 explores the methodology, theory and topics of research in discourse analysis, with a specific focus on Discursive Psychology. From these perspectives, knowledge and its management are approached as human action accomplished in social interaction. A brief comparison is drawn between DP and ‘sense-making’.

Chapter 4 brings together the salient ideas and theses from the preceding discussions, principally drawing connections between notions of tacit knowing (knowing how), Discursive Psychology, and the thematic categories of trust, risk, identity and context implicated in knowledge sharing actions. Directions for primary research are thus established. A brief summary and set of conclusions completes Part One.

## *Part Two*

Part Two begins with a short introduction, followed by a detailed and thorough discussion of research methodology, including epistemology and ontology, and indicative research questions. The research is located in social constructionism as an interpretive study focusing on organizational knowledge sharing. The subsequent four Chapters each report in detail the analysis and findings of original research tropicalized on each of the four knowledge sharing thematic categories. The final Chapter brings all of these findings together in a detailed discussion framed around the research questions, subsequently linking these findings to the debates and issues in KM raised in Part One.

## **Summary**

The aim of the present study is to develop a practical approach to organizational knowledge work focusing on knowledge sharing, and which can be shown to have resonance for KM. The objective is to address a perceived gap in the KM literature in terms of the near absence of a theory of language, and the study of discourse as the location of knowledge work, thus representing an extension to existing theory and research in the field. The study has the potential to make a valid contribution to a domain that is perceived as contested and overly complicated, and which is claimed by many in the field to have failed to deliver on its promises. The indicative research questions are these: the analysis of knowledge sharing actions in organizational discourse, drawing on DP, and with a focus on the themes of identity, trust, risk and context, will show how these are discursively constructed by speakers as co-relational and influential to knowledge sharing, and with what effect. In particular, a DP analysis can display how these thematic categories are tacitly accomplished psychological phenomena in organizational discourse.

# **PART ONE**

## **Literature Review**



## **Chapter 1: Debates and themes in knowledge management**

### **1.1 Key questions in the knowledge management domain**

The principle issues reported in the knowledge management (KM) literature have changed little over the last two decades, not least of all the debate over precisely what constitutes knowledge management. The roots of many if not most of these issues can be traced to the debate over the nature of knowledge itself. Consequently this Chapter begins with a brief review of the complexities and confusions over the focus of management - knowledge. Developing from there, the role of KM is considered: is KM just a 'trendy' name for information management or a tool in the strategy for business success? Two themes of interest emerge: first, a consensus over the importance of knowledge in the modern organizational environment and second, a view of knowledge as a socially accomplished phenomenon allied to a move to a more people-centric approach in contrast to the conventional reliance and emphasis on technology, which in turn raises the question of whether it should be managed at all. This leads into the debate over the commodification and reification of knowledge, and issues concerning KM's reported high rates of failure. The difficulty in measuring KM success or failure is itself identified as a 'failure factor'. The issue of culture is discussed around the question of whether 'one size can fit all.'

The discussion subsequently turns to an investigation of two of the most prominent themes in KM, creating and sharing knowledge, highlighting the diversity of perspective. The subject of knowledge sharing is of particular interest given that it represents a more practical focus of study as opposed to, for instance, new knowledge creating. Consequently, the review highlights some of the key factors reported in the literature as influencing, in some way, knowledge sharing practices. These factors are used to establish some early directions for primary research.

### **1.2 The debate over the nature of knowledge**

Perhaps one of the most challenging issues in the KM domain concerns the nature of knowledge itself (Grant, 1996; Quintane, Casselman, Reiche and Nylund, 2011; Tsoukas and

Vladimirou, 2001; Schultze and Stabell, 2004; Snowden, 2002). Based on his content analysis of 160 publicly available organizational KM frameworks (theories, strategies, accounts, reports), Heisig concludes that "...a uniform understanding of the term knowledge does not exist in the KM frameworks," (2009: 13). There is in its place considerable complexity and confusion over the nature, constitution and location of knowledge (Gourlay, 2006; Bhatt, 2001; Grover and Davenport, 2001; Quintane *et al.*). This in turn has implications for KM and all of its associated issues and debates as it would seem reasonable to suggest that the way in which knowledge is defined determines how it is managed, and how it is researched.

In broad terms the literature is largely split between those who intentionally or otherwise reify knowledge as an object (e.g., Nonaka, 1994; Andreeva and Kainto, 2011; Leonard, 2007), and those who view it as an accomplishment of or in social action (Blackler, 1993, 1995; Quintane *et al.*, 2011; Greenwood and Levin, 2005). Between these two perspectives, debates around the nature of knowledge turn around subjectivity (e.g., Gourlay, 2006) versus objectivity (e.g., Nonaka and Toyama, 2007); personal (e.g., Grant, 2002) versus organizational knowledge (e.g., Nonaka, 1994) with, for instance Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) emphasising the need for a clearer understanding of the relationship between these two concepts.

A significant debate concerns the tacit-explicit framework of knowledge, arguably the most frequently referenced definition in the KM literature (Virtanen, 2011; Alguezaui and Filieri, 2010). Explicit refers to knowledge that can be easily transferred, shared, articulated, stored and codified, while tacit refers to knowledge that is difficult to articulate and costly to share (Grant, 2002). Nonaka is credited with introducing this framework to KM in the 1990s (Virtanen). His theory of the knowledge creating firm (e.g., 1991; 1994) claims to offer a prescription for how organizations can leverage success by generating new knowledge through converting tacit to explicit knowledge and vice versa. Nonaka openly draws his tacit / explicit construct from the earlier work of Polanyi (e.g., 1962). (Nonaka's theory together with its various subsequent versions, developments and derivatives are discussed in detail in the next Chapter). Michael Polanyi, a philosopher and scientist, wrote extensively on the nature of personal knowledge in the context of the exact sciences.

The works of both Nonaka and Polanyi have since become the most influential and cited in the KM literature (Despres and Chauvel, 2002). While the former is the target of considerable criticism (e.g., Thompson and Walsham, 2004; Virtanen, 2011; Jakubik, 2011; Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001; Gourlay, 2006), Polanyi's work is reputed to be widely misunderstood and misrepresented (Grant, 2007; Grant and Qureshi, 2006; Tsoukas, 2011; Virtanen; Gourlay) with a suggestion that variation in the interpretation of Polanyi's work underlies at least some of the issues in the KM field (Crane and Bontis, 2014: this topic is returned to in section 2.5.3).

A brief reference to some of the other formulations of knowledge in the KM literature serves to illustrate the confusion and complexity on this question: Thompson and Walsham (2004) emphasise the importance of context to any understanding of knowledge; for Greenwood and Levin (2005), knowledge is a socially constructed and distributed phenomenon which positions knowledge as the product of social interaction, emphasising the action-orientation of knowing; in a similar vein, Brown and Duguid (1999) formulate know how as embedded in practice; for Boisot (2002), knowledge comprises dispositions to act and as residing in people's heads while data is out there in the world, and information is that which mediates between the two. In his account of Communities of Practice, Paul Duguid (2005) reasons that knowledge can be understood as knowing how and knowing that, with the former enabling the latter to be actionable but notes that one cannot be substituted for the other, nor can knowing that give rise to knowing how. This can be seen as a further development of the ideas proposed earlier by Brown and Duguid.

From this brief survey on the subject of the nature of knowledge within the KM literature, this can be characterised as contested and complicated territory but one which also, it is proposed here, underpins most if not all of its other debates and issues.

### **1.3 What is knowledge management?**

In their report of methodologies used in KM practice based on 12 private and public sector organization case studies, Bouthillier and Shearer (2002) identify the definition of KM as an area of major concern. Using a framework of six features of KM initiative (goals and

objectives, the nature of the knowledge under management, the sources and users of knowledge, knowledge processes and methodologies, and technologies used), they report 8 distinct KM methodologies ranging from an emphasis on communication to one on action. What is particularly intriguing about this study is the suggestion of the prime organizational focus on tacit knowledge, which they describe as ill-defined. However on a cautionary note, Bouthillier *et al.*'s interpretive study is based on an investigation of organizations' publicly available documents: it could consequently be criticised on the basis of subjectivity and selectivity. The researchers do raise the valid question of whether KM is just a 'faddy' new name for Information Management, suggesting that the differences between the two disciplines are not well expressed.

Hislop (2010) asks a similar question in his quantitative methods investigation of academic journals and consultancy firms, finding that KM as a topic is attracting increasing interest from academia but that leading consultancy firms appear to have dropped any reference to the practice. Note that in 2014 this is not strictly speaking the case: Pricewaterhouse Cooper LLP, for instance, may not use the label knowledge management, but the language and the issues they deal with as publicised on their website are inherently bound to those of KM.<sup>2</sup> Add to this the substantial list of international conferences on the subject (as any routine Google search reveals), and it is clear that KM continues to be a widely regarded organizational concern. Interestingly, Hislop notes a shift in KM's emphasis from technology towards a more people-centric focus, arguably the result of an increasing movement in the direction of knowledge as a socially constructed phenomenon as noted earlier. The latter point is discussed in more detail in the subsequent Chapter from the perspective of KM theory.

Setting some historical context, David Snowden (2002) proposes three ages or generations of KM development. The first, pre-1995, is dominated by technology and process re-engineering with the second, beginning in the mid-1990s, marked by Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) influential book, *The knowledge-creating company*. Snowden's third generation introduces what he claims to be a new paradoxical understanding of knowledge as both a 'thing' and a 'flow' (Snowden's terms). The essence of these ideas can be seen in Bontis' essay on intellectual capital in which he proposes that organizational knowledge management

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/people-change-consulting-services/index.jhtml>, [Online] Accessed 26 March 2014.

focuses on two related phenomena - organizational learning flows and intellectual capital stocks: they are related on the principle that the more readily an organization can acquire knowledge, the greater its tendency to use it. Consequently Bontis emphasises paying attention to how knowledge moves and changes within organizations. On a point of criticism, it could be argued that the ability to assimilate knowledge is no guarantee of proficiency in its application.

The findings from studies of KM practice would suggest something of a gulf between practice and research (Grover and Davenport, 2001). Crane (2011), for instance, reports an analysis of discourse in a Knowledge Manager's online forum as compared and contrasted with issues and debates in the literature. A key finding is that while forum participants axiomatically treat knowledge as object, this remains the topic of considerable debate in the literature. Returning to Bouthillier and Shearer's (2002) analysis, they note that while organizations seem to be applying Nonaka's (e.g., 1994) model of the knowledge creating firm (which would explain the identified emphasis on tacit knowledge as this particular theory foregrounds its importance), they contrastingly find that the acquisition of knowledge, creation of new knowledge, or identification of knowledge needs are – in all cases – not on the firms' agendas although knowledge sharing is. They also note a heavy reliance on Information Technology (IT), which contrasts with Hislop's (2010) review which charts a move away from technology, but which is consistent with the emphasis on knowledge sharing. If these organizations are only intent on knowledge sharing supported by IT – and by default, coding, recording and storing – are these practices not better understood as information management?

According to Wiig (1997), KM is the defined process by which all things related to knowledge such as policies and programs are managed with the aim of building and deploying intellectual capital effectively for the purposes of gain. This is a broad explication which could be open to considerable interpretation. Taking a more socially grounded approach, Blackler (1995) views KM as the management of organizational competencies with the emphasis on knowledge and the attainment of competitive advantage. Boisot (2002) claims, as do many, that the impetus behind the take up of KM at the organization level is driven by rapid developments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), suggesting that KM is at least in part defined by technology and technology practices. Grant (2002), for instance, in his account of the knowledge based view of the firm, points to

increasing digitisation as a significant propellant. According to Grant, this view of the firm, developed in the 1990s, is based on the resource/capability analysis of the firm, epistemology and organizational learning, all of which, he claims, have their focus on the role of knowledge as a factor in production. However, he questions whether this adds up to a new theory of business activity.

A further perspective is offered by Zack (2002) who promotes the idea of knowledge as the most important strategic resource that an organization can possess, in which the ability to manage and leverage this effectively represents the most important capability in achieving and maintaining a competitive advantage. Consequently, Zack reasons, firms need to identify what they do and do not know, with the gaps addressed as part of an overall organizational strategy linked to economic value and competitive advantage. In the field of Organizational Learning, this would be called a Training Needs Analysis and a Return on Investment. Although Zack argues for the need for an organizational strategy, his perspective could be interpreted as suggesting that KM is another name for Managed Learning Environment.

One topic of debate that is of particular interest is the view of knowledge as a social phenomenon (Jakubik, 2011). In her argument for a new framework for knowledge creation to replace that proposed by Nonaka (1994), Jakubik calls for a better understanding of knowledge as a phenomenon embedded in human action and interaction. This has synergies with Heisig's (2009) finding of an emphasis on human factors (culture, people, leadership) as perceived key success factors in KM, which he identifies in his comparative analysis of 160 KM frameworks. Note that Heisig's report draws on data published between 1995 and 2003, with the frameworks including anything from an academic theoretical piece to a firm's published organizational strategy. This none-the-less suggests that the theme of human factors and action has a persistent track record in the literature.

What can be drawn from this brief review of KM definition is that commentators largely agree on the primary aims and objectives of KM, albeit often using differing terminologies, but disagree on where its primary emphases should lie and how KM should be implemented. Further, the answer to the question over KM's status as a 'faddy' new name for Information Management largely depends on which prescription is subscribed to. Consideration of what is meant by 'knowledge management' leads directly to another question of interest: should knowledge be managed?

#### **1.4 Should knowledge be managed?**

The specific issue here concerns whether knowledge should it be managed, controlled and ordered in the way that KM seems to suggest? Heisig's (2009) review, mentioned at the end of the previous section, finds that the most frequently discussed KM activities are knowledge transfer, generation, use, storage, management (e.g., organizing and classifying) and acquisition. These can all be understood as control activities: that is, activities which aim to control, in some way or another, the target of interest.

Evidence of control is also found in a study by Burford, Kennedy, Ferguson and Blackman (2011). They divide the literature into two discordant theoretical themes: the traditional approach contrasted with the practice-based approach. The traditional view emphasises high-level organisational strategy, with work directed and knowledge controlled at every stage from production to use, and the role of manager as central to knowledge work. In contrast the practice-based view has learning and knowing as embedded in everyday practices and experiences from which knowledge emerges. (The practice-based approach has some coherence with Communities of Practice', which is discussed in section 2.4). In their view, it is the latter which is the more successful and practical approach. Thus, traditional KM is about decisions made by a manager which, according to Burford and her colleagues, lets knowledge simply slip through the organizational net. This view of the practice-based approach has connection with the findings of an ethnomethodological study of how members of an alliance of organisations evolve into a distinctive and unified social entity through their everyday practices and sharing of experiences: they become a practice in their own right, with no suggestion of any attempt to manage the group's knowledge (Bjorkeng, Clegg and Pitsis', 2009).

In his conceptualisation of organizational knowledge creating, positioned as a challenge to that proposed by Nonaka (e.g., 1994), Gourlay (2006) raises the question of ethics directly. In referring to the social nature of knowledge, he suggests that collective knowledge can also be viewed as behaviour. In this sense, "(T)he issue of consciously influencing others' unconscious behaviours also raises important ethical questions," (1429). Reporting on a similar theme, Rechberg and Syed (2013) focus on the issue of ownership. They claim that

the conflict lies in the idea that while people have knowledge inside their heads (which they own), their employing companies require that they share it. Their reasoning suggests that this creates a tension in knowledge processes and potential ethical concerns in the organizational conduct towards those individuals. Their solution is a moral contract between employees and employers, proposing that such a contract would lead to improved KM practices. In the absence of any support from research, this remains a speculation.

The whole issue of the appropriateness of managing what some view as a social phenomenon, or as 'sticky' to the individual (Leonard, 2007: her term), is sparsely covered in the literature. Central to this question as with many others is the definition of knowledge, which leads to the next topic of discussion, namely the view of knowledge as a commodity.

### **1.5 The commodification and reification of knowledge**

A characterising feature of the traditional perspectives (aligned to Snowden's (2002) first and second generations) on KM is the commodification and reification of knowledge. The literature is largely split over this issue with some claiming that commodification leads to poor practice while others see it as a business opportunity. For instance Smith (2005), in her paper on researching ethnic minorities, concludes somewhat pessimistically that far from being inspired by the pursuit of knowledge, the knowledge economy has the goal of turning knowledge into a commodity and which is perhaps inappropriately referred to as 'knowledge creating'. Contrastingly, Ichijo (2007), in his definition of KM as the process of sharing, creating, protecting and discarding knowledge, un-problematically constructs it as an object of value to be traded and leveraged.

A different perspective on the notion of knowledge as commodity can be drawn from Peter Drucker's (1998a) visionary paper on the nature of future organizations. He predicts that an organization 20 years hence will have fewer tiers of management, relying instead on 'knowledge workers' who would be seen as specialists. (This article was originally published in 1988: consequently Drucker could be referring to 2008 or 2018). Arguably the first to introduce the notion of the knowledge worker, Drucker also gives a pragmatic account of knowledge: "(I)nformation is data endowed with relevance and purpose. Converting data into information thus requires knowledge. And knowledge, by definition, is specialized," (5).



Accordingly, workers are the ones who will do the majority of work, which they can do because they are specialist. Moreover specialists are needed by the transformation that technology is bringing to the workplace. One interpretation of Drucker's vision suggests that it is the knowledge specialists who are the commodity rather than the knowledge that they possess. As an interesting aside, Drucker rather ironically draws positive connections between this theoretical future organization and the workings of the UK's National Health Service, which the UK media in recent years frequently paints as on the verge of near collapse<sup>3</sup>.

By the mid-1990s, the view of knowledge as a commodity had become deeply entrenched which is consistent with Snowden's (2002) chronology of KM development, as noted earlier. Knowledge had become branded as the essential feature of the successful company, linked to innovation abilities and capabilities (e.g., Drucker, 1998b; Ichijo, 2007; Leonard and Straus, 1997), and competitive edge (e.g., Bhatt, 2001; Quintane, Casselmam, Reiche and Nylund, 2011; Grover and Davenport, 2001) amongst many other positive attributes. As Spender and Grant (1996) summarise, knowledge had become acknowledged as the main source of 'economic rent' (their terms), and its management had become a significant concern in business thinking (Shadbolt and Milton, 1999).

If a product can be a commodity with a value does it necessarily follow that it must be seen as an object? Thompson and Walsham (2004), in their analysis of the role and importance of context to knowledge, are particularly critical of approaches to knowledge which reify it as an object, singling out Nonaka's (1994) theory of the knowledge creating firm. This is, arguably, a point of interpretation as Nonaka does not make a direct reference to the reification of knowledge, but it can be inferred as such mainly because of the knowledge conversion process which lies at the heart of this theory (see section 2.5 for discussions).

Another way in which knowledge has been commodified and reified is through the emphasis on technology – that is, as an object to be classified and coded, tagged with metadata and stored in a repository for instance. KM has often been criticised for laying too much emphasis on ICT and IT (e.g., Shadbolt and Milton, 1999; Prusak, 2001; Grover and Davenport, 2001; Bhatt, 2001). However, it would be redundant to insist that technology plays no part in KM.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, the BBC's report on 'collapsing hospitals': <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-19577489> [Online]. Accessed 26 March 2014.

Technology is often credited as a major driver in the take up of KM (e.g., Smith, 2005; Grant, 2002), and technology is today a ubiquitous, vital and embedded part of most organizations.

Ironically, alongside the knowledge commodification issue, and against a backdrop of general agreement over its importance to organizational success, the practice of KM has a less certain outlook. Grover and Davenport (2001) predicted that knowledge management, if it realises its full potential, should eventually become so embedded in the organization that it becomes all but invisible. Invisible or simply not there? This leads into the question of KM success or failure and the problems associated with its measurement.

### **1.6 Success or failure**

In a review of the historical and contemporary developments in KM, Prusak and Weiss (2007) conclude that around 50% of the initial KM implementations in organizations failed for a variety of reasons: too much emphasis on technology, a failure to link KM initiatives to organizational strategy, a one-size fits all approach, and, of particular interest here, a lack of focus on the social aspects of trust and relationships. This finding, while drawing on no more than anecdotes and references to other literature, is consistent with the period in which knowledge is predominantly seen as a commodity. Prusak and Weiss do not specify how they define failure as an outcome so it is unclear how the figure of 50% has been arrived at. Weber (2007) notes 15 failure factors in her literature review focusing on repository-based KM approaches, finding that attempts to build a ‘monolithic organizational memory’ are doomed, and that technology should not be seen as the sole solution (to successful KM). This conclusion finds support in other studies, particularly where KM initiatives are exclusively focused on ICT projects, and which are often specifically designed to convert tacit to explicit knowledge (e.g., Grant and Qureshi, 2006). Lack of supportive leadership is also seen as a significant contributing factor to failure. A related issue is the apparent inability to show measurable benefits, something which Crane (2011) highlights in her analysis of an online KM discussion forum. However note that Weber, like Prusak and Weiss, does not define what constitutes failure as an outcome of KM.

Some workers have studied specific examples of KM in practice. Garcia-Perez and Ayres (2010) report a study of knowledge sharing practices amongst academic researchers, where a

wiki is used as the knowledge-sharing environment. Despite the academics' involvement in its design, and stated intentions to use it, the wiki failed over time through lack of use. Garcia-Perez and Ayres use qualitative semi-structured interviews with a randomly selected small representative group of researchers to unpick the reasons for the failure, finding that lack of time and inertia are key factors in low contributor rates and visit duration. In a similar vein, Tong and Mitra (2009), in their study of how Chinese culture affects KM practices, find that a company website established as a formal knowledge sharing platform attracted little use, with most of their participants not even aware of its existence. In a fascinating study of US pharmaceutical giant, PharmaCorps, Braganza and Mollenkramer (2002) use interviews and access to corporate documents to chart the rise and fall of a KM initiative on a global scale. In this case, with the PharmaCorps strategy wholly centred on IT, the failure to deliver this led to the dismantling of the KM initiative and its team.

More recently, Lee, Gon Kim and Kim (2012) use self-reporting survey methods in a quantitative study of firms' capabilities to acquire, convert, apply and protect knowledge. Although this is one of the few research reports which approaches its topic based on a stated hypotheses for empirical testing, the methods are not explicit enough to be replicable, nor is there any statement of control for confounding variables such as bias, to which self-report surveys are claimed susceptible (Brannen, 2005). None-the-less, their findings are consistent with the literature: top management has a strong impact on knowledge process capabilities, as do collaboration, learning and IT support. But, again, what this study does not do is offer any measure of success or failure as outcomes.

Focusing a critical lens on learning and knowledge-creating organizations, Garvin (1998) has a slightly different perspective on failure. Claiming that there have been more failed programs than successes, Garvin suggests that it is the scholars, with their 'near mystical terminology' (his terms), who are largely to blame for this failure through being too quick to jump on "...the bandwagon, beating the drum for 'learning organizations' and 'knowledge-creating companies'," (49). Too much emphasis has been placed on knowledge creation, he claims, and not enough on its application. A review of the KM literature by Akhavan, Jafari and Fathian (2005) suggests that in the near two decades since Garvin implicated scholars, little has changed: they note a KM failure rate of up to 70%, which elsewhere Virtanen (2011) ascribes to popular theories of KM being simply wrong. Akhavan *et al.*'s work is

based on an analysis of what others have reported, rendering this an interpretation of data that is already interpreted, and consequently open to criticism of bias and selectivity.

A further explanation of KM failure suggests it is due to traditional thinking. In their review of the literature, Burford *et al.*, (2011) find that organizations ingrained in traditional thinking have a tendency to objectify knowledge (in one, the organization's knowledge repository became known as the information junkyard). By traditional thinking, the researchers refer to an emphasis on high level strategy, and rigid structures in which work is directed and knowledge recorded in documents. They also note that such organizations force the establishment of communities of practice rather than allowing these to emerge naturally. In contrast, Nonaka's (1994) theory of the knowledge creating firm refers to the informal community as the location of emergent knowledge and new ideas, proposing that because these entities are so important they should be related to the formal hierarchical structure of the organization. That is precisely what Burford *et al.* suggest leads to failure.

A recent investigation of failure factors in KM initiatives finds the top-ranked causes to include a lack of a KM orientated culture coupled with a deficit in top management commitment and support, resistance to change, lack of worker involvement and weak usability of the KM systems (Akhavan and Pezeshkan, 2013). Similarly to Akhavan *et al.*'s earlier study in 2005, the later work uses case studies drawn from the extant literature, raising the previously concerns. They also claim to draw on 'Grounded Theory' for their study's methodology, but do not describe what this is. Further, no dates are given for the case studies raising the possibility that the researchers' conclusions are based on out-of-date data.

This raises a point worth emphasising: in most of the examples reported here and elsewhere in this literature review, the researchers do not generally specify any form of rigorous methods for controlling for confounding variables and bias, for instance. It is therefore possible that for each cited failure, a success story could probably be produced.

A broad conclusion that can be drawn is that early KM initiatives were not entirely successful perhaps largely because organizations focused on the tangible, digestible, measurable features of KM such as the introduction of new ICT. The notion of measurement is briefly considered next.

## **1.7 Measuring knowledge management**

Very little exists in the literature in terms of robust and tested methods for measuring the success or failure of KM initiatives. This is not surprising given the difficulties over definition: if the subject of measurement is not well specified, how can it be measured?

Jenny Darroch (2003) claims to be the first to develop a scale to measure KM behaviours and practices which she suggests will help in the development of a theory of KM. The scale is specifically developed to measure behaviours in knowledge acquisition, dissemination and responsiveness (use of knowledge), and underwent a (claimed) rigorous development and validity testing program. No other example of a similarly developed scale has been found elsewhere in the KM literature, so this particular work stands out as a scientifically based, psychologically orientated empirical work published in the KM literature. A further point to draw is that while Darroch makes much of the definition of KM, she does not define its product.

A report by Chourides, Longbottom and Murphy (2003) argues that KM, far from being a passing fad, is an essential tool for survival. They report a qualitative methods investigation of the critical factors and performance measures in effective KM, proposing five principle factors – strategy, people / HRM, IT, quality and marketing. In their review of the literature, Chourides and his co-workers find that motivation and reward have notable impacts on KM and that an environment which facilitates trust is essential. Their empirical study uses surveys and interviews, limited to private sector firms, finding little evidence to support the *perception* that KM leads to improved performance, and that performance measures are not well developed. Additionally they emphasise the need to be able to demonstrate unambiguous links between KM and the ‘bottom line’ (their terms).

This apparent lack of an ability to measure KM impacts and outcomes is a point of on-going debate, arguably underlined by the problems with knowledge and KM definition, but also suggestive of considerable belief in a business practice that has questionable evidence of its ability to deliver (Lambe, 2011).

## **1.8 Knowledge management and culture**

The theme of culture is frequently raised in subsequent discussions so here the sides of the debate in KM are positioned in overview. The principle question concerns whether ‘one size can fit all’. Can a framework or theory and its associated practice which is allegedly shown to work in, for instance, a Japanese culture, transmit, translate and operate effectively in other cultures? The question does not just concern national culture, but also organizational culture (Tong and Mitra, 2009), even culture at the level of group. Hence, the notion of culture is here understood in its wider sense of context.

A recent empirical study which focuses on how Chinese national cultural factors influence KM practice in high-tech firms claims that factors such as fear of losing face, hierarchy consciousness, and preference for face-to-face communications results in a general tendency to keep knowledge implicit but with a willingness to share informally (Tong and Mitra, 2009). Arguably one would find the same outcomes in Western firms but for different reasons. In their study of Korean organisations, Bock *et al.*, (2005) similarly find that cultural factors influence KM outcomes – in their case, intentions to share knowledge.

Others have investigated organisational factors on KM practice and outcomes. Donate and Guadamillas (2011), in an empirical study of 111 Spanish firms, find that organizational culture, leadership and Human Resource practices affect KM practices on innovation outcomes. In his theoretical piece, Rai (2011) claims that organizational culture is critical in building and reinforcing new knowledge but admits that little is known about how this works. Yoo and Torrey (2002) compare the effects of US and Korean culture on a single multi-national finding major differences in knowledge sharing behaviours between the two: Koreans tend to share knowledge in informal settings, while their American counterparts perceive their KM IT system as their primary vehicle for sharing their knowledge.

The results of these and other studies suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach will simply not work. As Despres and Chauvel (2002) point out, organizations vary considerably in structure, scope, culture and many other aspects such that a standardised approach will not deliver the desired KM outcomes. A significant differentiator not mentioned by Despres and Chauvel is, of course, language.

Culture, understood as context, is shown to influence KM and its outcomes on at least three inter-related cultural levels: group, organizational and national. From a psychological perspective, there is a fourth layer to this founded on the notion of individual differences, and which complicates the landscape even further. In social psychology, mainstream research in the study of personality places considerable emphasis on measuring individual differences (e.g., variation in anxiety levels in response to tests), and the relationships between these (Pervin, 2003). JC Spender (1996) indicates such differences when, drawing on Kant, he claims that knowledge is formed from individual sensory impression, implying its uniqueness to the individual rather than constituting some universally shared truth about any external reality. It is the subject of creating new knowledge that is turned to next.

### **1.9 Creating new knowledge**

According to Drucker (1998b), new knowledge is the superstar of entrepreneurship. In fact, the importance of new knowledge, its role in achieving and maintaining organizational competitive edge and in leveraging innovation - even allowing for the debates over its definition and substance – are generally accepted. The on-going debate in the KM literature concerns the ‘how’ based on an interpretation of the ‘what’. This question is inevitably at the centre of the subsequent Chapter’s discussions around KM theory so, here, the concept of new knowledge creation is considered from a learning perspective.

Two assumptions are drawn from the literature. First, that new knowledge is generally created in social interaction between people (Greenwood and Levin, 2005; Gaines, 1989; Lee *et al.*, 2012). Second, that the creation of new knowledge involves a learning process yet, within the KM literature, the learning aspect of new knowledge in particular is under-rated (Lytras and Pouloudi, 2006; Boisot, 2002). For instance, Brown and Duguid (1999), while emphasising the role and importance of organizational Communities of Practice, and the social nature of knowledge, make no reference to the learning process. It is also on these grounds that Gourlay (2006) criticises Nonaka’s (1994) theory of the knowledge creating firm. More specifically, Blackler (1995) draws attention to Nonaka’s distinction between knowledge and learning which he considers to be a mistake. Similarly, Garvin (1998) distinguishes between learning organizations and knowledge-creating companies, suggesting

that too much emphasis is placed on knowledge creating at the expense of knowledge application (with the inference that this application refers to learning). In one of the few empirical studies to focus specifically on organizational learning culture, Lee *et al.*'s quantitative methods study of 120 firms using self-report questionnaires finds that a learning culture positively affects knowledge process capabilities (defined as the capability to acquire knowledge, convert it, apply and protect it).

Leonard (2007), in her discussion on knowledge transfer, emphasises the role of active learning through guided practice, observation and problem solving. Leonard's fundamental thesis is that when knowledge is transferred from one person to another, it rarely remains identical to its original as the knowledge becomes mapped to the recipient's pre-existing internal store of knowledge, experience, categories and concepts. Accordingly, transferred knowledge effectively becomes new knowledge to the recipient. This further implies that knowledge is personal and individually different. On a similar theme, Boisot (2002) notes how people interpret data in different ways and likens knowledge creation to problem solving through hypothesis testing, claiming that this is fundamentally a learning process.

Further insight can be drawn from a consideration of Bloom's Taxonomy, originally published in 1956 and subsequently revised in 2001 (Krathwohl, 2002). According to Krathwohl (one of the Taxonomy's originators), its original purpose was to create a universal, hierarchical and psychologically-based matrix against which all learning objectives could be mapped and measured. It consisted of 6 elements, listed in terms of their relative and incremental complexity: evaluation, synthesis, analysis, application, comprehension, and knowledge. The revised version comprises two dimensions – knowledge and cognitive process. The knowledge dimension's sub-structures are 'factual', 'conceptual', 'procedural' and 'metacognitive'. Those of the cognitive process comprise 'remember', 'understand', 'apply', 'analyse', 'evaluate' and 'create'. This is a universally adopted framework within education and beyond (for instance, anecdotal evidence suggests the Taxonomy is often referred to in organizational learning strategy, design and implementations), yet receives little attention in the KM literature. What this framework represents is a description of the most important goals of learning and their inter-relationships.

A comparison of Bloom's Taxonomy (revised) with notions of knowledge creation drawn from the KM literature suggests that the traditional approaches to understanding and



explicating new knowledge creation are overly-simplistic. According to the Taxonomy, the creation of new knowledge is the pinnacle of a hierarchical, multi-tiered, incremental and co-relational cognitive process which recognises four types of knowledge. Furthermore, these knowledge types are defined clearly within the Taxonomy, and with a notable absence of reference to tacit or explicit knowledge structures. While some in the KM literature, as noted above, refer to the relationship between knowledge, new knowledge creation and the learning process, from the Bloom's Taxonomy perspective knowledge is *a part* of the learning process, and new knowledge creation is *one outcome* of the process. Importantly, the implication of the Taxonomy is that knowledge *can* be managed, but from the learning process perspective.

### **1.10 Knowledge sharing**

A key organizational imperative associated with KM is knowledge sharing. Many scholars consider knowledge sharing (KS) as integral to improving organizational performance (e.g., Earl, 2001; Venkitachalam and Busch, 2012). From a common-sense perspective, however, the prospect of an organization in which its members do not share their knowledge either in conversation or in text would seem inconceivable. More specifically, KS is connected to competitive advantage (Andreeva and Kainto, 2011; Bock *et al.*, 2005; Ringel-Bickelmaier and Ringel, 2010); increased productivity (e.g., Alguezaui and Filieri, 2010); it is key to creating value (e.g., Garcia-Perez and Ayres, 2010; Bock *et al.*); critical to innovation (e.g., Andreeva and Kainto; Alguezaui and Filieri); KS supports response to change and quality improvements, and contributes to new knowledge creation (Andreeva and Kainto). The practice of sharing knowledge is also linked to cost reduction (Ringel-Bickelmaier and Ringel). Bouthillier and Shearer (2002) claim that knowledge management's success is reliant on KS which, based on all of the preceding attributes assigned to KS, would seem reasonable.

One critic of this conventional view of the underpinning importance of KS is Boisot (2002) who claims that it is not knowledge that is shared, rather it is information. From a pragmatic perspective, his argument is somewhat weakened by the title of his work – *The Creating and Sharing of Knowledge* – and the impression that he uses the terms knowledge and information interchangeably. For instance, having reasoned that "...it is never knowledge as

such that flows between agents, but rather data from which information has to be extracted and internalised” (72), he subsequently reasons that in order to share knowledge there needs to be at least some degree of articulation of that knowledge. In spite of this slight confusion, he does offer an interesting and entirely plausible explanation for KS as signifying a degree of resonance between the repertoires (his terms) – the expectations and behaviours - of two or more people. Along with Bock *et al.*, (2005), who define KS as the willingness of people to share, and Evans (2013) who specifically refers to willingness to share as a necessary condition to KS, Boisot is one of the few who describe KS in terms of a process. This could be seen as indicative of the myriad issues associated with the definition of knowledge itself, discussed at the beginning of the Chapter.

Evidence in support of KS as an advantageous organizational practice can perhaps more readily be seen in the lengthy list of barriers, critical factors and enablers associated with the practice. Before taking up some of these issues, it is worth noting a perspective offered by the psychologist Thomas Suddendorf (2013), in his account of the gap between humans and non-human species. Suddendorf reasons that the instinct in humans to share knowledge is innate, irrepressible, and a significant underpinning feature and factor in human evolution: “...by linking our minds to those of others we have enormously increased our predictive capacities and powers of control,” (158), and that humans by their nature give preference to situations more likely to result in new information and understanding. However, Bock *et al.* (2005), in their study of Korean organizations, find that extensive knowledge sharing in organizations is the exception. Yoo and Torrey succinctly identify the key issue: “(I)f knowledge sharing is so universal an aspect of the human experience and critical to relationships, then why is there an issue when it comes to the organizational context?” (2002: 424).

As indicated earlier, a review of the KM literature on knowledge sharing raises a number of barriers including what is described as the natural desire to store and hoard one’s knowledge (Bock *et al.*, 2005; Prusak and Weiss, 2007; Rechberg and Syed, 2013); costs associated with KS (e.g., Alguezaui and Filieri, 2010); the threat of reputational damage (e.g., Bock *et al.*; Leonard and Sensiper, 2007); and the lack of personal recognition (Rechberg and Syed). Some point to the lack of incentives to share creating a barrier (e.g., Prusak and Weiss; Donate and Guadamillas, 2011; Akhavan and Pezeshkan, 2013), but contrastingly, Bock *et al.* and Greer and Lei (2012) find that extrinsic rewards can work as a hindrance to KS. Issues concerning time and a lack of critical mass are found in the context of online knowledge

sharing communities (Garcia-Perez and Ayres, 2010). Leonard and Sensiper warn that low values placed on mentoring can particularly impede the sharing of tacit knowledge. A review of the critical and enabling factors reveals a more discernible pattern.

Technology is frequently connected to KS, distinguished by two contrasting perspectives. Garcia-Perez and Ayres (2010), for instance, in their study of KS behaviour in the context of a research group's Wikipedia, claim that technology does not constitute the 'silver bullet' (their terms). Others promote a similar perspective (e.g., Akhavan and Pezeshkan, 2013; Bouthillier and Shearer, 2002). In contrast, Earl (2001) argues for the importance of communications networks, with their implications of technology mediation. Web 2.0 / Enterprise tools are positioned by Levy (2009) as key enabling factors though noting, perhaps controversially, that their use must be controlled. Clearly, technology in some form has a role in knowledge sharing – as it does in almost every aspect of the modern organization's operations. But technology is a tool of which the perceptive value is dependent on many factors. Consequently, the discussions will not pursue this topic beyond these few points drawn from the literature, principally noting the debate's focus on the extent or otherwise of technology's role in delivering and mediating KS activities.

Culture is a frequently visited theme in KS (see also section 1.8, for instance). Earl (2001) invokes a culture of mutual support as critical to KS while others more explicitly emphasise a culture based on trust (e.g., Alguezaui and Filieri, 2010; Panahi, Watson and Partridge, 2013; Leonard, 2007; Lin and Huang, 2010; Bock *et al.*, 2005). In their literature review and case study examining the effects of culture in KM practices in general, Yoo and Torrey (2002) claim that KS is concerned with trust, integrity, and status. The importance of a trusting, and mutually supportive culture can be seen as the explaining factor in some of the barriers noted above. For instance, without a trusting climate one might very well be disposed to protect one's knowledge and to guard against reputational damage.

There is a strong theme of the social world in accounts of what enables KS. Person-to-person communications in the form of regular meetings (Earl, 2001), physical proximity (Leonard, 2007), and shared narratives (Leonard; Alguezaui and Filieri, 2010) are promoted as key – and common-sense – enablers. These have synergies with an emphasis on the social group (Prusak and Weiss, 2007), networking (Quinn, Anderson and Finkelstein, 1996), and the idea of density (Buchel, 2007; Alguezaui and Filieri). Donate and Guadamillas (2011), in their

study of Spanish firms' sharing of best practices, find that coaching and leadership are important. There are, of course, many other factors mentioned in the KM literature, such as knowledge stickiness and knowledge gaps (Leonard), with the former relating to difficulties in sharing knowledge as a result of problems in separating it from its source (host), and the latter referring to differences in the knowledge between transmitter and receiver. What can be drawn from the present review is that these barriers and enablers (collectively referred to hereafter as 'KS factors') are rooted in fundamental organizational practices, which implies the foundational nature of KS behaviour.

A closer analysis of these factors suggests that these can be mapped or related to one or more of four thematic categories: trust, risk, context and identity. The first two, as shown in the previous discussions, are explicitly referred to in the KM literature on knowledge sharing. The third, context, can be applied to those factors which refer to the action environment and its associated social norms such as those relating to culture. The final category, identity, whilst not specifically referenced in the accounts of KS indicated here, is embedded to factors such as leadership, the urge to stored and hoard personal knowledge and the threat of reputational damage, for instance. Table 1 makes this mapping explicit.

Context = C; Identity = I; Risk = R; Trust = T

<b>KS Factor</b>	<b>Mapped category</b>
Naturally store and hoard knowledge	C I R T
Lack of incentives to share	C
Extrinsic rewards act as a hindrance	C
Trust, integrity and status as key to KS	I T
Culture of mutual support	C I T
Trusting culture / climate	C T
Reputational risk	C I R T
Coaching	C I T
Leadership	C I T
Values placed on mentoring	C R T
Associated costs of KS	C R
Threat of reputational damage	C I R T
Time – diverting work time away from real work	C R

Lack of personal recognition	C I R T
Lack of critical mass	C R
Regular person-to-person communications	C I T
Physical proximity	C
Shared narratives	C I T
Emphasis on social groups (networking, density)	C I T

*Table 1: Knowledge sharing factors mapped to thematic categories of trust, risk, identity and context*

All that has been done here is to organize this lengthy list of claimed influencing factors in KS into a pattern of subjective psychological phenomena. This mapping is itself, and by admission, subjective and interpretive in that the factors are drawn from many different authors each of which has their own aims and agenda. The general heuristic adopted has been to regard each factor as emanating from perceptual experience, and to ask, in the case of shared narratives for instance, given that it is one's perception which leads one to understand this factor as being an experience of shared narratives, what are the psychological phenomena which might give rise to this. With shared narratives, context, identity and trust are conjectured to be the phenomena which are intrinsic to an understanding of the activity of shared narratives.

The final section of this Chapter attempts to draw all of the preceding discussions together under some common themes.

### **1.11 Summary**

This is, beyond doubt, a complex story. Directly leading from the question over the nature of knowledge is the debate over the nature of its management. There are various typologies of KM indicated in the literature although there is a common theme of acceptance of the important role that knowledge and its management – however done – have in an organization's success, sustainability and competitive edge. There is also the question of whether knowledge should be managed at all, with some at least raising this as a question

related to ethics. Unsurprisingly, debates over the commodification and reification of knowledge are shown to be polarised.

The debates and questions around KM success or failure are interesting if for no other reason than that little account is given of what such success or failure actually looks like. None-the-less, there is a theme of high rates of failure reported in the literature with reasons variously ascribed to organizational strategy (e.g., too much emphasis on technology, lack of supportive leadership and disassociation from central organizational strategy), economic consequences (e.g., lack of measureable benefits and an impact on working time), and socio-psychological factors (e.g., a lack of focus on the social aspects of knowledge work such as trust and relationships, and resistance to change). Issues over the ability to apply a robust measurement to KM activities are not only categorised as a failure factor but also result in a lack of supporting evidence for KM as an advantageous organizational practice. Also indicated as a failure factor, the 'one size fits all' as seen from the cultural perspective is claimed to be ineffective due to variation in national cultures. This variation is also claimed to persist at the organizational, group and individual levels, seen from a wider viewpoint of context.

Drawing on the literature, the discussions around new knowledge creation and sharing knowledge generally reprise similar issues to those raised elsewhere. It is interesting to note that while the literature considered here spans a period from the late 1980s to the present, the same issues are shown to recur. It has also been shown how the factors implicated in KS can be mapped to the four thematic categories of trust, risk, identity and context. In most cases, each factor maps to more than one category, and this suggests a potential for co-relation. For instance, leadership, shared narratives and trusting climate map to common categories: can these categories be shown to be co-relational in knowledge sharing actions? Arguably, the same set of thematic categories could be applied to factors claimed to be implicated in KM failure. From a pragmatic perspective and for the purposes of the present study the practice of knowledge sharing - rather than KM failure, for instance - represents a more viable and accessible focus for research.

In the following Chapter, the principle KM theories are reviewed, compared and contrasted, and critically evaluated with particular attention to how these have developed over the last two decades or more. The background to the following discussions also attends to whether

the thematic categories of trust, risk, identity and context are equally implicated as they are in the discussions on knowledge sharing?

## **Chapter 2: Knowledge management's theories<sup>4</sup>**

### **2.1 Introduction**

From any perspective, the knowledge management (KM) landscape is a complex one, not least in the diverse definitions of knowledge itself as noted in the previous Chapter. This has been shown to impact on many of the other debates in KM: the definition of KM (Bouthillier and Shearer, 2002), ethical issues associated with the management of knowledge (Gourlay, 2006), the commodification and reification of knowledge (Greenwood and Levin, 2005), reportedly high failure rates (Virtanen, 2011), the question of how to measure knowledge outcomes (Spender, 2002), whether knowledge is personal or organizational, or both, and cultural specificity (Despres and Chauvel, 2002). In addressing two of the most prominent themes in KM – knowledge creating and sharing – the diversity of perspective on the nature of knowledge is implicated in the diversity of claims for influencing and impacting factors. All of these issues have implications for research, practice and theory.

This Chapter reviews some of the most influential theories, showing how one in particular has dominated the field over the last two decades despite its alleged flaws and misrepresentations. Theories are classified according to a taxonomy, which illuminates what could be seen as a growing trend towards a view of knowledge as accomplished in social action, and bound to context. Context has been identified in the previous Chapter as one of the four thematic categories of knowledge sharing (KS). The discussions begin by addressing some ground-preparing questions. Is KM no more than a passing fad, where does it find its origins, and what are its practical drivers?

### **2.2 Fads, origins and drivers**

This section briefly discusses the issue of fad or substance in relation to KM, a question that is addressed by several scholars, followed by an investigation of its origins which finds

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<sup>4</sup> Elements of this Chapter are published: Crane, L. (2013). A new taxonomy of Knowledge Management theory and the turn to knowledge as constituted in social action. *Journal of Knowledge Management Practice*, 14, (1).



competing versions. The role of technology and Web 2.0, touched on in the previous Chapter, as key drivers in the take up of KM, is also discussed in more detail.

### 2.2.1 More than a passing fad?

A valid question, similar to that considered in the previous Chapter, concerns whether KM is merely a passing management fad (e.g., Hislop, 2010). Prusak insists that KM "... is not just a consultants' invention but a practitioner-based, substantive response to real social and economic trends," (2001: 1002). He does, however, acknowledge that there is some credibility to the sceptic's perception of KM as a consultant's new economic gravy train to replace declining revenues from reengineering (his terms). Umemoto (2002) points out that KM has become a lucrative industry in its own right. Contrast this with Lambe's questioning of how KM has even survived as a corporate practice when, according to his evidence, it has "...poor execution and low satisfaction rates," (2011: 193). Some go further and question the whole notion of managing or controlling knowledge (e.g., Gourlay, 2006). Rather than representing a professional response and toolset for evolving market needs and corporate trends and pull factors, as Prusak suggests, is KM no more than a manufactured doctrine with a practice designed to generate funds for its practitioners and inventors? Or does it have real substance and a justifiable foundation? A perspective is offered towards the end of the following two discussions.

### 2.2.2 The origins of knowledge management

The literature variously describes KM as having its roots in the 1960s and 70's (Lambe, 2011), the 1970s and 80s (Wiig, 1997), the early 1990s (Prusak, 2001), even in the 17<sup>th</sup> century scientific revolution (Boisot, 2002), or as evolving across three generations (Snowden, 2002). Taking a practical line, Wiig proposes that in reality humans have explicitly or otherwise managed knowledge since, for instance, masters took on apprentices. This implies that sharing and creating knowledge is a basic behaviour, but one which has only emerged as a formalised business practice in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The majority of the literature locates the beginnings of organizational KM in the mid-1990s, marked by the publication of one book. Supportively or otherwise, many credit Nonaka and Takeuchi as the progenitors of modern organisational KM with their influential book, *The Knowledge Creating Company*, published in 1995 (e.g., Umemoto, 2002; Snowden, 2002;

Grant, 2007; Virtanen, 2011; Tsoukas, 2011). Note that two earlier versions precede this one (Nonaka, 1991; 1994), and various developed versions succeed it.

Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) book presents a detailed account of the theory of the knowledge creating firm, largely based on observations of Japanese firms, and arguably stands as one of the most significant KM theories so far developed, and which continues to be developed. An earlier account, published in the Harvard Business Review (Nonaka, 1991), resulted in Nonaka being described as 'Mr Knowledge' by *The Economist* magazine (Umemoto, 2002) and prompted McFarlane (2011) to cast Nonaka in the role of 'father of KM'. As will be shown, the publication of this book, and its subsequent popularity, has had a paradigmatic impact (Gourlay, 2006) on the shape, direction, values and validity of KM in almost every sense.

A recent alternative to this view of KM's origins comes from Lambe (2011) who argues that KM is more properly and accurately located in the disciplines of economics and sociology and, more specifically, organizational learning, intellectual capital, and data and information management. Referring to what he refers to as KM's collective amnesia, Lambe argues that the five golden years of KM during the 1990s – when the popular KM literature classics were published – effectively erased all traces of its antecedents, setting a new agenda for decades to come. As Lambe states: "...a better understanding of prior thinking... can perhaps clarify some of the confusions and inconsistencies that beset knowledge management practitioners, [and] bring focus to some of the muddy thinking and silly doctrines that still abound in knowledge management..." (178). His central argument is that KM's direct origins lie in the respective works of Arrow, Machlup and Rogers published in 1962, and which Lambe claims laid the foundations of social and economic theory for the next five decades. These works, and subsequent work in those disciplines, debate and address issues which KM wrestles with today (Lambe). It is this carelessness in ignoring its parentage which is at the heart of KM's dichotomies, according to Lambe. However, it is not strictly true that all KM literature has ignored its parentage: for instance, both Nonaka (1994) and Grant (2002) make reference to works by Machlup and Arrow. Further insight may be gained through a consideration of KM's driving factors.

### 2.2.3 The role of technology and Web 2.0

Technology is widely seen as an influential driver for the development and uptake of KM (Drucker, 1998a; Brown and Duguid, 1999; Grant, 2002; Bhatt, 2001; Boisot, 2002; Prusak, 2001). Panahi, Watson and Partridge (2013), for instance, emphasise the role of Web 2.0 and social media and their affordances for sharing tacit knowledge. But this implicates something of dichotomy. In the past, there has been considerable criticism of KM theories and practice for placing too much emphasis on a systems (or IT) approach, to the point of risking a loss of distinction from IT: that is, promoting the application and use of technology as a *key enabler* for KM success (e.g., Lindvall, Rus and Sinha, 2003; Weber, 2007; Markus, 2001; Grover and Davenport, 2001).

Critics of the systems approach include Prusak (2001) who claims that the focus on technology has reductively defined KM as a process. Similarly, Despres and Chauvel (2002), criticise the rush to take up technology solutions, and the brushing aside of accumulated wisdom of cognitive sciences, philosophy and other disciplines, echoing Lambe's (2011) view. More recently, Ragab and Arisha (2013) point to evidence which implies that many organizations' KM initiatives which took a 100% IT based approach have in fact failed, blaming this state of affairs on the belief in 'exaggerated predictions' (their terms) made by IT vendors. At least in the literature the adherence to technology has softened and few would now consider that technology is the start and end solution to any organizational activity. As Brown and Duguid (1999) argue, problems cannot be solved through the use of information technologies alone and that to do so is to make the error of conflating knowledge and information. Despite this, a casual online search for jobs in knowledge management today reveals that IT continues to be the prerequisite hallmark. A recently advertised lectureship at a UK University explicitly linked knowledge management to Information Systems in the role's title. Despite this, technology, as a specifiable, tangible resource, is perhaps an easier prescription to apply than some of what follows.

In recent years there has been a notable move towards a more social approach to KM with a more people-centric perspective (e.g., Tsoukas, 2011; Jakubik, 2011). In part, this change in emphasis can, rather ironically, be explained by the Web 2.0 phenomenon. Beginning in the early 2000's (Osimo, 2008; Levy, 2009), Web 2.0 ushers in a new era of social networking tools that enable people to become push participants as opposed to passive pull voyeurs.

Levy contrasts the people-orientation of Web 2.0 with the traditional organizational focus of KM, arguing that KM must change.

With KM's apparent obsession with technology from its earliest days, it is a compelling notion to consider that it is technology in the shape of social networks and media services which are again shaping KM's theory and practice. However Garcia-Perez and Ayres (2010) caution strongly against making the assumption that Web 2.0 tools are the sole solution to over-coming issues with, for instance, knowledge sharing. Contrastingly, Prusak and Weiss' (2007) emphasis on social networks and new search technologies in facilitating effective knowledge sharing, for instance, supports a Web 2.0 based solution. However, note that Prusak's and Weiss' arguments and viewpoints are based on the evidence of anecdotes and references to other literature, whereas Garcia-Perez and Ayres draw on their own study, albeit small, concluding that there is still much to understand about Web 2.0 technologies. If this is the case, then what chance for KM and Big Data Analytics, with the latter recently identified by Crane and Self (2014) as constituting both a threat and an opportunity?

To answer the initial question raised in section 2.2.1, the conclusion may be drawn that KM is more than a passing fad or fancy of a consultant's imagination, if for no other reason than the weight of interest in the topic. One can also conclude that it takes its origins from multiple directions which marks it as a far-reaching organizational endeavour. Further, technologies continue to be an influential driver but this paradoxically places KM in a position of risk: what will happen to KM as technologies continue to develop and evolve, opening radically new ways of leveraging their capabilities and contents? Will KM melt into the fabric of the organization and become as much a part of their daily operations, aims, visions, achievements and strategies as Grover and Davenport (2001) predict?

### **2.3 An approach to theories in knowledge management**

The diversity and complexity of KM theory suggests that it would be useful to attempt to develop a method of enabling the comparing and contrasting of various paradigms. This section offers such a taxonomy based on a critical review of more than 40 theories. In preparation for this, two basic questions are asked: what constitutes a theory and how do

theories in KM measure against such a benchmark, and secondly, what is the nature of the underpinning evidence in support of theory?

### 2.3.1 What constitutes a theory?

In reviewing the KM theoretical literature, one becomes aware that there is relatively little use of the word theory. That is, few theorists, when proselytizing their work, refer to it as such preferring instead, for instance, the term framework. Lambe (2012: private correspondence) suggests that it is the incommensurate discipline-languages which underpin KM, together with the lack of a single body of integrated theory (see also McFarlane, 2011), which leads to this absence. If one adopts the scientific understanding of the meaning of theory, that it is an explanation and prediction about a state of affairs given a certain set of circumstances and that such predictions can be empirically tested and shown to be statistically probable or not (Chalmers, 1999), then it could be argued that much of KM theory would be considered problematical. Consequently, in reviewing the theoretical literature, one has had to adopt a less restrictive agenda and accept as theory any work which describes itself as such, or as a framework. The absence of the category theory is not the only absence.

### 2.3.2 Lack of empirical evidence

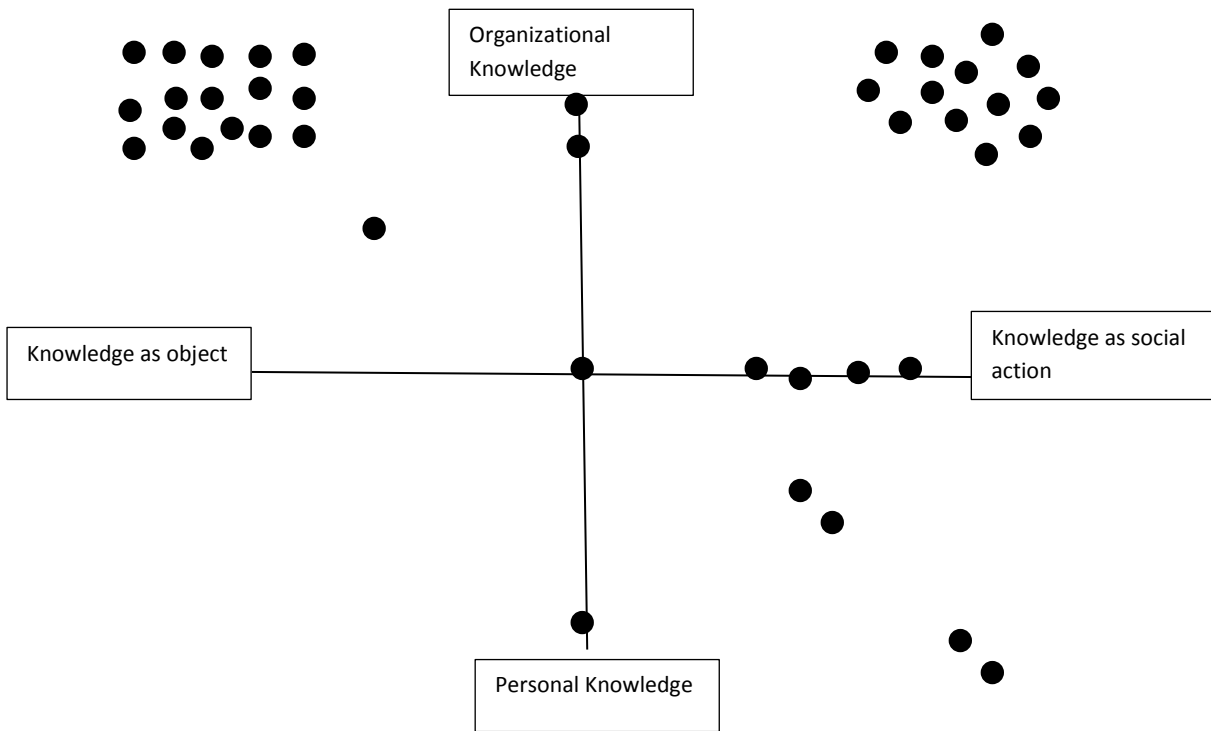
A further observation of the KM theoretical literature is the reliance – as evidence – on what others have reported rather than the evidence of first-hand scientifically grounded research. For instance Tsoukas (2011), in proposing a phenomenological view of tacit knowledge, bases his entire principle largely on an exposition and interpretation of what Polanyi wrote on the subject with no reference to empirical research findings. Another example is Jakubik (2011) who offers a new framework based around the notion of ‘becoming to know’, as a replacement *in part* of Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) theory of the knowledge creating firm. The evidence in support of her proposal is drawn from what others have theorised rather than on empirical research findings. Where frameworks or theories do draw on evidence from research, this tends to be of relatively limited scope in terms of, for instance, participants (e.g., Bouthillier and Shearer, 2002; Donate and Guadamillas, 2011), or in relying on second-hand or anecdotal findings (e.g., Leonard, 2007; Buchel, 2007; Burford, Kennedy, Ferguson and Blackman, 2011).

There is, in fact, little evidence of empirical testing of KM theory. A review of 2,175 journal articles published in the KM literature reports the ‘shocking statistic’ (their terms) that only 0.33% of research actually involves field studies (Serenko, Bontis, Booker, Sadeddin and Hardie, 2010: as cited in Ragab and Arisha, 2013). One notable exception is a study by Nonaka, Byosiere, Borucki and Konno (1994) which investigates the hypothesis at the heart of Nonaka’s theory of the knowledge creating firm. Nonaka *et al.*’s quantitative methods study, an opportunity sampling of 105 Japanese businessmen using self-reporting questionnaires, finds support for the theory: “(T)acit knowledge is thus mobilized through a dynamic “entangling” of the different modes of knowledge conversion in a process which will be referred to as a “spiral” model of knowledge creation”, (342). It is not made clear how this conclusion can be drawn from questionnaires using Likert-like scales nor whether there are any alternative viable explanations for the findings.

### 2.3.3 A taxonomy of theories in knowledge management

As discussed earlier, KM finds its roots in many different disciplines and, perhaps as a consequence, its spectrum of theory is broad, diverse and complex. Heisig’s (2009) review of KM frameworks and theories, referred to in the previous Chapter, finds little in common between them.

A review of the theoretical literature by Despres and Chauvel (2002) counts 72 different KM theories: they report that while there is little universal agreement over the nature of knowledge, there is a broad consensus across most theories that people are the cornerstone of KM and that organizational-level knowledge does not exist (as distinct from organizational knowledge as a unit of analysis, which subject is addressed presently). Thus, according to Despres and Chauvel, the majority of theories in KM approach knowledge as a social construct, and this raises the notion of knowledge as action-orientated. Following Despres and Chauvel, but with the proviso of not being in agreement with all of their conclusions, it is proposed here that theories in KM can be organised into the bisecting continua of organizational knowledge vs. personal knowledge, and knowledge as object vs. knowledge as social action (see Figure 1). Interestingly, Spender (2002) offers a similar formula, splitting the KM field into two radically distinct domains, to use his words: one un-problematically construes knowledge as object while the other not only rejects the whole idea of knowledge reification, but which also denies any transformation properties.



*Figure 1: A taxonomy of theories in knowledge management*

The theories and frameworks to which Figure 1 refers are detailed in Table 2

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Table 2: A taxonomy of theories in knowledge management (specifies the source for Figure 1)

Authors (Year)	Main Focus	Focus on Organization	Focus on Personal	Objectifying	Social Action
<b>Gaines (1989)</b>	Knowledge Acquisition		X		X
<b>Nonaka (1991, 1994)*</b>	The knowledge creating company	X		X	
<b>Blackler (1993)</b>	Organizations as Activity Systems	X			X
<b>Blackler (1995)</b>	Activity Theory and ‘Knowing’	X			X
<b>Nonaka &amp; Takeuchi (1995)</b>	The knowledge creating company	X		X	
<b>Nonaka et al (1996)</b>	Technology in support of the knowledge creating company	X		X	
<b>Quinn et al. (1996)</b>	Managing Professional Intellect	X		X	
<b>Spender (1996)</b>	Knowledge as the Basis of a Dynamic Theory of the Firm	X	X		X
<b>Leonard &amp; Straus (1997)</b>	Creative Abrasion	X (B)			X (B)
<b>Drucker (1998a)</b>	The Coming of the New Organization		X		X
<b>Kleiner &amp; Roth (1998)</b>	Learning Histories	X			X (B)
<b>Nonaka &amp; Konno (1998)</b>	The concept of ‘Ba’ as the foundation for knowledge creation	X		X	
<b>Brown &amp; Duguid (1999)</b>	Architecture for Organizational Knowledge	X			X (B)
<b>Cook &amp; Brown (1999)</b>	Generative Dance between Organizational Knowledge and Organizational Knowing	X			X
<b>Wenger (2000)</b>	Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems	X			X
<b>Markus (2001)</b>	Theory of Knowledge Re-use	X		X	
<b>Tsoukas &amp; Vladimirou (2001)</b>	Organizational Knowledge	X	X		X
<b>Earl (2001)</b>	‘Schools’ of Knowledge Management	X		X	

<b>Bhatt (2001)</b>	Knowledge management as an interaction between technologies, techniques and people.	X		X	
<b>Choo (2002)</b>	Organizational Knowing	X		X	
<b>Boisot (2002)</b>	'I-Space': creating and sharing knowledge	X	X		X
<b>Grant (2002)</b>	Knowledge Based View of the Firm		X	X (B)	X(B)
<b>Leonard &amp; Sensiper (2002)</b>	Tacit Knowledge and Innovation: the 'Innovation Funnel' theory	X			X (B)
<b>Snowden (2002)</b>	Complex Acts of Knowing: "Cynefin"	X	X	X	X
<b>James &amp; Lucardie (2003)</b>	Reconsidering the Tacit-Explicit Distinction: the Functional View theory of Tacit Knowledge	X		X	X (B)
<b>Thompson &amp; Walsham (2004)</b>	Context as an inseparable art of Knowing	X			X
<b>Gourlay (2006)</b>	Knowing How and Knowing That	X			X
<b>Lytras &amp; Pouloudi (2006)</b>	Framework for Knowledge Management from the Learning perspective	X		X	X
<b>Leonard (2007)</b>	Transferring tacit knowledge within organizations	X		X	
<b>Prusak &amp; Weiss (2007)</b>	Importance of social groups	X			X (B)
<b>Lee &amp; Lan (2007)</b>	Conversational Collaboration and Pillars of Collaborative Intelligence	X			X (B)
<b>Ichijo (2007)</b>	Knowledge enablers	X		X	
<b>Buchel (2007)</b>	Creation and transfer of tacit knowledge within organizations.	X		X	
<b>Nonaka &amp; Toyama (2007)</b>	Theory of the knowledge-creating firm	X		X	
<b>Weber (2007)</b>	A new framework to address failure factors in repository-based knowledge management initiatives.	X		X	
<b>Ehin (2008)</b>	Un-managing Knowledge Workers	X		X	
<b>Guzman (2009)</b>	Practical Knowledge – a framework		X		X
<b>Burford et al. (2011)</b>	The Practice-based Theory of Knowledge	X			X

<b>Jakubik (2011)</b>	Framework for Knowledge Creation: Becoming to Know	X	X	X
<b>Rai (2011)</b>	Integrative framework for organizational knowledge management and organizational culture.	X		X
<b>Tsoukas (2011)</b>	Phenomenological Framework for Tacit Knowledge		X	X
<b>Quintane, Casselman, Reiche &amp; Nylund (2011)</b>	Innovation as a Knowledge Based Outcome: a new framework and definition	X		X

\*Nonaka's 1991 and 1994 papers are included as one because they are more or less the same work.  
(The 'B' in brackets indicates that the selected classification is borderline.)

The sampling of KM theory (42 in total) on which this taxonomy is based is by no means exhaustive. Each point on the axes in Figure 1 represents a theory or framework. A slight majority of theories are located along the knowledge as social action axis (21, two of which are credited to Blackler), which is in fact consistent with Despres and Chauvel's (2002) findings. In the present viewpoint, these are split based on their primary focus on personal or organizational knowledge. Those theories referenced on the axis line itself are interpreted as bilateral – their focus is on both personal and organizational knowledge, or knowledge as object and as social action. By contrast, the group of theories occupying the knowledge as object space (17, five of which are credited to work by Nonaka and colleagues) are all largely focused on organizational knowledge – which is logical. If a theory posits knowledge as an object, it seems reasonable to conclude that knowledge is approached as an object (asset) of the *organization*.

Table 2 shows the detail of the source for Figure 1 with all theories shown chronologically to elicit any developing trends. Whilst the earliest listed theoretical works (e.g., Gaines, 1989) are interpreted as emphasising personal knowledge, since the early 1990s the focus of theory has been largely on organizational knowledge, according to this sampling. But, also since the late 1980s, there have been two clearly demarked schools – those who posit knowledge accomplished in social action, and those who take a reductive approach. So while the KM that is accredited to Nonaka and his colleagues has, beyond doubt, proved the most influential and best known, there has been a persistent alternative working alongside offering a different perspective.

It is important to draw attention to the subjective nature of this categorization of theory. It is not the case – unfortunately – that each author has explicitly marked their theory as treating knowledge as an object or social action, or that their focus is on organizational as opposed to personal knowledge. Such classifications are arrived at through interpretation on the part of the researcher. The object/social action classification is based on how authors treat the subject of their theories: in some cases (e.g., Blackler, 1993, 1995; Gourlay, 2006), the author expressly conjures knowledge as social action while with others this is more an interpretive choice based on the author's language used to describe knowledge and how it is managed. On the Organization / Personal classification, the interpretation is more straight-forward: is the theory /framework more focused on one or the other, or is it focused on both? Admittedly, a different researcher may arrive at a different interpretation.

The debate around the personal vs. organizational knowledge question is the object of some confusion in the literature, and is thus worth of a brief discussion.

#### 2.3.4 What is organizational knowledge?

Despres and Chauvel (2002) ask whether knowledge can only ever be personal, or can it be organizational, or both. This is arguably something of a red herring question. Clearly, each individual has knowledge that is personal to them and, equally obviously, an organization consists of individuals. So, what of organizational knowledge? Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) address this very question. In their theoretical piece, using a single case study to illustrate their theory in practice, Tsoukas and Vladimirou investigate the links between personal and organizational knowledge, and human action in organizational contexts. They claim that the lack of a theory of organizational knowledge, as well as a theory of knowledge itself, is responsible for difficulties with organizational knowledge. Based on their review of the literature, Tsoukas and his colleague define personal knowledge as the ability of the individual to operate effectively within a collective drawing on their understanding of its context and all things associated with this including its theory. Thus, similarly to Despres and Chauvel, they underline the intrinsic importance of context to the point of necessity. They also draw a relationship and a distinction between the personal and the collective (organization) which is next discussed in more detail.

Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) claim that organizational knowledge is the process by which people draw upon and act on a corpus of generalizations – generic rules produced by the organization, about which communities have shared meanings, and on which people formulate judgments. People understand these rules – generalizations, as they call them - only by connecting them to their own informal judgmental capabilities, or personal knowledge. In this theory and interpretation, personal knowledge facilitates meaning for organizational knowledge which is inherently action-orientated. Accordingly, in a simpler analysis, personal knowledge can be seen as an ability, and organizational knowledge represents a process. One cannot function without the other. This idea finds considerable consistency and synergy with the perspectives offered by, for instance, Duguid (2005) in his account of *The art of knowing*: in this account, knowing how (interpreted as synonymous with tacit or personal knowledge) mediates the actions of knowing that (interpreted as synonymous with explicit or

organizational knowledge). Duguid's formulation is discussed in more detail in section 2.4.2. What is also worth noting here is how Tsoukas and his co-worker's theory of the relationship between personal and organizational knowledge can be interpreted as implicating the four thematic categories earlier related to KS: context, identity, trust and risk. While noting that their ideas draw heavily on the philosophical literature - in this case, Polanyi - which they adopt uncritically, their base of evidence is limited to one single case study with no detail given of the research methods or means of analysis. But, as a discussion of the *nature and relationship* of personal vs. organizational knowledge, it is a robust piece of rhetoric.

Taking a wider perspective, Grant (1996; 2002) focuses on the knowledge based view of the firm (KBVF: see section 1.3 for a brief explanation) rather than knowledge management *per se*. He locates this firmly in the resource-based and capability-based theories of the firm, epistemology and organizational learning. While he cites a number of push factors behind the development of the KBVF (e.g., technology, network connectivity, speed of change, the perpetual 'beta'), he doubts if this represents a theory in its own right. Essentially, Grant's (1996) version of KBVF positions knowledge as the most strategically important of a firm's resources, and a tenet to which Nonaka had already laid claim (1991, 1994).

This particular perspective on the KBVF can be contrasted with that described by Brown and Duguid (1999) who, opposite to Grant's (e.g., 1996) perspective, give primacy to organizational knowledge over personal knowledge. The contrast between these two versions of the KBVF operates at a fundamental level: Grant argues that firms exist to co-ordinate teams of specialist workers so that their knowledge may be integrated (reminiscent of Drucker's (1998a) *The Coming of the New Organization*), whereas Brown and Duguid see the hard work of organizing knowledge as the important business of the organization. In their world, it is the firms that generate the knowledge with knowledge and practice inextricably linked (a precursor to Duguid's (2005) subsequent rationale of knowing that dependent upon knowing how), while in Grant's, it is the individual. Further, Grant warns of the risks of focusing too much on organizational knowledge: "(T)he danger inherent in the concept of organizational knowledge is that, by viewing the organization as the entity which creates, stores and deploys knowledge, the organizational processes through which individuals engage in these activities may be obscured," (113) Thus, firms are knowledge structures not knowledge creators. What both agree on is the importance of knowledge to firms' success, and an influencing role for technology.

Arguably, the literature conflates two questions. The question of whether knowledge is personal or organizational or both, which is often confused with the question of whether the *unit of analysis*, as the focus of research and theory, should be at the personal or organizational level. The taxonomy of KM theory adopted here understands that the personal vs. organizational axis refers to the unit of analysis, *not* the implied or explicit stance of any given theory on the nature of knowledge. The following sections discuss what the application of this taxonomy reveals about theories in KM.

## **2.4 The personal vs. organizational knowledge on the social action axis**

### 2.4.1 Focus on the personal compared with the organizational as the unit of analysis

As discussed earlier, Grant (1996, 2002) is critical of theories which give primacy to organizational knowledge and is one of the few who make a clear reference to the unit of analysis, arguing that this should be the personal not organizational level. In this model, the goal is not knowledge transfer but knowledge integration. Note, however, that Grant does not appear to dispute the existence of organizational knowledge, only that it should not be the focus of knowledge activities at the expense of personal knowledge. According to Grant, it is the knowledge constitutive of persons that is the valued asset and that this can only be leveraged by integration through team-work.

By (borderline) implication, Grant (2002) reifies knowledge as the object of integration mechanisms and processes: for instance, rules and directives, sequencing, routines, group problem solving and decision making. There is also a suggestion of the commodification of knowledge: “(K)nowledge is the overwhelmingly important productive resource in terms of market value...” (136). Yet if those particular references are set to one side, Grant is also arguably positing knowledge as social action in his emphasis on (social) integration practices as key to managing knowledge. From this direction, his approach may also be interpreted as implicating the effects of context, identity, trust and risk.

In his discussion of knowledge, Grant (2002) uses a discourse of possession, an approach which, in an earlier work, Cook and Brown (1999) take issue with. They claim that such a

discourse, with its implication that knowledge is something that people have, is limiting because it emphasises one type of knowledge (explicit) above the other (tacit) resulting in a growing literature with a tendency to explicitly or implicitly label knowledge as typology of one. While Cook and Brown's theory rests on the notion of knowing as social action, their focus is more on the organizational level in contrast to Grant's approach.

Cook and Brown's (1999) thesis approaches knowledge as a tool of knowing, with knowing connected to how we interact with the world. In their thesis, it is the interaction between knowing and knowledge that leads to the creation of new knowledge and ways of knowing. At the most common-sense interpretative level, this idea implicates both context and identity as a minimum. Cook and his co-worker call this interaction the 'generative dance', proposing that it is this interaction which is the source of all innovation. Accordingly, knowledge is not only used in action but is also grounded in action. They advocate that more attention should be paid to what knowledge work is done – in other words, practice – which has some synergy with Guzman's (2009) position (see below). They arguably soften their case by proposing that perspectives of knowledge as possession and knowledge as practice may be mutually distinct but are not incompatible: but it is not clear why Cook and Brown should want to introduce a novel proposal while acknowledging the traditionalist view. There are consistencies between their notion of knowing as action accomplished in social contexts - distinct from knowledge as the requisite tool to knowing action - and the later ideas proposed by, for instance, Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001), and Duguid (2005), and those proposed earlier by Blackler (1993, 1995), which are discussed shortly. What they do not do is offer a perspective on how those social contexts come into being. The knowing perspective is further developed in the next section in the discussions of theories with a joint focus on personal and organizational knowledge.

There are two other points of interest to draw from Cook and Brown's (1999) work: their criticism of the traditional scientific view of knowledge as something which must be sought, found and articulated – in other words, knowledge as object. Second, their strong disagreement with the proposal that tacit knowledge can be converted to explicit and vice versa, which is the process that lies at the heart of the theory of the knowledge creating firm (e.g., Nonaka, 1991, 1994: see section 2.5).



Cook and Brown's (1999) framework can be compared and contrasted with that proposed by Guzman (2009), whose theory of practical knowledge is located in the personal knowledge / knowledge as social action quadrant. He draws attention to two opposite positions in the literature: one approaches practical knowledge as held in people's heads, while the other sees it as situated in practice. Similarly to Cook and Brown's ideas of possession and practice, Guzman reasons that the two positions are not mutually exclusive. Based on his review of the literature, his theory has the aim of clarifying the confusing diversity of opinion. He underlines the synergies between the cognitive and practice dimensions of knowledge using a simple case to make his point: it is the users of rules (as one form of knowledge) who determine when and how to use those rules. This constructs a connection between knowledge how and knowledge that, with knowledge as a multidimensional concept which can be personal, situated and socially constructed at the same time. If it is personal, situated and socially constructed, then it is bound to context and implicates identity. Guzman's emphasis on the actions of interpretation and determination also invoke notions of trust and risk.

Another interesting feature of Guzman's (2009) proposal is his treatment of dimensions of practical knowledge as fuzzy (his term) – they are not clear-cut categories but rather form a continuum. His aim is to explicate the various types of practical knowledge, linking each to specific learning strategies, with the objective of providing organizational managers with a toolset for selecting the most appropriate learning strategy to suit a particular practical knowledge context. By road-mapping the type of practical knowledge that is to be shared or transferred between persons, the most effective learning approach can be selected and applied. While Guzman's theory of practical knowledge can be seen as having considerable weight and rational validity, it is entirely based on a review of the literature with no indication of empirical testing.

#### 2.4.2 A joint focus: personal and organizational knowledge

The theories which follow the notion of knowledge as social action and which take a joint focus on both personal and organizational knowledge include Spender (1996), Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001), Boisot (2002), Snowden (2002) and Jakubik (2011). Duguid's (2005) formulation of knowing how-knowing that is included in these discussions because, whilst not categorised here as a theory, it has particular resonance for *Discourse and Knowledge Matters*.

Boisot's 'I-Space' theory of knowledge creation, similarly to Guzman's project (2009), emphasises the importance of social learning as the foundation of knowledge creation. Recall his viewpoint that people do not share knowledge, rather they share *information* which becomes knowledge once internalised to the individual (see section 1.10). In Boisot's model, knowledge is highly personal, relying on shared repertoires between individuals to reach common understandings, which thesis has resonance with Searle's (1969) notion of shared rules in speech acts. Thus his theory has a joint focus both on the personal and the organizational aspects of knowledge. Although using different terminology, the theory is also consistent with the ideas proposed by Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001), for instance. A divergence is Boisot's leaning towards a cognitive understanding of knowledge with his emphasis on the cognitive effort (abstraction and codification) required to articulate knowledge for sharing with others. Boisot's model, perhaps more strongly than others, foregrounds the role of identity, trust and risk, and context in the idea of shared repertoires and common understandings.

In her transformative teleology framework, in which teleology relates to a phenomenon's end or purpose, Jakubik (2011) views the individual and social as not separate and different levels of organizational life. Rather knowledge is seen as embedded in human action, interactions and situated practice, which has some resonance with others (e.g., Guzman, 2009). In her investigation of the relationship between knowledge creation and learning, she draws on the social view of learning defined by Wenger (2005: as cited in Jakubik): "...learning is not located in individual heads, but in the processes of co-participation and in experiences. Learning can be seen as a social act, as a process of practice," (384). Of particular interest here, Wenger (2000) claims that identity is a key structuring element in how we know because knowing is an act of belonging, referring here to Communities of Practice. In his account of these Communities as Social Learning Systems, Wenger also arguably invokes the importance of context. Two of the KS categories are therefore implicated here. What Wenger and Jakubik do not do, in the same vein as that noted in reference to Cook and Brown (1999) earlier, and in fact relevant to most if not all KM theorists, is explicate how these social contexts, identity and so forth, come into being.

The theme that is evident is that theories in the KM domain are dealing in topics that are of interest to the social psychologist. Moreover, to a larger or lesser extent, they can be

interpreted as invoking thematic categories of context, identity, trust and risk, implicated earlier (Chapter 1) as factors in KS. Next, five singular theoretical approaches are: activity theory, the phenomenological perspective, know(ing) how-know(ing) that and Communities of Practice, and creative abrasion.

### *Knowledge, activity theory and activity systems*

Frank Blackler (e.g., 1993, 1995) is responsible for some of the most insightful work in the field of KM – and some of the least recognised or understood. Blackler's (1993) *Knowledge and the theory of organizations* is based on a modified version of activity theory and, like Wenger (2000), Boisot (2002) and Jakubik (2011), he emphasises the central role of social learning. Activity theory was originally proposed by the Psychologist L.S. Vygotsky, working in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, and was subsequently developed by Engestrom (1987: as cited in Blackler). This focuses on the material actions and communications processes of persons, constituting these as the focus of study of human activity. Additionally, these ideas locate the context of actions within activity systems: "...the theory of organizations as activity systems offers an antidote to simplistic interpretations of the nature of individual knowledge and action, and organizational cultures and competencies," (1882).

Developing on these ideas, and in proposing that people construct themselves in action as a historically evolving process, Blackler (e.g., 1993, 1995) is advocating a constructivist approach in which knowledge is performative. In this, he may be one of the first in this domain to refer to the idea of identity construction. He is critical of the mainstream rational-cognitive approaches to KM in their reification of knowledge as an object and assumption of the rationality of both organization and individual. Interestingly, Selznick (1948), in his *Foundations of the theory of organization*, formulates the organization as a co-operative system of rational action which is at risk from the indiscipline or irrationality of its participants.

Blackler (1995) promotes a move away from knowledge as objective, tangible and routinisable, to knowledge as constituted in social action. Thus, he develops Engestrom's idea that the unit of analysis should be the socially distributed activity system within which knowing is done (Blackler, 1993). He goes further, emphasising the importance of language

in such systems, referring to it as the archetypal communal activity (his terms) without which action would not be possible (1995). He proposes that the focus of research, practice and analysis should be on the activity systems in which knowledge is socially accomplished: knowledge as mediated (e.g., through language), situated (in context), provisional (constantly developing) and contested (the subject of power relations). This can be clearly mapped to the thematic categories of context and identity, with the implication of trust and risk. Moreover, there is an explicit connection made between these actions and language.

Blackler is an early advocate of what could be described as a postmodernist approach to KM, in critical reaction to mainstream conventions (the rational-cognitive approach), although unfortunately his work has been largely overlooked in the literature. None-the-less, in the position he adopts, his work has considerable synergy with later theorists such as Tsoukas (2011).

#### *The phenomenological perspective*

While Tsoukas and Vladimirou's (2001) theory is interpreted as taking a bilateral approach to both organizational and personal knowledge at the social action end of the taxonomy axis, Tsoukas' (2011) subsequent phenomenological view of tacit knowledge, drawing on Polanyi, quite clearly has a focus on personal knowledge. Drawing on Polanyi's (e.g., 1962) account of the importance of the scientist – the knower – in the act of discovery and validation of scientific knowledge, Tsoukas criticises the modern movement towards the de-contextualization of knowledge. In his phenomenological approach, he claims that explicit knowledge cannot exist without the tacit, consistent with Polanyi's view. This personal coefficient factor suggests that that all knowing – which implies the actual and potential to know residing in the individual's head – is rooted to some context and action. Tsoukas' theory is centred on personal knowledge as an action-orientated phenomenon as opposed to a global understanding of knowledge but, like many others, his emphasis on the importance of context, for instance, does admittedly blur the lines of this categorisation. The synergies of his theory with the earlier work of Guzman (2009), Cook and Brown (1999), Blackler (1993, 1995) and Jimes and Lucardie (2003) are clear. In this, context emerges as essential to knowing action.

Tsoukas (2011) is a strong critic of Nonaka's theory of the knowledge creating firm (e.g. 1991, 1994), devoting a substantial part of his paper to the unravelling of this theory. In his criticism, Tsoukas is not alone.

*'Know(ing) how' and 'know(ing) that', and Communities of Practice*

Another critic of Nonaka's theory is Gourlay (2006) who, like Blackler (1995) and Tsoukas (2011), spends much of his paper attempting to dismantle Nonaka's (1994, *etc.*) ideas, seeking to demonstrate the questionable foundations and miscalculations on which they are based. Gourlay differs from the mainstream's general acceptance of the tacit and explicit components of knowledge, instead offering an explanation based on the concepts of know how and know that. Although sounding similar to Duguid's (2005) knowing how-knowing that formulation, there are significant differences. In Gourlay's thesis, know how, not fully articulable, is rooted in and characteristic of everyday life whereas know that emerges from the processes of reflecting and theorizing. He views both of these concepts as behaviours, reasoning that in order to manage knowledge, one must do so indirectly by managing behaviour which, as discussed in the previous Chapter, raises a number of issues. Moreover, Gourlay claims that the act of management has the potential to destroy that which it seeks to control. An interpretive view implicates the four thematic categories of context, identity, trust and risk: that is, know how rooted in everyday life (context), know that as an outcome of reflection and theorising (identity) which, collectively with the notion of behaviour, gives rise to the potential for trust and risk.

Like Blackler (1993, 1995), Gourlay's reasoning is consistent with postmodernist thinking, and also arguably suffers from a lack of supporting empirical evidence. None-the-less, note the synergies with the ideas proposed by, for instance, Tsoukas, through his emphasis on know how/that as behaviour thus making the connection to action.

Moving more towards the organizational end of the knowledge as social action axis, Brown and Duguid (1999) place Communities of Practice (CoPs) at the heart of their proposed architecture for organizational knowledge. In this, knowledge is mostly collective, with successful communities of practice characterised as informal in nature, consistent with Wenger's (2000) claim for the primacy of the informal over the formal. Ironically, their architecture is largely dominated by themes of command and control. For instance, they

emphasise the organizing work of firms which contrasts with Grant's (1996, 2002) view, for instance, that the organization exists to foster and co-ordinate an environment in which individuals can integrate their personal knowledge with that of others. Brown and Duguid view the organization as the *means* of knowledge generation, with organizational knowledge as more important than personal knowledge – the sum is greater than its parts. Their architecture for organizational knowledge is largely about inter-firm communications and the mobilisation of human, technological and process-based conduits through which a team's knowledge can be shared amongst other teams. For example, they propose that Translators, people who are attached to more than one team, are important transports for knowledge between teams in a kind of cross-fertilisation process.

Originally introduced in the early 1990s, Communities of Practice theory has proved immensely influential but frequently misused according to Duguid (2005). Emphasising the inherently social substance of CoP theory, he approaches the CoP as the vehicle in which the shared knowing how of the community is on display, and not just that of its individual members. His explication of CoP theory is largely concerned with dispelling the myth that tacit knowledge can or should be converted to the explicit. He equates knowing how to tacit knowledge as the art of the practice, also described as the action of learning to be, and knowing that to explicit knowledge as the action of learning about. He reasons that to attempt to transform the former into the latter will likely lead to a transformation of learning *to be* into learning *about*. The importance of this lies in the simple analogy: learning to be is the art of knowing, of becoming to be a member of a Community of Practice, for instance, or of assimilating an art from a mentor over time. Learning about is equivalent to reading from books. To use Duguid's reasoning, one does not become an accountant by reading an accountancy textbook. Duguid's account has coherence for the ideas developed here and in subsequent Chapters. To complete this section, a brief visit to the *Theory of creative abrasion*.

### *Creative abrasion*

Leonard and Sensiper (2002) also pursue the notion of people sharing knowledge in group work. Their *Theory of creative abrasion* frames the different backgrounds, skills, experiences, and understood social norms that individuals have as the factors which generate the melting pot of innovation. In this implied chaotic environment, people will challenge each

other leading to an abrasion of different ideas which in turn give rise to new ones. Their explanation of this outcome is simple: people will search for novel solutions to problems when they are exposed to ideas and perspectives which challenge the prevailing wisdom. Moreover, it is the tacit dimension of an individual's knowledge, learned through practice, not capable of articulation, which formulates this as valuable to group work and innovation. This does imply an open mind to new ideas which cannot always be assumed, but it does have some interesting connections to Argyris' (1977) concept of double loop learning which is addressed shortly.

As a basic idea, this is not entirely divorced from the concepts of social learning advocated by, for instance, Blackler (1993, 1995) and Boisot (2002), and is consistent with Brown and Duguid's (1999) CoPs. It sits on the organization end of the organization vs. personal knowledge continuum through its focus on the organization – teams of workers – as the unit of analysis. For Leonard and Sensiper (2002), the individual is problematic in possessing the tendency to hoard tacit knowledge, and reluctance to share knowledge through fear of failure or of looking foolish. A further interesting point to draw from what they describe as a nascent piece of work is their acknowledgment of the need for a cross-disciplinary approach to understanding knowledge and innovation: "(C)clearly, many different fields of inquiry are relevant, including ones as diverse as design, cognitive psychology, group dynamics and information technology," (495). Bearing in mind the fundamental importance to their theory of linguistic social interaction, it is interesting that the authors omit the more communications orientated disciplines from their list. There are echoes of Peter Drucker's (1998a) visionary piece on the future organization comprised of specialist teams dedicated to specific projects, and for the present purposes, also carries resonance of the categories of interest – context (team-work), identity (team-membership), trust and risk (fear of failure, etc.).

Leonard and Sensiper's (2002) creative abrasion has origins in an earlier piece of work by Leonard and Straus (1997). Taking a more general, higher level viewpoint, this argues that innovation necessarily requires a mixture of different styles of human thinking. If a manager staffs his firm with like-minded individuals, with similar educational backgrounds and lifestyles, innovation will simply not emerge. Wenger (2000) makes a similar point: innovation needs conflict. Consequently organizations need the means of determining thinking styles and preferences, and for that, Leonard and Straus suggest that managers make use of psychometric tests. Whilst their reasoning is logical, the evidence on which it is based

is limited and anecdotal and its assumptions are substantial. The suggestion of individuals being assessed for thinking style, and appointed based on this assessment, raises some ethical concerns. The works of Leonard and Sensiper, and Leonard and Straus can be interpreted as orienting to knowledge as social action through their emphasis on social interaction, with consequences for knowledge as an action category.

The opposite end of the continuum - knowledge as object - is largely dominated by one theory.

## **2.5 Reification of knowledge: one paradigm dominates**

This section mainly focuses on discussions of the theory of the knowledge creating firm, starting with a detailed account of the theory itself, followed by an analysis of some of the major points of criticism brought against it. A brief review of other significant objectifying accounts of KM concludes this section. A key question concerns whether the theories considered now can also be interpreted as implicating the context, identity, trust and risk thematic categories associated with KS.

### 2.5.1 The dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation

The majority of theories which deliberately, or by implication, reify knowledge largely cluster around a focus on organizational knowledge. Nonaka and his colleagues' theory of the knowledge creating firm dominates the field (e.g., Nonaka, 1991; Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Toyama, 2007; Nonaka *et al.*, 1994; Nonaka *et al.*, 1996; Nonaka and Konno, 1998: hereafter collectively referred to as the *Dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation*). At the heart of this theory is the SECI model which explains knowledge creation as the outcome of a dynamic interaction between subjectivities and objectivities. According to this model, new knowledge is created in a spiral of interaction between the processes of Socialization, Externalisation (explicit knowledge), Combination and Internalisation (tacit knowledge). The idea of social interaction as a key component in the theory is further emphasised in drawing on Searle's (1969) theory of *Speech acts* which argues for the relationship between language and action. In this, Nonaka's theory is one of the very few to make a direct reference to a theory of language. None-the-less, the theory is positioned at



the knowledge as object end of the axis because of its central tenet that tacit knowledge can and should be converted to explicit knowledge in the fashion proposed by the SECI model. As Snowden (2002) summarises, Nonaka and his colleagues conceptualise knowledge creation as the output of a process that passes knowledge from the individual onto the group, and from the group to the organization, and thence to wherever else it needs or can be transferred to. This, he claims, is quite obviously a reified view of knowledge as the object of management that at some point in the SECI process can be rendered explicit.

The irony inherent in the SECI model is that, while Nonaka and his co-workers emphasise the importance of tacit knowledge, the proposal of converting this to explicit knowledge implies a devaluation of the former - it is only useful if transformed to the explicit (Virtanen, 2011). A dissenting voice to this interpretation is Snowden (2002), who argues that the SECI model does not mandate that all knowledge in people's heads and conversations should or could be made explicit. However in this, Snowden stands out from a majority of scholars critical of the SECI model. Note that in later versions of Nonaka's theory (e.g., Nonaka and Toyama, 2007) an explicit reference is made to an interaction between explicit and tacit knowledge but the conversion mandate remains at its core, thus arguably diluting the reference to interaction.

The idea that new knowledge can be generated in this dynamic interaction between two types of knowledge representing the subjective and the objective, which is fertilised and promoted in the socially-engineered environment of Ba (e.g., Nonaka and Konno, 1998), is the target of considerable criticism. Blackler (1995) singles the theory out as being rather traditional (his terms), criticising its reductionist treatment of knowledge, and its distinction between knowledge (creating) and learning. For instance, many would disagree with Nonaka's (1994) proposal that learning is a static and limited concept. As discussed in Chapter 1, knowledge is elsewhere posited as a *subset of learning* (e.g., Krathwohl, 2002). Grant arguably hands out a veiled warning against theories such as Nonaka *et al.*'s: "(T)aking the organization as the unit of analysis not only runs the risk of reification, but, by defining rules, procedures, conventions, and norms as knowledge fails to direct attention to the mechanisms through which this 'organizational knowledge' is created through the interactions of individuals, and offers little guidance as to how managers can influence these processes," (1996: 113).

Resonant of Grant's (1996) concerns, Despres and Chavel (2002) criticise such theories (Nonaka *et al.*'s) for being too prescriptive and as representing nothing more than the

shuffling of ideas back and forth in structures and systems. Thompson and Walsham claim that “...his [Nonaka’s] view of all such knowledges as objects to pass between these different stages, has contributed to a sense that the focus of knowledge management systems [...] should be to ‘externalize’ and ‘combine’ tacit forms of knowledge,” (2004: 726). This, Thompson and his co-worker argue, leads to contradiction because:

*“...the meaning of any objective ‘knowledge’ will always remain the subjective product of the person in whose mind this is constituted, always relationally defined, and therefore does not transfer easily to others in a form which may be operationalized to the benefit of the organization,”* (Italics in original: 726).

Additionally, Virtanen’s (2011) review of the literature concludes that most ICT focused KM initiatives aim to convert tacit to explicit knowledge, mostly failing. The implied necessity of removing context from (tacit) knowledge embodied in *Dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation* is further criticised by Despres and Chauvel who claim that without context, knowledge is meaningless.

### 2.5.2 Cracks in the ‘SECI’ engine

Gourlay (2006), pointing to other cracks in the engine (his terms) of the SECI model, describes the *Dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation* as more a theory of managerial decision-making than knowledge creation. On the evidence used to support the validity of the theory (e.g., Nonaka *et al.*, 1994) he comments that this in reality represents nothing more than what managers *believe* to be the source of new ideas.

### 2.5.3 ‘The Great Misunderstanding’

Perhaps most problematic is the suggestion that Nonaka and his colleagues have misinterpreted and misrepresented the works of Polanyi (Gourlay, 2006; Virtanen, 2011; Tsoukas, 2011; Grant and Qureshi, 2006; Grant, 2007), in what Tsoukas refers to as the ‘great misunderstanding’. As the core foundation of the theory draws on Polanyi’s work on the nature of knowledge, this is a significant issue. The primary sticking point is over the nature of tacit knowledge. Polanyi (1962) proposes that all knowledge is personal, involves judgement, and that all knowledge contains a tacit element, which is often difficult if not impossible to articulate. According to Tsoukas, this establishes the contextual and action-orientated nature of knowing. However, Nonaka’s interpretation is slightly – but crucially –

different: “Polanyi classified knowledge into two categories. ‘Explicit’ or codified knowledge refers to knowledge that is transmittable in formal, systematic language. On the other hand, ‘tacit’ knowledge has a personal quality which makes it hard to formalize and communicate,” (1994: 16).

In his analysis of Nonaka and his various co-workers’ interpretation of Polanyi’s works, Tsoukas (2011) criticises their emphasis on reducing practical knowledge (viz. tacit knowledge) to precisely definable content. In other words, the aim of collecting knowledge located in people’s heads and translating this to explicit knowledge will achieve little more than reduce the value of that knowledge by converting what is known to that which is representable. This is precisely the argument that Duguid (2005) and others imply in their view that knowing that does not produce knowing how. So, while Nonaka *et al.* draw on the works of Polanyi, their interpretation and representation of it – particularly the nature of tacit knowledge, and its potential for conversion to explicit knowledge – is misrepresentative.

A related issue is highlighted by Grant (2007) in the claim that many researchers in the KM field who refer to Polanyi have not actually read the source material, but are instead relying on others’ interpretation. This, combined with a less than critical approach to the work of Nonaka and his colleagues, suggests Grant, is one of the underpinning reasons for KM’s lack of success.

Some in the KM field diplomatically work around this particular issue: Jakubik (2011) for instance claims that her theory of knowledge creation builds on and addresses the weaknesses in the *Dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation*, describing a useful chronology in the process. Bhatt (2001)’s theory of KM, based on an interaction between technologies, techniques and people, does not make any claims to build on the more influential theory but is reminiscent of the latter in its premise of the interaction between two types of knowledge. Other theorists, including Rai (2011), un-problematically and uncritically adopt Nonaka *et al.*’s theory as the basis of their own.

Nonaka (1994) makes reference to the works of two other influential theorists: Argyris and Schon’s (1978: as cited in Nonaka) *Double loop learning in organizations*, and Anderson’s *Architecture of Cognition*, (1983: as cited in Nonaka). Nonaka arguably misrepresents both of these works. Argyris’ (1977) theory of double loop learning (DLL) is essentially concerned

with senior managers continuously challenging organizational policies, procedures, visions, objectives – as internal theories of action - and so on in order to ensure progress and development. Without this, Argyris claims, firms will remain in a status quo and will eventually be overcome by others. According to Nonaka, firms have difficulty implementing DLL themselves but he claims that this is built in to his theory of the knowledge creating firm. In reality, the only discernible synergy between Nonaka's theory and DLL is Nonaka's proposal that managers should challenge what employees know. However, Argyris is primarily talking about people's own *internal theories of action* based on organizational dictates, while Nonaka is talking about third parties challenging knowledge in others' heads – and how the latter interpret organizational dictates, for example. Arguably, then, DLL is not built in to the theory of the knowledge creating firm.

Nonaka (1994) draws on a 1983 version of Anderson's ACT Model however Anderson's (1996) later version suffices for the purpose here. According to Anderson, declarative memory (which Nonaka equates to explicit knowledge) is a schema like structure encoding a small bundle of knowledge, whereas procedural memory (equated to tacit knowledge) is applied automatically, is tied to context and can often not be articulated (Eysenck and Keane, 2001). Complex cognitions are the result of interactions between declarative and procedural knowledge: "(A)all that there is to intelligence is the simple accrual and tuning of many small units of knowledge that in total produce complex cognition. The whole is no more than the sum of its parts, but it has a lot of parts," (Anderson: 356). He also claims that production rules, which embody procedural knowledge, can create declarative structures but not the other way around. (Recall Duguid's (2005) view that knowing *how* cannot be derived from knowing *that*). Nonaka states that in Anderson's theory declarative knowledge is *transformed* into procedural knowledge: "(T)he idea of 'knowledge conversion' may be traced from Anderson's ACT model..." (18). This is not a strictly accurate account of Anderson's own version of affairs, who uses the term interactions to describe the relationship between these two forms of knowledge / memory. There is no mention of any conversion in Anderson's ACT model.

Note that both DLL and ACT are absent from subsequent versions of the SECI model (e.g., Nonaka and Toyama, 2007).

#### 2.5.4 More troubling observations on the theory of organizational knowledge creation

Reminiscent of subsequent claims made by, for instance, Brown and Duguid (1999) and Wenger (2000), Nonaka (1994) describes the informal community as the location of emerging knowledge. He goes on to suggest that these need to be integrated into the formal hierarchical structure of the organization. This implies a transformation of the informal to the formal, something that according to some would lead to a loss of much of the values and benefits afforded through informally organized work groups. Such is the conclusion reached by, for example, Ehin (2008), in his framework for un-managing knowledge workers: accordingly, formalisation of communities of practice within a top-down hierarchical structure does not work, view previously promoted by Wenger.

Expanding on this theme of communities, a key claim of the *Dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation* is that it is cross-cultural. This is difficult to substantiate, particularly in the light of its nature. Recall that the theory is originally developed based on observations of Japanese firms (section 2.2.2). As is widely theorised elsewhere (e.g., Snowden, 2002; Blackler, 1993, 1995; Despres and Chauvel, 2002), knowledge is inextricably bound to culture (as context), and culture arguably varies from organization to organization, from community to community, from nation to nation and so forth. A one size fits all approach does not sit well with this perception (e.g., Markus, 2001).

With respect to the thematic categories of context, identity, trust and risk, this theory offers an ambiguous view: for instance, context from one direction is valued (e.g., social interaction, Ba), but then de-valued from another (culture is irrelevant and can be crossed, the conversion model). Despite these difficulties, the *Dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation* continues to dominate the KM theoretical landscape, with numerous other theorists following in its wake in one fashion or another, mainly through an uncritical acceptance and adoption of the tacit/explicit explanation at its heart (e.g., Bhatt, 2001; Rai, 2011).

#### 2.5.5 Other perspectives in the knowledge as object spectrum

Briefly, other theories at the knowledge as object end of the axis include Earl's (2001) strategic approach to KM. He analyses case studies, interviews, workshops and published materials to develop the schools of KM – technocratic, economic and behavioural – arguing

that each applies to different types of organization. Earl's work can be seen as a practical aid for knowledge managers, which at least acknowledges that there are many contexts of KM, although the selective and subjective nature of his methodology should be noted.

Leonard (2007) considers facilitators and barriers to knowledge transfer within organizations. Leonard is one of the few theorists to point out the difference between knowledge that is transferred and knowledge that is re-used: once transferred, she reasons, knowledge will not be the same as its source because the recipient will index it to their pre-existing knowledge and experience, thus adapting the original. Along with many others, Leonard draws on case studies from the literature, and her own anecdotes, to warrant her proposals. The problem with transferring tacit knowledge, she claims, lies in its stickiness (her term) – referring to the difficulty of separating knowledge from its source – and cultural effects, the tension between attempting to apply rigid coding contrasted with ambiguity of knowledge, and the knowledge gaps between the knowledge transmitter and receiver. The subject matter of Leonard's framework, and her treatment of it, implies knowledge as an object in contrast with her other work (e.g., Leonard and Strauss, 1995; Leonard and Sensiper, 2002) which does not. That aside, there is the suggestion of the thematic categories of KS in her idea of stickiness and cultural effects (context), knowledge gaps between knowers (identity), and connotations of trust and risk that these imply.

Leonard's (2007) perspective can be contrasted with Markus' (2001) theory of knowledge reuse. Taking a systems approach to KM, Markus advises that KM should only be concerned with explicit knowledge, emphasising the importance of organizational memory systems. As an opposite view, James and Lucardie (2003) note that some scholars blame the focus on explicit knowledge as a failure factor in KM technologies. According to Markus, different knowledge reuse situations require different approaches: for instance, she argues that the producers and users of shared work have different needs. While this may be seen as an example of what some have insisted is at the heart of KM's issues – too much focus on IT (e.g., Prusak, 2001; Grover and Davenport, 2001; Bhatt, 2001; Akhavan, Jafari and Fathian, 2005; Weber, 2007) - Markus can also be understood as invoking the influence of context. Ironically, Weber lists the construction of enormous organizational memory systems as one of the 15 factors leading to KM failure, but then offers a framework for how technology should be approached, adopted and implemented in organizations (e.g., design input from end

users). The connection between technology and KM failure factors has already been discussed in the previous Chapter.

Snowden's (2002) *Complex acts of knowing* stands out as representing all four of the axis' criteria: that is, it treats knowledge both as an object (thing, to use Snowden's term) and action (flow), with its focus on both organizational and personal knowledge. His Cynefin model represents four domains of knowledge: bureaucratic, professional, informal and uncharted. Its purpose is to facilitate sense-making as an aide to decision-making, leadership and so forth. While Snowden's model does not represent a KM theory in the conventional sense what it does do is step the convention beyond the management of knowledge for its self-serving sake to knowledge and its management as a fundamental building block in any organization.

Two points raised by Snowden (2002) are worth noting: first, he argues that the number of informal and formal communities in any large organization is a barrier to their formal management, a perspective that can be contrasted with Nonaka's (e.g., 1994) exhortation to formalize all such communities. Secondly he suggests, perhaps somewhat controversially, that KM need not concern itself with every social community in the workplace, nor should it attempt to claim ownership and control over every scrap of knowledge in people's heads. Neither will bring advantage to decision-making, problem-solving, and leadership, for instance.

In terms of the thematic categories of context, identity, trust and risk, most of the foregoing in this section is ambiguous. To a larger or lesser extent, one might arguably suggest a common implicating of the notion of context, but here that is predominantly framed as the context of the environment and its contents (e.g., IT system) as influencing the human participants. The exception is Leonard (2007).

Continuing in the pragmatic theme, there is one more feature of KM theory that needs to be explicated: the inductionist basis.

## **2.6 Issue over the inductionist foundation of theory**

It could be argued that KM's most influential theories, in general, are predominantly inductive in nature. Nonaka's theory (e.g., 1991, 1994), as already noted, is developed from observations of Japanese firms, and this has implications for the validity of the theory in the wider (cultural) context.

A second perspective draws attention to the fact that no two observers watching the same scene or phenomenon will perceive it in exactly the same way (Chalmers, 1999) – in psychological terms, the notion of individual differences. The logical inference of this is a relational chain of culpability: if observation can be subject to error, what chance for the facts that it produces, and the scientific knowledge that is constructed on those facts? Similar claims are made by, for example, the social constructionist and psychologist Kenneth Gergen (e.g., 1991). This whole issue opens up the objectivity-subjectivity debate which has a lengthy history in the fields of philosophy and science but which is beyond the scope of the present discussions. One brief account, referenced by Polanyi (1962), serves to underline the issues associated with objective observation: the Royal Astronomer Nevil Maskelyne fired his assistant David Kinnebrook in 1795 because he noticed differences between his own observations and Kinnebrook's of the same astronomical phenomenon. Twenty years on, the German astronomer Friedrich Bessel attributed these differences to individual differences over which we have no control (Schultz and Schultz, 2004).

As many KM theories take scientific enquiry and knowledge as their basis, it is appropriate to bring the scientific perspective to bear. If the inductionist approach to theory development involves extracting facts from observation then developing a theory to explain them, and it can be shown that those facts can be wrong, where does this leave the theory? Specific to Nonaka *et al.*'s claim for cultural transcendence, the facts observed and used to construct theory are drawn from firms operating in Japanese culture. Would the same facts be observed in a British or French or Spanish cultural environment? Or, for that matter, by European observers of Japanese companies?

No apologies are made for giving over so much space to a discussion of one theory in this review given that the *Dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation* represents the



dominant perspective and paradigm. There are, of course, many more theories in the KM field, but this non-exhaustive review of the literature gives an idea of the ground covered and issues raised.

## **2.7 Summary**

In this review of KM theory, the landscape is understood to be broad, complex, sometimes ambiguous, often confusing. In the attempt to bring some clarity, KM theories are classified into the categories of personal vs. organizational knowledge, and a view of knowledge as object or knowledge as social action.

This classification reveals an anomaly in the theoretical literature. The dominant theory (e.g., Nonaka, 1991; Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) can be located in the category of knowledge as object, with its focus on the organizational unit of analysis, along with a number of other theories. But there is arguably a trend towards the view of knowledge as social action, or as accomplished in social action, but none of its theories or frameworks has achieved the popularity and recognition assigned to the former. Added to this is the perspective that KM has yet to achieve the kind of success to be expected from a discipline and practice that concentrates on what is widely seen as an organization's most important asset.

It has also been shown how the KM theoretical literature is often the site of considerable debate and contradiction, characterised by accusations of misinterpretation and misrepresentation. In part these issues emanate from the substantial assumptions on which many theories rest: that knowledge can be identified as a singular thing or activity; that KM outcomes can be measured in some way; that the tacit can be made explicit and vice versa; that this phenomenon called knowledge resides in people's heads, but that they must be motivated to share it. Many assume that language, communication and social interaction are important, but how is not specified; that what will work in one culture or organization will work in another; that with the right organizational structure, knowledge can be commanded and controlled.

Four final points can be drawn. First, that the view of knowledge as social action invokes an understanding of social action as discourse (talk and text) in interaction. Secondly, that while those theories and frameworks shown to occupy the knowledge as social action end of the taxonomy axis can be interpreted as implicating, to some degree, the thematic categories of context, identity, trust and risk, previously identified in Chapter 1 as categories relevant to KS, those on the knowledge as object axis are far more ambiguous in this respect. Third, that while some of the knowledge as social action based theories explicitly orient to the importance of language – variously understood as communication, discourse, talk and text in social interaction – and others imply this, none (in this sampling) have optioned discourse in the organizational context as a viable and relevant site for research. Finally, and extending the latter point, a theory of language is also shown to be all but absent (one exception being, ironically, Nonaka’s *Dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation* (1994) in its reference to Searle’s (1969) *Speech acts theory*), in spite of some scholars’ emphasis on the import of language.

To summarise, if KM is not perceived to have achieved any significant measure of recognised success in practice – as some have concluded – yet there is a demonstrable trend towards the view of knowledge as accomplished in social interaction, along with the implied importance ascribed to language and communication, then it would seem logical to extend these directions, for the purposes of the present research, to the site of action: talk and text.

The next Chapter moves the debate in the direction of critical social psychology, Social Constructionism, and Discursive Psychology in particular, and considers how the latter – the analysis of how actions are accomplished in talk-in-interaction, and with what consequences - could represent a valid, even novel (to KM), perspective and approach to KM. The origins and some of the contributions of Discursive Psychology are discussed, along with those from the wider field of discourse analysis.

## Chapter 3: Discourse as the site of knowledge action

### 3.1 Introduction

The analysis of theories in knowledge management (KM) in the previous Chapter reveals an interesting and notable trend towards a conception of knowledge as embedded in social action – implicating the action of knowing as an accomplishment of discourse. If the action of knowing is largely if not entirely done in talk/text-in-interaction, it seems logical then to consider language as the site of knowing and consequently as the topic of study. An action-orientated approach to language as the site of social accomplishment, and as constituting the topic of study in its own right, is consistent with the paradigm of Discursive Psychology and the Social Constructionist movement in the field of social psychology.

To lay some early ground-work, Stainton-Rogers (2003) differentiates between *critical social psychology* and *experimental social psychology*: the former is positioned as a challenge to the latter and its adherence to traditional experimental (viz. laboratory) methods of research. By critical social psychology, Stainton-Rogers refers to developing new perspectives on what social psychology should be, and should be concerned with and which draw on, amongst other theories, Social Constructionism and discourse analysis. Consequently the following discussion is situated within the context of *critical social psychology* thus providing some clear boundaries, and discusses the case for the study of organizational knowledge work drawing on Discursive Psychology.

This Chapter begins with a brief introduction to Social Constructionism – or constructivism – a movement which Kenneth Gergen is credited with coordinating in social psychology (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Adopting Stainton-Rogers' (2003) terminology, critical and experimental approaches in the field are compared with a particular focus on the debate over methodologies in research. This leads into a short discussion of the *turn to talk* and the discipline of discourse analysis finding the latter to be a broad field which exists across many disciplines besides psychology. The discussion focuses on Discursive Psychology which is highlighted as the preferred approach to research, and which offers a theory of language and methodology to inform research into organizational knowledge work. This is compared with

some of the other dominant discourse-based methodologies used in (Critical) social psychology. Drawing on these, some of the more popular themes in discourse research, some with direct relevance to KM, are reviewed. This is followed with a brief review of an organizational practice known as sense-making, comparing and contrasting its core tenets with those in Discursive Psychology. The primary conclusion drawn concerns the underpinning importance of discourse – talk and text – to human accomplishment in action which, it is claimed, holds relevance to the everyday business of organizational knowledge work.

### **3.2 Social Constructionism and its view of knowledge**

“Knowledge constitutes the very basis of all forms of social cognition, including social attitudes, social identities and attribution, among many other phenomena traditionally studied in social psychology,” (van Dijk, 2013: 498).

The movement against the rigours of positivism and its reliance on experimental research methods in social psychology has been growing over the last four decades (e.g., Gergen, 1973, 1991, 2009; Potter and Edwards, 2003; Silverman, 2007; Antaki, 2000; Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Darlaston-Jones, 2007; Wood and Kroger, 2000; Wiggins, Potter and Wildsmith, 2001). It is against this background that Social Constructionism (SC) marks a radical change of emphasis, focus and epistemology in social psychology (Willig, 2001). Often referred to as the *crisis in social psychology*, the result is a near schism in the discipline which persists to this day (Antaki, 2000). In particular, the movement saw a shift in the focus of academic and research interest from the self-as-entity (which, from traditional perspectives, can be empirically tested and measured) to the self as a construct accomplished in language. This idea is succinctly expressed by Potter and Wetherell in claiming that “...any sociopsychological image of the self, in fact the very possibility of a self-concept, is inextricably dependent on the linguistic practices used in everyday life to make sense of our own and others’ actions,” (1987: 95). Thus, as Willig describes it, SC “...draws attention to the fact that human experience, including perception, is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically,” (7).

SC has its roots in the 1950s with the then growing interest in ideas of language as social performance (Willig, 2003). From the SC perspective, knowledge is not approached as something out there waiting to be discovered but rather as constructed in talk-in-interaction (Stainton-Rogers, 2003; Gulich, 2003). Accordingly, knowledge cannot be an unambiguous perception of truth and fact (Gergen 2009). At the heart of the constructionist perspective is the view that people engage and interact with the world and its phenomena through meaning-making (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). As Guba and his co-worker reason, knowledge can never be separate from the knower because what a person knows is bound to their meaning-making mechanisms (their terms) which are themselves inextricably a part of the social, cognitive and linguistic worlds in which the knower exists. This notion has some interesting synergies with sense-making, the study of how people experience life (Madsbjerg and Rasmussen, 2014), which is addressed later in the Chapter.

This view is, of course, at considerable variance to much of the mainstream KM knowledge-as-object theoretical literature. However, the genesis of the idea that "...knowing comes into existence only through social participation," (Gergen, 2009: 229) is frequently implied in the many theoretical approaches, particularly those categorised as knowledge as social action. These debates and ideas inevitably raise the objectivity-subjectivity debate however, as noted earlier (section 2.6), this topic is beyond the scope of the present work. A more relevant discussion concerns the critical vs. experimental debate over research methodology, which follows.

### **3.3 Critical vs. Experimental and the debate over method**

The critical social psychology movement particularly evolved as a reaction against the so-called laboratory methods of discovery common in experimental social psychology (the traditionalist position). This latter sets the goal of research as the production of objective truths and knowledge, which can only be gained through the application of the scientific method (Stainton-Roger, 2003), and the discovery of general laws through observation (Gergen, 1973), both of which imply what Willig (2003) describes as a straightforward relationship between the world, and human perception and understanding of it. From this perspective, language is a medium which reflects reality un-problematically (Marshall, 1994). Gergen particularly criticises traditional scientific principles and research methods used in the

study of human behaviour, claiming that human behaviour cannot be empirically tested in the same way as the objects of the natural sciences. He further claims that the modern world's obsession with the need for objectivity, facts, realism, observation and rationality results in an academia in which "...fields of study could be viewed as 'knowledge factories', generating objective truths like so many sausages," (Gergen, 1991: 36).

Specific to the field of social psychology, the reaction against laboratory methods began in the 1970s - the crisis in social psychology referred to earlier - with many questioning the validity of attempting to simulate the real world in the laboratory, often using undergraduates as experimental participants (Antaki, 2000). According to Antaki, experimental social psychology and its methodologies are based on the mistaken belief that a simulated event in a laboratory, and the beliefs and attitudes that this might uncover for instance, unproblematically has resonance with – or indeed is a direct reflection of – similar events in the real world. In Wood and Kroger's thesis, "(P)erhaps one of the most misguided transfers of method from one field to another is the introduction of the laboratory experiment into social psychology for the simulation of aspects of culture," (2000: xiii). For Potter and Wetherell (1987), amongst the earliest to promote discourse analysis in the field, one of the greatest errors of the reliance on experimental methods is the resulting treatment of language as little more than a code for communication, to use their words.

The turn to talk led to an increasing interest in language as social performance (Willig, 2003), and in discourse analysis (DA) as a research methodology (Wood and Kroger, 2000). Whilst DA in general is not a new paradigm in the study of organizations (see, for example, Holmes, 2005; Hardy, 2001; Greatbatch, 2009; Svennevig, 2012a; Nielsen, 2012; Phillips and Oswick, 2012; Stubbe, Lane, Hilder, Vine, Vine, Marra, Holmes and Weatherall, 2003; Whittle and Mueller, 2011; Choi and Schnurr, 2013; Boje, Oswick and Ford, 2004; Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy, 2004; Clifton, 2012; also see Grant and Iedema, 2005, for a discussion which distinguishes between organizational discourse studies and organisational discourse analysis), the KM literature has largely ignored any DA approach, including Discursive Psychology.

It is important to emphasise that the arguments presented here are not meant as an indictment or de-valuing of traditional psychology. This has made a significant and rich contribution to the understanding of the human mind and behaviour for more than 100 years. Notable achievements include, for instance, the work of Elizabeth Loftus (e.g., 2002) in the field of

human memory which has been influential in providing compelling evidence for the idiosyncrasies of memory, with practical implications for eye witness testimony. Working in the same field, others have made significant contributions to the understanding of recall memory (e.g., Godden and Baddeley, 1975), and the structure and functioning of memory (e.g., Baddeley, 1999). Human thinking has also been shown to be less than logical: early work by Peter Wason during the 1960s on problem-solving – the now famous Wason Selection Task – is still debated and the subject of experimentation (e.g., Tourangeau and Penney, 2005).

The following sections review some of the principle topics in discourse analysis from the perspective of critical social psychology and which have some, at least, relevance to KM.

### **3.4 The turn to talk**

#### **3.4.1 Shifting paradigms**

In organization and inter-organization research, there is a growing popularity and credibility in postmodern paradigms (e.g., Guba and Lincoln, 2005) and, in particular, discourse analysis (e.g., Phillips and Di Domenico, 2009; Greatbatch, 2009; Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy, 2004; Phillips and Oswick, 2012). Equally, there is evidence that discursive studies are proving significant, not just in terms of the study of organizations, but also in contributing to debates around what constitutes an organization (Hardy, 2001). This is a conclusion which Phillips *et al.* claim is illustrated in their discursive model of institutionalization which emphasises the relationship between text, discourse, institutions and actions. Discourse analysis, as noted earlier, is framed within the Social Constructionist paradigm, which is diametrically opposed to conventional or traditional theoretical and experimental methodological approaches. Whilst, as with all theoretical approaches and research methods, DA has attracted its share of criticism, in the subjective nature of its data (Zajacova, 2002) for instance, “(T)here can be no question that the legitimacy of postmodern [viz. Social Constructionist] paradigms is well established and at least equal to the legitimacy of received and conventional paradigms,” (Guba and Lincoln: 191).

### 3.4.2 Types of discourse analysis

There are many different types of discourse analysis (Wooffitt, 2005: see Wooffitt for a comprehensive and critical review) perhaps indicative of Potter's claim that the growing popularity of these methodologies has, by the end of the 1990s, mushroomed across multiple diverse disciplines. For example, in a fascinating study of workplace interactions, Stubbe, Lane, Hilder, Vine, Vine, Marra, Holmes and Weatherall (2003) apply and contrast five different DA methodologies to the same discourses, noting substantial areas of overlap as well as significant differences and points of tension between them. Potter and Wetherell (1987) draw attention to the definitional confusion in the field in that virtually all research – in any discipline - concerned with language, whether in a social or cognitive context, uses the term discourse analysis. Such is the state of confusion that, "(I)it is a field in which it is perfectly possible to have two books on discourse analysis with no overlap in content at all," (Potter and Wetherell: 6). Phillips and Di Domenico (2009) offer a comprehensive summary of DA methodologies, together with a review of their application in organization studies, pointing out that they all share an interest in how social reality is constituted in talk.

One point to note here is that some scholars have argued for a multi-disciplinary and integrated (mixed) methods approach to organizational discourse to avoid what are seen as the risks of isolated and parochial approaches (see Phillips and Oswick, 2012, for a review of the organizational discourse field). Brannen (2005), Mieroop (2005), Guba and Lincoln (2005), and Bryman (2009) are all proponents of mixed methods. Even David Silverman (2007), a firm critic of the experimental scientific method in social psychology, admits that quantitative methods can *sometimes* aide qualitative research, *potentially* bringing the attributes of reliability and validity to research findings. This does raise a question: in admitting such attributes, does one not risk weakening one's argument in favour of Social Constructionist research approaches? The issue of validity in particular is addressed in detail in Part Two (Methodology).

In the discipline of (critical) social psychology, amongst the most commonly adopted DA methodologies are Discursive Psychology, Conversation Analysis, Membership Categorization Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. The focus here is on Discursive Psychology (DP): why this approach and not another? There are several reasons why DP is the preferred method of discourse analysis with respect to the study of KM. First, DP focuses



on language as action with consequences, and which is variable; secondly, DP can be applied to all forms of communication (Potter and Edwards, 2012) – spoken and written – which offers a level of flexibility unavailable in some of the other types of DA; thirdly, it is both a methodology and a theoretical framework; fourthly, DP is particularly concerned with knowledge in the sense of how events are explained, described and how accounts are constructed as factual (Edwards and Potter, 1992); finally, DP approaches language as inseparable from the processes of cognition (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), which constitutes discourse itself as the topic of study rather than a mere conduit to inner thoughts. According to Perakyla, “...the key theoretical presupposition is that mental realities do not reside “inside” individual humans but rather are constructed linguistically,” (2005: 871). This positions talk and text as the core locus of human action, performance and accomplishment in every psychological respect.

The next section introduces Discursive Psychology in detail, followed by a brief summary of the other types of DA used in (critical) social psychology mentioned earlier.

### **3.5 Discourse analysis in (critical) social psychology**

#### 3.5.1 An introduction to Discursive Psychology

Potter and Wetherell are credited with being the first to introduce DA to social psychology in the mid-1980s (Potter, 1998a), followed by their seminal book, *Discourse and social psychology: beyond attitudes and behaviour* (1987). Discursive Psychology was developed and formally introduced by Edwards and Potter in their 1992 publication of the same title. The earlier work applies the DP (although not using this label) theoretical framework, and its distinctive discourse analysis methodology, to the study of attitudes and behaviour as examples of studying psychological phenomena in discourse as the site of action and accomplishment. By comparing and contrasting this to conventional theories and methods, Potter and Wetherell seek to highlight the weakness of mainstream approaches, and the advantages of discourse analysis in revealing the social world as constituted in language. The later work similarly draws critical comparisons between a research focus grounded in DP and conventional research approaches with its focus including the topics of human memory and attribution.

The core assumption of DP is that language, as the location of the social world, is the site of human action and performance (as distinct from behaviour), and that talk/text are locally and situationally organized (Potter and te Molder, 2005). People use language to create versions of the social world. It is, in sum, a functionally-oriented approach which topicalises discourse itself (Edwards and Potter, 1992).

Contrastingly, experimental social psychology approaches language as a transparent medium which reflects reality as it is (Marshall, 1994), manifest in the use of surveys and interviews. Here, the topic of interest is *what* people report or say, as a means of uncovering some hidden cognitive structure (Billig, 2001) such as attitudes or beliefs, or intentions to act. Rather than study what Billig describes as "...ghostly essences, lying behind and supposedly controlling what can be directly observed" (210), critics of experimental approaches (see sections 3.2 and 3.3) argue that research should approach psychology as constituted in language, which raises the possibility of studying the processes of thinking directly as they are made live and relevant in the discourse itself (Billig).

The assumptions central this understanding of language are what make DP singular: that discourse is constructive, functional, consequential and variable (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). It is constructive in that people construct versions of reality linguistically in discourse (Perakyla, 2005). This in turn implies that all language is functional in that it works to achieve some accomplishment (e.g., persuasion or argument, blaming or warranting). It is consequential in the sense that discourse construction and function lead to consequences for speakers. It is variable in that one person can describe another, or a phenomenon, action or scene in different ways to different people.

An on-going debate which affects not only DP, but also other types of discourse analysis, is the extent to which the analysis of discourse should address, focus on or even acknowledge cognition and cognitive states. This has been the subject of some confusion, and has implications in particular for DP as both a theory and a methodology in psychology. Rather than engaging in this deeply contested area (see for instance, van Dijk's, 2006, criticism of what he terms DP's mindless approach) there is one key point to draw out concerning Edwards and Potter's position. They claim that "(D)iscourse analysis [and by inference,

Discursive Psychology] is particularly concerned with examining discourse for how *cognitive issues* of knowledge and belief, fact and error, truth and explanation, are dealt with,” (1992: 29, italics applied). That is, cognitive phenomena are constructed and managed in discourse itself.

Unlike experimental approaches in social psychology, DP is not concerned with attempting to understand what is said in talk as a means of shining a torch on some underlying cognitive phenomenon (Potter and Edwards, 2003). Rather, the focus is on *how* social realities are produced, and with what effect. This juxtaposition of approach highlights what Edwards and Potter (1992) indicate as a major problem in experimental methods: in its use of questionnaires, scales and so forth, the conventionalist searches for patterns and consistencies in data with the aim of uncovering phenomena which can be generalised. But, how does the conventionalist accommodate for the variation in talk and text? In this case, the conventionalist must sort out (to use Edwards’ *et al.*’s terms) any variability in the data or it may impact on results. In the DP paradigm, variability in language is sought for and studied for its consequence and function. As Potter and Wetherell claim, “(V)variability of the kind seen in detailed studies of discourse is thus a considerable embarrassment to traditional attitude theories,” (1987: 54), and it is this feature of DP which is its empirical mainstay. Phillips and Di Domenico (2009) summarise this concept in their claim that, rather than being seen as a problem to be managed, language and its effects are (or should be) the core focus of social sciences.

Having discussed some of the core features and concerns of DP, the discussion now considers some of the other principle DA methodologies adopted in the field, beginning with Critical Discourse Analysis.

### 3.5.2 Other principle discourse analysis methodologies

Van Dijk (2001) describes *Critical Discourse Analysis* as focusing on the relationship between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality and the role of the discourse analyst. With respect to the latter, he argues that there can never be an unbiased interpretive analysis of discourse, and consequently the role and position of the analyst must be treated as part of the analysis. Stubbe *et al.*, in their comparative study of five DA methods, locate the prospect of bias even earlier in the process in describing the act of transcription: “(T)he process of

transcription is inevitably selective, and therefore involves a certain amount of interpretation and analysis,” (2003: 353). This notion is largely embraced by all types of DA used within critical social psychology, and which arguably finds its roots in Gergen’s (1973) early claims for the implications of bias and context (see, for instance, section 3.3).

For Fairclough (2001), who is attributed with developing it (Perakyla, 2005), the purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis is to show how language works in social processes, how it is involved in power, domination and ideology. This particular type of DA is concerned with how discourse is used to influence the direction of social and political processes: “...CDA involves the use of discourse analytic techniques, combined with a critical perspective, to interrogate social phenomena,” (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004: 236). More specifically, it constitutes a method of analysing discourse for how political and social inequalities come into being (Wooffitt, 2005). Note, however, that Paul Chilton (2004), in his detailed account of political discourse analysis, makes no mention of this type of DA. One further point to draw, and which has resonance directly with KM, is that Fairclough relates CDA to the knowledge economy in drawing equivalent meanings between a knowledge-based economy and a discourse-based economy from the perspectives of creating and using knowledge as new discourses.

Two other types of DA – *Conversation Analysis* (CA) and *Membership Categorization Analysis* – both emanate from the work of Harvey Sacks (Stokoe, 2012; Perakyla, 2005). Similarly to Discursive Psychology, CA has the core assumption that talk is the site of human action (Drew, 2003a), and that it is locally and situationally organised (Potter and te Molder, 2005). It focuses on everyday mundane conversation, and is particularly interested in how “...different speakers are meshed together in conversations and the way different types of actions – e.g., blamings, greetings, excuses – are produced and managed,” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 80). Both Wooffitt (2005) and Drew offer detailed explanations of CA, which Drew describes as a naturalistic, observation science of actual verbal and non-verbal behaviour. In 1987, Potter and Wetherell refer to CA as youthful suggesting that it was at that time relatively unknown: by contrast, in 2012, Stokoe refers to the CA’s juggernaut, indicative of the explosion of research interest in CA. Recent work, for instance, includes Svennevig’s study of agendas and workplace meetings; Ford and Stickle’s study of how turn-taking is managed in work meetings; Rautajoki’s analysis of how TV discussion show

participants manage identity and accountability; Nielsen's study of how meeting facilitators use various devices to facilitate innovation in organizational brainstorming sessions; Cromdal, Landqvist, Persoon-Thunqvist and Osvaldsson's study of calls to an emergency number, particularly investigating the impact of various different operators' greetings. These are just some of original CA studies published in 2012.

There is an apparent, and on-going, debate over what types of data CA should be concerned with – video and audio, and / or written texts. Some claim that the nature of CA limits it to only audio-visual materials (Perakyla, 2005; Drew, 2003a). Others take the view that it can be applied to any type of data, including, for instance, online forums and chat rooms as demonstrated in a study by Nilsen and Makitalo (2010).

A second area of debate centres on the issue of context or culture: Chilton (2004) is, for instance, critical of CA's disposal of contextual knowledge which he argues is crucial to analytic interpretation. In contrast, Drew (2003a) differentiates CA from other types of DA in that the researcher should not bring their *a priori* knowledge of context to the analysis, but rather allow participants to show their sense of context through their talk. Others argue that this is too limiting, resulting in a restriction in what Abell and Stokoe describe as "...the notion of culture in the study of the situated social self," (2001: 417). More recently, Antaki (2012) criticises Waring, Creider, Tarpey and Black (2012) for their use of retrospective accounts by participants to introduce missing context to the analysis of action-in-conversation. Antaki argues that such retrospective accounts of inner motivations have no place in CA. The debate over culture/context is one of the prime reasons why the present researcher does not subscribe to CA as a methodology.

Compared to this juggernaut, Stokoe (2012) claims that *Membership Categorisation Analysis* (MCA) is a mere milk float. Whereas CA is concerned with the sequential practices – 'turn-taking' – MCA is focused on the meaning-laden categories evoked in everyday conversation. Its key assumption rests on the insight that people are referred to using categories, and that at any point, an individual may be referred to or labelled with more than one different category: e.g., mother, sister, wife. Each of these categories carries meaning and, in many cases, they come with category-bound activities, activities which are considered to be typical or expected of a given category (Perakyla, 2005). The idea that we live in a world of identity categories -

each of which has a bearing on behaviour, sense-making and discursive repertoires - is a foundational theme in Gergen's (1991) notion of the saturated self. In this, the individual is seen as a multiplicity of selves and human significance is determined by relationship. MCA is therefore concerned with category as action with consequences.

According to Stokoe (2012), MCA is at risk of being subsumed into CA. In reality, the two methods are not mutually exclusive, nor do they necessarily overlap with one another. There are, in fact, examples of useful and insightful studies which combine both types of analysis in their methodology (e.g., Stommel and Koole, 2010).

### **3.6 Topics of study in discourse analysis**

Thus far, the Chapter has described and summarised the theoretical and methodological stances of various types of DA as frameworks and methodologies which have much to offer to KM. To add weight and substance to this perspective, the following sections review and discuss some of the more popular (and relevant to KM) DA topics in (critical) social psychology, with a particular focus on research in Discursive Psychology.

The span of DA research is enormous even within the boundaries set out above and, frustratingly, does not fit neatly into a categorisation of three or four manageable headings. As DA has matured, research has tended to follow a path leading to increasingly tiny – but important – minutiae of human talk in interaction. Edwards (2006b), for instance, analyses the use and consequences of modal verbs in the context of police interviews with suspects: the latter, he finds, use them to construct themselves as not capable of acting in the way of which they are accused – it is used normatively and dispositionally. Officers use the same verbs to call into question the suspects' statements, a strategy famously adopted by Mandy Rice-Davies during her witness statement in a 1960s court case: "Well he would [say that] wouldn't he," (as cited in Edwards and Potter, 1992). Another example is a study involving personnel in French tourist offices which Chevalier (2011) uses to investigate how call-takers construct impartiality when dealing with recommendation-seeking phone calls. In other words, he is interested in how staff avoid giving recommendations while at the same time appearing helpful and polite.

Other studies focus on gender (e.g., Charlebois, 2010; Potter and Edwards, 2003; Stokoe, 2012; Schegloff, 1997; Rhodes and Pullen, 2009), identity (e.g., Benwell and Stokoe, 2012; Locke and Edwards, 2003; Myers, 2010; Condor, 2000; Hobbs, 2003; Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004; Abell and Stokoe, 2001; Davies and Harré, 1990; Crane, 2012b; Rautajoki, 2012; Holmes, 2005; Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Mieroop, 2005; Brown and Phua, 2011; Wetherell, 2001; Greatbatch, 2009; Gulich, 2003; Giles, 2006; Hutchby, 2001; Whittle, 2005), attitudes and evaluative practices (e.g., Wiggins and Potter, 2003; Potter, 1998a; Potter and Edwards, 2012), occupational roles and good practice (e.g., Marshall, 1994; Wasson, 2004; Svennevig, 2012b; Ford and Stickle, 2012; Housley and Smith, 2011; Nielsen, 2012; Holmes, 2005; Cromdal, Landqvist and Osvaldsson, 2012), and knowing as an interactional accomplishment (Lester and Paulus, 2011; Marra, Moore and Klimczak, 2004; Svennevig; Gulich; Paulus, 2007; Hutchby; Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005).

As it is the purpose of this section of the Chapter to draw upon this body of work to support the relevance of DA as a research methodology, the following discussions concentrate on two of the most popular and distinct themes of DA study: identity, and Computer Mediated Communications. The latter is of particular interest bearing in mind the prominence of the use of such technologies within the context of KM.

### 3.6.1 Discourse and identity

Identity is a phenomenon of particular interest to the discourse analyst and, according to Côté (2006) is one of the fastest-growing areas in the social sciences. Brown and Phua (2011) speculate on this growing phenomenon with an interesting perspective: they suggest that concrete ideas of who we are are becoming less certain in a world in which the domination of ideas of commodification and ubiquitous technologies leads to fragmentation, discontinuity and crisis. This idea has resonance with Gergen's (1991) notions of the increasingly fractured nature of the self, largely in response to the ever-increasing invasion of technology in all aspects of human life. It is ironic that in a world in which social media, Web 2.0 and so forth are promoted and positioned as enhancing and transforming our abilities to communicate, some see them as the source of identity fracture.

## *Debates*

From the social constructionist perspective, there is a move away from the notion of identity as a static, enduring entity towards identity as dynamic, fluid and malleable, dependent on context (Abell and Stokoe, 2001; Phillips and Di Domenico, 2009). From these perspectives, identity can be seen as a socially and relationally constructed phenomenon (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1990; Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Gulich, 2003; Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004; Gergen 2009), although, it can be argued, perhaps not entirely at the whim of context at any given time.

There is a tendency for some DA purists to take an extremist view of identity in the implication that it simply does not exist outside of social interaction with others: in other words, solipsism. For instance, if one follows Gergen's ideas to their extreme, that identities are constructed in relation to social environments, interactions and shared meanings (e.g., Gergen, 1991; 2009; 1994: as cited in Abell and Stokoe, 2001), then this suggests that a person's identity only comes into existence in social interaction. But then, it can also be argued that this is not really what Gergen means, particularly if one consults his later (2009) work on *Relational Being*, which posits that the individual, and all of their actions and cognitions, is *grounded* in relations with others. Also note that Silverman (2007) warns against seeing context as anything other than that constructed by discourse participants themselves. There is, then, some ambiguity over this particular issue.

Côté (2006) describes the field of identity as filled with debate, much of which is focused on what constitutes identity and how it should be researched. Côté is drawing out more of a political argument for the streamlining of what he describes as the current Tower of Babel state of identity research and theory, which would result in a more potentially powerful lobbying position with policy makers. He also argues that pure identity research often has no real prescription for the practical utility of its ideas. This is a criticism which is also touched on by Madsbjerg and Rasmussen (2014), in their case for a sense-making approach to understanding human life experience: they suggest that the human sciences have been largely ignored by the business world as being notoriously difficult to understand and, worse, irrelevant. That may be the case, but what the present discussions seek to demonstrate now is the utility of identity research in the DA paradigm.



### *Example studies*

This brief review of work in the identity field considers three studies. First, Abell and Stokoe (2001) use a combination of a social constructionism and Conversation Analysis (CA) to investigate how Princess Diana accomplished the business of constructing and contrasting her true self and her royal role as two distinctive identities in a TV documentary interview. They show how culturally situated identities are located in conversation, claiming that social identity does not exist as some private cognitive process, but rather, "...identity is rooted in a discursive theory of language," (417). Specifically, their study shows how identity is manufactured in social interaction between people rather than being a single, individualistic, enduring and static inner self.

Abell and Stokoe's (2001) study particularly makes the case for the importance of importing relevant cultural context to any discourse analysis (as argued by Chilton, 2004) in order to locate identities as they are constructed. This is something which the CA purist might criticise, but which Abell and Stokoe insist allows them to work with the best of both worlds – the microscopic word scrap (their terms) detail of CA, and a broader, more context driven approach.

In the second example, Locke and Edwards (2001) adopt a DP approach to study former US President Bill Clinton's testimony before the Grand Jury, demonstrating how he uses crafted rhetorical practices to both manage and mitigate the relationship between himself and Monica Lewinsky. A key finding of their analysis is the revelation of how Clinton reflexively accomplishes self-identity as caring and responsible, through his portrayal of Lewinsky. That is, in portraying Lewinsky as unreasonable, overly-emotional and demanding he effectively and reflexively casts himself as the exact opposite. This study also demonstrates how Clinton uses memory limitations, combined with an explicit desire for accuracy of recall, as a rhetorical resource to mitigate accountability for forgotten actions. In their analysis, Locke and Edwards explain how such claims to memory failure can serve as a device for mitigating – or avoiding – responsibility which is powerful, persuasive and consequentially effective. The use of this and other devices works to construct Clinton as only interested in the evidential facts, and consequently as someone to be trusted and believed.

These are the sorts of findings which cannot be unravelled through traditional qualitative or quantitative methods. Incidentally, note a recent article in *New Scientist* which announces the

development of a new Artificial Intelligence application which identifies, for instance, the frequent use of phrases such as ‘as far as I can recall...’ as indicators of false testimony.<sup>5</sup> This is precisely the type of phrase that Clinton is shown to use.

In the third study, Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1990) use a combination of Conversation Analysis and discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell’s 1987 version) to analyse informal interviews with subculture group members, with a particular interest in how social comparisons are used to accomplish authenticity. According to conventional Social Identity Theory, people innately strive for a positive self-esteem or self-image, and that this is a prime motivator in making social comparisons in intergroup and between group contexts (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005). Accordingly, members of one group will often display prejudice against others through drawing on social comparisons (Widdicombe and Wooffitt). Widdicombe and her co-worker diplomatically call into question some of the underlying assumptions in this analysis, arguing that if identities are socially produced, and one is interested in understanding how, then the imperative is to locate study in the context of action - discourse. Their analysis of punk-rockers’, goths’ and hippies’ talk draws out a clear being/doing distinction, a shallowness versus genuineness embedded in social comparison talk. Speakers compare groups to an external standard, compare past and present characteristics of their group, and compare new members with older members. In this way, the creation of categories is shown to be connected to the action of social comparison. The analysis also shows the recurrence of motivation as a linguistic resource for differentiating between group members in that motives between different members vary from authentic to shallow or faddy.

### *Identity and categorical groups*

Another piece of work uses the example of older workers to demonstrate how Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be used to unpick very real social issues, and how meanings associated with labels influence behaviour and action (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004). CDA is focused on how language is involved in the social relations of power and domination (Fairclough, 2001).

Ainsworth and Hardy’s (2004) interest lies in how the identity of older worker, and its associated meanings, is invoked in discourse showing how this has real consequences for

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<sup>5</sup> “Our laptop says the witness is unreliable”, *New Scientist*, 8 March 2014, No 2959

people categorized in this way. Conventional research methods, they suggest, are unable to unlock these subtleties. Their point is that a CDA approach can reveal the ways in which the use of labels and categories in identity construction can constrain individuals, and how the meanings attached to those labels can influence behaviour. Unfortunately Ainsworth and her colleague's work is not a report of a CDA study, but rather a well-reasoned and persuasive argument for the advantages of undertaking such a study.

Categorical groups are constructed in many different ways. Hobbs (2003), for instance, uses a linguistics study of courtroom proceedings to demonstrate how a lawyer uses her rhetorical practices and resources to construct an in-group which includes herself and the jurors, but not the opposing attorney. According to Hobbs' analysis, this in-group is constructed through the use of African American Vernacular English by the lawyer when addressing the (African American) jury. Hobbs refers to this practice as impression management but it can also be seen as an example of active, dynamic identity construction with, here, the sole purpose of alignment with the jury. This is shown to be a powerful and effective resource in constructing mutual empathy.

Hobbs' (2003) understanding of impression management is different from that in the DA literature. For instance, Condor (2000) presents impression management as a device for prejudice-avoidance. In her discourse study of how English people formulate their country in an interview context, she rather surprisingly finds that people deploy impression management strategies and devices to actively avoid being heard to have an explicitly national stance, or to overtly display national pride. Condor suggests that one way of interpreting this is that participants hear talk of English nationalism as typical Anglo-British xenophobia (her terms). She does conclude, however, that the apparent correlation between national and prejudice accounting which seems to be an evident rhetorical pattern in her data is not necessarily universal to all British citizens. Her study uncovers the immensely complex nature of identity work (note, though, that she does not specify the type of DA she uses in her study), and the effects and consequences of (un)conscious impression management work. Impression management has close ties to stance (or position) taking, which is considered next.

#### *Stance-taking and status work*

Myers (2010) investigates how bloggers use language to take stances in online forums, suggesting that the priority of the blogger is to mark their position relative to others rather

than dialogic debate or collective discussion. Stance-taking, Myers claims, is not just about having an opinion on any given topic, but also about using that opinion to align or misalign with someone else interactionally. Arguably, the business of stance-taking is fundamentally concerned with identity construction and both are bound to context and social interaction.

Similarly, Crane (2012), drawing on DP, analyses a knowledge managers' online discussion forum investigating how contributors construct their identities as expert with entitlement to be heard as such. The analysis shows how participants use rhetorical devices to actively and relationally accomplish membership of an elite group, and that membership of this group is marked by within-group competitive rivalry. In other words, participants work to establish their expert credentials relationally which, Crane claims, has some synergies with the theory of creative abrasion (Leonard and Sensiper, 2002; Leonard and Straus, 1997).

This notion of expertise being constructed interactionally and relationally is also evident in Gulich's (2003) study of knowledge transfer between experts (doctors) and non-experts (patients). She identifies three devices used in the construction of expertise: self-categorisation, category-bound activities such as the use of specialist terms following a colloquial description, and evaluation. Crane (2012) identifies similar devices in her analysis. The primary contribution of Gulich's work, however, lies more in the identification of *how* experts share knowledge with non-experts, and to what effect, finding that a divergence in perception between these two categories often leads to unsuccessful communications. For instance, patients are shown to script long-term illness as having a sudden onset, while doctors construct it as having a long development and onset. In other words, Gulich clearly shows how doctors and patients can often construct two entirely different meanings of the same thing. This finding is reminiscent of Leonard's (2007) claim that gaps in knowledge between two or more people can result in barriers to knowledge sharing.

From this brief review, it can be seen that DA applied to the study of identity can reveal features and facets of human social and interactional life and action which may not be available to traditional experimental research methods. Whilst it is acknowledged that some of the findings are not entirely relevant to organizational management and studies, and KM in particular, the point here is to show what *can be achieved*.

The discussions now turn to some of the issues and research findings in Computer Mediated Communication.

### 3.6.2 Discourse and Computer Mediated Communications

Computer Mediated Communications (CMC), such as online discussion forums, have been a topic of interest for researchers for more than two decades. Marked by an explosion in social media and networking sites, online environments have become the locus of the drive for recognition and status in online communities (Otterbacher, 2011). Markham (2005) describes the computer-mediated construction of self as a unique phenomenon for study because in such environments individuals as selves and the social structures within which they exist and act are the outcome of mutually shared negotiation. Consequently, this demands new and different research methodologies to fully explore. As a precursor to Otterbacher's later ideas, Markham conjures the uniqueness of the online environment perfectly with the coupling of two phrases: "I am perceived, therefore I am", and "I am responded to, therefore I am," (795). This takes on a slightly darker aspect when understood in the light of Gergen's (1991) description of technologies of social saturation which, he argues, are leading to an erasure of the individual self, and increasingly blurred lines between man and machine (1999).

A further issue relates to the ethics of researchers using what are ostensibly public online discussion forums for research data, a topic which is returned to in Chapter 7 on Methodology.

Taking a more practical perspective, CMC is of particular interest here because of the high profile role that technology plays in the KM sphere. While many in the KM field claim that technology cannot and should not be viewed as the final solution (e.g., Shadbolt and Milton, 1999; Bhatt, 2001; Grant and Qureshi, 2006), it is none-the-less prominent in the KM literature both as a feature of KM (e.g., Lindvall, Rus and Sinha, 2003), and as the object of behavioural study (e.g., Garcia-Perez and Ayres, 2010). But, as has been shown elsewhere, focusing study down to the level of actual discourse – in CMC or elsewhere – is not something that the KM literature has so far pursued.

Studies have mainly followed DA in the Sociolinguistics tradition, using linguistics/content analysis methods to study texts quantitatively and qualitatively (e.g., McKenzie and Murphy,

2000; Montero, Watts and Garcia-Carbonnell, 2007; Marra, Moore and Klimczak, 2004), although there is a call for more attention to be focused on the latter (Schrire, 2006). While there are some synergies between the version(s) of DA adopted in Sociolinguistics and those in critical social psychology, there are differences resulting in criticism. For instance, Edwards (2006), in his study of police interviews, criticises linguistic studies of modal verbs for ignoring the social actions they accomplish. Elsewhere, linguists are criticised for using the term gender un-problematically as an analyst's category (Stokoe, 2012). According to Potter and Edwards, Sociolinguistics as a methodology is flawed for adopting constructs drawn from cognitive psychology: "(A)an appeal to some cognitive realm [...] is unnecessary and misleading," (2003: 102).

A further issue centres on the inclusion of appropriate data extracts in reports, in part to support the validity of research claims. This practice is not generally the case in much of Sociolinguistics research reviewed here. For all of these reasons, the present chapter draws upon the Sociolinguistics literature only in so far as it is relevant to the discussion of CMC in general and topics covered, which is the first subject under discussion.

### *Coverage*

Research in CMC tends to be clustered around academic sites (e.g., McKenzie and Murphy, 2000; Montero Watts and Garcia-Carbonnell, 2007; Marra, Moore and Klimczak, 2004; Lester and Paulus, 2011; Schrire, 2006; Paulus, 2007; Veerman and Veldhuis-Diermanse, 2001; Jordan, Schallert, Park, Lee, Chaing and Cheng, 2012); online support groups for people with physical or mental health issues such as eating disorders (e.g., Stommel and Koole, 2010; Giles, 2006), self-harming (e.g., Smithson, Sharkey, Hewis, Jones, Emmens, Ford and Owens 2011) and depression (e.g., Morrow, 2006; Chirrey, 2011); and blogs (e.g., Myers, 2010). Appearing less frequently as a focus of research are sites such as product review sites (e.g., Otterbacher, 2011) and professional practice forums (e.g., Crane, 2011; 2012). Academic sites, such as forums in Higher Education, are frequently used in CMC research, although Markham (2005) notes a general shift in ethnographic research towards CMC in everyday life. Collectively, studies of CMC have raised a broad spectrum of fascinating findings. Before reviewing some research examples, one of the major issues associated with CMC research is raised because of the singular nature of this environment.

### *Researcher bias*

Markham (2005) addresses the paradox of the embodied (i.e., the researcher) versus the unembodied (i.e., the forum participants) and the implications of this in terms of researcher role and bias. While endorsing CMC as a valid and rich vein for research, she warns against what she sets out as the prime pitfalls. With the embodied-unembodied issue, she is referring to the potential transfer of the researcher's own experiences and judgments to her data. For instance, Markham argues that a researcher may unconsciously attribute categories (e.g., gender) to forum participants – that is, assign them with a body. The risk of this embodiment is particularly high, Markham suggests, with texts which display features such as misspellings or poor grammar: the temptation is to categorise the contributor as being poorly educated. Further, Markham notes how some researchers clean up their data by effecting corrections. This method of treating data is completely contrary to the DA methodologies discussed earlier in this Chapter, and would likely be considered unacceptable. Note that Markham's discussion of research methods in CMC is generally focused on ethnomethodology research methods.

For Benwell and Stokoe (2012) CMC data is ideal for researchers who are concerned with issues of authenticity because there is no need for any transcription process. From their perspective and with this type of data, the researcher can assume to role of lurker (their term). The implication is that without the physical presence of the researcher, even as a non-participative observer, the potential for influencing the course and nature of participants' actions in any given scenario is removed. Benwell and Stokoe devote an entire chapter of their investigation of *Discourse and Identity* to the analysis of discourse in virtual worlds. Thus there are two quite contrasting views.

Whilst acknowledging the rationale of Markham's (2005) reasoning over this issue, it can also be argued that the analyst – consciously or otherwise – inevitably brings her own embodied sensibilities to the performance of research. One is necessarily employing embodied senses (perception) and cognition. The issue is arguably more to do with *how* the researcher acknowledges herself as a co-participant in the study, bringing to the fore an awareness of *what* effect the text is having – what it is making her think, imagine, see – and how. As McKenzie and Murphy (2000) suggest, there is a need to accept the subjectivity of analysis, and consider factors which might impact on the findings.

### *Focus of study*

Topics studied in the Sociolinguistics tradition include stance-taking and how this is used rhetorically and strategically to attract the attention of others in the overly crowded virtual world (Myers, 2010). The question of whether orality is confined to the spoken word, or can also be deployed in discussion forums is investigated by Montero, Watts and Garcia-Carbonnell (2007) in the context of Spanish students learning English. Fayard and DeSanctis (2005) also investigate the phenomenon of orality, this time in the context of a knowledge manager's forum. Their study, unfortunately, focuses on behaviours only at the very highest level. In both of these studies, little conclusion is drawn from the presence of orality in forums, leaving unanswered questions such as, what does orality accomplish, what is its effect on the interaction? One can speculate here that orality is a complex phenomenon and arguably connected to issues of presence, which Benwell and Stokoe (2012) suggest is important in cyberspace identity and status.

McKenzie and Murphy (2000) also locate their study in the HE environment, with their focus on the evaluation of a student online discuss forum, as do Marra, Moore and Klimczak (2004), who are particularly interested in evidence of cognitive development and meaningful learning in a course-related forum. However, Marra *et al.* adopt a highly stage-managed study: the participants are especially selected, the event is selected, and there is a deliberate selection of case studies. The study also tends to mix CA with content analysis, assigning the former with research objectives which conflict with those expressed in the DA literature. Moving away from the location of Higher Education, Otterbacher's (2011) linguistics study interrogates online product review sites to elicit the relationship between discursive tactics and self-prominence. In particular, the study is interested in how contributors use available cues to formulate judgments about the credibility and utility of others' contributions. Without the presence of visual body language clues, for instance, Otterbacher proposes that reputation becomes key to building trust, and that there is still much to learn in this area of enquiry.

Turning to the DA literature, there is a wider spectrum of topics with a substantial body of work investigating rhetorical practices, and their accomplishments, in health support CMCs. Community membership is of particular interest. Stommel and Koole (2010) report a study of contributions posted to an eating disorder support site, hosted in Germany. Using a combination of Conversation Analysis and Membership Categorisation Analysis, Stommel and Koole are interested in how new members to the site negotiate membership in terms of



expectations and requirements. The *a priori* expectation is that membership will be low-threshold with no particular entry requirements. They use their analysis to show that this is in fact not the case. In an insightful unpicking of the action in the postings, Stommel and his co-worker point to three interesting phenomena: first, that entry is dependent upon the newcomer doing being ill; secondly, that existing members only ever interact with the newcomer, not with each other; and thirdly, that a sequential misalignment is evident in the newcomer's rejection of advice given by members. The expectation inherent in sequential pairs is that – in this instance - advice is accepted.

Advice-giving, as a phenomenon of study, is a popular topic for the discourse researcher. Another study which finds that advice giving is largely ignored investigates postings to a support forum for young people who self-harm (Smithson, Sharkey, Hewis, Jones, Emmens, Ford and Owens, 2011). The authors show advice-giving to be a troublesome activity, in which posters commonly use disclaimers such as 'I'd probably...' and 'it's been said...' as well as terms of endearment to preface potentially unwelcome advice-responses. Upgrading the issues associated with advice-giving, Morrow (2006) points to the potentially threatening nature of advice messages in terms of a problem-poser's self-image in his study of a support site for depression sufferers. (Note that Morrow's study is linguistic but is included here because of the topic of study, relatively rigorous analysis and because it includes excerpts drawn from the data.) He speculates that advice may not be followed by advice-seekers precisely to avoid finding themselves in the debt of the advice-giver.

Another interesting feature which Morrow (2006) draws out is the use of metaphor by those posting problems: e.g., '...it feels like...' He argues that metaphors are used as imperatives rather than by stylistic choice because of the difficulties in describing complex feelings. Compare these findings with those of Gulich (2003), for instance, who uses a Conversation Analysis approach to examine patient's use of metaphor in knowledge transfer interactions between patients and doctors. The findings show how metaphors situated the patient's perception of their illness markedly differently from that of the doctor, with consequences for reaching shared understanding.

Smithson and her colleagues also investigate how advice-givers in a self-harm support forum establish their credentials to be heard: "(I)n an online context where people cannot use normal interactional cues to determine the identity of a speaker, the ways in which posters

use their posts to demonstrate their validity as members or expert become paramount in whether or not they are accepted,” (2011: 489). Crane (2012) explores this phenomenon in detail in her DP study of how knowledge managers negotiate and construct selves as expert in the context of an online professional KM forum. The findings show how forum participants use rhetorical devices such as consensus followed by elaboration, and elite group construction / membership, to script themselves as experts. A key finding is that expertise is largely situated relationally in interaction with others, although a superficial analysis would suggest that only limited participant interaction is taking place. Crane also notes the use of disclaimers as a key device to manage accountability, a practice described in many studies (e.g., Smithson *et al.*, 2011; Lester and Paulus, 2011).

To complete this review of the discourse literature, the discussions turn to one of the few DA studies which focus on the construct of knowing. Taking a Discursive Psychology approach, Lester and Paulus (2011) study HE students’ blog postings in response to a course requirement to discuss their beliefs and experiences of dietary supplements. The conclusion of the analysis is that students use disclaimers (‘I don’t know much about it’) to minimise accountability for their blogs and that such disclaimers are often focused on the action of knowing. In other words, Lester and co-worker are claiming that students are not talking about their lack of knowledge about food supplements, but are rather managing and protecting their identity as a student and all of the expectations that flow from this category such as intellectual competence. There is a substantial difference between the two viewpoints.

### **3.7 Sense-making**

It is worth giving a brief consideration to ‘sense-making’ as an organizational practice of study, and its synergies and contrasts with DA in general and Discursive Psychology in particular. The former is a substantial field in its own right and consequently there is no intention here to go any further than a superficial account. Sense-making draws on the practice of phenomenology, with a focus on the study of how people experience life (Madsbjerg and Rasmussen, 2014). Phenomenology was Alfred Schutz’s (1967; originally published in German in 1932) answer to some of the most profound and critical questions facing the Social Sciences in the early decades of the twentieth century: namely, the role of

objectivity versus subjectivity in the social sciences, and the nature of human action. In this project, Schutz foregrounds the concept of lived experience.

According to Madsbjerg and his colleague, sense-making "...reveals the often subtle and unconscious motivations informing consumer behaviour and can lead to insights that enable transformations in product development, organizational culture, and even corporate strategy," (2014: 82). What can be inferred from this is that sense-making is largely occupied in the territory of organizational management and management consultancy, and the claims made for its practice have considerable synergies with some of those in DA. For instance, Greatbatch proposes that Conversation Analysis can "...reveal and analyse tacit, 'seen but unnoticed' aspects of human conduct, which would otherwise be unavailable for systematic study," (2009: 487). Consistent with the social constructionist perspective, the sense-making paradigm emphasises and is sensitive to how people interact with the world through meaning-making.

In comparison to DP particularly, however, there is a subtle difference. While Madsbjerg and his co-worker talk about hidden motivations that shape behaviour and which can be revealed through research, DP is solely concerned with social life as normative and rhetorical practice, rather than as the end result of an interaction of unspecified mental patterns and factors. (Potter, 1998a). Norms do not control actions, they are orientated to by individuals in their discourse. In sum, DP does not approach human (inter)action – discourse - as a window providing access to the ghost in the machine, to borrow from Ryle's (1949) famous description of the soul. Instead, it studies the action itself. Similarly, sense-making studies human experience through action (e.g., through conversation, interview, observation and so forth) to gain an understanding of how the individual makes sense of the world. But, once again, the subtle difference lies in sense-making's search for what lies beyond the action, while DP considers the action itself as constituting the boundaries of interest.

As indicated at the outset of this section, the topic of sense-making is substantial and complex. The intention with this brief discussion is to raise a potential area of mutual synergy and interest between the field of sense-making and DP in particular.

### **3.8 Summary**

This Chapter began with a discussion of the rise of Social Constructionism and discourse analysis in social psychology, set against a background of challenging debates, differentiating between the critical and experimental approaches. In particular, discussions focused on criticism of experimental research methodologies, and their reliance on laboratory techniques. It is shown how discourse analysis is divided into many different types, indicative of its use in many disciplines besides that of psychology. The discussions then moved onto a consideration of Discursive Psychology, and some of the other principle types of discourse analysis adopted in critical social psychology.

The breadth of topics and themes addressed in discourse analysis research is extensive and difficult to neatly package. Consequently two themes (identity, and Computer Mediated Communications) which have some resonance for organizations in general and KM in particular were selected for review to provide insight into how these themes are dealt with, and how their findings contribute to the knowledge. The research reviewed here is just a tiny sample of the work that has been done. While many of these cases are not situated in the organizational workplace context, their implications for workplace discourse and organizational life are none-the-less valid and potentially transferable. They show how people do the business of constructing everyday realities, and how these realities can often be shown to be at odds with *assumed* realities. They demonstrate how fundamentally important language is to the action of, for instance, constructing identity. Thus, these findings offer useful and relevant insights commensurate with the everyday business of the organization.

Additionally, it is claimed that discourse analytic studies can uncover facets of social life and interaction that would be unavailable to more conventional, experimental research methods.

Discursive Psychology is briefly compared and contrasted with the organizational practice of sense-making, finding a case for mutual synergy and interest despite differences in focus and approach, particularly to cognition.

The present study proposes to adopt Discursive Psychology as the preferred method of studying organizational discourse and knowledge work from the perspective of psychological

action for a number of reasons (see section 3.4.2). The most interesting of these, perhaps, is the paradigm's constitution of language as constructive, functional, consequential and variable as the site of psychological action, and as having a particular concern with knowledge in terms of how speakers' accounts are explained, described and constructed as factual. Also of specific interest is the idea that if Discursive Psychology is not concerned with what speakers explicitly state (as a linguistics or content analyst might be, for instance), but rather what they discursively do, then is it the case that Discursive Psychology represents a methodology for the direct study of displays of tacit knowing as the influencing and mediating aspect of social interaction, as many KM scholars have suggested that it is (e.g., Duguid, 2005)?

The penultimate Chapter in Part One reprises the thematic categories of knowledge sharing identified in Chapters 1 and 2 - identity, trust, risk and context - and considers these from the perspectives of discourse analysis and Discursive Psychology. The Chapter begins with a revisit to the subject of tacit knowledge, considered in the previous Chapters in the context of KM, with the aim of determining if there is value or validity in speculating that discourse analysis drawing on Discursive Psychology can reveal tacit knowing in action.

## **Chapter 4: Making connections: tacit knowing, Discursive Psychology, and the thematic categories of identity, trust, risk and context**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous Chapters have reviewed issues, debates and theory in the field of knowledge management (KM), and Discursive Psychology within the wider perspective of discourse analysis and the turn to talk in critical social psychology. It is proposed that Discursive Psychology constitutes a valid approach to the study of organizational knowledge work in discourse, and which may lead to insights unavailable to more conventional experimental research paradigms. The present Chapter attempts to draw several lines of investigation together with the objective of developing scope and direction for primary research. The basis of this is the speculation that the study of organizational discourse, drawing on Discursive Psychology, can reveal tacit knowing in action, and that this can be connected to the thematic categories of identity, trust, risk and context identified in Chapter 1 as factors in knowledge sharing actions.

The Chapter proceeds with a reprise of the subject of tacit knowledge, raised at various points in the previous Chapters (e.g., section 1.2: the significant debate over the tacit-explicit framework of knowledge; section 1.6: KM initiatives' focus on tacit knowledge implicated in high failure rates; section 2.3.3: five out of 42 KM theories explicitly reference the tacit in their titles; section 2.5.1: the *Dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation* is shown to be the primary source of disagreement over what tacit knowledge is, and what should be done with it). Here, discussions focus on the values ascribed to tacit knowledge, and the disputes over its nature. This is followed by a discussion of tacit knowledge from the perspective of Discursive Psychology, building on the speculation that the latter can reveal the former as aspects of human discursive action. Discussions particularly focus on the thematic categories identified in Chapter 1 as being implicated in knowledge sharing activities, with the objective of positioning these as central themes for the study of organizational discourse drawing on Discursive Psychology.

## **4.2 The values of tacit knowledge**

According to Nonaka, (e.g., 1994) tacit knowledge (TK) is crucial to the creation of new knowledge and innovation with an imperative to convert the tacit to the explicit through mobilisation, amplification and externalisation.

In contrast to Nonaka's (1994) vision of tacit as the *subject* of amplification, Spender (1996) ascribes TK's value to its amplifying *agency*. Accordingly, competitive advantage results from an integration of tangible (explicit) firm-specific knowledge with the intangible (tacit), leading to unique outcomes. Unlike Nonaka, Spender does not speculate on the nature of this integration. Leonard and Sensiper's (2002) *Innovation funnel theory* develops the link between innovation and TK, but are critical of the tacit-explicit distinction. In his notion of organizational knowledge stocks and flows, Deeds (2003) describes tacit flow as the most crucial to acquire but the most challenging. Duguid (2005) claims the importance of Communities of Practice to be contingent on the TK that they share, and that TK (knowing how) makes the explicit (knowing that) actionable.

Others variously characterise TK as the well-spring of all knowledge (Ehin, 2008), vital to competitive advantage and the explaining factor in expertise (Puusa and Eerikainen, 2010). Central to strategic performance (Bontis, 2002), TK is the most valuable component of individual knowledge (Boisot, 2002), and as such, important to KM as a whole (Rechberg and Syed, 2013). Bontis is one of the few who temper valuations of TK with its limiting characteristics in terms of competitiveness and adaptability.

Thus, irrespective of theoretical perspective, TK is valuable to organizations, and as such requires some action. But the question remains – what is it?

## **4.3 Tacit knowledge as a disputed phenomenon**

What is also clear from a review of the KM literature is that while a substantial number of scholars draw on the same source (e.g., Polanyi, 1962) in respect of TK (e.g., Nonaka, 1994; Spender, 1996; Spender and Grant, 1996; Leonard and Sensiper, 2002; Greenwood and

Levin, 2005; Duguid, 2005; Gourlay, 2006; Grant and Qureshi, 2006; Grant, 2007; Puusa and Eerikainen, 2010; Virtanen, 2011; Tsoukas; Oguz and Sengun, 2011), there are as many - often subtly - different interpretations (see section 2.5.3, and The Great Misunderstanding).

In Nonaka's project (e.g., 1991, 1994), TK is distinct from explicit knowledge; it is rooted in action, tied to a specific context, acquired through experience, comprising skills and cognitive elements, and intrinsic to developing shared understanding. Elsewhere, TK is described as a tool which aids action, yet is not part of it (Cook and Brown, 1999), it is intangible (Spender, 1996), cannot be easily articulated and is held unconsciously (Leonard and Sensiper, 2002), and cannot be divorced from context nor explicit knowledge (Thompson and Walsham, 2004). Tsoukas (2011) also sees the tacit as a requisite for explicit knowledge, comprising a functional, phenomenal and semantic structure. Greenwood and Levin (2005) prefer the formulation of knowing how, indicative of TK as expressed through action, consistent with Duguid's (2005) formulation.

Arguably, this diversity in the accounts of TK stems from interpretation of their source and an apparent inconsistency in its use (Grant, 2007). It is possible that the root of this stems from Polanyi's (1962) own account of TK which is rather broad: TK is personal, practical, abstract, ineffable, indefinable, unspecifiable, instrumental and dwelling in subsidiary awareness; that all acts of knowing containing tacit and explicit components, and consequently one cannot exist without the other. It is not the intention here to add to the existing multifarious interpretations of Polanyi's (e.g., 1962) work, as this would simply repeat what others have already claimed. Suffice to state that this is a contested question (e.g., Virtanen, 2011; Grant and Qureshi, 2006; Oguz and Sengun, 2011).

One point of variance between the KM literature and Polanyi (1962)'s account is, however, worth noting. While not explicitly casting TK as having value, his description of it as something difficult to grasp, hard to articulate, slippery, beyond ordinary understanding, inevitably conjures something worth seeking. Without TK, is KM not simply managing explicit, codifiable, quantifiable, expressible *information*, reminiscent of questions addressed earlier (see, for instance, sections 1.3 and 2.2.1).



There is one further feature in the tacit debate which has not yet been addressed, and which has direct resonance to the proposal of Discursive Psychology as a means of revealing tacit knowing in discursive action: the implicit formulation.

#### **4.4 The implicit formulation**

In a theory designed to address the tacit-explicit issue, Boisot (2002) proposes that new knowledge results from mentally abstracting and coding information from the environment, with this pattern seen as a process of problem-solving. Thus Boisot introduces the idea of TK as implicitly acquired. Similarly, Leonard and Sensiper (2002) claim that knowledge can be acquired through implicit learning, and also connect TK to problem-solving. Greenwood and Levin (2005) characterise tacit knowing as hidden understanding, and as the active struggle to know how to act in the world. More explicitly Gourlay (2006) claims that know how contains a tacit fraction and that this is acquired unconsciously through implicit learning. More recently, in his phenomenological framework for TK, Tsoukas (2011) claims that for rules to have practical use they must be assimilated and stored in the unconsciousness. This is in considerable contrast to the traditional dualism – the either/or state of knowledge (Grant, 2007) – expressed in the tacit-explicit distinction promoted by Nonaka (e.g., 1994).

These approaches to an understanding of TK suggest the implicit, perhaps even unconscious nature of the acquisition and use of the tacit. Moreover, they all imply an influencing role for tacit knowledge in everyday actions. This influencing potential can be seen in the notion of knowing how making knowing how actionable (Duguid, 2005). The next section explores this further in relation to Discursive Psychology.

#### **4.5 Revealing tacit knowing in action-orientated discourse**

What has prompted the present reprise of the subject of TK in the KM literature is the fundamental tenet of Discursive Psychology (DP) itself. DP is concerned not with what people say – the contents of their talk and text – but rather what they do with it: what rhetorical resources are deployed, what functions performed, and with what consequences (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Wiggins and Potter, 2003). Discourse is approached as

accountable, action-orientated and functional (Edwards and Potter). An analysis of organizational discourse, from the DP perspective, is not concerned with what might be termed the explicit. If DP is not concerned with the explicit, can it be claimed that it has, instead, a concern with the tacit? Tacit, in this sense, is understood as referring to the means by which people make sense of their world, and which makes the explicit actionable (Duguid, 2005).

From the DP perspective, “(M)otives and intentions (vernacularly understood) are built inferentially out of descriptions of actions and events; they are built to contrast with alternatives; they attend to matters local to the interactional context in which they occur; and they attend reflexively to the speaker’s stake or investment in producing those descriptions,” (Edwards and Potter, 2005: 246). Thought (cognition) is inseparable from discourse (Edwards and Potter, 1992), which has synergies with some formulations of the tacit in the KM domain. The KM scholar Tsoukas (2011), for instance, implies that the conduit metaphor of communication prevalent in research in the cognitivist framework leads to a misunderstanding of tacit knowledge. According to Potter (2006), the cognitivist perspective views discourse as the expression of thought, intentions or other underlying cognitive process, implicating a mind-behaviour (discourse) distinction, with behaviour being contingent on mind. By contrast, “(R)ather than seeing the study of discourse as a pathway to individuals’ inner life, whether it be cognitive processes, motivations or some other mental stuff, we see psychological issues as constructed and deployed in the discourse itself,” (Edwards and Potter: 127).

Other connections can be found between DP’s approach to discourse and formulations of tacit in the KM literature. DP’s view of discourse as action-orientated corresponds with the notion of tacit knowing as action-orientated (Greenwood and Levin, 2005), and as an influencer of action (Tsoukas, 2011; Polanyi, 1962). The importance of context in the formulation of the tacit (Thompson and Walsham, 2004; Tsoukas) is also reflected in DP’s approach to context. According to Potter, the particulars of any given context of discursive social interaction are important because they are subject to human perception (Potter, 1998b).

In essence, the proposal of adopting a DP theory and methodology by which to study organizational knowledge work is simply extending in a direction to which many KM theories are already pointing (Crane, Longbottom and Self, 2012.).

#### **4.6 Thematic categories of knowledge sharing**

In the discussion of debates and issues in KM (see Chapter 1) it is shown how knowledge sharing (KS) is generally claimed to be one of the most significant organizational imperatives, and a key KM success factor (Bouthillier and Shearer, 2002). There is a strong theme of the social world in accounts of knowledge sharing, aligned to the importance of language (Blackler, 1993; 1995). Yet, in their extensive study of the influencing factors on intentions to share knowledge, Bock, Zmud, Kim and Lee (2005) report that examples of extensive knowledge sharing are somewhat absent.

Drawing on the KM literature, barriers and enablers associated with knowledge sharing are mapped to several thematic categories of KS: identity, trust, risk, and context (see Table 1, Chapter 1). The review and analysis of KM theories – particularly those which are interpreted as approaching knowledge as social action or as embedded in social action – similarly invoke these categories. It is further speculated towards the end of Chapter 1 that these categories are co-relational. For instance, will risk always co-relate with trust? According to the KM literature, the source barriers and enablers from which these thematic categories are drawn are affective in nature: the implication is that they are bound to and influencing of knowledge sharing actions, but an explanation of how is not made explicit.

Whilst these thematic categories are shown to be present in the KM literature, they are also present in those relating to discourse analysis (e.g., Edwards and Potter, 1992; Snejder and te Molder, 2005; Clifton, 2012; Otterbacher, 2011; Dennen, 2009; Hutchby, 2001). Developing on this, it is speculated that the analysis of everyday organizational discourse, drawing on DP, will show how these categories mediate knowledge sharing, and with what consequences for speakers and discursive transaction. Of key interest is the potential that these categories, from the DP perspective of their constitution as psychological phenomena constructed in discursive action, can be shown to be tacitly accomplished. Such phenomena can and are routinely constructed explicitly in everyday discourse but, in drawing on DP, their influence on knowledge sharing actions can be made the subject of research.

DP can be categorised as an emic research approach which has its emphasis on the meanings and understandings which speakers themselves are shown to invoke and make relevant. This

contrasts with the etic approach generally taken by the majority of research in the KM literature and which foregrounds the concerns and meanings of the researcher. As Clifton (2012) succinctly points out, there may be no correspondence between a conceptual definition adhered to by the researcher, and that observable in the discourse of actors. The point is that definitional difficulties have been shown to underlie many of KM's issues and debates (as discussed, for instance, in Chapter 1): it is suggested that an emic approach to research renders these irrelevant.

The KS thematic categories provide some clear boundaries for the primary research. This Chapter concludes with a brief sketch of each, drawing variously on the literatures of KM, and discourse analysis.

#### 4.6.1 Identity

Identity is a topic that is subject to so many different meanings, definitions and research approaches that Côté (2006) is prompted to describe it as the Tower of Babel of the Social Sciences (as noted in section 3.6.1). It has also been noted how the Social Constructionist movement marked a change from a view of the 'self-as-entity' to the self as discursively constructed (section 3.2). Where the traditional view of identity is one of a static and monolithic entity, the constructionist / discursive approach sees multiple identities based on the idea of becoming rather than being (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; see also Gergen 1991; 2009). This leads Sveningsson and his colleague to position identity as central to questions around motivation, stability and change, loyalty and commitment, leadership and decision-making, for instance. Taking a wider perspective, Brown and Phua (2011), writing in the management literature, propose that identity is closely tied to how people make sense of their world. The thrust of the interest in identity from the discourse analysis perspective tends to concentrate on how people go about the business of managing their identities in the context of what social actions are being accomplished, with what linguistic resources, and what effect (e.g., Condor, 2000; Abell and Stokoe, 2001).

For the purpose here, a useful understanding of the concept can be drawn from Davies and Harré's (1990) notion of positioning, according to which theory people routinely position themselves through discursive practices. That is, people implicitly or explicitly cast themselves in a role in discourse and that such moves accomplish actions with consequences.

This is similar to Edwards and Potter's (1992) notion of category entitlements, the idea that the veracity or factuality of a speaker's account can be mediated by the normative entitlements associated with a particular identity category (e.g., doctor) to which the speaker claims membership. Positioning in organizational discourse is particularly meaningful in its connections to power, influence (Benwell and Stokoe, 2012) and persuasion, for instance. As Holmes (2005) notes, power is an important consideration in the construction of workplace identity. Wetherell sums it up: "(T)o speak at all is to speak from a position," (2001: 23).

Drawing connections to KS, Gulich's (2003) Conversation Analysis study of knowledge sharing between doctors and patients reveals identity to emerge interactionally – relationally – and as situated in context. It follows that knowledge sharing can be approached as an accomplishment from a subject position in a given context, and that such positions are inference rich (Abell and Stokoe, 2001), with the potential to influence the directions and outcomes of this sharing. Another study shows how displays of status-based knowledge not only index to the discursive identities of speakers, but are also shown to talk the hierarchy of an organization into being (Clifton, 2014: 4). It is further proposed that most if not all of the themes considered to be influential in KS can be related to identity in the sense of identity as socially constructed in talk in interaction.

#### 4.6.2 Trust

Organizational theorist Chris Argyris (2009) reasons that an absence of trust within an organization will likely lead to a lack of communication. However, the concept of trust has proven a problematic one (Clifton, 2012). Schoorman, Mayer and Davis (2007), for instance, highlight a schism between conventional approaches to trust as being dispositional and trait-like (e.g., Ferrer, Connell and Travaglione's, 2004, study of co-worker trust), and their more ecological approach locating trust in relationships. In their multi-dimensional model, trust is defined as the measure of willingness to be vulnerable to another. Further, they formulate dimensions of trustworthiness – presumably the focus of the measure of willingness – as perceptions of a person's ability, integrity and benevolence: "(A)s the perception of each of these factors increases, we would expect an increase in willingness to take a risk in a relationship," (Schoorman *et al.*: 346), and vice versa. Thus, in this model, trust is very clearly aligned with risk and, by extension, with identity work and context.

Debates from KM concerning knowledge sharing and trust are discussed in Chapter 1 (e.g., Bock *et al.*, 2005; Leonard, 2007; Lin and Huang, 2010, Yoo and Torrey, 2002). Here, it is argued that what is missing from these accounts is an explanation of *how* trust mediates knowledge sharing (other than as a help or hindrance).

In the discourse analysis literature, Otterbacher (2011) and Dennen (2009) invoke reputation as an important identity factor in online communities' sense of trust, while Sneijder and te Molder (2005) show how account trustworthiness is enhanced when contributors to online forums demonstrate a concern with saying no more than they can be sure of. Hutchby's study of callers to radio talk shows demonstrates how they construct themselves as authentic first hand witnesses to the events they describe. In scripting themselves as being in possession of first-hand knowledge of a particular event, Hutchby claims that speakers invoke rights to authenticity of experience, emotion and legitimacy as a narrator. First-hand accounts are also a way of constructing what Clifton (2012) terms epistemic primacy which he links to category bound rights to knowledge.

In one of the very few discursive studies of trust in the workplace, Clifton (2012) investigates displays of epistemic primacy, showing how co-participants orient to these as displays of trustworthiness in an organizational setting. The analysis makes explicit how epistemic primacy is accomplished using a variety of discursive devices such as displays of first-hand knowledge (like Hutchby's, 2001, radio callers), objective and unmitigated statements, and declarative statements worked up in juxtaposition to previous hedged about utterances.

Central to Discursive Psychology is the everyday "...dilemma of presenting factual reports while being treated as having a stake in some specific version of events or some practical outcome," (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 3). That is, when people script factual accounts, they routinely work to mitigate against being seen to have a vested interest in the contents of those accounts, and may even invoke instructions as to how accounts should be understood by co-speakers (Smith, 1978). This suggests that trust is not worked up in isolation, but rather in relation to other psychological phenomena and actions.

### 4.6.3 Risk

There are arguments for knowledge sharing to be understood as instinctive and innate behaviour in humans (Suddendorf, 2013), yet there is evidence in the KM literature which suggests that there are significant barriers and inhibitors to this practice (see Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion). Amongst these, knowledge sharing is particularly associated with the threat of reputational damage (Leonard and Sensiper, 2007; Bock *et al.*, 2005), low values assigned to mentoring and sharing (Leonard and Sensiper), cost (Bock *et al.*; Alguezaui and Filieri, 2010), and the threat of industrial espionage (Bock *et al.*). Arguably, all of these factors index to risk. That is, risk as a phenomenon constructed by social actors rising from their understanding of situated context.

Schoorman *et al.*'s (2007)'s multi-dimensional model of trust, as shown earlier, makes a contingency connecting trust and risk, with risk as a measure of ability, integrity and benevolence. Arguably, this connects trust and risk directly to matters of stake, interest and accountability.

People routinely orient to stake and interest in everyday conversation – that is, they work to inoculate their accountability against potential criticism and accusation of bias – which is a frequent topic of investigation in the discourse literature (e.g., Wetherell, 2001; Lester and Paulus, 2011; Edwards and Potter, 2005; Locke and Edwards, 2003; also see Stubbe, Lane, Hilder, Vine, Vine, Marra, Holmes and Weatherall, 2003, for a comparative study using five different discourse analytic methodologies to study the same workplace conversation). The way in which people deal with accountability is one of the most basic and pervasive forms of discursive action, and very much concerned with risk – risk to self, and to others.

### 4.6.4 Context

As has been shown in previous discussions, many in the KM field emphasise not just the values of knowledge but also its contingency to context (Grover and Davenport, 2001). Thompson and Walsham (2004), for instance, claim that the absence of context renders knowledge meaningless. Accordingly, context is not only inseparable from knowledge, it creates and defines it (Thompson and Walsham), and hence knowledge is always knowledge in some context (Despres and Chauvel, 2002).

There have been several KM studies of the effects of culture (viz. context) on knowledge-related activities (e.g., Tong and Mitra, 2009; Bock *et al.*, 2005; De Long and Fahey, 2000; Yoo and Torrey, 2002). Tong and her colleague, for instance, claim that if "...the tools and processes designed to manage the knowledge and facilitate the sharing do not take into account the differing national cultures represented by the different parts of the organization, there will be severe impediments preventing the vital circulation of the modern enterprise's life's blood – knowledge," (421). This has some synergies with Despres and Chauvel's (2002) conclusion that organizations vary so considerably in structure, scope, culture, and so forth that a one-size-fits-all approach to KM will never work.

From the DP perspective, context is approached as a phenomenon made live by speakers in discourse (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Analysis is then concerned not with the analyst's own sense of context but with what speakers themselves orient to as context in the interactional procedures of discourse. This is the topic of some debate in the wider discourse analysis field: for instance, in response to arguments made by Waring, Credider, Tarpey and Black (2012) for the use of talk-extrinsic data in Conversation Analysis-based research, Antaki reasons that "...conversation analysts are happy to use the word 'context' in the sense of things visible to the analyst or made live by the people in the scene themselves. Otherwise, not," (2012: 493). To contrast with this stance, Hutchby (2001) makes an interesting point in his (Membership Categorisation Analysis) study of radio talk show callers. One caller raises the subject of dog mess in the streets, mentioning that she is the mother of young children. Hutchby notes that around the time of the radio show, there was a news story about the risks of disease from dog mess. He argues that knowledge of this story, and its importing into the analysis, results in an important context for the caller's account which would otherwise be missing from the analysis.

In respect of the present study, an analytical focus on context in organizational discourse can be seen as potentially corroborating the findings of analysis that specifically focuses on the other themes implicated in KS. The rationale for this is that DP approaches context as phenomena which speakers themselves construct in discourse as live concerns, as noted earlier. Consequently, while trust, risk and identity are recognised in discourse research as contexts invoked in talk and text, context itself constitutes a broader category in which research has an interest in what contexts are invoked by speakers and how – and which may, in the present data, lead to claims for the speakers' scripting of trust or risk, for instance, as



contexts to which they orient. This is the understanding of context which is integral to subsequent discussions.

#### **4.7 Summary**

In summary, these four thematic categories represent relevant themes for the analysis of organizational discourse, with the primary goal being to explicate how these phenomena affect the practice of knowledge sharing. The speculation that an emic approach to the study of organizational discourse drawing on DP could indicate tacit knowing in action is arguably a valid one, with the potential to realise findings of interest to the KM field. A further point to draw is this: if a DP approach can explicate how these thematic categories are invoked and made relevant by speakers in their discourse, then it could be conjectured that they will have an equal influence on organizational knowledge creating and innovation, both of which are connected to KS (e.g., Andreeva and Kainto, 2011; Nonaka, 1994).

## Chapter 5: Summary and conclusions

### 5.1 Knowledge and discourse matters: summarising the case

The literature review begins by engaging with the broad and complex field of knowledge management (KM), shown to be characterised by competing theory and often polarized debate. Proponents claim that considerable organizational benefits are to be gained through the pursuit and management of knowledge within the organization. From a common sense position it would be illogical to disagree with this. Moreover, there is probably sufficient evidence, mostly in the form of case studies and anecdotes, to be able to mount a reasonable case in favour of these claims. Paradoxically, these claims are weakened by the substantial issues and debates concerning the definition of knowledge, shown to underlie questions over the constitution of KM itself, the business of creating and sharing knowledge, and reported high rates of KM failure, for instance. The central issue concerns the ‘how’ (how should knowledge be managed) and the ‘what’ (what should KM’s actions be focused on) rather than the ‘why’ (why should knowledge be managed, as distinct from whether it should be managed which is a question discussed in section 1.4). The ‘how’ and ‘what’ are precisely the types of questions which Discursive Psychology is concerned with.

The detailed analysis of the critical factors (barriers and enablers) associated with knowledge sharing, which is described as advantageous to organizational performance, maps these to four thematic categories – identity, trust, risk and context (see Table 1, section 1.10). It is emphasised that the source of these critical factors is the KM literature, with the concession that the thematic mapping is the outcome of the present researcher’s interpretation. An additional point of emphasis is that while scholars in the KM literature implicate these critical factors as consequential to knowledge sharing actions, there is little explanation of *how*.

The review and analysis of theories in KM finds competing paradigms, as one would expect in a field characterised by so many issues and debates. Against a background of one dominant theory (*The dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation*, e.g. Nonaka, 1994), the categorisation of theories into a taxonomy (see section 2.3.3) of *personal vs. organizational*

*knowledge*, and *knowledge as social action vs. knowledge as object* reveals a persistent theme of knowledge work located in social interaction, with some explicitly implicating language (e.g., Blackler, 1995; Gourlay, 2006; Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). This theme precedes the earliest publication of Nonaka's theory (described as a guide: 1991) with Drucker writing in 1988 (original version of Drucker's 1998a article), reaching through to the present (e.g., Tsoukas, 2011; Venkitachalam and Bosua, 2014). However, the KM literature review shows a near absence of locating research directly in organizational discourse – talk and text – and a similar near absence of a theory of language.

A further finding of the KM theoretical review claims that those theories located on the *knowledge as social action* taxonomy axis can be interpreted as implicating the thematic categories of knowledge sharing referred to earlier. Those on the opposite end of the axis are interpreted as being more ambivalent in this respect.

Together these two findings suggest both a location and a purpose for primary research: that research should focus on organizational discourse as knowing action, with the purpose of investigating how knowledge sharing themes impact and influence knowledge sharing actions.

Chapter 3 sets out the rationale for approaching the study of organizational discourse drawing on the paradigm of Discursive Psychology (DP), which is located in what Stainton-Rogers (2003) refers to as critical social psychology, and constructionism. DP represents both a theory of discourse and a methodology for its study as a topic in its own right, approaching language as action-orientated and locally situated. It is particularly concerned with knowledge – how events are explained and described, and accounts constructed as factual.

Chapter 4 revisits the KM literature on the subject of tacit knowledge / knowing, building connections between this and Discursive Psychology, and the four themes of knowledge sharing. In particular, it is claimed that DP, as a methodology, could provide the means to analyse and reveal tacit knowing in action in discourse, drawing together three perspectives: first, tacit knowing is approached in the KM literature as an action-orientated phenomenon (Greenwood and Levin, 2005) and second, according to Duguid's (2005) knowing how/that formulation, which is considered to have particular resonance with the directions of the present discussions, tacit knowing has influencing potential and is what makes the explicit

actionable. Thus, and thirdly, tacit knowing can be approached as a feature of how knowers make sense of the world, to themselves and each other, and which constitutes the discursive accomplishments which are of interest to Discursive Psychology. The scope and directions of primary research are outlined.

The present Chapter develops on these summary findings and proposals with a consideration of two related questions: does the proposal for a study drawing on DP, and its approach to knowledge as constructed in social discursive interaction, imply a fundamental change in direction for KM? Secondly, how will such a study contribute to KM? The conclusions complete this Chapter, and Part One, setting clear directions for primary research.

## **5.2 A change in direction?**

A study of KM practices drawing on DP could be interpreted as implicating a change in KM's direction. From a practical viewpoint, most KM studies use conventional research methods - quantitative surveys (e.g., Donate and Guadamillas, 2011), qualitative surveys (e.g., Tong and Mitra, 2009), semi-structured interviews (e.g., Thompson and Walsham, 2004), and case studies (e.g., Weber, 2007). As noted earlier, little evidence has been found of any discursive approaches to KM studies, although elsewhere in the wider organization studies field, they are very much in evidence (see section 3.3 for references to some examples). From KM's perspective, the application of a discourse analytic *methodology* represents a change in focus onto action and accomplishment in discourse. It is, however, unlikely that a different methodology and research location would lead to paradigmatic shifts in thinking.

On a *theoretical* level, many KM theorists and academics consider knowledge and knowledge work to be constituted in social interaction (see Chapter 2), implicating the primacy of talk and text, and knowledge to be action-orientated. This suggests that, in reality, the proposal made here is simply extending an existing and current direction in KM, rather than changing it.

Developing this point, if one conceptualises knowledge as located in social interaction, which implicates discourse, then should one not also draw on a theory of discourse in order to

describe a complete version of affairs? The majority of KM theories, whether categorised as knowledge as object or knowledge as social action, explicitly or otherwise emphasise the importance of communication in the accomplishment of knowledge work (e.g., Nonaka, 1994), but most do not specify a theory of language or discourse. It is conceivable that approaching the study of knowledge work drawing on the paradigm of DP, and its theory of discourse, will allow a more complete picture to be contemplated, from speakers' constructed perspectives. This leads into question of how this approach might contribute to KM.

### **5.3 Exploring implications**

KM's basic questions are concerned with how, and in what circumstances and environments, new knowledge is created, and knowledge shared between people? A reliable and realisable answer to these questions will, according to most workers in the KM domain, lead to sustainable organizational success, innovation, competitive edge and organizational wealth (see sections 1.9 and 1.10). However, reports of successful outcomes from KM initiatives are far from being seen as the norm (see section 1.6, for instance). The ambiguity over success or failure raises a number of questions and points: for instance, the perceived limited availability of valid methods and tools of measurement, although there are some exceptions (e.g., Chourides, Longbottom and Murphy, 2003; and Ragab and Arisha, 2013; Darroch, 2003). There is the debate over the definition of knowledge in KM to be considered: how can a phenomenon be measured if its object is not well defined? Added to this is the matter of defining what is meant by success (Quintane *et al.*, 2011).

For DP, measurements of success or failure are irrelevant. They are not the issue because the objective of discourse analysis is not to evaluate content and outcomes, but rather to uncover accomplishments and their effects for speakers. With respect to the issue of measuring KM activities, linked to success or failure, the proposed study's contribution is not to determine probabilities and so forth, but rather to open the possibilities for a different way of understanding these issues.

Briefly referring to some of the main issues in KM discussed in Chapter 1, it is suggested that the proposed study adds a further dimension to the debate over what KM is, and what it should be concerned with. In contributing to the KM debate over the nature of knowledge,

the present study applies a constructionist conceptualisation of knowledge and a methodology for its study. Thus, the present study renders the question over commodification/reification of knowledge irrelevant. In respect to the questions over ethics and culture, the proposed study represents a potential alternative understanding of the types of questions that could be asked. For instance, instead of asking, will ‘one approach transfer across different cultures be they national, organizational or operating at the group level’ (referring to a KM theory or strategic approach), from the DP perspective, one might ask, ‘what shared understandings are constructed and how do these vary across different groups?’

In the simplest sense, the study contributes to KM by providing support to those who promote the importance of language in knowledge work, and the notion of knowledge accomplished in social interaction. It is hoped that the study will be seen to represent support for those who advocate a view of tacit knowing / knowing how as action-orientated and action-influential. On a more practical theme, it also supports those KM scholars – and practitioners – who criticise those who place too much reliance, in some cases 100% emphasis, on the use of technologies as the strategic solution to delivering KM success. In this sense, the study adds to the literatures which report such reliance as an underlying KM failure factor (see sections 1.6 and 2.2).

A primary claim by discourse analysts is that their methodologies can reveal phenomena which other more conventional and experimental research methods would not (see, for instance, Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Silverman, 2007; Potter and Edwards, 2003; Willig, 2003; Wiggins and Potter, 2003; Hardy, 2001). With particular reference to organizational knowledge sharing, the main contribution to KM would be an explication of how such actions are accomplished, and with what influencing factors and consequences. It is speculated that if the influencing and impacting circumstances can be identified through the analysis of organizational discourse drawing on DP, then this opens the potential for a different conceptualisation of knowledge sharing as an interactional accomplishment.

## **5.4 Conclusions**

A number of conclusions can now be drawn. First, despite the apparent debates and differences around theory in KM, what they largely have in common is a commitment to

language as an important facilitator and mediator in the accomplishment of knowledge work. This is interpreted and concluded as approbation for a research approach which positions discourse as the topic of study.

Secondly, it is concluded that Discursive Psychology represents an appropriate framework for research to draw upon because, amongst other reasons, its major concern is epistemological (Edwards and Potter, 1992: see section 3.4.2 for discussions).

Developing this, a third conclusion refers to the multifarious issues and debates uncovered in the KM field, many concerned with fundamental questions such as the nature of knowledge, and what constitutes KM. One of these debates holds particular attention for the present study: the formulation of tacit knowledge, or tacit knowing as some prefer. Specifically, it is concluded that a study of organizational discourse drawing on DP will reveal tacit knowing as an action accomplishment of discourse, which is distinct from what Edwards and Potter (2005) refer to as the mistaken idea of minds revealed or expressed in what people say.

Fourthly, it is concluded that whereas the KM literature indicates various factors as having influence on knowledge sharing, a study drawing on DP has the aim of investigating how the mapped thematic categories, approached as co-relational in discourse, are accomplished by speakers and with what effect in the context of knowledge sharing events.

Indicative research questions, then, are concerned with the analysis of knowledge sharing actions in discourse in organizational settings, drawing on DP, and with a focus on the themes of identity, trust, risk and context: how are such actions accomplished, are the thematic categories shown to be co-related, can discursive actions associated with the thematic categories be shown to influence knowledge sharing, and if so, how and with what effect? In particular, can it be shown that these themes are accomplished as tacit psychological phenomena constructed and displayed by speakers in discourse?

This concludes Part 1. Part 2 begins with a detailed discussion of methodology as the foundations for reporting the analysis and findings of primary research.

# **PART TWO**

## **Primary Research**



## Chapter 6: Introduction to Part Two

The second Part of the thesis begins with a discussion of research methodology along with a detailed explanation of the specific methodology adopted in the present study. The themes of knowledge sharing identified in Part One – identity, trust, risk and context – each form the primary topic of analysis in the four subsequent Chapters. Research data comprises recordings of routine organizational knowledge sharing meetings, and an online discussion forum. Wood and Kroger offer a useful overview of the directions for the analysis: “(T)he overall goal of the analysis is to explain what is being done in the discourse and how this is accomplished, that is, how the discourse is structured or organized to perform various functions and achieve various effects or consequences,” (2000: 95). Consequently, the four analytic Chapters present both analysis and discussion of findings at a fine-grain level, with attention paid to how and what actions speakers accomplish, and with what effect for both speakers and co-speakers, with the overall emphasis on knowledge sharing actions. The analysis and discussions are supported through the inclusion of relevant extracts from the research data. Note that the reader will find a key to the coding used in the included data extracts in the Appendix.

The findings are discussed in Chapter 12 specific to the indicative research questions posed here. Discussions relate back to the issues around knowledge management raised in Part One, and in particular focus on the implications and issues of the findings specific to knowledge management in general. As specified in the indicative research questions, findings broadly support the notion of knowledge sharing activities being contingent to the themes identified here, and which are considered in detail in Chapter 4. The themes are shown to be discursively constructed collaboratively by speakers as co-relational phenomena. Further, these discursive actions are shown to influence the scope, directions and substance of knowledge sharing action, as displays of tacit knowing.

The next chapter on Methodology locates primary research as an interpretivist and qualitative approach, drawing on a constructionist view of knowledge as socially constructed in everyday discourse. A detailed explanation of the research methodology and design is presented, and matters of strategy – including a discussion of the measurement of quality of qualitative studies – are also addressed, along with a consideration of ethics with particular

respect to the use of discussion forum data in research. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the research approach in this particular case.

## **Chapter 7: Methodology**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Methodology is concerned with the way in which the researcher frames questions for research, and the research is conducted using a project designed to provide reasonable answers.

The importance of methodology rests on the common-sense notion that research findings can be disputed, criticised, and even rejected entirely on the basis of the researcher's methodology. Consider the criticism of methodologies used in cognitive and experimental social psychology (e.g., Edwards and Potter, 1992); Silverman, 2007). According to Silverman, for instance, conventional qualitative research design in social psychology, in the assumption that this involves researchers asking questions, risks simply not studying behaviour. The many issues associated with methodology are not so much concerned with the technical skills of the researcher in designing and implementing a study, but rather with something more fundamental to science as a whole. They concern positions on ontology and epistemology as the foundations to methodology. Like most other aspects of scientific endeavour, these topics are not immune to considerable debate: e.g., Gergen's (1973) condemnation of traditional methods in social psychology for their abandonment of matters of culture and history; Antaki 's (2000) criticism of traditional laboratory-based experimental methods; Hardy's (2001) arguments for the use of discourse analysis methods in organizational studies; Potter and Edwards' (2003) response to criticism of their stance on cognitivism, and Van Dijk's (2006) arguments for a sociocognitive account of context, describing the approach adopted by Edwards and his colleagues as anti-cognitivist and mindless. From one perspective, the field of modern social sciences can be seen as largely split by a schism of philosophy.

This Chapter proceeds with a brief discussion of ontology and epistemology as determinants in methodology, with the aim of locating the present study. A consideration of the nature of the debates reveals two opposing perspectives: positivism and Social Constructionism. As a qualitative and interpretive methods study, the present work is aligned with the latter.

This is followed by an explanation of the research method – Discursive Psychology (DP) - to add to that already described in Chapter 3. This section includes a consideration of the criticism that has made concerning discourse analysis (DA) in general and, in particular, the question over the measurement of quality of qualitative research. Next, based on Potter and Wetherell's (1987) ten-stages of discourse analysis, a detailed description is given of the research design, data and participants. The latter includes a consideration of the ethics associated with the use of data from publicly available online discussion groups (some of which is used in the present research). This is followed by a consideration of the potential limitations of the methodology used here, and research conduct in general. The Chapter concludes with a summary of the proposed indicative research questions (detailed versions of which are included in section 7.4.1).

## **7.2 Locating the present study**

At the root of what Yanow and Ybema (2009) describe as the paradigmatic wars, epistemology, theory of knowledge, and ontology which is concerned with the nature of reality, are both characterised by similar tensions. Experimental social psychology typically adopts a positivist epistemological position which understands knowledge as objective, knowable and discoverable, where reliable facts can be discovered about the social world as it really is (Stainton-Rogers, 2003). This is congruent with a realist ontology, located in the modernist philosophical approach. In contrast, critical social psychology adopts a Social Constructionist epistemology (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed introduction to this topic), located in the postmodernist philosophical perspective, which holds both knowledge and reality as constructed in social interaction (e.g., Gergen, 1991; Stainton-Rogers). Holden and Lynch (2004) emphasise that philosophical stance dictates methodological choice, and that the absence of philosophical clarity can lead to inappropriate research methods being adopted for particular research questions. The reader is referred to section 3.3 for previous discussions on critical social psychology as a reaction and counter-reference to, and criticism of the research methods adopted by proponents of experimentalism.

The positivist position rests on three principle assumptions: that facts are perceived via the senses through diligent and unbiased observation, that facts precede and are independent of theory and that facts constitute a firm and reliable basis for scientific knowledge (Chalmers, 1999). Its epistemology and ontology consequently assumes that facts can exist as objective phenomena and that as such they may be objectively observed, discovered, attended to and acted upon. It is precisely all of these assumptions that Social Constructionism rejects (e.g., Gergen, 1991). Gergen was amongst the first in the social sciences to criticise the positivist philosophical position in social psychology (e.g., 1973), later referring to the crisis over beliefs in objective knowledge (1991: his terms). He claims that whereas positivism relies on observable facts which can be transmuted into laws which are stable over time, human behaviour is not historically stable. Moreover, on the subject of methodology, it takes a rare social psychologist to successfully refrain from colouring his or her work with their personal values, methods and so forth (Gergen, 1973). There cannot be, in consequence, any kind of objective representation of the truth in the study of human behaviour.

The present study, in drawing on DP, is described as qualitative, interpretive, and located in constructionism. Potter (1998a) clarifies this constructionist position with two salient points: first, speakers' accounts, reports and descriptions construct versions of their world and, second, that those accounts are themselves fabricated in occasions of talk – that is, locally situated. The key point is that DP takes an anti-cognitivist approach (Potter) and in particular takes exception to the cognitivist formulation of language as a super-conduit to inner mental thought (Edwards and Potter, 1992). A key difference between DP and other types of discourse analysis lies in its focus on psychology: it treats psychology as practical, accountable, situated, embodied and displayed (Potter, 2005).

### **7.3 Research method**

#### *7.3.1 An explanation of the method*

To begin with, Stainton-Rogers offers a useful definition of the term discourse from the perspective of constructionist social psychology: "...a discourse is defined as the product of constructing and the means to construct meaning in a particular way," (2003: 81). As Stainton-Rogers notes, as do Potter and Wetherell (1987), the field of discourse analysis is characterised by numerous methodological types and definitions of discourse. The version

cited here is ideally suited to the present purposes and is consistent with DP as a methodology for research.

DP draws on ideas from discourse analysis, conversation analysis, rhetoric and ethnomethodology (Potter, 1998a; Potter and Edwards, 2003). It takes its theoretical and analytical origins in, for instance, the works of Gilbert and Mulkay (e.g., Mulkay and Gilbert, 1982) in sociology and their study of scientific knowledge and rhetoric (see Potter for a detailed account). It is concerned with the action-orientation of language (talk and text), specifically the rhetorical construction and organization of versions of affairs, their social organization - how it works – and what it is designed to do (Edwards and Potter, 1992). In short, DP is “...concerned with the nature of knowledge, cognition and reality: with how events are described and explained, how factual reports are constructed, how cognitive states are attributed,” (Edwards and Potter: 2). It is, in other words, a functional approach to the analysis of discourse with a particular interest in epistemology, and its core assumption is that language is constructive/constructed, functional, consequential and variable.

In Wooffitt’s analysis, DP is “...focused on the ways in which cognitive notions can be treated analytically as situated practices which address interactional and inferential concerns in everyday circumstances,” (2005: 116). By locating psychology in language, it makes possible the direct study of the processes of thinking (Billig, 2001), contrasted with the traditional experimental method which by comparison is reduced to the study of secondary or indirect phenomena. This difference is significant: DP studies psychological phenomena as constructed in everyday talk and text, and as oriented to by both speaker *and* recipient (sometimes referred to as *next turn proof*), while conventional methods treat discourse as the means of accessing inner mental thought (Edwards and Potter, 1992). This inevitably treats phenomena as second-hand. A further significant difference lies in DP’s focus and interest in what is *not* said, as well as what *is* said.

The kinds of questions that DP focuses on are then: *how* is the account constructed to appear, for instance, factual and objective, *what* resources are used, with *what* function (Edwards and Potter) and *how* these connect to topics in social psychology (Potter, 1998a). Again, this contrasts with traditional methods which focus on *why* questions. Another primary difference is that DP does not place importance or emphasis on hypothetico-deductionism, and while

Potter positions DP as an observational science, it should not be seen as a wholesale promotion of inductionism (Potter).

The DP project draws its data from everyday talk and text (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Perakyla, 2005), which can take the form of audio and /or video recordings, interviews, and any kind of relevant written text. Following Edwards and Potter, the focus of analysis is on the social and rhetorical organization present in the data, as opposed to linguistic organization, for instance. It is, thus, an observational science which seeks to describe and document phenomena as a means of supporting broader theoretical claims (Potter, 1998a). In this sense it is a theoretically informed analytical approach which seeks to investigate and understand social psychological phenomena (Stubbe, Lane, Hilder, Vine, Vine, Marra, Holmes and Weatherall, 2003), as they are enacted as situated in procedural discursive interaction (Potter, 2005).

An approach which sites knowledge work in discourse, and takes that discourse as the locus of study, has the potential to lead to a greater understanding of how knowledge work *works*. It is claimed that such an approach simply extends an existing trend seen in the knowledge management (KM) literature which conceptualises knowledge as social action (see section 5.2).

### 7.3.2 Grounds for criticism and the issue of measuring quality

In considering what criticism has been made concerning discourse analysis, an interesting viewpoint is expressed by Stainton-Rogers (2003): she suggests that studies in critical social psychology have been largely (as of 2003) ignored by researchers in the experimental tradition. Consequently, there is a perspective that criticisms of DA methodologies are often raised by its own proponents (e.g., see Antaki, Billig, Edwards and Potter, 2002, for a discussion of analytic standards: Schegloff, 1997, on the issue of context: on the issue of cognition, see van Dijk, 2006; Edwards, 2006a; Potter, 2006; Potter and Edwards, 2003; Wood and Kroger, 2000: on the omission of considerations of experience, unconsciousness, subjectivity and so forth, see Benwell and Stokoe, 2012: for the subjectivity of analysis, see Stubbe *et al.*, 2003; Zajacova, 2002: and see Antaki, 2012, on the subject of using mixed methods). As noted earlier, researchers in critical social psychology also frequently direct

criticism in the direction of experimental methods research (e.g., Antaki, 2000; Zajacova), despite the apparent lack of reciprocity. Arguably, the most obvious and problematic issue concerning qualitative research in general, and one that can be understood as underlying many other points of criticism, concerns the question of how to measure the quality of quantitative research methodologies. This is consequently the principle focus of the following discussions.

The question of how to measure the quality of qualitative research methods is the topic of a substantial debate amongst qualitative researchers (Smith, 2003: see Cooper and Branthwaite, 1977, for an interesting approach to the question). This evidently concerns the issue of how to determine the values of qualitative research (Yardley, 2000). The problem can be condensed into three inter-connected features of qualitative research: first, the diversity of method (Yardley; Elliott, Fischer and Rennie, 1999); second, the perspective that conventional criteria of measurement such as reliability and validity, so well established in quantitative methodologies, are irrelevant (Wood and Kroger, 2000; Smith); and third, the profound difference in epistemology between quantitative and qualitative researchers and their methodologies which Elliott and his co-workers suggest is the source of the problem. In particular, Yardley claims that the first two combined have led to a situation in which there is an absence of firm *general* guidelines pertinent to the work of the qualitative researcher. It is this omission that both Yardley and Elliott *et al.* seek to address with their evolving proposed guidelines.

Specific to the field of DA in psychology, there is a further matter that impacts on the quality question and which concerns the use of the term *measure*. While many DA scholars debate and propose methods for addressing the quality question, the term *measure* does not seem to feature (e.g., Wood and Kroger, 2000; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1998a). There is perhaps one simple reason for this: the term *measure* implies a scale or a benchmark, a mark out of ten, which in turn implies quantification. In contrast, Wood and Kroger stress the limited role for quantification in DA in general. Arguably, more appropriate phraseologies are provided by Wood and Kroger (how research claims can be warranted) and Potter (how research claims can be validated: this latter point is important and is returned to shortly), for instance.



Examples of how one can strategically approach the quality issue in DA methodologies (in general) are detailed by both Wood and Kroger (2000), and Potter and Wetherell (1987), with the former drawing on the latter. Wood and her colleague propose that the issue concerns warranting – how to give justification and grounds for analytic claims. They question the application of the traditional notion of validity on the common-sense grounds that an analytic account can only ever represent one version of affairs, so it can never be considered either true or false. If validity is traditionally considered to be the measure of research claims' connection with the world as it is, then clearly DA studies cannot be evaluated on this basis. An alternative conceptualisation of validity is needed.

Wood and her colleague's solution for warranting centres on two principle components: the trustworthiness of the account which can be addressed through ensuring that a clear and detailed description of all stages of research is included in the account, and the soundness of an account which principally concerns the analytic section of the research report. A number of factors need to be adhered to including the grounding of analysis in speakers' orientations (emphasising the speaker's understanding as displayed in discourse vs. the analyst's interpretation) which refers to the *next turn proof* of discourse mentioned earlier; the coherence of analysis (a claim should satisfactorily account for exceptions and deviants in a discourse); the plausibility of an account in for instance how it relates (can be grounded in) to other work in similar areas; and the notion of fruitfulness (using Potter and Wetherell's term, 1987), which addresses the implications of an account for other work, and what questions it might raise in terms of future research.

Specific to Discursive Psychology, Potter (1998a) provides a set of 4 pragmatic guidelines. Interestingly, Potter describes his guidelines as validation procedures, and wastes no time on debates around whether this term should be used in this type of research methodology or not: he simply re-formulates it. Potter's procedures start with the analyst's attention to grounding their claims in speakers' own understandings as displayed in discourse, and which also serves as a check for interpretive claims – the next turn proof aspect. This has correspondence to Yardley's (2000) *sensitivity to context* principle. Secondly, attention to what Potter describes as deviant cases can be useful in assessing the sufficiency of claims – do deviant cases in a discourse, for instance, support an analytic claim, or weaken it? This has far less synergy with Yardley's principles, arguably because the explicit search for and importance assigned to deviant cases is particular to the DP methodology, and one or two others. Potter's third

procedure concerns an account's coherence with respect to previous studies in similar areas, which can be clearly related to Yardley's first principle, as well as her third, *impact and importance*, but which varies from Wood and Kroger's (2000) understanding of coherence.

The last procedure concerns the reader, and which Potter (1998a) describes as the most important of the four. This concerns the inclusion of extracts of data (the real data) in research reports such that the reader is able to make their own judgment of the analyst's interpretation. Although he does not elaborate on this point here, this is an interesting notion: it potentially makes the reader part of the analytic work as an active contributor, and implicates the role of the researcher as interpreter. This can be contrasted with Yardley's (2000) emphasis on a study's impact and importance in the sense of how a study markedly contributes to the knowledge (does it tell us anything new, does it make a difference?). Whilst it is certain that Potter has this as an objective for research, there is a suggestion that this is made more personal to the individual reader rather than the academic research community as a whole.

The present study uses Potter's validation procedures, as shown in the following sections. On a final point, Potter's caveat states that "...none of these procedures *guarantee* the validity of an analysis. However, work in philosophy and sociology of science over the last 30 years has cast doubt on the possibility of such bottom-line guarantees in science, whether provided by observation, replication or experimentation," (1998a: 241: italics in original). Even the independent audit and inter-rater reliability approach, as outlined by Smith (2003) and Wood and Kroger (2000), for instance, are no guarantee for an account's warrantability according to this caveat.

## **7.4 Research design**

### **7.4.1 Design**

A first point to note about the DP methodology is that there is no straightforward prescription for analysing discourse (Potter, 1998a). Edwards and Potter (1992) synthesise various features of discursive action and the relationships between them in a conceptual scheme referred to as the *Discursive Action Model*. It is organized into three principle themes: action (e.g., a focus on action rather than cognition), fact and interest (e.g., negotiating the dilemma of stake and interest), and accountability (e.g., the speaker's displayed sense of accountability

in reports). It establishes some useful guiding principles as well as some potential areas on which to focus research (such as, for instance, how speakers construct and manage their remembered accounts of past events as factual and authentic).

More useful as a framework for guiding methodology, Potter and Wetherell (1987) map out a ten-stage guide to discourse analysis: research questions, sample selection, data collection, interviews, transcription, coding, analysis, validation, report writing and application. This is not meant as a strict order of business for undertaking DA: the order in which these actions are engaged is entirely dependent on each specific research case (Potter and Wetherell). Both the *Discursive Action Model* and Potter and Wetherell's ten-stage guide are used to inform the present study, with the latter providing points of discussion here. Note that both sample selection and data collection are addressed in the following sub-sections, 'Research Data' and 'Participants and ethical considerations', and that the topic of interviews is not relevant to the present study. 'Validation', in the following discussions, addresses how the present study approaches matters of validation procedures (Potter, 1998a). Report writing is self-evidently addressed in this thesis, and application is addressed in the final Chapter of the thesis.

Throughout the following accounts, the implications of the role of the researcher is implicitly understood or directly addressed.

### *Research questions*

In DP the use of research questions is more a matter of opinion and preference than prescription. Some are persuaded that even indicative research questions are unnecessary and potentially limiting to the analysis at hand (e.g., Wooffitt, 2005, specific to Conversation Analysis). Where they are used, Willig (2003) advises that these should be themed around stake and accountability in everyday discursive practices. Accordingly, DP asks *what* and *how* questions rather than the *why* questions which are the hallmark of experimental methods.

As with any research project, an important part of formulating research questions is researching relevant literature. This has two practical outcomes: first, it enables the researcher to understand how particular topics are dealt with, and to identify any gaps in the literature. Secondly, it enables the researcher to ground analysis in existing research. Both support the drive for coherence: a piece of work which contributes to and builds on existing work will

likely be seen as more plausible than one which does not (Potter, 1998a). Consequently, based on the themes evident in the KM literature review (e.g., trust), the DA literature and in particular that relevant to Discursive Psychology were critically researched. This led to a relatively broad purview which can largely be categorised as (1) those literatures concerned with DA/DP as a methodology and a theoretical approach and (2) reports of studies relevant to the matters in hand. To facilitate such a broad field of research, the present researcher created a research database using Microsoft Access in which details of all published papers / books (including those from KM and related fields) were recorded and codified, along with links to the source publication, and research notes. To date, this database contains almost 500 entries. A further action that the researcher took was to create a mini-database of DA terminology used in research reports which, during the analysis, greatly facilitated the discovery of studies compatible with, or in other ways, (un)supportive of the analysis and its findings reported here.

Based on the research reported in the previous Chapters, the indicative research questions are formulated as:

In the environment of organizational knowledge sharing, how are matters of identity, trust, risk and context constructed as live issues and concerns of speakers?

It is suggested that such matters or themes are influencing in the context of knowledge sharing – how and with what effect for speakers and their business?

It is also suggested that these themes work co-relationally – how is this displayed in discourse in social interaction, and with what effect?

It is proposed that these matters are accomplished tacitly as psychological phenomena, with the implication that speakers orient to them as live matters consequent to their understanding of what is going on in the environment: how is this displayed and oriented to in discourse?

These questions are grounded in all of the preceding reviews of the literatures.

### *Transcription*

Transcription as a preparatory step to analysis involves transforming spoken (as opposed to written, such as online forum contributions) texts into written form suitable for analysis. It also involves annotating the transcript with symbols indicating pauses (often including duration), intakes of breath, rises or falls in tone, increase or decrease in volume, over-talk, laughter, speech repairs and so on. The aim is to produce a written version that is, as far as the research aims require, as accurate a representation as possible of the spoken words while acknowledging that a literal rendering is impossible (Wood and Kroger, 2000). A key to transcription conventions, based on that developed by Gail Jefferson, used in the present study is contained in the Appendix (Table 4).

The transcription's level of detail is determined by the research question (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The process began with a gist transcription noting what each meeting recording covered in terms of explicit topic, action (e.g., argument, agreement, persuasion etc.), speaker, indicative timings and so forth, as a first step in becoming familiar with the data. The aim was to produce a transactional description of each meeting's discourse. Each meeting recording was then transcribed in detail, using the appropriate transcription conventions, using the gist version to discard any meeting talk considered to be wholly irrelevant to the business at hand: e.g., unintelligible talk, pauses for passing traffic, or references to technical difficulties with IT systems used in the meeting. As well as representing a practical stage in preparation for analysis, it is also considered to be invaluable in familiarising the researcher with her data.

The following is a short example taken from the analysis contained in the subsequent Chapters:

1. Steve: Wa::ay. (.) Okay so we have Ade, Damien and Manoj.
2. (2) ['yeahs' via conference call]=
3. Steve: Yep, yep, yep. Good. Okay. Ummmm. (0.5) Right=
4. Bob: = Shall we go through the list ↑first?
5. Steve: Ye::ah Mark why don't you - why don't you wheel us through the list?
6. Bob: Alrighy so starting in alphabetical with (names). So, (project name)?

The '::' in Line 1 indicates the word is elongated, while the bracketed number in Line 2 indicates a length of silence. The '=' shown in Lines 3 and 4 indicates no discernible gap between utterances, while the '↑' displays a rise in intonation (Wood and Kroger, 2000).

So far as possible, the researcher attempts to act in the role of objective observer in the transcription, coding and analysis stages. It is however clear that no such research can ever be immune from the implications of the presence of the researcher – even to the extent of the way in which a particular utterance is heard by the researcher being open to the possibility of being heard differently by another.

### *Coding*

Not to be confused with the application of transcription conventions or with the analysis itself, coding is the process by which the researcher searches for and selects instances in the transcript relevant to the research question or theme under investigation (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

The indicative research question leads to a particular interest in the themes of identity, trust, risk and what contexts in general speakers make live in their discourse. The research is concerned with whether, and if, such themes as psychological phenomena oriented to by speakers as mutually shared and displayed understandings, have an influence and effect on the scope and content of knowledge sharing actions. Consequently, the process of coding involves trawling through the data – working iteratively between the transcripts and the recordings – to identify the presence of these or related themes as discursive actions: instances of interest. Potter and Wetherell (1987) advise that such a process should be as inclusive as possible – that is, even instances which are considered to be borderline in relation to the themes of interest should be included.

### *Analysis*

Analysis is an iterative process in which the researcher must continuously move back and forth between analytical concerns, the corpus of relevant published literature, and the data itself, both the transcripts and the source recordings. The researcher frequently, for instance, felt it necessary to return to the original recording from which an instance of interest was drawn to experience over and over again its whole context, and the actual performance of the speakers.

The core principle is that the topic of interest is language itself (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 2005). While there is no set procedure for doing analysis there are some key questions to be borne in mind: why am I reading the text in this way, what are the features which lead to this way of reading it (Potter and Wetherell, 1987)? One is looking for both patterns and variation in the data (Edwards and Potter, 1992).

Analysis focused specifically, one after the other, on each of the four identified themes related to knowledge sharing. Note that the purpose of the meetings (and forum), in each case, is understood as knowledge sharing: for instance, a sales and marketing meeting has the purpose of sharing past, present and predicted activities and experiences.

The analysis begins by identifying the patterns within the organizational structure of the data: what is its nature, is it agenda-driven for instance? This is followed by a stage which investigates the rhetorical practices evident in the data: what discursive work is being done, and with what effect? Next, the analysis considers matters of construction, evaluation and function; what is being constructed, how is this negotiated, for instance, and with what function? In examining the instances of interest identified earlier in the data, their general context is addressed: why this extract, what is happening, what precedes it, what are its major features? Throughout all aspects of the analysis, exceptions or deviant cases are sought, with the analytic purview focused on what speakers themselves orient to or construct as consistent and different (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Thus, following Potter, careful and systematic description provides the basis for theoretical claims. The analysis also focuses on rhetorical effects and consequences; what are the effects of the discourse on speakers, has anything changed? Throughout, the analysis is carefully grounded in the relevant literatures where possible.

Analysis is concerned with the ways in which speakers manage issues such as blame and accountability, the action orientation and rhetorical organization of talk, and how people construct particular versions of reality and what these accomplish for the interaction (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005). Specifically, and drawing on the theory of language (discourse) represented in DP (Edwards and Potter, 1992), the study is concerned with the question of how people, in everyday organizational settings, go about the business of constructing and accomplishing knowledge sharing actions in discourse, with what function and what consequences. Specifically, the analysis is interested in how speakers orient to the

identified themes associated with knowledge sharing, and with what effect for speakers and recipients. Each instance of interest identified in the coding stage is analysed for action, function and effect, and compared with other instances, with an iterative process of testing used to identify features of interest to the focus of the study, and in turn to compare and contrast these with features in the extant literature.

### *Validation*

Potter's (1998a) four validation procedures specific to Discursive Psychology are applied in the research: (1) analysis pays attention to speakers' own understanding as displayed in discursive interaction (and not just the analyst's interpretation); (2) the adequacy of a claim is assessed against any deviant cases in the data; (3) analysis and claims are grounded in previous studies, and, (4) the inclusion of data extracts allows the reader to form their own interpretations and judgments. Taking each of these procedures in turn, a description is now given of how these are applied.

The analysis is concerned with those issues which the speakers themselves make live and relevant in their talk. That is, analysis attends to what sense speakers and recipients construct and orient to, and not just how the researcher might interpret a particular utterance. Following Edwards and Potter, reports and descriptions are "...examined in the context of their occurrence as situated and occasioned constructions whose precise nature makes sense, to participants and analysts alike, in terms of the actions those descriptions accomplish," (1992: 2). So, where, for instance, analysis suggests a particular contextual matter such as trust is made live by a speaker, evidence is sought for this as an understanding displayed in subsequent speaker turns: the next turn proof procedure. If such evidence is absent, the researcher's interpretation is either excluded from the analysis, or explicitly marked as potentially speculative. An example of this can be seen in the analysis of risk (Chapter 10). This is a practical example of the research attending to the role of the researcher.

Deviant cases are particularly sought: that is deviant to the perceived dominant pattern, for instance, seen elsewhere in other instances from the data, or in a meeting recording as a whole event. An example of this can be seen towards the end of Chapter 10, along with a discussion of its meaning to the analytic claims. Deviant cases can either support analytic claims, or serve to weaken them. The objective is not to ignore them as irrelevant to the



business at hand, but rather to notice these for what they accomplish, and how they relate to analytic claims. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) advise, exceptions can often draw attention to important features and problems.

From the outset of the research and analysis, the present study approaches existing DA studies as a major source of knowledge to inform and provide a source of coherence for analytic claims (Potter, 1998a; Wood and Kroger, 2000). This can be seen in how the analysis reported in the following Chapters is, for instance, grounded in the literature where relevant, showing how the analysis and claims made here either support or vary from extant work.

Extracts (see Table 3 in the Appendix for a summary) from the data are included in the reported analytic findings to both support analytic claims, and to allow the reader to formulate their own interpretation and judgement of the data. This attends particularly to the ever present possibility that talk and text are open to more than one analysis and conclusion. Extracts are placed alongside detailed descriptions and accounts of how the analysis is grounded and developed. Following Wood and Kroger (2000), the demonstration of analysis through the inclusion of extracts is understood as a key requirement of warrantability.

#### 7.4.2 Research data

The size and content of any sample selection is driven by the research question. Potter and Wetherell (1987) advise that the size of any given sample is not the determinant of a study's successful outcome because the analyst's first priority is an interest in the language itself, how it is used and what it accomplishes, not the speakers. Most DA research generally samples a corpus of data from different sources, or from the same source (e.g., Wooffitt's, 2001, study of verbal interaction between mediums and their clients finding reported speech to be a commonly used linguistic device which, he claims, works to invoke favourable assessments of psychics' authenticity).

When collecting data, many of the same principles of conventional research methods are relevant: a consideration of ethics, for instance, and ensuring the appropriate permissions are gained. Preference is always for using naturally occurring language in interaction (that is, with the complete absence of the researcher). However, the use of surreptitious recordings would, for instance, be ethically questionable. This raises a question of ethics in respect of

some of the data used here, drawn from a public online discussion forum, and which is addressed in the following sub-section (section 7.4.3), as part of a general discussion on the ethical approach of the present study.

Firms were selected for the study based on the researcher's prior relationship with their senior management, and the nature of their business with its emphasis on sharing and developing knowledge. This prior relationship transpired to be an essential factor in gaining the cooperative participation of both organizations. Several other organizations, with which the researcher had no prior connection or relationship, were also approached as potential participants but, while expressing support for the research project and its aims, all declined to become involved as participants. This suggests a sobering lesson and potential limitation for future research: the nature of the research methodology is such that, without a prior relationship of trust, potential participating organizations are unlikely to agree to take part.

Individual participants were not selected by the researcher: instead these represent, in effect, an opportunity sample in that they happened to be present in the meetings which took place at times and dates when the researcher, with the agreement of the organizations' senior management, was present at their respective premises (but not physically present in the meetings themselves). Nor did the researcher select the meetings to be recorded, or influence their topics of discussion. In this sense, while the organizations themselves are actively selected by the researcher, the actual participants are not. Nor was the researcher physically present in any of the meetings themselves, not even in the role of observer. It is claimed then, that this can be considered as naturally-occurring data.

The principle empirical basis for the present study comprises digital audio recordings of 13 individual meetings, collectively representing some 15 hours of recordings, taking place in two different London-based organizations during March and May 2013. These meetings are regular, scheduled meetings in each case. In addition to this, analysis also makes use of data from a public online discussion forum (see section 9.3.1 for a description).

The only instrument used in the data capturing part of the project was a small digital audio recording device which was positioned in meeting rooms in advance of meetings to be recorded. All participants were briefed in advance, verbally or via written instruction, of the nature and purpose of the study.

### 7.4.3 Participants and ethical considerations

This section of the Chapter focuses on the ethical conduct of the study, with particular consideration given to the use of online discussion data. This is followed by a description of the two participating firms. A description of the online data and its source is given at the start of the analysis in Chapter 9.

The project complied with the University's ethical standards by first submitting a detailed proposal for primary research to the University's ethics committee. This was approved. In compliance with ethical standards for research, two documents were prepared: a participant consent form and an information/briefing form. All participants were given both documents prior to any recording being undertaken. In most cases, the researcher gave a short outline verbal briefing to meeting participants on the nature of the research, and particularly of their rights to withdraw from the study at any point. Participants, comprising organizational employees, contractors and /or associates of two independent London based private sector consultancy firms, were required to sign individual consent forms. However, in the case of one organization, the company signed a consent form on behalf of its employees in order to expedite matters. All participants, and their organizations, are treated as anonymous in all aspects of the research.

With respect to the online discussion forum data, no overt permission was sought by the researcher from forum participants. Participants made their contributions voluntarily to a publicly available discussion forum (LinkedIn): that is, access to this forum is not restricted to registered forum members only, although in order to access LinkedIn in general, users must first register with LinkedIn itself. Note, though, that there is no restriction, fee or qualification required in order to register with LinkedIn. A further important point to note is that this group, which is a networking group, publishes no explicit rules, guidelines or other considerations in respect of members' contributions, and their use thereof. To post a contribution, one must register with the group (again, no qualifications or restrictions are applied), but access to its contents is available to any LinkedIn member.

Was it unethical to sample and use this data collected in this way? The review of studies using data from Computer Mediated Communications (section 3.6.2) gives an idea of the

widespread practice of using such data in research, particularly noting the work of Markham (2005) on the issue of the researcher paradox. Recall Benwell and Stokoe (2012) on the advantages of using this type of data (see section 3.6.2), with the researcher in the role of lurker, and no need for transcription, thus resulting in data that can be considered to be more authentic and pure (than transcribed meeting recordings, for instance). They, in fact, make no reference to any ethical issues with using data from such sources. In reality, the emphasis in online data-based studies is more focused on the values and advantages of using this data rather than on any ethical issues that this might raise (e.g., Antaki, Ardevol, Nunez and Vayreda, 2006). Moreover, in their account of the revolution of Big Data, Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier (2013) describe in some detail how large internet businesses including Google, for instance, routinely scrape the internet for content as data for their algorithms. There is no indication of any permission being sought from individual contributors.

To answer the initial question, is it ethical: it is claimed here that the use of such data, because of its circumstances in terms of accessibility to wider audiences, and the implied acceptance by contributors that their data may be used for purposes other than they intended, together with the practical problems in attempting to gain permission from individual contributors and the impact that this would have on growing and valuable (Benwell and Stokoe, 2012; Antaki *et al*, 2006.) contributions from research in Computer Mediated Communications, is ethically acceptable although noting the caveat that this is a grey area of discussion and conclusion.

What follows is a brief outline of context for each participating organization. Note that the context of individual meetings, where they form the basis of subsequent analysis, is described in each case of use.

#### Organization A

Organization A is located in Central London although the business also has offices elsewhere in the UK and in mainland Europe. It has a full-time staff of around 80. The company describes itself as a learning and communications specialist, with a particular focus on the design and application of learning technologies and software to facilitate the transformation of client organizations into successful (learning) businesses. Whilst the organization operates in a competitive market place which can

be described as highly knowledge-focused, the organization itself does not have any formal KM policies or practices in place (like Company B). Also similarly to the other participating organization, the work environment is a large, airy open-plan space. People largely work at long banks of desks and there is a lot of 'hot-desking'. There is a centrally positioned coffee area with a small sitting area where ad hoc meetings take place, and where informal chat happens. Both meetings rooms are screened off from the main working area. The working space is relatively quiet, and informal.

### Organization B

Located in the centre of London, Organization B describes itself as a Services Innovator and Aggregator, which provides specialist professionals on permanent or contract basis to the public sector in the UK, and which has a core staff of around 60. The core business is, in effect, a contract bidding machine. The working environment is a large open-plan office, surrounded by spacious, glass-fronted meetings rooms. These are used for formal, scheduled meetings as well as ad hoc ones when available: that is, they are in use virtually all of the time. Another noticeable feature of the environment is the low noise level despite the perennial presence of one or more floor-walkers talking on a mobile phone. The organisation is team-driven. There is an interesting contrast between the heavy use of internal email to communicate with colleagues (across the room, for instance), and occasional impromptu problem-solving or idea generating interactions which take place by, for instance, the coffee facilities. In fact, the researcher particularly observed that ad hoc meetings often took place around a counter in front of the centrally located kitchen area, which suggests that the design of this area in a prominent position was deliberate.

### **7.5 Points of limitation**

As noted earlier, an obvious and very practical limitation to the present work is the difficulty in gaining the trust and agreement of organizations to take part in studies of this type. This clearly has implications for future research. This issue is not so much concerned with sample size (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, advise that sample size is not a determinant of a study's success), but rather sample variety. The present study is limited to two organizations, and

while they operate in quite different fields they are both involved in the private service sector. It would have been preferable to have been able to include, for instance, organizations from the public sector, and some from radically different business sectors.

A further limitation (of necessity) of the present study is that the research and analysis is entirely done by one researcher. This experience leads the present researcher to conclude that such studies would benefit from the involvement of more than one researcher in order to be able to bring different perspectives and knowledge to bear (ironically, much as Leonard and Sensiper, 2002, claim in their theory of creative abrasion in the KM field). These matters draw attention to the interpretive nature of the study and its methodology. It is always possible that another researcher might arrive at different findings and conclusions, particularly if using a different analytical methodology. Suffice to state that the adherence to Potter's (1998a) validation procedures mediates, as far as is possible, the consequences of these types of research limitations.

With particular reference to Discursive Psychology, one point is worth emphasising, and this concerns the relevance of this type of research and its findings specific to the business world in general, and the knowledge management practitioner in particular. In Chapter 3 reference is made to the caution given recently by Madsbjerg and Rasmussen (2014) that studies in the human sciences are often seen by those in the business world as of little practical relevance, as being academic and notoriously difficult to understand. The onus is consequently on the shoulders of the researcher to find and promote the relevance of research work specific to the audiences to whom it may or should be of interest.

There is one final issue to raise in terms of potential limitations, and this concerns the decision to focus on the thematic categories of knowledge sharing – trust, identity, risk and context. Is it possible that in looking for how these matters are invoked in discourse, one simply finds what one seeks? That the act of looking brings these interpretations to the fore? When looking for instances of how and what speakers invoke as context, is the researcher unawaredly conjuring a context by applying her own categories? In mitigation, careful and methodical attention is given to seek, not just for instances where speakers invoke this or that context, but also for evidence of co-speakers orienting to the same phenomena thus displaying shared understanding, as next turn proof.

## **7.6 Summary and indicative research questions**

The conclusions at the end of Part One led to the formulation of some indicative research questions. These are expanded into a detailed version in the earlier discussions on Research questions in the current Chapter. These can be shortened to:

Using an approach drawing on Discursive Psychology, discourse in organizational settings is analysed for how the thematic categories of trust, identity, risk and context are made live, and with what, if any, influence and effect they have in what are understood as knowledge sharing meeting / forum contexts. In particular, will such an analysis inform an understanding of these thematic categories as tacitly invoked phenomena, and can these themes be shown to be co-relational?

This is a qualitative, interpretive methods study located in constructionism, with an approach to knowledge and versions of reality as socially constructed in everyday discourse. Its methodology draws on Discursive Psychology, with its design informed by Potter and Wetherell's (1987) ten stages of discourse analysis, Edwards and Potter's (1992) *Discursive Action Model*, and Potter's (1998a) four procedures of validation. In addition, matters of measuring the quality of DA studies, and ethical concerns have been addressed, and the limitations of the present study noted. The following Chapters report the study's analytical findings, based on the preceding description of method and design. Data comprises recordings of meetings at two private sector service companies. Analysis is particularly focused on knowledge sharing activities.

On a final note, it is conjectured that by extending the directions and boundaries already taken by many in the KM domain, the present study has the potential to contribute alternative ways of conceptualising KM, knowledge work and knowledge sharing in particular.

## **Chapter 8: Trust is essential to knowledge sharing**

### **8.1 The importance of trust**

The importance of trust in knowledge sharing (e.g., Bontis, 2002; Yoo and Torrey, 2002; Earl, 2001; Alguezaui and Filieri, 2010; Bock, Zmud, Kim and Lee, 2005; Leonard, 2007; Lin and Huang, 2010; Panahi, Watson and Partridge, 2013; Rechberg and Syed, 2013) and trust's status as the essence of operational functioning (e.g., Clifton, 2012) constitute two good reasons to take trust as a focus of research. Whilst Clifton points to difficulties over definition, recall Schoorman, Mayer and Davis' (2007) model which locates trust in relationships as a measure of willingness to be vulnerable, defining trust as acceptable risk contingent on perception of others' ability, integrity and benevolence (see section 4.6.2). This leads to the speculation that knowledge sharing is contingent to trust, and that trust works relationally with the other identified thematic categories of knowledge sharing – identity, risk and context.

The data analysed here is drawn from a recording of an organizational meeting in which the activity of knowledge sharing is understood as implicit: this is not a meeting in which one person deals out tasks and actions, but rather a regular encounter involving members of a team who come together to share knowledge of actions and activities of mutual interest and concern. It is speculated that analysis of the data will show trust and related themes in action, providing the opportunity to explore how trust is made live in discourse, and with what effect, relevant to knowledge sharing activities.

How do people do trust? If knowledge sharing is concerned with constructing accounts and descriptions, versions of affairs, with the aim of sharing these with others, then it is a common sense understanding to link trust to factual accounting. That is, people routinely script their accounts or reports as factual (Edwards and Potter, 1992), authentic (Hutchby, 2001) and acceptable. Thus, speakers might invoke actions of epistemic superiority (Clifton, 2012) and displays of possessing access to unique and preferential knowledge (Willig, 2003). In scripting factual accounts they are orienting to trustworthiness both of account and of self, arguably contingent one to the other. In accepting and agreeing with versions produced by others, speakers index others' trustworthiness – that is, a willingness to be vulnerable to



others (Schoorman *et al.*, 2007), as a measure of others' ability, integrity and benevolence. These ideas consequently set the directions of the present data analysis and discussions.

The Chapter proceeds with a brief discussion of the data and its context which forms the topic of analysis. This is followed by the analysis and discussion which shows trust to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon, constructed in the turn-by-turn interaction of discourse, and as a relationally situated underpinning construct to knowledge sharing. The Chapter concludes with some preliminary reflections. Conclusions and implications for KM and practitioners are discussed in Chapter 12, combined with those from subsequent analytic Chapters.

## **8.2 Data**

The data for the present analysis comes from a Company B meeting recording. This is a regular weekly team meeting, involving 5 participants, all male. Two participants are located in one of the meeting rooms in Company B's London offices, with three others calling in via conference call from different locations. It is assumed that the virtual attendees cannot see the others, and vice versa, for the simple reason that there is no suggestion of such visual availability.

The context of the meeting is a weekly exchange of team activities, responsibilities, future actions, and issues arising. The subject is the development of data handling services (software application) for discrete units of a major public sector organization. There is a further meeting immediately following this one, which some of these actors will attend. It becomes clear that this second meeting has the business of decision-making, and is the source of some tension. This largely emanates from Steve (e.g., he frequently calls '*Next!*' to close down one topic and move speedily to another), but other participants orient to their tacit understanding of this context using phrases such as '*I'm chasing that*', '*yep, yep, yep, that's all underway*' and '*waiting for decisions*'. In other words, this is a conversational discourse that is continuously orienting to explicit action. There is also the almost continuous sound of fast, often furious, typing which can only emanate from the meeting room in London.

Whilst a substantial part of the meeting follows the patterned structural organization of 'topic announcement', 'participant report' and 'team leader evaluation', its choreography is marked

by regular disagreements. There are six extracts presented here, five of which orient to challenge, rivalry and disputed claims to superior knowledge – what Clifton (2012) terms epistemic primacy. The first extract serves to set the scene, in establishing the status of the participants in the context of the meeting, and a very particular imperative – the need for speed. Each extract is presented in the order in which it appears to illustrate the sequential unfolding of themes, challenges and shared understandings of context which participants make live in their discourse in interaction.

### **8.3 Establishing rights to control the meeting agenda**

The meeting is initiated when the three remote actors dial in via conference call technology. Extract 1 shows what transpires.

#### Extract 1: 130319\_005

7. Steve: Wa::ay. (.) Okay so we have Ade, Damien and Manoj.
8. (2)
9. ['yep', 'yep', 'yep' via conference call]=
10. Steve: =Yep, yep, yep. Good. Okay. ↑Ummmm.
11. (2)
12. Steve: ↓Right=
13. Bob: =Shall we go through the list ↑first?
14. Steve: Ye::ah Bob why don't you why don't you wheel us through the list?
15. Bob: ↑Alrighty so starting in alphabetical with [names]. So, [project name]?

Lines 1 – 9 script what would be colloquially known as the meeting ‘pecking order’, whilst at the same time invoking the need for speed, direction, and the business at hand. Steve clearly orients to doing leadership in his rights to summon participants to the meeting, with his roll call (Line 1) serving to confirm what ‘we have’, while simultaneously invoking his rights to formulate first turn assessments (Line 4: Clifton, 2012b). The latter three are reflexively constructed as the commanded. Steve is also shown to claim rights to make decisions (Line 8) and to establish the pace of the meeting in his reformulation of Bob’s proposal (Line 7) with a sanction to ‘wheel us through the list. This can be heard as a sense of time pressure with the need for speed, to which Bob orients with his ‘Alrighty...’ (Line 9). Notice the 2 second delay in the three virtual attendees responding to Steve’s statement of who we have (Line 2): in a face-to-face meeting, such a delay would be understood to suggest troubles in interaction

(Drew, 2003b), but as Steve does not orient to this understanding in his assessment (Line 4), it cannot here be analysed as such. It could simply just be a case of the nature of virtual meetings being more tolerant of such delays.

Steve hesitates over what topic to start with – the extended ‘ummm’, brief pause and carefully spoken ‘Right’ invokes a display of searching (Potter, 1998a) amongst competing topics (Line 4). Bob steps in with a tentatively spoken suggestion formulated as a question with a candidate answer (Potter and Edwards, 2012), orienting to Steve’s control of the ‘agenda’. Steve’s stretched affirmative (‘Ye::ah’) indexes the candidate answer, scripting reluctance – going through the list would not have been his preferred course of action. Subsequent analysis shows how this actor frequently uses the stretched ‘ye::ah’ to signal difficulty, disagreement or reluctance. Instead of producing an alternative topic, he reformulates Bob’s suggestion and the ‘list’ becomes topicalized as the first business of the meeting, with its call for participants to share knowledge. Bob’s implied possession of the list, coupled with his suggestion of action, casts him in a secondary role to Steve’s leader status.

The sense of speed invoked in this extract arguably has an interesting effect on subsequent transactions. In three of the following extracts (2, 3 and 4), the action of argument – competing accounts – is shown to be triggered at the point at which Bob, as the possessor of the list to be ‘wheeled through’, is attempting to effect topic closure and transition to a new topic. Also, extract 3 contains a call for a ‘bigger discussion’ on a particular topic. All of this suggests that the imperative for speed is not only creating a tension, but is also being resisted. The normative and appropriate place for topic discussion and comment would be between topic opener and closer. Thus the action of initiating further discussion on a topic during or after the issuing for its closure indicates troubles, suggestive of dissatisfaction with time allocated to topic discussion, with its inference of a potential for decisions based on less than adequate discussion or debate. There is, in fact, only one instance of argumentative actions taking place within the appropriate topic discussion space, and that is initiated by Steve himself.

A final point to raise is the team’s mutual familiarity: there is no need to explicitly establish roles as this is already tacitly known. Thus, the mutual roles are shown to be tacitly

understood, the objective of the interaction is made live, and the team's familiarity with one another made contingent.

#### **8.4 Working up trust through epistemic superiority and authenticity**

##### *Emerging challenge*

The next extract comes less than 3 minutes into the meeting, and displays the first evidence of emerging challenge to claims to knowledge and rights to formulate assessments.

##### Extract 2: 130319\_005

43. Bob: Ok well we'll leave it on the list just to keep ↓chasing them on VPN and  
44. dongles but it's good to know that we're (.) y'know that we're we can keep using the  
45. desktops as]  
46. Steve: [Yeah I wou(ld) I do want to get off the desktops as poss- as fast as  
47. possible but (0.5) for the moment we-uh we ↓don't have much choice.  
48. Ade: Yeah]  
49. Steve: [we do need to keep]  
50. Ade: [that worries me a bit (.) the only part that worries me  
51. about it is if we go onto ( ) and it's the same set up as we used t've then (.) it's  
52. not good. We might as well stick to desktops.  
53. Steve: Yeah well it- I-I –I think the conversation at 4 o' clock will prove that it's  
54. only an intermediate anyway.  
55. Bob: Yeah, there's things we may not]  
56. Steve: [I think we're gonna be getting out of out of ( )  
57. fai::rly rapidly anyway  
58. Ade: Okay.

This action involves three actors, Steve, Ade and Bob. In Lines 43 – 45, Bob works to close down a list item with a two-part action: first, he serves up the classic topic boundary marker, 'Ok' (Svennevig, 2012b), combined with a projected future action ('...leave it on the list just to keep ↓chasing...': Line 43). These collectively work up a closing component (Drew and Holt, 1988). But, rather than producing a new topic, Bob issues a topic extension with an assessment ('it's good to know': Line 44) combined with a knowledge component ('y'know'), typically used to project assumptions of shared knowledge and intersubjective agreement (Clifton, 2012). Specifically, here, he is orienting to Ade's prior turn account. This is the first occasion that Bob has scripted an assessment, not formulated as a question to Steve. Note how Steve interrupts Bob, with the implicit inference that Bob's claims to serve

assessments are not warranted. What happens next is a see-saw of competing assessment, with issues of trust being made live and under threat.

On the surface, the disagreement in Lines 46 – 57 is over nothing if Steve's account that '...we're gonna be getting out of...' (Line 56) is accepted, so why argue? To draw on Clifton (2012), this is about jockeying for position, through making claims to rights to knowledge. But these can only be considered as a form of trust work where recipients orient to the knowledge claims as such.

### *Competing strategies for conjuring trust*

There are two clear stages to the unfolding disagreement. In the first part, Steve scripts a preferred turn (Line 46: Edwards and Potter, 1992), receipting Bob's assessment with a weak agreement, followed by a repair which is hearable as a contrast device ('but'), marking the end of the concessionary materials and the start of a competing assessment. According to Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1990), such devices are typically associated with persuasion talk. Thus he serves up his version of future events formulated first as what he would like to see, then deftly shifts footing (Abell and Stokoe, 2001) from first person to group collective ('...we don't have much choice': Line 47) which has the effect of working up consensus as a warrant for truth (Edwards and Potter). In other words, by projecting a mutually shared state concerning one set of affairs, he retrospectively works up a similar state in respect of desktops. Consensualism is shown to work up stake inoculation, against, for instance, criticism for having personal interest in one's account, and in factualising accounts (Edwards and Potter). Thus, it is not just a case of what Steve wants, but what the team wants, and in this respect, they are collectively thwarted by external factors. Combined with his persuasion talk, it is suggested that here Steve is doing trust, and this is precisely what Ade orients to with his minimal agreement token (Edwards and Potter: Line 48). Perhaps orienting to the insufficiency of Ade's assent, Steve ploughs on with his version (Line 49).

The second part to the unfolding disagreement talk occurs in Lines 50 – 58 and is initiated by Ade's interruption which talks over Steve's continued account of affairs as being inclusively imperative ('we do need to keep': Line 49). Ade's self-selected floor-grab comes with a strong orientation to professional care and responsibility. He conjures the cognitive state of being worried, but which is downgraded ('...a bit...the only part...': Line 50), a practice which Potter and Edwards (2003) describe as an activity of disclaiming responsibility. Thus,

it is not Ade's fault that he is worried, but rather the consequence of an external state of affairs. In Line 51, he invokes collaboration and consensus in scripting an inclusion pronoun (Abell and Stokoe, 2001) twice ('we go' and 'we used'), which shifts the onus for worry onto the team as a whole: they should all be worried. This is followed by an explicit warrant for worry, framed as a conditional proposition ('if...then': Chilton, 2004). According to Chilton, this move scripts the speaker as possessing knowledge about cause and effect, which bolsters his rights to authentic knowledge claims, reflexively working up the unacceptability of Steve's version.

Ade completes his turn with an assessment ('not good') in the form of an un-hedged declarative assertion which works to concretise accounts (Clifton, 2012), linked to a projection of future action in what 'we might as well' do. 'Might' is interesting here because it would usually be associated with scripting a hedge or mitigation against criticism, allowing for the possibility of other candidate actions. However, here, it works up the common-sense nature of what might be done, invoking a sense of tacitly known background knowledge (Clifton, 2006). Consequently, Ade's description of affairs is shown to be rising from intuitively known facts, with the resulting course of action framed as a reasonable one that the team would have consensus to, and which implicates Steve's version as being untrustworthy. Thus, Ade's is an acceptable account, based on superior knowledge, and as such stands as trustworthy, and hard to challenge. There is also the suggestion of an invocation of risk – Ade clearly conjures Steve's version as being risky ('not good'), and with the potential to lead to poor outcomes for the team. Thus, Ade can be said to have scripted himself as unwilling to be vulnerable (Schoorman Mayer and Davis, 2007).

#### *Avoiding direct challenge by reformulating the problem*

According to Wood and Kroger (2000) prefacing an account with 'Yeah, well', as Steve does in Line 53, works as a weak token of agreement, which is a classic signal of forthcoming disagreement (Clifton, 2012). However, Steve does not directly disagree with Ade's account, rather he discards it using empiricist accounting (Edwards and Potter, 1992): the future predicted conversation is concretised temporally, and will prove Steve's reformulation of affairs. In other words, he retains the topic problem (Chilton, 2004) but reforms it in the light of his claims to privileged access to knowledge (Willig, 2003), thus avoiding a direct challenge to the authenticity of Ade's account. Ade's version is shown to be consigned to

history, as irrelevant to the here, now, and future. Note how he also works to downgrade (Locke and Edwards, 2003) the problem (‘...only an intermediate...’: Line 54).

Thus Steve predicts a set of affairs beyond the decision-making powers of the team, and which is carefully hedged as having conditional status (Wooffitt and Allistone, 2008). In this way, he downgrades the status of the problem raised by Ade, and diffuses the potential for further dispute.

A three-part turn sequence completes the interaction. Bob’s aligning report that there are ‘things we may not’ (Line 55) is interesting in what it does. First it can be heard as orienting to knowledge (‘things’) out there which is beyond the reach of the team but, secondly and crucially, it is argued here that Bob, in conjuring the team consensus, is orienting to the three virtual attendees and not Steve. There is also a suggestion of lack of trust in external agents who know things and make decisions that impact on the team, whereas Steve’s version is reflexively indexed as having trustworthy status. In Lines 56 and 57, Steve indexes Bob’s account of lack of knowledge with his interruption, then confirms himself as the one who does have access to ‘things’ out there in his claim to knowledge served as news. The interactional accomplishment is trust: there are people out there who may not be trustworthy, but as Steve has access to knowledge of ‘things’, his account can be trusted, and Bob’s account in Line 55 can now be seen as an endorsement of Steve’s trustworthiness directed to the team. This can be unpacked a little more.

Steve’s turn in Line 56 is prefaced with an invocation of a cognitive state (‘I think...’) which, in contrast to his earlier stuttered ‘I-I-I think...’ (Line 53) marking his account as open to doubt, works here as an explicit opinion marker (Chilton, 2004). Linking these two utterances by Steve (Lines 53/54 and 56/57), the persuasion work becomes clearly evident as Steve conjures his version of affairs as being more and more authentic and predictable, but which is a version of affairs that only he can predict. The veracity of his opinion – and therefore its trustworthiness – can be seen in his confident emphasis on timescales (‘fairly rapidly’: Line 57). His claim to privileged access to knowledge bilaterally works as a warrant in linking to his earlier stance over ‘getting off desktops’ (Line 46). The risk is downgraded and that which Ade has conjured for group worry is effectively deleted but without challenging its authenticity. Steve, then, claims what Clifton (2012) terms epistemic primacy, working

reflexively to script self as trustworthy. Ade orients to with his token of acceptance in Line 58.

The following two extracts display disagreement taking a more confrontational and combative turn.

### **8.5 Risk and reputation as contingent factors to trust**

#### *Calling on witnesses to work up persuasion*

Extract 3 initiates some 5 minutes into the meeting. Just prior to this, Bob has raised a topic from his list which is directed to Ade for comment. What follows next can only be described as a mutual questioning of ability by Steve and Damien, with implied risks to trust. Recall that Schoorman, Mayer and Davis (2007) posit ability as one of the three dimensions of trustworthiness, the calculation of which influences perception of acceptable risk in others.

#### Extract 3: 130319\_005

78. Ade: Yeah I've not had a look at that yet.  
79. (1)  
80. Bob: Okay hhhh]  
81. Steve: [it- it's something that (.)every time I talk to a [Client] they do go 'ooh  
82. four months that's a long time'  
83. Bob: °yeah°  
84. Damien: [Clients] always say that but I'm nuhhh ( )]  
85. Steve: [I know]  
86. Damien: [( ) I think we need a bigger  
87. discussion about whether to use ( ) or not but I don't think realistically it's only  
88. gonna be a month better (.) in terms of actually being usable. The first the first  
89. month's returns (0.5) patchy at best=  
90. Steve: = Yeah it's what ↑[name of Competitor firm] use.  
91. (2) [sound of rapid typing]  
92. Bob: Okay  
93. (2.5)  
94. Bob: so do we want em is this something for Manoj to look ↑into? Or is]  
95. Steve: [Yes please.

What is interesting about this particular extract is Steve's formulation in Line 90, issued in a sarcastic tone of voice, and referencing the name of a competitor company. Hutchby (2011) shows how such sceptical rejoinders are linked to non-neutral moves. What this company



uses is precisely the software product that Damien calls into question (Lines 86 – 89). Steve’s response in Line 90 is not issued as a news item – that is, it is not designed to inform co-participants of some new state of affairs. Rather, it can be heard as a strong rebuke. Does this signal a crumbling of trust between the two actors?

The sequence initiates in accordance with the now established procedural organization: Bob issues a topic, which is commented on by the relevant actor, with Steve then completing the tri-part action with an assessment. In this instance, Ade receipts the topic issue with his habitual ‘yeah’, then reports the issue status: no progress has been made, thus bouncing the topic straight back to Bob (Line 78). The latter’s slight hesitation in picking up his slot (‘Okay’: Line 80), followed by the start of something more [unfortunately unintelligible] suggests surprise, but none-the-less signals topic closure.

Steve, interrupting Bob, marks Ade’s response as being insufficient (by preventing the closure of the topic), and initiates the work of upgrading the task’s importance. He warrants this using direct reported speech, in this case, of the client: ‘...every time I talk to a [client] they do go...’: Line 81. It is framed as direct in so much as it conjures an exact reproduction of what others have said, shown to make claims stronger and more credible as fact (Wood and Kroger, 2000). Note that Steve makes no reference to the task itself, instead invoking the negative consequences of the task not being done. He effectively casts himself in the role of eye-witness to a version of affairs. Recall Hutchby’s (2011) study of witness accounts in radio call-in shows which, he claims, serve to construct speakers as legitimate narrators of events (section 4.6.2). Other examples of eye-witness accounting are seen in subsequent Chapters. Also note the extreme case formulation prefacing the reported speech (‘every time’; Line 80), used here as an instrument to upgrade the ante (Schegloff, 1997). This formulation works up the routine and predictable nature of what clients say, which, in turn, reflexively invokes implicit consensus in what is common knowledge and which serves as a warrant for truth (Edwards and Potter, 1992). The stakes associated with the task which Ade has reportedly not looked at are thus heightened, risk is made live, to which Bob aligns agreement (Line 83). The nature of the task, at this point, is not the topic of dispute. Things then take a surprising turn.

### *Two competing versions of the same witness accounts*

Despite not being the agent of the task under discussion, Damien self-selects with a turn designed to shift risk from not doing the task to the task itself. He directly challenges Steve's conjuring of routine, common knowledge as a warrant for truth by scripting the inconsequential nature of what clients say: it is the very routine-ness ('always say') of what clients say which renders it not worth listening to. The contrast marker ('but') signals the dispreferred nature of what is about to follow (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Steve's talk-under ('I know': Line 85) orients to what is about to now emerge as being a known-about account. Damien does not concede his turn to Steve's interruption, but continues to press his version of affairs, summoning a broader picture with a call for a 'bigger discussion' (Line 86/87).

### *Issuing challenges to competency and undermining trust*

This call works on two levels: first, it indexes back to his own account of what clients always say framing this as irrelevant, and beside the point, thus deleting any risk associated with what they say, reflexively working up criticism of Steve's use of such evidence. Secondly, the call for a bigger discussion, formulated as a decision-making event ('whether to use [] or not': Line 87), implies that the decision has already been discussed, but not thoroughly enough with the implication that its decision outcome is flawed. Risk is thus made live in a new trajectory. Collectively, Damien's account serves as a competency challenge, used to challenge the previous speaker's competence to comment on a given issue (Hutchby, 2011).

The decision making process is further called into question through the issuing of a declarative assertion (Clifton, 2012) in Line 88/89. In his study of trust actions in workplace interactions, Clifton shows how such assertions work up states of affairs as concrete reality, thus formulating the speaker as accountable for being right. The action of holding oneself up publicly as accountable is a marker for trustworthiness. In this instance, Damien works up a prediction of minimal benefits to be gained if Steve's course of action is adopted. In this way, the account offered by Damien works as a display of superior knowledge as authentic, and which is none-the-less accountable. It is accountable in the sense that future events could prove him to be right – or wrong. It is thus a risky claim to make, so to make a concrete prediction about 'the first month's returns' rhetorically and reflexively casts him as knowledgeable expert, with ability and integrity (in none-the-less reporting such a negative projected future action). Thus, his displays of possessing superior knowledge, of ability to predict, of accountability, integrity and authenticity all work inter-rationally as a display of

doing trust. In other words, he constructs his version of affairs as hard if not impossible to dispute. But this is precisely what Steve does.

Orienting to the implicit competency challenge (Hutchby, 2011), Steve's rejoinder is immediate – a tapering off and lowering of voice tone – issuing a discard by scripting the evidence of what another company (later identified as a competitor) does. It can also be heard as a call to common knowledge of facts out there (Edwards and Potter, 1992). This arguably conjures a question over Damien's ability and knowledge, with the implicit implication that Damien's account is biased in favour of his own interests. Thus, he reverses Damien's competency challenge, scripting Damien's account as not to be trusted, and that others know more, with all of associated consequences for reputation. Trust becomes undermined, and Damien makes no further contribution at this point. The impact of Line 90 can be seen in the 2-second delay and repair in Line 92, in which Bob attempts to 'line under' the debate with a tentative formulation of a question on future projected action, issuing this with a candidate answer (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005). He clearly makes live a context of discomfort, moving to change the topic.

In this exchange, ability and reputation are shown as tacitly managed, as accountable and contingent to trust, authenticity and trustworthiness. Actions are recipient-designed (Potter and Edwards, 2012) to invoke warrants (e.g., claims to superior knowledge) for the trustworthiness of accounts. In this way, trust can be seen as implicit to knowledge sharing, as well as working co-relationally with ability and reputation.

It is claimed that extract 3 shows trust breaking down, however this is not the end of the matter.

## **8.6 Trust breakdown connects with knowledge sharing breaches**

### *Factual accounting as a warrant for trust*

Extract 4 comes a few lines later, following the selection of Manoj to 'look into' the task (the subject of extract 3), and the latter's acceptance of the work.

Extract 4: 130319\_005

101. Bob: °‘kay good°  
102. [Rapid, noisy typing)  
103. Damien: Uh it’s gonna (.hhhhh) it (.hhh) that’s gonna  
104. be a ↑lot of work so do we need to before we get Manoj doing y’know  
105. (0.5) two weeks work ( ) package to put in the cos there’s basically a-at  
106. least one rule for every single field=  
107. Steve: =No no tha-that’s]  
108. Damien: [ ( )  
109. Steve: [that-that’s not what I’m asking for at  
110. the moment what I’m as::king for is simply for Manoj to get his head  
111. around what we would need to do to ( ) data (.) to create ( ) that we  
112. can ↑use um and then report back on (.) feasibility and scale of the  
113. task (.) not to actually ↑do it=  
114. Damien: =right yeah okay (.) ↓no problem.  
115. [lots of rustling]

To all intents and purposes, the topic has been closed, a resource assigned to the task, with agreement that it should be carried out. Bob actions a topic boundary marker (Svennevig, 2012b), ‘Kay good’ (Line 101), with the rapid typing suggesting that the decision just made is being concretised in the form of meeting notes. It can be speculated that this concretising action is what drives Damien to re-open it in what is essentially a breach of the meeting’s procedural norms, something which it is assumed that only Steve, as Leader, is warranted to do. The two claims to witness evidence constructed by Steve in extract 3 have not persuaded Damien to change his opinion.

It is suggested here that Damien orients to his breach of meeting norms with a metaphorical hand in the air invoked by his opening particle ‘Uh’ (Line 103), working up a claim to speak. Note how his opening utterance contains markedly heavy exhalations of breath, and a repair: ‘...it’s gonna...that’s gonna...’. This invokes. His concerns have moved from issues around what the client can expect (extract 3, Lines 87 – 89) to those around a team member who has just been tasked with ‘a lot of work’, which is tonally emphasised, making it hearable as concrete fact based on expert knowledge. His orienting to a concern for others works to inoculate against potential criticism of having personal stake and interest (Edwards and Potter, 2005). His claim is thus serving up facts that are out there for anyone to see.

He further embellishes the factual nature of his account with quantification: ‘two weeks’ work’ (Line 105). The actor treats this piece of fact as accountable (Silverman, 2007), wrapping it in a two-part warrant. The scripting of ‘y’know’, prior to the quantification fact, typically works to project shared knowledge and intersubjective agreement (Clifton, 2012); the team already jointly know this to be the case thus consensus and corroboration are invoked (Edwards and Potter, 1992). The second part of the warrant lies in the appeal to a self-evident level of common sense (Thompson, 2004) concerning what the task will specifically require (‘...there’s basically at least one rule for every single field’: Lines 105/106), formulating this as obvious to everyone (but perhaps not Steve), and therefore undeniable. Notice also the absence of any references to cognitive states (e.g., I think) which might conjure a doubt marker, or epistemic downgrade (Clifton). This absence increases the strength of the account in its warranting of an objective (authentic) state of affairs.

Damien’s turn works up Steve as being unreasonable, and perhaps not even being in possession of the most basic facts (the rule for every field). It also orients to pressures of time, with the heavy emphasis on ‘a lot of work’ quantified as being ‘two weeks’, with the risk that this implies. In their study of quantification rhetoric in a media environment, Potter, Wetherell and Chitty (1991) argue that such accounts are not simply accounts of some robust reality but are specifically designed to argue. The upshot is a second attempt by Damien to serve up a version of Steve’s task as being inappropriate – and risky. However, it now transpires that Damien has entirely misunderstood the nature of the task.

*A breach in knowledge sharing comes to the fore*

Steve is quick to discard Damien’s version of affairs (Line 109) for the second time. The stuttering repetition of ‘tha-that’s’ coming at the start of his utterance suggests a measure of surprise. Damien’s description of the task is not what Steve is asking to be done, thus working up a classic form of counter argument. He orients to the implicit accusation contained in Damien’s turn. Not only does Steve rebut the charges, but he also deflects the conjured unreasonableness back at Damien. The task is downgraded to ‘simple’, with a boundary conjured around its being solely intellectual in nature (Line 110). The requirement for a report on feasibility and scale of the now future projected task (the action that Damien has been concerned with), contrasted with ‘not to actually ↑do it’ (Line 113), scripts Damien’s version of affairs, in which Manoj was being asked to do the actual job, as being wholly irregular, and something that Steve would never sanction. Steve, in this fashion,

successfully re-takes the moral high ground, arguably eroded as a result of his quip in Line 90, whilst simultaneously dismantling the position scripted by Damien. Damien's position – his ability and reputation – are thus undermined. What Steve is displaying is a constructed context of lack of trust.

The upshot of these two interactions shown in extracts 3 and 4 is a significant climb-down by Damien (Line 114), and arguably a breakdown in trust. The gap of silence indicated in Line 115, with its audible sounds of papers rustling, suggests discomfort amongst team members. There is one question that remains unanswered: how is it that Damien misunderstood the task that Steve (and Bob) refers to at the outset of the discussion? Whilst it cannot be known or even speculated what is going on in the minds of speakers, what can be speculated is that the breakdown in trust between Steve and Damien, inaugurated in extract 3, clouds the issues for the speakers, and the business of sharing knowledge. Damien formulates the task of migration from one software database to another as (1) a lot of work, and tedious, (2) not likely to give more than minimal benefits in return, and (3) as in need of a much broader discussion, with its suggestion of insufficient and even poorly informed discussion to date. That, by any standards, is an entrenched position. Steve, on the other hand, orients to what the clients want, what the competitor company does (and knows), and to himself as competent manager who would not require a task to be actually done before it is understood fully in terms of scope and feasibility. They are almost – but not quite – arguing about different things. Could this be understood as a breakdown in shared understanding of context? This question is returned to in Chapter 11. Note how Steve does not orient to Damien's concerns: he effectively discards them. A breakdown in trust has, it is conjectured, resulted directly in a break in communication, as Argyris (2009) predicts, and hence a misunderstanding in knowledge sharing.

## **8.7 Knowledge, trust and blame**

### *Issuing the call to account*

The following two short extracts appear in a further disagreement interaction between the same two actors – Steve and Damien – occurring around 20 minutes into the meeting. Steve is coming to the end of a short descriptive report of another meeting where he presented the team's software product for review, receiving a good reception. This leads him into a

relatively lengthy and technical description of navigation through the software application which ends with Line 200, and the formulation of a problem.

Extract 5: 130319\_005

200. Steve: .....so we're missing the middle level which is u::m which is  
201. ↑[label name]?  
202. (1.5)  
203. Damien: We're not mi- no we're not missing any- it's just uh the only way  
204. it couldn't be worked there's only jus' one thing it jus' automatically  
205. collects it  
206. Steve: Ye::ah=  
207. Damien: =So it's there it jus' doesn't show=  
208. Steve: =That's a ↓problem  
209. (1.5)  
210. Damien: ↓Yeah it's a problem but there's nothin' that could be done  
211. about it unless you wanna (.) hire someone for the software. It sho- it  
212. ↑should display at top of the chart that – it should (.) show it at the top  
213. of the chart in the title of the chart.

Steve is referring to layers within the navigational system of the team's software application, one of which is claimed to be missing (Line 200). The action of introducing a non-list item orients to his status as Leader, with the attendant rights to steer the transactional direction (Wooffitt, 2007) of the discourse. Here, he issues an assessment formulated as a question through raised voice tone at the end. Although he uses the inclusive pronoun 'we', typically having the effect of projecting or presupposing agreement in meeting contexts (Clifton, 2006), it is suggested that here, the pronoun serves to separate 'we' as a group which includes Steve, the members of the previously reported review panel, and possibly the other three meeting participants, from Damien himself. It can thus be heard as 'we have a problem, and it's your responsibility' – as a blame action, but with the raised tone at the end.

Why does this serve as a question? A question is one part of an adjacency pair, with an answer forming the other. The two are discriminately related in that the first defines an appropriate response in the second (Silverman, 2007). Thus, Steve's turn makes an answer from Damien conditionally relevant (Clifton, 2012). He is publicly calling him to account.

The rhetorical pattern displayed in Lines 200 to 206 is a repeat of 'yes it is' contrasted with 'no it's not': Hutchby (2011) refers to such devices as 'polar contrastives', typically used in

argumentative discourse. Damien explicitly denies Steve's account of the software ('nothing is missing': Line 202), formulating this denial as accountable by wrapping it with a warrant (e.g., '...only way...couldn't be worked...': Lines 202 – 203). This is stake management work in the sense of scripting one account while simultaneously undermining another (Edwards and Potter, 2005). In displaying his knowledge of what is not missing, he orients to self as technical expert, reflexively painting Steve as in-expert, and irrational even in suggesting that 'something is missing'. He bolsters his account in Line 206, scripting an upshot ('...it's there it just doesn't show'), with 'just' working to downgrade the issue (Abell and Stokoe, 2001). This is delivered in response to Steve's stretched receipt token (Line 205) - which can be heard as a sceptical rejoinder (Hutchby) - in the attempt to formulate an acceptable end to topic in its dealing with Steve's initial question over 'something missing'. Instead of closing the topic, Steve ups the ante in the form of an intensifier (Schegloff, 1997), upgrading the issue to 'a problem', with 'that's' working as a metaphorical pointing of the finger. Blame is thus made live and attributed.

In the final part of extract 5, there is a short delay before Damien responds, which makes his initial acceptance of the label 'problem' hearable as an admission, and thus Damien orients to the blame work done by his colleague. Note however, how Damien's construct of 'it's a problem' contrasts with Steve's version ('that's a problem'). The 'but' in Line 208 signals the start of a disclaimer (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), an acknowledgement that attribution has been made live and must be deflected.

### *Managing blame*

He first deselects himself as the subject of blame ('there's nothing that could be done'), and then offers a contradictory set of affairs which explicitly sets the trajectory of attribution back in Steve's direction ('...unless you wanna...': Line 209). The warranting work for this attribution re-direction is formulated in the implicit understanding that Steve, in his Leader role, is responsible for project budget, with the rights to spend money on a novel solution ('hire someone for the software': Line 209). There is a solution available out there, but it requires money to be spent, and Steve owns the responsibility for this, with the reflexive implication that it is Steve's fault for not spending appropriate sums of money. His absolution work is completed in his subsequent proffering of his solution as the only one available, with the implicit understanding that his account of affairs can be trusted as an accurate description of reality: he has done as best as he can.



*Question over competence or simply not sharing knowledge?*

What is interesting about this interchange, with all its implications of blame and attribution, is that Damien is not only aware of the ‘problem’, but has already taken steps to resolve it in the only available way (to him). However, until now, that is a state of affairs unknown to Steve. Knowledge of the ‘problem’ has only come to communal light as a result of this argument. This is unusual given the attention to detail which, elsewhere, Steve in his role of Leader is shown to display. This understanding of events becomes explicit in extract 6.

Extract 6: 130319\_005

220. Steve: C-can you have a conversation with David and see if there’s  
221. some way to trick it.  
222. (1.5 )  
223. Damien: D-hm::mm=  
224. Steve: =Y’know put something ↑else in that has no data  
225. in or something ↓I don’t know.  
226. (2)  
227. Steve: Y’know put in a second]  
228. Damien: [( )the thing is the only thing you can do  
229. is to put a blank to put a blank [] in but then  
230. (1)  
231. Damien: [] [software tier label] and then a blank underneath  
232. it]  
233. Steve: [this is (.)this is the kind of thing that makes me  
234. think I don’t like [Software]↑.

In the intervening lines, Steve and Damien continue to discuss the problem and its implications for the software. Just prior to this, Damien has repeated his assessment that ‘it’s a problem’ but one about which nothing can be done. (It is also worth noting that, throughout all of these exchanges, the rhetoric is largely spoken in reasonable tones – the tones of voice one would expect in a professional business meeting.) Bearing in mind that Damien has just delivered a factualised and objective version of affairs (‘nothing to be done’), Steve’s turn in Lines 220 and 221 can be seen as orienting to a lack of trust in events as described by the other. Not only does Steve persist in the existence of potential other solutions out there, with the implication that either Damien does not know of them or has not considered them, but he now introduces another character in the request that Damien ‘have a conversation’ with David. This conjures David as more competent and implicitly more trustworthy than Damien, working as a competency challenge (Hutchby, 2011). This, in contrast to his earlier issuing of

the problem in Line 200, is not formulated as a question. The non-question status can be seen in Damien's response with its noncommittal utterance. Steve scripts such a projected future event as having the ability to realise devious solutions ('way to trick it': Line 219), with the implication that these will come from David. Damien is reflexively scripted as either lacking in such knowledge and imagination, or, possibly, holding it back. This latter understanding stems from Steve's subsequent turn (Lines 224 - 227).

With no articulated response from Damien, and with his non-linguistic utterance suggesting disdain at the proposal of 'tricking', Steve continues to conjure knowledge of solutions 'out there' which his repeat of 'y'know' formulates as projected inter-subjective agreement (Clifton, 2012) shared with Damien. That is, Steve scripts Damien as being privy to knowledge that he has not shared, and which may hold an acceptable solution to the problem ('something'). So the work done here is persuasion, with his claims to knowledge mitigated by 'I don't know'. This phrase is shown to be a way that people handle or downplay stake or interest in reports and descriptions (Edwards and Potter, 2005), and as a display of lack of knowledge in search of a candidate account (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005). This works in sharp contrast to the project knowledge that Steve scripts Damien as having, but not sharing. The issue of trust is again made live, with attribution work setting its trajectory.

Unfortunately, Damien's turn at talk in Lines 228 to 232 is all but unintelligible, but there is enough of a gist to gather that, again, Damien is scripting 'only one solution', and this has already been considered (if not implemented). The final turn in this extract (Lines 233/234) marks a radical change in rhetorical trajectory. Once again, Steve uses a rise in tone at the end of the utterance which, here, does not script a question but rather an appeal for consensus. He issues a subjective assessment of the software that is being used to create the team's software product as problematic and prospectively unlikable. This displays his claims to rights to make such an evaluation, and which Wiggins and Potter (2003) show as being linked to action such as persuasion and blaming. In this case, it is argued that Steve's game-changing evaluation of affairs erases blame from Damien, and works to re-establish trust through orienting to consensus. The upshot, in invoking consensus in this way, is an evaluation of a state of affairs that is shared by everyone, so it must be true (Edwards and Potter, 1992). In shifting blame to the software, Steve effectively changes rhetorical strategy. Damien's subsequent turn (not included here) orients to this in offering a more detailed account of the problem and what he has done to resolve it, which raises the question of why

he did not do so earlier in this exchange. The exchange concludes with Steve accepting things as they are, but leaving options open.

## **8.8 Preliminary reflections**

The starting point of the present analysis has been the speculation that knowledge sharing is contingent to trust and that this, as a phenomenon invoked by speakers in interaction, can be shown to work co-relationally with the other KS themes of identity, risk and context. It is further speculated that trust will be shown to have an influencing effect on knowledge sharing activities in discursive action, and that trust as a KS theme can be shown to be tacitly accomplished by speakers as psychological phenomena. These speculations are explored in the context of an organizational meeting. One meeting was selected for analysis over examples from multiple meetings to ensure that developing relationships could be brought to the fore. Consequently, the six extracts are included in the order in which they appear in the meeting transcript.

What the analysis shows is that knowledge sharing practices are inextricably bound to matters of trust, as made contingent and live by the meeting participants themselves. Trust is shown to be a dynamic, constantly changing pattern of rhetorical action: it is invoked by one speaker then dismantled by another, then re-established. Displays of trust also vary from context to context: for instance, in his interaction with both Ade and Damien, Steve deals with matters of inter-relational trust in different ways. What is also clearly seen is how trust works co-relationally with risk as a live concern for speakers: for instance in extract 2, Ade conjures Steve's proposed plan of action as risky invoking its untrustworthiness, displaying tacit knowledge of background facts as a warrant. Steve mediates this state of affairs by simply discarding the issue which he is able to do because he has access to privileged knowledge (epistemic superiority) which Ade does not, and which is superior to Ade's, and which understanding is displayed in Ade's acceptance of Steve's version. Risk is thus managed as a contingency to trust.

It has also been shown how trust works co-relationally with identity – particularly visible in the collaboratively conjured contexts of reputation, competence and authenticity, for instance. In the last extract, for example, Steve is shown to negotiate his understanding of Damien as

either incompetent or obstructive with his sharing of knowledge. It is almost as though he is testing first this theory and then that in order to reach a view of Damien as one or the other, and, of course both options come with a problem which must be managed, and the blame that has been conjured and made live must be attributed somewhere. Moreover, it could be argued that risk can also be shown to be co-relational with identity, as well as trust. In the latter example, Steve can be understood to be carefully working to mediate the risk of a breakdown in trust and attribution left unresolved, which he does skilfully by relocating both attribution and distrust onto the software at the root of their conversation.

On a point of general observation, knowledge displays, as a function of doing trust, are linked to persuasion rhetoric, authenticity, factual accounting and attribution as well as risk. Trustworthiness of self and account are shown to be mutually contingent: it is difficult to have one without the other.

On the question of trust as an influencing factor in KS, it has been shown how in the moment-by-moment turns of discourse, trust erosion is implicated in knowledge sharing problems with consequences for mutual displays of competence and reputation. Breakdowns in trust are speculated to lead to a clouding of issues. It was noted earlier how trust can work relationally with attribution (in this case, blame), linking this to risk: analysis shows that the explicit removal of blame leads to a re-establishment of trust, which in turn re-engages knowledge sharing actions as voluntary. Similar outcomes are shown in the analysis of another meeting (Chapter 13, extract 2) in which two speakers volunteer additional and important accounts when the meeting leader exonerates them from any criticism or blame.

Extract 6 particularly displays speakers' tacit understanding of the importance of trust to the business of sharing knowledge and the goal of solving problems. In working to resolve the trust breach-attribution problem, Steve and the other participating speakers index to their tacit sense of the meeting's purpose, and what will and will not facilitate and mediate its business of knowledge sharing. A further display of tacit knowing can be seen in extract 1 in which speakers invoke both mutual familiarity and the sense of mutual status and rights. Thus, and in effect, the meeting's norms are made live and displayed as collaboratively shared. Some of the subsequent actions, however, are shown to be deviant to these norms in, for instance, Damien's introduction of argumentative alternative claims after a topic closing action has

been initiated, and contrary to the meetings norms in respect of Steve's status as the only speaker with rights to breach these rules (extract 3).

What is missing from the analysis, though, is an explicit example of Schoorman *et al.*'s (2007) model of trust being contingent on perception of another's ability, integrity *and* benevolence. Understood as the human characteristic of being well-meaning or kind, benevolence, as a discursive construct of speakers themselves, does not appear to feature in discourse which is otherwise shown to display concerns with trust, reputation and so forth. It is possible that an alternative analysis might hint at its presence but, alternatively, it might simply be the case that benevolence is not a constructed action here because the action of constructing and displaying trust and trustworthiness in organizational settings is not contingent to perception of another's kindness, for instance.

The next Chapter explores the phenomenon of identity, arguing for the centrality of identity and stance taking to the business of sharing knowledge, and continuing to build on the connections between these and the other thematic categories of knowledge sharing.

## Chapter 9: Negotiating identity in knowledge sharing action

### 9.1 Introduction

In the previous Chapter, and with the focus on trust, identity has been shown to be invoked through reputation, authenticity and claims to superior knowledge, for instance. Similarly to the concept of trust, identity is also the subject of debate and competing definition (Côté, 2005). This can be seen in the diverse topics theorized and studied in relation to identity: for instance, stance-taking (Myers, 2010), positioning (Davies and Harré, 1990), and impression management (Hobbs, 2003). These can be approached as *categories* of identity as constructed in discursive social interaction. As noted in Chapter 4, Davies and Harré's version of positioning theory is useful in offering a basic perspective of identity, and identity work, as the product not the source of linguistic and semiotic practices (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). Throughout this Chapter, these category terms are used as appropriate to the context of the actions of speakers, but are collectively considered to constitute identity.

Drawing on the discussions in Chapters 3 and 4, identity is approached as socially and relationally accomplished, and very much bound to context (Gulich, 2003). Recall Davies and Harré's (1990) notion of people accomplishing positioning through rhetorical practices. This leads to the speculation that knowledge sharing (KS) is accomplished from a subject position in a given context, that such positions influence its direction and outcome, and that most if not all of KS's thematic categories will emerge relationally when the analytic focus is on identity. It has already been shown, for instance, in the previous Chapter, that identity is bound to matters of trust.

This Chapter<sup>6</sup> investigates the relationship between identity and knowledge sharing in two different contexts: an organizational meeting between a client and a contractor, and contributions to an online discussion forum. In the first, analysis uncovers complex identity work in which the anticipated subject positions become almost reversed, and which reversal leads to a break-down in knowledge sharing, and a breach in client-contractor etiquette. In this action, matters of trust, reputation and authenticity come to the fore, shown as worked up

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<sup>6</sup> Elements of this Chapter were subsequently developed into a research paper by the author, and which was published in the Journal of Knowledge Management, 2012, 16, (3) : 448 - 460

relational discursive actions. In the second, analysis shows how, despite the static nature of the environment, knowledge sharing is intrinsically linked to positioning in social interaction. Forum contributors are shown to index particularly to expertise with entitlement to be heard – and trusted. Whilst constituting different contexts, they both concern knowledge transactions. Each of the analyses is concluded with some preliminary reflections, with findings discussed in Chapter 12.

## **9.2 I'm in charge! No! I am! Negotiating positions of authority**

The analysis is preceded by a brief discussion of the event's context, the participants, and expected norms in terms of actions, motivations and roles. The meeting is split into two parts, marked by the arrival of a third participant. In the first part, the investigation focuses on how unexpected positions are shown to be invoked, and the impact on the directions of knowledge sharing. In the second part, the arrival of the third actor is shown to have consequences for positioning actions, knowledge sharing transactions, and in particular, the impact of this actor's introduction of a 'bombshell'.

### **9.2.1 Context, participants and expectations**

The meeting in the client company's (Company B) offices is a pre-arranged appointment. Its purpose is to discuss a brief for the design and installation of a promotional exhibition stand. It initially involves two people: the client representative (*f*) and the contractor (*m*). It is assumed that the contract has already been awarded to the contractor: he makes references to a pre-existing quotation already being accepted. Thus, the meeting is not a sales occasion, but rather a brief-taking exercise. Part way through the meeting, a third person (*m*) joins in, and who is also a client member. This entry considerably changes the meeting's dynamics. Unlike the meeting featured in Chapter 8 and subsequent Chapters, there is little evidence of familiarity between the contractor and the client members and, while the two client members are obviously familiar to one another, this is a different form of familiarity to that seen in the previous Chapter.

Common-sense suggests that all participants have a vested interest in sharing knowledge: the client representative, as the possessor of the client's requirements, and the contractor as the

possessor of knowledge about stand work. The meeting's purpose requires both parties to share knowledge to accomplish mutually shared understanding and sense-making. Thus, both have stake and interest in ensuring that the client's requirements are satisfactorily met, that all (potential) issues are addressed, and a favourable outcome assured. If not, there could be negative repercussions for both parties. Two possible motivation categories can be speculated: first, positive motivation to perform one's job to one's best professional abilities – with all of its associated rights and duties (Davies and Harré, 1990) – and second, failure avoidance. As Brown and Phua (2011) suggest, identity is a key performance issue, and is implicated in project success or failure.

Couched as client-contractor etiquette, the categories of client and contractor invoke a number of taken-for-granted norms: the client is in charge, makes decisions on what is to be done, knows what they want and need, and will disclose this information authentically. The category of contractor invokes notions of compliance, trusted expert allied to reputation, solutions provider. The anticipated actions are that the client will list their requirements, with the contractor suggesting ways in which these may be realised. But, in the first meeting part, the analysis reveals an anomaly to this causing a shift in the normatively expected positions. This has an impact on the anticipated directions for knowledge sharing leading to a breach in client-contractor etiquette which becomes activated in the second meeting part.

### 9.2.2 Meeting Part 1 – problems, complexities and appeals to common sense

The first extract is chosen because it does not comply with the expected pattern of accounting. As the analysis shows, role positions become the subject of delicate interactional negotiation, with the categories of client and contractor becoming blurred, and the expected primary direction of knowledge sharing (client to contractor, setting the agenda for the contractor's response) being all but reversed.

At the meeting's outset, the client (E) and the contractor (M) swap mundane pleasantries before jointly agreeing that, despite a lack of information from the exhibition organizer, they may still proceed with their discussions, with E confirming she has a brief. This ownership occasions an agenda for the meeting with its owner cast in the dominant position. No mention is made of a third participant yet to arrive. Getting down to the business at hand, E informs M of a set of circumstances concerning the stand of which he is unaware: the stand will not just



feature the client but will also include up to three of its partners. She predicts a forthcoming ‘huge meeting’ involving all parties where expectations for the stand – branding, collateral, staffing - are to be discussed and agreed. This future meeting will not involve M. The first extract comes immediately following this disclosure.

Extract 1: 130320\_02

1. E: Uhhmm (.) so (.) ↑if they want branding on the stand as well (.) is that going
2. to be a hu::ge...
3. M: .hhh the only thing I think you need to be aware
4. of is the fact that uhmm [intake of breath] looking at the stand (.) and the
5. size of the one that we did uhmmm which is the same size [*he mutters about*
6. *pulling up an image on his laptop*] is the uhmmm [*mumbles about his laptop*
7. *‘deciding to stop working’*] it’s the ↓size. I mean you’ve got a-a fairly
8. big stand in re- in regards to uhmmm (.) the exhibition itself. [*mutters about*
9. *his laptop having thousands of images*] On the other hand yo-you’ve got to
10. consider that if you’ve got yourselves and three other companies]
11. E: [Yeah]
12. M: [you’re all vying for
13. the same amount it’s the message is gonna get re[ally, really compli[cated.
14. E: [really] [yeah, that’s what I
15. think too as]well
16. M: [Uhhmm you know (.) it..it..yes you want people to contribute towards the
17. actual stand itself but ultimately um]
18. E: [The thing is we want it to be a [Company name] (.) a
19. [Company name] piece of work – it’s more that they’re working with ↑us and all of the (.)
20. products or services that they’re gonna be (.) promoting they do (.) through us anyway so I
21. think we can kind of get away with bit of a]
22. M: [well that-that’s the size stand that you’ve got]

[... Lines 23 – 41 omitted]

42. M: (*coughs*) Yes you ↑can do ummm (.) my advice will be↓
43. [gap] if you .hhh if you .hhh if you have too many screens if you have
44. too many people on the ↓stands if it looks too complicated=
45. E: =↓people won’t come
46. over (.) ok=
47. M: =It’s gonna be i- you’re gonna ge- you’re gonna get a confusing message=
48. E: =Yeah
49. M: ↓A::d what’s gonna happen is is that ahhhh wh- people just
50. aren’t gonna be attracted to it=
51. E: =yeah
52. M: =.hhh you don’t want to have too many people
53. ↓on the stand (.) um as I did when I worked with Thomas before ummm (.) we
54. actually went through and I- I sorry yeah

[...Lines 55 – 59 omitted]

- 60.M: but th::e (.) the problem that you might have is the fact that uh ↓well you probably
- 61.will have if you’ve got that it’s going to be too crowded and people

62.aren't gonna get the message there's gonna be .hhh four different names up  
63.there and it's all gonna get well who is it]  
64.E: [who is this], yeah]  
65.M: [y'know it's going to get really  
66.really confusing=  
67.E: =OK=  
68.M: .hhh I↑think(.) yes you want to get these people to buy into it yes it would  
69.be great if they could (.) help to contribute towards the costs a bit uh but  
70.ultimately (.) ↓I think you need to probably put your foot down a bit and say  
71.look, yeah well we do want your contribution but it is a [Company name] sta]nd  
72.E: [yeah]  
73.M: If you've got loads of screens going on who-who's looking at ]what  
74. E: [at what, yeah.  
75.Can we have ↑one ↓computer screen si-simply because one  
76.of our Directors has said that he wants to be able to-o ummm he's launching  
77.an online product and he wants to be able to have-show people it interactively=  
78.M: =I've  
79.come up with a fe::w layouts initially

### **Invoking positions of authority**

The evolving subject position discourse (Davies and Harré, 1990) is characterised by three features: M's repertoire of bad news, persuasion and trust, and the scripting of professionalism and epistemic primacy (Clifton, 2012b). All of these features work up M's position as authoritative and authentic, with a stake in both his client's and his own reputation, and as guardian of what the client wants, with the latter particularly seen as more orienting to the role of client rather than contractor. These are all features of trust encountered in the previous Chapter. M's accounting reflexively indexes E in the role of amateur in need of strong advice and this, as the analysis shows, is resisted by E. Each of these three features is considered in turn.

#### *Negative repertoire*

The negative repertoire can be seen in M's invoking of 'too many screens' (Line 43), 'too many people' (Line 52), 'four different names' (Line 62) and 'loads of screens' (Line 73) leading to a confused message with visitors not being attracted to the stand. Note the use of quantification rhetoric. As highlighted in the previous Chapter, quantification accounts are not only designed to argue, but make "...a specific version appear independent of the speaker and thus a fact rather than an interested account," (Potter, Wetherell and Chitty, 1991: 336). Thus M indexes common-sense facts which should be obvious (Thompson, 2004), and concern with what might be called clutter-avoidance, serving to conjure his arguments as

difficult to dispute without appearing incapable of seeing the obvious, and fond of mess. This is all indexical and consequent to how E proposes to deal with the involvement of the client's partners in the stand which is clearly constructed by M as a problem in the making.

Across the trajectory of the extract, M escalates the problem from the inference that the stand's size is not appropriate for 'yourselves and three other companies' (Line 10), to a problem which E 'might have', then 'probably will have' (Line 60/61) and which is rounded up as leading to a 'really, really confusing' message (Line 65/66). The repeat of 'really' in these two lines works as an extreme case formulation which scripts his case as cut and dried and not open to negotiation (Edwards and Potter, 1992). ). One can readily see this if one thinks of the conventional alternative to 'really' in such a phrase – 'very, very confusing': the use of 'really' brings the added sense of reality, concreteness and unavoidability, if his advice is not heeded. Interestingly, when used as a standalone utterance, say in response to some account given by another speaker, the term 'really' invokes a charge against the truthfulness of what the other speaker has said (Silverman, 2007). Context is everything.

This negative repertoire works so effectively that it causes E to almost beg for 'one computer screen' (Line 75). This is charged and comes armed with a warrant (Silverman, 2007) – a Director is launching a new product, and needs to be able to demonstrate it (Lines 76/77). The emphasis on 'our' Director works to call attention to the title of the person needing the screen – this is not E wanting a screen, but a Director, who cannot be denied. There are three repairs in this one utterance suggesting that E is treading very carefully (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005). There is a sense here that M has taken his rhetoric too far. He is also explicitly driving the agenda, and setting the direction for knowledge sharing, in opposition to that expected.

### *Persuasion and trust*

Despite scripting what can be seen as a robust, non-contestable argument, M's tone of voice is friendly, concerned and warm. This seems inconsistent with the apparent warning work that M is doing with, for instance, his prediction of dire future events (Lines 42 – 50). Note, however, that the candidate solutions to these problems are contained in the warnings: avoid too many screens, avoid too many people, and the message becomes de-complicated. This display of epistemic primacy (Clifton, 2012b) is served as the warrant for the warning work

being done. Such actions index the accountability of descriptions (Silverman, 2007), and an awareness of the potential for criticism (Antaki, Ardevol, Nunez and Vayreda, 2006). If there is potential for criticism, the mitigating factor is persuasion. Everything about M's discursive actions orient to persuasion, displaying knowledge of these problems based on previous experience. This can be seen more directly in Lines 49 and 50 in which M's utterance is initiated with a marked drop in tone and volume to the level of near whisper. This can be understood in two ways: first, as a sharing of confidence and secondly, as an appeal to common-sense. Sharing confidences invokes trust work while conjuring the self-evident nature of common sense (Thompson, 2004), as un-problematic and obvious to everyone. The cleverness of these types of action lies in their effect of issuing a version of affairs to which every reasonable person would subscribe but which is none-the-less *his* version of affairs. M is thus managing stake with persuasion discourse invoking trust. E's orienting to trust can be seen in Lines 64 and 74, for instance, in her speech mirrors of M's utterances. That is, she displays acceptance of M's claims.

#### *Claims to professionalism and superior knowledge*

M makes claims to knowledge of what E will get, wants, or does not want (e.g., Lines 47, 52, 60). This works to script what she *should* want and need as imperatives, with the reflexive inference that E lacks possession of the *right* aspirations. This, in turn, issues E – and her brief – with a potential credibility problem (Silverman, 2007), bilaterally constructing M as the owner of a more appropriate brief: the positions are thus reversed.

Analysis also shows that his claims to knowledge are warranted through his scripting of care for the client's reputation with his risk-avoidance rhetoric. Such claims, according to Brown and Phua, "...position relevant others as naïve, neophytes, amateur and inexpert," (2011: 86). Arguably, at this point in the conversation, this is precisely the identity to which E orients with her acquiescent minimal utterances (e.g., 'yeah': Lines 51, 72). By contrast E's speech mirrors (Lines 14, 64, 74) do something more than this. This partial echoing – in three places – of M's preceding utterance, and mostly almost simultaneously with M's talk, suggests that E is resisting the 'unknowledgeable' role being formulated into being by M. Working together, the minimal acquiescents and the speech mirrors serve not just as consensus (Abell and Stokoe, 2001), but also corroboration. Thus, E is not just accepting M's claims as trustworthy (as noted earlier), she is invoking a position of experience (Rautajoki, 2012),

which is in contrast to the role construction that M orients to. This reveals the moment-by-moment delicate identity negotiation work.

None-the-less, the progenitor of this risk is the fact that it is E, and not M, who will be present at the crucial forthcoming meeting with partners to discuss the stand. Having conjured these positions of authority and its opposite, what does M do with them? The next part of the analysis demonstrates how this role is crucial to accomplishing the action of creating a script – in effect, conjuring a position which E is to adopt at the future partners’ meeting.

### **Formulating a script for the client**

What is it about this extract which suggests that what M is doing is conjuring a script for what E should say at the future partners’ meeting? Towards the end of the extract, M makes an explicit statement of what E will need to do in respect of the partners (Lines 68 – 71): ‘(you) say, look, well...’, which E receipts with a minimal affirmative. Completing the narrative, M adds further weight of evidence against ‘too many screens’, which again, E’s echo in Line 74 serves to corroborate, with the latter working so effectively that E immediately follows this with an appeal, with its subject (‘computer screen’) uttered almost sub-vocally as if working to hide its presence. It is also the case that E’s turn (Lines 75 – 77) serves as the first indication of a brief being shared: the Director’s specific requirements. The point made here is that the prior actions in the extract are all carefully choreographed to this point, and designed to make public all of the reasons and arguments for why E should adopt a particular stance with the partners, and what she should say. This can be unpacked.

A comparison of Lines 16-17 and 68-71 shows how the latter repeats almost exactly the former, with the earlier utterance interrupted by E and the repeat serving to complete it. As the scene setter for this action, M orients to the necessity of bringing the problem into sharp focus – making it real – with vivid accounting which works to factualise his claims (Lines 12 – 13: Edwards and Potter, 1992). Note, for instance, that the word ‘problem’ is missing from E’s inaugural question (Line 2), although its presence can be heard in M’s responding audible intake of breath. E positively receipts, and partly echoes M’s utterance (Line 14), scripting consensus, and alignment with M’s stance (Schegloff, 1997), and even making an explicit

claim to similar opinions (Lines 14-15: ‘...that’s what I think too aswell’). To all intents, M’s persuasion work has succeeded and trust is invoked – at least, on her part.

M’s continued escalation of the problem (Lines 16 – 17) invoking mental states for E (what she wants), infers that what E thinks ‘aswell’ is insufficient to ward off risk. It formulates E as being untrustworthy. E’s interruption (Lines 18-21), spoken quite rapidly, scripts an attempt to downgrade and reclaim the escalating problem. Turns of talk typically demonstrate the speaker’s sense of the previous turn (Potter, 1998a): E orients to discomfort with M’s problem escalation moves, and also arguably his formulation of what E can and cannot do. In other words, is M over-stating the scale of the problem? E works up a careful stamp of ownership (Lines 18-19: ‘...we want it to be a...’), with the company’s name repeated as the owner of the stand. In this way, she scripts a mitigating circumstance (Abell and Stokoe, 2001) for the potential problem: it can be managed. In thus re-characterising the nature of the problem, E attempts to reclaim the floor. In response, M prefaces his utterance with the particle ‘well’ (Line 22), shown to signal the insufficiency of the previous turn (Wood and Kroger, 2000), conjuring E’s account as an insufficient strategy, and the source of risk, potentially to reputation. Also, in otherwise explicitly avoiding orienting to E’s account (starting in Line 22, he offers a factual description of the stand and its features), he compounds the potential credibility problems (Silverman, 2007) of E’s strategy. Thus, a potential tension is created.

Subsequently, M issues all of the reasons and arguments for why E should adopt a particular stance with the partners, using a number of rhetorical resources. These have the effect of working up the factual *and persuasive* status of his account, reflexively orienting to his claimed position of knowledgeable expert with a concern for reputation: self and account as authentic, and therefore trustworthy, not motivated by self-interest. The description of the stand, for instance, begun in Line 22, serves as a form of empiricist accounting which Edwards and Potter (1992) explain as constructing a constrained neutral record of events. He also uses 3-part listing in two places, shown to be effective in persuasion discourse (Edwards and Potter): (Lines 43 – 44) ‘too many screens’, ‘too many people’, ‘too complicated’, and (Lines 61 – 62) ‘too crowded’, ‘people aren’t going to get the message’, ‘it’s going to be four different names up there’. Additionally, he uses a contrast marker (Lines 42 – 43), with the ‘ummm’ serving to mark the end of concessionary material (what E *can* have), and the direction of his advice in avoiding ‘too many screens’.

However, the most powerful warrant for his claimed position (Line 53) comes with the invoking of past experience with this same client, involving similar problems to those predicted here. M, then, scripts privileged access to knowledge (Willig, 2003) which he does delicately and with attention to avoiding specific allocation of blame. As the only actor able to invoke this previous experience, how can it be disputed? The meaning of this previous experience as being problematical is not made explicit, but rather is worked up in shared meaning through the familiar use of the phrase ‘too many people’. What is also implied is that the client did not heed his advice on this previous occasion.

Now M moves to complete his scripting work, with the earlier contingent status of the problem hardened to predictable fact, and with E displaying fully shared consensus through her echo in Line 64. Note how this works as indirectly reported imaginary speech of future stand visitors: it is not just what she thinks, or what M says, but what *other people* will problematize.

With these moves, the trajectory of the discourse is shown to lead to a repeat of M’s earlier warnings, this time encased in an explicit script for E to use at her partners’ meeting. Again, the anticipated position norms of client and contractor are blurred.

### **Influencing effects of ‘the script’**

From this point on, part 1 of the meeting largely follows expected norms for a meeting of this type, with a far more equivalent, interactional and collaborative sharing of ideas and options. None-the-less, the script worked up by M continues to influence the direction of the discourse. M twice explicitly re-issues the problem, the first reiterating the theme of ‘clear message’, with its opposite leading to people simply walking past the stand. The last few lines of this exchange are included here as they generate an account which is directly contradicted by the third participant when he joins the meeting. The claims invoked in extract 2 are not just contradicted, but are shown to be wholly wrong. As becomes clear when the third participant joins, E has omitted to pass on one vital piece of knowledge.

Extract 2: 130320\_02

141. M: ...or something along those lines (.) underneath so-o (.)people see  
 142. [Company] name]  
 143. E: [ yeah]  
 144. M: [that's what they see [Company name] right across the  
 145. top (.) people are gonna co- gonna ↓ want to see you there and they're  
 146. gonna look at that and think ↓ 'ah there's [Company name] stand=  
 147. E: =we know who they are=  
 148. M: = we know who they are

Note how the company's name is made the dominant subject of this transaction, with the name scripted as the big attraction, and that visitors will 'know who they are'. This idea is co-created by both participants, with both working up what imaginary exhibition visitors will think (Lines 146 – 148) with the client referred to in the third person. Like reported speech, this has the effect of rendering accounts vivid and dramatic (Wood and Kroger, 2000) but here, also done objectively ('they' rather than 'we'). What is co-created here is an imaginary version of future events, scripted as authentic and mutually understood.

By the time that the third participant joins in, M and E have completed discussions on the stand's brief, with the key features and requirements worked up as mutually agreed business. The closing stages of the meeting are signalled by E's summation of the core requirements, and a move to trivia such as the organization of dishes of sweets on the stand. The third participant comes with something of a bombshell.

### 9.2.3 Meeting part 2 – 'Seasoned exhibitionists' and bombshells

Recall that the primary purpose of the meeting is to share knowledge so that knowledge of the client's requirements can be matched by knowledge of exhibition work, with the objective of realizing a successful exhibition presence. So far, E and M have negotiated a set of criteria for the exhibition stand, with the interactional trajectory (Wooffitt, 2007) shown to be heavily influenced by M. It has been shown how M works to effectively reverse the entitlements of the categories client and contractor, such that the knowledge transaction work is driven by him. They have also mutually invoked reputation, trust, authenticity, and epistemic rights as live issues. P now enters the meeting. He is introduced by E as 'P', 'our Services Director' who is 'very heavily involved' in the event, a matter which P confirms. E initiates a review of the discussions thus far. During the course of the next sequential interaction, it is shown how P explicitly scripts his position as highly experienced in stand work, and how this is deployed when he shares knowledge of a novel circumstance which serves both as a bombshell in



regards to discussions in the first part of the meeting, and highlights a breach of client-contractor etiquette.

### **Shifting the position of authority**

The first part of the review is largely a two-part interaction between P and E, with E doing the describing of the solution for screens, and P contributing minimal continuers, comments and suggestions. M becomes more involved in the latter part, when the discussion moves into the slightly contested topic of wireless or hardwiring for laptops: M advises against using wireless technology, while P describes it as being ‘tidier’. The dynamics start to change when P asks M to ‘give an indication of what the whole space will be like’, with the subsequent interactions predominantly involving P and M only. M’s discourse, once again, becomes impregnated with directives towards what ‘you’ve got’, what ‘you’re gonna have’, what ‘you’re gonna want’ and what ‘you can’t have’. Extract 3 displays what happens as M moves through a list of mundane features such as doors, storage space, charging laptops.

#### Extract 3: 130320\_02

554. M: Um-m (.) put your coats, your collateral, ]all that type of st-  
555. P: [all yeah yeah I’ve done a  
556. ↑huge amount of stand work heh heh so ]so totally agree heh heh  
557. E: [He’s a pro by me heh heh]  
558. M: You’re a seasoned eh ]exhibitionist aswell  
559. P: [I am yes I am yes]

This is the first time that P scripts himself as possessing relevant knowledge. He interrupts M’s listing of features with a double receipt (‘yeah, yeah’, Line 555), with its suggestion of ‘OK, I know all this’, then gives tonal and descriptive emphasis to the volume of his experience, using an extreme case formulation, ‘huge’ (Line 556), which works up its authenticity. This explicitly establishes the position of P as knowledgeable such that M does not need to continue with his line of detail, hence the interruption. Note the spontaneous matching laughter by P and E, signalling affiliation, with E working to upgrade (Potter, 1998a) the claimed stance made by P (Line 557), but also note that P continues to talk over E, invoking a sense of her claim being unnecessary. The upshot is that M orients to this change in positioning by reformulating P’s claims with the explicit category title ‘seasoned

exhibitionist' (Line 558), with all of the rights, themes and images – its context - that this normatively evokes (Silverman, 2007).

During meeting part 1, M is shown to work up his rights to direct the discourse trajectory, warranted by his expertise and experience (epistemic primacy: Clifton, 2012b) – his authority. Now he has a rival, in-so-much as he is now not the only one present with such epistemic claims. Also note how M neatly conjures the category (Abell and Stokoe, 2001) of 'seasoned exhibitionist' as being the joint ownership of both himself and P in the scripting of 'aswell', affiliating P's position to his own. P's overtalked response (Line 559) both receipts and scripts category recognition (Perakyla, 2005) with M. Thus, both work interactionally to co-create status for each other to the exclusion of E. The upshot is that for most of the rest of the meeting E is side-lined until P leaves. These discursive actions place P in the position of a dual status: client with a warrant to be heard as a decision-maker, and as experienced exhibitor with rights to all of the inherent entitlements of that category (Edwards and Potter, 1992). What transpires next would not have had the same trajectory and impact if it were not for this dual status.

### **Issuing a bombshell and working to save face**

#### Extract 4: 130320\_02

655. P: [the other the other very po::werful brand that we've got available is the  
656. Acme Jobs  
657. E: (spoken in a whisper) which is part of the ]Job Centre  
658. P: [and I would – no-no-no-no that's  
659. that's effectively our na- (.) that is ↑ours]  
660. E: [So are ↑we-e](carries on talking)  
661. P: [So what↑ I was think  
662. ↓yeah alri what I was thinking was ↓yes we have [Company name]  
663. up but if you were – if you're having something here I would say that o::ur  
664. either the same size as ↓[Company name]  
665. E: [uhum]  
666. P: [Or close to it – it's the Acme Jobs]  
667. E: [Acme jobs, yeah]  
668. P: Because all of the [prospective customers] it's just such a recognisable  
669. Brand]  
670. E: [hmm]  
671. P: [they will gravitate to it ↑more than they will much more than they  
672. will to [Company name]

Just prior to extract 4, P has raised the subject of the client's partner companies, triggering M and E to rehearse their previous discussions on the need to avoid confusing messages, with imaginary visitors once again called upon in indirect reported speech by E. P interrupts M with his utterance in Line 655, dropping the bombshell. There is a fifth brand to be displayed ('Acme Jobs') and moreover, P constructs this brand as having more attractor power than the client's own name. Contrast this with the contents of extract 2. In a subsequent utterance, P goes as far as to work up a contrast between exhibition visitors' reactions: while they will 'register with Acme Jobs' as they 'wander past', their eyes will 'glide over' the company's name. Extract 4 thus highlights a breach in client-contractor etiquette in that E has omitted the Acme Jobs aspect from her earlier (attempted) brief-giving and consequently both she and M have just invested their previous discourse in a false set of stocks. Consequently while E is seen to have not given an authentic brief, M, in spite of his prior knowledge of the client's stands, is now understood to have persuaded E to the potentially false belief that the client's name will be the attractor for visitors. How this is dealt with by P is intriguing.

A first point to note is the absence of any utterance from M during extract 4. E's stage whisper (Line 657) can be assumed to be directed at M, but is immediately and vociferously denied by P, the four-repeat of 'no' scripting denial as an extreme case formulation, as undeniable. Moreover, P's interruption of E in Line 661 renders her about-to-be-asked question as irrelevant which has the effect of working to side-line the rest of her turns in this extract (minimal continuers in Lines 665 and 670; corroborating echo in Line 667) as equally unnecessary to the business of P at this point.

What is interesting about this interaction is the contrast between P's utterances in Lines 661–664, and his conjuring of 'gravity' in Line 671. In the former, P first scripts 'I was think...' and 'I was thinking...': according to Abell and Stokoe (2001), such phrases can serve to signal that what follows may not necessarily be fact, while Wooffitt and Allistone (2008) refer to these as doubt markers orienting to the conditional status of the candidate items. In contrast, Chilton (2004) suggests such phrases work as explicit opinion markers indicating further expansion to come. The expanded opinion slot which follows scripts a contingency ('...if you're... [then] I would say...'). These two resources working together here suggest a delicate avoidance of a face threatening act. According to Brown and Levison's Theory of Politeness, 1987; as cited in Benwell and Stokoe, 2012), speakers attempt to preserve their self and others' esteem or face (see also Myers', 1989, study of scientists use of positive and

negative politeness to mitigate face threatening acts). In other words, P is orienting to, and quietly brushing to one side, the previous discourse acts by M and E which are now shown to have been uninformed. All are off the hook, while P formulates his requirement for the Acme Jobs logo to be the same size (or close to it) of the company's logo as a *suggestion*.

This interpretation of P's delicate orienting to face saving can be seen in the light of his subsequent account in Lines 668 – 671. This account serves as a warrant for the foregoing suggestion: putting the Acme Jobs logo into a prominent position on the stand will be a good thing because it is so recognizable to visitors. Then he concretizes this with his account of how visitors will 'gravitate' to the stand. Here, 'gravitate' serves as scientific discourse with an evaluative inference (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005) calling on scientific, and in the case of gravity, inevitable fact. According to Charlebois (2010), scientific arguments are rhetorically strong because they refer to things that are unchangeable. In Edwards and Potter's (1992) terms, this utterance would be classed as empiricist warranting which, they argue, bolsters accounts as factual. As such, this phraseology is a far more powerful account of future events than calling on indirectly reported *thoughts* of imaginary visitors. Finally, note the use of the future tense modal, 'will' (Line 671), shown to be stronger than a standard (e.g., 'should') modal (Sneijder and te Molder, 2005). P delicately deals with a potential threat to face, both M's and the client's, then formulates a strong warrant for adopting his suggested actions. Further, it is claimed that this strategy works because of his already established credentials as 'seasoned exhibitionist', and that these actions invoke reputation in their mitigation work in respect of both contractor and client.

#### 9.2.4 Preliminary reflections

A few speculative observations can now be made about how positioning actions are shown to influence the course of knowledge sharing, and how identity works relationally with trust, reputation and authenticity in particular. During the first part of the meeting, M drives both the agenda and its direction accomplished through conjuring epistemic primacy and experience, a discourse of persuasion, and invocation of trust, reputation and authenticity. Risk is shown to be invoked by M but, arguably, only as a rhetorical device to bolster his persuasion actions. But in driving the agenda in these directions, the delivery of the brief – the actual requirements of the client – becomes somewhat lost and it transpires that a significant requirement has been omitted. M's stance, and its reflexive construction of E as

an amateur, has influenced how E has shared her knowledge of the brief. However, this interpretation only has substance if E was in fact in possession of the information about 'Acme Jobs' in the first place: this is not made explicit in the discourse. Yet, it is claimed here that during the second meeting part, in orienting to the potential face threatening act and in scripting E's turns as irrelevant (extract 4), P orients to his understanding that she *did* possess this knowledge but failed to impart it. He effectively covers over the issue, thus indexing reputation and concerns with authenticity. An alternative and potentially valid analysis suggests that Elaine may simply have been displaying reluctance – in not mentioning the 'Acme Jobs' logo – to issue knowledge of a fifth logo in response to Mike's persuasive rhetoric against such clutter.

During the course of the second part of the meeting, P and M collaboratively conjure the context and category of 'seasoned exhibitionist' with mutual membership. This has the effect of re-contextualising P's subsequent turns in the sequence. There is an irony here in that P, while claiming the rights and responsibilities of the category of seasoned exhibitionist, is a senior manager of the client firm and it is this same firm which M had earlier implied was responsible for a previous stand's problem of having too many people. There is also the question of why P waited until some way into the meeting before making this explicit claim to knowledge. It is speculated that this is connected to lack of familiarity between contractor and client representatives. It would be interesting to investigate other examples of this sort of rhetorical action.

In issuing the bombshell, P takes full control over the direction of the knowledge sharing: he displays his power to manage the potentially face threatening act consequential to the client-contractor etiquette breach. Then he accounts for the change of plan, initially introduced as a suggestion, as a mandatory requirement. Whilst this may add further risk to the potential for confusing and complicating messages, the particularly strong warrant that P issues for its adoption works to mediate this. In fact, if one follows P's logic, it would not matter how many logos and so forth are on display because visitors' eyes will 'glide over' them in favour of the Acme Jobs one. This is clearly formulated as opinion-sharing, but it is conjured as fact, common-sense, and the product of what is tacitly known to happen at such events. Add to this P's earlier positioning work, and this version of affairs is hard to deny. As Wetherell (2001) remarks, people speak from positions, which come loaded with inference and are consequential to rhetorical accomplishment.

Identity is shown to be relationally bound to matters of trust and risk, with a reprise of context such as authenticity and reputation seen in the previous analysis of trust work.

Building positions of authority, expertise and trust are equally central to the business of sharing knowledge in the context of online discussion forums, and it is to this context that the investigations now turn.

### **9.3 Trust me, I'm an expert: building identities as expert in an online forum**

The analysis again focuses on positioning and identity work, this time making a more technical and granular investigation of how forum contributors, in this instance, position themselves as knowledgeable experts with entitlement to be heard. That is, the question concerns how participants construct positions as expert whose shared knowledge is worth having, orienting to category entitlements (Silverman, 2007). This is conjectured to be a delicate, intricate and even problematic action in the context of discussion forums (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of discourse analysis and Computer Mediated Communications). So, whereas the earlier meeting analysis takes a more holistic, interactionist approach (because it is a live interaction), forum data affords the opportunity to study what might be called the nuts and bolts of positioning and knowledge sharing from the perspective of Discursive Psychology.

#### **9.3.1 Data**

In November 2010, a member of a Linked In Knowledge Managers discussion forum posed some 'basic questions' around KM. Linked In is an online social networking service for professionals, facilitating virtual networks of contacts ('connections') and special interest discussion forums. Over a seven-day period, 14 individuals (*m*) made contributions to the forum, although one contributor was subsequently excluded from this study because of deficiencies in written English. The data was downloaded in its entirety from the forum. No changes of any nature were made to its contents and the researcher also made no contribution to the forum herself. For these reasons, the data can be said to be naturally occurring: "...naturally occurring data can serve as a wonderful basis for theorizing about things we

could never imagine,” (Silverman, 2007: 59). As this is written text, no notation protocols have been used, and text is shown as is. To protect individual identities, all names have been changed to letters of the alphabet, reflecting the order in which they appear in the discussion.

### 9.3.2 The trigger: more than a request for advice

The trigger for the discussion is a set of questions posted by A to start a new discussion.

#### Extract 1:

1. A: I have some basic question in knowledge management. What
2. are the objectives of knowledge management? What is the main
3. role of knowledge manager? How can encourage technician and users to use it?
4. B: Great question, I'm interested in the answer of this also.

Superficially, A scripts himself as simply seeking advice, where the framing of questions as ‘basic’ (Line 1) works to mitigate any potential criticism (Abell and Stokoe, 2001). However, according to Gricean maxims, the first sentence is superfluous to the business of asking questions (Wood and Kroger, 2000): so what is it doing there? A tone of frustration can be heard in Line 1, suggesting that a return to basics is needed in the face of difficulties or complexities and insufficiencies elsewhere: it is not just doing a request for advice. B’s turn orients to this problem, scripting a warrant (Willig, 2003) for the questions (Line 4). This effects a form of collaborative recognition in which, according to Perakyla (2005), two people work together to create a status for each other: thus, A is not the only one who needs a return to basics.

A’s questions create a gift of an opportunity: they serve as an open invitation to KM practitioners / managers to ‘shop-window’ and share their knowledge and expertise. One would expect each participant to engage in the business of displaying their wares – in this case, expertise – with little discussion interaction between them. According to Myers (2010), individual stance-taking has precedence over discussion in online forum contexts. At top level, this is indeed what the forum looks like, with only one overt instance of direct between-participant engagement over several turns. Contrastingly, analysis of the forum shows that the actions and business being performed are – for the most part - complex and highly relational: positions of expertise and knowledge by one contributor are dependent on

orientating to others. Further, it is shown how constructing expertise is linked to competitive rivalry. Two primary actions are revealed: group work, performed in social interaction between contributors, and claims to privileged knowledge (epistemic primacy: Clifton, 2012b), which do not necessarily rely on discursive interaction between contributors. Beginning with the theme of group work, this is shown to constitute a multi-layered rhetorical practice, and which can be grouped into 4 sub-themes: construction, positioning, rivalry and consensus patterns. Each of these is investigated in turn.

### 9.3.3 Constructing in-groups as markers of expert status

According to Rasmussen (2010), members of social groups assume that other members have the same view of the world as they do. The implication of this is that group members have group empathy, a socially shared perspective (Gergen, 1991). Various studies have explored how people use their discourse to construct in-groups and out-groups as an essential strategy for managing position and accomplishing some desired outcome (e.g., Hobbs, 2003; Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004). In their study of the category of older workers, Ainsworth and Hardy suggest that "...discourse constructs identities by defining groups, their interests, their position within society and their relationship to other groups," (240). Thus, the casting of groups and group membership is a performative resource strategically and relationally used to construct and manage position. Extract 2 is the first group construction action in the forum, and has important consequences for what follows.

#### Extract 2:

82. C: Remember a strategy without tactics is like a head without legs.
83. It is the what without the how. The strategy and tactics will be
84. different for each organisation, as each organisation is unique.
85. While we cannot describe the exact route we can advise on the
86. road rules to guide you there.

This is the second contribution from C, in response to A's reformulation of his questions implying that C and D, the first responders to the original questions, had not understood them. In Line 82, C uses an imperative with a call to action, to 'remember', scripting the importance of tactics to strategy through the use of a metaphor, thus accounting (Silverman, 2007) for his previous tactically-loaded turn. Note how the call to remember also serves as a cognitive construct, here directly invoking memories (amongst readers) of precisely what he



is about to argue, thus formulating a consensus. This contrasts with Gulich's (2003) study of doctor-patient consultations noting how metaphorical language is often used to conceptualise knowledge, experience and feelings, particularly where there is a perceived gap between the speaker's and recipient's understanding of a particular state of affairs. Here, C is doing precisely the opposite of what Locke and Edwards (2003) describe as 'working to routinise', in formulating a 'strategy without tactics' as being extraordinary, further compounded by matter-of-factly constructing this as deficient and illogical - the 'what without the how' (Line 83). This can be heard as an admonishment to A, thus scripting A's reformulated questions, and their emphasis on strategic over tactical, as being ridiculous. The admonishment starts the business of constructing an expert elite group (Lines 85/86), to which C scripts his membership.

The reference to advising and road rules, combined with the use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' which can be used to construct consensualism (Thompson, 2004), establishes this group as expert, reflexively scripting A as being in the out-group, as the one needing to be guided. This can be conceptualized as invoking themes of trust, authenticity and even, perhaps, reputation. C accounts for the scope and boundaries of the group (Lines 83 – 85), reflexively accomplishing the second function of positioning himself as a key in-group member, whilst at the same time working to manage the expectations of the out-group. This is reminiscent of Snejder and te Molder's (2005) finding that trustworthiness is bolstered when online contributors say no more than they can be sure of. What this utterance does is fascinating in that, on the one hand, C warrants for the group's inability to offer concrete direction ('...each organization is unique': Line 84), but he none-the-less scripts the potential advice of the group as worth having. There is also a suggestion of this being a closed-elite group which will only go so far in giving advice.

#### 9.3.4 Positioning and group membership

Extract 2 shows how C constructs a group then takes a position or stance within it. Almost all subsequent forum contributions – while not making explicit reference to group membership – formulate relational positions to it which they do using one of two actions. The first of these is a warrant for membership through displays of credentials.

Extract 3:

87. G: I am working in knowledge intensive sectors for more than  
88. 15 year now and I switched on purpose between areas with a

In extract 3, which comes immediately after extract 2, G indexes his membership to the expert group with a display of credentials as a warrant (Silverman, 2007) for membership. The claimed experiential longevity allied with a claim to purposefulness is used explicitly as a passport for group admission. The second method is more subtle, and involves relational stance-taking or positioning.

According to Davies and Harré (1990), people position themselves through their language practices in relational interactions with others. Myers (2010), in his study of stance-taking in public discussion blogs, argues that stance-taking uses opinion as a tool to align or misalign with some other. In this sense, stance-taking is relational and reflexive. There are similarities between Myers' bloggers and the participants in the present forum: both have a need to present themselves as *entitled* to an opinion (Myers), which is both functional and consequential.

In extract 4, E uses a verb of cognition, 'I think' (Line 46), to position himself in relation to C and the elite group. Here, opinion has the function of warranting group membership.

Extract 4:

46. E: I think C accurately "touched on" the second  
47. part of your concerns, "...encouraging technicians/users" - this  
48. requires incentives that satisfy the "what's in it for me" requirement  
49. people have, in order to gain their investment of time/energy/support.

As shown earlier in the meeting analysis, the fragment 'I think' has been shown to work as a doubt marker (Wooffitt and Allistone, 2008), as a condition on what follows (Abell and Stokoe, 2001), and as rooted in social action with an indexing characteristic to 'face' (Wooffitt, 2005). Here, it works to signal and strengthen an expanded opinion turn to come (Chilton, 2004). The use of a container ('touched on', Line 46) reflexively marks what follows as an elaboration on C's earlier contribution, and simultaneously serves to undermine

C, scripting C with the category of credibility problem (Silverman, 2007). The ‘touched on’ nature of C’s earlier contribution can be heard as marking it insufficient, too light, limited in its substance, with the use of parentheses serving to draw attention to this deficiency. So, E’s initial complementary note about the accuracy of C’s contribution is effectively downgraded (Potter and Edwards, 2003). This is compounded by the elaboration work in Lines 48/49, again signalling the insufficiency of C’s earlier contribution. In short, this can be heard as ‘I know more than he does!’ with an associated appeal to authenticity.

What is interesting about this formulation is the work that it achieves in terms of groups and membership. On the one hand, it is shown that E effectively downgrades C’s contribution as insufficient, but on the other, he actively works to warrant membership of the elite in-group of KM experts. Is he constructing a new, rival group? It is suggested that what E is doing here is establishing what will become an in-group pattern in subsequent contributions: rivalry. In this instance, E conjures rivalry through ascribing a note of insufficiency to a previous contribution. Another way to construct the category of rivalry is through disagreement.

### 9.3.5 In-group rivalry

The next extract marks a display of some very complex actions with consequences, serving as an example of the competitive rivalry that marks the in-group.

#### Extract 5:

155. K: You can get people to use the system, by ensuring that they  
156. find knowledge that helps them  
157. (and J, I am going to disagree with you I am afraid. It  
158. should be more about knowledge seeking and re-use than about  
159. knowledge sharing. No point in sharing if nobody is seeking, no  
160. point in sharing if nobody re-uses)  
161. J: I'd agree about the seeking but I've always thought of re-use as  
162. part of sharing.  
163. That said, the number of organisations that collect knowledge  
164. but make no effort to encourage is re-use is legion!!

This extract is one of the few occurrences where participants directly address one another in a form of debate. The first part of K’s claim (Lines 155/156) is clearly addressed to the forum

in general, with the use of the second-person pronoun scripting what ‘you’ can and (by default) cannot do, which works up this version as factual. K formulates his disagreement with J in a container of brackets, invoking the form of an aside (Lines 157 – 160), framing it as being something that he prefers not to do (Line 157), thus scripting the category of politeness. Myers (1989) argues that such politeness devices are used to mitigate against face threatening acts, and that speakers generally attempt to avoid threats to their own face and that of others. Another example of managing potential face threatening acts is shown in the earlier meeting analysis, and in the next Chapter focusing on risk. Here the politeness device works to construct K’s desire to agree with J, but in the event, he cannot. He then formulates a warrant for his disagreement stance with an elaboration of a set of affairs (Lines 158 – 160). In doing this, K constructs a version (Willig, 2003) of KM that is at variance to that constructed earlier by J. In this case, the elaboration turn does not function as an insufficiency note but rather as an alternative formulation presented as practical, pragmatic and beyond doubt: ‘should be....No point....no point’. In particular, the invocation of ‘no point’ (Lines 159/160) conjures J’s contribution as having a potential credibility problem (Silverman, 2007), reflexively casting K himself as having more experience and expertise, with stronger entitlement to in-group membership. That is, positioning self as more trustworthy. Such jockeying for influence (Clifton, 2012b) is a frequent occurrence in the meeting analyses.

As a further point, all of these actions and devices not only script the speakers’ positions, but also, importantly, serve to display their tacit knowledge of the forum’s social norms of politeness and respect for each other’s positions. One can only speculate on what might have happened if one of these contributors had posted a comment *without* the delicate manoeuvres such as those employed by K, for instance (e.g., ‘I am going to disagree with you I am afraid’).

J initially indexes agreement with K, but then conjures a disclaimer framed with an extreme case formulation (Abell and Stokoe, 2001): ‘...but I’ve always thought...’ (Line 161). This works to re-position the stance claimed in the first part of the talk with a contrasting new stance. Potter and Wetherell (1987) speculate that such contrast structures can make speech messages more convincing, invoking trust and authenticity. The invocation of credibility problems comes in Lines 163/164 where J makes a claim to privileged knowledge (Willig, 2003), framed with a disclaimer, ‘That said...’, indexing his first stance in Line 161. J

contrasts the practice of ‘seeking’ (Line 163) with another extreme case formulation, ‘legion!!’, marked with two exclamations to increase the ‘volume’ of his rhetoric. This latter also underlines the validity status (authenticity) of his claims in his personal access to real data which emphasizes the failure of ‘the number of organizations’ to re-use knowledge, in direct contradiction to J’s argument.

### 9.3.6 Consensus patterns

This is a commonplace pattern of accounting in the text (Charlebois, 2010): a participant indexes consensus agreement to the previous turn, then performs an elaboration which serves both as an account for warranting in-group membership and conjures insufficiency of previous contributions. In the understood sense of a discussion forum, this pattern is the nearest the participants get to in terms of achieving a discussion. This consensus pattern is well displayed in extract 6.

#### Extract 6:

192. M: I also want to support K on the topic of incentives - people  
193. should "do" good KM things because it makes sense in the  
194. pursuit of a business objective, not because they are offered a  
195. carrot or beaten with a stick.  
196. As K said, that leads simply to gaming behavior.  
197. The rewards should be mostly intrinsic, rather than extrinsic.

This is the last participant in the forum data. M scripts his support for K (Line 192), then constructs an elaboration which warrants this support (Lines 193 – 195). Alternatively, one could argue that the elaboration component can be heard as scripting K’s earlier contribution as being insufficient in that it requires more elaborate detail from M. M frames further consensus agreement with K in Line 196, accomplishing a confirmatory note. He then rhetorically and reflexively accomplishes two actions again in Line 197: he both scripts an elaboration of what ‘K said’, and performs a warrant for his consensus agreement with K. But, again, one could interpret this as a note of insufficiency inherent in K’s earlier contribution.

By scripting previous turns as less than adequate in the business of explicating KM, contributors position themselves as competitive to others – as knowing more. In this way, participants are shown to employ stance-taking (Myers, 2010) or subject positions (Charlebois, 2010) which are wholly reliant on the invocation of others’ credibility problems (Silverman, 2007) in the endeavour of casting self as trusted expert, and as the possessor of authentic knowledge. It is reasonable to propose that one can only be authoritative and knowledgeable in the company of others: or, as Gergen claims, “(O)ne cannot be authentic alone,” (2009: 41).

The importance of in-group construction linked to competitive rivalry has implications for and synergies with group creative abrasion theory proposed by Leonard and Sensiper (2002). Abrasion theory proposes that innovation relies on groups comprising individuals with different skills, experiences and knowledge creating a melting pot in which innovation can ignite. Through their group work, participants work collaboratively to provide a solution to A’s questions, whilst at the same time working up position credentials as expert with entitlement to be heard as such through the deployment of competitive rivalry devices – creative abrasion in action. Forum participants may not be in the business of generating innovation but in the business of displaying expertise, interactional abrasion is shown as essential.

### *9.3.7 Claims to privileged knowledge*

One of the most commonly displayed repertoires in the forum is the making of claims to privileged knowledge. This is accomplished through various devices: listing, references to information ‘out there’, use of metaphors, display of experience, use of parentheses, alignment with authority / leadership and use of abbreviations for domain specific terminology. Arguably, these devices index more directly to the call to basics in their explicit and presented as straightforward nature. Two of these are explored here.

#### *Listing*

Several contributors do listing which invokes knowledgeableness: extract 7 shows an example. This is the third response to the questions posted by A, and its organization explicitly indexes the questions: Objectives, Role and Reach. The rhetorical pattern created

by this structure of response *attempts* to script D as knowledgeable expert who can offer answers to such questions.

Extract 7:

11. D: Objectives: The main aim of KM is to simplify and improve the
12. process of creating, capturing, sharing, and distributing of knowledge
13. in a company. Implementing KM solutions helps making better
14. informed decisions, fewer errors, less reinventing of wheels,
15. increased innovation, and responsiveness, improved products,
16. services and profitability.

The listing evident in Lines 12, 14, 15 and 16 refers to process as well as outcomes. Rasmussen (2010) shows how listing, performed in this way, provides a warrant to be heard as more knowledgeable than others. That is, invoking claims to epistemic primacy (Clifton, 2012b) with its reflexive accomplishment of trust work. Here, listing functions as a display of practiced knowledge: it is constructive and ordered, serving as a calling card. Listing is also a feature noted in the analysis of the meeting in the first part of this Chapter, and in fact in most of the other analytics Chapters. It is particularly connected to scripting a position of authenticity with detail (vivid accounting) bolstering the authenticity of claims. Additionally, the positive emphasis evoked by D ('...simplify and improve...' and 'better informed...fewer....less.....increased.....improved...') scripts KM as a beneficial practice, something worth doing, reflexively scripting D as an expert worth knowing, with connotations of reputation. What is missing from this text is any suggestion of interaction with others. The scripting intent, then, is clear, but is it as effective at constructing expert identity as the insufficiency-elaboration strategy?

*Metaphors*

Metaphors are complex devices which depend on social discursive interaction for meaning and consequence: rooted in history and culture, they play a crucial role in discourse (Wee, 2005). In extract 8, the use of metaphors arguably works to construct the category of expert through displaying the ability to draw analogies between a KM practice and something completely different, reflexively scripting the speaker as sympathetic to A's difficulties.

Extract 8 is the first actual response to A's questions. It is quite short, and indicative of a response made at speed, perhaps in a bid to be seen as the first to formulate an answer.

Extract 8:

5. C: KM objective is to utilise distributed implicit and explicit knowledge
6. of people. The main role of the K manager is to employ methods to use
7. this knowledge. User adoption builds when benefits are visible and tangible.
8. Yes it is like herding cats or starting a mobile phone network , you
9. start small & build participants who see the benefits of adoption.

The two metaphors (Line 8) contain categories which are particularly inference rich (Abell and Stokoe, 2001). The 'yes' at the start of Line 8 functions as a both a receipt and a disclaimer for the difficulty of doing KM, with the advice given in Line 9 conjuring the mitigating circumstances. It indexes directly to A's frustration tone in invoking the difficulties of doing KM. The first metaphor (Line 8) constructs KM as requiring extreme skill and experience, functioning as an extreme case formulation (Abell and Stokoe). The indicated tone of orality (Montero, Watts and Garcia-Carbonell, 2007) also serves to invoke sympathy with A's difficulties. The second metaphor is interesting in its variance from the first, and its potential to be seen as a constructed source (Wee, 2005). However, in the absence of any further explication by C, the first metaphor works to shine meaning on the second, implying that 'starting a mobile phone network' is as hard as 'herding cats'. The consequence of this construction of KM scripts C as a KM expert, but one who is sympathetic to A's issues, and who has the expertise to provide guidance. Note how this claim to privileged knowledge works interactionally with others (in this case, A) through its orality, unlike the listing in extract 8. It also acknowledges the difficulties of KM which is at variance to the issue-softening effect of discursive devices such as listing.

### 9.3.8 *Preliminary reflections*

The analysis investigates how KM practitioners construct and manage position as expert in a public online forum as an enabler of knowledge sharing. Two principle strategies are revealed, the simpler of which is that of making claims to privileged knowledge – epistemic primacy. This strategy does not depend on interaction with others, and it is not necessarily



relational, arguably limiting in its power to persuade. The more effective strategy involves group work around the four themes of in-group construction, positioning and membership, in-group rivalry and consensus-elaboration. What these strategic themes demonstrate is the fundamental variance in talk-interaction. On the one hand, participants work collaboratively to invoke consensus with others (with only one instance of polite disagreement). But on the other, this is invariably followed by an elaboration turn that effectively casts a question over the completeness and sufficiency of previous turns, while reflexively bill-posting the turn-maker as more knowledgeable. Expertise is shown to be consequential to rivalry, which is consistent with Leonard and Sensiper's (2002) creative abrasion theory.

Similarly to the findings of the meeting analysis shown earlier, the forum actors are shown to tacitly invoke categories of trust and trustworthiness, of authenticity and reputation connected to identity, all of which are shown to be worked up relationally. It can also be speculated that the *context* of the discussion forum as a public arena in which contributors are explicitly unknown to each other, with all of the attendant risks of engaging in discourse concerning what for many can be surmised to be their profession, is an influencing factor in the sequential organization. If Gulich (2003) is followed, identity is inevitably bound to context, and the meaning of a discourse depends on the context of its use (Wetherell, 2001). Combining both of these analyses, both meeting and forum, what is arguably shown is a clear relationship between thematic categories of identity, risk and trust as contexts made live by speakers themselves.

Risk is the subject under investigation in the following Chapter.

## **Chapter 10: Knowledge sharing as a risky business**

### **10.1 The risky business of sharing knowledge**

Knowledge sharing is particularly associated with threat to reputational damage (e.g., Leonard and Sensiper, 2007: see Chapters 1 and 4 for discussions) which formulates knowledge sharing as a risky business. Recall Schoorman, Mayer and Davis' (2007) multi-dimensional model of trust, with trust existing in relationships, and contingent to perception of risk (ability, integrity, benevolence), a connection that was shown to be particularly displayed in the analysis of trust discourse in Chapter 8. Whether or not one subscribes to this model, what can be argued as a common sense approach is that people make routine evaluations of risk every day, but that what they rarely do is pause to explicitly calculate the affordable risk. Risk construction and assessment are, from this perspective, largely accomplished implicitly.

It is also argued that matters of stake, interest, and accountability are concerned with risk (see Chapter 4 for discussion). Central to one view of the organization expressed in organization research is the notion that people are motivated to act by goals, implying that actions are never entirely random which leads Whittle and Mueller (2011) to conclude that people have stake and interest in actions, for which they are accountable. Accountability implies that accounts can be subject to the risk of counter claim, counter version or alternative version from others. Developing this perspective, it is speculated that people are continuously engaged in the routine business of assessing the risk in taking this or that action, with much of this accomplished tacitly. Risk, in the everyday sense of the phenomenon, is a tacitly understood appraisal of the world and its contents and as such is likely to be influential on action.

Thus far, the focus on trust has revealed risk as a co-relational phenomenon, but with the focus on identity, risk is shown to be a background context. The present Chapter moves the focus onto risk itself.

To gain an understanding of how risk is played out in organizational discourse, and the impact on knowledge sharing, this Chapter centres on weekly sales and marketing meetings recorded with both participating organizations. The environment of such meetings, as a knowledge sharing forum, offers a fascinating vehicle for studying accountability. It is speculated, for instance, that in such meetings there are tensions between desires to announce good news, and the need for caution; between the need for truth-telling and desires to avoid issuing bad news. How do participants protect stake, interest and reputation when called on to make reports and predictions of sales activities? What is uncovered is a far more complex, intricate and multi-layered phenomenon than that referred to in the knowledge management literature. The analysis reveals connections between risk and identity, in the invoked contexts of reputation and authenticity, for instance, and also trust in collaborative interaction. Perhaps of particular importance here, the analysis builds on the findings in the previous Chapters specific to the ways in which participants discursively construct and orient to the context of their meeting and which influences action outcomes.

The analysis begins with a discussion of rhetorical organization, finding some intriguing points of variation between the two team meetings. The focus then moves to high-stakes and truth-telling, with their sub-themes of stake, authenticity and challenge. This is followed by an analysis and discussion of two rhetorical constructs – narrative and consensus-corroboration – as particular to the high-stakes context. The theme of narrative is carried over into the final part of the main analysis, featuring an instance of discourse which appears to deviate considerably to those elsewhere in the analysis. To complete the discussions, some preliminary reflections are sketched, with the main implications of the findings for knowledge management included in Chapter 12 along with those from the other analytic Chapters.

## **10.2 Sequential and rhetorical organization: group norms and reputation**

The sequential and rhetorical organization of both meetings is, on face value, identical and bound to tacitly understood group social norms. Both comprise members familiar with one another, with neither exhibiting the kind of roll call seen in Chapter 8. It is emphasised that it is the participants themselves who construct context (Silverman, 2007), which forms the particular topic of the following Chapter. In each meeting, the Chair launches the meeting,

controls the opening and closing of agenda topics, and offers evaluative assessment for each participant report that is made. The Chair controls when and how attendees may make a contribution either by calling to the floor for self-selecting accounts, or by calling on a meeting participant by name. In floor-calling, the Chair is not necessarily opening the floor to any elective: the content of the topic can work as a tacit form of addressing by placing a limit on the potential contributors qualified to contribute (Svennevig, 2012b). A variation of this can be seen in Chapter 11, in which historical accounting is shown to potentially limit contributions to interaction. Thus, a tacitly understood group social norm concerns the Chair's authority over the interactional trajectory of the meeting, but this is shown to be mediated by the collaborative, negotiated nature of the talk. An example of the intricacies of this type of interaction can be seen in extract 1, from Company A, just over ten minutes into the meeting. The Chair is closing one topic, in preparation for another. He has fielded several questions directly to one contributor (John), followed by an open floor invitation which is initially responded to by John, then others, the last of which opens this extract.

Extract 1: 130520\_003 Company A

88. Chair: A::h I-I did ↑wonder about that actually  
 89.           when you were talking about it  
 90.           so I'll- I'll probably talk to you about  
 91.           that one off-line () find out more about  
 92.           that one heh=  
 93. Sam:     =I'll fill you in later- in on  
 94.           that ]one  
 95. Chair:     [O::K↑ then ] OK  
 96. Sam:                                 [same subject – same  
 97.           subject, different client, different  
 98.           technology heh  
 99. Chair: Yes – yeah heh OK. Different world,  
 100.           Sam I think, different ↓world. [Sam :  
 101.           *heh heh*]. Uhhh..uhhh that's cool tha-  
 102.           tha- uh well that was that was it in  
 103.           terms of uh items to go out uh soh-  
 104.           any-any new ones to add in? [*silence*]  
 105.           Sounds like a (.) silent no uh ] uh/  
 106.           John:                                 [There'll  
 107.           be s-sorry Dan the uhhh the [*company*  
 108.           *name*] one that we sent out uhmm  
 109.           [*makes a noise of 'searching'*] about  
 110.           a week ago? Uh they've come back  
 111.           and said they're pretty much tha-they  
 112.           want to go ahead with that (.) I think  
 113.           we need to do another (.) iteration of  
 114.           the proposal if you put that in again for  
 115.           the 31<sup>st</sup> of May ...

116. Chair: OK=  
117. John: =Uhhh we should get confirmation to start  
118. that (.) project by then.  
119. Chair: OK. Thank you very much↑.

In Lines 88/90, the Chair makes arrangements to engage with Sam at an unspecified future date. Topic closing sequences have been shown to contain such follow up plans (Svennevig, 2012b). The Chair, then, can be seen to be signalling a topic transition. However the business is shown to be incomplete in Sam's turn (Lines 93/94), which initiates immediately following the Chair's non-lexical noise. Contrast his reference to future plans ('I will') with the Chair's use of the modal adverb 'probably' (Line 90): the latter conjures epistemic modality – "...the speaker's assessment of probability and predictability," (Sneijder and te Molder, 2005: 678). Further analysis suggests that this probability is interpreted by Sam as not only referring to future arrangements, but also to a question-mark over the value of what Sam has to impart. Sam's turns (Lines 93/94, 96 - 98) can be seen as filling in vague probability on future arrangements, and working to establish the publicly available value of his future account, effectively concretising both as a candidate repair (face-saving) to an unsatisfactorily left state of affairs. In this sense, Sam orients to reputation as a live issue, which is understood to be a context of identity work. The Chair's repeated 'OK' in Line 95 serves to both receipt and confirm (Rautajoki, 2012) Sam's reformulation of future plans and report values, re-invoking topic closure. However Sam disallows topic closure (Lines 96 - 98), displaying his desire for a more explicit response from the Chair.

The reputational face-saving now becomes mutually done with matching humour (Lines 98/99), shown to influence social cohesion and group solidarity (Greatbatch, 2009). The Chair's direct orientation to Sam's contrast structure ('same', 'different', Lines 96/97) scripts ratification (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005), strengthening what Sam has said with the upgrade 'world' (Potter, 1998a). Sam signals consensus with the Chair's reformulation of his contribution with reciprocated humour (Lines 100/101). Potter and Hepburn's case study of an institutional meeting notes how "...laughter and humour can be used to 'soften' troubling or critical actions," (2010: 60): in this instance, it works to smooth the reputational face-saving actions. The interaction is thus shown to be a complex and delicate, collaboratively accomplished management of mutual stake and interest.

With a final evaluation of the preceding exchange as being ‘cool’, invoking a satisfactory conclusion to the topic, the Chair moves into a more explicit topic winding down sequence (Lines 102 - 104). Despite no response to his call for any ‘new ones’, the Chair is still not in a position to bring about topic closure, instead seeking consensus on the matter (Line 105), again underlining the collaboratively negotiated nature of the interaction. His choreographed reluctance to use his authority as Chair to move the meeting on becomes clear with the interruption from John (Lines 106 - 115), suggesting interruptions are consistent to the meeting’s business-as-usual. John none-the-less orients to his breach of the Chair’s attempts to effect closure with an apology (Line 107), which could be seen as both justifying the interruption and heading off rejection (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), but the real stake management work (Silverman, 2007) is done in John’s about-to-be-given report.

The display of searching (Potter, 1998a) in Line 109 emphasises the just recalled nature of the account given, indexing the need for accuracy. The function and consequence of this action is different to that seen in a previous example of this type of action (Steve: extract 1, Chapter 8) where the display of searching was linked to an indecision over what topic to begin the meeting with. Similar actions by different speakers can work with variable effect and outcome. Note how John is careful to hedge his claims with ‘pretty much’, ‘I think’, ‘if you’ and ‘should get’ (Lines 111 - 117): these have exactly the opposite effect to Clifton’s (2012) notion of declarative assertions which work up states of affairs as concrete reality. Thus, whilst he is delivering welcome news in Line 117 in predicting a new contract, the entire claim is made contingent on three of its features: the client, the proposal to be written, and temporal factors, two of which he has no control over. According to Wood and Kroger (2000), hedging is a negative politeness strategy which serves to construct statements as provisional, and which are particularly noticeable in actions of stake management. In this way, John inoculates his stake (Wetherell, 2001), not so much against potential accusation of having a vested interest in his account but more rising from his tacitly displayed understanding that future events may not transpire as he predicts. That is, there is a risk that things might not turn out as he scripts them. The Chair receipts this with a positive token, accepting the contingent nature of the claim, moving to close the topic with rising intonation in Line 119 sounding a note of finality. Further interpretation of this interaction would suggest that, similarly to the earlier collaborative work between the Chair and Sam, here both actors are orienting to and delicately co-managing the potential risk of accepting welcome news at face value.

A second tacitly understood group norm is introduced by the Chair at the outset of both meetings, and this is particularly important in respect of the research focus: risk, high stakes and truth-telling. In the following analysis the influencing role of context starts to unfold.

### **10.3 High stakes and truth telling**

Both meetings are initiated by the Chair with an account of financial position which, it is claimed here, invokes the high-stakes nature of the meeting's business, with its associated risks. With Company A, this is constructed as a collective team position, whereas with Company B, the Chair invokes a between team member competitive component, delaying the collective team financial results until further into the meeting. A further important difference between the two in terms of rhetorical practices can be seen in the team A's patterning of often voluntary, self-selected turns and vivid accounting compared with team B's Chair-led pattern where people are mostly Chair-selected for turns which are, for the most part, limited in their details. These two points are important and are returned to in the final section on preliminary reflections.

It is suggested that foregrounding an account of finances foregrounds the financial health of the firms as contingent on the sales teams' activities. In constructing reports of financial status, the Chairs effectively script participants' reports as accountable with a mandate for truth and accuracy, and which have direct consequence to the organization's economic success. The present analysis shows how participants orient to this context in their reports. As participants formulate accounts, they employ a range of rhetorical practices to construct selves as knowledgeable and accounts as factual, objective and unbiased by personal interest or motivation, as a fundamental layer of management of stake and interest (Sneijder and te Molder, 2005). That is, speakers routinely inoculate descriptions against alternative or counter versions, for instance, or criticism (Abell and Stokoe, 2001). In the previous discussions on trust and identity, the actions of invoking epistemic primacy (Clifton, 2012b) and authenticity are frequently displayed as rhetorical strategies for factualising and concretising accounts. In the present analysis, speakers are shown to accomplish a slightly different set of strategies in their scripting of accounts as authentic, acceptable, and therefore trustworthy in what they, themselves, construct as a high stakes context.

## *Stake and authenticity*

Extract 2 shows how the Chair of Company B orients to stake and authenticity.

### Extract 2: 130319\_003 Company B

8. Chair: Uuum this information is up to last
9.        Thursday.
10.       So in terms of who has done the most
11.       placements so far this year (.) ↑Scotland!
12.       You're comin' in in first ↑place um Bob's
13.       actually made um 13 placements ah so
14.       far this year totalling in excess of
15.       £[*amount*] so I think that actually
16.       deserves a round of applause – whoo
17.       whoo (*applause – cheers – whoops*
18.       *round the table*)... well done Scotland.
19.       Long may that continue um

This extract comes at the start of the meeting. Just prior to this, the Chair has called for 'quick scores' relating to three levels of sales achievement (bronze, silver and gold), conjuring a between team member competitive element. Her account opener (Lines 8/9) accomplishes two key actions: first, her formulation of 'this information', rather than 'the information', can be heard as a possessive scripting of her ownership with authority to deliver, interpret and evaluate the information – which is exactly what she does. This raises issues of stake and interest, and potential credibility problems (Silverman, 2007) associated with bias and subjectivity. Secondly, the 'up to last Thursday' temporal deixis (Benwell and Stokoe, 2012) conjures the sense of latest available and beyond dispute nature of the forthcoming account. This combination implicates a tension.

The headline news is delivered with a repeated extreme case formulation invoking positive assessment (Lines 10 – 15): 'done the most', 'first place'. As Edwards and Potter note, and as shown in the previous Chapters on trust and identity, such formulations can work "...to make a report more effective by drawing on the extremes of relevant dimensions of judgement," (1992: 162). This is combined with an attention to accuracy and veracity with 'Bob's actually made', and the slight pause before referring to numbers of placements made suggesting a



glance at paperwork in hand, scripting the authentic nature of the account. Note also the repeated reference to ‘so far this year’ in Lines 11 and 14: this effects the positive nature of the reported news, and its accuracy. Perhaps most importantly for the ensuing transactions, it works to raise the stakes for other participants with its suggestion of more placements to come, something which others on the team must compete with.

The news evaluation (Lines 15 – 19) does the work of attempting to resolve any unfolding tensions and the Chair’s own potential stake and interest in these affairs. She invokes a demand for consensus with a call for a shared loud news receipt (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005) thereby side-stepping the implications of her stake and interest. The use of ‘actually deserves’ strengthens the call with a warrant of authenticity. On a more tacit level, what may also be heard is an appeal to group corroboration which contrasts with the competitive element introduced at the outset; is the Chair now working to invoke team affiliation and mutual support? The analysis cannot show if this is the case as the Chair continues with her monologue for some time, with no further calls for cheering. Indeed, the first occurrence of a different speaker takes the form of a brief, factualised statement in response to a direct question from the Chair. The analysis cannot therefore reveal how the participants understand this speculated group construction vs. team member rivalry other than through the action of their cheers when demanded.

In this short extract, then, the Chair is shown to accomplish two primary actions: first, she establishes the high-stakes nature of the meeting (with its implication of risk), while foregrounding team member competition and rivalry. At the same time, she orients to authenticity of account – truth telling - as a necessary response to high-stakes and resolves as acceptable the team’s co-shared stake and interest in these proceedings.

### *Authenticity and challenge*

Company A’s Chair accomplishes the same in a comparatively different way, shown in the following extract which also comes from the start of the meeting. Just prior to extract 3, John (assuming temporarily the role of Chair) refers to an email that he has sent to all participants containing the month’s financial data, which he has asked to be checked (by the data’s source). Note how he scripts a version of events in which he is not the source of the financial information, but rather its monitor.

Extract 3: 130520\_003 Company A

8. John: so-umm wh-when we finish the what-ifs  
9. sometime this morning (.) uh that should  
10. put us at about (.) the same situation we  
11. were in last month which was great  
12. what we've done I think is move some  
13. of the [client name] revenue from this  
14. year into next (.) which is ↓probably  
15. prudent. Uhhh so we can um we-we'll get a  
16. truer picture of what's gonna come in  
17. this year (.) I think by the end of today.  
18. Brian: Yeah.  
19. [cough]  
20. John: heh heh that was-that was Brian ↑violently  
21. agreeing (.) with the previous comment  
22. (1) Good stuff ↑uum=  
23. Brian: =It-it might (.) just-jus' as a positive note  
24. uhm what-what I've done I've moved  
25. an amount into next ↓year with the idea  
26. that if I move just a little bit too much  
27. into next year it can only be a good  
28. thing when we claw it back to ( ) the  
29. other way around=  
30. John: =yeah (.) So all good stuff.  
31. ↑So um rather than dwell on the numbers  
32. that are in here um/

There is a considerable amount going on in this extract: the contrast work, for instance, between John's scripting of what 'we' have done (Line 12) with Brian's account of what 'I've done' (Line 24), both referring to the same topic. The first works up an inclusion account which can be heard as constructing consensus (Abell and Stokoe, 2001), shown by Edwards and Potter (1992) to be a factor in establishing the factual nature of affairs. On the other hand, Brian formulates an account of possession, effectively re-attributing ownership for the reported action, perhaps one reason why John moves to dismiss 'the numbers' – and any further claims by Brian – in Line 31.

Keeping the eye on the present line of enquiry, the high stakes work is done by implicating the collective participants in the business of establishing position for this month (Lines 8 – 11) and the year's end (Lines 16/17). The vivid level of detail afforded in John's account, including the reference to moving money, works as fact construction (Edwards and Potter,

1992), and as a warrant for the truth of the given version, which is evaluated as ‘probably prudent’ (Line 15). Here the use of ‘probably’ works to distance John as the agent from the probability of the claim (Myers, 1989) should future events transpire otherwise, thus attending to accountability. Wiggins and Potter (2003) propose that evaluative expressions serve to work up the speaker’s entitlement to express an opinion, and, from this perspective, John can be heard as scripting not just the money move, but himself too, as being ‘probably prudent’. The high stakes nature – and prudence - of the enterprise is further strengthened by John’s account being laden with hedging (Rasmussen, 2010) over the probability of events (‘should put’, ‘about the same’, ‘I think’, ‘probably prudent’) and with a discourse of accuracy and truth with the connotations of authenticity and trustworthiness (Lines 15/16). What happens next is intriguing.

Brian gives a subdued token of agreement (Edwards and Potter, 1992) to John’s initial report (Line 18). John’s reaction is to verbally identify the speaker (obviously dialling in and not visible to all participants). He could have simply ignored Brian’s ‘yeah’ and cough – no one would have been the wiser. But here he reformulates Brian’s token with an extreme case formulation (Abell and Stokoe, 2001): ‘violent agreement’. One of the effects of such formulations is to up the ante and the accuracy of a claim (Edwards and Potter). However, here, it works up irony (contrast this with Hutchby’s, 2011, sceptical rejoinder which serves to dismiss accounts) implicating an invitation bordering on demand for an explanation: Brian’s token turn cannot be ignored, and he is thus held accountable. This conjures John’s awareness of accountability for his previous turn, as well as indexing his concerns with truth – trustworthy knowledge. John arguably interprets Brian’s turn as working up doubt over John’s description of affairs, as a challenge to its authenticity which must be resolved. Understood in this way, John constructs the latter’s turn as a competency challenge (Hutchby). By casting Brian in the role of violently agreeing, raising connotations of Brian’s personal stake and interest in the affairs being reported, John reflexively indexes his own concerns with objectivity, thus working to protect his own stake (Edwards and Potter, 2005). Note also John’s laughter (Line 20) prior to his account of ‘violently agreeing’: unlike the example seen earlier, here laughter orients to a potential problem with Brian’s brief response. Thus, John is scripting a call to account and the next turn would be normatively taken by Brian in response.

John makes a turn transition opportunity available to Brian (Line 22) with a pause after ‘previous report’, which Brian does not take up, in contrast to expectations. John proceeds with a topic closing token (‘Good stuff’) and a brief display of searching (Potter, 1998a) for the next topic item (‘ummm’). An alternative interpretation might suggest that this pause works up a second transition opportunity: the topic has been insufficiently reported due to Brian’s lack of contribution. Thus, John has issued a call to account, making a turn transition opportunity available, which is not taken: John then creates a second opportunity through his delaying tactic, and this time Brian responds which displays Brian’s orientation to this understanding of events. Moreover Brian displays his tacit knowing of the meeting’s concerns with accuracy and knowledge to be trusted with his account of ‘what has been done’ which he scripts as ‘positive’ (Line 22), effecting a contrast to John’s description of ‘probably prudent’. Brian, in other words, displays his orientation to a need to offer a clearer and more positive picture than that reported by John, with his delayed and hesitant utterance conjuring troubles with John’s preceding account – particularly its precision (see Drew, 2003b, for an analysis of precision in discourse).

Although he appears to repeat the account made by John, there is a subtle but significant difference. While John’s version of affairs is hedged with contingencies, Brian’s is assertive, and shown to be accountable by the issuing of a warrant (Silverman, 2007) in the form of a conditional structure (Potter and Wetherell, 1987): “if I move... (then) it can only be...” (Lines 26 – 28). Thus the account is pragmatically occasioned (Edwards and Potter, 1992) and conditional. Brian rescripts the state of affairs, orienting to his knowledge of cause and effect (Chilton, 2004), which is privileged to him and only him but which he has shared in a display of willingness and concerns for accuracy. In so doing, he upgrades the ‘probably prudent’ evaluation to an undoubtedly (‘it can only be a good thing’) prudent one. John effectively issues a concession marker (Wood and Kroger, 2000) in Line 30, conceding to the evidence introduced by his colleague: he upgrades his previous evaluation in Line 22 to ‘So all good stuff’, which also works to pre-signal the forthcoming topic closing sequence, and marking the topic as adequately covered (Lines 31/32).

If this is to be shown as a valid analysis of the data, accounts given by other meeting participants should orient to similar concerns with truth and accuracy, and an understood context of high stakes, through their turns. Edwards and Potter (1992) show how two

discursive strategies, narrative and consensus-corroboration, routinely work to formulate accounts as factual. This is shown in the next extract.

### *Narrative and consensus-corroboration*

Extract 4 comes roughly half-way through the meeting (Company B), after the Chair has delivered a report on the team's joint financial achievements. The Chair is now going round the room calling on individuals to provide accounts of current and future predicted orders.

#### Extract 4: 130319\_003 Company B

238. Ann: S::o th::ey are continuing to come out  
239. for a lot of ↑roles um which is really  
240. good um but they're not (.) being (.)  
241. fantastic at coming back to us with  
242. feedback so I think that's something  
243. em that we obviously need to work  
244. on. I think the only way we're go-we're  
245. gonna work on that is by ge(tt)in' to  
246. know the hiring managers directly  
247. yeh um obviously it's gonna help that  
248. me and Tom are going up there  
249. next Thursday]  
250. Chair: [yup]  
251. Ann: [uum yeh just need to  
252. Keep (.) keep going ↑really=  
253. Chair: =↑Yep=  
254. Ann: = but we are  
255. having some (.) success with them  
256. obviously um ][*hearable sniff*]  
257. Chair: [Indeed! Just need to  
258. have some ↑more!

The first thing to notice is the narrative construction of Ann's account: good news contrasted with its opposite (Line 240), an interpretation of these events, and the formulation of a candidate solution (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005) to the problem of lack of feedback (Lines 244 – 246) through getting to know the hiring managers. The proposed solution is confirmed in her future plans to 'go up there' with her colleague. The Chair's turn in Line 250 is what Wooffitt (2007) calls a 'minimal or non-lexical continuer' which is typically interpreted by speakers as a request for more information. Whereas 'Yep!' (Line 253) is treated as an

informal synonym for ‘yes’, ‘yup’ is not. What is interesting about these non-lexical minimal continuers is not just their signalling for more information, but also their effects on the prior speaker’s next (expansion) turn. Wooffitt’s study robustly shows how these speech tokens typically lead to next turns marked with hesitation and circumspection. This is precisely what can be seen here.

In contrast to the precise narrative work done in her first turn part, Ann now searches for something more to say (‘uum yeh’), finally resorting to what might be described as stating the obvious – the imperative to ‘just keep going’ (Lines 251/252). This combination scripts a doubt marker conjuring the conditional status of the statement (Wooffitt, 2007). Again, the Chair gives a minimal receipt, this time using a lexical term, the upbeat tone of which arguably prompts Ann to produce a further expansion turn with a more positive evaluation: ‘we are having some success’, which is scripted as being tentatively cautious, but obvious, and therefore beyond criticism or doubt. Ann’s work to effect a warrant in the form of a claim to success, combined with her earlier account of difficulties to be overcome in a particular way, is tacitly endorsed as a direction of travel in the Chair’s call for ‘more’ (Lines 257 – 258). It could also be interpreted as an admonishment to Anne that she needs to do more, that enough is not being done. However, in the context of risk, high stakes and truth-telling in general, and the trajectory (‘yup’, ‘yep!’, ‘Indeed!’) of the Chair’s turns in this extract, a more plausible explanation is the Chair orients to endorsement, motivation and that having ‘more’ is not such a big task, with ‘just’ doing the downgrading work (Abell and Stokoe, 2001).

According to Derek Edwards and his colleague (1992), narrative accounting scripts claims as more plausible, and factual. The narrative construction here has the effect of bolstering the authenticity of the claim, thus orienting to the tacit understanding of the need for truth-telling. This reflexively also has the effect of scripting avoidance of over-stated or exaggerated claims, which could run the risk of being shown by subsequent events to have been issued as unwarranted claims. The discursive effect is similar to that in Snejder and te Molder’s study of participants in an online veganism forum which draws attention to the use of modal constructions (e.g., ‘certainly’, ‘in my opinion’) which, they argue, “...allows speakers to display a concern for saying no more than they can be sure of, thus enhancing the

trustworthiness of their accounts,” (2005: 675). There is an interesting contrast to this in extract 6.

Ann’s consensus-corroboration work accomplishes further truth-telling action and particularly orients to the high-stakes nature of the business in effectively sharing the risk amongst colleagues. For instance, in Lines 242 and 243, Ann’s own account of what needs to be done is obvious to ‘we’ – her colleagues. Also, it is not just her that is going to meet the hiring managers – her colleague Tom is also going - which has the effect of calling a witness.

Extract 5 shows how participants in Company A interpret events. This extract comes just before mid-way through the meeting as part of the meeting agenda item of presentations, and follows a fairly extended two-way positively themed conversation between the Chair and John with limited input from anyone else.

Extract 5: 130520\_003 Company A

171. Chair: Ok eh [name]! [name]! Eh Mark that’s  
172. the next one on the list but it doesn’t  
173. got a date so it did-has it happened  
174. ↑yet or↓  
175. Mark: Uh Jim and I were meant to  
176. go there last week and ↓they  
177. postponed and they’re coming back to  
178. me this week with a new date and it’s  
179. at it’s down at [name] in [place name] so  
180. it’s-it’s in [name] itself rather than  
181. [name] which is go]od  
182. Chair: [Mm↑m]  
183. Mark: [ I’ll let you  
184. know the date when it comes through=  
185. Chair: =ok-I’ll  
186. ju- I’ll put it to the bottom of the  
187. table there n’ with a TBD on it []  
188. still keep it in there] ↑ok  
189. Mark: [()]

There is a slightly accusatory note in the Chair’s call to Mark to provide an account: there is no date in his list, and this, combined with his account of being absent the previous week (given earlier in the meeting), leaves him in the position of not knowing, which he constructs

as an unsatisfactory version of affairs. Mark orients to the discrepancy with a hesitant start before delivering his account (Lines 175 – 181). The first part indexes the lack of a date on the Chair's list with a mitigating (Abell and Stokoe, 2001) description of affairs: the date *was* for the previous week, but the client postponed (as opposed to cancelled) with the warrant that they (the client) will be in touch this week with a new date. He emphasises 'this' which upgrades the veracity of the account, effectively erasing his accountability for the lack of meeting and date. The final part of his account (Lines 179 - 181) works to upgrade the news value by issuing new information (change of meeting location) which Mark positively evaluates as 'good'. The action of delivering this evaluation – with its potential to be called into question – displays his expectation that the Chair and others are sufficiently knowledgeable (Svennevig, 2012b) of the implications of the change of venue to concur with his evaluation. He is, in other words, orienting to the knowledge held by other group members.

The account and warrant are receipted by the Chair with a non-lexical minimal utterance. Mark does not actually pause in his account, but continues across the Chair's turn (Line 182). The Chair's utterance in Line 182 can be interpreted in either of two ways: first, it could be understood as a minimal continuer (Wooffitt, 2007), as a call for further clarification or it could be interpreted as a sceptical rejoinder (Hutchby, 2011). In both Mark's continuation of his account, and in the marked rise in tone in the Chair's 'mm↑m' (Hutchby), it is shown to be mutually understood as agreement for further elaboration. Mark's turn, and that of the Chair in Lines 185 to 188 work as contrasting descriptions (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005). Mark orients to his previous avowal of a new date being issued this week, and the currently incomplete list, with a firming up of his belief in his prediction – he will issue the date when it 'comes through' thus working up his version as authentic and trustworthy – and accurate. This is slightly risky in that future events might show him to be wrong about the date: he is exposing himself to future criticism. It also reflexively indexes his role in managing client action, which is a running theme to both meetings. Clients do not just appear: it is the job of the sales and marketing team to find clients and business opportunities and manage these into effect. Mark's account at this point could also be heard as a further apology for the missing date with an affirmation that this will be rectified.

The Chair's turn effectively works as a repair in the sense of orienting to Mark's avowal confirmation, but working to downgrade (Abell and Stokoe, 2001) potential future credibility



problems by receipting the report with ‘ok-I’ll ju’’. He will still keep Mark’s meeting on the list, but placed at the bottom, and marked with a ‘TBD’. Thus it is the Chair who works to remove risk to Mark’s accountability through the construction of a hedge on the probability of future events. Truth, accuracy – and the potential for risk - are consequently shown to be live concerns which are constructed and oriented to interactionally.

#### **10.4 Doing ‘uber authenticity’ through vivid narrative accounting**

Compared with the other extracts and the rest of the meeting discourse in general, extract 6 is hearable as an exaggerated, even glamourized embellishment of events. It also includes an explicit display of subjective bias towards the speaker’s own stake and interest in the serving of extreme case formulations as evaluations (e.g., ‘it was absolutely brilliant’, and ‘I loved it’: Line 200). Moreover, his account of enduring ‘two hours’ of being the target of questions formulated as putative weapons (‘firing questions at me’: Line 206) aimed by PhDs no less has the reflexive effect of scripting the speaker as clever, intelligent, knowledgeable and trustworthy to succeed in exceptional circumstances. Unlike extract 5, no-one takes action to collaboratively manage any prospective threat to his stake and interest. As such this account would represent a breach of the shared understanding of a mandate for truth and accuracy as mitigation against risk: in other words, it looks like a deviant case (Potter, 1998a). Stake and authenticity can be seen as live issues.

There are a number of key features of this account which allow for a different analysis. The extract comes around 19 minutes into the Company A meeting, and a few moments after extract 5. It involves the same actor as the previous extract (Mark), and is initiated by the Chair in a casually framed request for an update on other meetings. What the detailed analysis suggests is that Mark is doing a form of uber authenticity in his vivid narrative accounting (contrast this, for instance, with that contained in extract 4), couched in a delicate management of stake and interest. This can be seen in three features: the issuing of a news headline; doing being ordinary as the preface to an account of extraordinary events; and quantification rhetoric.

Extract 6: 130520\_003 Company A (*‘UM’ = unknown male*)

187. Mark: Yes they both happened [heh heh] the [name of city]  
 188. One (.) was like a- a – a-sor-sor- it was like an interview=  
 189. UM: =oh ah  
 190. ↓yeah]  
 191. Mark: [I turned up e::hh thinkin' I was meetin' one person an'  
 192. I was meeting the Vice uh the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the  
 193. education for the whole of the university=  
 194. UM: =brilliant=  
 195. Mark: = plus six other PhDs]  
 196. Female: [.hhh!]  
 197. Mark: [that were all heads of um [heh]  
 198. heads of various departments (*uttered laughingly*)  
 199. [*general noises in the background*]  
 200. Mark: It was ↑absolutely ↓brilliant I loved it they they were uh they  
 201. were brilliant]  
 202. UM: [m]mm  
 203. Mark: [I I I sat in the middle (.) with a herd of them round  
 204. me]  
 205. John: [heh ]heh  
 206. Mark: [firing questions at me for two hours a herd of PhDs]  
 207. [*general*  
*laughter*]  
 208. Mark: [a herd  
 209. of PhDs I loved it u::h a::nd they want to talk to Line about uh  
 210. a potential business partnership on ↓all their programmes  
 211. ↑their MBA (.) uh turns over 20 million a year (.) their department  
 212. for just one of their small departments which is the business (.)  
 213. department turns over 49 million a year u::mm and they want  
 214. to ↓make quite a lot of their stuff online and so I've  
 215. arranged another meeting for myself and [name of company CEO]  
 216. cos the first (.) the first th- (.) the first (.) step is to talk about  
 217. a business partnership as opposed to what they're actually going  
 218. to be doing. (*He goes straight into an account of another meeting*).

### *Issuing a news headline*

Marks's account is initiated by a question from the Chair concerning whether two other scheduled meetings have taken place. He does not explicitly ask for any further information. In extract 5, Mark's reply to a similarly framed question orients to accountability in so far as the negative response (the meeting did not take place) requires an explanation in the form of a warrant. Here, the answer given is an affirmative but, again, Mark issues a detailed report which on the face of it has not been requested. Thus Mark displays his tacit knowing of the meeting norm of sharing knowledge that is more than simply issuing bare facts. The way that

Mark prefaces his account, and the actions that this accomplishes, is unusual compared to the other extracts.

The account is prefaced by two actions in Lines 187/188: laughter followed by the scripting of a news headline. In their study of interaction in an online discussion forum, Antaki, Ardevol, Nunez and Vayreda (2006) show how prefaces work as routinely used but powerful devices to key the reader (in their study's case) to apply a particular understanding to what follows. Similarly, Smith (1978) shows how an interviewee issues instructions as a preface to her account of her friend's mental illness which works to orient the interviewer to a particular interpretation of events. Here, Mark's formulated preface works in much the same way. According to Greatbatch and Clark (2002), in their study of laughter in the context of gurus, public speaking and audiences, laughter can be used to express solidarity amongst speakers and to accomplish group cohesion, enhance self-esteem, gain approval and to manage embarrassment. But, in this case, it is only Mark who laughs and as such, stands as a signal that what is about to follow is unusual, thus it is doing the work of calling attention.

The news headline, which works up a different interpretation of the preceding laughter, takes the form of an evaluative inference (Hepburn and Wiggins, 2005). That is, the description ('...was like a- a- a sor sor it was like an interview') is loaded. Combined with the laughter, it underlines the out of the ordinary nature of what is to come. The comparison of events to an interview is quite deliberate, which can be seen in the repair and the emphasis given: this is not working as metaphor (although it has the linguistic construction of a metaphor in 'it was like'). As the account unfolds, the category of interview is shown to be a compatible descriptor. What this category does invoke, however, is a sense of confrontation, job and performance appraisals, discomfort. So, the headline suggests that what is about to follow is not just unusual, but also has a potentially negative outcome with the laughter serving *at this moment in time* to manage its potentially embarrassing nature.

This is precisely the interpretation that the unnamed male participant displays in his downbeat token of empathy ('yeah'). The second action which the formulation accomplishes is to establish the start of a narrative – a story – not just a report and as such works to capture the floor for an extended turn without interruption. With the exception of minimal, mostly non-linguistic, tokens Mark is able to unfold his story without pause. The upshot of the

preface formulation, then, is to signal the unusual nature of what follows, but which is described in terms of an everyday common occurrence ('an interview') albeit out of context, and which is served up with mitigating laughter. In this way, whilst signalling a forthcoming unusual account, this is none-the-less issued with a claim to authenticity.

A further point to draw out concerning prefaces is the common practice of re-stating the opening preface at the end of the account and which signals that whatever it is that the preface has promised has in fact been delivered (Antaki *et al*, 2006). This suggests that the absence of such a repeat would leave an unsatisfactory account, perhaps even calling into question its authenticity based on the accusation that 'you have not done what you said you were going to do'. The repeat comes in Lines 206 – 209: the action of being the target of fired questions serves as an interview scene. Noticing this feature draws attention to the construction of the account as a whole: the vivid narrative accounting is accomplished in Lines 187 – 209, and which is punctuated by unobtrusive minimal continuers (Wooffitt, 2007): that is, permits to the speaker to continue. The second part of the account (Lines 209 – 218) does the business of factual accounting. It is quite clearly an account in two halves.

### *Doing being ordinary*

The second feature which suggests that Mark is doing uber authenticity can be seen in Lines 191 – 195. This is an example of doing being ordinary (Line 191: 'I turned up e:hh thinkin' I was meetin' one person...') which is followed by an account of extraordinary events (Lines 192 – 195: '...was meeting ... the Pro-Vice Chancellor... and six other PhDs'). Thus, extraordinary events are framed in the context of an ordinary person going about their ordinary, usual business. According to Wooffitt, such rhetorical displays establish the speaker's normality and social competence, which "...is a central feature of warranting the factual basis of our claims," (2005: 107). What is equally interesting about this particular part of the account is the repair seen in Line 192: Mark starts to say that he met with the Chancellor, but then self-corrects with 'Vice-Chancellor'. In the hierarchy of the higher education establishment, the latter is subordinate to the former. This could be seen as a downgrading of the importance of Mark's encounter. Contrastingly, the repair is seen in the context of the warranting of factual claims: it is doing authenticity in the display of attention to detail and accuracy. As we saw in the previous discussions around trust (Chapter 8), these types of actions routinely have the function and effect of constructing trustworthiness on the

part of the speaker (Clifton, 2012). Note the evaluative token issued in Line 194 ('brilliant') which suggests not just acceptance of the account thus far, but positive evaluation with a permit to continue.

The extraordinariness of the circumstances as they transpired is compounded in the reference to 'plus six other PhDs', with the number tonally emphasised. This is subsequently further upgraded to a 'herd of PhD's' (Lines 203 and 206). Note how Mark uses the category 'PhD' and *then* offers a second category of 'heads of various departments' (Line 198), with the latter delivered with a sprinkling of laughter. The reference to 'PhDs' causes a sharp intake of breath on the part of one hearer, while the second category causes, not matching laughter which one might expect at this point in the account and with a direct indexing to Mark's own laughter tones, but rather general positive murmurs. Why refer to PhDs over department heads (a job category which is more likely to be the routine business of the participants) and why upgrade from 'six' to 'herd'?

It is suggested here that the category of 'PhD' has the effect of, firstly, underlining the unusualness of events in that PhDs may be a common resident at higher education institutions, but 7 (including the Pro-Vice Chancellor) in one place and time is unusual. Secondly, the term 'PhD' comes with strong category inference (Silverman, 2007), which is quite different from that of department head, and the *way* in which this is used has a very important function in terms of the speaker's own identity and self-esteem. That is, PhD invokes studiousness, intelligence and knowledge, academic ability, teacher, and so forth: it invokes the sense of the daunting, and this invocation can be seen in the deliberately audible sharp intake of breath by one of the hearers. Having conjured a very particular category, Mark then effects what can be described as a mirror action: by placing himself in the middle (Line 203) as the target of a firing line of questions (Line 206) by a 'herd of PhDs' for 'two hours', and which trial of endurance has a positive outcome for the speaker, he accomplishes self as clever, intelligent, knowledgeable, trustworthy and able to cope with the unexpected.

Notice how Mark repeats the collective noun 'herd' three times (Lines 203, 206 and 208), with the second two occurrences arguably orienting to the laughter initiated by John in Line 205. By any analysis, Mark appears to be on the brink of getting carried away by his own performance. This brings a serious risk of being seen as exactly the opposite to that which he

has earlier scripted (i.e., clever, intelligence, etc.). Consequently the third repeat (Lines 208/209) can be construed as quite deliberately used to reprise the preface as a signal of the end of the narrative account, with the ensuing ‘u:h’ signalling a change of business. Such linguistic scraps may also be interpreted by hearers as marking a turn transition point (Wooffitt, 2005), a point in someone’s talk which allows for a new speaker to step in. However, in this instance, Mark is quick to follow with a stretched ‘a::nd’: stretched words like this are routinely used to retain the floor (Hutchby, 2011) in arguments. The contrast between the first half of the account and the second part could not be more stark.

### *Quantitative accounting*

Sprinkled throughout the account as a whole, Mark uses quantification rhetoric (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter, Wetherell and Chitty, 1991). He meets with the Pro-Vice Chancellor and ‘6’ other PhDs, leaving the listener to do the arithmetic; he was questioned for two hours, which precision contrasts nicely with ‘a herd’, which invokes a numberless quantity but which is none-the-less substantial; he refers to turnovers of ‘20 million a year’ and ‘49 million a year’. As shown elsewhere, quantification rhetoric constructs accounts as factual, as making “...a specific version appear independent of the speaker and thus a fact rather than an interested account,” (Potter, Wetherell and Chitty: 336). That being the case both parts of the account are therefore themed with factuality framed as beyond the manipulation or influence of the speaker and consequently free of his personal stake and interest.

Coming as it does after the repeat of the narrative preface, and containing two substantive economic numbers, one would expect that this is the part of the account which does the upshot, provides the warrant for the earlier vivid narrative. This is also the only part of the account which contains vague accounting: ‘a potential business partnership’, ‘they want to make quite a lot of their stuff’ and ‘the first step is to talk about a business partnership’ which is contrasted negatively with ‘they’re actually going to be doing’ (underlining added). Notice that the referred to discussion will not address what ‘they’ will be doing, implying that this refers to what the client will be doing. Any sensible interpretation would suggest that discussion of a business partnership in the absence of its purpose (what they will be doing) would run the risk of being a nebulous one. This is clearly reporting a business opportunity for the organization but it is vague and insubstantial. Arguably, Mark himself orients to this turn on events with a triple repeat of ‘the first’ in Line 216, suggesting both unease at

referring to ‘first steps’, and perhaps recognising that the events in which he has engaged thus far, and which he has reported here, represent no steps whatsoever. As if to consign his just delivered account to history, Mark swiftly and smoothly moves on to an account of another meeting with a different client. Note also the complete absence of any interaction from any other member of the team.

Taken as a whole, it is proposed that Mark orients to the lack of substance in the actual report of business opportunity. His vivid narrative accounting, shown to be explicitly theatrical, combined with factual accounting accomplished through for instance quantification rhetoric, works to obscure this lack. It can be conjectured that if asked subsequently about Mark’s account, what hearers would recall would be the ‘herd of PhDs’, not the announcement of a potential business partnership opportunity. One could further speculate that it is the narrative accounting, as a form of collateral information (Edwards and Potter, 1992) which is doing the real uber authenticating work, serving to cloud a report which is otherwise risky in its potential to lead to nothing more than talking. The practice of vivid accounting, and emphasis on accuracy and authenticity, as a strategy for masking difficulties is reported in studies of courtroom discourse (e.g., Locke and Edwards, 2001), and other forms of testimony.

### **10.5 Preliminary reflections**

Both of the meetings analysed here represent classic examples of knowledge sharing meetings with a participant-oriented high-stakes context. It is argued that in orienting to this context, with its implications of risk, the trajectory of the interactional meeting discourse becomes driven by matters of stake and interest. This is evidenced in the emphasis given to displays of truth-telling, accuracy, authenticity and trustworthiness, and concerns with reputation. The hallmarks of the meetings analysed here are consequently similar to those displayed in the previous Chapters’ focus on trust and identity. Building on this, one could then make the case that risk is shown to be a co-relational phenomenon with both, all of which are shown to be co-relational factors in knowledge sharing action. The knowledge sharing theme of context, originally determined as factor based on the KM literature, begins to look like vehicle for, or category to describe all impacting themes because these are the contexts that speakers themselves invoke as live concerns.

Of particular interest here is the effect of the high-stakes context invoked by speakers on their knowledge sharing actions. One of the key questions for the present research concerns how matters of risk and so forth influence knowledge sharing, and with what effect for speakers and the business at hand. Whilst the analysis reveals similar discursive practices in both meetings in displaying high stakes as a live concern, what can also be seen is a significant difference in how this plays out in their respective patterns of accounting. Recall extract 4 in which Ann displays apparent reluctance to provide any further elaboration beyond her initial narrative construction. A reminder of the meetings' purpose sets some further background.

The purpose of the meetings is to share accounts of sales and marketing activities against the backdrop of the drive for organizational financial health and success. Participants have a vested interest in giving positive reports, but orient strongly to the need for report accuracy, authenticity and trustworthiness. Derek Edwards and Jonathan Potter (1992) argue that people routinely work to construct preferred versions of accounts as disinterested – that is, to use objectivity, for instance, to decouple self-interest and accountability, to construct mitigating circumstances as a way of warranting or justifying versions of affairs, or to hedge accounts as contingent on factors which can be scripted as beyond their control. The high stakes nature of the meetings, linked to the taken-for-granted assumption that accounts can be accepted as realistic versions even though the actor is often the only witness present to the version being related, makes the business of managing stake and interest more acute and complex.

It is claimed that the introduction of the category of finances at the outset of both meetings (extracts 2 and 3), with its implicit connotations of organizational health and success, is what accomplishes high stakes as a live concern for speakers. This, it is claimed, in turn sets in motion the meetings' imperative for truth-telling and accuracy. In extract 3 this category is formulated as a group accomplishment – that is, financial reports are given based on how the group has collectively performed. In the other extract, the category of finances is displayed as team member competition and rivalry. With respect to this extract (2), as it only features the Chair as speaker, it was noted that it was not possible to determine how this formulation is oriented to by other speakers: that is, whether they display mutually shared orientation to the competitive component of the financial account, *at that point*. But this can now be unpacked.



While both meetings can be considered to display similar features in their overall organizational structure and meeting goals, a comparison between them reveals a subtle but significant variance. In the Company A meeting, the discourse throughout is shown to be more collaborative with contributors often volunteering and elaborating on accounts as self-selected turns. By contrast, Company B's meeting is characterised by contributions being called for by the Chair, with minimum details reported and few taking up elaboration turns (extract 4 being one of the – albeit limited - exceptions). Also, although not included here, the longest account in Meeting B, and probably the most important in terms of the scope of business opportunity described, comes right at the end of the meeting, with consequences for available time to afford appropriate levels of discussion. To illustrate this point of variance, the following extracts from both meetings serve to display their respective characteristic patterns of accounting:

Extract 7: 130520\_003 Company A

228. John: Tom you went to th::e uh (.) you went to meet the (.) ]lady  
 229. Tom: [yeah]  
 230. John: from [*company name*]  
 231. Tom: [Yeah ( ) the lady from uh the lady from ↑[*name*]'s  
 232. ↓interesting actually cos she works in [*name*] HR(.) so she knows all  
 233. the ↓people they're working with there ↑um they they talking about  
 234. doing some pilots in HR on mobile actually I ↑actually think it was  
 235. more for their u::m (.) it was more sponsored by the unions actually]  
 236. John: [mm?]  
 237. Tom: [quite  
 238. interesting yeah so that kinda ↓be a interesting project and the lady  
 239. from [*name*] that ↓didn't turn up but I'm gonna see uh ↑in fact  
 240. strangely I got call the next day from one of her team=  
 241. John: =yeah=  
 242. Tom: ↓so (.) about the HR learning [*product*]( )  
 243. John: [That's excellent

Extract 8: 130319\_003 Company B

301. Chair: Yes she did. Fa::n↑tastic an' last but by no means least (.) Jane!  
 302. Jane: .hhh  
 303. Chair: What's happenin in your world?  
 304. Jane: Got an awful lot of em CVs (.) outstanding both the ( )  
 305. Chair: [yup!]  
 306. Jane: e::mm but I've  
 307. got one interview for the same BA role that Ben's predicted on so I'm  
 308. not goin' to predict on that e::mm so ↑yep there we go yep ( )  
 309. Chair: ↑OK ↓zero this ↑week. So the scores on the doors [*name*] are

Without going into an in-depth analysis here, the collaborative nature of Company A's meeting discourse is clearly shown in extract 7 in the extended and detailed accounts of activity given by Tom in response to a call to account made by John. Note how John's call is not formulated as a question, but does contain a candidate topic (the meeting). Note also how Tom's accounting is punctuated with tonal work, opinion and assessment. The extract from Company B is occasioned by a call in the form of a question, with no indicative candidate answer other than a reference to the location of activities ('your world'). Jane's is more tonally neutral than Tom's and is carefully factual with the only assessment given to describe 'an awful lot em CVs' (Line 304).

Based on the detailed analysis of the two meetings, and this admittedly high level comparison of extracts 7 and 8, it is proposed that the way that the finances category is introduced to each meeting is the source of the effect that can be seen here. In this sense, what the financial category does is activate existing tacitly known and understood context, mutually shared between members. In the case of Company A, the high risks context is formulated as a context of collaboration, assessment and knowledge elaboration. With Company B, it is formulated as between team member competition which can be seen in how members carefully hedge their accounts in the form of summary or headline accounting. Thus, even though collective financial results for the group as a whole are presented part-way through this meeting, the first part of the discourse invoking between team member competition remains foregrounded as the activated context.

This Chapter has raised what might be considered some contentious issues and findings in relation to risk and related contextual matters. These are returned to in the discussions of all of the findings in Chapter 12 however the following Chapter starts to address these by focusing the analysis on context.

## Chapter 11: On matters of context

### 11.1 The importance of contextual particulars

“Contextual particulars such as setting or behavioural environment are important because they are *perceived, experienced, attended to, understood, and so on,*” (Potter, 1998b: 31: italics in original).

There is one feature of the notion of context that should be re-iterated and clarified from the outset of this Chapter. As shown in the previous discussions around trust, risk and identity, people invoke (script, construct, conjure, occasion and so forth) contexts as live concerns in everyday talk and text in social interaction. From this perspective, while trust, risk and identity can be explicitly expressed in descriptions and accounts for instance, they can also be displayed discursively as implicitly understood and constructed contexts. In the quotation cited above, Potter locates ‘setting or behavioural environment’ *as a subset of* contextual particulars, with those particulars described as the product of perception, experience, attention, understanding, and so forth. That is, participants in any given environment act upon that environment, influenced by their often tacit understanding of contextual particulars. It is, in its simplest sense, a very circular affective action. Contextual particulars are the way in which individuals make sense of the world, and know how to act.

A brief reprise of some of the conceptualisations of context from earlier Chapters provides some useful background to the present analysis and discussions. Context, in the knowledge management field, is variously formulated as comprising the shared meanings and experiences of an organization’s members, and integral to knowledge (Thompson and Walsham 2004); and as bound to knowing (Tsoukas, 2011). Duguid (2005) claims that knowing how makes knowing that actionable which implies that it is a person’s knowledge of background context that mediates knowing how to act. Knowing how, as the tacitly known understanding and interpretation of the environment and its contents, influences action, which is reminiscent of Boisot’s (2002) idea of knowledge sharing being contingent to degrees of resonance between the repertoires of speakers. All of this suggests that shared understanding of context, in particular, is essential to the sharing of knowledge (KS).

From the discourse analysis perspective, context is approached as integral to constructive accounts of identity (Abell and Stokoe, 2001) and stance taking (Myers, 2010). Potter (1998b) proposes that context, like cognition, should be treated as phenomena formulated, worked up, constituted and oriented to by speakers in interaction. One way of interpreting these and similar perspectives is to approach context in discourse as the speaker's interpretation – construction - of the world and its contents which interpretation influences action.

The previous Chapters have investigated organizational discourse with a concern for trust, risk and identity and which are shown to function co-relationally as concerns made live by the speakers themselves. It is also claimed that these thematic constructs particularly influence the directions and scope of knowledge sharing actions. If, as claimed at the beginning of these discussions, these thematic constructs can be understood as contexts or contextual particulars constructed in discourse (see section 4.6.4 for discussions), then it follows that turning the analytic focus onto the question of what *contexts* speakers make live in their discourse in knowledge sharing meetings will bring those same themes to the fore. However analysis should not second-guess findings so the question that the present Chapter addresses is this: what *contexts* are invoked, and how, in organizational meeting discourse, and with what effect on the trajectory of that discourse and knowledge sharing actions in particular?

Several meetings from both of the participating organizations are analysed with findings organized into three principle categories: shared understanding, stance taking and historicity. The analysis reveals some intriguing insights and some surprising findings which lend support to the findings in the previous analytic Chapters.

## **11.2 Data**

Data are drawn from 4 meetings, three from Company A. The fourth, with Company B, is a meeting involving 3 participants (2 *m*, 1 *f*); it is short (under 15 minutes) and concerned with developing proposals in response to a client's brief. Of the Company A meetings, one involves 7 participants in a conference call (not all participants speak so the ratio of *m* to *f* is

unknown), in a regular weekly meeting of the company's project management team. The other two involve the company's senior management team (unknown number) in two consecutive weekly, face-to-face meetings. In all four instances, participants are clearly familiar with one another, and all can be categorised as knowledge sharing activities. Five extracts are included here.

### **11.3 Shared understanding**

In her analysis of the Princess Diana television interview for Panorama, Wetherell (2001) shows how all meaning in discourse is relational. An utterance comes into meaning in the light of others' understanding which makes meaning-making a joint production. Duguid (2005) makes a very similar point in his discussion of the importance of knowing how, as does Boisot (2002) in his discussion of the resonance between speakers' repertoires. A good example of the functional accomplishment of invoked context can be seen in Hobb's (2003) study of a defence lawyer's courtroom talk, showing how she uses an American vernacular to invoke group membership and shared identity with the jury members. It is not *what* the lawyer said, but *how* she said it that conjured shared context, according to Hobbs, which suggests a shared understanding. There is a caveat to add to this: in reality, one can only conjecture a sense of shared context between the lawyer and jury members, as there is no corroborating account from the jury members themselves.

Drawing on two of the meetings, the analysis shows how members use different discursive resources to invoke shared understanding or common context. Two are considered here in detail: the collaborative continuer and gisting and elaboration. The simplest and probably most commonly used resource is the collaborative continuer (Clifton, 2012b), in which one speaker finishes the sentence of another, displaying knowledge of what is on another's mind. Thus, speakers display shared context and collaborative engagement (Drew, 2003b). Extract 1, from Company B, comes some 10 minutes into the meeting. Throughout, A and P (the same P in Chapter 9) have worked up collaborative continuers as a frequently recurring pattern of their talk, and which has limited contributions from the third member.

## *Displaying knowing what's on others' minds*

Extract 1: 130320\_004 Company B (A and P = *m*, C = *f*)

200. A: ... certainly in the central government an' an'  
201. an' the police space and I hope the justice  
202. space whereas (.) it ↑works] it's delivering what they need to ↓do=  
203. P: [hmm]  
204. C:=yep  
205. A: let's let's plan on it] and make sure it ↑works=  
206. C: [O]  
207. P: = [*noise of agreement*]  
208. A: um we're seeing it from the [*Government Agency*], we're seeing it from  
209. the [*Government Department*], [*names*] did it through their (.) managed service  
210. before someone's gonna bite on it an' ↑°we can make it work°  
211. P: Yeah. An' have the experience to ↑do it.  
212. (2)  
213. C: [*name*] wants to meet with you next Wednesday.  
214. (3)  
215. P: Are you paying attention to our meeting (.) [*name*]?  
216. C: I can multitask I'm female.  
217. P: .hhh so no

The imperative to work collaboratively and consensually can be seen in Line 205 with repeat of the inclusion pronoun 'let's' (Abell and Stokoe, 2001) followed by a call to action ('make sure it works'), scripting group responsibility. Both C and P issue affirmative tokens, invoking understanding and agreement (Clifton, 2012: Edwards and Potter, 1992).

An interesting variation of the standard collaborative continuer can be seen in Line 211. P's turn does not explicitly work to complete A's sentence, rather it completes the listing work that A has begun. In Lines 208/209, we see a 3-part list, shown to be an important rhetorical device in doing persuasion (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Chilton, 2004): 'we're seeing it from the [*government agency*]' (1); 'we're seeing it from the [*Government Department*]' (2); '[*names*] did it through their managed service' (3). Then we see another candidate 3-part list started in Line 210: 'someone's gonna bite' (1); 'we can make it work' (2). It is to this which P adds the completer (Line 211: 'An' have the experience,'), in a direct display of knowing where his colleague is going, and with its suggestion of a frequently produced 'mantra'. There is the further suggestion of this being the final element in the 'mantra' with its appeal to reputation. It almost serves as a *topic* completer.

A and P work collaboratively to build a case framed in a context of persuasion, thus displaying being a team (Clifton, 2012b). (As shown in Chapter 8, persuasion is connected to trust.) This raises a question: who is the persuasion aimed at? Clearly not at each other, and clearly not at the third meeting participant (as will be shown momentarily). There is a suggestion of a rehearsal of a case that will be given elsewhere, and this could be seen as a characteristic of proposal talk.

The silence in Line 212 suggests that their business is done. Ford and Stickle (2012) illustrate how, in workplace meetings, transition from one speaker to another is a highly collaborative interaction which is closely monitored and managed. Here, C displays her understanding of the silence (and possibly the ‘mantra’ completer) as topic closure in claiming rights to issue a new topic (Line 213). The following 3-second silence conjures a problem in the making. Drew (2003b) suggests that a one-second delay in responding to a speaker indicates ‘troubles in interaction’.

P’s eventual utterance indexes the previous business as *incomplete*, marking C’s position as outside the shared context work. Perhaps in a bid to avoid being side-lined C invokes a warrant in Line 213 (‘I can multitask I’m female’), with the latter part of the construction reflexively indexing the inability of males to multitask. Thus, C works up her own membership of the group ‘female’ and which has abilities that are beyond that of the group ‘male’ to which the other two members belong. It would be a simple matter to interpret these exchanges as being concerned with gender – it is C who explicitly introduces the category ‘female’. However, in contrast, the analysis here suggests that this is more concerned with group membership, with one group (females who can multitask) being scripted as better than the other (males who cannot), which effectively works up a display of lack of interest – or perhaps not lack of interest, more lack of being impressed, by the work of the shared context group.

P’s turn works up a sceptical rejoinder (Hutchby, 2011), scripting a rejection of C’s claims. So, in this case, while A and P are shown to display team-work and collaborative engagement, with their conjuring of shared understanding of context, C displays her version of understanding of this version of affairs through orienting to a competing group. Shared context, then, can be a contested enterprise raising issues of stake and interest. Note also how

the collaborative continuer and doing being team work by P and A has effectively exiled C from the knowledge sharing actions.

### *Gisting and elaboration*

The second extract comes from Company A's project manager meeting, managed by the Chair (Stuart) with an agenda. The extract comes some ¾ of the way into the meeting (unnecessary elaborative lines are excluded here for brevity). The build-up to this interaction is Stuart's formulation of a problem raised by another team in the business (Team Z) and which is publicly issued to the team with considerable difficulty: project managers are making requests to this team for help in using a software package, which is interfering with their busy schedule. From the outset, Stuart invokes a context of discomfort, unease, difficulty – but who is this targeted at, his meeting members, or Team Z? After much hedging, he finally spells out his request: 'Has anybody been building any apps in [*software package*]'. Dorothy metaphorically raises her hand. Stuart presses her with several questions, trying to get to the bottom of the matter, before, again, resorting to an explicit question (Line 215).

#### Extract 2: 130521\_003 Company A

215. Stuart: .... is that why you've been asking those kinds of questions?  
216. Dorothy: ↑Um well it was trying to get um ( ) ↓and so trying to work out  
217. the process of how you do that and who you go to cos it just seemed  
218. like Team Z are jus- kind of like playing me around back and forth to  
219. each other but (.) now it makes sense who who to go to  
220. Mark: I mean I I can back that up aswell um because (.) from my point of view  
221. I've got to build a new theme not me personally but I I need t::o em build  
222. a new theme into [*software package*]...

... [approx. 10 lines omitted – all Mark]

231. Mark: ...so ↑I had this question ↑previously um a::nd I didn't quite get  
232. the clear answers from Team Z it was like we::ll it's a bit more complicated  
233. and s-so on and so forth...

... [approx. 5 lines omitted – all Mark]

238. Mark: ...but ↑internally we need  
239. to know what the what the ( ) is what is at stake when you say uh we need to  
240. change the particular theme for uh for a client (.) as in my case  
241. Stuart: OK that that's helped a lot actually e::m so yes thank you thank  
242. you Dorothy thank you Mark that's um that's helped me understand where  
243. you're coming from and I can see and I I can ↑answer the ( ) that



244. that pain of being (.) passed from one desk to another and then slightly feeling  
 245. apologetic about going an' knocking on somebody's door and and asking  
 246. the question and them them saying oh no that's not me an' you know I've  
 247. been there too s::o I I I can I can totally see um what you're saying but  
 248. that's great thank you.

Dorothy indexes Stuart's question as constituting an accusatory why-question which is loaded (Rautajoki, 2012): this can be seen in her serving of a warrant for her actions with mitigating circumstances (Abell and Stokoe, 2011) in which the difficulty is underlined with the repeated 'trying to'. In this way she displays her knowledge of her stake being at risk of potentially negative consequences which renders it accountable (Silverman, 2007) and at risk of blame. What this is all concerned with is where blame should be attributed. Difficulties are further worked up in Lines 217 – 219 in attributing Team Z as '...kind of like playing me around...', conjuring Team Z as time-wasting.

Note that while Dorothy concludes her account on a positive note, in now knowing who to go to, it is her *prior* difficulties that Mark indexes with his affiliating (Clifton, 2014) evidence ('I mean I can back that up aswell': Line 220). He launches an elaborate description of his experiences with Team Z, working up stance as eye-witness (Hutchby, 2001). According to Hutchby, eye-witness accounts script authenticity of experience with entitlement to formulate opinion as a legitimate raconteur. The upshot is given in Lines 231 – 233: he was also not given clear answers. The two eye-witness accounts are thus heard as working up consensus and corroboration, mutually attesting to the factuality of versions (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Both Mark and Dorothy, in working to inoculate their stake against criticism, display a shared understanding of the context of a loaded question and its connotations of blame.

Mark concludes his lengthy account with a warrant for his actions, reflexively constructing Team Z as unforthcoming with knowledge (Lines 238 – 140). A shared context of dissatisfaction with between team support is thus invoked, with procedural consequentiality (Potter, 1998b). That is, the invoked contextual particulars, to use Potter's terms, have effects on the progress, structure, and direction of subsequent talk.

Stuart both receipts and scripts evaluation ('...helped a lot': Line 241) working up exoneration from any wrong-doing: his relief can be clearly heard. It can also be speculated

that what he is displaying here is the source of his earlier discomfort: that is, his being placed in the position of potentially having to attribute blame to his team members as a consequence of the actions of another team. He follows this with a gist account summing up the talk so far, and fixing its meaning (Clifton, 2014; 2006). He prefaces the gist account with affiliation ('...helped me understand...': Line 242) with the previous speakers (Clifton, 2014) as a form of consensus with a warrant for truth (Edwards and Potter, 1992). This has the effect of issuing instructions concerning how his subsequent gist account is to be understood: as an authentic and incontestable account of affairs.

The gisting work in Lines 244 – 247 upgrades the prior reports (Rasmussen, 2010) in scripting experiences as 'painful'. He expands the context of dissatisfaction, introducing the emotional response of being 'slightly apologetic' (Lines 244/245). The final warrant is his invocation of himself as a witness ('...I've been there too': Lines 246/247) with first-hand knowledge, and consequently as the possessor of authentic experience. This is delivered in stark contrast to his earlier difficulties and hesitation in first raising the topic. Consequently, Stuart is doing more than summing up prior talk, he is adding to its authenticity with his own first-hand knowledge, and thus its truth is made impeccable. As shown in Chapter 8, matters of authenticity and truth are bound to trust.

In the follow-on talk, both Dorothy and Mark volunteer turns in which they spin *positive accounts* of Team Z, indexing a sense of fair balance. It is suggested that this volunteered additional information, which turns out to be important to the team, is released by Stuart's actions in blame absolution. In Chapter 8, there is an almost identical set of affairs (extract 6) in which the meeting leader's removal of blame from another speaker results in the latter becoming more willing to share knowledge than in previous extracts from the Company B meeting. What has also been displayed is strong between team rivalry combined with equally strong intra-team loyalty – within the same business – with potential consequences for knowledge sharing.

In these extracts, working up shared understanding of context has resulted in important knowledge being shared, with participants shown to work collaboratively to accomplish consensus. In these actions, arguably, trust, risk and identity are implicit as shared contextual particulars. In the following discussion, participants are shown to engage in a very different kind of contextual talk.

## **11.4 Stance-taking**

In Chapter 9, stance-taking was shown to be closely bound to matters of identity, stake and interest. In the following extracts, matters of stake and interest are brought to the fore in a constructed context of competing claims. What emerges is a complex web of connected psychological phenomena at work conjuring a live context of attribution and blame, and a discourse of ‘them and us’ as a form of identity work. The analysis further connects these themes to frustration and disagreement, reputation and risk.

### *Invoking the context of courtroom*

Extract 3 comes from the first of the two senior management meetings (Company A). John (the same as in Chapter 10) has just arrived late to the meeting (around 30 minutes into a 90 minute meeting). The extract is drawn from an extended argument between John and Roger (also note that the ‘Jim’ referred to is the Chair from extract 1, Chapter 10.) Just prior to this, Roger has raised an issue, which he intends to talk to John about ‘probably outside of this meeting’, as it is ‘very specific’. John reformulates this, activating it as a valid topic for meeting discussion: ‘Is it specific to the people that you see?’ Does he want an audience, or does he want witnesses? He knows what is coming.

### Extract 3: VN550143 Company A

1. Roger: ... ↑OK well in summary without me me trying to keep very calm
2. at this point .hhh we had that [*name*] job that was sold yest]erday
3. John: [mmm]
4. Roger: which was great you know [*contract value*] new project new client in
5. [*name*] .hhh the ummm I’ll try not to exaggerate but the proposal went out
6. the presentation was done without anybody seeing the budget (.) schedule (.)
7. design (.) technology
8. John: OK is that entirely true?
9. (1)
10. John: Is that entirely ↓true=
11. Roger: =Well ]nobody saw the budget
12. John: [ ( )]yeah
13. Roger: Nobody saw the [*reading*] technical solution (.) certainly nobody
14. saw the schedule
15. (1)

16. Roger: unless you know /you think otherwise] ( )
17. John: [No I I I'd just seen a couple of
18. emails passed between Tom and Jim where ah
19. (1)
20. John: Jim outlined how he'd got to the point where he'd got he did say he'd
21. not passed the budget through up here but he said that he'd worked
22. through the budget with [*name – said slowly as if reading the name*]
23. Roger: Well it was using a (.) spreadsheet that was is isn't (.) umm released
24. I understand the [*project type*] one was done two months ago (.) but=
25. John: =OK we'll talk about this specifically ( ) we all know there is a big issue
26. where [*project type*] is concerned and I think Jim went through what he
27. thought was ( )]
28. Roger: [Be↑cause we all know there was a big issue where [*project type*]
29. was concerned the dangers of saying we can do something for [*contract value*]
30. (.) in two months making assumptions like that are ( )=

The dispute centres on a project proposal/presentation given to a new client by a member of John's team (Jim), and which the client has accepted. The sequential unfolding is patterned by claim and counter-claim, with reputation as a contextual undercurrent to matters of stake and interest (Edwards and Potter, 2005). The key claim made by Roger is that nobody saw any part of the proposal/presentation (Lines 5 – 7) before being given to the client. This is forcibly repeated in Lines 11 and 13, working up an extreme case formulation ('nobody'), routinely used in argumentative discourse (Hutchby, 2011). The upshot is that Jim's actions are formulated as wrong and contrary to the organization's interests, with implications of risk to reputation. John's counter-claim is that Jim *did* show the budget to someone, thus rendering Roger's claim to be false. The extract can be heard as conjuring a context of courtroom drama where members adopt stances of prosecutor (Roger) and defence (John). Both speakers orient to the truth of what really happened (Edwards and Potter, 1992) but, unlike courtroom cross-examination, their concerns are less with memory of events, and more with the truth of where the blame lies. The stakes are high with Roger making explicit reference to 'dangers' (Line 29).

Roger prefaces his account of the problem by scripting its seriousness: he is trying to 'keep very calm' (Line 1), indexing possession of rights to the opposite – explosion and panic - and to avoid exaggeration (Line 5) thus composing matters as alarming enough without being embellished. Sandwiched in the middle he sets out a context ('that job that was sold': Line 3) which he positively evaluates ('great', 'new project new client': Line 4). So, he invokes an

emotional cognitive state, followed by an objective evaluation which can serve to compliment or do persuasion (Wiggins and Potter, 2003), then he upgrades the ante (Schegloff, 1997) in invoking rights to be alarmed. These actions frame his claim as loaded. This is high drama invoking the context of attribution and blame, with consequences for reputation. Thus, an explanation is made conditional (Clifton, 2012b), with the suggestion that Roger himself may be called to answer the case to others further up the hierarchical ladder.

John's repeat turns (Lines 8 and 10) index Roger's prior turn as attributing blame, which makes them the subject of defence. This initiates the business of claim and counter-claim, invoking courtroom rhetoric. He explicitly calls for an account of truth working up an epistemic doubt marker (Wooffitt and Allistone, 2008) calling trust and authenticity into question, and reflexively indexing to possession of mitigating facts. His questioning of what is 'entirely true' scripts matters as needing to be *entirely* true, or not true at all. Thus Roger's subsequent turn is also made conditionally relevant (Clifton, 2012b), prompting him to repeat his claim. Similarly to Lines 5 - 7, Roger does listing – this time a clear 3-part list – invoking the factuality of his claim (Lines 11 – 14). In their analysis, Edwards and Potter (1992) show how three-part listing is rhetorically important in environments such as courtrooms. This can also be seen as an unmitigated display of rights to knowledge – these are the facts and they are out there for anyone to see (Clifton), working up their status as undeniably authentic and trustworthy. Thus, Roger invokes epistemic primacy (Clifton), indexing John's concern with the entire truth. Truth and blame are thus made live within the context of courtroom.

So far, both speakers have displayed knowledge of the facts as the warrant for the directions of blame attribution and as evidence of what actually happened. The attempt to resolve a dispute through an appeal to facts is precisely what Wooffitt (2005) advises cannot work because it is the facts themselves which are in question. Roger appears to orient to this understanding of the context as it is developing.

The pause between Roger's repeated claim and his take up of a next turn suggests that he expects a response from John at this point, which by his actions he declines to give. In his subsequent turn, Roger's repair from what John 'knows' to what he 'thinks' (Line 16) opens the possibilities not just to what John knows but also to what he *thinks* he knows, casting doubt over John's possession of objective facts: thus John is scripted as having personal stake

and interest in these accounts (Edwards and Potter, 1992). So, whilst his previous turns served the accusation, here, Roger issues a call for witness account but which is already painted as subjective.

John interrupts his colleague to construct his version of events. The pause in Line 19 suggests reading from papers he has to hand (perhaps the emails referred to in Line 18) implying that his evidence is drawn, not from memory, but rather from written material which scripts concerns with authenticity and objective factual accounting. This is further implied in how John states the name of the person - who has 'worked through the budget' with Jim - slowly and carefully as if reading from documented evidence. So, whilst John makes a concession that Jim did not pass the budget 'through up here' (presumably meaning head office), the 'but' marks the end of the concessionary material signalling that what follows is in opposition to this (Wood and Kroger, 2000): Jim did show it to *someone* rendering Roger's claim that 'nobody' saw the budget as false. This is the kind of logical accounting that one would expect in a courtroom (see, for instance, Locke and Edwards' (2003) discursive study of (then) President Clinton's Grand Jury testimony). Both orient to evidence and witnesses.

In formulating his defence, John ignores reference to the other elements of the proposal – the 'schedule, design, technology' – not having been seen by anybody. He has moved the argument's focus solely onto the topic of 'budget'. This is an effective rhetorical strategy: in limiting the scope of the argument, it is more easily pulled apart. In response to Roger's factual accounting of accusation, John adopts a stance which manages stake and interest by doing objective accounting, building an alternative version of accounts which works simultaneously to undermine Roger's (Edwards and Potter, 2005).

Roger orients to his accusatory claim having been undermined by introducing new evidence – 'spreadsheet' (Line 23) – prefaced by 'well': Wood and Kroger (2000) suggest that this conversation particle scripts previous accounts as insufficient, while Edwards and Potter (1992) suggest that it signals a dis-preferred response on the way. With his initial claim undermined, it is proposed that here this particle scripts what comes next as weak argument, with the slight pause and 'umm' (Line 23) conjuring a metaphorical scrapping of barrels. Like any effective defence lawyer, John pounces on this weakness: 'OK we'll talk about this specifically...' (Line 25), displaying the same argument-minimising tactic used earlier. He then invokes witnesses ('we all know'):"...a major way of warranting the factuality of a

version is to depict it as agreed across witnesses...” (Edwards and Potter: 163). Thus John works up consensus and corroboration. The interruptive response by Roger transforms this witness call into a warrant for concerns with ‘dangers’ (Lines 28/29). The to and fro of argumentative rhetoric continues for several more minutes, with other members joining in, and increasingly detailed displays of what actually happened and mitigation. The upshot comes in extract 4.

### *Doing ‘them and us’*

#### Extract 4: VN550143 Company A

150. John: I’ll tell you what is inflaming=  
151. Roger: =yeah=  
152. John: =and this has come from Tom this morning (.) how ↑utterly  
153. pissed off he is (.) that (.) no-one nobody in this organization is  
154. remotely happy (.) that we’ve won a new piece of ↑work=  
155. Roger: =↓We’re very very hap]py  
156. John: [well they need to communicate that  
157. a little bit=  
158. Roger: =Well we will sit y’know this is gre↓at and then I’ve got two  
159. days to find a whole team pull everyone off everything else to  
160. to do it! Of course I think it’s brilliant but I said similarly (.) John  
161. (.)  
162. Roger: Where did the budget come from he’s the one who had  
163. to (.) be under 50 so (.) it’s 48

In this extract, coming towards the end of the argument, John effectively reverses the earlier prosecutor-defence stances, by issuing a claim to epistemic primacy (Clifton, 2012b: Line 150) which prefaces a new accusatory claim, effectively reversing the direction of attribution. This claim is even more ‘inflaming’ than the previously conjured risks and dangers for the business. His secondary preface conjures a witness report - Tom’s phone call this morning – as reported speech, shown to work up the factuality and authenticity of versions (Wood and Kroger, 2000), and is a classic stake management / inoculation tactic (Edwards and Potter, 2005: 249). Thus John is able to use inflammatory language (‘utterly pissed off’: Lines 152/153) without fear of criticism: he is simply reporting another’s words. The accusation, that nobody is happy ‘that we’ve won a new piece of work’ (Line 154), sets in motion a new context of them and us. Winning contracts is precisely what John and his team are employed to do. Thus ‘this organization’ is scripted as irrational and flawed in not welcoming success. It is further speculated that John has pressed for the client/proposal meeting topic precisely in

order to raise this ‘inflaming’ state of affairs. It also raises the question of why the firm should be troubled with newly won contracts, which reappears in extract 5.

The context of them and us emerges interactionally across Lines 154 – 160. Indexing to John’s reflexive scripting of organizational unhappiness, with implications of irrationality, Roger formulates the opposite (‘we’re very very happy’), marking this as extreme. Clifton (2006) notes that extreme case formulations can leave a speaker open to disagreement in that all that is required is one exception to the case. Arguably, this is what John indexes with his overlapping interruption of preferred organizational action: ‘what *they* need to communicate’: Line 156). In referring to ‘they’, John makes explicit his stance apart from the organization. On one side of the line, he and his team, successful at winning contracts, reputation intact; on the other, the organization, irrational, which cannot communicate, and is thus conjured as having the problem.

Roger orients to this serious turn of context with what can be heard as a conciliatory message (‘well we will sit..’: Line 158). This is quickly discarded, replaced with the formulation ‘y’know’. Elsewhere, this is shown to work up collaborative consensus, but here it works with ‘gre↓at’ (Line 158) to script a sceptical rejoinder (Hutchby, 2011). The subsequent spelled out consequence of winning the new contract is invoked as extreme (‘whole team... everyone off everything else’: Line 159) and loaded with irony (‘Of course I think it’s brilliant’: Line 160). Because of the actions of John’s team, extreme measures will need to be taken by others, with his own earlier avowal of organizational happiness rendered as ironic. The organization cannot be both happy and having to take extreme measures. The teams *he* refers to will be extremely disrupted because of the actions of John’s team: ‘them and us’ is consequently made mutual.

While it is argued that both speakers arrive at a point of mutually shared context of ‘unhappiness’ and ‘organizational schism’, they clearly do so from conflicting perspectives – thus this context is contested. Frustration is brought to the fore through disagreement. Having made this point, Roger returns the rhetorical trajectory back to the matter at hand (the troubling budget, Lines 162/163), enacting authority (Clifton, 2006). Thus Roger is displaying his possession of the agenda and scripting himself as not yet being satisfied with the answers he has been given.



What has started out as an issue over a proposal/presentation with concerns for truth and blame has transformed into conflicting contexts of organization, and a clear demarcation between them and us: recall Hobb's (2003) study of courtroom rhetoric with a focus on conjuring opposing groups – them and us. Two further points: (1) no-one questions the consequential link between proposals/presentations unseen by others and risks/dangers to the organization, and (2) no-one questions or requests clarification on the nature of those risks. It can therefore be construed that such knowledge is already tacitly understood and known by meeting members.

In the final extract, further and related debate unfolds, but in a very different way.

### **11.5 Doing historicity**

Extract 5 is drawn from the following week's senior management team meeting. As background, the previous week's meeting makes an explicit reference to a 'big message' concerning resources and capacity which needs to be conveyed to the organization's Board of Directors.

#### Extract 5: VN550144 Company A

1. Roger: The I ↑think I don't know this but I think there are several reasons
2. ↓wh:y we might slow something down (.) historically one would be the
3. technology isn't quite ready (.) something like [*client name*] we weren't
4. we-we slowed that down because we wanted to use [*software package*] and
5. it wasn't ready and so on and so on (.) make decisions
6. John: [*sniff*]Could have used something else
7. (.)
8. Roger: Could've.
9. (1)
10. Alan: I don't know that that's the ↑actual reason why we °slowed that down°
11. (1)
12. Roger: We held off for a while yeah uh I dunno ummm another one
13. might be that .hhh we are trying to use our (.) our own resources and not
14. get new people in so push out (.) tha- earlier in the year °definitely
15. don't know°

... [16 lines excluded]

33. Alan: ... So (.) It begins with (.) PMs=

34. Ted: =mm]mm
35. Alan: [being fast to react=
36. Roger: =yeah=
37. Alan: =and then us having the (.) necessary people in but ↑if we DO that
38. the benefit t::o our ↑numbers is the ↑revenue comes in faster=
39. Roger: =mm]m
40. Vicky: [It's that is all theoretically I kno::w I can remember when you first tried
41. to ramp up the freelancers and looked at it=
42. Ted: =mmmm=
43. Vicky: = that four clients were delayed=
44. Ted: =Yup=
45. Vicky: =so we ↑can't control that....

The issue under discussion is why start-up on new contracts is sometimes 'slowed down'. The organization employs a full-time staff of developers/designers, supplemented by hiring freelancers (people hired on short-term contracts). The primary shared context invoked here is history, with recollection of what has happened in the past in the search for reasons. But, arguably, there is a further tacitly understood context made live by the speakers, and which relates to frustration-disagreement, and power. The hint of these can be seen in the first three rhetorical transactions.

Across Lines 1 – 5, Roger speculates a reason for the deliberate actions of slowing 'something' down invoking historically located knowledge of technology not 'quite ready'. The invocation of historical events has the effect of potentially limiting speakers to those who have direct knowledge of the events: it thus works as a tacit form of addressing (Svennevig, 2012b). There are two features about his utterance which are relevant: first, he works to mitigate against criticism or disagreement with stake inoculation (Edwards and Potter, 1992) work ('I think', 'I don't know'), orienting to the potentially contentious or problematic nature of his speculation, but then uses invocation of historical fact ('something like [*client name*] we weren't we slowed...': Lines 3/4) as a warrant for his stance. Secondly, he neatly attributes blame for 'slowing down' to the technology which reflexively deflects blame from the team. Note also the scripting of 'and so on and so on' (Line 5) which attempts to establish shared knowledge (Potter, 1998b), with its assumption that recipients will fill in the blanks, marking his account as authentic. His disconnected reference to 'make decisions' is curious: he does not use the past tense, inferring that the decisions which affected the client's project (Line 3) are still being made.

John indexes these decisions (Line 6), effectively reformulating (Chilton, 2004) Roger's historical version, and reflexively scripting self as eye-witness with consequential claims to knowledge. He redistributes blame to the decision maker by activating an alternative strategy – choosing a different technology – implying that knowingly opting for a technology that was not ready was/is misguided.

Roger, after a brief silence, corroborates his colleague's version with a matching phrase ('could've': Line 8). There is a sense of an uncomfortable truth lurking here. No one asks why such a decision was made, knowing that technology was not ready, and no one refers to who took that decision. Alan's utterance in Line 10 arguably works to close down this nebulous, between the lines talk by scripting doubt over Roger's version, implying a directional change is needed with the quietly spoken 'slowed that down' marking the current trajectory as problematic.

Roger self-selects with a following turn in which he accounts for other reasons. The key points to notice are the hesitancy, repeat of doubt markers (Wooffitt, 2007: 'I dunno': Line 12, and 'definitely don't know': Lines 14/15), and repair in Line 14. This is in considerable contrast to this speaker's measured speech patterns in the previous week's meeting talk (extract 3). Roger can be heard as orienting to concerns with authenticity and stake. Further, Roger re-locates his accounts into the present.

The excluded lines see the debate continuing, placing increasing importance on the need to 'ramp up' staff numbers to cope with workload. In this way, the direction of the discussion has shifted from the troubling matter of misguided decisions about technology to staff numbers. Vicky comments that ramping up is contingent to profitability, scripting herself as a financial person, with other participants accepting her judgment in these matters. The denouement comes in Lines 33 – 45. In this part, Alan carefully builds a case, affiliated to (Clifton, 2014) by other members. Note how across lines 33 – 37, Alan is 3-part listing: (1) 'it begins with PMs', (2) 'fast to react', and (3) 'having the necessary people'. This works up persuasion rhetoric (Edwards and Potter, 1992), invoking factuality. In contrast to historical accounting, Alan is projecting future actions (Clifton, 2012). This can be seen in his display of a conditional structure (Sneijder and te Molder, 2005): '↑if we DO that (then) the

benefit...’, scripting him as knowledgeable of cause and effect on future outcomes (Chilton, 2004).

Vicky serves the rhetorical bombshell across Lines 40 – 45, re-invoking historicity and effectively undermining Alan’s projection of future outcomes with a call to historical events which evidence his version as unworkable. She orients to Roger’s confirmation token (Rautajoki, 2012) in Line 39 with ‘you first tried’ targeting her turn directly to him. Scripting knowledge and memory (‘I know I can remember...’: Line 41), the stretched vowel conjures a concern with authenticity allied to the importance of learning lessons from the past: Roger has already looked at ramping up freelancers, but ‘four clients were delayed’. The implication is that, in these circumstances, a ramp up would have been risky: ramping up would have meant staff members sitting with nothing to do because project start-up is delayed by the clients who, it is implied, cannot be controlled. Thus, the speaker scripts an evaluation of Alan’s built-up case, with the upshot that they have no control over what the clients do. Thus, the context of history is called upon to provide facts to warn against future actions which works in contrast to Roger’s earlier historical accounting as a route to reasons.

Finally, returning to the notion of frustration-disagreement and power raised earlier, it is suggested that while this senior management team display claims to rights and powers to discuss such sensitive and important matters, with the knowledge to do so, what they do not display having is rights and power to make decisions. In the first part of the extract we saw how the decision to use unready technology is cast as misguided, but no one asks why such a decision was made, with the author of the decision unnamed. It is inferred that this author is not present in the meeting - if they had been they would almost certainly have defended their past actions. It is further suggested that this decision-maker is located higher up the organization’s hierarchy. This being the case, the senior managers’ meeting is reduced to a ‘talking shop’, which can be seen in the frustration-disagreement which marks both meetings.

### **11.6 Preliminary reflections**

The findings suggest that context in the sense of speakers interpretation and understanding of their environment and its contents is a catalytic dimension of KS which both influences the discursive trajectory and is consequential to KS activities. In analysing the contexts that

speakers invoke as live concerns, it has been shown that, in many cases, these can be categorised as contexts of identity (reputation, for instance), trust (authenticity and claims to epistemic primacy, for example) and risk (the consequences of one team's actions on another, and the implication of decision-making beyond the control of the senior management team, for instance).

The findings show that speakers conjure shared understanding of context in two ways: first, through displaying knowledge of what's on another's mind and second, in gisting and elaboration work. Displays of others' cognition is an efficient way to short hand a meeting, for instance, where speakers share a common purpose, similar experiences and are familiar with and trust each others' abilities. But there is a suggestion that repeated enactment leads to a potential barrier to other contributors taking up turns, with implied consequences for the sharing of knowledge in equitable measures.

With gisting and elaboration, displays are shown to work up consensus and affiliation – group membership with a shared emotional experience ('pain' and 'embarrassment leading to an apologetic state') conjuring mutually shared and understood context. This constructed affiliation inevitably leads to mutual exoneration: the meeting host (extract 2) for raising the troubling issue in the first place, the two others for any wrong-doing in their actions. The important upshot is that the latter two speakers are both prompted to volunteer further knowledge of the incidents resulting in the sharing of important and useful knowledge with all meeting participants.

The construction of a context of them and us emerges in the analysis of stance-taking in the first of the senior management meetings (extract 4). The extended discourse of argument initiates with the invocation of a courtroom drama in speakers' extreme concerns for truth and objectivity, claim and counter-claim, claims to knowledge superiority, and blame attribution. There is a marked pursuit of detail, against an undercurrent of reputational risk, made explicit in the warnings of risks and dangers to the business. When the stances become reversed, and a claim of wrong-doing at the organizational level is introduced, this quickly coalesces into a context of them and us. Arguably this emerges from the context of courtroom rhetoric. In a courtroom, the prosecution and defence are expected to take sides, to promote alternate versions of events, and to question claims to knowledge. Here, this is shown to have an effect on the directions of KS.

Perhaps the most contentious interpretation is made of the final extract in which the invoking of history in the search for reasons for a particular issue raises the ghost of a contextual difficulty – the existence of a decision-maker who makes flawed decisions, and which, it is implied, is the reason for the ‘slowing down’ of contract work. The silences and absence of discussion on this matter suggests an anomaly. Analysis suggests that while meeting members have a right to discuss such issues, they have no rights to make decisions, leading to the further conjecture that the disagreement-frustration which marks both meetings emanates from this status. Taken as a whole extracts 2 – 5, drawn from the same company but representing different tiers within the hierarchy of the business, script an organization which potentially has issues concerning horizontal and vertical internal communications.

The final Chapter brings together all of the findings from this and previous Chapters in a discussion largely centred around the research questions shown at the start of Part Two. Findings are also considered from the perspective of how they can be related to those key issues and debates found to be so challenging for the field of knowledge management in the discussions in Part One.

## Chapter 12: Discussions and future directions

### 12.1 Introduction

Using an approach drawing on Discursive Psychology, discourse in organizational settings is analysed for how the thematic categories of trust, identity, risk and context are made live, and with what, if any, influence and effect on what are understood as knowledge sharing meeting / forum contexts. In particular, will such an analysis inform an understanding of these thematic categories as tacitly invoked phenomena, and can these themes be shown to be co-relational? (*Summary of indicative research questions, section 7.6*).

This project began with a view of knowledge management (KM) as a problematic field characterised by its range and scope of debates and issues (Chapters 1 – 2). In spite of the broad often competing perspectives and theories, there is a persistent theme of knowledge as embedded in or as constituting social interaction within which the ‘knowing how-knowing that’ formulation (e.g., Duguid, 2005: see, for instance, section 2.4.2) is considered to be the most relevant. This led to the speculation extending the sphere of interest onto everyday organizational discourse would create the opportunity for researching knowledge work in action. A critical review and analysis of KM research and theory identified a number of factors considered to be influential to knowledge sharing practices, considered by many to be the underpinning construct to KM’s success and the creation of new knowledge, for instance (e.g. Bock, Zmud, Kim and Keem 2005; Boisot, 2002; Evans. 2013). These factors were subsequently mapped to the thematic categories of trust, risk, identity and context, with the latter claimed to be the corroborating phenomenon for the relationship between trust, risk and identity, and knowledge sharing practices, as discussed in section 4.6.4.

Taking these themes as the subject, the research reported in the previous four Chapters draws on Discursive Psychology for both a theory and a methodology for the investigation of knowledge sharing actions in organizational meetings and an online discussion forum. As outlined towards the end of Part One, the research also acknowledges an understanding of tacit knowing as an ‘implicit’ formulation (see section 4.4). Connections are drawn between this and the formulation of ‘knowing how-knowing that’ promoted by, for instance, Duguid (2005) and Blackler (1995) in the KM field. Central to this formulation is the idea that

knowing how makes knowing that actionable, with the former representing the uncodifiable substrate that informs the use of codified knowledge (the ‘code’), to use Duguid’s terms. It is suggested that Discursive Psychology’s methodology shows tacit knowing (knowing how) as an accomplishment in discourse in social interaction.

The principle claim is that the research findings show how these thematic categories are invoked by speakers where the aim is to share knowledge, that they are co-relationally and locally situated. Further, they are shown to influence the direction and scope of knowledge sharing actions. The substance on which these claims are based can be seen in the findings of the focus on context as a generic theme, in which trust, risk and identity are shown to be constructed and oriented to by speakers in knowledge sharing action. The relationship between these findings and the original factors in knowledge sharing (KS), on which the thematic categories are based (see Table 1, Chapter 1), is briefly considered next

What is immediately clear is that not all of these (19 in all) could be said to be present in the data. Some are obvious in their absence: ‘values placed on mentoring’, for instance, and the ‘time-costs’ implication. Interestingly, the analysis which indicates the greatest number of KS factors is ‘context’ (12: as one might expect), with that showing the least being ‘risk’. Trust has the next highest number present (9). This assessment is not in the least scientifically done but, as a ‘gist’ picture, one interpretation might be as follows: trust, risk and identity are pervasive concerns of speakers engaged in KS actions, with trust shown to be the most significant and risk, the least.

This picture can however be easily dismantled. There is sufficient evidence to support the idea of trust as co-relational with risk (see, for instance, section 4.6.3 and Chapter 10). There is also sufficient evidence to support the notion of constructed identity as foundational and fundamental to the accomplishment of discourse in social interaction (see sections 3.6.1 and 4.6.1, and Chapter 9). Recall Wetherell’s (2001) simple but effective insight that to speak (to utter, to write) is to speak from a position - for instance, a position of personal beliefs, agendas, values, experiences, preferences, and knowledge.

What could be concluded from this brief retro-visit to the source of KS factors is that they are, for the most part, too specific to the context in which they are originally situated. Moreover, factors such as people’s natural tendency to store and hoard their knowledge (e.g.,



Rechberg and Syed, 2013) and the inhibiting effects of an absence of incentives to share (e.g., Prusak and Weiss, 2007) are not reflected in the present analyses. None-the-less, collectively what the KS factors did do was prompt an interest in trust, risk and identity.

The aim of this Chapter is to discuss the research findings relevant to the detailed indicative research questions (first stated in section 7.4.1), and which are used as a framework to guide the discussions. Drawing from this, the next section explores the potential implications of these findings in relation to the issues and debates in KM (see Chapters 1 – 2) leading to some future directions for the development of these ideas, and for further research. (The reader is referred to section 7.4.1 for a reminder of the validation procedures addressed by the the present research, and 7.5 on its potential limitations).

## **12.2 An interpretation of the findings**

### **12.2.1 Constructing live issues and concerns**

*In the environment of organizational knowledge sharing, how are matters of identity, trust and risk constructed as live issues and concerns of speakers?*

Taken as a whole, the findings represent a broad and complex range of discursive devices and strategies which speakers routinely use in their everyday discourse. In the present case, the invoking of trust, risk and identity as accomplishments in social interaction are shown to work as displays of knowledge of mutually shared understanding of the context and meeting precepts in which those discursive actions take place. A further feature is the implicit nature of these actions: these are not the outcome of conscious goal-directed linguistic behaviour. That would suggest a distinction between thought and discursive action with inner minds as the controller of language, an assumption that is criticised by many working in the field of critical social psychology including, for instance, Edwards (2006a) who claims that mental states are actively managed in talk and text. Even the most measured and careful utterance is a complex play of probing the context, sense-making informed by tacit knowing, and an orienting to shared understanding. What is also the case is that whilst there is a certain amount of consistency in the display of discursive devices and strategies between different scenarios, there is also a great deal of diversity. In the previous Chapter, it was claimed that

sharing knowledge is contingent to shared understanding of context: this accomplishment is shown to depend on speakers' possession of an innate understanding of and ability with an extensive communicative 'tool-set'.

A key finding is that in instances of social interaction where the objective and purpose is to share knowledge, speakers ('speakers', 'actors' or 'participants' collectively refer to speakers in meetings and forum contributors) are shown to invoke identity, trust and risk as live concerns. That is, KS is shown to be contingent to these three contexts. As a caveat, it is not suggested that these are the *only* KS influencing discursive contexts – a wider research focus might well reveal others. As a first observation, though, from the outset of the interactions analysed here, few of the speakers explicitly refer to these contexts (one exception being in Chapter 11, extract 3). So how do they emerge in the action? The first research question is concerned with how speakers go about the business of constructing these particular thematic categories: what discursive tools (devices and strategies) are mobilised and how can such tools be shown to have the effect of constructing trust, risk and identity as speakers' live concerns? A consideration of some of the more prominent and commonly deployed of these serves to clarify the findings in respect of these enquiries.

### *Authenticity*

Constructing accounts and reports as authentic is perhaps one of the most common discursive actions in the data, seen in virtually all of the interactions analysed here, and which suggests a fundamental role in KS. What is interesting is the length to which speakers go to formulate their utterances as factual, objective, honest and beyond dispute: in other words, as trustworthy, immune from risk and which in turn are relational with identity. Edwards and Potter (1992) in their account of *Discursive Psychology*, list nine different discursive devices that their research shows are used by speakers to construct accounts as factual – in the terms used here, authentic. Of these, the analyses have found examples of *category entitlements* (e.g., section 9.2.3: the construction of 'seasoned exhibitionists'); *vivid description* (section 10.4: 'uber authenticity' through vivid accounting, and section 11.3: doing 'gisting and elaboration'); *narrative* (section 10.3: structuring an account in the form of a narrative); *empiricist accounting* (section 9.2.3: orienting to scientific facts); *rhetoric of argument* (section 11.4: invoking the context of courtroom); *extreme case formulations* (section 11.4: as a marker of argumentative discourse); *consensus and corroboration* (section 11.5: eyewitness accounts have the effect of scripting mutual consensus and corroboration); *lists and*

*contrasts* (sections 9.3 and 11.3: using 3-part lists to construct accounts as factual and complete, also associated with persuasion talk).

The action of constructing accounts as authentic has direct connotations of trust through orienting to the trustworthiness of accounts, as noted earlier. It is also evident that trust works reflexively in the sense that when a speaker scripts their account as authentic, worthy of trust, they are simultaneously scripting their self as trustworthy. Trust is also reflexive in the sense that speakers and their utterances cannot exist as trustworthy independently of others: claims and identities come into existence in the light of others' displays of shared context. For an account or report to be understood as authentic and trustworthy, it requires co-speakers to index to this understanding. This suggests that, in doing trust one is also invoking risk as the opposite potential. In Schoorman, Mayer and Davis' 2007 model of organizational trust, this notion is central in that trust correlates with the degree to which an actor is willing to take a risk on another.

Discursive actions which challenge the authenticity of another's version of affairs are particularly found to be connected to the context of risk. For instance, recall the sequence (section 10.3, extract 3) in which one speaker (John) gives an account of financial status: his account is shown to be hedged with caution and an attention to accuracy, reflexively invoking the risks associated with non-compliance with such concerns. It is further claimed that John's response to his colleague's (Brian) token of agreement interprets this as a challenge to the authenticity of his (John's) account. Both are then shown to be mutually concerned with giving an accurate version of affairs, albeit both giving slightly different versions, and which is interpreted as the two working collaboratively to script an authentic set of events. These actions, it is claimed, effectively set a benchmark for what follows in scripting live concerns with truth and accuracy in a high-stakes (risk) context.

An explicit scripting of high-stakes and risk can be seen in Chapter 11 (extract 3). The extract concerns a project proposal given to a client allegedly without anyone on Roger's team having seen it (which constructs Roger and his team as possessing seniority over the others and what they do), with Roger overtly referring to the 'dangers' of 'saying we can do something' and 'making assumptions'. This state of affairs is interpreted as risky to the company's interests, and to its reputation, which reflexively constructs Roger and his team as the guardians of organizational reputation and well-being. Both speakers are shown to take

their concerns with what really happened to extremes: trust and authenticity are questioned, and assignation of blame made a live issue. In this extract, a range of discursive devices are displayed, including 3-part listing, unmitigated displays of rights to knowledge, facts out there as authentic and trustworthy, the extreme attention to accuracy of account (something is either ‘entirely true’ or not true at all), and calling on witnesses. It is these and other features of the extract which result in the sense of courtroom drama unfolding. In this one sequence alone, it is claimed that trust, risk and identity are invoked through shared concerns with authenticity.

### *Competency challenge*

Another discursive tool that is seen in the data and which is connected to trust, risk and identity is challenge to competency. Variations on this action can be seen in speakers’ invoking of a context of lack of trust (in another) and blame attribution (Chapter 8); challenge to authenticity (Chapter 10); conjuring potential credibility problems and the consensus-elaboration (insufficiency) constructs, both seen in Chapter 9, and the actions around invoking competitive rivalry; the construction of rival groups (section 11.3: the construction of the rival group of female, and 11.4: the construction of ‘them and us’), and the scripting of sceptical rejoinders (sections 8.5; 8.7; 10.3; 11.3 and 11.4).

Competency challenges are shown to be fundamental to argumentative rhetoric with sceptical rejoinders particularly associated with stance-taking actions – that is, constructing identity from this or that position. What the findings demonstrate is that when speakers are shown to script competency challenges, in one form or another, they are both issuing a challenge to the competency of another while simultaneously working to bolster their own competency. Actions of this type, it is claimed, work up contexts of risk (by implicating the lack of competency of others), trust (in framing one’s own version as the preferred version) and identity (as accomplishing a stance on a particular issue).

A good example of this phenomenon is seen in the construction of two competing versions of the same witness accounts in the discussions around trust (section 8.5, extract 3). The topic at issue is whether what clients say is relevant as sound evidence of a risk to the project (‘four months that’s a long time’) if particular actions are not taken as priority by the project team, or whether what clients say is irrelevant and not worthy of notice. The second version of affairs is shown to work to undermine the first and, in so doing, calls into question the first

speaker's (Steve) competence in using such evidence when it is in fact groundless according to the second speaker (Damien). The risk that Steve conjures is not only deleted by Damien in his preferred description of what clients say, but this also works reflexively to script Steve's account as risky in its faulty perspective. Clearly, Damien can only make such a claim if he himself occupies a position of knowledge of what clients say. This exchange on its own does not however produce an effective *challenge* to competency: this comes to the fore in Damien's immediately following account of needing 'a bigger discussion' on the subject. This implies lack of sufficient discussion to date with the potential for flawed decisions being made, and that this is the real issue, not what clients say. Thus, risk, trust and identity are displayed as socially constructed, indexical and locally situated concerns.

### *Attributing blame*

Displays of knowledge are connected to blame attribution in the context of trust work (Chapter 8), and identity (Chapter 11). Attribution theory is a substantial topic of study in social psychology (see Edwards and Potter, 1992, for a succinct summary): from the perspective of Discursive Psychology, attributions are approached as social acts accomplished in discourse rather than the verbal expression of inner mental attitudes about social acts, for instance (Sneijder and te Molder, 2005). It is claimed here that in the context of producing social acts which are interpreted as attributing blame in some direction, speakers are simultaneously shown to work up concerns with trust and identity as tacitly understood contexts. In both of the following examples, blame attribution emerges as the upshot of a complex set of interactional moves by speakers.

In the scenario from Chapter 11, the attribution of blame is shown to be a significant contributing factor to the construction of them and us, and which is initiated with the invoked context of courtroom drama. The attribution of blame is made live by Roger, warranted by the potential risk to reputation posed by the actions of members of John's team, and his invocation of rights to be alarmed. With blame conjured and attributed in John's direction, a trajectory of claim and counter-claim ensues implicating the high stakes of the argumentative actions and with no speaker willing to give way. Actions of authenticity and trustworthiness are deployed in bolstering competing accounts: for example, Roger's 3-part listing work as a display of self as the possessor of superior knowledge. What is at stake is the direction of blame attribution. John is shown to deflect blame back in the direction of Roger through issuing a new accusatory claim which is scripted as even more 'inflaming' than Roger's

original accusation. This, it is shown, leads directly to the problematic formulation of them and us with all of its connotations of taking sides, blame and fault and so forth. In this scenario, speakers accomplish matters of trust, identity and risk as the underpinning constructs to attributing blame, using a range of discursive tools to bolster their mutually competing perspectives.

The scenario from Chapter 8 concerning ‘something missing’ from a software product similarly displays a pattern of blame being made live and attributed, and which leads to competing versions of states of affairs. The difference here is that the inaugurator of the blame (Steve) is the agent of its eventual re-direction away from his initial target (Damien). The fine-grained analysis of the discourse interprets Steve as pointing the finger of blame directly at his colleague. Damien’s interpretation of Steve’s actions as constituting blame are shown in his attempts to reflect blame back by reformulating the source of the problem: the ‘something missing’ could be resolved by spending more money, which is within the governance of the project leader, Steve, and it is his implied failure to do so which results in the problem. Eventually, Steve is shown to explicitly reattribute blame away from his colleague (and himself) and onto the software product itself. This scenario particularly displays the consequences for matters of trust, identity and risk.

Both this and the scenario from Chapter 11 demonstrate how speakers bring matters of trust, risk and identity into action as locally situated concerns and this, as the next discussion addresses, has consequences for the actions of knowledge sharing.

### 12.2.2 Influencing knowledge sharing

*It is suggested that such matters or themes are influencing in the context of knowledge sharing – how and with what effect for speakers and their business?*

This is an interesting question and, if shown to be substantiated, it would have particular ramifications for organizational practices of knowledge sharing and the knowing how-knowing that formulation (considered in the following section). It is claimed that the analyses and their findings suggest four ways in which knowledge sharing is influenced by the speakers’ invoked contexts of trust, risk and /or identity. The first concerns blame attribution, the second implicates actions of consensus, the third concerns the scenarios of financial

accounting in Chapter 10, and the fourth centres on the role reversal actions in Chapter 9. The following discussions unpick each of these in turn.

### *The attribution of blame*

In two different meetings, one each from Company A and B, blame previously attributed to members present in the meetings is explicitly removed and reattributed to an expressly stated target beyond the meeting participants themselves. This, it is claimed, results in the subsequent voluntary sharing of knowledge appropriate to the goals of the business at hand, and which had not been forthcoming up to that point. Why does it require members to be explicitly exonerated from blame in order for them to re-engage in knowledge sharing? One suggestion is that the business of sharing knowledge is, in these cases, diverted or prevented by the speakers giving priority to managing attributed blame. That is, they orient to the present threat to their reputation, for instance, over the business of the meeting which is to share knowledge.

The more acrimonious of the two instances concerns the argument between Steve and Damien (section 8.7) over the ‘something missing’ from the software, noted in the earlier discussion on attributing blame from the perspective of discursive tools and strategies. The scenario quite quickly develops into questions over Damien’s competence (in, for example, Steve’s suggestion that his colleague should seek advice from someone else on how to ‘trick’ the software) followed by Steve’s change of strategy towards persuasion and the suggestion that Damien possesses, but is simply not sharing, relevant knowledge. It is claimed that these actions implicate an erosion of trust. Changing direction again, Steve suddenly reattributes blame onto the software product itself. It is this action which triggers both a reinstatement of mutual trust and a more detailed sharing of knowledge by Damien.

In the other instance (section 11.3), the action of blame is more subtly accomplished, with its attribution immediately becoming the topic of concern in the three-way dialogue between Stuart (meeting leader) and two of his project managers, Dorothy and Mark. The entire gist of the piece is concerned with actors working collaboratively and consensually, first Mark with Dorothy, and then Stuart with both, to arrive at a reasoned and agreed outcome which attributes blame clearly to Team Z. In this scenario, unlike the first, knowledge sharing actions are not shown to be specifically impeded: they are instead more compromised. That is, their KS actions at this point in the scenario are more concerned with attending to the

potential attribution of blame than with sharing the knowledge they have gained as a result of their respective encounters with Team Z. This can also be seen in the two project managers' volunteered subsequent accounts concerning Team Z *after* Stuart has exercised rights of full exoneration for the team.

### *Consensus as a component in sharing knowledge*

Consensus has been shown to be displayed in the data in some very different ways and with variable effects for both speakers and hearers. Two of these are considered here: the first is seen in the scenario in Chapter 11 in which two meeting participants are shown to display what is on the other's mind, with the second drawn from section 9.3's discussions of identity construction in an online forum, and in particular the consensus-elaboration action.

In the meeting example, analysis shows how two of the three meeting participants display doing being a team and mutually shared understanding by repeated use of collaborative continuers – that is, one speaker completes the utterance that another has started. One interpretation suggests that this demonstrates active team work and close collaboration, mutual trust and understanding, commonly shared knowledge of context, and so forth. Another sees these actions as effectively blocking the third participant from participating in the knowledge sharing dialogue. There is a further suggestion that the two men are conjuring what could be seen as a frequently expressed 'mantra'. Or alternatively, rather than seeing the contents of their turns as being well-rehearsed, it is the deployment of collaborative continuers that is the frequently used discursive strategy. In other words, when these two speakers are together, and the goal is the preparation of some kind of business proposal, they do this a lot.

It is suggested that it is towards this latter understanding that the third (female) participant leans in her counter-formulation of 'group of females who can multi-task', to which she (obviously) belongs and to which the others do not. The implied order of their 'not belonging' is their inability to multi-task *because* they are not female. The upshot is that any potential knowledge contribution from one of three meeting participants is effectively blocked. In this case, then, consensus has a blocking effect, with identity and trust foregrounded.



In the discussion forum, a rather different accomplishment is ascribed to the action of consensus. Here, knowledge sharing is shown to be mediated by the consensus-elaboration strategy in which contributors first orient to preceding contributors / contributions in the discussion, displaying consensus often through explicit opinion markers, then they elaborate on these same prior turns. They effectively set about adding to the knowledge by sharing their own whilst simultaneously scripting the prior turn (which they are orienting to) as being insufficient. This, it is claimed, is one of the principle actions used by forum contributors in scripting identity as expert with entitlement to be heard as such. An extension to this analysis might even speculate that the consensus part of consensus-elaboration turns is very similar to a collaborative continuer in the displays of shared understanding between two contributors. But unlike the meeting example, this display of shared understanding is largely one-way, and paves the way for competitive claims to more knowledge than previous contributors.

In both of these examples, identity in particular is shown to be implicated in the actions of doing consensus, but with very different consequences for the directions and scope of knowledge sharing.

The final two cases – financial accounting and role reversal – show singular and perhaps surprising findings rising from events which could be considered to be relatively common in regular organizational meetings. Both display the influencing effects that speakers' interpretation of context, in this case risk and identity positioning, have on how and what knowledge sharing unfolds.

#### *Financial accounting*

The risk case is interesting because a direct comparison between sales and marketing meetings from the two different participating organisations is possible. In both cases the account of financial position, given by the meeting Chair (section 10.3), headlines the meeting. This, it is claimed, sets in motion a context of high stakes and risk with a mandate for truth-telling, accuracy and authenticity in the giving of reports. Participants' reports are conjured as accountable and consequential to the financial health of their respective organizations. In other words, the stakes are too high to accommodate for exaggerated, overly-embellished, inaccurate or even misleading accounts. That is where the similarity

between the two meetings ends. What is shown is that the way in which the Chairs produce the financial reports influences subsequent knowledge sharing actions.

In the case of Company A, the report is constructed as something to which all meeting participants contribute, as a collaborative accomplishment. With the other meeting, the financial accounting is from the perspective of individual team members or mini-teams: individual achievements are compared, judged and attributed, thus invoking competition and rivalry. Between team member competition and rivalry may be seen as a way of motivating actors to achieve more, surpass their colleagues, or receive publicly attributed award. In theory, members are thus motivated by comparative success and reward. In terms of the team's individual sales performance that may well be the case but, here, the interest lies in the jointly accomplished knowledge sharing activities, and these, it is argued, are shown to be potentially compromised by the financial accounting.

The comparison between the two meetings reveals how the construction of rivalry at the outset of the Company B meeting has the effect of limiting subsequent speakers' accounts of activities. These accounts, it is claimed, are constructed to give no more than the basics and, in all cases, are not freely volunteered. For instance, when the Chair is shown to invite further elaboration on a particular account (section 10.3: Narrative and consensus-corroboration), the speaker displays hesitation and circumspection, even reluctance. A direct comparison of a representative example of discourse from each of the meetings (section 10.5) highlights the considerable difference in levels of detail contained in each.

A further variation between the two meetings can be seen in how the respective Chairs call for members' accounts: Company A's chair either issues a call to the floor for participants to self-select to initiate the delivery of their account, or he issues a question with a candidate answer to a particular participant. In contrast, Company B's Chair issues calls to report to each participant individually, more often than not with an open-ended question (e.g., 'what's happenin' in your world'). It is suggested here that the construction of the context of team member rivalry, combined with the way in which participants are called to report, with its display of an absence of knowledge on the part of the Chair concerning what is likely to be reported, has the effect of limiting accounts to the bare facts.

In contrast, Company A's meeting accounts are shown to be often vivid and considered. The deviant case (section 10.4) is an instance from Company A's meeting in which the participant, it is claimed, uses vivid accounting, quantitative rhetoric and extreme attention to authenticity to paper over the somewhat vague and insubstantial account of his meeting with prospective clients. In other words, this participant orients to the tacitly understood norms for accuracy, authenticity, trustworthiness, cautious evaluation and so on as constructed in social interaction by other participants. While he takes these actions to the extreme, *he does not exaggerate* and even goes to considerable lengths to formulate his account as highly accurate.

### *Role reversal*

The last example comes from section 9.2 in which the analysis focuses on the positioning actions of three participants in a client-contractor meeting. In the first part of the analysis, it is claimed that the strategically accomplished role-reversal actions by the contractor (M) have the effect of positioning him as the possessor of 'what the client wants and needs' which is worked up as a preferred substitute for any brief that the client (E) may actually have. The upshot of these complex, collaborative actions – for instance, scripting persuasion, trust, corroboration, objective and factual accounting, and potential credibility problems – is that the contractor talks his version of the client's brief into existence as what she wants and needs. He cements this in his scripting of what E should say at a forthcoming meeting with the client's partners, and in their jointly accomplished summary of the agreed brief towards the end of their meeting. If it had not been for the arrival of a third participant, that would have been the conclusion of the meeting. However, as shown in the analysis, the contractor's version of the brief is misguided, the result of vital information not being shared by E herself.

This is a good example of how the positions that people create for themselves and others through their discursive actions can have a direct effect on knowledge sharing outcomes. Here, it is not a case of knowledge sharing being limited, as in the sales and marketing meeting from Company B, but rather its being misdirected.

The variation in effect on KS actions in three of these thematic examples is quite revealing. The attribution of blame can be both an inhibitor and a trigger: the pattern in both of the scenarios here is 'blame made live and attributed directly to an actor, or made live with the threat of attribution in the direction of meeting actors' followed by 'explicit blame

exoneration with blame re-directed in an entirely different direction' which leads to explicit increases in knowledge sharing. This suggests that if blame is introduced in a meeting context, without its being attributed to any specific actor present in the meeting and subsequently re-directed, then it may not have the same effect on KS actions.

The interesting feature about the consensus actions is the suggestion that displays of sharing what is on another's mind, where other actors are present and who are not included in the mind sharing actions, could result in a sense of competitive rivalry ('them and us') – in this case, seen in the construction of a rival group of 'females who multi-task'. From the financial accounting scenarios, there is the hint that, if constructing between team member competitive rivalry is seen as a motivating factor in energising greater accomplishment, this can also be seen to have practical consequences for team knowledge sharing, with further implications for leading to a fragmented collective team effort. Is motivation in this scenario misguided?

### 12.2.3 The co-relational nature of invoked concerns

*It is also suggested that these themes work co-relationally – how is this displayed in discourse in social interaction, and with what effect?*

There are so many instances where the analyses show the co-relational way in which the contexts of trust, risk and identity are worked up in discourse that they seem to be mutually dependent: that one context cannot be without the others. This has one or two implications, the most significant of which is that these are contexts which the speakers themselves construct as co-relational. That is, if trust is invoked – implicitly or explicitly – by one speaker, it is shown to be common knowledge and understanding that risk, for instance, is also implicated. This might, in fact explain how speakers go to such lengths to formulate their accounts as authentic and trustworthy, as touched on earlier. They are effectively engaging in risk management. This raises a further question: if trust, as an example, is invoked by a speaker without any co-relational context of risk and identity then will it still be orientated to as trust by co-speakers?

Paradoxically, however, as the analysis is concerned with the interpretations and sense-making actions of speakers – what they display as shared understood contexts in interaction – this would be difficult if not impossible to substantiate as it would rely on the researcher

interpreting a particular construct as being present in the discourse, and then showing how co-speakers *do not* orient to this construct. Whilst analysis is concerned with what is not present in any given set of data, to rely on the interpretation of one speaker and which is not shown to be comparatively shared as understood by other speakers would result in a potentially invalid analysis. It could also be argued that the fundamental co-relational nature of these contexts is such that it would be hard to even imagine a situation in which speakers might collaboratively do trust without simultaneously invoking risk and identity as concerns.

Arguably, the most that one can do is accumulate sufficient cases of co-relation to warrant the claim. There is no particular pattern in the data for how speakers display these contexts as co-related. However a few instances from the data serve as good examples.

In the first, participants in the discussion forum are shown to invoke their identity as expert with appropriate rights to be heard as such and as trustworthy (section 9.3). At the same time they are shown to display previous contributors as giving insufficient accounts, thus working up a warrant for the necessity of additional explanation. Those additional explanations are explicitly conjured as emanating from the speaker's experience and knowledge. So, in this case, identity and trust are constructed co-rationally, designed to achieve a particular effect: the 'I'm the expert because I know more than he does' strategy. The risk element – which in the analysis is related to the public, online nature of the forum – can be seen particularly in how two contributors delicately call one another's accounts into question while at the same time attending to matters of politeness and face-saving (e.g., section 9.3.5). Recall the way that one contributor quite delicately and explicitly scripts his disagreement with a previous contributor (see extract 5) in a container of parentheses, conjuring the sense of an aside directed only to that contributor. This is an interesting case which shows how people are willing to debate topics publicly but are none-the-less reluctant to do outright disagreement and argument in such public arenas.

As a further and more complex example of this type of action, recall how, in the first of the two senior management meetings from Company A (section 11.4), Roger raises a topic of concern with his colleague, John, just prior to extract 3 and then proposes that it is something which can be dealt with 'probably outside of this meeting', a move which John explicitly resists. It can thus be inferred that while Roger seeks to avoid public disagreement, John works to keep it firmly in the public eye of the other meeting members. It is subsequently

speculated that John may have deliberately worked to ensure Roger's topic stays on the meeting's agenda, as he is shown to use this as the springboard to launch into an even more 'inflaming' topic. In these displays, all three contexts are shown to work relationally and, in fact, quite forcefully, with the result that knowledge sharing becomes highly contested.

Continuing with this particular meeting analysis, which takes on the characteristics of a courtroom drama scenario (section 11.4), this contains one of the few examples of explicit identity construction in the data: Roger displays himself as alarmed by the events brought about by the actions of John's team. Consequently blame is displayed as a live concern for both participants, and which becomes the rhetorical object of subsequent interactions. Throughout, speakers are shown to use several rhetorical devices to script themselves and their accounts as more trustworthy than the other (epistemic primacy, for instance).

It has earlier been claimed that trust, risk and identity are shown to have an influencing effect on knowledge sharing actions. The co-relational nature of these contexts has an effect which is perhaps even more obvious. Trust, risk and identity, as contexts mutually invoked by speakers, do more than influence: they mediate knowledge sharing either positively or negatively. All of these interactions, including those in the discussion forum, are concerned with the sharing of knowledge, with trust, risk and identity interpreted as discursive thematic actions that are integral to this accomplishment. This interpretation explains the effects of influence discussed earlier.

The final question considers whether these accomplishments can be understood as tacitly done.

#### 12.2.4 A tacit accomplishment

*It is proposed that these matters are accomplished tacitly as psychological phenomena, with the implication that speakers orient to them as live matters consequent to their understanding of what is going on in the environment: how is this displayed and oriented to in discourse?*

A primary aim of the research is to use the analysis of discourse to show how the various discursive actions, in particular the invocation of trust, risk and identity, are accomplished tacitly by speakers – both in their scripting and displayed understanding of other speaker's

utterances. Reprising the knowing how-knowing that formulation, knowing how which can be thought of as the tacit fraction is the unspecifiable foundation which makes knowing that actionable and meaningful (Duguid, 2005). Added to this, language is approached as action-orientated and consequential for speakers and recipients. The interest in the tacit fragment stems from the field of knowledge management's attention to the concept of tacit knowledge as a phenomenon of value, and as integral to the actions of knowledge sharing and creating, amongst others.

A first observation, touched on earlier, is the near absence, with only one or two exceptions, of speakers making explicit reference to contexts of trust, risk and identity. The interpretation of the discursive action, and the displayed invocation of these contexts, is entirely made through bringing to the fore those contexts which speakers themselves collaboratively and implicitly construct as live concerns. For example, in the two sales and marketing meetings (Chapter 10), neither of the two Chairs explicitly states the high stakes nature of the interaction, nor mandates that the delivery of participants' accounts must attend to accuracy, truth, trustworthiness and authenticity in order to be acceptable. These features, it is claimed, are constructed as integral to their reports and as an unstated requirement on those subsequently made by other meeting participants. In this way, the actors display a shared understanding of a context of high stakes and the necessity of staying within the parameters of acceptability – the shared and displayed understanding of the meetings' precepts.

A second observation is that these displays of the tacit fragment – shared understanding of context – could not be shown through conventional research methods, a point which Greatbatch (2009) also raises in his account of Conversation Analysis in organizational studies. It is only through the application of the methodology (and similar methodologies) used here that discourse can be shown to be action-orientated, with function and consequence – the majority of which is arguably performed by the actors on what might be termed the implicit (tacit) level. Recall Boisot's (2002) theory that knowledge sharing is the consequence of resonance being achieved between the repertoires of different speakers. In his study of knowledge sharing, Evans (2013) also finds shared vision (and trust) to be important influencing factors. If shared vision and resonant repertoires are determinants of knowledge sharing, it is highly unlikely that conventional methods of investigation would demonstrate this. However, the discourse analysis method adopted in the present study is particularly suited in examining how such psychological phenomena, at once both hidden from sight but

in plain view, are collaboratively accomplished. Even when speakers are shown to be engaged in serious argument, they are, despite this, shown to be working collaboratively.

It is worth bringing in a particular point concerning the data from Company A. The sales and marketing meeting actions can be seen as a role model for knowledge sharing as effectively and efficiently done (Chapter 10). However, the same company's project management meeting actions bring to the fore a particular problem concerning dealings with another department within the same firm (section 11.3). This is particularly compounded by the displays of intra-team member support and loyalty, an example being the gisting and elaboration work displayed by the project leader. In other words, a kind of them and us is implicated, with connotations of between departmental (horizontal) knowledge sharing issues.

In the same organization, the first of the two senior management meetings brings a sense of them and us more bluntly to the fore (section 11.4), with the organization ('them') scripted as acting irrationally. In second meeting, there is the 'ghost' of a contextual difficulty: the decision to use a particular technology on a project, knowing that the technology was not ready to use (section 11.5). It is not stated explicitly that this refers to another person who is not present in the meeting, nor is the decision to use this technology explicitly described as being wrong. Instead it is constructed by Roger as the excuse to 'slow down' the project start-up. John's suggestion that another technology could have been used, the weak acknowledgement of this given by Roger, the denial by a third speaker that the choice of this particular technology was in fact the reason for 'slowing down' the project, combined with Roger's moves to change the topic suggest an uncomfortable truth. Decisions are perhaps not within the governance of the meeting members. This leads to the speculation that the members of the senior management team lack the power to make important decisions: all they are entitled to do is to make recommendations to a higher level of the business (could this be the level at which the decision to use technology known to be not ready was taken?). This is displayed by at least one member as problematic, and can also be seen as a further kind of them and us. This has implications for bottom up (vertical) knowledge sharing problems.



The following section discusses the research findings in relation to debates and issues in KM summarised and synthesised in Chapter 5, drawing some implications for knowledge management in general.

### **12.3 Relating the findings to debates and issues in knowledge management**

On a practical note, as the focus of the present research has been exclusively on organizational meeting and online discussion forum discourse, the findings can only realistically be seen from those perspectives. Other types of organizational discourse that could be used in future similar projects include knowledge sharing practices in the context of mentoring and learning, and employee exit interviews, for instance, even the contents of knowledge repositories such as expert biographies, project reports and consumer surveys. Those, and many other instances, would represent valid, relevant and potentially advantageous lines of future research. For now, however, the discussions reprise some of KM's principle concerns in the light of the present findings.

#### **12.3.1 The central concern of knowledge management with 'how' and 'what'**

Central to KM's concerns are the questions around 'how' to manage knowledge and 'what' should be the focus of KM actions. 'How' and 'what' questions, as already noted, are precisely the concerns of Discursive Psychology – and indeed most other discourse analysis methods. Consequently, the findings demonstrate how speakers (in these instances included here) perform knowledge sharing actions, how these are constructed as contingent to trust, risk and identity, and how these thematic categories influence the scope and directions of knowledge sharing actions. It has also been shown how these themes are invoked by speakers as co-relational constructs. These discursive actions and their consequences for both speakers and hearers are, it is claimed, the outcome of actors' implicit orienting to the environment and its contents, as displayed in discourse.

As an emic approach to the study of organizational action, the present research methods have their principle concern with the contexts and other accomplishments actors themselves display as shared understanding and concerns in discourse. This is contrasted with the etic approach adopted in mainstream research which gives precedence to the researcher's own

understanding and interpretation over that of participants in the data. It is suggested that such an approach risks irrelevance in foregrounding concerns and understandings that are not necessarily those of the actors.

To address KM's 'what' question – what should KM actions and practice focus on – a constructionist view approaches knowledge as constructed in everyday discourse in social interaction, and which can be studied directly using discourse analysis methodologies. This moves the focus of interest onto the social relationships integral to discourse. Prusak and Weiss (2007), in their review of failure factors in KM, note that a lack of focus on the social aspects of relationships, including trust, is one of the major reasons for high KM failure rates. The empirical research reported here would arguably lend support to this perspective.

Similarly, in relation to KM's 'how' question – how do we manage knowledge – it is obvious from the findings that speakers routinely manage their knowledge in socially enacted discourse. This leads to suggestions of some specific cases for how such actions could be mediated, even improved. For instance, the scripting of financial accounting is shown to invoke very particular concerns with high stakes, authenticity, the need for trustworthiness, and so on. How such accounts are made, how they are formulated in relation to the members of a meeting, and at what point in the meeting these are included, have effect on speakers and their actions. There is also the case of attributing blame: blame made live and attributed, even theoretically, to group members needs to be removed elsewhere in order to restore normative knowledge sharing practices. A further point that one could derive from the findings is support for the idea that people routinely and ubiquitously shared knowledge all of the time: it is a normative function of social discourse. But, like the inevitable variance in people's command of their own language, just because a practice is occasioned in normal everyday action it does not logically follow that they are good at it.

This type of study adds to the debates over what KM is, what it should or can be concerned with, by extending the directions already indicated by many researchers and theorists in the KM field. This touches on one or two issues connected to the previous discussions concerning DP's relevance to KM and which are considered next.

### 12.3.2 The ‘relevance’ issue concerning Discursive Psychology

Is it being suggested that KM practitioners should, as a matter of routine, record and analyse their organization’s meetings, trawl through endless documentation, and subject them to a forensic analysis of discourse? At the very least, this would be impractical. What is suggested is that this particular approach can be seen as an additional tool in working towards and accomplishing specific goals, or in aiding the resolution of specific problems. An example would be where there is a need for a fresh strategy for the management of an organization’s knowledge. Rather than an individual, or a group of people, working in isolation to develop such a strategy, might it not be a better approach to investigate how an organization’s members define and understand knowledge, what it means to their work, and what they hold to be the most valuable type of knowledge to the business? That is, in taking an emic approach, as opposed to an etic one, one can tap into the group’s shared common understandings rather than imposing understanding – which might be alien – from a distance.

A second point, related to the ‘relevance’ issue concerns DP’s terminology. In short, this is difficult and does not sit well with natural talk. One of the reasons behind this type of terminology is that DP draws on Conversation Analysis for its methodology. This latter, in its purest form, is very specifically focused on discovering and specifying the ‘architecture of the structure of verbal interaction’ to borrow Wooffitt’s (2005) description (see section 3.5.2). It has developed, of necessity, a complex, precise and very technical vocabulary for accomplishing this. At the end of Chapter 3, it was speculated that the sense-making paradigm promoted by Christian Madsbjerg and his colleague, for instance, could potentially constitute a vocabulary more suited to the organization and its concerns. This has not been explored, but is one potential avenue for future research and development.

### 12.3.3 A theory of language

The KM field, it is concluded, is largely lacking a theory of language (with a noted exception being Nonaka’s, 1994, reference to Speech Act Theory in his *A Dynamic Theory of Organizational Knowledge Creation*), despite many theories in KM emphasising the importance of social interaction as the location of knowledge work. Blackler (1993), for instance, explicitly underlines the important role of communication in his view of organizations as systems of activity. It is argued in Chapter 5 that if one approaches knowledge from such perspectives, and which most in the KM field do in one respect or

another, then it makes sense to draw upon a theory of language to inform an understanding and explanation of how knowledge emerges in language. In the present case, the approach to a theory of language draws on Discursive Psychology and Social Constructionist theory.

#### 12.3.4 A different conceptualisation of knowledge sharing

It is claimed that the research findings can be seen as supporting those theories which specifically locate knowledge work in social interaction, and in particular for the formulation of knowing how-knowing that specific to knowledge sharing practices. In scoping the research of knowledge sharing discourse, it was noted that while research and theories in KM identify factors which influence knowledge sharing, they have little to say on how they influence these practices in action. There are some exceptions which offer empirical support for what influences knowledge sharing – Evans’ (2013) recent study of trust in organizational KS for instance. It could be argued that the findings here have some coherence with Evans’ findings. The present findings can thus be seen as attempting to at least start to answer the question of how factors influence KS actions, and with what consequences, at the detailed level of discourse. One further point to add is the suggestion that the findings also lend support to those who are critical of an approach to KM which is wholly or mostly focused on IT.

Does this research add up to a different conceptualisation of knowledge sharing? That would be quite a substantial claim to make, and would require considerably more research to warrant. What can be cautiously suggested is that the findings indicate *the potential* for an alternative conceptualisation of KS. That is, alternative in relation to the conventional approach to KM/KS, but which can be seen in the insights given by, for example Boisot (2002), Duguid (2005), and Tsoukas (2011). KS, to be effective, relies on speakers’ shared understanding of context, as displayed in interactional discourse, and which is influenced by the individual’s personal stocks of knowing how. It relies on speakers’ attention to the potential effects of discursive actions such as blamings, high stakes, normative roles and their entitlements, rivalry and consensus work on KS outcomes. That would suggest that members of organizations might well benefit from training in how to be effective communicators from a discourse-savvy perspective.

### 12.3.5 Approaching the core issues in knowledge management

Similarly to the previous question, a consideration of some of the other principle concerns in KM from the perspectives of the present findings suggests the potential for an alternative approach. Previous discussions suggested that a strategy drawing on the DP approach renders such matters as the commodification-reification issue, and measuring KM outcomes as irrelevant (first touched in in section 5.3). That is essentially justified from the viewpoint of DP as a research methodology. Drawing on this, the commodification-reification formulation of knowledge is effectively dismantled. A strategy which reifies knowledge as an object or commodity is dealing with what would be more accurately described as information. It may have intrinsic market value, it may be vital to the organization's operations and growth, and so forth, but it is information. Consistent with many theorists and researchers in KM (see section 2.4, for instance), knowledge is understood as that which is co-constructed in social interaction between persons. Knowledge exists in the action of reading another's written words, or interpreting visual displays (e.g., Duguid, 2005). To avoid risking the endless philosophical arguments over the nature of knowledge, the argument concerning commodification-reification can be rested with the simple claim that what has been displayed in the analyses of the previous Chapters is not an objectified knowledge being distributed.

The issue of measuring KM success or failure, from a conventional understanding, is also rendered meaningless because DP is not concerned with making evaluations or judgments (section 5.3). But, in this case, some alternative questions can be offered in its stead. For instance, on a case by case basis – project teams, Communities of Practice, management teams and so on – what inhibits and what promotes knowledge work from a discursive perspective? The analyses show considerable variance in outcome from the use of certain discursive strategies – the case of consensus, for instance – and between the different groups of speakers. This suggests that a blanket strategy is unlikely to work. But, again, further research in this particular area may lead to the development of approaches which may, in combining the DP approach with other methods of organizational analysis, realise a method of comparing knowledge work outcomes between groups, for instance, or over time.

Relating the findings to issues around culture, and criticism of the 'one size fits all' (see section 1.8 for discussions), raises an interesting point. The criticism of 'one size fits all', referring to concrete rules and procedures, strategies and policies, claims that what suits one

organization or team in a particular environment and set of circumstances is unlikely to have cross-contextual or cultural attributes. In contrast, what the findings suggest is that trust, risk and identity could be universally enacted contexts and concerns in knowledge sharing discursive action. However, care needs to be taken with the use of ‘universal’. What can be claimed is that the data used in the present study, drawn from various sources, shows participants’ commonly displayed shared understandings of these contexts as live concerns. It is an unfortunate limitation of the present study that effects of disparate national cultures, for instance, are not a factor. However, this does suggest a particular line for future research. The point that is speculated is this: one-size-fits-all in the manifestation of rules, processes and so forth may well not be adequate to the task of mediating the goals and objectives of the organization, but people all communicate using language, they do things with their words, and the uncodifiable substrate, it is conjectured, is essential to accomplishing shared understanding.

#### **12.4 Future directions**

If there is one simple claim that could be drawn it is this: knowledge work (however it is described and understood) is an accomplishment of the social interaction between persons, their environment and its contents, which positions discourse – talk and text – as an important location for its study. Add to this the indexicality of language in the sense that meaning is contingent to the context in which it is embedded, and that this context is the fabrication of the speaker and which emerges from and is influenced by their tacit knowing or practical knowledge or knowing how (whichever term is preferred). What is also the case is that discourse, as the source and site of knowledge work, has been somewhat neglected in KM. So, when it was claimed that this project has the aim of extending the focus of interest onto the site of language, what was being proposed in reality was a recognition of the values and advantages to be gained by moving the sphere of interest and action to the actual level of organizational action.

What of future directions? There are one or two directions for further research which will be considered shortly. In general, it is hoped that the ideas and research findings expressed here will lead to a greater interest in discourse as an organizational resource in KM. Speech is, to

borrow from Whorf (1940), ‘the best show that man puts on’. It is also hoped that the practice of knowledge management can consider alternatives to the insistence on a reliance on process and technology. Nonaka, regarded by many as the founder of modern KM (e.g., McFarlane, 2010), proposed that the focus of analysis should be on how an organization interacts with its environment and the ways in which it creates and disseminates information and knowledge (e.g., 1994). All of this involves people and discourse. A reappraisal of Nonaka’s original intentions may be warranted.

To complete these discussions, some specific suggestions for lines of future research are outlined. It was suggested at the end of Chapter 3 that the sense-making paradigm promoted by Madsbjerg and Rasmussen (2014), for instance, could potentially offer a vocabulary more suited to the study of the organization and its concerns, and which might be adapted for use in Discursive Psychology projects with a focus in these directions. Whilst this has not been explored here, research and development may lead to a more useable terminology and which would address the issues raised earlier (section 12.3.2).

In the earlier discussions around criticism of the one-size-fits-all approach, a potential paradox is indicated. Differences in and between culture, organization, team and individual would suggest that such an approach will not be effective. But the present research findings suggest that there are commonalities in discourse constructed and shared in interaction. This is not a reference to a commonly shared technical vocabulary within a given team, for instance, but refers to discursive action accomplished at the tacit level. The present research is limited to a small number of organizations and an online discussion forum: a larger scale study could focus on teams in a variety of cultures, multinational organizations, for instance, and multinational teams who come together to solve particular problems, or to take part in particular joint exercises. Such a project would potentially build on the present findings, filling this substantial gap in the research reported here, as well as those from the (much) broader discourse analysis field. This could serve to develop a closer understanding of how and whether discursive action at the tacit level – and the kinds of shared displays of the contexts of trust and identity, for example – is accomplished from a cross-cultural perspective.

Finally, a third potentially fruitful topic for research would be a project aimed at developing a methodology to enable a robust and valid comparative analysis (as distinct from ‘measure’)

of knowledge outcomes as an accomplishment of discourse in interaction. Directions likely to produce some interesting results could be research comparing outcomes between different teams, and comparing those from the same team over a period of time, perhaps starting with the initial setup of the team. Of course, the key to this particular project's success lies in the definition of knowledge outcome. None-the-less, the case may perhaps now be made that the idea of attempting to measure knowledge outcomes, and the success or failure of KM as a whole, is both a problematic and archaic management practice.



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## APPENDIX

Table 3: Table of all data extracts contained in Chapters 8 - 11

No	Extract filename	Subject / speakers	Location (Chapter.section)
1	13019_005	Company B: Weekly project team meeting, with participants including Steve, Bob, Ade, Damien and Manoj. Extract concerns the agenda.	8.3
2	130319_005	Company B: Weekly project team meeting, with participants including Steve, Bob, Ade. Extract concerns challenge, epistemic superiority and authenticity.	8.4
3	130319_005	Company B: Weekly project team meeting, with participants including Steve, Bob, Ade, Damien. Extract risk and reputation.	8.5
4	130319_005	Company B: Weekly project team meeting, with participants including Steve, Bob, Damien. Extract concerns trust breakdown.	8.6
5	130319_005	Company B: Weekly project team meeting, with participants including Steve, Damien. Extract concerns trust and blame.	8.7
6	130319_005	Company B: Weekly project team meeting, with participants including Steve, Bob, Ade, Damien and Manoj. Extract concerns competence, knowledge sharing.	8.7
1	130320_02	Company B: Client-contractor meeting to discuss a brief for an exhibition stand. Extract concerns the need to include more partners in the stand's branding than solely that of the client. Involves 'M' and 'E'	9.2.2
2	130320_02	Company B: Client-contractor meeting to discuss a brief for an exhibition stand. Extract concerns how visitors will 'see' the stand. Involves 'M' and 'E'	9.2.2
3	130320_02	Company B: Client-contractor meeting to discuss a brief for an exhibition stand. Extract concerns a third participant claiming to have experience of exhibition stands. Involves, 'M', 'E' and 'P'.	9.2.3
4	130320_02	Company B: Client-contractor meeting to discuss a brief for an exhibition stand. Extract concerns P adding what appears to be a fundamental change in the brief so far discussed. Involves 'P' and 'E'.	9.2.3

1	Lines 1 - 4	Online discussion forum: the question is asked which starts off the forum discussion.	9.3.2
2	Lines 82 - 86	Online discussion forum: contributor 'C' constructs and 'in group'.	9.3.3
3	Lines 87 - 88	Online discussion forum: contributor 'G' claims lengthy experience.	9.3.4
4	Lines 46 - 49	Online discussion forum: contributor 'E' constructs relational stance-taking.	9.3.4
5	Lines 155 - 164	Online discussion forum: disagreement sequence between contributors 'K' and 'J'.	9.3.5
6	Lines 192 - 197	Online discussion forum: consensus pattern followed by elaboration.	9.3.6
7	Lines 11 - 16	Online discussion forum: example of 3-part listing as a strategy for display knowledge.	9.3.7
8	Lines 5 - 9	Online discussion forum: Using metaphor to display knowledge.	9.3.7
1	130520_003	Company A: Weekly sales and marketing meeting with participants including the Chair, Sam and John. Extract concerns reputational face-saving and accuracy in mitigating against risk.	10.2
2	130319_003	Company B: Weekly sales and marketing meeting with one participant, the Chair. Extract concerns financial discourse.	10.3
3	130520_003	Company A: Weekly sales and marketing meeting with participants John and Brian. Extract concerns financial discourse.	10.3
4	130319_003	Company B: Weekly sales and marketing meeting, with participants Ann and Chair. Extract is concerned with narrative accounting and consensus-corroboration.	10.3
5	130520_003	Company A: Weekly sales and marketing meeting, with participants including Chair and Mark. Extract concerns	10.3
6	13050_003	Company A: Weekly sales and marketing meeting, with participants including Mark, John, male and female. Extract is concerned with 'uber authenticity': a potential deviant case.	10.4
7	130520_003	Company A: Weekly sales and marketing meeting, with participants including John and Tom. Extract is compared with extract 8 in terms of patterns and elaboration in accounting.	10.5
8	130319_003	Company B: Weekly sales and marketing meeting, with participants including Chair and Jane. Extract is compared with extract	10.5

		7 in terms of patterns and elaboration in accounting.	
1	130320_004	Company B: Meeting to discuss proposal for a client. Extract concerns participants displaying what is on each other's minds. Includes Andy, Peter and Cindy.	11.3
2	130521_003	Company A: Project Manager's regular meeting. Extract concerns participants working up shared understanding of context through gisting and elaboration. Includes Stuart, Dorothy and Mark.	11.3
3	VN550143	Company A: The first of two Senior Management Meetings. Extract concerns a dispute over a proposal recently given to a prospective client. Includes Roger and John.	11.4
4	VN550143	Company A: The first of two Senior Management Meetings. Extract concerns continuing unfolding disagreement from extract 3 and conflicting contexts of the organization. Includes John and Roger.	11.4
5	VN550144	Company A: The second of two Senior Management Meetings. Extract concerns displays of frustration, disagreement and power. Includes Roger, John, Alan, Ted and Vicky.	11.5

Table 4: Conventions for transcription referenced in Chapter 7, and applied in Chapters 8 – 11

The transcript notations used in the excerpts presented here adopt a ‘lite’ version of the Jefferson standard, originally developed by Gail Jefferson, and widely used throughout discourse analytic research (Wood and Kroger, 2000).

Alndfnkn [jkdsafjhd] hksd [hfdkjfhkjkd]	<b>Square brackets</b> used between lines, or bracketing two lines of talk indicate the onset and end of overlapping talk.
Jllklkl=	The use of the <b>equals sign</b> at the end of one utterance and the onset of the next indicates no interval between utterances.
=jlkjlkjlkj	
(.)	<b>Round brackets encasing a period</b> indicates an untimed (i.e., just hearable) pause.
(number)	<b>Round brackets encasing a number</b> indicate a pause of x seconds.
Lklklnlk-	A <b>dash</b> indicates a sharp cut off to speech.
<u>Ldflasmdlf</u>	<b>Underlining</b> indicates emphasis.
LMLFGMSDFLGM	The use of <b>capitals</b> indicates markedly louder talk.
°kdfkldsf°	<b>Degree signs</b> indicate talk is markedly softer than surrounding talk.
Kjlkjkjk::kjhkhj	<b>Inserted colons</b> indicate word stretching.
↑↓	<b>Upward / downward pointing arrows</b> indicate increase or decrease in intonation.
.hh	<b>Audible breath.</b>
Heh or hah	<b>Indicates laughter.</b>
( )	<b>Use of round brackets</b> denotes unclear speech.
[kjandfkdnfkjdn]	<b>Square brackets</b> are used to denote contextual or explanatory information.
...	<b>Repeated periods</b> indicates talk omitted from the extract.