Knowledge Sharing and Organizational Learning: The Case of Management Consultancy

Bente Elkjaer
Aarhus University - Danish School of Education - Denmark
elkjaer@edu.au.dk
http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9541-9725

Ulrik Brandi
Aarhus University - Danish School of Education - Denmark
brandi@edu.au.dk
http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7361-8432

Abstract

We explore knowledge sharing in light of a pragmatist understanding of organizational learning. This takes us beyond knowledge as cognition and into an encompassing understanding of what it means to share knowledge. We draw upon a case study on knowledge sharing amongst management consultants, and transcend the idea that knowledge sharing is a matter of either codification or personalization. We do so through an understanding of learning that begins in the embodied experiences of work, and in which inquiry into uncertainties is the pathway to learning and knowing. This also means that we widen the issue of knowledge sharing beyond participation in practice because we include an explicit learning aspect in participation. In the concrete case of management consultancy, some of the impeding issues were working alone, tight time schedules, and insufficient knowledge sharing systems, while some of the facilitating issues included social gatherings, play, and working together on projects.

Keywords: knowledge sharing, organizational learning, case study, management consultancy, American pragmatism, practice theory

When we study the scholarly literature on knowledge sharing, we find two overall strands. The first understands knowledge as an asset or commodity that is acquired, sustained, and managed based on a coherent system with a focus upon individual incentives to share knowledge (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Deckert et al., 2007; Dyer & Nobeoka, 2000; Hansen, 2002; Tsai, 2002). Knowledge in this understanding is both something explicit and codified, or something tacit and un-codified, i.e. issues related to systems or persons. Another strand in the knowledge sharing literature argues for a distributed and situated understanding of knowledge with a focus upon the social practices of organizing. This means that knowledge sharing is viewed as relational practices and not only tied to individuals but also to collectives and organizations as well as to artefacts (J. Brown, Isaacs, Vogt, & Margulies, 2002; J. S. Brown & Duguid, 1998; Cook, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This understanding, which is based upon different versions of practice theory (see also Nicolini, 2012; see e.g. Schatzki, 2017), changes the locus of knowledge sharing from minds of persons to participation in the organizational practices (Brandi & Elkjaer, 2011; Østerlund & Carlile, 2005). In sum, reading through the literature on knowledge sharing, we see a divergent understanding between knowledge as a 'body of knowledge', which is acquired, sustained, and managed by systems and persons, and knowledge that emerges from the practices of organizational work and life. However, although we find the latter position helpful in transcending the dualism between systems and persons, the problems are, firstly, how this embedded, relational, and emerging knowledge is acquired and sustained by persons and, secondly, how it is possible to enhance knowledge sharing amongst persons. In this paper, we aim to show how a pragmatist philosophical inspired understanding of organizational learning helped us solve these problems in a research project on knowledge sharing amongst management consultants.

A pragmatist take on organizational learning resembles a practice theoretical understanding of knowledge sharing in its understanding of knowledge as situated in the organizational practices; however, pragmatism offers concepts to elaborate the learning that unfolds in the participation in practices (Elkjaer, 2000, 2003, 2004). It does so through the notions of experience and inquiry. This is elaborated below. Here, it is sufficient to say that the notion of experience at the same time encompasses persons – experience is what persons 'do' and 'suffer' or 'enjoy' from these doings – and transcends persons in the sense that the doings/sufferings/enjoying is done within an 'experienced'

(empirical) world. In a practice theoretical understanding, persons are seen as 'carriers' of practices (see e.g. Nicolini, 2012), whereas the concept of experience in a pragmatist philosophical understanding maintains the notions of persons and worlds as well as connects them in a dynamic way: experience also means 'empirical world'. The notion of inquiry helps us understand how we may enhance knowledge sharing. Inquiry is triggered through meetings with situations of uncertainty and, as such, are opportunities to learn and enhance experiences and, in turn, possibly knowledge.

This pragmatist theoretical framework not only acted as sensitizing devices to interpret knowledge sharing amongst management consultants but also as guidelines for (some of) the methods we chose to apply to research knowledge sharing amongst management consultants. Knowledge is a subset of experience; most experiences are not cognitive and communicative but remain within the emotional sphere of life. This was our background for using pictures (and associated texts) when gathering data about facilitating and impeding aspects of management consultants' knowledge sharing. Pictures speak more to emotional aspects of experiences than texts, and a combination of texts and pictures appeared promising (Ray & Smith, 2012).

In the following, we first elaborate on pragmatism followed by an introduction to management consultancy, our case, and methods. Then we present our interpretations of management consultants' illustrations of impeding and facilitating aspects of knowledge sharing. Our discussion reverberates around how the concepts of experience, inquiry, and organizational learning bring out other aspects of knowledge sharing than hitherto considered, i.e. codified, personalized, and embedded in practices. Finally, we bring together the different strands in our conclusion.

A pragmatist understanding of organizational learning

Our inspiration for working with a pragmatist understanding of organizational learning is the American pragmatist, John Dewey, who points to the central notions of experience and inquiry (Dewey, 1925 [1981], 1938 [1949]). Pragmatism connects our being in the world with our knowledge of the world and, as such, understands ontology as fundamental for epistemology – first we are and then we know. In other words, pragmatism connects our actions in the world with our thinking – anticipatory and reflective (Dewey, 1917 [1980]). In his earlier writings, Dewey understood this relation as

'interaction'; however, he later saw that 'transaction' was a better term because it connotes that all aspects of a situation move and that nothing is held constant (Dewey & Bentley, 1949 [1991]; see also Hammarström, 2015).

The notion of experience is the most central term in Dewey's pragmatism, but it is not an easy concept to work with (Bernstein, 1966 [1967]; Dewey, 1917 [1980]; Hahn, 1980). We have indicated above the duality in the encompassing and transcending persons and world, but there are other dualities connected to the notion of experience. In defining his notion of experience, Dewey cites an older pragmatist colleague, William James: *"We begin by noting that 'experience' is what James called a double-barrelled word. Like its congeners, life and history, it includes <u>what</u> men do and suffer, <u>what</u> they strive for, love, believe and endure, and also <u>how</u> men act and are acted upon, the ways in ways in which they do and suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine – in short, processes of <u>experiencing</u>"* (Dewey, 1925 [1981]: 18, Dewey's underlining). In using this quotation, Dewey wants to point to the duality of product (content) and process within the concept of experience. Dewey, however, also wants to point to experience as (mainly) processes of lives and living and not primarily experience associated with knowledge. Moreover, lives and living in Dewey's terms are the continuous transactions between persons and their natural and social environments – or 'worlds'. These are experienced as situated and concrete, 'worlds' in which knowledge, emotions, aesthetics, and ethics are all vividly present, and where to become knowledgeable is only a part of experience. When experiences become knowledge through inquiry, they turn into learning experiences through the ascribing of meaning to the experiences.

Experience derives from the relations (transactions) between persons and worlds, and experience (the empirical world) is what makes experience possible. It is *in* experience that difficulties arise, and it is *with* experience that problems are resolved by inquiry. Inquiry (or critical and reflective thinking that are synonymous with inquiry) is an experimental method by which new experience may be had not only through action but also by using ideas and concepts, hypotheses and theories as 'tools to think with' in a playful and instrumental way. Inquiry is concerned with consequences and pragmatism views persons as future-oriented rather than oriented towards the past. This is evident from persons' exercising playful anticipatory imagination ('what-if') rather than causal thinking based upon *a priori* propositions ('if-then'). What follows from this orientation towards the future is that knowledge (in Dewey's terms: 'warranted assertibilities') is

provisional, transient, and subject to change ('fallible') because future experience acts as a corrective to existing knowledge.

It is not possible to understand the meaning of Dewey's concept of inquiry if the value of the aesthetic and emotional experiences in Dewey's concept of experience is not recognized because inquiry is an answer to a felt ('emotional') encounter with an uncertainty in experience. Inquiry is a method, a way to 'think' (Dewey, 1933 [1986]), explore, and resolve this feeling of tension, and inquiry begins with the attempts to define what the problem is causing the tension. When something is experienced with the 'stomach' or an emotional response is exhibited as part of a situation, inquiry is a way to help define experience in a cognitive sense and to re-create meaning. To do so, it is necessary to activate former similar experiences by experimenting with different possible ways of attributing meaning to the situation at hand and, through that, transform the emotional experience into something that can be comprehended; as such, it is a learning and communicative experience. This is how an emotional experience becomes a reflective one; it becomes a learning experience, and may become knowledge, which in turn can be part of informing experience in the next similar experience of an emotional uncertainty.

It is through inquiry that experience is had and knowledge may be created. In this process, ideas and hypotheses, concepts and theories are a part. Different hypotheses can be formulated and a mixture of ideas and thoughts from former experiences activated. Concepts and theories are used instrumentally and experimentally both in thought actions ('imagination') and in bodily actions in which they can be tested. When a problem is resolved, a feeling of control ('consummation') may replace uncertainty for a period (Dewey, 1933 [1986], 1938 [1986]). Not all experience, however, leads to knowledge. Some experiences never enter consciousness and communication but remain emotional and sub-conscious. Dewey talks about the aesthetic and emotional experience, and about happiness and sorrow as also being experience. The mutual formation of persons and worlds reaches beyond the present worlds because persons are capable of inquiring and looking at themselves as well as the situation and changing both 'what' and 'how' is experienced through re-interpretations and re-actions. To live is to be engaged in the transactions that comprise experience, and experience is a process of life that changes continuously and in which new uncertain situations are an invitation to respond, an incentive to inquire, and to critically and reflectively think and have new experiences or to re-create old ones.

The concept of experience opens the notion of knowledge as embedded in the organizational practices, and inquiry helps us see how knowledge may be created and enhanced through learning. The concept of experience takes us away from persons as 'carriers' of practices and into seeing that persons' experiences are always mutually constructed and re-constructed with and within the social and material (empirical) worlds of which they are a part. This makes it possible to ask persons to illustrate their experiences (in this case knowledge sharing), remaining mindful that this is not their personal and individual experiences but rather their experiences transacting with the concrete and situated worlds (in this case consultancy work) of which they are a part. This simultaneously gives agency to persons and worlds as well as to the concrete transactions between them. The concept of inquiry connects in two ways to our above questions to practice theory. Firstly, inquiry is what we asked persons to do when illustrating their work and, secondly, inquiry is a concept connected to creation and enhancement of experience and knowledge and, as such, to learning. When seeing knowledge sharing in light of learning, it is possible to see how knowledge sharing is an aspect of work, and that it is both more than a matter of knowledge and a matter of knowledge through the concept of experience. In the following, we turn to our field of study and case: management consultancy.

The case of knowledge sharing amongst management consultants

Little is known about both the work and the knowledge of management consultants. With some exceptions (Humle, 2014), there is a lack of knowledge of the work of management consultants: *"(...) despite their increasing influence little is known about the* <u>*work*</u> *of management consultants"* (Alvesson & Johansson, 2002: 1, our underlining). Fincham and Clark (2002) argue that this is due to the constant transformation of management consultancy because of the swings and fashions of management ideas and techniques. The lack of knowledge of the knowledge of management consultants, Freidson (2001) argues, is due to the fact that management consultancy does not rest upon a professional, i.e. legitimate and trustworthy, knowledge base. Rather, the knowledge base of consultants is too *"elusive, fuzzy and perishable to sustain traditional professionalization projects"* (Muzio, Kirkpatrick, & Kipping, 2011: 805).

When studying the literature on knowledge sharing amongst management consultants, we overall find the same dilemma as above between explicit and tacit

knowledge, codified and personal knowledge (Ambos & Schlegelmilch, 2009; Donnelly, 2008). The strategies of codification and personalization within management consultancy are reflected in the strategies of standardized products (i.e. specific methods and concepts or a 'toolbox') versus creating personal communities amongst management consultants as a way to share knowledge (Ambos & Schlegelmilch, 2009). When knowledge sharing is understood as personalized, impeding and facilitating aspects of knowledge sharing is claimed to be a complicated issue due to a lot of factors such as, for example, lack of incentives, competitive tensions, time pressure, and fear of criticism (Donnelly, 2008).

This lack of knowledge about both the work and knowledge of management consultancy provides a challenge to the coordination and control of management consultants (Mintzberg, 1983). It also provides a challenge to the induction of newcomers into the industry as well as how newcomers are able to learn and align their knowledge with old-timers (Sprogoe & Elkjaer, 2010). In the paper, we primarily address the issue of the lack of knowledge about management consultancy work, but we do so through the lenses of their experiences of their knowledge sharing practices through asking them to illustrate how knowledge sharing is impeded and facilitated.

Our case is the management consultancy part of a large Nordic based consultancy group, which we call XMC. The whole group has about 9,000 employees in approximately 200 offices in 20 countries (Tholstrup, 2011). XMC is one of a number of principal business units in the group and has its own business responsibilities with about 475 permanent full time employees situated in Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Finland. XMC is organized across country divisions in 'learning environments' (LEs) based upon the different fields of management consultancy like HR, evaluation, IT management, and general management consultancy (GMC, our target group in the research project), which, for example, deals with issues on 'organizational implementation and change'. The LEs were explicitly set up in order to facilitate knowledge sharing amongst consultants. The idea was that the LEs were the 'homes' for training, certification, and knowledge sharing.

The LEs for evaluation and HR were working well due to either possibilities for standardized work practices (evaluation) or a strong culture based upon a shared theoretical framework amongst participants (HR). The LE for the 120 members of the general management consultants (hereafter just management consultants) had, however, never been working well in spite of many initiatives. About five training sessions had been

offered each year within the LE of the management consultants, but only three had been completed due to lack of attendees. In 2010, most training sessions were cancelled due to lack of participants, although some training sessions were held with fewer than the required 12 attendees. A certification program for management consultants launched in 2009 was later abandoned because there was no organizational support by way of an incentive system for being certified. In order to provide formalized structures for knowledge sharing, the idea of 'knowledge lunches' was introduced, and one video lunch with participants from different divisions across countries was undertaken in 2009 but subsequently terminated due to lack of demand. The top management of XMC was well aware of the problems of standardization as a way to knowledge sharing amongst this group of consultants, which is why the initiatives primarily were directed towards creating stronger personal ties and exchange of knowledge particularly between newcomers and old-timers. They had, however, not been successful and thought that something else should be done; therefore, they called upon our expertise on organizational learning.

In researching this case of knowledge sharing amongst the management consultants in XMC, we have employed several methods to find out why this group of management consultants apparently did not (want to?) share their knowledge. These methods included extensive notes from several meetings with the management of XMC, the reading of internal policy documents, and an online survey measuring the 'organizational learning capacity' (Chiva, Alegre, & Lapiedra, 2007; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Preskill & Torres, 1999). We also conducted interviews with key stakeholders such as the persons in charge of the different LEs, and applied SnapLogs to enable the management consultants to inquire into the impeding and facilitating issues of knowledge sharing (Bramming, Hansen, Bojesen, & Olesen, 2012; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Harper, 2002). SnapLogs are a combination of pictures and texts by the persons who are the focus of the research, in this case the general management consultants. In this paper, we primarily employ results from our interpretation of the SnapLogs because the empirical data from this research method relate to the concrete experiences of management consultants and, as such, may point to ways in which to enhance knowledge sharing. More specifically, 20 representatives from the group of general management consultants made SnapLogs after an instruction from the research team.

In the instruction, we asked management consultants to use SnapLogs to illustrate situations in which knowledge sharing is either impeded or facilitated in their eyes

(pictures) and ears (texts). We understand these 'photo-text' illustrations of knowledge sharing amongst management consultants as their inquiry into their situated work experiences of what impedes and facilitates knowledge sharing. We interpret the results of the SnapLog exercises as situations in which knowledge sharing is an aspect of work. Using pictures as data helps us to see emotional aspects of the problem addressed, i.e. knowledge sharing. In this way, the data help us to move beyond knowledge sharing as solely a cognitive activity and to include a concrete and embodied aspect of management consultants' inquiry into their work experiences.

We have interpreted the SnapLogs through successive readings of the pictures and texts. In the beginning, we read the SnapLogs inspired by a phenomenological way of reading texts (Giorgi, 2002). This is a way in which you 'bracket' your pre-understandings, research questions, and theoretical framework with the purpose of staying close to the empirical data and to condense them into themes. The themes are then grouped into more general themes using the research questions as a lens – in this case, 'what do the SnapLogs tell us about the impeding and facilitation issues of knowledge sharing amongst management consultants?' This resulted in three issues impeding knowledge sharing: organization of work, of time, and of systems for knowledge sharing; and in three issues facilitating knowledge sharing: social gatherings, time to play, and to work together on projects. Finally, we address these issues through our theoretical lens of pragmatism in order to open the issues of impeding and facilitating issues for knowledge sharing as tensions in the management consultants' experiences of work and as inquiry into ways for enhancing knowledge sharing amongst management consultants.

## Impeding aspects of knowledge sharing in XMC

There appears to be three major issues regarding impeding aspects of knowledge sharing: the organization of work, of time, and of systems for knowledge sharing. The first picture about the organization of work shows a lonely man in an otherwise empty space, and the following is written as a text to the photo: *The photo shows an empty office with a consultant at the coffee machine. I think the picture illustrates that you from time to time are alone working as a consultant. The photo illustrates that knowledge sharing is difficult when consultants work on client projects at the premises of the client. In a lot of*

projects, our consultants are working with the client at his premises all week long. That calls for new ways of sharing knowledge.

The first SnapLog tells us about the conditions of management consultants as working 'alone' 'on client projects' at their premises. This organization of work makes knowledge sharing 'difficult' and 'calls for new ways of sharing knowledge'.

The second picture shows a lonely suitcase in a train station, and the following is written: *The photo shows a suitcase in a train station, which symbolizes travel time that means often less time in the office and in contact with other colleagues. A lot of travel time and thereby little time to be in the office to meet colleagues in formal and informal meetings often leads to less sharing of experience and less reflection about it with others.*
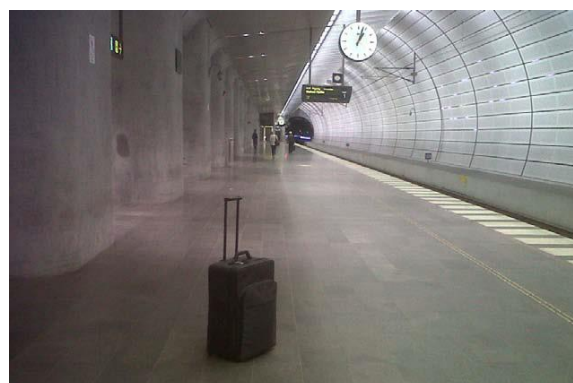
This SnapLog illustrates the other side of being alone in the home office, namely being away while travelling to and from clients' premises. A lonely suitcase in a train station symbolizes this. The text talks about 'a lot of travel time' that takes time away from being in the XMC office with colleagues. Travel time means that there is less time to meet colleagues, to 'share experience and reflect with colleagues'. Again, the SnapLog tells us

about the conditions for working as a management consultants, which signals that work is lonesome and on the road, which prevents knowledge sharing or calls for new (not yet found) ways for knowledge sharing.

When we interpret these two SnapLogs together, they illustrate situations of the organization of work for management consultants in XMC that act as an impediment for knowledge sharing both because s/he is frequently away on long journeys and working alone in the home office. This means that if colleagues are actually in their home office, nobody is there with whom to share knowledge. When these situations are illustrated with pictures of for example a lonely man or a lonely suitcase, they speak to us as situations of emotions. We sense the loneliness (of man and suitcase) as not only cognitive impediments to knowledge sharing but impediments that speak into the heart of what it means to be a management consultant.

The second issue that results from our interpretations of Snap Logs illustrates the organization of time in one way or another. The first picture shows a screen picture of an electronic calendar, and the text reads: *The photo shows a calendar with very little room for new meetings and activities. It is an easily understandable physical illustration of "being busy". Quite often a consultant has a very busy schedule and there is little room for re-thinking, formal learning activities (courses, conferences), social meetings (informal sharing of knowledge) etc.*

The second picture touches upon the same issue as the first picture, and the text is the following: *The photo shows a clock to symbolize what I miss most about each working day: Time! The Rolling Stones sang, "time is on my side, yes it is" – already in the year 1964. Is time on our side? Do we really have enough time to share our experiences and*

knowledge with other members of the general management consultants' learning environment? It is hard enough with XMC Y-country colleagues.

In the first picture, we see a fully booked Outlook calendar, while the second picture illustrates a clock on a wall. Both pictures address the issue of time and the organization of time in XMC. Many other SnapLogs illustrate a fully booked calendar and we see several photos with a clock, hereby emphasizing that time is an important feature that acts as an impediment for knowledge sharing in XMC. The text talks about 'little room for rethinking' and of 'being busy' as well as openly questioning whether there is 'enough time' for knowledge sharing. Again, we almost sense the desperation of what it means to have continuously too little time. It is not a matter of not wanting but of not being able to share knowledge.

A third set of illustrations shows situations which we have termed the organization of systems for knowledge sharing. The first picture shows bins with lots of paper, and the text says: *The photo shows tons of paper with knowledge that no one uses. Having tools and methods only described on templates and paper and not translating into dialogue impedes knowledge sharing.*

The second picture shows an office with no people but with computers, and the adjacent text is: *The photo shows an empty office with a computer. I was just taking pictures from our new domicile – and afterwards I thought it was a good illustration. I don't think we are good enough at exploiting our IT systems ("XMC-Link"). We need more discipline to update our systems with references, curriculum vitas, and so forth.*

These two pictures showing respectively bins filled with paper and a lonely switched-on computer illustrate that it is not knowledge to be shared that is missing but useful knowledge. There is lots of codified knowledge stored in IT-systems in XMC but it remains unused because it is only 'templates and papers' and not dialogue, which could connect the codified knowledge with persons and in this way make it come to life. In these latter pictures, we almost revisit the loneliness from the first issue of the organization of work; now it is all the templates and paper as well as the computers and systems that appear 'lonesome'.

The SnapLogs do not show unwillingness or lack of motivation for knowledge sharing. Rather, the SnapLogs illustrate situations of the work conditions for management consultancy. The lonely man in an empty space and a fully booked calendar illustrate (some of) these conditions. In addition, the SnapLogs include illustrations of systems of codified knowledge that do not interact with persons and which therefore remains dead knowledge. This means that the two strategies for knowledge sharing, codification and personalization, are not working for the management consultants in XMC. So what is working for knowledge sharing? It is to this issue that we now turn.

Facilitating aspects of knowledge sharing in XMC

While the impeding issues appeared to be around the organization of work as being alone, lack of time, and systems that were not useful, the facilitating issues point to social gatherings, time to play, and work together on projects. The first photo shows a group of people around a grand piano, and the text is: *The photo shows XMC Company Day 2011 in Copenhagen. Since it was the only way of sharing experiences between the countries that I have been involved with so far. Events are one way to facilitate sharing experiences, however much more is needed to create true collaboration. Tools of collaboration should be linked to day-to-day-work in order to create true, systematic collaboration.*

The second picture shows a table football game with no people around it, and the text reads: *The photo shows one of the kicker tables in X-country. This is the one in the X-town office. I spent many hours in my work time at this table and met colleagues from other departments and new interns. Many times we also talked about the projects and problems and discussed them. Knowledge sharing is also about bringing the right people together. It matters to have fun. And it happens when you do not expect it to happen.*

The third picture shows a man building a bridge while children are watching, and the text reads: *Working together in joint projects, using joint knowledge, is a good way of building bridges between the national corporations. This bridge is especially important in terms of creating a common understanding and a common meaning of the language that is used for methods and concepts (e.g. performance management might describe different concepts in the different national corporations). Working together in joint projects would foster the building of such a bridge.*

The above three SnapLogs shows a group of people singing around a grand piano, a table football game, and a man building a bridge together with some children. These pictures indicate that knowledge sharing is facilitated when connected to bringing people together and to the actual work of management consultants in XMC. In these illustrations of facilitating issues of knowledge sharing, it is persons connecting around something in their social and material worlds, singing, playing, and working together.

Although there is nobody around the table football, which in that sense makes it somewhat 'lonely', it appears to be an invitation to play and interact with each other. Looking at the singing session and the conductor's (the piano player?) instruction, we are almost part of the picture. Singing together is an outlet for being together, everybody sings in different ways, but in unison and joint sounds come out as a result. The picture (and the text) with the man building a bridge is almost symbolic; knowledge sharing is about building bridges across people, countries, and language.

In these latter SnapLogs in which the management consultants were asked to inquire into what in their experiences with work could be done to facilitate knowledge sharing, we clearly sense that it is not more codification or more personalization that is called for. It is rather more transaction, more situations of engagement with peers around 'something' like work or other joint activities that provide meaning to the management

consultants. The SnapLogs are examples of situations in which there may be occasions for learning for work through transacting, and when you may not be expecting to share knowledge, but which you do because a situation calls for it.

Discussion

When the management of XMC called upon our expertise to solve their problems with knowledge sharing amongst their general management consultants, they knew that more standardization of work might not be the right answer given the complexity of their tasks, and they had seen that the creation of more personal ties and deliberate planned knowledge exchanges were not working well. They apparently did not seem important enough for the management consultants to join. Our research on knowledge sharing brought us to a practice theoretical understanding hereof, but we found that seeing persons as 'carriers' of practices did not quite open the transactions between persons and worlds that the pragmatist concept of experience does. In addition, we needed the concept of inquiry to be able to enhance the problem of knowledge sharing amongst management consultants. These problems led us to see that if we wanted to help XMC with their knowledge sharing, we needed a pragmatist take on organizational learning that works from the concepts of experience and inquiry. It made it possible to see that knowledge sharing is not experienced as a matter of knowledge but of the organization of work. This transcends and includes knowledge but also learning. Knowledge sharing as embedded in participation in organizational practices is a step transcending the dualism of persons and systems, but the concept of experience makes us see persons transacting with their worlds of work, and as such see how learning is a useful concept.

When we interpret the management consultants' illustrations (pictures and texts) of the impeding and facilitating issues and knowledge sharing in their work in light of a pragmatist inspired concept of learning from experience, we are able to see how they ascribe meaning to these issues. When work is organized as one-(wo)man armies, when a lot of time is spent on the roads (or railways), when time is a scarce resource, and when systems fail to do what they promise (offer help to share knowledge), these are the experiences of management consultants' opportunities or rather lack of opportunities for sharing knowledge. These illustrations are examples of the ascribing of meaning to management consultancy work and show that knowledge sharing is not a matter of

knowledge but of the organization of work for knowledge sharing. Likewise, when asked to illustrate what may facilitate knowledge sharing, the management consultants take a point of departure in their experiences of what may provide avenues for knowledge sharing. We believe that opening the management consultants' participation in organizational practices through the concept of experience (and hence learning) provides us with tools through which to see how the impeding and facilitating factors are not only to be found in inadequate systems, lack of motivation, or embedded in organizational practices, but to participants' experiences with their work. Taking this seriously in an effort to help amend matters may be a step forward, and inquiry is another helpful 'tool to think with' as shown in the above methods and interpretations.

Conclusion

We began this paper by introducing two versions of knowledge sharing, codification and personalization, which imply respectively standardization of work and incentive schemes to motivate for knowledge sharing. A third version diverges from the two mentioned because of it's questioning of knowledge sharing as either based in systems or persons and proposes that knowledge sharing takes place through participation in the social practices of work. When zooming in on knowledge sharing amongst management consultants, we found that the ideas of knowledge sharing were to be found in the two versions of codification and personalization; however, what created further inhibitions to these strategies for knowledge sharing were that little is known about the work of management consultants. Even if the majority of management consultants have completed a professional degree, it does not mean that their knowledge follows traditional professional standards, which makes knowledge sharing even more complicated amongst management consultants because the work is not easy to standardize. Working with knowledge sharing as participation in organizational practices is also difficult when the work of management consultants is as black boxed as it appears to be. This is our background for bringing in pragmatist notions of experience and inquiry in a learning rather than a knowledge sharing perspective.

The main methodology we have applied and reported in this paper are SnapLogs, which are a combination of pictures and texts that speak not only to cognition but also to emotions and, as such, to an embodied understanding of learning. In the paper, we point to the issue of the organization of work, time, and knowledge sharing systems as

impediments to knowledge sharing and to social gatherings, play, and working together on joint projects as facilitating for knowledge sharing. These latter issues, we argue, are issues of learning and of organizing for learning.

Our results show how pragmatism points to the use of a method, SnapLogs, which asks the informants to not only inquire into and tell us something about impeding and facilitating issues of knowledge sharing but also illustrate this through the pictures. This brings out experiences with work that are more encompassing than knowledge because experiences are always embodied in persons and worlds and include emotions. Pragmatism used as a method and as a framework for understanding learning and organizing through the concepts of experience and inquiry helped us to transcend the dilemma between standardization and personalization as well as participation. Used in this way, and because pragmatism brings in emotions, pragmatism helped us to see that enhancing knowledge sharing amongst management consultants is not solved through either standardization and codification of knowledge or by creating incentives and motivation to do so. Analyzing impediments and facilitating knowledge sharing amongst management consultants calls for something 'third', something that begins and ends in the concrete situations of work. It is from this concretization and grounding in specific organizations and persons that knowledge sharing as organizational learning may be enhanced.

The illustrations of management consultants' inquiries into their work and the organizing hereof very well illustrate the usefulness of the pragmatist version of organizational learning. It is a door that opens into the situated working – and living – of management consultants. If management at XMC were to learn from these inquiries, it would be around two issues: firstly, to organize social and playful events in which it is possible to take a 'time out' with possibilities to meet other management consultants across the organization and share experiences; secondly, to include newcomers and management consultants with different experiences in joint projects. The latter proposal would entail making some room for time slack, and in some projects to open up for a looser system for billing. Through these two ways, it would be possible to organize for not only knowledge sharing but for organizational learning because issues other than cognition and knowledge would be involved – singing, playing and working together.

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