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Beyond knowledge management – understanding how to share knowledge through logic and practice

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Abstract
The aim of this paper is to develop our understanding of how knowledge is shared within a professional service firm. Insights from a 1-year ethnographic study suggest that it is important to go beyond the 'theoretical limitations' of knowledge management in order to understand how to manage knowledge within a firm. From the analysis of how knowledge is shared in practice, three logics emerge that help us understand not only how, but also why knowledge is shared among professionals within a professional service firm. A conceptual framework regarding how to better understand sharing, handling and developing knowledge within an organization is discussed, and implications for managers and future research are outlined.
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Introduction

Knowledge management as a research field and management practice has been the subject of intense discussion since the mid-1990s. The special issue by Spender & Grant (1996) in the *Strategic Management Journal* regarding how management can think of knowledge strategically is seen by many as the starting point of knowledge management (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2011). While knowledge management arose as a promise and an 'antidote' to organizational and inefficiency problems in the mid-1990s, the issue of how to share and benefit from existing knowledge has occupied researchers for a long time (Newell *et al*, 2009). As explained by Edwards *et al* (2009, p. 114), knowledge management is a fairly new term even though '[…] it refers to a set of activities that must have occupied the minds of humans for millennia. How to make use of what we know? How to find out what others know? How to come up with new ideas? These are just a few of the facets of what has become known as [knowledge management]'. Interest in how to better manage knowledge within an organization in order to increase efficiency and performance can actually be traced back to scientific management and the Hawthorne studies of the early 1930s. While scientific management resulted in solutions for how to rationalize production, it is interesting to note that the effect of the Hawthorne studies further influenced research into motivation and organizational learning focusing on knowledge and learning within organizations (cf. Argyris, 1957). However, when knowledge management emerged as a concept, interest in knowledge literally exploded and it is now widely discussed within different research

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fields, for example, economics, organization theory, institutional theory, and strategic management (Dierkes *et al*, 2001; Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003, 2011). The drawback with the high level of interest that emerged, both among practitioners and researchers, was that knowledge and knowledge management soon became buzzwords. Everybody was eager to address these popular concepts, for various reasons (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001). Contrary to what could be expected, the high level of interest led to a diversified research field and, rather than trying to look into synergies and previous research into, for example, organizational learning, there was a tendency not to share knowledge and experiences between various research communities focusing on these issues (Dierkes *et al*, 2001; Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003, 2011). As a consequence, the new conceptual frameworks and models that were suggested were developed in isolation, with both researchers and practitioners being left with a diversified and sometimes even inconsistent view of how to think of and manage knowledge within an organization.

Despite numerous research projects and practical attempts at understanding and managing the key process of knowledge management, that is, knowledge sharing, there is little evidence of how such efforts have contributed to competitive performance (Huysman & Wulf, 2006). Following decades of research, there is still no general understanding of how to define and think of knowledge management (e.g., Baskerville & Duplipovici, 2006; Lloria, 2008; Edwards *et al*, 2009). The reason why no universal definition exists is not, however, surprising as both knowledge and management as concepts are difficult to define (e.g., Styhre, 2003). Another reason why there is no general understanding, or perhaps the reason for many failed knowledge management projects, is that few studies have actually focused on how knowledge is shared in practice in day-to-day work. It is questionable whether knowledge has been studied at all, or if the focus has actually been on information (e.g., Alvesson, 2001; Gherardi, 2006). In fact, one of the pioneers of knowledge management, Laurence Prusak, emphasized in the foreword to a recent book on the subject that '[…] knowledge practitioners, consultants, and technology vendors all jumped on the knowledge management bandwagon to implement these systems. Unfortunately, the ideas were flawed. They were not so much wrong as misguided in their approach. […] knowledge management looked very much like information management, and, not surprisingly, the results produced by these new knowledge management projects were quite similar to earlier knowledge management projects – disappointing the knowledge advocates and especially the users and clients who were expecting great things from the more effective use of knowledge within the organization' (Leistner, 2010, p. xii). Thus, while many struggled to manage knowledge, that is, what was considered to be *the* competitive resource that would distinguish successful firms from others (e.g., Spender & Grant, 1996), most organizations seemed, in retrospect, to have been stuck with solutions regarding how to make information more accessible. Although efficient information technology (IT) and information systems (IS) may have had a certain impact on competitiveness in terms of becoming more efficient, IT/IS can no longer be seen as the only competitive tool. Today, IT/IS is a necessity and something that all firms use. An appropriate way to describe the use of IT/IS today is to think of it in terms of a hygiene factor, or a fundamental resource (e.g., Hendricks, 1999). An extension of that analogy would be to think of what motivates co-workers within an organization to use various IT/IS tools, and other methods of sharing knowledge, in line with the argument on hygiene and motivation factors given by Herzberg *et al* (1959). Recent research into factors of knowledge sharing suggests that, ultimately, we need to understand the motivation or driving force for wanting to share knowledge with others (e.g., Kalling & Styhre, 2003).

The critique of how to define and study knowledge management has led to new research paths (cf. Jonsson & Tell, 2013); some researchers tend to refer to the first and second generations, or the IT perspective and the human perspective of knowledge management, in order to underline that they go beyond the traditional view of knowledge management or IT/IS perspective (Carter & Scarbrough, 2001; Hislop, 2009). In order to develop our understanding of how to manage knowledge within organizations, the focus, claim the advocates, should rather be on the agents of knowledge, that is, the individuals or co-workers, who are ultimately the ones needing to share their knowledge and experiences with others (e.g., Tsoukas, 2008; Styhre, 2011; Cook & Brown, 1999; Orlikowski, 2002; Gherardi, 2006, 2009). Knowing in practice focuses on how knowledge is shared by in practice. The practice perspective is emphasized by an increasing number of researchers because, as noted by Styhre (2003, pp. 156–157): 'Knowledge does not fall from the sky, rather it is always an outcome of social practices and procedures of evaluation. Therefore, knowledge must always be examined at its source, i.e. the activities of the individual and community of practice. […] the closer one gets to the individual's use of knowledge, the less codified the knowledge becomes'. However, researchers have recently criticized the knowing in practice perspective for focusing too much on the situated learning process and not enough on the practical implications of how to manage knowledge in organizations (Jordan & Mitterhofer, 2010). Following the critique, it is important to take a holistic perspective when both studying and analysing knowledge sharing in practice. It is important to reduce the gap between the normative and the descriptive literature. A promising approach to that is, thus, focusing on and studying knowledge and learning in practice, and relating findings to previous research. This is because, as Østerlund & Carlile (2004) note, '[…] knowledge sharing is a complex process that goes beyond the mere transfer of abstract bodies of knowledge'. Therefore, they argue, researchers should approach, in line with Lave & Wenger (1991), knowing as situated in communities of practice or activity systems (Østerlund & Carlile, 2004,

p. 91). In order to develop our understanding of managerial attempts at organizing and managing knowledge within a firm, we need to take a closer look at what this means and how it is understood in practice. Following this, the *aim* of this paper is to develop our understanding of how to manage knowledge within an organization by focusing on how knowledge is shared in practice in the day-to-day work of a professional service firm.

From insights into an ethnographic study of how knowledge is shared in the day-to-day work of a professional service firm, three logics are identified, which jointly contribute to our understanding of how, and why, knowledge is shared in practice. Inspired by Friedland & Alford's (1991) idea regarding multiple logics , this paper suggests that, in order to understand knowledge sharing, it is important to understand the knowledge-sharing process as consisting of three separate, but complementary, logics. The three logics that emerge from the practice perspective are then linked and discussed in relation to the dominant research perspectives on knowledge and learning. Thus, this paper goes beyond the limitations of the existing research fields and offers a conceptual framework of how we can understand the key process of sharing knowledge within an organization through the idea of logics and practice. Both practical implications and suggestions for future research are discussed in the final section of the paper.

Theory: how to manage knowledge within an organization

Despite the fact that there are numerous excellent and extensive reviews of what constitutes knowledge management, it is still difficult to identify a universal definition (e.g., Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Dierkes *et al*, 2001; Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003, 2011; Baskerville & Duplipovici, 2006; Lloria, 2008; Mingers, 2008; Hislop, 2009). As some critics argue, the fact that, frequently, neither knowledge nor management have been defined makes it even more difficult to understand what knowledge management is and how it will help us to understand how to better manage knowledge within organizations (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001; Styhre, 2003). However, Schultze & Stabell (2004, p. 551), who offer a review of various definitions of knowledge management, stress that the most common definition emphasizes the ability to capture the co-workers' knowledge and to protect the organizational knowledge that is being developed; 'Typically knowledge management is defined as the generation, representation, storage, transfer, transformation, application, embedding and protecting of organizational knowledge'. This definition can be compared with what some researchers refer to as the first generation of knowledge management as the emphasis is on how to capture and store knowledge. For instance, Hislop (2009) and Newell *et al* (2009) refer to knowledge management as belonging to the first and second generations. While the first generation can be described as taking an IT perspective, the second generation can be described as taking an individual perspective. Lloria (2008) makes a similar distinction and notes that some researchers emphasize IT more, while others focus on the human factor when understanding how to measure, manage, and create knowledge. Padova & Scarso (2012) refer to a 'hard technology-oriented' and a more 'human-oriented' approach to knowledge management. Much of the focus on knowledge management, and especially with reference to some of the early works, has been on implementing knowledge management systems and strategies making implicit knowledge explicit and possible to store. That perspective takes a static view of knowledge, treating it as an object and possible to separate from practice. Much of the early literature also takes a normative perspective, focusing on how to become successful when implementing a strategy of knowledge management. However, the early literature has been questioned by a number of researchers who have offered critical reviews and questioned whether or not it is at all possible to manage knowledge while treating it as an object (e.g., Styhre, 2003; Alvesson, 2004; Tsoukas, 2008). Knowledge should rather be understood, they argue, from a constructivist approach that treats knowledge as a social process. However, more recent research, according to Kumar & Ganesh (2011), views these two approaches as complementary and thus not in conflict with each other. In order to become successful, it is probably not just important to manage and handle knowledge, by storing and transferring it, but also to share and learn, through a social process, in order to develop new as well as existing knowledge. However, there is a lack of studies actually focusing on all these aspects and explaining them using both approaches.

In a review of the theoretical foundations of knowledge management, Baskerville & Duplipovici (2006, p. 100) note that researchers have drawn on different theoretical sources such as information economics, strategic management, organizational culture, organization structure, and quality management. The literature is diverse; and in addition to that, the literature focusing on two key concepts, knowledge and learning, is also diverse and, in some cases, learning is not even discussed within at least the first generation of the knowledge management literature, but rather within the organizational learning literature. Instead of looking into synergies, researchers seem to have ended up discussing definitions and demarcations (Salk & Simonin, 2003; Vera & Crossan, 2003; Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2011). Vera & Crossan (2003) write that much of the confusion regarding what is meant by knowledge management in fact stems from the failure to differentiate knowledge management from organizational knowledge. Lloria (2008) stresses that this confusion is also related to the fact that both practitioners and researchers have studied organizational knowledge and knowledge sharing from different perspectives. Vera & Crossan (2003) also argue that, whereas practitioners tend to talk about knowledge management, researchers have a tendency to talk about organizational knowledge. While academics focus on the management of learning processes when discussing knowledge management, practitioners tend to emphasize the management of IT. Further, it is argued that the organizational learning literature focuses on descriptive studies aimed at an academic audience, while knowledge management literature tends to focus on prescriptive studies for practitioners. In addition to this, knowledge management is often described in terms of different management tools, either as an operational tool or as a strategic one (Mårtensson, 2000). That is also in line with the argument that mainstream knowledge management is often examined or theorized within the management discourse, treating knowledge in a technical–instrumental manner in order to separate managers who know from those who do not and are managed (Styhre, 2003).

Although it is not within the scope of this paper to offer a review of the different perspectives, it is important to outline what seem to be the dominant ideas behind these fields with the aim of developing our understanding of how knowledge is shared within an organization. The discussion about dominant ideas stems from previous reviews, as well as a selection of the most cited references within these perspectives (see, for instance, Dierkes *et al*, 2001; Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003, 2011). However, before outlining these ideas, it is important to note that not all researchers are explicit in terms of what perspective or theory they aim to contribute towards; thus, some ideas that seem to 'belong' to, for instance, knowledge management are sometimes discussed within organizational learning.

Organizational learning, as the term implies, mainly focuses on how the members of an organization learn by focusing on how individuals learn and how their learning process can be developed into organizational learning through practices and values in order to allow reflection and feedback. Two dominant ideas regarding organizational learning appear in the work of Argyris & Schön (1978), on single and double loop learning, and in Crossan *et al* (1999), a framework of organizational learning where the focus is on learning on the individual, group, and organizational levels. The emphasis on *the learning organization* is on how an organizational context may contribute to increased learning and knowledge sharing. This perspective is often described as normative; Senge (1990) and his work on 'the Fifth discipline' are often mentioned as being among the most cited references that 'belong' to this perspective. However, the distinction between organizational learning and the learning organization is not always clear; as noted by Örtenblad (2009), many researchers use these concepts interchangeably. For instance, Contu & Willmott (2003, p. 283) note that: 'Learning has been something of a Cinderella of management theory and practice. In the study of management, it has tended to be treated as a worthy but unexciting topic that is tucked away in introductory courses in organizational behavior. For practitioners, it is associated most closely with training. Until comparatively recently, when learning has been connected directly to corporate performance, competition advantage, and knowledge management – notably through the writings of Senge – attentiveness to "organizational learning" was confined to the margins of study and practice'. In line with Easterby-Smith & Lyle's (2003, 2011) categorization, we note that organizational learning relates to learning processes within an organization, contributing to theory, while the learning organization relates to the organizational context, contributing to practice and how to organize a learning culture.

In addition to organizational learning and the learning organization, *organizational knowledge* is also discussed, most often within the strategic management literature. The focus is on how values, attitudes and routines are created, that is, how organizational knowledge is created and contributes to the organization's strategic ability to achieve competitive advantage. Much of the literature is also devoted to what might break or hinder knowledge sharing by focusing on various factors (e.g., Kalling & Styhre, 2003; Ciabuschi, 2005). Often, the organizational knowledge discussion overlaps with *knowledge management*. A clear example here is a well cited model that often falls under the category of knowledge management but which, in fact, focuses on the creation of organizational knowledge and the knowledge-creating firm. The model, often referred to as the SECI model, was originally created by Nonaka (1994) in order to explain how the individual's knowledge, by means of a knowledge spiral, creates organizational knowledge. Although there is no universal definition of knowledge management, the basic idea is how management can manage, using various strategies for creation and maintenance, the knowledge within an organization. The work of Hansen *et al* (1999) on codification or personification strategies for managing knowledge within organizations is another clear example often mentioned in the discussion on knowledge management. Although Vera & Crossan (2003) stress that researchers tend to focus on organizational knowledge and practitioners on knowledge management, this is not always the case. As previously stressed and noted by Alvesson & Kärreman (2001), knowledge management, when it emerged, soon became very popular and, as a consequence, it also became an 'umbrella name' for related concepts. The fact that knowledge management became an umbrella name for related concepts also led to confusing and inconsistent findings as knowledge management was seldom defined or distinguished from other concepts. As a result, researchers stressed the importance of looking at synergies in order to develop our understanding of how to manage knowledge within an organization (e.g., Dierkes *et al*, 2001; Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003). Spender (2008) describes the difference and the similarity between the two dominant perspectives on how to manage knowledge within organizations, that is, knowledge management and organizational learning, thus: 'In practice, the two literatures run curiously parallel and, worshipping at different altars, honor different high priests; March or Argyris and double loops, on the one hand, *vs* Polanyi and tacit knowledge, on the other. While the focus of organizational learning is mostly on managing the production or growth of the organization's knowledge, knowledge management is more puzzling. At times, it seems to embrace learning, whereas at other times it suggests the more extensive agendas of the "knowledge-based view" or the knowledge-based view of competitive advantage […] To summarize, organizational learning seems to be about managing the creation of the organization's knowledge, while knowledge management is about optimizing the economic value delivered' (Spender, 2008, pp. 160–161).

Easterby-Smith & Lyles (2003, 2011) map the four concepts or perspectives based on the dichotomies of theory-practice and content-process, but stress that these distinctions are not straightforward and often overlap. They argue that maps such as the one they suggest may guide the reader initially but that hopefully also, after deeper insights, they make the reader aware that the distinctions may be less informative. For instance, they claim that '[…] some [researchers] build on the paper by Cook & Brown (1999) which distinguishes between the epistemology of possession and practice. In this case 'possession' fits well with the view of knowledge as content, but the epistemology of practice (or knowing) fits more closely with the process of learning from experience'. The fact that the different perspectives overlap should not be so surprising as knowledge and learning *per se* are related concepts. Crossan *et al* (2011, p. 453) describe the potential in integrating organizational learning and knowledge management in order to better understand how we know and how we learn: 'The development of knowledge and knowledge management stimulated research on knowing, which is closely associated with learning. In particular, the underlying ontology and epistemology that emerged around knowledge fostered vibrant debate about the sociology of knowing and learning … In fact, a theory of organizational learning should help to account for the nomonological net of the many related concepts, such as sense-making, knowledge management, absorptive capacity, dynamic capabilities, and organizational change'. As stressed, because of the criticism of knowledge management, existing and related research fields, for example, organizational learning, also became subject to analysis, witnessing a regenerated interest in the management of knowledge (Hislop, 2010). The critique and the regenerated interest in related perspectives has also led to a growing interest in practice-based research, that is, knowing in practice, which focuses on how knowledge is used and shared in practice. The argument put forward in this paper is that we need to understand the different perspectives, but also the fact that these perspectives relate to each other, as knowledge and learning cannot be separated, and that it is thus important to take a holistic approach if our aim is to develop our understanding of how to better manage knowledge within an organization. As will further be explained, it is in the interface between theory and practice, as well as between process and content, that the perspective of 'knowing in practice' makes a contribution, that is, when we take a practice perspective on how to manage knowledge within a firm, theory and practice as well as process and content need to be understood.

Gherardi (2006), who advocates the knowing in practice perspective, argues that the knowledge management literature has a simplified and objectifying view of knowledge and how it can be managed, assuming that all knowledge results in action. She also criticizes research into organizational learning for being too descriptive and for not focusing on knowledge in action. The knowing in practice perspective focuses on experiences and knowing how to do something, or how to perform a task, rather than on how to store and transfer information and knowledge. Orlikowski (2002, p. 271) explains that '… sharing "knowing how" can be seen as a process of enabling others to learn the practice that entails the "knowing how"'. Gherardi (2006) also argues that, in the discourse of learning and organization, there is a notion that knowledge resides in the heads of the individuals and that the literature on organizational learning adheres to this notion. Another notion of this discourse, wherein knowledge management is argued to reside, is that knowledge is located either in the head or the management of the organization, viewing knowledge as an asset. The knowing in practice perspective does not view knowing and practice as separated, rather that knowing 'takes place in the flow of experiences' (Gherardi, 2006, p. 14). This may be related to Cook & Brown's (1999, p. 383) argument that not all that is known can be captured in knowledge but can rather be viewed as epistemic work and as part of both practice and of what is possessed in the heads of the co-worker; '[…] understanding of the epistemological dimension of individual and group action requires us to speak about both knowledge used in action and knowing as part of action'. Further, it is important to understand that knowing is an ongoing social accomplishment, not static, and that it is 'constituted and reconstituted as actors engage in the world in practice'. Knowing in a simple sense is a verb connoting action, doing, and practice, whereas knowledge is a noun that connotes a thing, an element and a fact. In her literature review, Orlikowski (2002) draws on Schön's (1983) example of the reflective practitioner, stressing that it is important to understand human agency. As a result, it is especially important to understand how humans, co-workers, share and use best practices in their day-to-day work. In addition to the epistemology of possession (i.e., knowledge), Cook & Brown (1999) suggest the epistemology of practice. It is stressed that, when adding knowing to knowledge, it is possible to account for the relationship between what we know and what we do. The relationship between what we know and what we do is, of course, important to understand when we want to develop our understanding of how to best manage knowledge within an organization and of how to become successful. What is of interest to note is that, while the organizational learning literature has brought ideas regarding practice into the discussion in order to problematize what is meant by knowing in its everyday use (Gherardi, 2009), this has not been acknowledged to any great extent within the knowledge management field. There are, of course, exceptions such as Mingers' (2008) review of previous research into knowledge management and his review of the verb phrase 'I know' when linking critical realism to the discussion and distinction between knowledge, truths and beliefs. In addition, some of what can be referred to as the second generation of knowledge management also tends to take a more practice-oriented approach, focusing more on human action (e.g., Hislop, 2009).

In summary, from previous research, we understand that, in order to develop our understanding of how to best manage knowledge within an organization, it is not only important to incorporate complementary perspectives into knowledge management, but also to take note of the underlying argument that the knowing in practice perspective offers, that is, that we need to take a practice perspective when studying knowledge sharing within the organization. Figure 1 is based on the framework suggested by Easterby-Smith & Lyles (2003, 2011) and summarizes the different perspectives discussed above, where knowing in practice is placed in the middle in order to underline the potential and importance of taking a practice perspective on how to study and manage knowledge within an organization.

Methodological considerations

This research builds on a 1-year long ethnographic case study of how knowledge is shared in the day-to-day work of a professional service firm, a particularly interesting context to study as knowledge is especially important to share as it is considered both the input and the output of such firms (Morris & Empson, 1998; Maister, 2008; Newell *et al*, 2009). Schwartzman (1993, pp. 3–4) stresses that '[…] ethnography is a particularly valuable method of research because it problematizes the ways that individuals and groups constitute and interpret organizations and societies on a daily interactional basis [and] it provides researchers with a way to examine the cultural knowledge, behavior, and artifacts that participants share and use to interpret their experiences in a group'. Schwartzman (1993, p. vii) further notes that: 'organizations are "formal" in the sense of having explicit tasks to accomplish and "informal" in the sense of the way members continually negotiate with one another in the interpretation and carrying out of such tasks', and that the promise of an ethnographic study, therefore, lies in the presentation of the 'work culture that emerges from the interplay between these so-called formal and informal aspects of organizational life'. Thus, in order to develop our understanding of how knowledge is shared between the members of an organization, an ethnographic approach seems very promising. This should be especially important as research generally taking an ethnographic perspective indicates that the ways in which people actually work differ considerably from how organizations describe this work in manuals, training programmes and so on (Brown & Duguid, 1991, p. 40). This is also in line with Barley & Kunda (2001, p. 90) and their article on the need for more detailed studies of work; 'The dearth of data on what people actually do – the skills, knowledge, and practice that comprise their routine work – leaves us with increasingly anachronistic theories and outdated images of work and how it is organized'. Further, inspired by Tsoukas' (2008, pp. 197–198) view of how to best understand organizational knowledge, we adhere to the idea that it is especially important to understand the social processes within an organization since '… seeing organizations as constituted by knowledge enables researchers to show the recursive loop between ways of knowing and knowledge produced. […] The ecological ideal, with its emphasis on inter-connectedness, situatedness and creative action, helps generate knowledge that is more organic, notices the emergent properties of organizations and the processes through which they are generated and views human agency in poetic (making/creative) terms'.

Figure 1 An illustration of the five research perspectives with a focus on how to manage knowledge within an organization. Developed from Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003, p. 3.

The ethnographic study was carried out over the course of 1 year (February 2010–February 2011). It combined 97 interviews (with co-workers on different levels and in different parts of the organization, see Appendix) with observations of meetings, training programmes and the day-to-day activities taking place at the firm. In order to develop an understanding of the firm, where knowledge and knowledge sharing is considered as both the input and the output, the interview questions were broad and open and the informants were asked to explain and talk about, for instance, the firm, why it was successful, why they had applied for a position there, how they had learnt or how they believed you learn the profession, how they defined knowledge sharing, and whether it was different from knowledge management. The co-workers were also asked to describe a typical day, how they typically proceed when working with a client matter and how they shared their experiences. These stories were then compared with observations, with new questions emerging throughout the research process. As noted by Bryman (1995), an observation offers the possibility of gaining first-hand knowledge of behaviour and context. Silverman (2006) suggests, with reference to Bryman (1995), different aims of observational research, of which ‘seeing through the eyes of the people being studied’ is of interest for this research. This combined observation method, that is, combining interviews with observations, can be compared with what Johansson (1998, p. 27) refers to as ‘shadowing people in the daily work’. The advantages of shadowing are described in terms of acquiring a deeper understanding of the study object/ subject and facilitating the interpretation and analysis of data. Shadowing is also discussed by Gherardi (2006) as a methodology for gathering data on the floor, yielding a combination of documentary data on how people, both individually and collectively, engage in their everyday activities. The present study can thus be described as being based on four data sources; interviews, observations, documents, and the firm’s intranet. Being able to both collect the data and analyse it in its real setting offers the opportunity to think of aspects that might not be possible to identify purely through interviews. This is in line with Ghauri & Grönhaug (2005) who stress that observation as a method also allows for learning and analytical interpretation. The major advantage of an ethnographic approach is that data can be collected in a natural setting and that it is possible to more accurately capture the dynamics of the phenomenon, for example, how knowledge is managed and shared, in focus in the study.

Schultze (2000) discusses various strategies regarding how to ensure reliability and validity when doing participant observations. Although reliability might be difficult to achieve, as an observation study or an ethnographic study cannot be replicated, it can be established through detailed descriptions (Silverman 1993, p. 146) allowing the readers to formulate their own interpretations before comparing them with the author’s. This research adheres to Dyer & Wilkins’ (1991, p. 615) argument that the ultimate goal of case study research is to: ‘[…] provide a rich description of the social scene, to describe the context in which events occur, and to reveal […] the deep structure of social behavior’. It is important to offer rich descriptions in order to be able to offer alternative aspects regarding how to develop an understanding of how to manage knowledge within an organization. Thus, in order to establish reliability, a description of what knowledge management and knowledge sharing mean to the professionals at the firm, a short introduction containing a few quotes will be offered before outlining a discussion about how knowledge is actually shared in practice. In terms of establishing validity, it is important to collect different kinds of data through, for example, documents and interviews, as well as over a period of time. The fact that the ethnographic study was carried out over the course of 1 year, and data collected from four data sources, increases the validity of this study. Moreover, Yin’s (2003) ‘pattern-matching’ method of analysis was applied, whereby empirical patterns were compared with those of theory meaning. The aim of this study, as in all qualitative research, is to search for analytical generalization in order to identify opportunities for theory expansions and future research. Transcripts from interviews and observations were compared with documents as well as field notes and a research diary, in which data and observations were continuously analysed and reflected on – both in relation to the ‘native’ role and to the role of ‘stranger’ (cf. Kondo, 1990). There was also the opportunity, on several occasions, to discuss the findings with key informants at the firm as work has progressed. Thus, to strengthen the reliability, respondent validation has been applied (Van de Ven and Poole, 1990).

The chosen professional service firm is a Swedish law firm, the largest and most prominent law firm in the Nordic countries, with its base in Sweden and four offices located there. In addition, at the time of the study, this firm also had eight offices in other countries around the world and was owned by approximately 85 partners, employing approximately 600 co-workers, of whom 400 are lawyers. The firm provides a full range of services, entailing that it offers expertise in specialties, which are jointly viewed as necessary when it comes to handling complex and international client matters. Besides being the largest and most prominent, the firm is also the number one choice of law students, having been so for 11 years in a row (2013). The reason why the firm is successful can be explained by its strong emphasis on corporate culture, with norms and values that emphasize team spirit, quality, and a business focus. The firm uses a profit-sharing system, whereby all partners share equally and all associates earn the same salary, depending on their length of employment at the firm. Within the industry, the organizational structure is referred to as a ‘true partnership’ or a ‘lockstep’ (e.g., Morris & Pinnington, 1998; Empson, 2007). In short, the structure relates to a profit-sharing system, whereby profits are shared equally and the wages of the co-workers are the same, depending on the number of years they have been employed by the firm. The structure is often described both as influencing and being reflected in the corporate culture, being referred to by some partners and senior counsels as the ‘spirit of the Three Musketeers’, whose motto is ‘one for all and all for one’. Also of importance in understanding the present firm is stressing that knowledge and learning play a key role, as the firm is a professional service firm that ultimately offers knowledge to its clients, and is frequently discussed. Since the mid-1990s, the firm has also had a specific support function, that is, ‘The Knowledge Department’, which is responsible for knowledge and learning. In addition to that, professional development lawyers (PDLs) were appointed a few years ago. PDLs are senior associates that work with both client matters and knowledge-related issues such as document handling, training and marketing-related issues for the department they belong to. In the following section, a discussion about how knowledge is shared in practice will be outlined, which not only focuses on how knowledge is shared but also why it is shared and what the motivational factors are for sharing knowledge with other professionals at the firm (see also Jonsson, 2012).

Knowledge sharing in practice/practicing knowledge sharing at a professional service firm

For this firm, knowledge sharing, in practice, is primarily practical. When asking questions about what knowledge sharing means, and whether it is different from knowledge management, it is clear that knowledge management is understood as a managerial effort regarding how to structure and organize knowledge, and in particular information, with the use of IT/IS, both through structured training programmes. Knowledge sharing is expressed as a part of the day-to-day work, or as a dialogue and a conversation wherein knowledge, and especially knowing how to do something, is shared. Knowledge sharing is also considered to be a means of developing a relationship between co-workers, something which is considered necessary with regard to learning the profession. This is how some co-workers expressed their understanding of knowledge management and knowledge sharing:

> Knowledge sharing is all I do (Partner)

> When I hear the words, though, I spontaneously think of knowledge sharing as what we do day-to-day – it happens all the time without any direct routines. Knowledge management, perhaps incorrectly, but then I think more about the structure and the people who are responsible for systems and knowledge banks ... (Associate)

> Knowledge sharing is about sharing with others ... it's natural – everyone pursues a shared goal. (Assistant)

> Knowledge sharing is about relationships. Knowledge management is about IT. (Associate)

In relation to the discussion about perceptions and expectations regarding what knowledge sharing means, it is also important to underline the two concepts/terms that were used when discussing knowledge sharing, namely, *knowledge handling* and *knowledge development* (see also Jonsson, 2012). Knowledge handling refers to organizational routines for structuring and organizing knowledge and knowledge development refers to organizational routines for developing new knowledge from different experiences. While knowledge handling seems to refer to templates and documents, as well as formal education that should be used mostly *before* a client matter, knowledge development seems to refer to tools/methods for learning *after* a client matter. Knowledge sharing was understood as being related to conversations and the day-to-day work and can thus be related to what happens *during* a client matter. What is especially interesting in relation to the discussion about how to manage and organize knowledge within the organization is the fact that both a process and a content perspective are important. It is important to store knowledge as content and to share knowledge and knowing as a process. An example of this is a very interesting organizational routine called *debriefing*. Debriefing was a formal process, whereby experiences from a client matter were identified and discussed within the team that had been working together on a client matter. The aim of debriefing was to summarize and share the lessons learnt from a particular client matter within the team in order to evaluate what went well and what could be further improved on in future client matters. The result of debriefing can be allotted to the routine for knowledge development, but it can also be referred to as a part of the routine for knowledge handling, that is, when relevant documents are stored for future client matters, but also when new routines for future client matters could be documented and shared with other teams at the firm. Here, it is important to stress that teams were created for each client matter and that the constellations of the teams thus varied. Team flexibility not only ensured that the clients would have the best expertise, for the client matter, but also that the professionals had an opportunity to work with different colleagues. In relation to the discussion about knowledge handling, knowledge sharing and knowledge development, it is also of interest to note that the co-workers were aware of how and when information, knowledge, and know-how or knowing had to be used in conversations both in the day-to-day work and during the interviews. The distinction becomes particularly important in relation to the discussion about where or how the co-workers felt they learnt best. Several co-workers stated that knowing or know-how is the most important thing to share, and that it is best shared through learning by doing/learning by observation. Or as one partner and one associate put it;

> The active know-how is more important than information – you need active know-how in order to assimilate information. (Partner)

> With experience, you learn to filter information but also to exercise better judgment. Experience and tactics are contributed by the partners and that's what you want to learn. (Associate)

How knowledge is shared in the day-to-day work

From observing how people work and how co-workers describe what they do, as well as how they work, it is clear that knowledge sharing is what people do in their day-to-day work. In particular, knowledge sharing is considered important and relevant when working on a client matter and everyone stated that it was on a client matter, or on the job training, that you learnt the most. This shared view suggests that knowledge sharing relates to doing things together and learning from each other. In order to facilitate this learning, and working efficiently, it is stressed that it is necessary to have structured routines regarding how, for instance, to staff and lead a project team before, during and after a client matter. It is also important to have standardized routines for handling documents and templates in order to benefit from previous experiences, but also because there are certain rules and regulations that a law firm has to follow when handling its client matters. It is thus important to separate knowledge handling from knowledge development.

In order to learn the profession and develop as a lawyer, much emphasis is put on training, both formal and informal, and on sharing experiences and knowing in practice. Training is considered, by many, to be an important part of knowledge sharing within the firm, especially what can be referred to as business knowledge, that is, knowledge of how to work as a lawyer for this particular firm. Both partners and associates stated that the best way to learn the profession, and to share knowledge, was on the job training, organized as an apprenticeship model, or learning by observing senior associates or partners in action. Many partners, particularly the older ones and senior consultants, believed that, in addition to the apprenticeship model, it is both important and necessary to have a formal training programme in order to offer associates a broad knowledge base, especially as the firm had become increasingly specialized. The firm has a 6-year training programme for associates, the Professional Development Programme, which encompasses training in specialist knowledge as well as in various skills, for example, negotiation techniques, where two partners discussed and shared their experiences with their associates. In addition to a formal training programme, each practice group provides specialized training for its associates via traditional training sessions as well as know-how lunches or junior breakfast meetings. Despite formal training and on the job training, the best method of knowledge sharing is expressed as an open attitude towards each other and the 'open door' principle;

> Open doors! That's the most important thing. Every day chit-chat and just going in and talking ... because the fact that there are so many issues that are not black and white and to just give an answer outright – to be able to discuss something and to reach a solution. Then we come back to this thing of if there's a cloned version of me, then it won't be so useful asking that person for advice. But if there's someone who asks have you thought of this instead and who can use his/her experience and offer a new perspective or take a different approach just using his/her personality. (Partner)

In order to further develop our understanding of how knowledge is handled, shared and developed within the firm, it is also important to understand what the motivations behind these processes are. In the following section, the focus will thus be on institutional forces, or the willingness to share knowledge and knowing within the firm.

Motivating why knowledge is shared in the day-to-day work

Having a specialist organization, with a clear up-or-out system that allows only a few associates to become partners, represents a challenge to knowledge sharing. In order to make sure that knowledge is shared among specialists, the professionals, it is important to have both a structure and a culture enabling and promoting knowledge sharing. As already stressed, the profit-sharing system, True partnership, can be seen as enabling both a knowledge-sharing structure and a knowledge-sharing culture. As profit is shared equally among the partners, and because all the associates earn the same wage, depending on the number of years they have spent at the firm, there is no disincentive to share knowledge. However, in order to make sure that the values of team spirit, quality and business focus, as manifested in True partnership, are maintained, it was stressed that it is important to recruit individuals that adhere to the principle and the culture. It is important to recruit individuals that share the norms and values of the firm. Personality is often mentioned and the fact that it is important to recruit different personalities in order to make sure that new perspectives and ideas are brought into the firm, but based on the guiding principles of True partnership. Many partners emphasized differing personalities and the fact that it was important to have partners that 'were not a cloned version of oneself'. The organizational culture can also be described as a learning culture, or as True learning, and it was emphasized that it is important to be curious and willing to learn, and to teach others;

> It's an attitude. Asking questions is a start … wanting to know and then getting to know has to be positive. It's a friendly act if someone asks me something. Someone expects me to know. Basically, someone's putting their trust in me and then you have to try to preserve that setting. I'm treated well here – they ask me about stuff and so I can't say that I don't have time, I have to answer them. Feeling proud – they put their trust in you. There's such a lot of trust behind that question. Then there's the setting when you sit down and chat and encourage the legal talk, carry on a discussion … (Senior counsel)

> The driving force is sharing and that it's fun to work here and that there's a strong culture of 'engagement'. It's a living organism because there's a continuous turnover of people here. (Senior associate)

> You know that if you've got a position here then you're 'fine'. You relax and it's fun to learn from each other. It's different from school, where it's very competitive. (Associate)

> … that it's not a one-way street and that there's a bit of give and take. And I think, and you know this yourself … when you come to a workplace, you want to learn. To feel that you can get better because you value knowledge and then you have to be able to get it as well. (Partner)

In conclusion, the main reason why knowledge is shared within the firm is the principles of True partnership, which guide not only the structure but also the culture. The attitude that knowledge sharing is part of your work and that it is fun to learn and help others is nourished via the apprenticeship model, whereby junior associates learn from senior ones and partners – and vice versa.

Discussion: understanding how to manage knowledge using a trinity of logics

In order to develop our understanding of how to manage knowledge, it is useful to relate the two concepts of how to

Table 1 A summary of the three logics and a process for managing knowledge within an organization

Knowledge handling	*Knowledge sharing*	*Knowledge development*
Hygiene factor (Necessity/basic)	Motivation factor (Develop/learn the profession)	Motivation factor (Develop the firm)
Knowledge management logic *IT/IS, documents & templates Processes/org routines*	**Professional logic** *Experiences Learning by doing/observation*	**Business logic** *Debriefing, Product development*
Before	During	After

handle knowledge and how to develop knowledge to the discussion about how to share knowledge. When focusing on how knowledge is shared in practice, it is clear that different processes are related to knowledge sharing. The three concepts, that is, knowledge handling, knowledge sharing and knowledge development, represent three different logics regarding how to manage knowledge within this firm. Knowledge sharing in practice, within this firm, can thus be described as three separate logics, a *Knowledge management logic* focusing on templates and documents, a *Professional logic,* whereby co-workers learn during specific client matters, learning the profession by means of sharing knowledge and knowing, and a *Business logic* regarding how to further improve and develop the firm by sharing experiences after a client matter. The motivation behind the knowledge management logic is making work easier and more efficient by storing and using documents and templates. The motivation behind the professional logic is developing as a professional and learning the job. Finally, the motivation behind the business logic is contributing to organizational learning and to the success of the firm. A successful firm motivates professionals who want to be a part of its success.

More specifically, a focus of the knowledge management logic is how to store information and make it accessible to all the co-workers of the firm, that is, securing organizational knowledge that has evolved from various client matters. The professional logic refers to how to work in practice, in a client matter, and what procedures and routines prevail. In relation to the different perspectives, this logic relates to both organizational learning and the notion of the learning organization. Here, the focus is on knowledge and skills rather than just pure information. The desire and motivation to learn the profession, and to contribute knowledge and expertise, can be found in this logic. This is also how and when knowledge sharing is described as a part of the work. Actual knowledge sharing – in practice – thus takes place during encounters and conversations between co-workers. Finally, the business logic relates to how lessons learnt from different parts of the organization can be utilized throughout it. The focus is on how new knowledge and new routines can evolve from lessons learnt in order to develop the firm and new business offerings. For a summary of the three logics and methods of sharing knowledge, and why, (see Table 1).

The three concepts, that is, knowledge handling, knowledge sharing and knowledge development, can also be linked to what was mentioned in the introduction about hygiene and motivation factors (Herzberg *et al*, 1959). It is clear that the motivation for learning in a project team or a practice group, and how to develop both as an individual and as a firm, is greater than using and constructing a template. IT and KM are considered necessities but what really motivates co-workers is learning and developing as a lawyer, as well as being able to contribute towards developing the firm. The real knowledge sharing takes place when co-workers meet, talk and work together, and, as previously stressed, the best way to learn the profession is considered to be working on a client matter.

In order to make these multiple logics (cf. Friedland & Alford, 1991) interact, it is clear that the business logic has to be the dominant one (cf. Prahalad & Bettis, 1986). The dominant logic sets the rules and values regarding how to work and share knowledge within this firm, that is, both with regard to how to structure certain routines for knowledge sharing and with regard to how to support and nurture a learning culture so that knowledge and experiences are developed and shared within the firm. Knowledge sharing at a professional service firm is all about business development; it is important that these multiple logics are guided by the business logic. In order to enable and ensure that the dominant logic will guide the knowledge-sharing process and the approach to knowledge and knowing, it is important to talk and work towards a common vision. In order to make the three logics interact, guided by the dominant logic, it is also, as previously stressed, important to recruit the 'right' co-workers, who are willing to learn and teach others – and further contribute towards a strong learning culture.

To conclude, when we let go of the 'theoretical limitations' to different perspectives on how to manage knowledge and focus on how knowledge is shared in practice, that is, when taking a knowing in practice perspective, three logics emerge that help us to understand how to

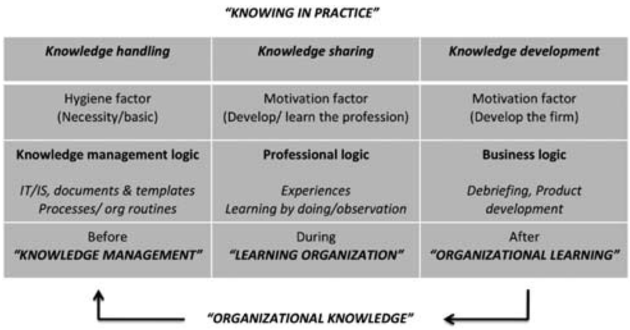

Figure 2 A conceptual model of how to understand and how to manage knowledge within an organization through logic and practice.

manage the central process of sharing knowledge within a firm. When we look into the meaning and processes of these three logics, it is clear that insights from each perspective are important. Bringing in ideas about organizational learning and how to develop a learning organization that helps us to understand how to store and develop organizational knowledge, not just information, which is what the fundamental idea of knowledge management is all about. This is, furthermore, in line with the argument of Kimmerle *et al* (2010) that, in order to make sense of knowledge management, it is important to consider individual learning and collaborative knowledge building as related processes. In their study, they stress that social technologies should be viewed as a potential for combining individual and collective learning. In an attempt to link the different theoretical perspectives to a practice perspective, and the three logics, a conceptual framework regarding how to manage knowledge evolves, see Figure 2. The underlying logics can be related to the conceptual model for describing the knowledge management lifecycle of Edwards *et al* (2009), where the focus is on how to create, retain, use, refine, and share knowledge. Although a thorough explanation of this cycle is not provided, the way of understanding knowledge management, or how to manage knowledge within an organization, fits well with the argument suggested in Figure 2. Here, knowledge development leads to the creation of new knowledge that needs to be managed and shared, and then further developed. In short, in practice, it is important to take a process, or even a cycle, perspective on how to manage knowledge within an organization.

Concluding discussion: knowledge sharing through logic and practice

The aim of this paper was to develop our understanding of how to manage knowledge within an organization by focusing on how knowledge is shared in practice in the day-to-day work of a professional service firm. From the ethnographic study, it is clear that, in order to understand knowledge sharing, it is important to go beyond 'the theoretical limitations' of knowledge management to fully understand how to manage knowledge within a firm. By taking a knowing in practice perspective, it becomes clear that it is important to incorporate the competing, but still complementary, research fields of knowledge management, organizational learning, the learning organization, and organizational knowledge. In order to develop our understanding of how to manage knowledge within an organization, it is important to focus on the three logics to explain how knowledge is shared in practice. It is important to understand how to handle knowledge, how to share it, and how to develop it. In terms of a contribution to research and practice, these three logics, taken together, contribute to our understanding of how to manage knowledge and the central process of sharing knowledge within an organization. Obviously, the aspects stressed here need to be investigated in greater detail. For future research, it would be interesting to further develop the ideas about the different logics with research focusing on how to learn a profession (Styhre, 2011). Future research could also focus on the various ways of organizing and motivating co-workers in relation to these logics. From this study of this particular professional service firm, it is clear that the motivational factors vary with each logic and it is thus important for management to understand that when developing the subsequent organizational routines for these logics. The issue of what motivates the professionals at a professional service firm is especially important to understand and thus emphasis should be on how motivation might vary between these logics. Because, as noted by Newell *et al* (2009), it is particularly significant to the knowledge workers at a professional service firm to be motivated by learning from other professionals. Knowledge workers are described as continuous learners and people who typically are willing to apply and add to their existing 'knowledge stock' (DeFilippi *et al*, 2006). In the preface to Barnard's (1971) book, Kenneth Andrews maintains that the important message that Barnard conveys is that, if an organization is to survive, there must be a willingness to cooperate, an ability to communicate, and a declared and accepted view. The manager's role is to establish a system of communication, to maintain the desire for cooperation, and to ensure that the organization's purpose is not abandoned. Following Yannow's (2004) suggestion that managers need to increase their understanding of knowledge at the periphery of the organization, that is, at lower levels within the organization and thus not just on a strategic or managerial level, this study responds to that claim. By studying how knowledge is shared on a micro-practice level, this research should be able to contribute towards practical implications for managers in terms of an increased understanding of how to set up strategies for managing knowledge using the three identified logics. The findings of this study further support the argument of Tsoukas & Vladimirou (2001) that managers must understand how to manage heuristic knowledge, that is, knowledge developed by employees in their day-to-day work. It is stressed that it is probably more, or at least equally, important to understand social relations and less important how to store digital information. It is thus necessary to incorporate not only the different perspectives on learning and knowledge, but also classical research into motivation, with the discussion about hygiene and motivation factors (Herzberg *et al*, 1959), as well as research on leadership in order to further develop our understanding for knowledge sharing.

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Appendix

Table A1 List of interviews

Position	*Date*
Senior Counsel, Head of Knowledge Department	24 September 2009
Partner	19 October 2009
Associate	16 October 2009
IT Systems Support	15 February 2010
PDL	11 February 2010
PDL	17 February 2010
Training Manager	17 February 2010
HR Manager	18 February 2010
Communications Manager	18 February 2010
Head of Office	19 February 2010
HR Manager	19 February 2010
PDL	22 February 2010
Managing Partner	23 February 2010
Finance Manager	25 February 2010
Risk and Quality Manager	25 February 2010
HR Manager	26 February 2010
Partner	5 March 2010
IT Manager	3 March 2010
Partner	19 April 2010
KM Systems Coordinator	5 March 2010
Partner	17 March 2010
Partner, Chairman of the Board	10 March 2010
Partner	17 March 2010
Senior Associate	15 March 2010
Partner	15 March 2010
Senior Counsel	15 March 2010
PDL	16 March 2010
PDL	1 March 2010
Senior Counsel	3 March 2010
Associate	14 June 2010
PDL	30 June 2010
Senior Associate	12 April 2010
Associate	23 March 2010
Senior Associate	23 March 2010
Associate	25 March 2010
Associate	14 June 2010
Assistant	30 March 2010
Associate	6 April 2010
Associate	7 April 2010
Associate	8 April 2010
Assistant Coordinator	9 April 2010
Specialist Counsel	15 April 2010
Assistant	8 April 2010
Partner	12 April 2010
Partner	13 April 2010
Partner	14 April 2010
Managing Partner	20 April 2010
Associate	15 April 2010
Assistant	15 April 2010
Senior Counsel	20 April 2010
Partner	20 April 2010
Partner	23 April 2010
Partner	3 May 2010
Partner	18 May 2010
Partner	29 April 2010
IT Systems Support	16 April 2010
Partner	20 April 2010
Partner	27 April 2010
Specialist Counsel	23 April 2010
Partner	23 April 2010
PDL	27 April 2010
Partner	29 April 2010
Assistant	27 April 2010
Partner	27 April 2009
Senior Associate	3 May 2010
Associate	6 May 2010
Assistant	6 May 2010
Partner	17 May 2010
Associate	14 July 2010
Associate	15 June 2010
Project Assistant	15 June 2010
Former Senior Associate	24 May 2010
Partner	8 June 2010
Partner	3 June 2010
Partner	14 June 2010
Partner	28 May 2010
Risk and Quality Manager	31 May 2010
IT Trainer	18 June 2010
Partner	16 June 2010
Former Librarian	23 June 2010
Managing Partner	28 September 2010
Senior Counsel, Head of Knowledge Department	29 September 2010
Managing Partner	6 October 2010
Senior Counsel, Head of Knowledge Department	12 October 2010
PDL	13 October 2010
Senior Associate	20 October 2010
Partner	29 November 2010
Partner	30 November 2010
Partner	30 November 2010
Senior Counsel	2 December 2010
Senior Counsel	2 December 2010
Partner	2 December 2010
Senior Associate	3 December 2010
Associate	3 December 2010
Senior Associate	3 December 2010
Senior Associate	8 December 2010
Managing Partner	14 December 2010