

## Sociomaterial Entailments of Knowledge Sharing Practices in Global Sourcing

This research is part of my PhD work that looks at the sociomaterial entailments of knowledge sharing practices in Global Sourcing.

In this presentation, we will first discuss the shift in discourse in the knowledge sharing literature on outsourcing and its implications for contemporary organizations in an increasingly connected world. Certain issues abound. As we enter the 3<sup>rd</sup> wave of outsourcing marked with collaborative partnerships and an increase in the use of virtual tools and social technologies, we see that this shift in landscape could have critical implications for the way contemporary organizations are sourcing out their services today. We also see that the current discourse on knowledge sharing in outsourcing continues to struggle with the tacit-explicit dichotomy. We argue that such a discourse is conceptually flawed. As IS academicians (and practitioners) we need to seriously re-think and go beyond such ontological dualities if we are to create a true movement in our discipline. Our argument is based on the premise that knowledge is intrinsically embedded in the everyday practices of individuals (Gherardi, 2006) as they interact amongst themselves and with material artifacts, and hence can best be understood and explained by using a practice-based perspective.

Our theoretical framework indicates that one way of explaining this shift in discourse is through the sociomaterial lens (Orlikowski, 2007), which can provide us with a novel way of looking at knowledge sharing practices across globally dispersed teams. Sociomateriality is the co-constitutive entanglement of the social and the material (Orlikowski & Scott, 2008), which relationally enact each other in practice and are considered inseparable - except for analytical purposes. However, we see that such an assumption does nonetheless still give us the liberty of separating the social from the material for analysis. We believe that such a paradox needs utmost attention and deeper diving into. We tried to understand this through our case study at ING, Netherlands and came up with some interesting findings! We saw that the way contemporary organizations like ING are now using modern, visual collaborative ways to share knowledge across global boundaries, like Halo Studios (3D visual technology), can go a long way in helping us understand such inseparability better and overcome these dualities in their truest sense.

This research work will be presented as two-fold: Firstly, we will explain the theoretical contribution by using the sociomaterial lens to develop a typology of 4 overlapping modes of knowledge sharing practices based on the (re)configurations of such practices in dispersed settings as the social and the material enact each other. This categorization is based on the premise that similar practices synchronize and lead to shared meanings, whilst distinct practices can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, often leading to back-sourcing of such services in instances where improvisation becomes unattainable. In between these two typologies are waves of knowledge sharing practices with different levels of improvisation. We postulate that such a framework can go a long way in helping outsourcing organizations understand the underlying dynamics of knowledge sharing complexities better, and provide a toolkit that could enable them to identify, define and deploy more effective knowledge management strategies.

Secondly, we use our framework to illustrate how an ethnographically-informed case study at ING helps advance our understanding of such dynamics as they take place in practice. This provides us with a more nuanced, contextually-grounded understanding of knowledge sharing practices in globally distributed work. Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) is being used to guide this PhD research process. SSM is an action-oriented process of inquiry for tackling problematical, messy situations of all types (Checkland & Poulter, 2010), like the wicked and challenging knowledge sharing issues that are so prominent in globally dispersed work. The empirical work for this project is still ongoing. However, insights gained from the first and second phases of data collection has helped us identify the critical need to pay particular attention to the increasing role and implications of virtual tools and social media technologies on globally distributed sourcing arrangements. Understanding the sociomaterial entailments of distributed work in this context is the next step of our research project.