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The Equivoque of Knowledge Management in Global IT Sourcing: A Practice-based Perspective

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Abstract
Against the backdrop of today's highly connected world marked with the increased use of technology, Global IT Sourcing is growing consistently over the last two decades. Such a trend entails the need to deploy effective knowledge management strategies within and across outsourcing organizations. Extant literature shows that this area remains largely under-theorized due to the complexities involved in understanding the underlying mechanisms and many facets of knowledge processes. One such complexity is the embeddedness of knowledge in local, situated practices and the difficulties that arise in reaching shared meanings when knowledge is circulated across globally dispersed settings. This research takes up the challenge of exploring what managing knowledge processes entails in the case of an IT-outsourced project using a practice-based vocabulary. Such a vocabulary seems particularly appropriate in understanding ongoing knowledge processes by studying the everyday work practices of human-actions as they interact with material artifacts. This encompasses a shift in discourse from individuals, organizations and institutions to human-action as the unit of analysis. The purpose of this research is two-fold: Firstly, it aims at investigating the knowing-how that is enacted through the everyday, ongoing work practices of human-actions as they interact with material artifacts. Secondly, it investigates how the collaborative ability in organizing and knowing-how to effectively manage knowledge across global boundaries improves the outsourcing process.

Keywords: Knowledge, Global Sourcing, Practice, Sociomateriality

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Against the backdrop of today's highly connected world marked with the increased use of technology, Global IT Sourcing is growing consistently over the last two decades. Such a trend entails the need to deploy effective knowledge management strategies within and across outsourcing organizations. Extant literature shows that this area remains largely under-theorized due to the complexities involved in understanding the underlying mechanisms and many facets of knowledge processes.

One such complexity is the embeddedness of knowledge in local, situated practices and the difficulties that arise in reaching shared meanings when knowledge is circulated across globally dispersed settings. This research takes up the challenge of exploring what managing knowledge processes entails in the case of an IT-outsourced project using a practice-based vocabulary (Schatzki et al., 2001; Orlikowski, 2002; Gherardi, 2006). Such a vocabulary seems particularly appropriate in understanding ongoing knowledge processes by studying the everyday work practices of human-actions as they interact with material artifacts. This encompasses a shift in discourse from individuals, organizations and institutions to human-action as the unit of analysis.

The purpose of this research is two-fold: Firstly, it aims at investigating the knowing-how that is enacted through the everyday, ongoing work practices of human-actions as they interact with material artifacts. Secondly, it investigates how the collaborative ability in organizing and knowing-how to effectively manage knowledge across global boundaries improves the outsourcing process.

Commensurate with the above objectives, three interlinked questions form the core of this thesis: Firstly, how is practical knowledge created, diffused and integrated within a specific practice and across interdependent practices in the field of outsourcing? Secondly, what are the processes by which distributed, fragmented items of knowledge are coordinated and integrated across globally dispersed settings, and how are these processes embedded in the work practices of human-actions as they engage with material artifacts? And thirdly, how do certain practices synchronize and others improvise, and what role do these practice re-configurations play in improving collaborative ability in outsourcing?

Renewed and emerging conceptualizations of knowledge, knowledge management, organization and sociomateriality from the social sciences literature are embedded in the IS field and using a practice-based vocabulary underpin the research framework for this project.

Preliminary findings for this research are from a case study at an outsourcing organization. This will be followed by an ethnographic study to look at and explicate knowledge processes in everyday work practices as team players interact amongst themselves and with artifacts.

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