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**INDIVIDUAL GENDERED  
EXPERIENCES OF  
ORGANISATIONAL ELEMENTS  
IMPACTING ON KNOWLEDGE  
CREATION PROCESSES IN A  
KNOWLEDGE-INTENSIVE  
ORGANISATION**

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PhD

2011

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of the  
University of Northumbria at  
Newcastle  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Research undertaken in the  
Newcastle Business School

October 2011

## Abstract

This thesis explores individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of management consultants in an international management consultancy. There have been calls to gain further insights into knowledge creation by exploring the impact of social aspects such as work practices, participation and organisational conflict on knowing and learning processes. These calls have been addressed mainly by considering single aspects of the organisational context and their impact on knowledge creation processes or by considering a range of different aspects of the organisational context but neglecting their interrelationship. This current research explores management consultants' experiences of various social aspects, which are understood as organisational elements, impacting on knowledge creation processes and the interrelationships between these aspects.

According to the social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning, social interaction is integral to knowing and learning. Since gender is understood to impact on social interaction, in this thesis it is acknowledged that knowledge creation, which is inherent to knowing and learning processes, is influenced by gender. Previous research tended to neglect the impact of gender on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes. More recently, women's inclusion and exclusion from knowledge creation processes in organisations has been explored through a theoretical analysis of a single organisational aspect, knowledge creation through networking.

Drawing upon a social-constructionist perspective on knowing and learning and gender in organisations, this thesis contributes to theory in the area of knowledge creation and gender in organisations by placing special emphasis on the role of gender whilst exploring various key aspects of the organisational context impacting on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes.

The theoretical potential of this research is developed through an exploratory case study of 15 men and women consultants working for the case study organisation. Through semi-structured interviews, accounts of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes were explored. Here, women, who have been neglected in previous research, received the same attention as men. New insights are offered by not only exploring women's experiences and the potential differences between women's and men's experiences but also considering the differences within the women's and men's accounts. Following an autoethnographic approach this research also offers a view from the 'inside' by including the researcher's own experiences as an insider management consultant, thus offering a further contribution.

This thesis argues that career opportunities, individual acknowledgement within the organisational context, motivation and trustful relationships are key aspects impacting on knowledge creation experiences of women and men management consultants. These aspects are interlinked and impact on each other. The research offers career opportunities and individual acknowledgement as key influences to the field of knowledge creation. Further, it illustrates how individuals' experiences of organisational elements that impact on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive organisation are gendered.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Table of Contents .....	ii
List of Tables and Figures.....	viii
Acknowledgements.....	ix
Author's Declaration .....	x
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Focus of this study .....	1
1.2 'Me' as the researcher and 'my' place in this research .....	1
1.3 Main theoretical concepts key to this research .....	4
1.3.1 Professional Services Firms and knowledge-intensive firms.....	4
1.3.2 Perspectives on knowledge and learning .....	7
1.3.3 The concept of knowledge creation .....	8
1.3.4 Organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes.	9
1.3.5 Gender in organisations.....	9
1.3.6 Women in knowledge-intensive firms.....	10
1.3.7 Gender and knowledge.....	11
1.4 The potential contribution of this research.....	12
1.5 The research parameters .....	14
1.6 The research approach .....	15
1.7 The case under exploration.....	16
1.8 The structure of this thesis .....	18
1.9 Chapter summary.....	20
Chapter 2 Concepts of Knowledge and Learning.....	21
2 Introduction.....	21
2.1 Professional Services Firms, knowledge-intensive firms and knowledge workers.....	21
2.1.1 Professional Services Firms .....	22
2.1.2 Knowledge-intensive firms .....	23
2.1.3 Knowledge workers – the consultant.....	24
2.1.4 From the partnership model to a Managed Professional Business Model.....	27
2.1.5 Standardisation of services .....	29

2.1.6	Mergers between and takeovers of knowledge-intensive firms .....	31
2.2	Debates on individual and organisational knowledge and learning .....	32
2.2.1	The cognitive-possession perspective on knowledge and learning .....	32
2.2.2	The social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning .....	34
2.3	Introduction of key concepts.....	37
2.3.1	Knowledge.....	37
2.3.2	Learning .....	39
2.3.3	Knowledge creation .....	40
2.3.3.1	The SECI model and its development .....	40
2.3.3.2	Criticism of the SECI model .....	45
2.3.3.3	The collaborative knowledge creation model.....	47
2.3.3.4	The 'becoming to know' framework .....	49
2.3.4	Innovation and underground innovators.....	53
2.3.5	The notion of knowledge management .....	55
2.4	Communities of Practice .....	56
2.5	Knowledge creation and the organisational context.....	60
2.5.1	The impact of organisational elements on experiences of knowledge creation processes.....	61
2.6	Implications of review for this study.....	68
2.7	Chapter summary.....	71
Chapter 3 Gender and Organisations .....		73
3	Introduction.....	73
3.1	Patriarchy and gender .....	73
3.1.1	Patriarchy .....	74
3.1.2	Gender .....	76
3.2	Doing gender .....	81
3.2.1	The gender we do and the gender we think .....	81
3.2.2	(Un)doing gender and doing gender differently .....	85
3.3	Gender and the organisational context.....	88
3.3.1	Organisations as gendered places.....	88
3.3.2	Gendered emotions in the organisational context .....	91
3.4	Women as travellers.....	94
3.5	Women in knowledge-intensive firms .....	96
3.6	Gendered knowledge in organisations .....	103
3.7	Implications of review for this study.....	105
3.8	Chapter summary.....	108

Chapter 4 Methodology and Methods .....	109
4 Introduction.....	109
4.1 Research philosophy.....	109
4.1.1 Ontological and epistemological choices .....	109
4.2 Gendered research .....	115
4.2.1 A gender lens .....	115
4.2.2 Gendered research.....	117
4.2.3 Women's experiences .....	119
4.3 Methodological choices .....	121
4.3.1 Characteristics of case study research .....	121
4.3.2 Autoethnography .....	123
4.4 Qualitative methods of data collection.....	126
4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews.....	127
4.4.2 The impact of gender on the research process .....	134
4.4.3 Research diary .....	136
4.4.4 Documentary analysis .....	137
4.5 Framework for data analysis .....	138
4.5.1 Narratives and stories.....	138
4.5.2 Data analysis .....	139
4.6 Ethical considerations .....	144
4.7 Establishing trustworthiness through crystallisation.....	146
4.7.1 The idea of crystallisation .....	146
4.7.2 Credibility.....	147
4.7.3 Transferability .....	148
4.7.4 Dependability and confirmability .....	149
4.8 Reflexivity.....	151
4.8.1 Positional and textual reflexivity .....	151
4.8.2 Reflexivity on the translation process.....	153
4.9 Implications of methodological decisions for this research .....	154
4.10 Chapter summary.....	156
Chapter 5 Individual Gendered Experiences of Knowledge Creation Processes... 157	
5 Introduction.....	157
5.1 The organisation under exploration .....	158
5.1.1 Introducing the organisation.....	158
5.1.2 Values of the organisation .....	159
5.1.3 The consultant .....	159
5.1.4 The consultant's career development .....	160

5.1.5	Women within the organisation .....	160
5.1.6	The organisation's approach to learning activities.....	161
5.1.7	The organisation's approach to knowledge management and knowledge creation.....	161
5.2	Interview participants and interpretations .....	163
5.2.1	The interview participants .....	163
5.2.2	Presentation of research participants and extracts from their accounts.. .....	165
5.2.3	Analytical framework.....	166
5.3	Consultants' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes.....	169
5.3.1	Communities of Practice .....	170
5.3.2	Knowledge creation .....	176
5.3.3	Organisational structures and procedures and processes.....	184
5.3.4	Power .....	185
5.3.5	Climate .....	187
5.3.6	Trust .....	190
5.3.7	Leadership.....	192
5.3.8	Autonomy .....	194
5.3.9	Motivation .....	196
5.3.10	Career and acknowledgement .....	200
5.3.11	Implications of the meso-level interpretations for this study .....	203
5.4	Consultants' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes through a gender lens .....	207
5.4.1	Unsettling the gender binary .....	208
5.4.2	Women in knowledge-intensive firms.....	209
5.4.3	The gendered nature of knowledge creation .....	213
5.4.4	The gendered nature of climate .....	217
5.4.5	The gendered nature of motivation .....	218
5.4.6	The gendered nature of career and acknowledgement .....	220
5.4.7	Illustrations of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes .....	228
5.4.8	Language in the interviews through a gender lens.....	231
5.4.8.1	Doing gender well in language use .....	232
5.4.8.2	Doing gender differently in language use .....	236
5.4.9	Implications of the meso- and macro-level interpretations for this study. .....	237
5.5	Chapter summary.....	241

Chapter 6 Theorising Individual Gendered Experiences of Organisational Elements impacting on Knowledge Creation Processes .....	243
6 Introduction.....	243
6.1 Original contribution to theory.....	244
6.2 Framework of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes.....	244
6.3 A social-constructionist exploration of individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes.....	246
6.4 Key organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes	247
6.4.1 Trust .....	248
6.4.2 Motivation .....	250
6.4.3 Career .....	251
6.4.4 Acknowledgement .....	252
6.4.5 Power .....	253
6.4.6 Implications of individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes for this study.....	254
6.5 The gendered nature of knowledge creation processes .....	257
6.5.1 Interpretation and theorisation process .....	258
6.5.2 The gendered nature of the experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes.....	259
6.5.3 The gendered nature of language in the interviews.....	264
6.5.4 Implications of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes for this study	265
6.6 Chapter summary.....	268
 Chapter 7 Research Reflections .....	 270
7 Introduction.....	270
7.1 Review of central arguments, research objectives and contributions of this thesis .....	270
7.1.1 Perspectives on knowledge and learning.....	272
7.1.2 Gender and gendered knowledge in organisations .....	273
7.1.3 Appropriate methodology and methods .....	273
7.1.4 Theoretical insights into individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes .....	278
7.1.5 Theoretical insights into individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes....	279
7.1.6 Contributing to knowledge creation and gender in organisations .....	281

7.2	Outcomes of reflexivity .....	282
7.2.1	Reflexivity on the interview process .....	282
7.2.2	Reflexivity on my position .....	292
7.2.3	Reflexivity on my interpretations .....	294
7.3	Limitations of the thesis.....	295
7.3.1	Philosophical orientation, level of engagement and epistemological interest.....	296
7.3.2	Organisational elements .....	296
7.3.3	The gender aspect.....	297
7.3.4	The takeover's impact.....	298
7.4	Possibilities for future research .....	299
7.5	What has happened since then? .....	300
7.6	Chapter summary.....	301
	References .....	303
	Appendix 1 Confirmation Case Study Organisation .....	342
	Appendix 2 Informed Consent Form .....	343
	Appendix 3 Interview Guide .....	344
	Appendix 4 Interview Transcript.....	345

## List of Tables and Figures

Table 2.1 The two main perspectives on knowledge and learning .....	36
Figure 2.2: SECI model.....	41
Figure 2.3 Collaborative knowledge creation model.....	49
Figure 2.4 'Becoming to know' framework .....	51
Table 2.5 Formal 'top-down' and informal 'bottom-up' Communities of Practice .....	58
Table 2.6 Organisational elements explored in previous research .....	68
Figure 2.7 Theory base on knowing and learning.....	71
Figure 3.1 Analytical framework of this study .....	107
Table 4.1 Epistemological journey of this research .....	114
Figure 4.2 Analytical framework of this study – a gender lens.....	117
Figure 4.3 The researcher-researched relationship.....	131
Table 4.4 Interview and transcript information.....	134
Table 4.5 Steps of data analysis .....	143
Table 4.6 Final template .....	144
Figure 4.7 The crystal .....	147
Table 4.8 Trustworthiness criteria .....	150
Table 5.1 'Pen-portraits' of research participants .....	164
Figure 5.2 Analytical framework of this study – a gender lens.....	168
Table 5.3 Final themes .....	169
Table 5.4 Illustrations of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes – doing gender well/doing gender differently .....	229
Table 5.5 Doing gender well in language use .....	235
Table 5.6 Doing gender differently in language use .....	237
Figure 6.1 Framework of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes .....	245

In memory of Dr Karen Keith

### **Acknowledgements**

To Professor Sharon Mavin – for encouraging me to embark on this journey, for her expertise and support and for not giving up on me on my way to completion.

To Dr Sandra Corlett – for her expertise and constructive feedback, for her patience and for always finding the right words to make me go on.

To Jan and Charlotte – for enduring my absence.

To my parents and my parents in-law – for their unlimited support.

To the research participants – for their openness and their time.

To those at Newcastle Business School who helped me to stay in touch with the university context; particularly Dr Rose Quan and Dr Jannine Williams.

## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name: Katja Starcken

Signature:

Date:

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research focus and process of this thesis as I explore the research question:

*What are individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of management consultants in an international management consultancy?*

The chapter begins with an overview of the focus of this thesis as well as an introduction of myself as the researcher and the researched to set up my place in this research. This is followed by an outline of the literature on concepts of knowledge and learning and gender in organisations which inform the analytical framework for the exploration of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes. Next, the potential contributions of this research and the research parameters are introduced. After a brief overview of the research approach, first details about the case study are provided. The chapter concludes with a summary of this and each subsequent chapter to outline the structure of this thesis.

#### 1.1 Focus of this study

This thesis explores individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of management consultants working for an international management consultancy. In particular, the research aims to explore consultants' experiences from a gender perspective. Due to the insider position of the researcher as a woman consultant working for the organisation under exploration the research presents a view from the inside of this international management consultancy which is influenced by a male organisational context.

#### 1.2 'Me' as the researcher and 'my' place in this research

Throughout my professional career, I have had an interest in knowledge and learning. I initially became aware of and interested in the concept of knowledge management when I worked as an intern, first for Siemens AG during my Bachelor course in the early 1990s, and second for an automotive supplier in the United States in the early 2000s. As part of the latter, I was responsible for setting up a marketing plan for the North American market. As I had no practical experiences in

this field I was dependent on the existing knowledge of sales representatives dispersed over the entire East Coast of the United States. In this situation I evaluated whether knowledge management would be an approach this organisation might consider introducing to their organisation in order to collect their comprehensive knowledge and to make it centrally available to their employees and managers. At this time I regarded knowledge management as a technique which could be readily applied to any organisation.

As part of my joint Masters programme in 2000 I spent one semester studying at the University of Hamburg before commencing my studies at Newcastle Business School. During the time in Hamburg, I got the opportunity to learn more about knowledge management on an IT-based Knowledge Management course. The course exclusively dealt with the technical and organisational IT-related aspects of knowledge management but not with the human side of it which was characteristic for the knowledge management debate at the time (Newell *et al.*, 2009; Hislop, 2009). During the following semester at Newcastle Business School the same approach of mainly linking knowledge management to technology was in the foreground. However, the then status of the academic debate was reflected by introducing organisational aspects and their impact on and meaning for knowledge management.

For my Masters dissertation I carried out case study research within Siemens exploring the extent to which Siemens had managed to transform into a knowledge-based company. In the course of this research my understanding of knowledge management moved from regarding knowledge management as a simple technique or tool to comprehending it as a complex, social process spanning the entire organisation.

Following my Masters graduation, this understanding was reinforced during an internship in Siemens' corporate knowledge management department. I had the chance to look at knowledge management through the eyes of the corporate management team. I became aware of the issues connected with conveying a knowledge management strategy into operative actions in a company with almost half a million of employees working all over the world in many different business segments. The challenges the knowledge management department faced were mainly connected to the complexity of their knowledge management approach and the impact of organisational aspects, such as organisational climate and culture, on the success of their initiatives.

In 2002, following this internship, I started working as a management consultant for a management consultancy which was later acquired by the organisation explored in this research and for which I still work as a Change Manager. This organisation will be further introduced in Section 1.7 of this chapter and in Chapter Five.

My experiences in this organisation as well as the outcomes of my Master thesis led to cognitive dissonance in terms of theoretical concepts and my own experiences. Understandings of 'knowledge workers' (Alvesson, 2004) imply that the efficient sharing of knowledge and the continuous creation of knowledge are of crucial importance in order to fulfil their jobs (Alvesson, 2004; Davenport, 2005; Hislop, 2009; Loewendahl, 2005) which is in line with my own experiences as a management consultant. However, my subjective experiences were also that the organisation under exploration did not always enable me and my colleagues to satisfactorily carry out these activities. This was my initial inspiration and motivation to conduct an in-depth study exploring the experiences of other management consultants as well as mine within this organisation.

Initially, this research aimed at exploring the individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of my colleagues and myself. After I had carried out the first interviews with both men and women colleagues and had started engaging with the interview accounts by transcribing them, I noticed that the research accounts in some parts differed. My first interpretations indicated that differences in how the consultants made sense of their experiences and how they sought to present themselves in the interviews were affected by the consultants' gender. I then decided to offer a second level of analysis in this study by reinterpreting the illustrations of the individual experiences by making explicit the gendered nature of these experiences.

When I started my research in 2005 I went on sabbatical in order to focus on my research. During this period I remained an employee of the organisation and therefore was simultaneously the researcher and the researched. I was a participant observer, distanced geographically and emotionally from my insider position as a consultant.

Mid 2006 I returned to the organisation working on client projects again. In the same way I was not able to discard my insider role as a consultant when I started the research, I was no longer able to discard my outsider role as a researcher.

During maternity leave in 2009 and 2010, I once again distanced myself emotionally from being a consultant. On my return to the organisation on a part-time basis in 2010, I was still in the consultancy environment but in an internal position which, once again, provided me with a changed position – I was no longer in the traditional management consultant position working on client projects but was able to observe it from a distance.

As already mentioned above, my role in this research is twofold. On the one hand, I am a researcher looking at and exploring my research interest. On the other hand, I am part of this research, as a consultant contributing her experiences. With this personal perspective, I am able to present insights I had experienced myself and gained in accounts from colleagues which would probably have been difficult for 'strangers' or 'outsiders' (Pels, 2000; Watson, 2011). However, due to these circumstances I needed to take care not to miss out important aspects which I had internalised and was hence blind to (Hayano, 1979; Sparkes, 2002). I aimed at addressing this potential risk by employing a reflexive approach throughout the study. All these aspects are dealt with in detail throughout this thesis, but particularly in Chapter Four and Chapter Seven.

The key theoretical concepts of knowledge and learning as well as gender in organisations will be critically discussed before the study fuses the two research areas to set up the analytical framework for this study and moves to the central argument.

### **1.3 Main theoretical concepts key to this research**

This section first introduces key theoretical concepts, central to this research, of the nature of the organisation, of knowledge and learning as well as knowledge creation in knowledge-intensive firms before illustrating the role of gender in organisations. It then fuses the two fields and discusses previous research undertaken on gendered knowledge and the role of gender in knowledge creation processes.

#### **1.3.1 Professional Services Firms and knowledge-intensive firms**

The nature of the organisation explored is regarded as setting the context for the individual experiences of knowledge creation processes of the research participants working for this organisation.

Authors such as von Nordenflycht (2007) and Loewendahl (2005) understand organisations whose activities comprise law, audit, accounting and consulting as Professions Services Firms (PSF). These kinds of organisations have also been referred to as knowledge-intensive or knowledge-based firms (Starbuck, 1992; Alvesson, 2004). Although there are different understandings on what constitutes a PSF (von Nordenflycht, 2010; Robertson, 1999) von Nordenflycht (2007, p.156) set up the common characteristics “*knowledge intensity, low capital intensity, and a professionalised workforce*” which distinguish PSFs from other organisations. Morris and Empson (1998), von Nordenflycht (2007) and Starbuck (1992) regard the knowledge-intensive nature of PSFs as the most essential characteristic in terms of the organisation’s output being strongly dependent on the sophisticated knowledge and skills of its workforce.

Another important characteristic deals with the professionalised workforce of PSFs (Torres, 1991). McKenna (2006) argues that knowledge-intensive organisations such as large management consultancies have widely abstained from professionalising consultancies so far but have instead relied on their individual reputation to ensure high-quality of their workforces’ work outputs. These organisations tend to focus more on the knowledge-intensity of their products and services than on the professionalisation of their workforce.

In this thesis, it is acknowledged that many researchers such as von Nordenflycht (2007), Loewendahl (2005) and Alvesson (2004) understand management consultancies as PSFs. However, in line with the aims and objectives of this thesis which deals with consultants’ experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in the organisation explored, it is regarded as more helpful to focus on aspects connected to the knowledge intensity of the organisation. To address this, management consultancies are primarily understood and referred to as knowledge-intensive firms.

Management consultancies provide sophisticated knowledge and knowledge-based services and products to clients. At the core of their activities lies the solving of complex client problems (Newell *et al.*, 2009). In order to be able to offer this support, consultancies are highly dependent on the primary source of their income, their management consultants (Alvesson, 1993).

These management consultants, also referred to as ‘knowledge workers’ (Alvesson, 2004), are usually characterised as being highly educated and motivated and as

holding analytic and communicative skills which enable them to identify and solve clients' problems (Ambos and Schlegelmilch, 2009; Alvesson, 2004; Mitchell and Meacheam, 2011; Loewendahl, 2005). One of their main tasks is the continuous creation of knowledge (Newell *et al.*, 2009) which is essential to knowledge-intensive firms to remain competitive (Alvesson, 2004; Alvesson, 2011; von Nordenflycht, 2010).

What is valid for both PSFs and knowledge-intensive firms such as management consultancies is the recent development from the traditional professional partnership model to the 'Managed Professional Business Model' (Cooper *et al.*, 1996). The partnership model has been characterised by a minimum of hierarchy and formal systems of management and control and a maximum of the professionals' individual independence and authority over their work, a synthesis of ownership and control, peer control and strong links to clients (Cooper *et al.*, 1996).

The organisational transformation from a partnership model to a Managed Professional Business is usually characterised by the introduction of administrative controls such as management by objectives and performance appraisal systems based on indicators such as the number of billable hours and clients (Brivot, 2011; Loewendahl, 2005; Brock, 2006) mainly introduced to ensure that employees behave and act in a coordinated and obliging way (Brivot, 2011). Although many organisations have technically kept the partnership model, the growing size of organisations, the reduction of partner shares and the implementation of different levels of partnership have decreased the meaning, impact and remuneration of partners to a level comparable to middle management positions (Carlson, 2004).

Another aspect characteristic for the transition to a Managed Professional Business is the introduction of knowledge management systems by which knowledge is supposed to be captured, standardised and transferred and thereby made available throughout the organisation (Brivot, 2011; Hislop, 2009) in order to ensure that standardised and universalistic principles and processes are followed throughout the entire organisation (Oligati, 2008). Starbuck (1992) and Maister (2003) argue that these systems are contradictory to the nature of professional work, which is regarded as being neither fully manageable nor measurable, and professionals, who have a strong affinity to autonomy, informality and flexible structures.

### 1.3.2 Perspectives on knowledge and learning

The concepts of individual and organisational learning and knowledge have gained increased attention since they are viewed as crucial for and inseparable from the process of knowledge creation (Karatas-Özkan and Murphy, 2010; Hoe and McShane, 2010). Chiva and Alegre (2005) summarise the theoretical diversity on those concepts by setting up two main perspectives which differ in terms of their ontological and epistemological understandings: the cognitive-possession perspective and the social-constructionist perspective.

The cognitive-possession perspective is based on a positivist epistemology and regards knowledge as something people have, a commodity they possess (Cook and Brown, 1999; Gourlay, 2004). According to this perspective knowledge is always available, independent of the knowing subjects and the context and can therefore be easily codified, stored and applied to different situations as well as conveyed from one individual to another (Lam, 2000; Chiva and Alegre, 2005; O'Dell and Grayson, 1998). This perspective does not consider the role of social interaction between individuals in relation to learning (Chiva and Alegre, 2005; Skerlavaj and Dimovski, 2007) but instead considers it as taking place in the individual mind (Elkjaer, 1999).

The social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning taken in this research is based on an intersubjective epistemology and mostly represented by organisation studies (Chiva and Alegre, 2005). According to this perspective, knowledge is something people do, and a process which unfolds over time rather than an outcome (Cook and Brown, 1999; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000). The concept of 'coming to know' which replaces the notion of knowledge (Cook and Brown, 1999) stresses the processual nature of knowledge which is dependent on social interaction and context in which it is constantly constructed (Jakubik, 2011; Karatas-Özkan and Murphy, 2010; Cunliffe, 2008). This process of 'coming to know' or 'knowing' is regarded as equalling the process of learning which, from the social-constructionist perspective, is perceived as also taking place in social relationships (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Unlike in the cognitive-possession perspective knowledge is not regarded as an object to be discovered and possessed by individuals but as constructed by individuals in their social interaction (Crotty, 1998). This thesis shares this understanding of knowledge and learning.

According to Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2000) this perspective subverts the previously dominant cognitive-possession perspective.

The social-constructionist perspective changes the level at which knowing and learning and, consequently, knowledge creation takes place from the individual mind to social interaction (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000).

Researchers such as Chiva and Alegre (2005) and Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) suggest that future research in line with this perspective needs to explore knowing and learning in relation to work practices and factors that have been widely excluded from previous cognitive-possession perspective research. These include aspects such as participation, power, organisational politics, conflict and collaboration (Rashman *et al.*, 2009).

### **1.3.3 The concept of knowledge creation**

According to Jakubik (2008) knowledge creation takes place in the social interaction between individuals, mainly within communities. This view conforms to the social-constructionist perspective followed in this research.

Jakubik's (2011) 'becoming to know' framework which draws on Cook and Brown's (1999) and Gherardi and Nicolini's (2000) replacement of the concept of knowledge by the concept of 'coming to know' is based on the concept of learning, knowing and becoming. Knowing to which learning is inherent is understood as an emerging, dynamic, dialectic and ongoing process of experiencing, learning and sense making. Throughout this process the individual changes and is 'becoming' through new understandings, new meanings and new perspectives which develop in this process (Jakubik, 2011). Jakubik (2011) regards the process of 'becoming to know' as a synthesis of social learning and knowing process which provide new experiences of knowing and learning and with it new knowledge.

The shift in focus of knowledge creation to human interaction and participation in communities (Jakubik, 2011) raises the importance of organisational aspects such as power and politics. These were widely disregarded in previous research by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) who set up the SECI model based on the assumption that knowledge creation lies in the individual's mind (Newell *et al.*, 2009).

The 'becoming to know' framework (Jakubik, 2011) provides an insight into social knowledge creation processes whilst at the same time considering that individuals hold prior skills and experiences which they contribute to processes of knowing and learning and therefore to the creation of knowledge. This current research offers a contribution to the understanding of the role of social context in knowledge creation

processes, which, according to Jakubik (2011) and Newell *et al.* (2009), has so far been addressed insufficiently.

#### **1.3.4 Organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes**

The social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning regards social factors as having crucial impact on the social interaction between individuals in which processes of knowing and learning (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000), and thus knowledge creation, take place. Researchers such as Taminiau *et al.* (2009), Merx-Chermin and Nijhof (2005) and Levin *et al.* (2002) have explored various factors enabling and barriers inhibiting knowledge creation as well as interlinked processes of learning and knowledge sharing. In this research the barriers and factors are referred to as 'organisational elements' in order to emphasise that these aspects are inseparable from and embedded in the organisational context. This research does not distinguish between enabling and inhibiting organisational elements since, depending on one's individual experience, a single element can be both.

Previous research has identified organisational elements such as power (Kirkebak and Tolsby, 2006), organisational structure (Ekvall, 1996), organisational climate (Naot *et al.*, 2004), notions of trust (Cannon and Edmondson, 2001) and management support (Taminiau *et al.*, 2009) as well as motivation (Merx-Chermin and Nijhof, 2005) as impacting on processes of knowledge and learning.

Rashman *et al.* (2009) and Chiva and Alegre (2005) call for research which looks at social aspects such as work practice, participation, power, organisational politics and conflicts in order to explore knowing and learning processes and to get an insight into knowledge creation processes from a social-constructionist perspective.

#### **1.3.5 Gender in organisations**

Gender in this research is understood as a socially constructed distinction between feminine and masculine whereby women and men exist and act in dynamic gender relations to each other (Acker, 1992; Simpson and Lewis, 2005; Nicolson, 1996; Fonow and Cook, 2005; Gherardi, 1994). Whereas the classification 'woman' and 'man' is strongly attached to the biological body and hence to sex, meanings of femininity and masculinity are not understood as fixed but as fluid concepts being constantly re-constructed through the meanings we assign to them (Alvesson and Billing, 2000; Mavin, 2009). Although this approach entails that neither men are exclusively masculine nor women are exclusively feminine, the majority of research

is still undertaken from the one-dimensional perception which entails the link of gender to the biological sex that women are linked to femininity and men to masculinity. This inevitably leads to the reinforcement of traditional views of both women's and men's characteristics (Mavin and Grandy, 2011; Kugelberg, 2006; Nicolson, 1996) which positions women and men at opposite ends and therefore imprisons women and men in gendered sex-role stereotypes (Mavin, 2008a; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Wilson, 1996). Men and masculinity are often viewed as the norm (Wilson, 1996) whereas women are constructed as 'the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1953).

This is particularly the case in patriarchal organisations which support male superiority and subordinate women to men (Colgan and Ledwith, 1996; Butler, 2004; Gherardi, 1994) and therefore construct women as deviant from the norm (Wilson, 1996). Therefore, women are regarded as not qualified and suitable for professional occupations (Maddock, 1999) which marginalises their potential contribution to organisational life (Mavin, 2001a). Often this male dominance is hidden and accepted as mainstream organisational culture (Simpson and Lewis, 2005). This may explain why an organisation which is perceived as being gender neutral by its members, from the outside may be regarded as being based on a 'corporate masculinity'. This implies that the organisation favours, often without realising it, the masculine world view, rewarding those who conform to it and subordinating those who do not, who are mostly women (Maier, 1999).

Linstead (2000), Acker (1990) and Wilson (1996) argue that gender neutral or gender-blind approaches to organisational life are in fact based on the male as norm. This is supported by Gherardi and Poggio (2001) who state that gender neutral organisations do not exist since every organisation holds specific gender expectations, which in male-dominated organisation often aim at 'keeping women in their place'. In line with patriarchy this place is outside the public realm or in less significant positions within the organisation since women are not regarded as being fully qualified for a professional career (Maddock, 1999).

### **1.3.6 Women in knowledge-intensive firms**

Since researchers have different understandings of management consultancies in terms of whether they belong to the group of PSFs, this thesis considers both research that explores PSFs and research that explores knowledge-intensive organisations in terms of reasons why women are attracted to these kind of organisations as well as the issues they may face in these organisational contexts.

According to Crompton and Sanderson (1986) the combination of dual pressures of supply-side constraints and cultural orientations may support women's decision to pursue a career in a professional environment rather than in general management. Crompton and Sanderson (1986) argue that in professional practices women have the opportunity to be both recognised and rewarded for their achievements since those are objectively measured against qualifications and work experiences.

However, the majority of women face a number of issues in these organisations. Covin and Harris (1995, p.7) for example argue that "*the consulting world for women is very different from the consulting world for men*" since women are by far more prone to face discrimination within the organisational context of a management consultancy due to being a woman. Overall, Covin and Harris (1995) see discrimination taking place to an extent where women consultants are regarded as not as qualified as their men colleagues. Within these organisations practices that appear to be gender neutral such as performance reviews, promotion systems and objectives against which performance is measured are largely based on masculine stereotypes and hence put women at a disadvantage (Coleman and Rippin, 2000; Jonnergard *et al*, 2010.; Gorman, 2005). This is supported by research carried out by Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) and Kumra (2010b) which suggests that management consultancies are still based on 'corporate masculinity' (Maier, 1999) which may negatively impact on the women consultants' career and working experiences.

Rudolph's (2004) study of management consultancies in Germany shows that women are the object of stereotypical gender assessments on a regular basis. This includes the attitude that whereas men are regarded as suitable for the job of a consultant by men managers, women are regarded as too emotional and too weak to climb up the career ladder. Rudolph (2004) adds that the main problem for women is to cope with the costs which come with pursuing a long-term career in a consultancy context. Women need to adapt to traditional male life models in order to succeed which, for the majority of women, is a price too high to be paid over a longer period (Rudolph, 2004).

Management consultancies are understood as patriarchal places in this research.

### **1.3.7 Gender and knowledge**

Durbin (2007) suggests that some organisations fail to use their women employee's full potential by not drawing on their skills and experiences. This can become

problematic when the continuous creation of new knowledge is necessary to remain competitive (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Garvey and Williamson, 2002). Styhre *et al.* (2001) name as a potential reason for this the gender-blind approach of both researchers and practitioners to knowledge and knowledge management. Researchers have only recently started to introduce gender theories to the field of knowledge management and knowledge creation (Durbin, 2011).

Styhre *et al.* (2001) conducted one of the first studies exploring the interrelationship between gender and knowledge management. Based on the assumption that knowing is embedded in social practices which are gendered and that organisations largely support male perspectives, they found knowledge is divided into legitimate knowledge (largely male knowledge) and peripheral or non-legitimate knowledge (largely female knowledge). Consequently, knowledge contributed by women is often not fully acknowledged in the organisation and therefore women are prevented from developing and demonstrating their full potential.

Connelly and Kelloway (2003) explored employees' perceptions of knowledge sharing cultures and found that, for women, management's support of knowledge sharing and an encouraging social interaction culture are vital for their willingness to share knowledge. Their findings are supported by the theoretical analysis carried out by Durbin (2011) on knowledge creation through networks which concludes that women can play a crucial role in processes of knowledge creation by contributing their full potential when the organisational context and culture reinforces social interaction and expressive behaviour.

Previous research on gender and its impact on learning and knowledge has been carried out in other fields. For instance, in management studies, Bryans and Mavin (2003) conducted research on how women learn to become managers and, in feminist studies, Nicolson (1996) explored gender and knowledge in the organisational context. In line with Durbin (2011) this research suggests that so far the understanding of how knowledge is created in social processes and how it is potentially impacted by gender is underdeveloped.

#### **1.4 The potential contribution of this research**

The social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning taken in this research regards social interaction as integral to learning and knowing processes (Jakubik, 2011; Karatas-Özkan and Murphy, 2010; Cunliffe, 2008). This approach implies that individuals have to interact socially to participate in these processes.

Gherardi (1994) and Acker (1990) suggest that social interaction is informed by gender which implies that knowledge creation which is inherent to knowing and learning processes is also influenced by gender. Previous research in the area of knowledge creation and related processes (Merx-Chermin and Nijhof, 2005; Taminiau *et al.*, 2009; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2008) has been carried out without paying attention to the impact of gender.

Only recently, Durbin (2011) has fused for the first time the fields of knowledge creation and gender in organisations by theoretically analysing, through a gender lens, the impact of gender on knowledge creation in networks. This research adds empirically to Durbin (2011) by exploring the research participants' individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes through a gender lens. This gender lens makes explicit (Collins, 2005) the gendered nature of knowledge creation.

This research offers illustrations of women's experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes alongside those of their men colleagues. By doing this, this research aims at giving women the same attention as men. The majority of previous research on management consultancies as well as on knowledge creation has been carried out from a gender-blind perspective, accepting the men's experiences as the norm and regarding women as deviating from the norm, which has prevented them from fully contributing to the organisation and has disadvantaged them in their organisational lives (Mavin, 2001a). This research aims to release women from their 'second place' (de Beauvoir, 1953).

Whereas Durbin's (2011) research focussed on women's experiences this research not only explores the potential differences between women and men but also considers the differences within the women's and men's accounts. This offers the potential to move away from the gender binary divide which positions women and men at opposite ends and therefore imprisons women and men in gendered sex-role stereotypes (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Mavin, 2008a). Hence, this research offers a potential contribution to theory.

Previous research on factors and barriers to knowledge creation and related processes of learning and knowing was largely undertaken from an outsider position. A notable exception is McLaughlin *et al.*'s (2008) research in which one of the authors was an insider of the organisation. However, the researcher neither

incorporated his own experiences nor utilised his relationships with other members of the organisation to gain meaningful insights enabled by trustful relationships.

This research adopts an autoethnographic approach which enables me to be the researcher and the researched at the same time and therefore to incorporate my subjective experiences as a woman insider of the organisation explored. This approach also enabled me to gain rich accounts due to the trustful relationships I shared with my colleagues, the research participants. The research participants' experiences resonated with my own and led to an understanding which an 'academic tourist', due to his/her outsider position, may find difficult to develop (Pelias, 2003; Richardson, 2000a). Hence, this research offers a methodological contribution due to its autoethnographic account.

### **1.5 The research parameters**

The aim of this research is to explore individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in an international management consultancy. Through the interpretation of the women and men consultants' accounts of their experiences, as well as of the experiences of the researcher as a woman consultant of the organisation, the study aims to offer theoretical insights into the impact of organisational elements and gender on management consultants' experiences of knowledge creation processes.

The central argument of this research is twofold. First, it is argued that organisational elements impact on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes. Second, it is argued that knowledge creation is gendered. The research question is:

What are individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of management consultants in an international management consultancy?

The following sub-questions will be answered in the course of this thesis:

- What organisational elements impact on knowledge creation processes?
- How do these organisational elements impact on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes?
- Are individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes gendered?

In line with these research questions the main objectives of this research are:

1. To critically explore individual and organisational level conceptual understandings of knowledge, learning and knowledge creation in organisations;
2. To critically explore gender and gender relations within the context of organisations as well as the gendered nature of knowledge;
3. To develop and conduct appropriate methodology and methods to explore and interpret the individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive organisation;
4. To provide, through interpretations of the consultants' accounts of their experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, theoretical insights into knowledge creation;
5. To provide, through a gender lens interpretation of the consultants' accounts of their experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, theoretical insights into the gendered nature of knowledge creation;
6. To provide distinctive theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions through the research outcomes;
7. To maintain a consciously reflexive approach throughout the research process.

The subsequent section outlines the research approach that was taken to achieve the research aims and objectives and to answer the overall research question.

### **1.6 The research approach**

This research is founded on an intersubjective paradigm (Cunliffe, 2008) which acknowledges that individuals create meaning by interacting and communicating with individuals around them. This understanding moves the location of knowledge creation from the individual's mind to the interaction between individuals and therefore supports the social-constructionist epistemology deployed (Cunliffe, 2008; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000; Dachler and Hosking, 1995). Social constructionism negates the separation between the individual and the world and instead promotes that in a constant process of becoming (Watson, 1994) realities are socially

constructed through interaction and communication between individuals (Crotty, 1998). Hence, knowledge is understood as constructed by individuals and not as being discovered or possessed by individuals (Crotty, 1998; Cunliffe, 2008).

This approach conforms to the social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning, and of gender, taken in this research. This approach also stresses the importance of social interaction and context to individuals in order 'to come to know' (Cook and Brown, 1999; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000).

This epistemology is also deemed most appropriate for exploring the individual experiences 'second-hand' through the accounts of my colleagues as well as 'first-hand' (Thorpe, 2008) due to my insider position as a consultant of the organisation under exploration. This is reflected in the autoethnographic approach taken as well as in the framework for data analysis and in the methods used which, according to Crotty (1998) and Cunliffe (2008), are appropriate for research based on social constructionism.

The section that follows introduces the case study research strategy explored in this study.

### **1.7 The case under exploration**

The research strategy of this research is that of a case study. This research is concerned with women and men management consultants' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes within the context of a specific larger management consultancy presented as an embedded single case study (Yin, 2003). In order to protect the anonymity of the organisation I refer to it as 'InterConsult'. InterConsult is a sub-unit of an international IT-hardware and –software company which I refer to as 'InterIT'.

According to Hartley (2004) case study research is most appropriate for comprehending how the organisational context impacts on social processes. The organisational elements impacting on social knowledge creation processes explored in this research are understood as being embedded in the organisational context.

This research draws on Yin's (2003) design of an embedded single case study. InterConsult is set up as the specific case at the meso-level, whereas the individual research participants represent embedded multiple cases at the micro-level. The macro-level of this case study is InterIT, which represents the wider context of the

consultants. The main aim of this research was to explore the micro-level experiences of consultants working for this organisation. Hence, they were not regarded as subunits of the case but as cases in themselves. However, these experiences were inseparable from and embedded in their common context at the meso-level, InterConsult, and at the macro-level, InterIT.

The single case study approach taken in this research is of a qualitative nature which is in line with the intersubjective paradigm and social-constructionist epistemology since it acknowledges the uniqueness of the socially constructed interview context and outcomes. This research does not aim at scientific validity and generalisation as promoted by Yin (2003) but rather follows Alvesson's (1995) and Robertson's (1999) interpretative approach acknowledging that some organisational phenomena can be explored in a fascinating and intensive way by single case study research. This case study strategy is employed to contribute relatively concrete illustrations (Watson, 2003) of the consultants' experiences and interpretive insights (Cunliffe, 2008) from a gender perspective to add empirically to the extant literature. Stake (2003) calls this an 'intrinsic case study' where the researcher is interested in and provides 'thick description' (Stake, 2003; Denzin, 1989) of the particular case.

In order to benefit from my insider role focussing on the exploration of this single case seemed most appropriate. This way I am able to draw on my own understandings when interpreting the rich data extracted from the semi-structured interview accounts. The single case study approach also allows me to apply an autoethnographic approach by incorporating and reflecting upon my own experiences within the organisation explored.

Fifteen consultants working for InterConsult were selected as participants for the semi-structured interviews. The eight men consultants and seven women consultants were aged between 28 and 40 years at the time the interviews were carried out and had been with the organisation between two and nine years. Ten of the consultants were at the beginning of their career working in the positions of a Consultant or Senior Consultant. Five of the participants were in middle management positions as Managing Consultants and Senior Managing Consultants. Overall, 14 of the consultants were based at different locations in Germany, one was based in Austria. I selected these colleagues as participants because I had been able to build a trustful relationship with them over a couple of years. In order to be able to sufficiently attend to the analysis of the rich accounts, which I was able to

gain due to this trustful relationship, I limited the number of research participants to 15 which, according to Trigwell (2000), provides an adequate sample.

## **1.8 The structure of this thesis**

**Chapter One** has introduced the focus and process of this research. The chapter provided an overview of the focus of this study and an introduction of myself as the researcher and the researched in this study. The key theoretical concepts of knowledge and learning, and gender in organisations which inform the analytical framework of this study were introduced and the chapter highlighted the potential contributions of this research. The chapter introduced the research parameters followed by a brief overview of the research approach and the case study. The chapter concluded with this overview of the structure of this thesis.

**Chapter Two** provides a comprehensive review of the literature and key concepts on knowledge, learning and knowledge creation as well as other related topics fundamental to this research to set up the theory base of knowledge and learning for this thesis. It begins by introducing the concepts of PSFs, knowledge-intensive firms and knowledge workers and then offers a critical review of work from researchers with different theoretical and philosophical perspectives on individual and organisational knowledge, learning and knowledge creation. Related concepts are introduced before the chapter discusses the importance of organisational elements in terms of their influence on knowledge creation processes. The chapter ends by outlining the implications of this literature review for this research.

**Chapter Three** introduces concepts on gender in organisations to set up the theory base on gender in organisations for this thesis. It provides and discusses concepts of patriarchy and gender which inform the key understandings of this research and introduces different approaches to gender and concepts on how to unsettle the gender binary divide. The chapter discusses the gendered nature of organisations and the role of gendered emotions in organisations. The challenges women face in male-dominated organisations with special emphasis on management consultancies are outlined. The concepts of knowledge and gender are combined by exploring previous research on gendered knowledge and knowledge creation. The chapter concludes with fusing the theory bases of knowledge and learning and of gender in organisations to the analytical framework of this study.

**Chapter Four** provides an account of the ontological, epistemological and methodological positioning of this research. It gives details about the social-

constructionist perspective and offers an introduction to the gendered research focus enabled by looking at the research through a gender lens and the autoethnographic approach applied. The chapter also provides details on the case study research strategy and introduces the method choices for gathering and interpreting participants' accounts and justifies the choices made. Criteria and methods for establishing trustworthiness of this research are discussed. The ethical considerations that emerged throughout the research due to the social nature and my personal involvement are highlighted and my reflexive approach outlined. The chapter ends with consideration of the implications of the methodological choices.

**Chapter Five** introduces the reader to the case, the organisation under exploration, and the research participants and illustrates the participants' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes. The chapter briefly introduces the organisation under exploration to provide the basis for putting the participants' accounts into their organisational context. The chapter presents and interprets the research participants' accounts through extracts from the semi-structured interviews. This first analysis at the meso-level concludes by considering the implications of the accounts and interpretations offered for this study. The chapter then moves on to offer a second level of analysis at the macro-level by exploring the individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes through a gender lens. This analysis aims at making the gendered nature of experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes as well as the gendered nature of knowledge creation explicit. The gender lens also explores the language used by the research participants in the interviews. Following the autoethnographic approach of this research this chapter includes my own experiences. The chapter closes by discussing the implications for this study of the illustrations and interpretations of the research participants' accounts at the meso- and the macro-level.

**Chapter Six** presents an overview of the theoretical insights of this study and highlights the areas in which these theoretical insights contribute to the existing bodies of knowledge in the fields of knowledge creation and gender in organisations. The chapter outlines the areas to which this thesis adds and offers a framework which guides discussion of the contributions. The interpretations of the individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes and the theoretical insights they provide are discussed before the chapter moves on to the interpretations and theoretical insights of these experiences through a gender lens. The chapter concludes by fusing the outcomes of the two levels of analysis.

**Chapter Seven** completes this research by reflecting on the research as well as the research process and its outcomes. The chapter evaluates the achievement of the research aims and objectives and points out the theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions offered by this research. The chapter reflects on the impact of my position as both the researcher and the researched on the research process and the interpretations given and discusses the limitations of this research. Possibilities for further research are offered. The chapter concludes with a brief update on what has happened in the organisation under exploration since the completion of the empirical part of this research.

### **1.9 Chapter summary**

This chapter has laid the foundation for this thesis by introducing the research focus and process. My educational and professional background has been introduced and my place in this research has been set up. The main theoretical concepts on knowledge, learning and knowledge creation and organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes have been presented. Further, the key understandings of gender in organisations and gendered knowledge have been introduced. Next, the potential contributions of this research were illustrated. The chapter then presented the research parameters and the ontological and epistemological choices made in this research. The case study research strategy employed has been discussed before the chapter concluded with an overview of the structure of this thesis. The chapter that follows is the first of two reviewing the literature which forms the theoretical foundation for this research. It critically discusses concepts around knowledge and learning and sets up the theory base on knowledge and learning of this research.

## Chapter 2 Concepts of Knowledge and Learning

### 2 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced how my experiences have informed my research topic and built the background for it. It also provided an introduction to concepts, central to this study, of knowledge, learning and knowledge creation as well as organisational elements influencing knowledge creation processes. In this chapter, these key concepts of knowledge and learning are critically reviewed. This chapter is the first of two which set up the analytical framework of this research. First, the notions of Professional Services Firms (PSF), knowledge-intensive firms and knowledge workers are introduced in order to set up the context for this research. Next, the critical review of contemporary debates on individual and organisational knowledge and learning and knowledge creation sets the social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning from which this research is conducted. The chapter then moves on to focus on organisational elements and their potential impact on individuals' knowledge creation activities. Then, the chapter discusses the implications for this research of the review of existing literature on knowledge and learning leading to a potential theoretical contribution of this research. The chapter concludes with an overview of the theory base on knowing and learning of this research set up in this chapter.

This chapter contributes to the first research objective to *critically explore individual and organisational level conceptual understandings of knowledge, learning and knowledge creation in organisations.*

The literature review in this chapter will be further constructed in Chapter Three to progress the overall thesis question: *What are individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of management consultants in an international management consultancy?.*

#### 2.1 Professional Services Firms, knowledge-intensive firms and knowledge workers

Due to the nature of the organisation under exploration in this research as well as the profession of the interview participants working for this organisation it is regarded as crucial to introduce the notions of Professional Services Firms (PSF) and knowledge-intensive firms as well as knowledge workers in order to achieve a common understanding of these concepts.

### 2.1.1 Professional Services Firms

According to researchers such as von Nordenflycht (2010) and Robertson (1999) there is no common understanding amongst researchers and practitioners on what constitutes a Professional Services Firm (PSF). Von Nordenflycht (2007) argues that there is not only one but that there are several characteristics which distinguish PSFs from other organisations. In his research von Nordenflycht (2007, p.156) focusses on exploring the characteristics “*knowledge intensity, low capital intensity, and a professionalised workforce*”. Von Nordenflycht (2007) emphasises that organisations do not have to meet all three characteristics to be regarded as a PSF. Morris and Empson (1998), von Nordenflycht (2007) and Starbuck (1992) regard the knowledge-intensive nature of PSFs as the most essential characteristic in terms of the organisation’s output being strongly dependent on the sophisticated knowledge and skills of its workforce. Von Nordenflycht (2007, p.159) also uses the term “*human capital intensity*” to describe this crucial characteristic of PSFs. As described in more detail later, one of the main challenges management faces in a knowledge-intensive organisational environment is to retain and manage the skilled workforce (Maister, 2003). Organisations whose activities comprise among others law, audit, accounting and consulting have been described as PSF. They have also been referred to as knowledge-intensive or knowledge-based firms (Starbuck, 1992; Alvesson, 2004).

Another characteristic crucial for the context of this research deals with the professionalised workforce of PSFs. According to Torres (1991) the three key characteristics of a profession are a distinctive knowledge base, regulation and control of this knowledge base and its use and the ideology of a profession. In detail this encompasses that a profession has a monopoly for its respective knowledge base, that it controls its monopoly independently without any interference of any other authority such as the state and that its regulations exclude non-professionals (von Nordenflycht, 2007). Membership can only be certified by a central association after expertise and obedience to the ethical code has been proved. The ethical code is connected to the ideology of a profession which prescribes apt behaviour for members of a profession. These features of professions are established and maintained in order to set high quality standards and to ensure that professionals adhere to these standards (von Nordenflycht, 2010). Although for some of the organisations’ employees formal accreditation is necessary, in accounting for example, for others, such as management consultants, no accreditation exists (Morris and Empson, 1998). What these professions have in common nevertheless is that they are generally connected to high status and a knowledge-intensive nature

of work (Freidson, 1986). McKenna (2006) argues that knowledge-intensive organisations such as large management consultancies have widely abstained from professionalising consultancies so far but have instead relied on their individual reputation to ensure high-quality of their workforces' work outputs. These organisations tend to focus more on the knowledge-intensity of their products and services than on the professionalisation of their workforce. To address this shift von Nordenflycht (2010) refers to them as 'Neo-PSFs'.

In this thesis, it is acknowledged that many researchers such as von Nordenflycht (2007), Loewendahl (2005) and Alvesson (2004) understand management consultancies as PSFs and the term will be retained when it is referenced as such. However, in line with the aims and objectives of this thesis which deals with organisational elements impacting on consultants' experiences of knowledge creation processes in the organisation explored it is regarded as more helpful to focus on aspects connected to the knowledge intensity of the organisation. To address this, management consultancies are primarily understood and referred to as knowledge-intensive firms, a term coined by Starbuck (1992).

### **2.1.2 Knowledge-intensive firms**

Loewendahl (2005) approach of separating knowledge-intensive firms into three different categories is assumed to be helpful for this research in terms of locating the organisation's strategic focus. In her work, Loewendahl (2005) distinguished knowledge-intensive firms into three types: client-based, problem-solving and output-based. The client-based type is typically represented by law and accountancy firms. The problem-solving type places its strategic focus on creative problem-solving, often linked to innovation, and is an approach frequently taken on by advertising agencies and software development companies. The third output-based type focusses on the adaptation of ready solutions to different clients of the same industry. This approach tends to be followed by large management consultancies.

Knowledge-intensive firms such as management consultancies are part of the knowledge economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century which is characterised by the increased importance of knowledge as a factor of production (Newell *et al.*, 2009; Castells, 1996). As a consequence of this development the amount and significance of knowledge-intensive organisations grows as well as the knowledge-intensity in organisations and work in general (Alvesson, 2011).

This research explores the experiences of consultants working in an international management consultancy. Management consultancies in this research are understood as knowledge-intensive firms which offer sophisticated knowledge or knowledge-based products to the market. The core activities of these companies include the solving of complex problems and the provision of solutions for clients (Newell *et al.*, 2009). As mentioned earlier these activities are highly dependent on the intellectual skills and expertise of a large proportion of their labour force (Alvesson, 1993, 2004). In management consultancies in particular, the consultants represent the organisations' primary source of income. Consequently, knowledge and the people developing and applying this knowledge, the consultants, are the primary assets of consultancies.

In order to be able to sustain their competitive advantage it is essential for management consultancies to retain an expert workforce which is capable of and willing to share and exploit existing knowledge as well as to build new knowledge faster than their competitors (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Newell *et al.*, 2009; von Nordenflycht, 2010). Retaining this highly educated and skilled workforce is regarded as challenging due to their strong bargaining power which is connected to them being scarce and therefore sought-after resources on the job market (Teece, 2003; Alvesson, 2000). Besides being hard to retain, knowledge workers such as consultants are also regarded as being difficult to manage due to their strong affinity to autonomy, informality and flexible structures (Starbuck, 1992).

Instead of focussing on the traditional management principles of authority, direction, supervision and formal organisational processes, knowledge-intensive firms need to manage by providing their knowledge workers with autonomy within more flexible and less formal and strict organisational structures and processes (Newell *et al.*, 2009; Davenport, 2005).

### **2.1.3 Knowledge workers – the consultant**

Newell *et al.* (2009, p.25) understand knowledge workers as “*professionals and others with disciplined-based knowledge (...) and skills whose major tasks involve creating new knowledge or applying existing knowledge in new ways*”. Most knowledge workers have high levels of education and hold analytic and communicative skills which help them to identify and solve problems (Newell *et al.*, 2009; Ambos and Schlegelmilch, 2009; Alvesson, 2004; Loewendahl, 2005). Consultants are considered to be representative examples of knowledge workers (Robertson, 1999).

Although consultants mostly develop a particular area of expertise during their career they often stay 'knowledge generalists' since they are confronted with new topics or new developments of a topic they are familiar with on a regular basis and have a broad view on the industry (Ambos and Schlegelmilch, 2009). Their job is often characterised by a lack of daily routine, a high demand for flexibility, extensive travelling, long hours during the week as well as on the weekends and a fairly high degree of autonomy (Robertson, 1999; Alvesson, 2000). Consultants typically work in project teams at the client's site detached from their organisation's offices (Alvesson, 2000). The majority of consultants often move from one project to the next which means that they have to adjust to new clients and new project teams on a regular basis (Ambos and Schlegelmilch, 2009). This group of typically fairly young consultants is usually paid far above average and experiences high status in connection with their occupation (Alvesson, 2004). The self-image of knowledge workers, especially consultants, is often based on their occupation which, to a large degree, may involve the tendency to work more than the 'average person' (Alvesson, 2000).

Mostly knowledge workers are intrinsically motivated but also derive their motivation from external sources such as appraisals, career opportunities and pay-rises (Mitchell and Meacheam, 2011). Due to their intrinsic motivation and their expectations upon themselves to deliver high quality long working hours are common (Alvesson, 2000). Alvesson (2000, p.1104) further connects long working hours to the self-image many consultants have developed which entails that *"being a knowledge worker or more in particular a consultant means being a hard-working and committed person"*. Maister (2003, p.199) adds that consultants in particular *"look for careers, not jobs"*. As long as consultants can see their career advancing they will stay. To them, their current job is one step in their career that will help them to achieve more senior positions and higher rewards over time. Knowledge-intensive firms therefore have to set up specific career tracks that provide consultants with clear guidance in terms of which performance and competencies they have to demonstrate in order to move to the next career level (Newell *et al.*, 2009). If the organisation does not provide a clear career path and the consultants cannot enhance their skills they will most probably leave and take their skills and knowledge with them (Loewendahl, 2005).

Consultants mostly come from diverse backgrounds in terms of their expert areas and prior work experiences. This diverse workforce is regarded as crucial in order to promote and sustain knowledge creation within an organisation (Kanter, 1988;

Starbuck, 1992). The consultants' knowledge has to be up-to-date at any time to enable them to offer high-quality services. Hence special importance is placed on development activities such as formal and informal training (Alvesson, 2004; Maister, 2003). In many consultancies informal workplace learning is strongly fostered since consultants are regarded to "*learn best from each other*" (Davenport, 2005, p.160).

Experiences and research suggest that knowledge workers have to be managed differently from employees in line management positions (Ehin, 2008; Alvesson, 2000). Ehin (2008) proposes that instead of managing knowledge workers in line with traditional management tools of authority, tight control and strict procedures within a hierarchical organisation, knowledge workers need to be equipped with autonomy, a shared identity with other colleagues and a network of a size that allows for face-to-face contact for all members within a self-organising system enabling consultants to unleash expansive and resourceful thinking which is essential for their work.

The notions of knowledge-intensive firms such as management consultancies and knowledge workers such as consultants are not unambiguous (Alvesson, 2011; Schreyögg and Geiger, 2007). Alvesson (2011) in his research for example found that consultants were often assigned to roles for which they had little formal education or appropriate work experiences. According to his findings expertise in a specific area was often deemed to be less important than the capability of the individual consultant to adapt to various contexts and jobs, to be focused and willing to work hard and long hours. Also, he found that consultants were often engaged by organisations as additional workforce when they were undergoing work-intensive change processes. Alvesson (2011) concludes that in many cases the consultancy business was more engaged in the outsourcing of labour than in offering advanced expertise which questions the meaning of knowledge-intensive firms as replacing the former key production factors capital and labour with knowledge. Further, the approach of the knowledge worker implies that the worker possesses specific knowledge. This perspective is introduced and critically discussed in Section 2.2.

Research by Taminiau *et al.* suggests that the importance assigned to consultants' billable project hours by consultancies' management diminishes the importance and acknowledgement of knowledge sharing activities and therefore hinders instead of promotes knowledge creation activities which are vital to the organisation's strategic competitive advantage (Taminiau *et al.*, 2009).

#### **2.1.4 From the partnership model to a Managed Professional Business Model**

Over the last years a development from the traditional professional partnership model, where those who succeed have received high monetary reward and recognition by their peers (Greenwood *et al.*, 1990), to the 'Managed Professional Business Model' (Cooper *et al.*, 1996) has taken place in the field of PSFs, including knowledge-intensive firms such as management consultancies. The partnership model, also called 'P2' because of the two crucial components partnership and professionalism (Cooper *et al.*, 1996), reduces hierarchy and formal control systems as far as possible and instead offers employees a maximum of individual freedom and power over their ways of working. It further enables a fusion of ownership and control, supports peer control and fosters strong client relationships. According to Cooper *et al.* (1996) this model has been dominant in law firms.

During the organisational transformation process from a partnership model to a Managed Professional Business, administrative means of controls such as management by objectives and performance appraisal systems rewarding measurable aspects such as high numbers of billable hours are typically introduced (Brivot, 2011; Loewendahl, 2005; Brock, 2006). According to Brivot (2011) these administrative controls are deployed by management to ensure that their subordinate employees behave and perform in co-operative ways. The shift to a Managed Professional Business Model has often followed internal growth, globalisation of services and mergers or takeovers of previously independent organisations (Brock, 2006). Although many organisations have technically kept the partnership model, the reduction of partner shares of the organisation as well as the introduction of different partnership levels within the context of the growing size of organisations have had a negative impact on the importance and compensation of partners. Today, a partner position can be regarded as equal to middle management positions (Carlson, 2004).

Beside these aspects which are characteristic for the organisational transformation process to a Managed Professional Business, the implementation of knowledge management systems has to be mentioned as a further key step. Usually, these knowledge management systems are implemented to make information available to the entire organisation by capturing and standardising it and making it transferrable (Brivot, 2011; Hislop, 2009). Best practices captured in these centralised knowledge management systems are supposed to ensure that standardised and universalistic principles and processes are followed throughout the entire organisation (Oligati,

2008). Here, knowledge is regarded as a commodity which can be separated from individuals and applied in any situation and context (Hislop, 2009).

Starbuck (1992) and Maister (2003) claim that these systems negatively impact on professionals and their ways of working which is characterised as not being fully manageable or measurable and as being dependent on flexible structures. Further, these systems are understood as contradicting the professionals' nature which is connected to autonomy and informality (Starbuck, 1992; Maister, 2003). Although the introduction of knowledge management systems can be regarded as potentially diluting the professionals' autonomy and their powerful positions within the organisation, Brivot (2011) found in her research in a French law firm that these bureaucratic systems have also had a positive impact on the professionals' work.

Brivot (2011) reports that the knowledge management systems introduced in the law firm she explored on the one hand did contribute to a higher bureaucratisation of knowledge creation processes but on the other hand did not cause a shift of the balance of power between the firm's management and professionals. Professionals reportedly aligned their behaviour to the controls and actively contributed to the knowledge management systems in place which aimed at increasing transparency of existing knowledge and its sharing and usage. At the same time they were able to keep their independence within their bureaucratised organisational environment (Brivot, 2011).

There were different reasons for professionals to support these changes although their professional authority was at risk. Brivot (2011) suggests that professionals recognised that a more systematic and standardised approach to client issues, as well as the provision of more consistent solutions, enhanced the reputation of professionals and the trust in their work results. Further, knowledge management systems were regarded as a crucial tool for dispersing knowledge throughout the organisation, based on which new knowledge and client solutions could be built. Brivot (2011) concludes that this shift to a more bureaucratised organisation does not always negatively impact on the professionals' power and their knowledge creation activities but can enable them to be more efficient in their creative processes and to apply their power differently by being able to focus more on individual client's requirements and conditions. What remains with the professional is the intangible nature of their work which includes the professionals' creativity, experiences and skills from previous work and based on this their ability to judge individual client requirements and act accordingly, for example by tailoring a

standardised approach to the client's context. Brivot (2011, p.504) argues that overall knowledge management systems are "*facilitating professional work rather than directing it*". However, Brivot's (2011) research was carried out in a law firm. Since this research has been carried in an international management consultancy it will be interesting to explore whether the bureaucratisation of this organisation through the shift to a Managed Professional Business Model, and with it the implementation of administrative controls and knowledge management systems, has had a comparable impact on the consultants participating in this research.

### **2.1.5 Standardisation of services**

Inherent to the bureaucratisation of knowledge-intensive organisations such as management consultancies is the increase of standardisation which has been widely regarded in a positive light as a way to rationalise and optimise service production (Hansen *et al.*, 1999). Benezech *et al.* (2001) argue that organisations consciously bring in external consultancies that work with standardised solutions to align their processes to these solutions which have been proven to be efficient and successful in other organisations. Hence, standardisation is a crucial element of consultancy practice (Wright *et al.*, 2012). At the same time, it has been criticised for not being applicable to the complex and context-dependent nature of management (Sturdy, 1997; Clark, 1995; Whitley, 1992). Standardisation in consultancies is often pursued by knowledge management strategies. Skills and experiences built on client assignments are gathered in databases and transformed into standardised methodologies and approaches which are then made available to consultants throughout the organisation (Morris and Empson, 1998). By doing this, especially large organisations such as the organisation under exploration seek to achieve that all client-facing staff offers coherent services to its clients drawing on the same methodologies and approaches (Morris and Empson, 1998).

Although many consultancy products are standardised or commoditised the specific needs of different clients makes customising of standardised solutions necessary. Due to working closely together with the client on client projects, the interaction with the client whose nature differs depending on the organisation's situation and the clients' ways of working makes adaptation of standardised approaches inevitable (Grey, 1994; Morris and Empson, 1998). The effective daily interaction with clients, which is of utmost importance for the successful delivery of client projects, requires inter-personal skills (Morris and Empson, 1998), the ability to build a trustful relationship with the client (Edvardsson, 1990) as well as client knowledge which often becomes a major source of competitive advantage not only for organisations

but also for single consultants (Nelson, 1988). These kinds of skills can, if at all, only partly be separated from the contextual nature and the individual which has gained these skills in a specific client relationship and therefore can not be standardised and stored in databases (Morris and Empson, 1998).

Standardised approaches have been widely regarded as a form of bureaucracy and organisational control impeding creativity and with it innovation for which consultancies and their consultants are often hired (Wright *et al.*, 2012). Whereas innovation is commonly connected to the creation of new ideas which break away from accepted patterns of behaviour (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2008), standardisation is connected to rules, universality and the continuity of behaviour (David and Rothwell, 1996). However, Wright *et al.* (2012) claim that standardisation of processes and services offers two things: on the one hand it provides the potential for improved performance by simplification; on the other hand it creates a common understanding and methodology for exploration which might result in incremental improvement and therefore innovation based on previous experiences. What is a standardised solution for one industry for example might be highly creative and innovative if applied and customised for one specific organisation or another industry (Mol and Birkinshaw, 2009).

At the same time, other researchers such as Werr *et al.* (1997) and Adler and Borys (1996) regard standardised methodologies or approaches as useful to provide parameters and a framework within which consultants are supposed to act and which supports them in dealing with complex, unstructured and unknown situations for which there is no standard solution available (Werr *et al.*, 1997) and in creating a modified solution which is tailored to the client's precondition and context (Baecklund, 2001; Wright *et al.*, 2012). In this thesis these methodologies are understood as a supporting guide that ensures that steps which have previously been proven to be crucial in the process of developing solutions for complex situations are followed (Werr *et al.*, 1997). This is supported by Wright *et al.* (2012) and Lippit and Lippit (1986) who regard standardised approaches as a pre-defined consulting approach which provides an order of activities from the identification of the problem to the diagnosis and implementation of the solution without unnecessary delay through wrong priorities and timing of deliverables. However, without adding professionals' personal skills and experiences to it as well as their ability to create individual solutions for their clients which take into account the client's specific context and situation, which implies the creation of new knowledge, successful project delivery and therefore the maintenance of competitive advantage

is not possible (Morris and Empson, 1998; Bergholz, 1999; Werr *et al.*, 1997). In order to safeguard the balance between standardisation and creative adaptation the usage of a specific methodology should not be prescribed too rigidly by the organisation (Werr *et al.*, 1997).

Resulting from this, the most crucial skill of consultants is the ability to respond to each client and unique situation by creatively adopting the organisation's standardised methodologies and approaches (Morris and Empson, 1998). Standardised methodologies and approaches can support the competitive advantage of management consultancies since they demonstrate that the organisation has vast amounts of experiences and competencies in the respective field that has been leveraged and is ready to be applied (Hansen *et al.*, 1999). However, without the creative ability of the organisation's consultants to adopt these methodologies to individual clients' needs as well as the extensive situated project experiences of the consultants these standardised methodologies and approaches cannot be applied in an effective way that leads to a successful project outcome (Morris and Empson, 1998).

#### **2.1.6 Mergers between and takeovers of knowledge-intensive firms**

Knowledge-intensive firms which merge with another knowledge-intensive firm or are taken over such as the organisation explored in this research can undergo a difficult phase of transition and change during which employees develop negative emotions and anxiety which stem from the fear of being made redundant, losing one's expert status and other potential impacts of any form of change (Empson, 2001). This anxiety can manifest itself in a number of ways. Individuals might regard the knowledge and skills of their new colleagues as less valuable than their own skills and knowledge. Different forms of knowledge in the two organisations might be accepted and their legitimacy valued differently (Empson, 2001). The more prestigious organisation could fear that their knowledge and, as a consequence, their reputation with clients may be damaged or 'contaminated' through the merger. Whereas employees of the less prestigious organisation might suffer from a complete loss of positive professional self-image due to the treatment by their new colleagues, it is also difficult for the employees of the up-market organisation to sustain their identity and self-image. This situation can cause an unwillingness of employees to share their knowledge with their new colleagues. If this is the case then one of the biggest potential advantages of mergers, the sharing of knowledge and improvement of innovativeness, could be minimised or even perishes (Empson, 2001).

The next section introduces individual and organisational learning and knowledge.

## **2.2 Debates on individual and organisational knowledge and learning**

The concepts of individual and organisational knowledge and learning have gained increasing attention and are viewed to be of crucial importance for knowledge creation and innovation processes which are vital to an organisation's competitive advantage (Karatas-Özkan and Murphy, 2010; Hoe and McShane, 2010). Different fields such as management studies, psychology, sociology and organisational theory as well as human resource studies have contributed to the research by approaching the topic from different angles (Dodgson, 1993; Karatas-Özkan and Murphy, 2010; Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007). In management studies, concepts of learning and knowledge have become part of the notions of the learning organisation and knowledge management. Whereas management studies are mostly interested in prescriptive approaches for the efficient management of learning and knowledge in organisations and often focus on technology, organisational studies focus on the human-level learning processes (Rashman *et al.*, 2009; Rebelo and Gomes, 2008). However, the academic communities have started to recognise that they share some common issues and underlying concepts (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000).

In their work, which is introduced in the following section, Chiva and Alegre (2005) summarise the main approaches to individual and organisational knowledge and learning and group them into two perspectives as a starting point for an integrative approach of the different approaches. The diverse approaches are based on different ontological and epistemological understandings.

### **2.2.1 The cognitive-possession perspective on knowledge and learning**

The first perspective, the cognitive-possession perspective, views knowledge as a commodity, as something people have (Nonaka, 1994; Cook and Brown, 1999; Gourlay, 2004), and as "*a collection of representations of the world, made up of a number of objects and events*" (Chiva and Allegre, 2005, p.53). Knowledge is regarded as universal and therefore independent from knowing individuals and context which implies that different individuals are supposed to come up with identical representations of an object or specific situations. Once this knowledge is acquired through, for example, training courses or reading books it can be applied to different situations. It can also be codified, stored and conveyed to other individuals (Lam, 2000; Chiva and Alegre, 2005; O'Dell and Grayson, 1998). Organisational

knowledge is created by merely integrating the existing knowledge of the individual members of the organisation (Grant, 1996) and can also be found in organisational rules and routines (Spender, 1996).

Organisational knowledge and organisational learning are regarded separately in this perspective but remain strongly linked since organisational knowledge is viewed as a key component of organisational learning (Chiva and Alegre, 2005).

Organisational learning is understood as a process through which knowledge changes and grows (Duncan and Weiss, 1979). The organisation learns when one unit of it acquires new knowledge (Chiva and Alegre, 2005; Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007; Huber, 1991). This perspective on knowledge is based on a positivist epistemology which neither takes into account the social nature of meaning and practice nor the social construction of knowledge (Chiva and Alegre, 2005; Skerlavaj and Dimovski, 2007). In line with this perspective Nonaka (1994) focused his work on the contribution of individual knowledge to collective organisational knowledge.

According to Chiva and Alegre (2005) research adopting the cognitive-possession perspective has mainly explored organisational learning in terms of how individuals learn in organisations or how individual learning theories can be applied to organisational learning. These theories focus on the individual as “*self-directed and autonomous*” (Chiva and Alegre, 2005, p.52). In relation to those theories the cognitive perspective of organisational learning takes on two main approaches. The first approach views individual learning as a model for organisational action. According to this approach, followed by researchers such as Weick (1991) and Levitt and March (1988), organisations are able to learn, presuming that they have matching or at least related capabilities to those of humans. Authors of this approach tend to look at learning processes without consideration of the context (Chiva and Alegre, 2005; Kakavelakis, 2010). Critics of this approach argue that the organisation is not human. Hence, attributes such as ‘learning’ and ‘thought’, human attributes, cannot be assigned to organisations (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000; Casey, 2005). The second approach suggests that organisational learning is individual learning in an organisational context (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007). Within this approach, followed by researchers such as Dodgson (1993) and Simon (1991), organisational learning is perceived as being more than the total of the learning of individual members of an organisation. The role of organisational culture is to inspire the individual to learn (Popper and Lipshitz, 2000). Still, learning itself is regarded as taking place in the mind of the individual (Elkjaer, 1999) which implies that this perspective does not consider that learning can occur through conversation and

interaction between people (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000; Gherardi, 1999). This perspective can mainly be found in management studies.

### **2.2.2 The social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning**

According to Chiva and Alegre (2005) the second and more recent approach, the social-process or social-constructionist perspective, has a different view on these aspects.

Gherardi (1999) criticised the cognitive-possession perspective for taking on a realist ontology. Instead she promoted the social-constructionist perspective based on a social-constructionist epistemology which challenges the traditional and often technical views of individual learning by ascribing organisational learning to its members' collective construction of knowledge. In this perspective, attention is on the processes through which individual or local knowledge is changed into collective or organisational knowledge and on the process through which this socially constructed knowledge impacts on and becomes a part of local knowledge (Huysman, 2000).

In this perspective, the notion of knowledge is replaced by 'knowing' which emphasises that 'coming to knowledge' is a process which unfolds over time (Cook and Brown, 1999; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000). Knowledge is not regarded as something individuals have, but something individuals do (Blackler, 1995). Learning in this context is not understood as a way of knowing about the world, but as a way of being in the world (Gherardi, 1999). Knowledge is not regarded as a representation of the world, abstract and universal, but as depending on context and social interaction (Jakubik, 2011) and as an act of collective construction and creation in which language plays a vital part (Karatas-Özkan and Murphy, 2010; Cunliffe, 2008). As a consequence, reality is viewed as socially constructed (Chiva and Alegre, 2005). The emphasis is on the process of 'coming to know' to illustrate that knowledge from this perspective is regarded as a process rather than an outcome (Karatas-Özkan and Murphy, 2010) and as being equal to the process of learning (Gherardi, 1999; Jakubik, 2011). Hence, there is no separation between organisational learning and organisational knowing in the social-constructionist perspective (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000; Chiva and Alegre, 2005; Wenger, 2000; Rashman *et al.*, 2009).

This perspective is mainly represented by organisation studies and is in line with Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of situated learning where learning is regarded

as taking place in social relationships instead of being acquired by individuals. According to Lave and Wenger (1999) learning can only be achieved through active participation which takes place in formal or informal Communities of Practice. This view sees learning as part of social practice, as something interpreted from the world we live in and therefore takes on a social-constructionist approach to learning (Elkjaer, 1999; Cunliffe, 2008). Besides researchers such as Lave and Wenger (1991), Gherardi *et al.* (1998), Jakubik (2008, 2011), Cook and Yanow (1993) and Brown and Duguid (2001) also followed the social-constructionist perspective.

Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2000, p.787) call this movement an upheaval which *overturned the previously dominant model which implicitly conceptualized learners as individual actors processing information or modifying their mental structures, and substituted it with an image of learners as social beings who construct their understanding and learn from social interaction within specific socio-cultural and material settings.*

Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2000) see a tendency towards the strengthening of the social-process perspective since recent research in the field of knowledge management has shown that the disregard of social factors can minimise the success of strategic management initiatives.

Overall, researchers such as Chiva and Alegre (2005) and Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) propose that research in line with the social-constructionist perspective needs to explore knowing and learning in relation to work practices and factors that have been widely excluded from previous research from the cognitive-possession perspective. These include aspects such as participation, power, organisational politics, conflict and collaboration (Rashman *et al.*, 2009). This thesis follows their call by exploring organisational elements and their impact on the experiences of consultants of knowledge creation processes following a social-constructionist perspective. However, the thesis also acknowledges Albrecht (1993) and Campbell *et al.* (2009) who state that individual members of an organisation hold previous experiences and skills which they contribute to the social construction and creation of new knowledge which is more in line with the cognitive-possession perspective (Chiva and Alegre, 2005). Table 2.1 summarises the social-constructionist and cognitive-possession perspective on knowledge and learning and also illustrates where this research is positioned within these two approaches.

The concepts of knowledge, learning and knowledge creation are further explored in the subsequent sections.

Table 2.1 The two main perspectives on knowledge and learning  
 Developed from Chiva and Alegre (2005), Cook and Brown (1999), Gherardi (1999), Blackler (1995), Gherardi and Nicolini (2000), Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (2000), Brown and Duguid (2001), Cook and Yanow (1993), Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2000)

Perspectives on knowledge and learning				
Cognitive-possession (based on a positivist epistemology)	Individual knowledge	Organisational knowledge	Individual learning	Organisational learning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A commodity – something people have</li> <li>• A collection of representations of the world applicable to different situations</li> <li>• Independent from the knowing subject and the context</li> <li>• Contributes to the development of organisational knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual knowledge shared between individual members of an organisation</li> <li>• Embedded in rules and routines</li> <li>• Key component of organisational learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The individual learns in a self-directed and autonomous way</li> <li>• Takes place through, for example, attending training courses or reading a book</li> <li>• A way of knowing 'about the world'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to individual learning: organisations are able to learn like individuals (approach one)</li> <li>• Individual learning in an organisational context, learning still takes place in the mind of the individual (approach two)</li> </ul>
Social-constructionist (based on a social-constructionist epistemology)	Knowledge		Learning	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge is something individuals do</li> <li>• The notion of knowledge is replaced by 'coming to know' or 'knowing'</li> <li>• 'Knowing' is a social process which is <b>equal to the process of learning</b></li> <li>• Act of collective construction</li> <li>• Dependent on context and social interaction</li> <li>• Takes place in interpersonal relationships</li> <li>• <b>No separation between individual and organisational knowledge</b></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning is a way of 'being in the world' which is <b>equal to the process of 'knowing'</b></li> <li>• Only possible through active participation in social practice</li> <li>• Placed in social relationships</li> <li>• Collective construction of knowledge by organisational members</li> <li>• <b>No separation between individual and organisational learning</b></li> </ul>	

## 2.3 Introduction of key concepts

### 2.3.1 Knowledge

In the knowledge economy, knowledge has become the key economic resource which has assigned the traditional factors of production, labour and capital to 'second place' and has become the overriding source of competitive advantage (Smedlund, 2008; Drucker, 1995). Knowledge is of particular importance to those organisations that are dependent on their workforces' knowledge such as management consultancies (Alvesson, 2004). It is no longer sufficient for organisations to apply and disseminate knowledge efficiently in order to compete successfully in their markets but also indispensable to constantly create new knowledge (Nonaka, 1994; Garvey and Williamson, 2002).

Most research refers to Polanyi (1962) and his understanding of knowledge which is based on Plato's work of the classical Greek period (Robertson, 1999). In his work Polanyi (1962, p.4) describes knowledge as "*justified true belief*". This individual, cognitive understanding is based on a realist ontology (Miller, 2008). Nonaka (1994) criticises Polanyi's (1962) understanding by stating that the truthfulness of knowledge, if at all, should on the individual level be judged in relation to individual belief. However, Nonaka (1994) suggests that the justification of knowledge should not take place on the individual level but instead within an organisational context. By emphasising the organisational context in connection to the justification of knowledge, focus is placed on the highly contextual and situated nature of knowledge (Robertson, 1999).

Researchers such as Cook and Brown (1999) and Gherardi and Nicolini (2000) replace the notion of knowledge being objective and static with an understanding of knowledge as being dynamic, understanding it as a practice of knowing. Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos (2004) add that the constructed nature of any form of knowledge is dependent on social practices and the context in which it has been established. Hence, knowledge cannot be neutral or unbiased or separated from the values of the individuals creating it (Hislop, 2009). This social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning taken in this research which acknowledges that knowledge is subjective and socially constructed also implies that what constitutes knowledge is open to debate and therefore challenges the cognitive-possession perspective that knowledge can be truly objective (Hislop, 2009). Competing understandings of what represents 'legitimate' knowledge can occur when conflicting understandings of the same events are constructed by different groups of individuals. As a consequence,

power and politics become more important with regard to which knowledge becomes legitimate (Storey and Barnett, 2000; Foucault, 1980).

Researchers such as Polanyi (1966), Blackler (1995) and Nonaka (2004) distinguish knowledge into tacit and explicit knowledge depending on how accessible it is. Tacit knowledge is regarded as residing within a single person or a group of people, the 'knowers' and as difficult to articulate adequately. Tacit knowledge is often referred to as 'know-how' (Polanyi, 1962) and related to skills. Knowledge is regarded as explicit when it can be stored in inanimate containers such as databases and manuals and therefore easy to share and theoretically accessible to a wider circle of persons (O'Dell and Grayson, 1998). It is therefore often described as 'know what' (Polanyi, 1962). Inherent to this classification of knowledge is the understanding that knowledge is an objective and discrete entity, a 'thing' (Gourlay, 2004) an individual can possess (Cook and Brown, 1999) which is in line with the cognitive-possession perspective on knowledge and learning. Authors such as Tsoukas (1996), Werr and Stjernberg (2003) argue that the tacit and the explicit dimensions do not represent two separate types of knowledge but describe different aspects of knowledge which cannot be separated. Hence, all knowledge has both explicit and tacit facets. The understanding of knowledge as something people do (Blackler, 1995) supports this view by eliminating the distinction between the body and the mind and emphasising rather that knowing and doing are undividable which implies that 'know-how' (tacit knowledge), and 'know what' (explicit knowledge) are interlinked. In line with this perspective this thesis does not distinguish between an explicit and tacit dimension of knowledge.

Yanow (2004) further classifies knowledge into local and expert knowledge in organisations. According to Yanow (2004) local knowledge is created and developed in context through interaction among people sharing the same work practice, whereas expert knowledge is usually derived from formal or academic training which is scientifically constructed. This kind of knowledge is described as general and abstract whereas local knowledge is understood as being developed through practical reasoning about events taking place in a specific context. Often individuals hold both types of knowledge depending on their formal education and practical experiences. However, often expert knowledge is paid more attention to since it is in the hand of managers which also hold the power to decide which knowledge is accepted in the organisation whereas local knowledge is often created and developed at organisational peripheries such as clients' sites which are kept from the organisation's centre where politics and decisions are made. Consequently,

local knowledge is often not only neglected and not viewed as expert knowledge but also not taken into account in the overall learning processes of the organisation (Yanow, 2004). These two dimensions are more in line with the cognitive-possession perspective on knowledge and learning. Nevertheless, they proved to be of importance in the consultants' accounts introduced in Chapter Five in relation to the acceptance of the experiences and skills consultants gained on client projects and the acceptance of this knowledge by management.

Knowledge sharing from a social-constructionist perspective is not understood as simple exchange of objective knowledge between individuals but as a process of social construction of knowledge by individuals to which these individuals contribute their prior experiences and skills (Hislop, 2009). Hence, in this research knowledge sharing is regarded as inherent in the process of knowledge creation and is therefore not dealt with separately.

### **2.3.2 Learning**

The heterogeneity in the learning literature provides numerous understandings of the concept of learning and where it occurs (Hislop, 2009; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000). Hislop (2009) categorises the different mechanisms and processes in which learning occurs into three different categories: Learning via the participation of individuals in formal training and education, learning via practices embedded in work processes such as post-project reviews or so called lessons learnt, and the facilitation of learning embedded in and emerging from day-to-day work practices via the creation of an organisational context which encourages learning, reflection and discussion (Styhre *et al.*, 2006).

Beside the diversity of understandings of what learning is and how it occurs research has focussed on the interconnection between individual and organisational learning. The two main perspectives which have emerged over time are the individual and the social view (Chiva and Alegre, 2009; Cook and Yanow, 1993). The individual view regards learning as an individual phenomenon and either understands organisational learning as taking place through individuals or individual learning as being a model for organisational action (Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007; Huber, 1991). This view is in line with the cognitive-possession perspective which understands learning as individual cognition (Popper and Lipshitz, 2000).

The social view on learning regards learning as inherent to human nature and as inseparable from social practice and context (Gherardi, 2000; Jakubik, 2011).

Learning from this perspective happens both consciously and unconsciously in formal and informal contexts (Wenger, 2005). Learning does not take place in the mind of the individual but in the processes of social interaction and practice in which individuals actively engage (Lave and Wenger, 1999). Hence, this approach does not make the distinction between individual and organisational learning. Learning in this approach creates emergent structures such as Communities of Practice and “constitutes trajectories of participation” such as individual and collective becoming (Wenger, 2005, p.227). Learning from this perspective is understood as being grounded in prior experiences which help people to understand new situations and experiences and to transform these experiences which leads to the construction of new knowledge (Jakubik, 2011). This social view corresponds with the social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning and will be further discussed in the next section.

### **2.3.3 Knowledge creation**

According to Jakubik (2011) the development of theories on dynamic knowledge creation can be clustered into different phases. During these development phases, which are introduced in this section, the focus of theory building moved from the importance of leadership to the crucial impact of context, then to comprehension of knowledge justification and most recently to aspects of subjectivity, practicality and its processual nature.

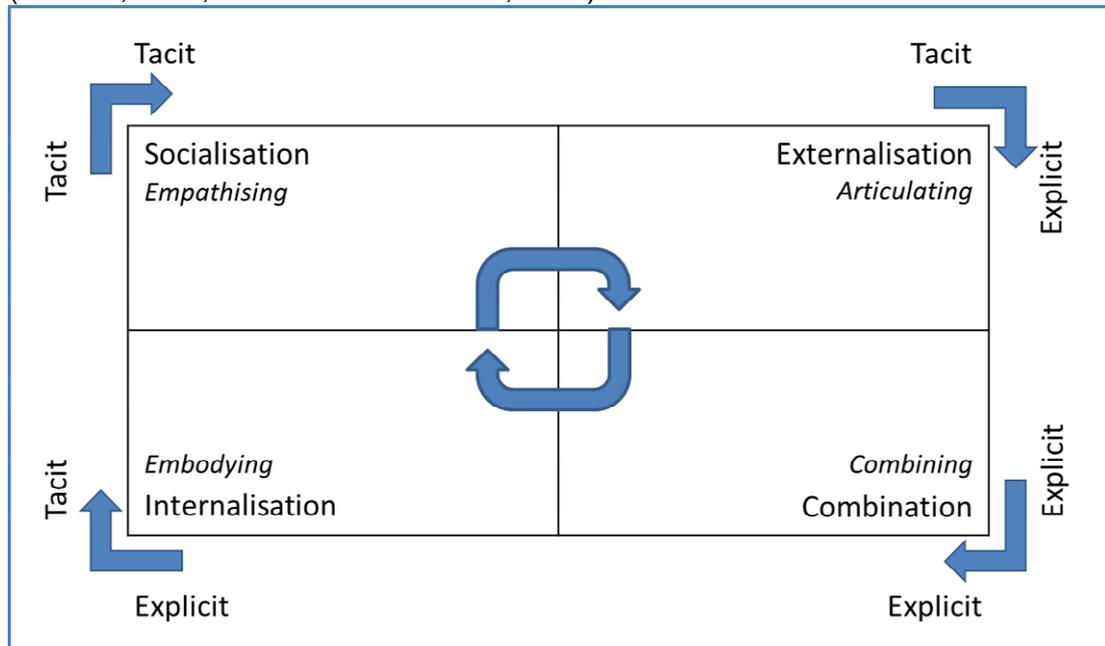
Until a few years ago, the majority of theory on knowledge creation drew on the cognitive-possession perspective on knowledge and learning while at the same time focussing on individual learning (Cook and Brown, 1999). Hislop (2009) acknowledges that the models developed also embody elements of a practice-based perspective.

#### **2.3.3.1 The SECI model and its development**

The most prominent concept of the process of knowledge creation is provided by Nonaka and Takeuchi. Their ‘SECI’ model (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) has achieved ‘paradigmatic status’ (Gourlay, 2006, p.1415). In their ‘SECI’ model the creation of organisational knowledge is illustrated as a spiralling process of social interactions among individuals who hold explicit and tacit knowledge (Nonaka *et al.*, 1998, p.147). Nonaka (1994) and Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) claim that the creation of knowledge takes place in four different conversion processes: from tacit to tacit (socialisation), from tacit to explicit (externalisation), from explicit to

explicit (combination), and from explicit to tacit (internalising). Figure 2.2 illustrates these conversion processes.

Figure 2.2: SECI model  
(Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995)



If these processes are combined with the dimension of time, spirals of knowledge are created. Inherent to these spirals are first of all the contents of knowledge which present both the inputs and outputs of knowledge spirals and the five phases in which the knowledge creation process is divided. These phases are the sharing of tacit knowledge, the generation of concepts and their justification, the set-up of a prototype and the dispersal of knowledge. Finally, the knowledge spirals also encompass the five enabling conditions necessary for a knowledge spiral to be commenced: intention, self-sufficiency, creative turmoil, redundancy of existing knowledge, and diversity (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Jakubik, 2011). Further, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) differentiate between different types of knowledge assets occurring in the four conversion processes of the SECI model: sympathised (assigned to the socialisation process), conceptual (assigned to the externalisation process), systemic (assigned to the combination process), and operational (assigned to the internalisation process) knowledge.

Nonaka *et al.* (2000) emphasise that the four conversion processes of knowledge creation are not a circle but a spiral to illustrate that organisational knowledge creation is continuously ongoing and prompting new spirals of knowledge creation. This dynamic process starts at the individual level but can expand over organisational boundaries.

Following this model, organisations have to create an environment which facilitates the necessary steps of knowledge retrieval, knowledge combination and knowledge sharing in order to enable individuals to create new knowledge (Newell *et al.*, 2009). From an epistemological standpoint this model implies that knowledge creation can take place on the following levels: individuals, groups, organisations and collaborating organisations. However, the basis of organisational knowledge creation is the individual's tacit knowledge (Nonaka *et al.*, 1998).

According to Jakubik (2011) this first phase of the development of knowledge creation theory provided the basis for all further development of theory on knowledge creation which is introduced below.

In a next step the SECI model was enhanced and slightly altered by adding the concept of *ba* and leadership to the SECI approach. According to Nonaka *et al.* (2000, p.8) *ba* is a “*shared context in motion for knowledge creation*”. The SECI process was further enriched by Nonaka *et al.* (2000) by adding four factors which constitute the different phases in the SECI process (see Figure 2.2): empathising enables socialisation, articulating enables externalisation, combining enables combination, and embodying enables internalisation. Nonaka *et al.* (2000) named this enhanced model a ‘Unified Model of Dynamic Knowledge Creation’.

According to Nonaka *et al.* (2000) *ba* provides a context in which knowledge can be shared, generated and used. It offers individuals the dynamism, quality and place to carry out the necessary steps of the knowledge spiral (Nonaka and Konno, 1998). *Ba* encompasses aspects such as a physical space, time, personal and mental space and shared ideals. These aspects allow individuals to act and to interact which is a necessary prerequisite for knowledge creation according to Nonaka *et al.* (2000).

Nonaka *et al.* (2000) summarise their dynamic model of the organisational knowledge creation process by illustrating that an organisation generates new knowledge by utilising its members' tacit knowledge in the SECI process which takes place in *ba*. The new knowledge is then integrated into the organisation's existing knowledge assets and feeds into a new spiral of knowledge creation.

The introduction of *ba* redirects the focus from the knowledge creation process to the necessary context for knowledge creation processes and the role of leadership in this process (Jakubik, 2011). Management is not supposed to control or direct this

process of knowledge creation but to enable and foster the creation of knowledge by providing certain conditions (Nonaka *et al.*, 2006). Middle management is supposed to actively engage in knowledge creation processes by participating in them as well as by leading *ba*. Top management is supposed to provide and disperse the knowledge vision and to create and maintain *ba* (Nonaka *et al.*, 2000).

Building upon the 'Unified Model of Dynamic Knowledge Creation' (Nonaka *et al.*, 2000), von Krogh *et al.* (2000a) further develop the theory on dynamic knowledge creation by highlighting the importance of the context in the knowledge creation process (Jakubik, 2011). In their research, von Krogh *et al.* (2000a, p.260) observed an 'evolution of knowledge initiatives' which many of the organisations explored in their research went through. Von Krogh *et al.* (2000a, p.261) summarise that at the beginning of their 'knowledge-enabling path' the organisation's focus was mainly on detecting and capturing existing knowledge within the organisation to, in a second step, then transfer it and to store it in an adequate form to make it available to the entire organisation and find new areas of use for this existing knowledge. During this stage, management often became aware that beside the efficient use of technology it was even more important that people were motivated to share their knowledge and use others' knowledge. At this stage, awareness rose that more emphasis needed to be placed on the knowledge transfer process and how employees could be motivated by their context to engage in these processes. To address this and in order to become 'innovators' organisations then had to take the next step which involved a shift away from the focus on knowledge assets to a focus on the processes and contexts of new knowledge creation. Von Krogh *et al.* (2000a, p.262) suggest a number of 'knowledge enabling tools' to be utilised by organisations' management in order to provide conditions which enable the organisations' members to create new knowledge:

- introduce a knowledge vision and remove knowledge barriers;
- develop a strong culture of conversations;
- activate knowledge activists who constantly engage and encourage people;
- create and manage the right context (*ba*);
- globalise local knowledge.

Next, von Krogh *et al.* (2000b) shifted their focus to the exploration of the justification of knowledge which, from their point of view, enabled a full understanding of the knowledge creation process. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) corporate knowledge is about beliefs and intentions and cannot be judged by its truthfulness since there is no objective position it can be judged from.

*“It is rather a question of justified true beliefs, emphasising the need for permanent implicit and explicit justification”* (von Krogh *et al.* 2000b, p.14). From their point of view, the process of knowledge creation can also be understood as the development of justified true beliefs and cannot be separated from the dominant logic within an organisation. Hence, the process of knowledge creation cannot be fully understood without exploring the dynamic process of justification and the dominant logic since these significantly contribute to the decision of whether new knowledge is accepted or rejected by an organisation (von Krogh *et al.*, 2000b).

Von Krogh *et al.*'s. (2000b) exploration of the justification of knowledge is included here in order to illustrate all development phases of dynamic knowledge creation theory discussed by Jakubik (2011). Since the justification of knowledge is beyond the scope of this work, this approach is not discussed in further detail.

Finally, Nonaka *et al.* (2008) contribute to the further development of dynamic knowledge creation theory by promoting a shift in relation to how knowledge and management are generally viewed. Based on the previously existing theory on knowledge creation they call for a replacement of 'conventional knowledge management' to 'knowledge-based management' (Nonaka *et al.*, 2008, p.2). What Nonaka *et al.* (2008) aim to achieve by this replacement is to provide an approach to how organisations can create their future by changing both themselves and their immediate environment through the process of knowledge creation. In order to accomplish this, organisations need creative capacity without which the organisational knowledge would not be able to survive in an interconnected global economy. Nonaka *et al.* (2008, p.14) call this creative capacity 'Phronesis' which they understand as the context-sensitive practical wisdom which enables individuals to comprehend specific situations and to determine and undertake the most suitable action necessary to create change. At the heart of their theory lies the assumption that knowledge is not objective, because then it would only be information, but subjective, depending on the human subjectivity and its context. Leadership in the context of Phronesis is understood as flexible, distributed and determined by the context and not as fixed administrative control.

To Jakubik (2011) this most current development of the dynamic knowledge creation theory through its focus on the subjective- and process-oriented aspects of knowledge creation demonstrates the need for a paradigm shift in relation to knowledge and the focus on philosophical standpoints and concepts in connection to the advancement of knowledge creation theory. Before the thesis moves on to

explore Jakubik's work in more detail the different theories on dynamic knowledge creation introduced so far are evaluated.

### **2.3.3.2 Criticism of the SECI model**

While theory based on Nonaka's and his colleagues' research is extensively cited and highly influential it has also been criticised. Overall, criticism focusses on a lack of clarity in the models' underlying assumptions, paradigms and concepts (Jakubik, 2011). The most important criticism relevant in the context of this thesis is discussed in the following.

Critics of the original SECI model, and the further developed models based on the SECI model introduced above, acknowledge that the dynamic knowledge creation theory has become more specific and has addressed some of the criticism raised in relation to earlier stages of the theory development (Gourlay, 2006; Jakubik, 2011). While different elements of the theory have been considerably changed during the evolution of the theory 'the engine' of the model, the knowledge spiral of the SECI process in which interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge takes place, has continued to be at the centre of the knowledge creation theory (Gourlay, 2006, p.1416; Nonaka and von Krogh, 2009; Jakubik, 2011).

This SECI model has been criticised for a number of reasons. One of the main epistemological assumptions of the SECI conversion process is that all tacit knowledge can be transformed completely into explicit knowledge and vice versa which is rejected by Cook and Brown (1999) and Gourlay (2006). According to Gourlay (2006) knowledge has been viewed unidimensionally since no differentiation is made between knowledge which is transformable and inherently tacit knowledge. Stacey (2000) adds that new knowledge in these models is understood as coming from extracting tacit knowledge from individuals and translating it into explicit knowledge available to the organisation. What remains unclear is how this new knowledge comes to arise in the individual's mind. Stacey (2000, p.25) criticises that *"for an approach claiming to explain the creation of knowledge, this is a major limitation"*.

In this thesis the differentiation between tacit and explicit knowledge has not been found to be helpful. As discussed in Section 2.3.1 following researchers such as Werr and Stjernberg (2003) and Blackler (1995) in this thesis knowledge is regarded as having both explicit and tacit facets and therefore as not being distinctively assignable to only one of these categories. This understanding is based on the

social-constructionist perspective taken in this research which regards knowledge as something people do (Blackler, 1995) which eliminates the distinction between body and mind and emphasises instead that knowing and doing, and hence tacit and explicit knowledge, are undividable. Regarding knowledge as potentially explicit inherently means that knowledge is understood as a 'thing' which can be possessed and stored which is in line with a cognitive-possession perspective on knowledge and rejected in this thesis.

The model has also been criticised for the subjective assumption made by Nonaka and his colleagues that the basis of knowledge creation always lays in the tacit knowledge of the individual (Newell *et al.*, 2009; Gourlay, 2006). Researchers working in a social-constructionist paradigm challenge the long-established idea that learning as well as the creation of knowledge takes place within individuals (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000). Now most researchers understand knowledge as being created through social interaction and conversation between individuals (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000; Cook and Yanow, 1993; Lave and Wenger, 1991) which is neglected in the original SECI model (Jakubik, 2011; Gourlay, 2006).

Bereiter (2002) argues that Nonaka's model does not give sufficient detail on how the construction of new ideas takes place and how a depth of understanding develops. Additionally, the model has also been criticised for neglecting the importance of different interests, power and political dynamics, which are supposed to be inevitably inherent to the knowledge creation process within the organisational context. Instead, the process from knowledge being possessed by an individual to knowledge becoming an organisational resource is illustrated as smooth and linear (Newell *et al.*, 2009).

Further, researchers such as Weir and Hutchins (2005) have criticised the existing theory for neglecting the embedding of knowledge into its respective national culture. The majority of research undertaken since 1995 has been carried out in Japanese organisations and the models resulting from this research reflect Japanese values and culture as for example the high commitment levels Japanese employees have for the organisation they work for. Hence, its relevance to business and national cultures which substantially differ from this culture and its values is likely to be limited.

Finally, Gourlay (2006) has criticised the model for its radical subjective understanding of knowledge as 'justified true belief' (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995)

which is misleading and provides managers' and their beliefs with too much power in the knowledge creation process which, from Gourlay's (2006) point of view has not been considered by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) who regard knowledge creation as a smooth and linear process (Newell *et al.*, 2009). According to Gourlay (2006, p.1423) this understanding of knowledge leads to new knowledge having to pass "*through the filter of managerial evaluation*" before it is accepted as practical for the organisation.

However, the SECI model and its adaptations provide the single and most influential model of knowledge creation in knowledge management and have channelled attention until mid of the 1990s to the neglected notions of values and the organisational context and their importance to the knowledge creation process (Jakubik, 2011; Hislop, 2009). Notwithstanding this neglect, this model is unsuitable for this research since the distinction of tacit and explicit knowledge is fundamental to it and its underlying assumptions are more in line with a cognitive-possession perspective; both are rejected in this research.

### **2.3.3.3 The collaborative knowledge creation model**

Jakubik (2008) takes a different approach to knowledge creation. In her research she looked at the learning and knowledge creation processes taking place in Communities of Practice by placing special emphasis on how community members interact and create knowledge and whether community members deem collaborative knowledge creation to be significant. Instead of focussing on conversion steps in line with Nonaka's SECI model Jakubik (2008) concentrated on knowledge creation within communities by focussing on social interactions at the micro-level between the community members. From Jakubik's (2008) point of view, members of a community have a low physical and contextual distance and the community offers them the opportunity to socially interact. Both aspects positively support the learning and knowledge creation process and hence communities are highly suitable for the exploration of knowledge creation processes which has so far been only marginally done (Jakubik, 2008).

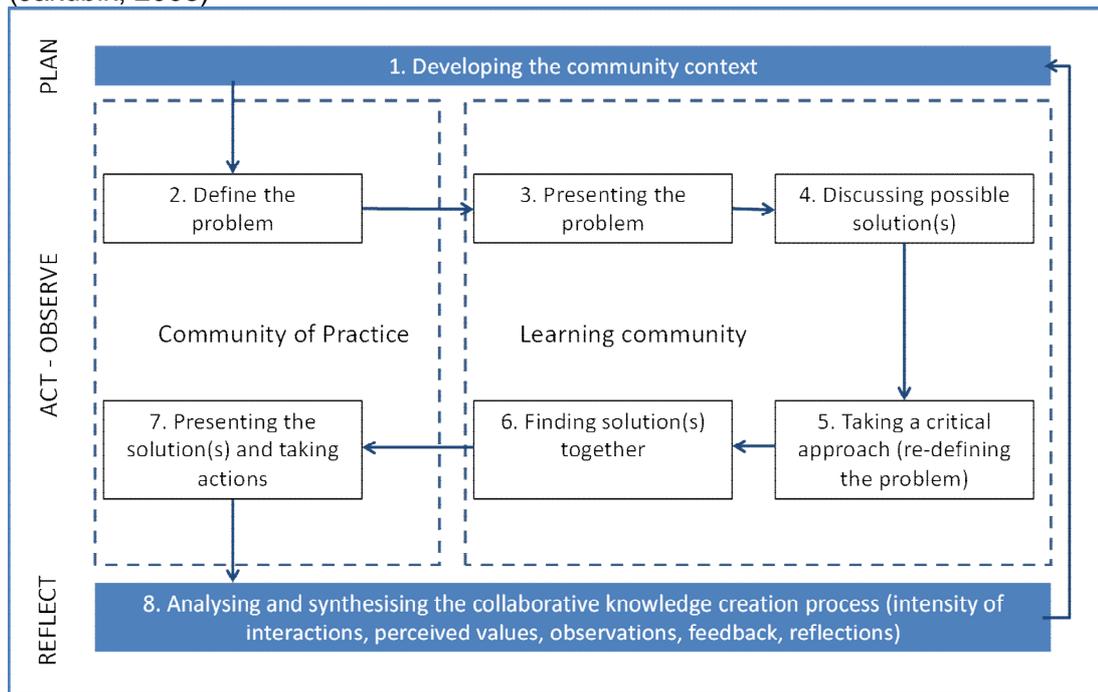
Jakubik's (2008) research is based on the assumption that knowledge is embedded in the relations between individuals and created in the process of interaction between individuals within a social context which is in line with the assumptions of the social-constructionist perspective taken in this thesis. Her research aims at helping to "*open the black box of community knowledge creation phenomenon*" (Jakubik, 2008, p.6) in order to provide an insight into the process of community

knowledge creation. The research is based on Nonaka *et al.*'s (2000) theory development relating to *ba* and enabling conditions within an organisation. Knowledge is understood as emerging in a social context which implies that knowledge is generated in a specific context and has a meaning which is strongly connected to this specific context (Jakubik, 2008).

During the course of four months of action research Jakubik (2008) explored the knowledge creation process in a community consisting of 54 members from different backgrounds ranging from managers, students, teachers and leadership and communication experts. The mutual reason for them to join this community was to increase their knowledge about internal branding practices. Jakubik participated in a number of community meetings as well as three full-day workshops (Jakubik, 2008). As a result of her exploration Jakubik (2008) set up the 'collaborative knowledge creation process' (see Figure 2.3) which consists of three stages: plan, act-observe and reflect. During the plan stage the community context is developed. During the act-observe stage the problem is identified, possible solutions are critically discussed, a solution is found and appropriate actions are taken. In the final stage of reflection the collaborative knowledge creation process is analysed in terms of intensity of interactions, perceived values, observations, feedback and reflections (Jakubik, 2008).

This model focusses on social interaction and its impact on knowledge creation in a community context, which offers valuable insights into these processes and addresses the call for research on processes of knowledge creation within social interaction (Cook and Brown, 1999). However, it focusses on knowledge creation which happens in a structured and purposeful way in terms of the topic of potential knowledge creation (internal branding practices) and the ways of social interaction in pre-set community meetings. Hence, this research does not address unstructured and emergent processes of knowledge creation in everyday social interaction. Further, the community members did not share a common organisational context and therewith common contextual conditions. Therefore, this model is not relevant to accomplish the research aims and objectives of this thesis.

Figure 2.3 Collaborative knowledge creation model (Jakubik, 2008)



#### 2.3.3.4 The ‘becoming to know’ framework

Jakubik (2011) further developed her research on knowledge creation by setting up the ‘becoming to know’ framework introduced in the previous section on learning. This framework focusses on the epistemological side of dynamic knowledge creation. Through this framework Jakubik (2011, p.377) wanted to “*enhance the understanding of the dynamic, dialectic, emerging and practice-based process of knowledge creation as a social phenomenon*”. By setting up this model, Jakubik (2011) followed Cook and Brown’s (1999) call for a better understanding and improved models of social processes of knowledge creation. She also attended to Nonaka *et al.*’s (2008) call for research paying more attention to ontological and epistemological issues.

Jakubik (2011) based her research on the previous research undertaken in the field of dynamic knowledge creation by Nonaka and his colleagues with special emphasis on the most recent focus on aspects of subjectivity, practicality and processual nature. By doing this, she followed and aimed at contributing to a constructivist discourse in which knowledge is understood as constantly affecting and being affected by social practices of individuals in communities. According to this approach, which focusses on practices of learning and knowing, both knowledge and learning are not separated from action (Schultze and Stabell, 2004).

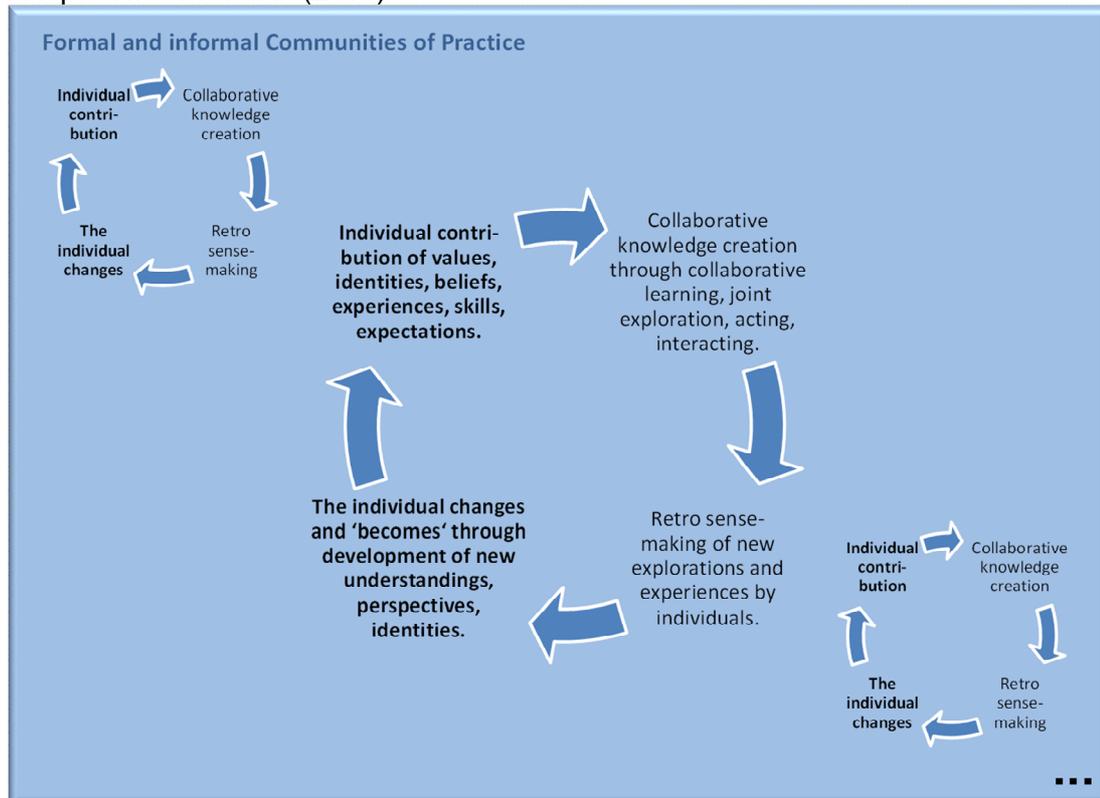
The framework is based on the concepts of learning, knowing and becoming. Learning, in line with the social perspective on learning by Wenger (2005), is understood as being social, a matter of engagement and participation, as being inherent to the nature of humans, and as happening both consciously and unconsciously in formal or informal contexts. Learning according to this approach and in line with the understanding of this thesis happens not in individual heads but in social interaction between individuals (Lave and Wenger, 1999). The process of collaborative learning is regarded as an iterative process during which knowledge is created. In line with this understanding, Jakubik (2011) argues that knowledge cannot be regarded as objective, existing independently of human actions, since it is constantly shaped by social practices within formal and informal communities. Instead, she views knowledge, or knowing, as a process and learning as being an inherent part of this process which corresponds to the social-constructionist perspective on knowing and learning. Knowing is regarded as an emerging and dynamic never-ending process which is also characterised by being dialectic and as a process of constant experiencing, learning and sense making (Jakubik, 2011).

An individual engaging in processes of learning and knowing brings in her or his identity, thoughts, values, beliefs, experiences and skills as well as expectations and aims which motivate and direct her or him to engage in a specific context. Knowledge develops outside of the individual through exploration, experiencing, acting and interacting in the organisational context as well as through individual sense-making of the explorations and experiences in retrospect (Jakubik, 2011). During these processes the individual *“is changing, is becoming, as he or she develops new understandings, new meanings, new intentions, goals, and new perspectives”* (Jakubik, 2011, p.386). Jakubik (2011) regards becoming in this context as changing a person in terms of the construction of self and of identity through the social construction of shared understanding in collaborative activities and social interaction. She understands this ‘becoming epistemology’ as a synthesis of social learning and knowing processes of individuals which offers new experiences of knowing and learning and therewith new knowledge (Jakubik, 2011).

Jakubik (2011) aimed at offering insights into the social and human side of knowledge creation by providing this framework which has largely been neglected by Nonaka *et al.* (2008).

The framework is illustrated in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4 'Becoming to know' framework  
Adapted from Jakubik (2011)



Jakubik's research shifts the focus of knowledge creation to human interaction and participation in communities which are strongly impacted by aspects such as power and politics which were widely disregarded in Nonaka's SECI model (Jakubik, 2011; Bereiter, 2002). Whereas the SECI model is based on an epistemology of possession and dualism with regard to knowledge, Jakubik's framework is set up within a constructivist and participative paradigm (Jakubik, 2011). Jakubik (2011) proposes a replacement of the SECI model connected with a paradigm shift focussing more on the human side of knowledge creation. While in the SECI model knowledge is created by a translation from tacit into explicit knowledge, knowledge develops during the interaction between individuals in Jakubik's (2011) framework. According to Jakubik (2011, p.394) *"by illustrating the move from engagement to becoming through exploration, experiencing and emerging sense making and enabling, the proposed framework better demonstrates the evolutionary and social character of knowledge development than the latest model of knowledge creation"*.

In summary, the framework illustrates that the process of knowledge creation is dialectic, iterative, interactive, social, dynamic and inseparable from the context it takes place in (Jakubik, 2011).

This thesis' social-constructionist perspective largely corresponds with what Jakubik (2011) introduces as the 'becoming epistemology' and inherent to it her understanding of the processes of learning, knowing and becoming. Jakubik's (2011) accommodation of individuals' prior skills and experiences in the knowledge creation process is also in line with the understanding of this thesis. However, the understanding of this thesis, in line with the social-constructionist perspective taken, is that the main locus of experiencing, interacting and sense-making and, inherent to it, the creation of new knowledge, is social interaction between individuals and not the individual's mind which is suggested by the social-constructivist perspective of Jakubik (2011). Further, in this thesis the engagement of individuals in processes of knowing and learning is not understood as always taking place with a defined aim but also as taking place without any aims connected to it. However, Jakubik's (2011) framework provides an in-depth insight into knowledge creation processes and has commenced a paradigm shift from a focus on the SECI model at the heart of knowledge creation processes to a focus on the social and human dimension in dynamic knowledge creation theory in knowledge management.

Notwithstanding, in this thesis the focus is on the context in which knowledge is created in social interaction between individuals and how this context impacts on individuals' experiences of knowledge creation processes and their willingness to consciously participate in knowledge creation processes rather than on the process of knowledge creation itself. As promoted by Nonaka *et al.* (2006) and Choo and Neto (2010) management is supposed to enable and foster knowledge creation processes by providing certain conditions which add to a favourable context. This is also supported by von Krogh *et al.*'s (2000b) statement according to which individuals cannot be forced to participate in knowing and learning processes and therefore it is important that the organisational context makes organisational members feel appreciated and valued in order to persuade them to participate fully in knowledge and learning activities and therewith knowledge creation processes (von Krogh *et al.*, 2000b). Nonaka *et al.* (2006) promote that *ba*, the context in which knowledge is created, should receive greater attention in research. From their point of view the organisational context is still under-explored. In line with these statements, this thesis focusses on exploring the organisational elements embedded in this context and their impact on individuals which is further discussed in Section 2.5.

### 2.3.4 Innovation and underground innovators

According to Kanter (1988, p.170) innovation can be understood as “*the creation and exploitation of new ideas*”. Dana *et al.* (2005) add that innovation can further be regarded as conscious modification or transformation by an organisation of its products and services, processes or structures which is necessary to remain competitive. The common-sense understanding that innovation processes are aiming at going beyond the realms of existing knowledge and developing new knowledge and insights is not universally applicable (Hislop, 2009). Many organisational innovations are comparatively incremental in their nature, meaning the alteration rather than transformation and replacement of existing knowledge in order to enhance organisational competence in terms of, for example, increased process efficiency or client responsiveness (Hislop, 2009; Tushman and Anderson, 1986; Wei *et al.*, 2011). Taminiau *et al.* (2009) add that in particular in consultancies the understanding of innovation varies. Some speak of innovations if the product the consultancy offers is completely new whereas others speak about an innovation when an existing product is applied in a different industry or even when it is simply applied to a different client.

Successful innovations require more than the creation of new knowledge (Newell *et al.* 2009). ‘Coming up with clever ideas’ is only the first step in the innovation process. In a next step these ideas have to be implemented before they then need to be diffused. In this process a number of important elements need to be considered (Newell *et al.*, 2009). Whether a creative idea is implemented or not strongly depends on political interests, power and influence within the organisation (Swan and Scarbrough, 2005). It may be that those in power only implement new ideas which are in their interest and will further extend their power. As a consequence, outcomes of the innovation process might be uncertain due to different groups within the organisation mobilising innovations in directions benefiting their interests (Dougherty, 2007). It is important for innovators to develop a social network which provides commitment and support to implement innovative ideas in order to positively use or bypass the potential issues illustrated above. However, even then the effective integration of innovation can be inhibited by structural or hierarchical barriers as well as by the innovator’s occupational status (McLoughlin, 1999).

According to Dovey (2009) trust does not only play an essential role in the process of converting new knowledge into new products, services or procedures. Within an organisational context that promotes trust individuals can freely create ideas and

knowledge which are then openly and honestly assessed and selected before they are jointly transformed into new products or services. In case of missing trust individuals might not be willing to disclose their ideas since they are afraid of making themselves vulnerable, being rejected and humiliated.

Oster (2010) introduces the notion of the 'underground innovators' in relation to the notion of innovation. The notion of underground innovators describes employees who *"develop products, services, or processes informally and outside of regular corporate channels, without the knowledge or permission of appropriate company authorities"* (Oster, 2010, p.566). Most large organisations have a considerable number of innovation projects in progress beneath the organisation's surface without being aware of it. Most of the work of these underground innovators focusses on practical client needs. Some of these innovators seem to be 'at war' with the organisation whereas others are content with the organisation and its leadership but feel that the existing corporate innovation system is constraining them in their work (Oster, 2010). Underground innovators are often capable of quickly creating innovations due to their broad backgrounds, multidisciplinary minds and diverse experiences (Negroponte, 2003). They nevertheless are dependent on the advice and skills of experts which they discretely seek within or outside of the organisation (Davenport *et al.*, 2003). Usually, underground innovators constantly ignore and skip corporate innovation procedures in order to focus on the quick and inexpensive completion of products, services and processes which satisfy the clients (Oster, 2010). In order for those innovators to reveal their innovations and provide organisations with the opportunity to leverage this innovation at the organisational level they have to be provided with recognition, appreciation and support from colleagues and management (Oster, 2010). Innovations cannot be forced out of individuals. Therefore, management should encourage the voluntary activities of underground innovators and encourage them to make their innovations available to the organisation (Oster, 2010).

In the company documents of the organisation explored in this thesis as well as in the interview participants' accounts the concept of innovation was often linked to the notion of creativity. Amabile *et al.* (1996) and Borghini (2005) understand creativity as the 'raw material' and the basis for the creation of both new knowledge and innovations. Amabile (1996) looks at creativity on two different levels: creative ability and creative outcome. Creative ability is understood as the ability and motivation to create or seek new knowledge which manifests in a number of ways: first, the tendency to break away from mindsets by generating new ideas; second by having

the confidence to adopt non-confirming perspectives and third by acting and taking risks without being dependent on social approval (Amabile, 1996). Creative outcome is described as creative activities resulting in products and ideas which are new and original and useful for the organisation in order to be successful (Oldham and Cummings, 1996). However, a detailed review of the concept of creativity and, related to it, the concept of self-efficacy which enables individuals to transform their creative ability into creative performance (Choi, 2004) as well as the impact of an individual's social environment on his or her creativity is outside of the scope of this research. This is because the concept of creativity, *per se*, is not the focus of interest in this study.

### **2.3.5 The notion of knowledge management**

Traditionally the notion of knowledge management entails the set up of explicit strategies, tools and practices applied by organisations' management in order to turn knowledge into an organisational resource (Newell *et al.*, 2009). In line with the cognitive-possession perspective, to which it has traditionally been assigned, knowledge management is supposed to untie knowledge from the individual in order to make it available to the organisation, e.g. by storing it in IT systems (Hislop, 2009). According to Earl (2001) the notion of knowledge management consists of three broad approaches: economic, behavioural and technocratic which are, to different degrees, concerned with social and technical factors. This categorisation takes account of the choices organisations have to take in relation to the role they allocate in their knowledge management approach to IT systems and Human Resource Management practices. Overall, knowledge management aims to ensure that the suitable knowledge gets to the right people at the right time in order for them to put knowledge into action to improve organisational performance (O'Dell and Grayson, 1998). Knowledge management remains a contested concept since it is linked to the attempt to 'manage' knowledge, often by relying on information technology, which is regarded by many researchers as largely unfeasible due to the intangible nature of knowing and learning processes (Hassell, 2007; Fuller, 2002).

However, recent development in the knowledge management literature demonstrate that within the academic community a shift is taking place from the traditional technical approach to a more human-oriented view which understands knowledge as being embedded in human actions and social interaction (Jakubik, 2011; Sun, 2010) and which regards the role of knowledge management as being not only responsible for the mere facilitation of knowledge transfer but also for stimulating 'knowing experiences' (Brivot, 2011) which is supported by von Krogh *et al.* (2000b)

who emphasise the importance of managing the organisational context in a way which makes organisational members feel appreciated and valued in order to persuade them to participate fully in knowing and learning activities. This approach corresponds with the social-constructionist perspective on knowledge management which understands the role of knowledge management being the provision of an enabling context in which individuals can interact to share and create knowledge and are allowed to do (and say) things differently and, hopefully, better (Choo and Neto, 2010; Newell *et al.*, 2009).

## **2.4 Communities of Practice**

Originally, the term 'Community of Practice' was not specifically referring to identified communities but to the evolving relationship between learning and socialisation within localised groups. Hence it can be applied to all forms of social networks and teams (Newell *et al.*, 2009).

According to Lave and Wenger (1991, p.98) a community can be understood as "*a system of relationships between people, activities, and the world; developing with time, and in relation to other tangential and overlapping Communities of Practice*". Brown and Duguid (1991) add that Communities of Practice surface amongst individuals who have a shared engagement in a joint practice around which they share a common knowledge. Problem identification, learning and knowledge creation can take place within Communities of Practice (Brown and Duguid, 2001) due to the low spatial and contextual distance between individuals (Doz and Santos, 1997). Useful and practical knowledge is often developed by people who directly benefit from a solution to a problem and not from assumed experts who develop a solution for a problem they are completely detached from. Those people who are directly affected by a problem together can come up with a practical solution (von Hippel, 1998).

According to Lesser and Storck (2001) and Wenger and Snyder (2000) Communities of Practice are now widely regarded as essential to sustain the organisation's competitive advantage by providing potential benefits such as efficient knowledge sharing, professional skill development, retaining of talents, the ability to quickly react upon client needs and demands, the reduction of time spent on 'reinventing the wheel' or best practice promotion and, most importantly, the sharing of new ideas which could lead to innovations. All of these potential benefits are crucial in organisations such as management consultancies where knowledge is the primary asset (Alvesson, 2004).

The notion of the Community of Practice has been founded on the acknowledgement that individuals in their workplace do not solely learn from formal training and learning activities but through activities carried out and experiences made in their everyday lives (Retna and Ng, 2011). This view is regarded as a critical alternative to a cognitive-possession perspective on knowledge and learning which views *“learning as knowledge acquisition in instruction and as separate from the context of everyday work”* (Kakavelakis, 2010, p.168). In relation to this the concept of practice plays a vital role in Communities of Practice. According to Cook and Brown (1999, p.386) *“practice implies doing”*. Breu and Hemingway (2002) understand practice as ‘coordinated activities’ of individuals as well as groups when doing their work, informed by an organisational or group context. In accordance to this understanding, and in line with the social-process approach to organisational learning and knowledge, knowing and doing cannot be separated from each other. Existing knowledge is not only applied in practice, but also produced and therefore dependent on the context in which people practice. Consequently, members of a community create and share knowledge cooperatively because they share a common practice (Breu and Hemingway, 2002; Hutchins, 1991). Communities of Practice theory focusses on a social view on learning which views learning as taking place within a framework of social participation in relation to context (Blackmore, 2010; Elkjaer, 1999; Lave and Wenger, 1991) and therefore conforms to the social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning. Learning can only take place through access to the community and the chance to participate actively in the practices of the community (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Gherardi *et al.*, 1998; Brown and Duguid, 1991). Learning results from actually engaging in the process of performance and is called ‘situated learning’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991) which takes place in the same context in which it is applied. It is not only organisations that can benefit from Communities of Practice; individuals are offered an identity and a social context in which they can enlarge and share their skills and experiences through active membership in a community (Hislop, 2009).

Community membership is largely voluntary and objectives constantly change due to the development of the topic of interest as well as the knowledge of community members. Control of external management is mostly limited or completely absent since the community is self-organised by its members, has emergent structures, is characterised by multiple and diverse relationships and has fluid boundaries (Wenger, 2010; Wenger and Snyder, 2000). However, it has to be taken into account that the degree of autonomy and flexibility of communities is closely linked to whether they have been formally created ‘top-down’ or informally emerged

'bottom-up' (Brown and Duguid, 1991). Table 2.5 illustrates the characteristics of formal 'top down' and informal 'bottom-up' Communities of Practice.

Table 2.5 Formal 'top-down' and informal 'bottom-up' Communities of Practice Developed from Brown and Duguid (1991), Saint-Onge and Wallace (2003), Lesser and Storck (2001), Jeon *et al.* (2011)

Characteristics	Formal 'top-down'	Informal 'bottom-up'
<b>Evolution</b>	Deliberately invented	Naturally emerged
<b>Role</b>	Building a predefined capability and/or creating knowledge for a given purpose	Sharing and creating knowledge among practitioners for community's own sake
<b>Membership</b>	Nominated by sponsors or members	Self-joining or by invitation
<b>Motivation</b>	Mostly mandatory	Often voluntary
<b>Level of sponsorship</b>	High (often by executives)	Low
<b>Life cycle</b>	Relatively short (until predefined goal is accomplished)	Undefined, depending on the commitment of its members
<b>Rewards</b>	Mostly external (e.g. incentives)	Internal (e.g. mutual trust and satisfaction)

Formal 'top-down' communities on the one hand often have difficulties with being fully supported by their members since the passion for a specific topic can be missing in these communities. It might even be viewed as yet another disturbance of daily work life by its members. Employees may experience their mandatory membership as additional workload to their daily tasks and not as something they could be benefiting from (Fontaine, 2001; Saint-Onge and Wallace, 2003). Informal 'bottom-up' communities on the other hand often emerge when informal networks continually attract more people which makes a more structured approach necessary (Fontaine, 2001). In naturally developed or bottom-up communities members feel in control of the community and participate out of passion. Thus, this kind of community is very often more genuine and successful in its outcomes, since its members care passionately for the community and feel responsible for success (Iaquinto *et al.*, 2011). The community is something which exists because of their interest and keenness for a specific subject and passion about what they are doing and about doing it well (Gherardi, 2003).

Wenger *et al.* (2002) set up five degrees of acceptance of Communities of Practice by organisations, offering a valuable framework for this study. Firstly there are invisible Communities of Practice within an organisation, completely unrecognised.

Even individuals being part of these Communities of Practice are not aware that they belong to a Community of Practice. Communities of Practice can also be 'bootlegged'; only visible to individuals part of or close to the Communities of Practice. It is likely that underground innovators (Oster, 2010) draw on these kinds of communities. The extent to which 'visible' Communities of Practice are accepted by the organisation's management can vary; some may not be accepted or even be sanctioned, whereas others might be highly accepted and supported. Institutionalised communities experience the maximum level of acceptance, often provided with an official status in the organisation (Wenger *et al.*, 2002).

Most of the literature dealing with Communities of Practice is very optimistic about the impacts communities can have. Lave and Wenger (1991, p.58) stress the *"contradictory nature of collective social practice"* which describes the dilemma, that on the one hand, community members work together towards a shared goal but, on the other hand, they compete with each other for visibility and promotion opportunities. The sense of identity of members of a community is mostly viewed as positive. Yet, this identity can also imply a sense of exclusiveness and ignorance towards individuals outside of the community and their knowledge (Alvesson, 2000). This can result in a community being solely 'inward-looking' (Hislop, 2009) and unable to absorb external ideas and knowledge which, in the long run, will severely damage the community's ability to be innovative. Overall, Brown and Duguid (2001, p.203) summarise that *"communities can be warm and cold, sometimes coercive rather than persuasive, and occasionally even explosive"*. Still, they have the potential to mediate between the individual employee and large organisations.

The notion of Communities of Practice also includes social networks which have evolved over time (Newell *et al.*, 2009). According to Davenport (2005) social or personal networks are critical for learning and knowing activities. Knowledge workers in particular tend to turn to their social networks, often consisting of former or actual colleagues, for solving issues they face as well as sharing creative ideas (Davenport, 2005). Participants of Davenport's (2005) research stated that they use their personal networks, which they had built over time, to connect well with others and to look for mutual benefit in the long run.

Relationships to other members of their personal networks are based on personal contacts rather than business contacts. Often personal relationships come into existence due to sharing a similar educational background, joint work and project experiences, interests, attitudes and leisure activities. These personal connections

make the members of personal networks more willing to commit time and effort to help each other (Davenport, 2005). Due to the trust which is usually built over time in these networks, individuals are willing to take risks by sharing ill-formed ideas and by being more creative than with colleagues they do not feel connected to (Andrews and Delahaye, 2000). Participants in Davenport's (2005, p.154) research said they regard their personal networks as "*two-way streets*" where members do not only demand feedback and input from others but naturally offer the same to others. In these personal networks new knowledge can be created which the individual member might contribute to his or her job.

## **2.5 Knowledge creation and the organisational context**

Jakubik's (2008, 2011) research in the area of knowledge creation has shifted the focus of research on knowledge creation from the individual mind to social interaction between individuals which is in line with the social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning. This supports Durbin (2011) who states that so far insufficient research has been undertaken to explore knowledge creation within social processes. The reason for this might also lie in the highly unstructured and context-dependent nature of the knowledge creation process (Choo and Neto, 2010) which suggests that research might focus on the organisational context and conditions which impact on knowledge creation processes instead (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001; Rashman *et al.*, 2009).

Previous studies have explored barriers inhibiting (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2008; Taminau *et al.*, 2009) and factors enabling (Merx-Chermin and Nijhof, 2005) learning, knowledge and knowledge creation. In this thesis these terms are regarded as unsuitable since the majority of barriers and factors are viewed as being delusive. Trust for example might be regarded as a factor if existing but it might present a barrier if lacking. Hence, this research replaces the terms barriers and factors with organisational elements which can be both inhibiting and enabling processes of knowledge creation. Further, this term emphasises that the elements explored are a part of and embedded in the organisational environment and inseparable from it. The majority of the organisational elements are interlinked and strongly impact each other. Depending on the element individuals have more or less influence on and control over these elements.

In the following discussion, organisational elements which may impact on the individual experiences of knowledge creation processes of individual members of organisations from a social-constructionist perspective are introduced.

### **2.5.1 The impact of organisational elements on experiences of knowledge creation processes**

The impact of power on knowledge has largely been neglected in knowledge management literature (Hislop, 2009; Heizmann, 2011). In this research however, emphasis is placed on the notion of *power* as it is understood as being inherent to the organisational elements introduced in this section since the concepts of knowledge and power are regarded as inseparable (Foucault, 1980). Kirkebak and Tolsby (2006) support Foucault's (1980) view by stating that knowledge cannot be understood without taking into account the power base to which knowledge is linked. Foucault (1980) understands all acts of power as embedded in particular ways of knowing and all statements of knowledge as entailing the exercise of power by implicitly preferring specific knowledge and probing the legitimacy of other knowledge at the same time. Foucault (1980) locates power within evolving social relationships which resonates with the understanding of knowledge or knowing as being embedded in specific contexts, social interaction and work practices (Hislop, 2009). Consequently, power from Foucault's (1980) viewpoint is not a resource or possession which individuals can utilise to influence other individuals but something which is constituted through social interaction which is in line with the social-constructionist perspective of this research. The process through which certain knowledge becomes legitimate and other knowledge becomes marginalised is regarded as a social process of negotiation between individuals articulating different understandings (Marshall and Rollinson, 2004; Heizmann, 2011).

Jackson and Carter (2000, p.76) understand power as *"the ability to get someone to do something that they do not particularly want to do"*. According to Jackson and Carter (2000) only those who are given the power by organisations to contribute to organisational debates participate in the organisation's knowledge creation. Kirkebak and Tolsby (2006) approach the notion of power from different lenses: for instance from the point of view of individuals who are in a position to exercise power and for whom power is a tool which supports them in achieving their goals, to a viewpoint of power as something which is imposed on individuals who are in a position of having to obey to those in power. In contrast to Foucault (1980), Kirkebak and Tolsby (2006) and Jackson and Carter (2000) regard power as a tool, as something people possess. According to Kirkebak and Tolsby (2006) it is important to note that often the creation of knowledge which happens at the lower hierarchical level of the organisation is impeded by those in power. Power can not only inhibit the learning and knowledge creation processes of these individuals, but it can also hinder the ones without power in expressing or communicating their ideas.

Consequently, their input to the creation of new knowledge is excluded and only certain kinds of knowledge, which either stems from the ones in power or supports those in power to achieve their political goals, become commonly accepted knowledge in an organisation (Kirkebak and Tolsby, 2006). At the same time, power may also lead to the suppression of learning and knowing processes when individuals withhold knowledge and therewith impede the sharing of it (Kirkebak and Tolsby, 2006).

This thesis concurs with Foucault's (1980) understanding that power and knowledge are inseparable and that power is embedded in and constituted through social interaction. However, in line with Kirkebak and Tolsby's (2006) view, power can deliberately be utilised by those who are given power as for example an organisation's management.

In connection with the notion of power, the **organisational structure** can be viewed as a tool to exercise power and control. Organisational structures constitute the duties and responsibilities of individuals depending on their role within the organisation. Structure is supposed to create order and organise relations in organisations in order to achieve certain purposes and often works in favour of those in power (Jackson and Carter, 2000). Nevertheless, formal structures can also provide a framework within which informal, social mechanisms can take place supported and guarded by structures (Rashman *et al.*, 2009; Ekvall, 1996).

Power can be regarded as determined by the relationship between an individual and the organisation's structure since the structure provides the framework of rules and the provision of resources which allocates control to those in power (Coopey, 1999). However, in order to enable processes of knowing and learning in large organisations control needs to be assigned to local decision-makers who are close to where the generation of knowledge takes place (Senge, 1990). Maister (2003) assigns special importance to consultancy management when commenting on organisational structure. From his point of view, departmental structures can support and hinder knowledge sharing. When professionals with similar expert areas work together the interaction with professionals in other expert areas is reduced. Hence, Maister (2003) suggests setting up business client groups or industry groups which combine different functional professional disciplines in order to improve the conditions for sharing knowledge or generating new knowledge. Closely related to the organisation's structure are **procedures and processes** which are usually introduced by management in order to control how work is done. They can impede

the necessary flexibility for knowledge creation processes if organised too strictly but can also prescribe approaches such as post-project reviews which contribute to learning and building of new knowledge (Popper and Lipshitz, 2000).

The **organisational context or climate** is regarded as vital in organisations which seek to foster learning and knowing processes and is also strongly influenced by the notion of power (Merx-Chermin and Nijhof, 2005). According to Weick (1996) the organisational context supports knowing and learning processes when it encourages trust, cross-boundary networking and risk-taking and therefore supports the view of Andrews and Delahaye (2000) who positively link those aspects to the benefits of informal networks. The organisational context should not only allow but strongly foster the questioning of existing procedures, experimentation and openness as well as constructive challenging and critiquing of the work of others without blaming (Naot *et al.*, 2004). In order to foster learning and knowing processes those in power have to be willing to give up parts of their power (Coopey, 1999). Management may be able to concentrate and control knowledge creation in order to avoid “*messy compromises*” where many individuals deliver input (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000, p.877) by hanging on to power and, as a consequence, denying individuals the space they need to engage in the social processes of learning and knowledge creation. However, when management uses their power for this purpose potential for knowledge creation in the wider community remains unused (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000). In organisations where power plays a major role, competition and mistrust will create a win-lose situation in which organisational learning as well as knowledge creation will only take place in a very constricted form (Coopey, 1999). Often the transformation of an organisation into a place where knowledge creation is enabled is inhibited by those in power who resist giving up control and deny access to crucial organisational knowledge to safeguard and further build up their very own power (Coopey, 1999). Further, an organisational context which is connected to employees feeling rewarded for sharing their work is vital since otherwise individuals may feel exploited when sharing their skills and experiences and therefore might resist doing so (Lucas, 2000).

As already mentioned, **trust** plays a major role in knowing and learning processes (Levin *et al.*, 2002). Previous research on trust strongly suggests that trusting relationships lead to greater knowledge exchange since individuals who trust are more willing to share knowledge and to listen (Andrews and Delahaye, 2000). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, in organisations where power plays a major role trust can often not be built which inhibits knowing and learning processes

(Coopey, 1999). Two specific forms of trust play a major role in this context: the benevolence-based trust and the competence-based trust (Levin *et al.*, 2002). The first form of trust is often based on a long-term relationship between two individuals in which no one intends to harm the other when given the opportunity to do so for example by being equipped with power. However, in the process of knowledge sharing and the creation of knowledge the second form of trust plays a major role. Here, one individual trusts another because he or she is convinced that the other person is knowledgeable about a given subject area. The maximum level of trust can be achieved when trust has been established on both levels (Levin *et al.*, 2002). Research has shown that competence-based trust is based on factors such as the use of a common language, sharing of a common vision and discretion independent of the duration of a relationship whereas benevolence-based trust additionally builds on receptivity and strong ties. Relationships which are based on trust give individuals the confidence to draw attention to themselves and to articulate ideas without being afraid of receiving negative feedback, being exposed or being rejected. By doing this, they make themselves vulnerable which individuals are only willing to do in trustful relationships (Meyer *et al.*, 1995; Schilling and Kluge, 2009; Argote *et al.*, 2003; Fulop and Rifkin, 1997). Closely linked to this aspect is the handling of mistakes. Only if employees feel safe and trust their peers as well as their management they will be willing to communicate openly instead of covering mistakes which is viewed as crucial in order for an organisation to learn from mistakes which is also regarded as vital for the creation of new knowledge (Cannon and Edmondson, 2001; Dovey, 2009).

Hence, an environment which provides individuals with the opportunity to develop trustful relationships in order to foster knowledge sharing and knowledge creation activities on all levels within the organisation is important. Managers can actively support this by fostering a common understanding of values, goals and how those goals are planned to be achieved. Further, managers should be role-models in demonstrating skills such as receptivity and discretion. Finally, management should enable and foster people to come together in a physical sense in order for them to develop social networks which are based on trustful relationships (Argote *et al.*, 2003). But not only trust between individuals on the same organisational level needs to be fostered. Also, it is important that individuals can trust their employer. Mistrust can easily turn into fear in this context which, among other consequences, leads to the unwillingness or even inability to learn and to share ideas (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000; Ekvall, 1996).

Another aspect which is viewed as influencing knowing and learning processes of individuals within the organisational context is the degree of **autonomy** they are provided with. Autonomy can be understood as the degree of trust in individuals to act independently (McKenzie and van Winkelen, 2004). Managing individuals, in particular in knowledge-intensive organisations, requires the maintenance of a fine balance between enacting power and control and providing autonomy. In order to allow individuals to create knowledge, management should give autonomy not only in relation to individuals' work patterns, but also in terms of time and location to pursue knowing and learning activities (Hislop, 2009). Knowledge workers in particular are regarded as the primary asset of knowledge-intensive firms (Alvesson, 2004). In many cases individuals are more skilled than their managers and highly specialised experts. Thus, management is not able to remain in control of knowledge-work processes anyway. Therefore, the responsibility of management should be shifted to facilitating favourable conditions in which knowledge sharing and creation can take place (Newell *et al.*, 2009).

The notion of **motivation** is another element of the organisational environment which impacts on knowledge creation activities (Hislop, 2009). Motivation can be divided into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation, on the one hand, describes motivation that is located within individuals and expresses itself in enjoyment of performing certain tasks or acquiring new skills and competences. Intrinsically motivated people derive satisfaction by achieving these goals and derive further motivation for future tasks. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is derived from external sources, the desire to either attain or avoid something outside the self. Intrinsically motivated individuals are more likely to work independently and to show more persistence in achieving their goal despite external obstacles (Walker *et al.*, 2006). Some groups of professionals, consultants for example, have developed a strong sense of themselves being a professional which is originated in extensive university education, training and social relations with people of similar educational backgrounds (Alvesson, 2004). Consequently, their identity is closely linked to their profession which not only concerns their identity as an employee but often also reflects how they view themselves as a complete person – at work as well as in their private lives. Maintaining this identity as a professional provides a major intrinsic motivation for many of them (Alvesson, 2004). According to Maister (2003) it is vital to continually challenge consultants in order to keep up their intrinsic motivation. However, organisations employing mainly individuals who can be expected to be highly intrinsically motivated may also have to provide a certain context to maintain this intrinsic motivation. In order to retain intrinsically motivated individuals

organisations have to trust them and allow them space and autonomy in which these individuals are able to fulfil their role. Acknowledging and rewarding individuals' achievements is equally important to maintain their motivation (Davenport, 2005; Maister, 2003). Further, attractive external conditions have to be provided such as satisfying job roles, career prospects, space and the possibility for further development and good social relations since even individuals who are highly intrinsically motivated respond positively to aspects which increase their extrinsic motivation (Alvesson, 2004). Organisations not offering these conditions will most likely not diminish this intrinsic motivation but will not be able to retain these employees who are aware of the value they contribute to the employer and seek an organisation that can offer these external conditions (Switzer, 2008). This research appreciates the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and will retain it. In this thesis, the two concepts are not understood as being strictly separated from each other and drawing from completely different sources but as interlinked and constituted by similar sources.

The notion of **leadership** which can be regarded as another manifestation of power is also viewed as important in order to enable and support knowledge creation activities (Merx-Chermin and Nijhof, 2005; Taminiou *et al.*, 2009). Beside the aspects already mentioned in previous paragraphs of this section, managers should provide a framework in which each individual is provided with the opportunity to develop and where clear steps are provided on how to advance in his or her career in order to maintain intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Mitchell and Meacheam, 2011). Further, direct management should give up parts of their power and provide freedom and autonomy to each individual in which he or she can engage in knowledge and learning activities (Switzer, 2008; Dvir *et al.*, 2002; Coopey, 1999; Taminiou *et al.*, 2009). Managers who are actively involved in and enthusiastic about learning and knowing processes are very likely to motivate their employees to contribute to these activities (Chong and Ma, 2010). However, in order to be trusted by employees it is regarded as important that managers are authentic in their behaviour (Garvey and Williamson, 2002) for example by also addressing aspects which are not handled well by the organisation in connection to knowing and learning activities. According to Dovey (2009) trust needs to be based on interpersonal bonds and collective performance. Hence, leaders need to spend sufficient face-to-face time with their employees in order for a trustful relationship to develop. Further, it is regarded as significant that the organisation's management's communication with regard to their vision, strategy or approach towards knowledge and learning is congruent to their leadership team's behaviour and organisational

structures and procedures. Otherwise, the organisation and its management is likely to be perceived as not authentic by individuals which might lead to mistrust and less willingness and motivation to participate and contribute to learning and knowing processes within the organisation (Garvey and Williamson, 2002).

The organisational elements explored in this section have been adopted from different researchers. Merx-Chermin and Nijhof (2005) identified the organisational elements of organisational structure, procedures and processes, organisational climate, autonomy and motivation as impacting on knowledge creation activities but have not explored how they impact on the individual experiences of knowledge creation in their research. Some researchers explored the impact of organisational elements on individuals in the organisational context in general or in relation to knowledge-intensive firms (Maister, 2003; Wong, 2005; Weick, 1996; Lucas, 2000; Senge, 1990; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000; Starbuck, 1992; Cannon and Edmondson, 2001). Other researchers explored the impact of isolated organisational elements in relation to knowledge, learning, knowledge creation and innovation (Foucault, 1980; Coopey, 1999; Kirkebak and Tolsby, 2006; Ekvall, 1996; Popper and Lipshitz, 2000; Szulanski, 1996; Naot *et al.*, 2004; Levin *et al.*, 2002; Taminiau *et al.*, 2009).

Taminiau *et al.* (2009) explored innovations through informal knowledge sharing in management consultancies from a social-constructionist perspective by carrying out interviews with management consultants from different management consultancies. Their interpretations of the interview accounts suggest that knowledge sharing can only lead to innovation if the consultants are supported by their management and the organisational context promotes the sharing of ideas.

The review of literature in the field of knowledge creation suggests that research on organisational learning and knowledge sharing often also includes aspects of knowledge creation which indicates that the concepts are often not clearly distinguished which is in line with Jakubik (2008) who regards knowledge creation as being part of learning processes. In line with the social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning taken in this research the notion of knowledge creation is regarded as difficult to look at in isolation from learning and knowledge sharing during which knowledge creation occurs. Hence, when looking at previous research on knowledge creation, research dealing with organisational learning and knowledge sharing which also establishes a link to knowledge creation has also been considered.

Although these researchers understood the organisational elements as factors, inhibitors or barriers and did not necessarily focus on knowing and learning processes their work contributes to the theory base of this research since the organisational elements are embedded in the organisational context and therefore impact on the consultants' experiences of knowledge creation from a social-constructionist perspective. The organisational elements discussed are summarised in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6 Organisational elements explored in previous research

Organisational element	Researchers
Power	Foucault (1980), Coopey (1999), Kirkebak and Tolsby (2006)
Organisational structure	Ekvall (1996), Maister (2003), Merx-Chermin and Nijhof (2005)
Procedures and processes	Popper and Lipshitz (2000), Merx-Chermin and Nijhof (2005), Wong (2005)
Organisational context/climate	Weick (1996), Lucas (2000), Naot <i>et al.</i> (2004), Merx-Chermin and Nijhof (2005), Taminiau <i>et al.</i> (2009)
Trust	Senge (1990), Pfeffer and Sutton (2000), Cannon and Edmondson (2001), Levin <i>et al.</i> (2002)
Autonomy	Starbuck (1992), Merx-Chermin and Nijhof (2005)
Motivation	Szulanski (1996), Merx-Chermin and Nijhof (2005)
Leadership	Wong (2005), Taminiau <i>et al.</i> (2009)

In this research the organisational elements are understood as being socially constructed through the actions and interaction of individuals within the organisational context. Senior management is 'traditionally' considered to have the power to influence the organisational context.

This consideration of the impact of organisational elements on individuals' experiences of knowledge creation processes concludes the review of existing literature on knowledge and learning in organisations. The next section considers the implications of this review for this current study.

## 2.6 Implications of review for this study

As a result of this review of concepts of knowledge, learning and knowledge creation as well as of PSFs, knowledge-intensive firms and knowledge workers, understandings of and perspectives on these concepts have been developed. This

section summarises the key concepts identified within this review which inform the theory base on knowing and learning and which will be taken forward to develop the analytical framework of this research. This analytical framework, based on which the research data will be synthesised and interpreted, is further developed through Chapter Three as the review of the literature relevant to this research is extended.

The key concepts informing the theory base on knowing and learning of this thesis are:

- *Professional Services Firms*: The “*knowledge intensity, low capital intensity, and professionalised workforce*” (von Nordenflycht, 2007, p.156) of PSFs distinguish these organisations from other organisations. The knowledge-intensive nature of PSFs is understood to be the most crucial characteristic since it implies that the organisation’s output is strongly dependent on the sophisticated knowledge and skills of its workforce. Management consultancies are understood as PSFs (von Nordenflycht, 2007; Morris and Empson, 1998; Starbuck, 1992).
- *Knowledge-intensive firms*: Knowledge-intensive firms provide sophisticated knowledge and knowledge-based services and products to clients and are understood to belong to the group of PSFs. Their activities are highly dependent on a large share of their labour force, also described as knowledge workers. Knowledge workers’ major tasks involve creating new knowledge or applying existing knowledge in new ways. Most knowledge workers have high levels of education, hold analytic and communication skills which help them to identify and solve problems and require to be managed differently from employees in line management positions in order to perform. Management consultancies are understood as knowledge-intensive firms and consultants as knowledge workers (Loewendahl, 2005; Alvesson, 2004; Starbuck, 1992; Ehin, 2008) in order to reflect the focus of this thesis on experiences of knowledge creation processes.
- *Managed Professional Business Model*: A development from the traditional professional partnership to the Managed Professional Business Model has taken place in the field of PSFs and knowledge-intensive organisations such as management consultancies. Inherent in this development is the move from a maximum of the professionals’ individual independence to an introduction of administrative controls which aim at ensuring that employees behave and act in a coordinated and obliging way. Further, this transition has brought with it the standardisation of services offered by the organisation which has been regarded as contradictory to the nature of professional work but has also been found to have some positive impact on their work such as enhancement of the reputation of the services offered on the clients’ side. Standardised services are

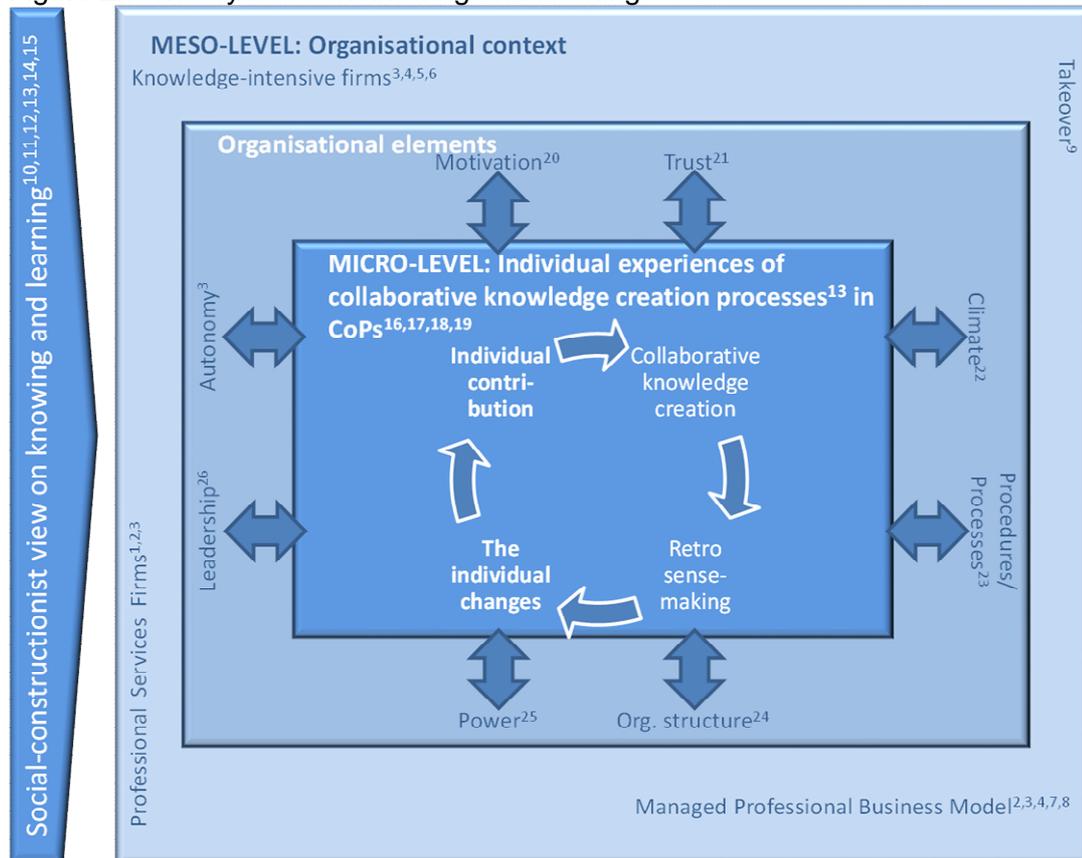
understood as not being able to replace the consultants' skills and experiences (Cooper *et al.*, 1996; Loewendahl, 2005; Brivot, 2011; Starbuck, 1992; Morris and Empson, 1998).

- *Takeover*: Knowledge workers can undergo a difficult transition phase in the aftermath of a merger or takeover. They may experience negative emotions and anxiety related to their fear of losing their expert status as well as their self-image and of being less valued (Empson, 2001).
- *Social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning*: The term 'knowledge' is replaced by the concept of 'knowing' in order to emphasise that knowledge is not an abstract and universal possession but a process which unfolds over time dependent on context and social interaction. In this process of coming to know, which is equal to the process of learning, knowledge is collectively created (Chiva and Alegre, 2005; Gherardi, 1999; Blackler, 1995; Jakubik, 2011; Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2000); Cunliffe, 2008).
- *Communities of Practice*: From a social-constructionist perspective the collective learning and knowing processes take place in formal and informal Communities of Practice within the organisational context. Communities of Practices emerge among individuals who share a common repertoire of skills and experiences and have a mutual interest in a joint practice. Informal communities often exist without the organisation being aware of it. A special form of these unrecognised communities is that of 'underground innovators' which are understood as employees who develop new knowledge without the knowledge or approval of their management (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger and Snyder, 2000; Brown and Duguid, 1991; Oster, 2010).
- *Knowledge creation*: The 'becoming to know' framework (Jakubik, 2011) shifts the focus of knowledge creation to social interaction and participation. The framework is based on the concepts of learning, knowing and becoming. Knowing is viewed as a process and learning as being inherent to this process which offers new experiences of knowing and learning and therefore new knowledge. During this process the individual is becoming since he or she develops new understandings and meanings (Jakubik, 2011).
- *Organisational elements*: in line with the social-constructionist perspective organisational elements are understood as being embedded in the organisational context and therefore as impacting on the consultants' experiences of knowledge creation processes. The organisational elements explored are power, organisational structure, procedures and processes, organisational context or climate, trust, autonomy, motivation and leadership.

(Foucault, 1980; Ekvall, 1996; Popper and Lipshitz, 2000; Lucas, 2000; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000; Starbuck, 1992; Taminiau *et al.*, 2009; Szulanski, 1996).

Figure 2.7 illustrates the theory base on knowing and learning developed in this chapter.

Figure 2.7 Theory base on knowing and learning



Von Nordenflycht (2007)<sup>1</sup>; Morris and Empson (1998)<sup>2</sup>; Starbuck (1992)<sup>3</sup>; Loewendahl (2005)<sup>4</sup>; Alvesson (2004)<sup>5</sup>; Ehin (2008)<sup>6</sup>; Cooper *et al.* (1996)<sup>7</sup>; Brivot (2011)<sup>8</sup>; Empson (2011)<sup>9</sup>; Chiva and Alegre (2005)<sup>10</sup>; Gherardi (1999)<sup>11</sup>; Blackler (1995)<sup>12</sup>; Jakubik (2011)<sup>13</sup>; Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2000)<sup>14</sup>; Cunliffe (2008)<sup>15</sup>; Lave and Wenger (1991)<sup>16</sup>; Wenger and Snyder (2000)<sup>17</sup>; Brown and Duguid (1991)<sup>18</sup>; Oster (2010)<sup>19</sup>; Szulanski (1996)<sup>20</sup>; Pfeffer and Sutton (2000)<sup>21</sup>; Lucas (2000)<sup>22</sup>; Popper and Lipshitz (2000)<sup>23</sup>; Ekvall (1996)<sup>24</sup>; Foucault (1980)<sup>25</sup>; Taminiau *et al.* (2009)<sup>26</sup>

## 2.7 Chapter summary

This review of existing literature has introduced the concepts of Professional Services Firms, knowledge-intensive firms and knowledge workers in order to establish the context of this research. Through engaging in the contemporary debates on the concepts of individual and organisational knowledge and learning and knowledge creation this chapter has confirmed this study's social-constructionist perspective on the concepts and processes of knowing and learning. After introducing the concept of Communities of Practice the chapter moved on to review the organisational elements that may impact on the individuals' experiences of

knowledge creation processes relevant for this research. These organisational elements include power, organisational structure, procedures and processes, organisational context or climate, trust, autonomy, motivation, and leadership. Central to these organisational elements is the notion of power which cannot be separated from knowledge (Foucault, 1980) and is closely interlinked to the other organisational elements. The chapter then concludes by considering the implications of the review for this study and by summarising the theory base on knowing and learning developed in this chapter. It also proposes potential theoretical contributions of this research. The next chapter enhances the analytical framework of this research by reviewing the literature on gender and organisations and by fusing the theory base of knowing and learning with the theory base on gender in organisations.

## Chapter 3 Gender and Organisations

### 3 Introduction

The preceding chapter provided the theory base for the concepts of knowledge and learning relevant for this research. This chapter enhances the analytical framework of this research by critically reviewing the literature on gender in organisations and by fusing the emergent theory base of gender in organisations with the theory base of knowing and learning. Relevant concepts of patriarchy and gender which inform the key conceptual understandings of this research are introduced. Different approaches to gender are reviewed and concepts on how to unsettle the gender binary divide are discussed. This is followed by the exploration of organisations as gendered places and the role of gendered emotions in organisations. Challenges for women working in patriarchal and male-dominated organisations and how they cope with them are discussed in general before the focus is placed on women in knowledge-intensive organisations. The chapter then fuses concepts of knowledge and gender in organisations by exploring previous research on gendered knowledge and knowledge creation. The chapter concludes by considering the implications of this review for this study, by combining the theory bases of Chapter Two and Chapter Three to the analytical framework of this study.

This chapter contributes to the second research objective to *critically explore gender and gender relations within the context of organisations as well as the gendered nature of knowledge*.

#### 3.1 Patriarchy and gender

Whereas research on the two previously separate areas of gender and organisations and the impact that these two concepts have on each started three decades ago (Acker, 1998; Colgan and Ledwith, 1996) researchers have only recently started to introduce the notion of gender to the field of knowledge sharing and knowledge creation in particular (Durbin, 2011). Exploring the gendered experiences of management consultants of knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive firm will provide further insights to this relatively new field by contributing an insider view into knowledge creation activities in a male-dominated environment (Alvesson, 2004). In the next section concepts of patriarchy and gender are critically reviewed to provide the reader with the key conceptual understandings that inform this research and to set up the context for this research.

### 3.1.1 Patriarchy

Originally used to describe “*the rule of fathers in the family*” (Nicolson, 1996, p.21) patriarchy is now mostly used to describe in which context and through which processes men and male-dominated organisations endorse male supremacy (Nicolson, 1996; Colgan and Ledwith, 1996). Within this patriarchal system female and male gender relations are characterised by power, which gives men and their values a superior position over women and their values at all societal levels, determines who has access to power and what is regarded as legitimate knowledge (Nicolson, 1996; Simpson and Lewis, 2005; Cassell and Walsh, 1993).

Based on this hierarchical structure between the sexes in patriarchal contexts men, as a social category, are understood as setting the standard and the values and as representing the norm and ‘One’ (de Beauvoir, 1953; Butler, 2004; Alvesson and Billing, 1997). Women, as a social category, are measured against this norm and regarded as lacking the qualities of the dominant sex, men, and are therefore labelled as the non-norm and the ‘Other’ (de Beauvoir, 1953; Katila and Merilainen, 1999). In line with this understanding, men are regarded as actors and as first sex, whereas women are seen as reactors and therefore as second sex (Lorber, 2010). Being deviant from the norm within patriarchal organisational structures, women are not regarded as being fully qualified and suitable for professional occupations (Maddock, 1999) which is of special importance for this thesis in terms of the impact of a patriarchal organisational context on the experiences of the participants of this study.

Walby (1989) and Maddock (1999) enhance the above by offering a theory of patriarchy as crucial to analysis of gender relations and an attempt to illustrate how gender inequality works within society and organisations and how gender roles inform and impact on the experiences of individuals. By doing this, patriarchy theory also aims at providing some understanding of what is needed in order to enable a more egalitarian society. However, Maddock (1999) and Simpson and Lewis (2007) argue at the same time that these views comprise the danger of neglecting the consideration that men are not a completely homogenous group and they themselves are subjugated to other factors such as race and class as well as economic factors or inhibited by the narrow definitions of masculinity.

According to Maddock (1999) patriarchy tends to be strongest where men have rigid and inflexible understandings of what women should do and in which ways they should behave, in particular to them as men. Patriarchy presumes fixed gender

relations which regard women to be less powerful than men by nature. Even though women nowadays have gained access to the public sphere, and therefore also to organisations, they keep struggling since they often remain subject to informal social codes that regard women as being the 'second sex' (de Beauvoir, 1953), as less competent than men and better suited for the domestic sphere (Katila and Merilainen, 1999).

Walby (1990) understands patriarchy as a complex system consisting of social structures and practices. In these structures and practices men are dominant and women the subordinates at all times. This theory of patriarchy is fundamental for the analysis of gender relations (Walby, 1989). In her work, Walby (1990, 1989) divides the "*system of patriarchy*" (Walby, 1989, p.220) into six main patriarchal structures: the patriarchal mode of production in which husbands expropriate women's labour in the domestic domain; patriarchal relations within paid labour; the patriarchy of the state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; and patriarchal culture. They present and describe the most important constellations of social relations which structure gender relations. By setting up these six structures she aimed at overcoming criticism on patriarchy (Walby, 1989).

Walby's (1989) patriarchal structures relating to patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, the patriarchal state, and patriarchal culture are particularly relevant for this study since they contribute to an understanding of the impact of patriarchy on gender relations in organisational contexts. The patriarchal mode of production has caused the division of labour to become a key differentiator between women and men including commonly accepted understandings of appropriate positions for women and men in our society. This understanding has been transferred from the private realm to the public sphere informing patriarchal relations in paid work. This structure demonstrates either the complete exclusion of women from paid work or at least the segregation of women within paid work which causes the devaluation of women's contribution and, as a consequence, low salaries (Walby, 1989). Patriarchal state, as a patriarchal structure, is reflected by the denial of women's legitimate access to powerful positions at the state level since they are constantly positioned as subordinates to men (Walby, 1989). This patriarchal state is also reflected within the organisational context in which women have to overcome diverse barriers to attain positions of power. Patriarchal culture, as a patriarchal structure, provides a diverse set of patriarchal practices which shape gender subjectivity in relation to the distinction between the genders within

the organisational context. This patriarchal culture is informed by and informs ongoing internal discourses (Walby, 1989).

Patriarchy has been criticised for being a concept which regards women as well as men as a homogenous group, disregarding aspects such as ethnic differences, class, age, sites of oppression and the intersection of ethnicity and gender (Butler, 2004; Walby, 1989). Also, patriarchy has been accused of lacking attention to the different forms of gender inequality based on historical and cultural variations (Walby, 1989). Walby (1989) addresses these criticisms by stating that patriarchy is flexible enough to consider the differences between women and the variations of their experiences. The six structures introduced above aim at understanding male domination within specific contexts whilst adequately considering the variations of women's oppression under different circumstance, in different places at different times without being either too complex or too simple (Walby, 1989, p.220).

Overall, the structures explain that the suppression and exploitation of women in the domestic domain by their husbands has served as a foundation for inequality in paid labour, where both are reflected in institutional orders (Walby, 1989). As a consequence, women are excluded from more sophisticated forms of work with access to power and influence and constricted in ways which only allow them to take on jobs which are regarded as only requiring basic and less valued skills (Walby, 1990). Male dominance has become part of societal and also organisational culture to an extent that it is hidden and accepted as mainstream organisational culture (Simpson and Lewis, 2005).

In line with Mavin's research (2001a) this research does not aim at changing the patriarchal system of the organisation under exploration. Instead the aim of this review of patriarchy is to achieve a common understanding and acceptance of the organisation as a patriarchal place which provides an important context to the research case since the exploration of this organisation as well as the involvement as employee is strongly affected by its patriarchal nature (Nicolson, 1996).

### **3.1.2 Gender**

In this thesis gender is understood as a socially produced distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine whereby women and men exist and act in dynamic gender relations to each other (Acker, 1992; Simpson and Lewis, 2005; Nicolson, 1996; Fonow and Cook, 2005; Gherardi, 1994). Gender is also understood

as being independent of sex and not as being biologically determined (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Nicolson, 1996).

This understanding, which emphasises the social construction of gender, is reinforced by Butler (1990, p.8) who states that

*originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed; hence, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex.*

Butler (1990) further states that 'woman' need not to be the cultural construction of the female body, and 'man' need not interpret male bodies.'

To Mavin (2008b) sex is something women and men are born with, whereas gender is something which is given. In her personal experiences this remained a subconscious process before she became aware of how she was gendered. Still, gender is often used synonymously with sex (Acker, 1992; Mavin and Grandy, 2011).

West and Zimmermann (1987, 2009) not only make a distinction between sex and gender but additionally take into consideration sex categorisation. Sex is determined according to the possession of female or male genitalia. Sex categorisation however considers the demonstration on the one side and identification on the other side of "*socially regulated external insignia of sex*" (West and Zimmermann, 2009, p.113) which include aspects such as outer appearance and behaviour. The link between sex categorisation and gender is described by West and Zimmermann as being a recognisable member of one sex category, which is usually connected to a certain active doing, and being liable to present common conceptions of what the nature of being a woman or a man is about. According to West and Zimmermann (1987, 2009) this is an ongoing process, strongly situative and characterised by 'doing' rather than simply 'being' (West and Zimmermann, 2009). In line with West and Zimmermann (2009) the understanding of gender brought to this thesis is that gender is neither something individuals possess nor a given and static property but a socially constructed activity, which is under constant change (Gherardi, 1994; Acker, 1992).

Gherardi and Poggio (2001) conclude from West and Zimmermann's understanding that gender can be regarded as a set of practices which support the understanding

process of relations between men and women, and between male and female. As part of this set of practices individuals position themselves according to the positioning of others through conversations. Gender plays an important role in this positioning process because gender is created by not belonging to one category, male or female, automatically entailing the belonging to the other, opposite, category. In this process male is often viewed as being the norm which socially constructs female as the other (Powell *et al.*, 2009).

In this thesis gender is understood not to be biologically determined as an individual's sex (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Acker, 1992) but socially constructed (Gherardi, 1994), something individuals do in interaction with others (West and Zimmermann, 1987). Whereas the classification 'man' and 'woman' is strongly tied to biological bodies and therewith to sex (Alvesson and Billing, 1997), the categories masculine and feminine "*offer an alternative to the variable-oriented fixation of 'man' and 'woman'*" (Alvesson and Billing, 1997, p.82) by being grounded within culture and being in constant 'social flux' (Billing and Alvesson, 2000). They are not fixed but constantly changing and dependent on the meanings we assign to them (Alvesson and Billing, 2000). According to Billing and Alvesson (1997, p.85) they should be regarded as "*traits or forms of subjectivities that are present in all persons*". These subjectivities manifest themselves in thoughts, feelings and values and can be found in all humans, independently of whether they are men or women (Billing and Alvesson, 1997, 2000). Here, both sexes have access to them. Although women possibly still find themselves rather drawing from female attributes due to socialisation, women who experience a different upbringing and education have the opportunity to draw from both 'pools', the one containing rather feminine attributes as well as the one containing the predominantly masculine characteristics (Marshall, 1984). Wilson (1996) supports this view by advocating that one should avoid viewing biology and personality as being responsible for gender differences. Instead, Wilson (1996) proposes, that differences between individuals, independent of their gender, should be regarded as results of their life experiences, their life context, resources and power, which can all change over time. If differences exist they should not be categorised into opposites and first class and second class attributes. Further Wilson (1996) draws attention to the fact that focussing on gender alone prevents us from taking crucial aspects such as age, race or class into account. Mavin's (2009) perception of masculinity and femininity as fluid concepts which are not linked to sex means that men are not just masculine and nor are women just feminine.

Still the majority of gender research tends to assign women to femininity and men to masculinity whilst ignoring crucial aspects such as cultural and social background. This simplification inevitably leads to sex-role stereotyping which primarily connects gender to the biological sex and reinforces traditional views of women's and men's characteristics which informs a dualistic view of gender, which is rejected in this thesis. This dualistic view conceptualises women and men as antipodes to each other (Nicolson, 1996; Mavin and Grandy, 2011; Kugelberg, 2006). Billing and Alvesson (2000) label this process as 'essentialising' gender which makes both men and women prisoners of gender (Wilson, 1996; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004). Very often in this process men and masculinity are regarded as the norm whereas women and femininity is declared as 'the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1953; Wilson, 1996). Masculinities are regarded as values and experiences that in a particular cultural context are interpreted as being assigned to men more often than women (Alvesson and Billing, 1997). Wilson (1996) emphasises that even if differences exist they can be acknowledged, but they should not be exploited to condemn women to a second class sex status.

Sex-role stereotyping is apparent in all aspects of our lives, in private and in public, which also includes organisational life (Martin, 2006). It locks women and men into their respective sex stereotyped label by positioning men and women in relation to masculinity and femininity respectively (Gherardi, 1994). Everyone is strongly influenced by these stereotypes and it is easy to accept them as given and not to challenge them (Nicolson, 1996). Particularly in patriarchal societies a common understanding exists on which characteristics can be assigned to which gender (Maddock, 1999).

According to these stereotypes typical female characteristics are to be passive rather than active which would be considered as aggressive behaviour. Further, instead of being active women should rather be responsive in every aspect of their relationship to men (Nicolson, 1996; Maddock, 1999). What can be once again noticed here is that the female gender is being characterised by contrasting from the male gender which is accepted as the norm. Also, being female is connected with being soft, emotional, sensitive, intuitive, nurturing, sympathetic, caring and compassionate as well as willing to please others (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Gilligan, 1982; Spencer and Podmore, 1987; Gherardi, 1994). Billing and Alvesson (2000) and Maier (1999) see the sex-role stereotypes as cultural codes of gender according to which being feminine is defined by identifying oneself in relation to, as well as being connected to others, being selfless and interdependent as well as

feeling responsible for others and taking care of others. Maddock (1999) adds to these attributes by describing femininity in terms of relationships as loyal to principles, reflective as well as group-oriented.

On the opposite side, typical male characteristics according to sex-role stereotypes are being rational and possessing analytical capabilities which allow putting aside emotions in their actions and their decisions (Billing and Alvesson, 2000). In more detail, the male gender is associated with being active, objective, tough, detached and independent, rational, in control, interrogative, self-assertive, dominant, focused on career advancement and competitive (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Metcalfe and Linstead, 2003; Wilson, 2003; Maddock, 1999; Gherardi, 1995; Maier, 1999; Marshall, 1984).

The differentiation between sex and gender is still problematic (Mavin and Grandy, 2011). Societal perceptions of gender, which fuse gender with sex, connect masculinities to the bodies of men and femininity to the bodies of women (Gherardi, 1994). Consequently, men are being connected with being productive, moving in public and giving commands which automatically relegates women to being private, reproductive, silenced and obedient due to the antithetical position of both concepts (Gherardi, 1994). Hence, attributes ascribed to femininity and, still mostly to the bodies of women, assign those who hold these attributes, mostly women, to 'second sex' (de Beauvoir, 1953) since they are attributes of 'the powerless' (Gherardi, 1994). However, also researchers continue using the term gender when actually talking about sex which conceals the social construction of masculinities and femininities and reinforces the misconception of masculinity and femininity being tied to bodies of men and women respectively (Patterson, 2010). Instead of positioning masculinity and femininity at two different oppositional and therefore binary points masculinity and femininity should be regarded as open to both women and men allowing social flux in which both sexes have access to cross-gender spaces of both masculinity and femininity and hence occupy a dual presence (Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Gherardi, 1994).

Nicolson (1996) acknowledges that due to an intrinsic link between an individual's gender and his or her experiences, perceptions of the social world, including organisational life, can differ significantly from one individual to another even though they might share the same sex. She emphasises the importance of gender when viewed as a process which organises all social life from the level of the individual to the family and our entire society. As a consequence, it also plays a vital role in

organisations. Broadbridge and Hearn (2008) and Kimmel (2000) support this view by stating that gender and power relations informed by gender are key characteristics of most organisations and managements. Gender does not only structure gender relations but also constitutes organisations and management. Simultaneously, organisational and managerial realities construct and sometimes even destabilise gender relations (Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008). Overall, Broadbridge and Hearn (2008) assess these sex and gender approaches as problematic since they are bound to a specific culture and neglect the important aspects of power, change and social structures to a large degree.

In more recent research the notion of male and female as individual traits has been replaced by constructionist thoughts which regard gender as a social product which is aligned with the social-constructionist epistemology of this research. In line with these thoughts attention has been shifted from female and male characteristics to gendering processes in terms of how gender is constantly reshaped and negotiated in the everyday social interaction between individuals. Research now focusses on how men and women 'do gender' (West and Zimmermann, 1987; Gherardi, 1996) and in which ways they contribute to gender identity construction by participating in processes of reciprocal positioning (Poggio, 2006).

## **3.2 Doing gender**

### **3.2.1 The gender we do and the gender we think**

According to Gherardi (1994, p.591) *"We 'do gender' while we are at work, while we produce an organizational culture and its rules governing what is fair in the relationship between the sexes"*.

First, West and Zimmermann (1987) introduced the concept of doing gender in their key article 'Doing Gender'. This paper challenges the, then, widely spread view of gender as a role or attribute which individuals take on or possess (West and Zimmermann, 1987; Messerschmidt, 2009). West and Zimmermann (1987) also reject the assumption that gender is a reflection of biological differences and instead promote a critical theoretical shift which places attention on the ways in which gender differences are accomplished in social interactions by actually doing gender (West and Zimmermann, 1987; Poggio, 2006; Jurik and Siemsen, 2009). In their work West and Zimmermann provide an understanding of gender as *"the activity of managing situated conduct, in the light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category"* and *"as a routine accomplishment*

*embedded in everyday interaction*” (West and Zimmermann, 1987, p.125) . Doing gender is regarded as a set of social activities which aim for defining particular characteristics as expressions of masculine and feminine natures (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). Hence, gender according to Gherardi and Poggio (2001) can be viewed as a set of social practices which help to establish the relations between men and women. By taking part in and performing social practices *“people position themselves by aligning themselves according to the positioning of others within situated discourses”* (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001, p.247) at a specific location and at a specific time. Gender is a central part of this positioning process, since individuals construct their gender identity by comparing themselves to others. In this comparison activity masculinity and femininity are understood and positioned as alternative and opposing categories which implies that belonging to one category inevitably precludes belonging to the other (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001).

Gender plays a vital role in the positioning and identity building process for members of both sexes and is one of the most frequently applied categories of self-identification (Gherardi, 1996). Due to the binary positions of male and female gender categories and the fact that belonging to one category eliminates the opportunity to belong to the other, undergoing this gender identity building process entails that individuals see themselves as fundamentally different from the adverse gender (Alvesson, 1998). However, individuals cannot construct their own gender identity without the opposite gender since the female as well as the male gender are defined by denying the attributes of the opposite gender. Hence, the gender categories are strictly separated from each other on the one hand, but on the other hand they can only exist in interdependency (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). This interdependency is often of hierarchical nature. Especially in male-dominated work sectors, such as the consulting sector explored in this research, maleness is set as the norm whereas femaleness is regarded as the gender deviating from the male and therefore from the norm (Wilson, 1996) – women are ‘the Other’ (de Beauvoir, 1953). Women are usually measured against the norm which is set by men and is regarded as superior (Wilson, 1996). Maleness or masculinity is often regarded as the antithesis of femininity (Simpson and Lewis, 2007). As a consequence, maleness is rather determined by what it is not than by what it is (Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

In order to explore the ‘gender we do’ (Gherardi, 1994) more in detail this review draws on Gherardi’s work (1994, p.595) which highlights based on West and Zimmerman (1987) that *“gender is something we think, something we do, and*

*something we make accountable to others*". The 'gender we do' in private as well as public spheres involves symbols and the use and transformation of these symbols. This way, we manage our dual presence by moving between a symbolic universe *"coherent with one gender identity and the symbolic realm of the 'other' gender"* (Gherardi, 1994, p.598-599). When doing gender we engage in ceremonial work to honour the symbolic meaning of gender and recognise the differences of gender by demonstrating suitable gender behaviour. The rules of ceremonial work are shaped by the customs and etiquette of a particular organisational culture. When we engage in 'remedial work' we repair the inequality of symbolic order and therewith socially construct the 'fairness' of gender relationships (Gherardi, 1994). The concept of remedial work is important within the context of this study since women working in the male-dominated consulting sector cause an inequality of the symbolic gender order which requires remedial work such as taking on positions in Change Management. By combining ceremonial and remedial work in this manner gender can be done without positioning the female as the 'second sex' (Gherardi, 1994; de Beauvoir, 1953).

In some cases, individuals may even do exaggerated gender by performing exaggerated forms of expected gender behaviour as Mavin and Grandy (2011) found in their research on women exotic dancers. Some exotic dancers in their study do gender through exaggerated sex category and gender balance (Mavin and Grandy, 2011). By doing this these exotic dancers aim at achieving higher client satisfaction which results in increased earnings. This striving for economic reward is rather connected to the notions of masculinity which demonstrates that whilst enacting exaggerated expressions of femininity in some elements of their behaviour they performed masculine behaviour at the same time. Both men and women can perform exaggerated forms of gender behaviour (Mavin and Grandy, 2011). This concept is interesting for this research in terms of whether and how both women and men participants performed exaggerated forms of gender behaviour within the patriarchal organisational context.

Gender does not only occur through actively doing it in everyday life but it also plays an important role at the 'level of symbolic structures' (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). Hence, we not only do gender but we also 'think gender' (Gherardi, 1994; Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). Gherardi (1994) states that the gender we think moves beyond the level of interactional and institutional behaviour to deep and trans-psychic symbolic structures. Gender is socially constructed on both the gender we do level and the gender we think level. In everyday interaction gender contents are

constantly negotiated whereas at the deeper level, the gender we think, the contents have greater stability and we are largely unconscious of them or their origin which might make us accept them as universal and ahistorical constructs. Martin (2006) concludes that we are potentially not aware of how gender impacts on our decisions and actions.

Czarniawska (2006) offers an understanding of gender as something which we make 'accountable to others'. She argues that in some situations gender is not accomplished but an ascription of gender as a property forced upon individuals by others through a discriminatory action. These subtle forms of discrimination remain invisible and are therefore perceived as legitimate. Although coercive the discriminatory action is often perceived as justified by the situation by the individual who is the target of this action and society (Czarniawska, 2006). In contrast to unlawful overt discrimination these subtle forms of discrimination are difficult to detect and have become so deeply rooted within organisational culture that they are accepted as mainstream legitimate practices. According to Czarniawska (2006) such 'silent actions' form the core of taken-for-granted gendering practices. In consultancies, these silent actions include for example that women are regarded as most suitable for positions in the area of Change Management where 'soft skills' are required (Tyler, 2005).

Martin (2003, 2006) adds to this discussion his approach of gender practices and the practising of gender which highlights the fluid nature of gender construction. Gender practices involve roles, norms and ideals in relation to gender which are available to humans to draw on in an interaction in which they do gender. Martin (2006) draws on West and Zimmermann (1987) when presenting examples for gender practices including language, outer appearance and dress style, vocabulary, actions and interests which are widely spread and accepted as well as culturally available and stereotypically ascribed to one gender. Through these forms of gender practices individuals either conform to or revolt against institutionalised gender status when practising gender which in itself forms gender through interaction. However, gender practices are often performed unconsciously and without being reflexive (Martin, 2003, 2006).

The gender constructed and accomplished in interaction is linked to specific social situations (Messerschmidt, 2009). Masculine or feminine practices are either accepted or rejected by individuals participating in social interaction in relation to normative conceptions of gender. Individuals draw on sex categories as a resource

for interpretation of situated social conduct as they seek to hold accountable behaviour as female or male. The decision to either accept or reject masculine or feminine practices is based on socially defined membership in one sex category (Messerschmidt, 2009). Inherently, the body is not neutral in the social interaction during which individuals do gender but individuals are already categorised by their sex when they engage in doing gender (Kelan, 2010). Understanding the importance of sex categories in social interaction is important to explore how the consultants' gendered experiences in this research were constructed in social interactions within a male-dominated organisational context.

In order to be able to fully comprehend gender and its ways of informing organisational contexts this research follows West and Zimmermann's (1987), Gherardi's (1994) and Messerschmidt's (2009) shift from viewing gender as a fixed possession of individuals to regarding gender as social interaction, something that individuals actively do and accomplish with others in their everyday lives. This understanding is in line with the social-constructionist epistemology of this research introduced in Chapter Four.

### **3.2.2 (Un)doing gender and doing gender differently**

Kelan (2010) argues that research which has been dealing with how gender is done within the organisational context has to a large degree focused on retaining the gender binary. From her point of view the gender binary is reinforced by the actual process of doing gender and, therefore, gender has to be undone in order to overcome the gender binary (Kelan, 2010). Hirschauer (2001) suggests that gender must be ignored in order to undo it. However, West and Zimmermann (1987) see doing gender as something which is 'unavoidable' since society is divided into the two essential categories of women and men and being placed into one of the categories is imposed onto individuals and crucial for them. Gender needs to be done as long as a fixed gender binary is commonly accepted and taken for granted. Hence, Hirschauer's (2001) suggestion is problematic.

Hirschauer (2001) himself assesses the undoing of gender as difficult since it implies that gender is being removed as a central element of social life which seems difficult if not impossible considering that gender is always relevant and taken-for-granted. Undoing gender from Hirschauer's (2001) point of view can only be achieved by forgetting gender. He suggests that gender research while focussing on gender neglects other categories and identities such as race and age. Consequently, forgetting gender by not paying attention to it would neither remove it

as a category nor eliminate the binary divide but it would simply be not drawn upon anymore. Undoing gender would also imply undoing the sex category. Kelan (2010) questions Hirschauer's approach in terms of who decides whether gender is undone or not and what can be understood as undoing gender. She gives the example that in one of her studies workers assumed they worked in a gender neutral environment but she as the researcher interpreted that the gender neutrality concealed the ideal of the masculine worker (Kelan, 2010). Kelan (2010) also rejects the notion that other elements of identity building processes such as race and age can be looked at separately from the gender element since gender is always relevant in positioning an individual. Kelan's (2010) conclusion that in the current state of research a post-gender world is not yet possible since we lack the vocabulary to portray this world is taken forward in this thesis. Inherent to this conclusion, Hirschauer's (2001) approach of forgetting gender is rejected.

From a poststructuralist and discursive perspective Butler (1990, 2004) sees the destabilisation of the gender binary as a way to undo gender. Butler's (1990, 2004) starting point is that gender is closely related to the desire to be recognised as a viable human being which can only be accomplished by complying with social norms which enact the binary divide. The ones which fail to comply with these norms are viewed negatively by others and have their status as human beings being questioned (Butler, 1990, 2004; Janoff-Bulman and Wade, 1996). Butler (1990, 2004) proposes that in order to challenge and to ultimately transform this binary divide cross-gender and transgender positions need to undo gender by questioning the naturalness of the gender binary whilst remaining within the gender binary but disturbing it. As a consequence, the artificial construction of the gender binary becomes visible which leads to new and multiple meanings. These enable the creation of more legitimate identities that individuals can take on and still be recognised as human beings since they comply with social norms (Butler, 1990, 2004). Kelan (2010) values this approach as challenging the dualism on which gender is based. She offers the example that being a female worker in a male-dominated position already challenges traditional understandings of masculinities and femininities because it creates a new form of femininity which can lead to something new once the obvious contradictions have been resolved. These new understandings allow a new pluralisation which jeopardises the gender binary.

However, Kelan (2010), Messerschmidt (2009) and West and Zimmermann (2009) conclude that undoing gender has rather to be regarded as re-doing or doing gender differently since the boundaries between doing gender and undoing gender are

difficult to assess. Risman (2009) adds that it may often be the case that individuals are undoing some elements of gender and doing others at the same time. Mavin and Grandy (2011, p.3) take on the position that in both doing gender and doing gender differently individuals are engaged "*in masculine and feminine scripts, where the sex category cannot simply be ignored or undone*" since in the majority of interactions sex and gender are impossible to differentiate because to us they are congruent. According to Messerschmidt (2009) a balance between male and female, the sex category, and masculine and feminine behaviour, the gender behaviour, is crucial to validate masculinity and femininity. Hence, a women needs to achieve accepted feminine behaviour through her socially perceived female body to do gender well and in line with her sex category and vice versa for men. By doing this congruence and a sense of balance between sex category and gender behaviour is achieved which validates masculinity and femininity (Messerschmidt, 2009).

In line with Linstead and Pullen's (2006) framework of multiplicity this research also takes into account what they call the 'third space' which understands gender as a social and cultural practice where practices can switch positions and therewith disrupt and displace established gender binaries. Consequently, women and men can do gender well and at the same time also do gender differently against their perceived sex category and expected behaviour performing multiplicity. In line with Mavin and Grandy (2011) this research promotes that the gender binary cannot be overcome in our times but rather may be unsettled by individuals performing multiplicity. It also acknowledges the importance of the sex category when doing gender and doing gender differently (Messerschmidt, 2009; Mavin and Grandy, 2011).

It is acknowledged that a feminist epistemology combined with feminist standpoint research aligns with the understanding in this thesis that gender is socially constructed. It also aligns with the chosen concept of doing gender and doing gender differently which rejects the gender binary and recognises instead that masculinities and femininities are subjectivities (Alvesson and Billing, 1997) which enable social flux across the two symbolic spaces (Gherardi, 1994). According to Griffin's summary (1995), feminist standpoint research is understood as placing women's experiences at the heart of the research, making the researcher accountable to the women research participants as well as to a wider feminist community, perceiving the private realm as also being political and regarding all research as tending to reflect the concerns of dominant groups. This thesis shares with feminist standpoint research the accountability of the researcher to the research

participants in particular and the feminist community in general. It also acknowledges that the majority of research has focussed on concerns of dominant groups. However, as further discussed in Section 4.2.2, this research aims at providing insights into women's experiences of knowledge creation alongside those of their men colleagues in order to give women the same attention as men which has been neglected in previous mainly gender-blind research. Therefore whilst feminist standpoint research has been considered, it has not been adopted as a key methodological standpoint in this research. Consequently, feminist standpoint research is not taken forward in this research.

The next section focusses on the role of gender in the organisational context.

### **3.3 Gender and the organisational context**

#### **3.3.1 Organisations as gendered places**

In this thesis, the organisational context is understood as providing a background to the power relations that influence and often constrain members' interactions and performances at work. Deeply embedded in this organisational context are expectations to conform to what men do (Maddock, 1999). Hence, management and organisations are not neutral but predominately gendered male (Kanter, 1977; Acker, 1990; Kerfoot and Knights, 1998). It is taken forward that the symbolic and material aspects of this organisational context representing the male dominance have become deep-rooted and taken-for-granted to an extent that male dominance has been accepted as mainstream (Simpson and Lewis, 2005; Wajcman, 1998).

Acker and Van Houten (1974), Martin (2006) and Gutek and Cohen (1987) support this view by arguing that research claiming that gender is not relevant at work, that employees can be regarded as genderless and that individuals leave 'gender at the door' when entering work need to be rejected. Even if individuals would strip off their gender at the door, gender would still be there since it was already there before stemming from the early days of bureaucracy which justifies the exclusion of women and the supremacy of men's qualifications based on patriarchal thinking (Martin, 2006). Patriarchal thinking strengthens gender division and male power and supremacy in organisations by reinforcing organisational processes and practices which reflect established notions of masculinity (Acker, 1998, 1990). Hence, women are assigned to 'second place' (de Beauvoir, 1953) and regarded as 'the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1953) deviating from the norm (Wilson, 1996) which marginalises their potential contribution to the organisation and disadvantages them in organisational

life (Martin, 2006; Mavin, 2001a). The legacy of these taken-for-granted and often invisible assumptions is still present and therefore assessing organisations and their structures and processes as gender neutral or agendered prevents understandings of everyday organisational realities of the gender order (Martin, 2006; Acker, 1998; Gherardi, 1994; Bruni *et al.*, 2004).

Wilson (1996) and Linstead (2000) conclude that gender neutral or gender-blind approaches to organisational life are in fact based on the male as norm and the male as representing the human in organisations which is in line with the understanding of the organisational context in this thesis. Gherardi and Poggio (2001) also criticise the notion of a gender neutral organisation. From their point of view gender neutral organisations do not exist since every organisation holds specific gender expectations, which in male-dominated organisations often aim at *“keeping women to their place”* (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001, p.246). In line with patriarchy this place is outside the public realm or in less meaningful positions within the organisation since women are not regarded as being fully qualified for professional occupation (Maddock, 1999).

According to Mavin *et al.* (2004) gender blindness of organisations will remain until the aspect of gender has become an integral part of the development of new theory and research practice in education.

Connell (1987) emphasises that gender is not an addition to on-going processes which are perceived as being gender neutral but an essential part of those processes which cannot be comprehended without an analysis of gender. Gherardi and Poggio (2001) add that in order to study gender in organisations researchers need to focus on how members of an organisation obtain and then create and replicate symbols, beliefs and patterns of behaviour connected with their gender membership. Concepts of patriarchy can help in understanding these phenomena as well as gender relations (Walby, 1989).

A different approach to gender in organisations has moved away from the concepts of patriarchy as a tool of gender analysis to exploring gender and organisations through notions of merit and choice. In recent research, concepts of merit and choice are applied in order to understand why despite the economic empowerment of women and the significant increase of women's presence in the workforce women still earn less than their men colleagues and still carry the main responsibility for childcare and the domestic sphere (Lewis and Simpson, 2010). More generally,

researchers look at the notions of merit and choice in order to make sense out of contradictions, inequalities and associated tensions within the women's working lives (Broadbridge, 2010). The notion of merit is based on the assumption that access to positions of power is determined by the talent, skills and abilities of individuals, that organisations look for the 'right person for the job' and that recruitment and promotion processes are based on fairness and gender-neutrality (Scully, 2003; Sealy, 2010; Simpson *et al.*, 2010). This approach promotes that women can compete for jobs and promotion on the same basis as men (Simpson *et al.*, 2010). Whereas the concept of merit emphasises the sameness of women and men, a different concept places emphasis on the difference between men and women giving eminence to women's distinctive traits and characteristics that are deemed to be essential to organisation success in our times (Lewis and Simpson, 2010; Simpson *et al.*, 2010). This concept praises women for their 'transformational' leadership style which focusses on building relationships through team working, good communication, participation and affectivity (Rosener, 1990; Mavin, 2001b). According to the special contribution approach these feminine characteristics are needed in the knowledge economy with its increased focus on services and client relationship (Billing and Alvesson, 2000). Rather than regarding femininity as inferior to the traditional masculine notion of managerial work it is regarded as a positive difference and special contribution (Simpson *et al.*, 2010). This approach reinforces sex-role stereotyping by assigning women to femininity per se whilst ignoring crucial aspects such as an individual's cultural and social background (Gherardi, 1994; Lewis and Simpson, 2007) and is therefore rejected in this research.

Simpson *et al.* (2010) summarise that approaches based on meritocracy on the one hand imply that women are the same as men and should be treated this way whereas notions of difference and special contributions on the other hand emphasise that women are different and celebrate their difference as an important asset to organisations. Both approaches suggest that gender inequality has been resolved which does not conform to the understanding of this thesis. However, Simpson *et al.* (2010) argue that the tensions women experience at work are often related to these two concepts and their own interpretations of their work lives which often make them feel disadvantaged and marginalised. According to Simpson *et al.* (2010) this tension can be eliminated through the notion of choice. Simpson *et al.* (2010, p.205) state that

*This can be seen in the way choice bridges the gap between sameness and differences. By drawing on the rhetoric around choice, women combine elements of sameness (choice implies equality and opportunity)*

*and difference (the need for choice is based on difference; the results of choice lead to difference in outcomes).*

By enacting this rhetoric of choice women are supposed to overcome the tension they experience due to sameness and difference (Simpson *et al.*, 2010).

According to this rhetoric women do have the choice between placing work and career at the centre of their lives or family and motherhood which implies that organisations can no longer be blamed (Simpson *et al.*, 2010; Sealy, 2010). However, Lewis and Simpson (2010) and Simpson *et al.* (2010) argue that this approach leaves out the structural and systemic elements that negatively impact on women such as women not having access to informal networks and support systems that are reserved for men. Instead individual women are made responsible for being disadvantaged because of their lack of skills or their choices to have a family for example. Broadbridge (2010, p.245) challenges the assumption “*that career ‘choices’ equate to ‘preferences’*”. She argues that the life cycle of women implicates a number of constraints on women which affect the choices women can make. These kinds of choices around family and career mostly do not need to be made by men. She also concludes that women’s choices are often related to and inhibited by traditional stereotypical views of gender roles which cast doubts on whether the choices women can make are all genuine choices (Broadbridge, 2010). Overall, this study’s understanding of the merit and choice approach is in line with Simpson *et al.* (2010) and Hing *et al.* (2002) who conclude that, as long as the organisational context including structures and policies is not gender neutral but gender biased, the merit and choice approach seems not to be an appropriate tool in understanding women’s experiences in organisations and why women are not as successful as men within the corporate world. This is supported by Sealy (2010) who reports that the notion of meritocracy has also been described as myth.

In line with the concepts introduced in this section this thesis understands the gender we do as ubiquitous across private and public spheres and as an integral and undeniable part of our everyday realities in organisations (Acker, 1990; Patterson, 2010).

### **3.3.2 Gendered emotions in the organisational context**

The notion of emotion is crucial for this research since some of the research participants experienced and reacted upon the organisational elements impacting on their knowledge creation activities very emotionally.

Historically the relationship between emotions and organisations has been ignored both by researchers and practitioners (Lewis and Simpson, 2007; Vince, 2002). Ross-Smith *et al.* (2007) account for this by arguing that emotion has been regarded as the antithesis of 'cold' rationality, the dominant approach in and to organisations. Vince (2002) and Bryans and Mavin (2007) add further potential reason by stating that doing research in this area and knowledge about it has been regarded as being uncomfortable and emotions in general have been viewed as unwelcomed in organisations.

However, over the last years emotion has become of interest to researchers as a critical dimension of organisational life since it cannot be denied that emotions are part of organisational life (Lewis and Simpson, 2007; Vince, 2002) either "*hidden or displayed, repressed or expressed, used or abused, ignored, managed, manipulated and/or controlled*" (Symons, 2007, p.89). What has been avoided in mainstream emotion discussions until lately is the relationship between gender and emotions within the organisational context (Lewis and Simpson, 2007; Ross-Smith *et al.*, 2007).

Ross-Smith *et al.* (2007) and Lewis and Simpson (2007) suggest that emotion work is inherently gendered in organisations and deserves attention which is in line with the understanding of this thesis. The rationality of organisations is still often linked to masculinity whereas emotions remain strongly linked to femininity. As a consequence, emotion is regarded as 'the Other', not suitable for the masculine world of rational organisations (Ross-Smith *et al.*, 2007; Symons, 2007).

Lewis and Simpson (2007) emphasise that, when exploring the role of gender in the relationship of emotions and organisation, researchers must be cautious not to reinforce the binary divide between masculinity and femininity by simply applying the gender differences to their studies. This approach would inevitably lead to the reinforcement of stereotypical views and inherently to 'essentialising' gender which characterises women as emotional, caring and dependent and men as rational, logical and independent (Lewis and Simpson, 2007; Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

Early research on women's experiences carried out from the women's voice perspective by researchers such as Gilligan (1982) and Belenky *et al.* (1997) aimed at highlighting women's experiences and, resulting from it, differences between women and men, as for example differences in relation to emotions. Their research focused on demonstrating that women behave in a different way to men both within

and beyond the organisational context in relation to how they relate to and communicate with others, how they learn and how they manage (Lewis and Simpson, 2007). According to Gilligan (1982) and Belenky *et al.* (1997), women are more strongly emotionally involved, for example by feeling responsible for others and attaching high importance to being related to others, whereas men are presented as being emotionally detached from others since their emphasis is more on independence and separation. Although this approach is acknowledged for directing the focus to women's perspectives it is also criticised for essentialising gender by reinforcing stereotypical views of women as being more emotional than men due to their given sex (Lewis and Simpson, 2007). This approach not only strengthens the gender binary divide but also reinforces the superiority of masculine over feminine attributes (Lewis and Simpson, 2007) and is therefore not taken forward in this research.

Instead of essentialising gender, Lewis and Simpson (2007) suggest moving beyond the binary divide by regarding emotion as a cultural resource in the construction of gender identities which provides an important foundation for the interpretation of the gendered experiences of this study's participants.

In order to achieve this, Lewis and Simpson (2007) deem it crucial to untie the strong association of emotions with femininity which is grounded in culture and history. In order to achieve this emotions must become institutionalised and, as a consequence, *"taken out of the realms of 'the body', 'nature' and the 'private sphere'"* (Lewis and Simpson, 2007, p.7). Research in this field might support the positive image of masculinity by demonstrating that masculinity does not exclude emotions per se. However, caution has to be paid that the binary divide is not reinforced by setting up two classes of emotions, masculine and feminine emotions, and by valuing masculine emotions higher than feminine emotions (Lewis and Simpson, 2007; Bolton, 2007). Bolton (2007) states that this weakness can be overcome by regarding emotion work as an active and on going social process in which individuals perform emotion work and draw on symbolic representations of both femininity and masculinity. Bolton (2007, p.21) regards emotion work as a *"situated 'doing' accomplished through the lived experiences of women and men within interactional and institutional arenas"*.

Out of a range of different studies on the interrelationship between gender and emotion in the organisational context the following outcomes are deemed to be of special importance to this research. As a conclusion on their study on senior

women's emotion work Ross-Smith *et al.* (2007) suggest that women might unconsciously contribute to the understanding of women as experts for emotions. They report that emotion work at worst transfers typical domestic roles into the organisational and public context. This interpretation is of crucial importance for women working as management consultants since they tend to take on roles as Change Managers and trainers to name a few which are strongly connected with emotions and taking care of others (Tyler, 2005).

Symons (2007) adds observations from her study of men and women managers who are in masculine occupations and/or work in masculine organisations, such as the organisation explored in this research. According to her conclusions men and women control their emotions but women at the same time also control their gender since being a woman in a masculine role in a masculine organisation demands specific attention to gender codes and social expectations.

Bryans and Mavin (2007) in their research focus on the emotional impact of mistakes made in the organisational context and how women and men respond to their mistakes. By doing so they place emphasis on how women and men draw upon gender schemas and emotion norms. Bryans and Mavin's (2007) interpretations in terms of individuals' understandings of their mistakes and their feelings about it imply that women are inclined to live with their mistakes whilst experiencing emotional intensity. Women tend to internalise and personalise the experience of their mistakes and live with them for a long time after the event. Women also tend to blame themselves for their mistakes. Men however tend to externalise their feelings for example through directing their anger at others and blaming others as well as their contexts and are less likely to live with them for long after the incident. Overall, Bryans and Mavin (2007) conclude that individuals when discussing their mistakes act in line with and therefore reproduce traditional gender schemas and emotional gender norms through the way they display emotions. This study and its outcomes are of special importance to this research in terms of how emotions were connected to the individual gendered experiences of knowledge creation of the research participants.

### **3.4 Women as travellers**

Research which regards organisations as genderless places and disregards the often deep-rooted and hence invisible male dominance does not acknowledge that this perspective reinforces that women are regarded as the other (de Beauvoir, 1953) deviating from the norm in organisational life. In this kind of research,

women's experiences are either completely ignored or misinterpreted (Gherardi, 1994). In this thesis it is acknowledged that organisations are not genderless places and that femaleness is often viewed as deviating from the norm, the maleness, which often becomes apparent when women enter male-dominated organisations or positions (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). To illustrate this situation more vividly researchers have developed a range of metaphors where those women have been portrayed as 'intruders' or 'foreigners in male territories' (Kvande and Rassmussen, 1994; Gherardi, 1996), as 'pioneers' (Gherardi, 1995) or as 'travellers' (Marshall, 1984). All metaphors have in common that they picture women as being out of place and as being disruptive elements in those settings.

Once women have entered a patriarchal and male-dominated organisation they face the challenge that if they behave in masculine ways by being efficient, competent and unemotional they are labelled unfeminine, but if they demonstrate supposedly female behaviours such as being caring and sensitive they are likely to be assessed as out of place and unsuitable for their role (Mavin, 2009; Evetts, 1997; Powell *et al.*, 2009). Research has shown that women either have to act like men in order to be successful, leave the organisation if they cannot perform this or remain in the organisation without behaving like a man but being excluded from important positions and not able to advance their careers (Powell *et al.*, 2009). If a man behaves in ways which are categorised as masculine behaviour this is perceived positively by his environment whereas a woman demonstrating the same behaviour is perceived negatively since our assumptions are challenged (Mavin, 2009; Janoff-Bulman and Wade, 1996). Masculine attributes are closely linked to stereotypical behaviour of men and therefore do not fit with our understandings of women. Women challenging the established gendered order are therefore labelled 'bitches' or 'battle axes' which enhances their visibility and isolation (Mavin, 2008b). While for the majority of women behaving in masculine ways may be difficult there may also be women who are comfortable with behaving in a masculine way and therefore drawing on both pools – the pool of behaviour characterised as masculine and the pool of behaviour labelled as feminine. These women face the risk of being isolated since they cross the symbolic space of gender as they illegitimately move in the masculine space (Powell *et al.*, 2008).

It is important for this thesis that although some stereotype shifts have taken place, women are still faced with the double bind since it is expected that they behave in ways perceived as feminine in order to live up to the gender social role expectations that comes with being a woman and in ways perceived as masculine to fulfil their

role in the organisations (Gherardi, 1994; Martin, 2003). Women can either challenge the gendered order by behaving in accordance to masculine stereotypes and be labelled 'bitches' (Mavin, 2008b) or they can adhere to the social role expectations and be labelled 'babes' (Mavin, 2008b) and be assessed as ineffective and unsuitable for their role which illustrates the on going lack of gender fluidity (Linstead and Pullen, 2006). They fail to satisfy the social role expectations of being suitable for their job roles and of being a woman at the same time which creates another binary. In order to satisfy both social role expectations women need to occupy both symbolic spaces and therefore maintain a dual presence which is prohibited due to binary thinking (Gherardi, 1994). Consequently, women are neither able to live up to the gender stereotypes of their job nor of being a woman. In order to balance out these expectations women often take on roles in their jobs which offer a fit to their gender roles and therefore presents the opportunity to manage the dual presence by gaining compliance between gender social role expectations and organisational roles (Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Eagly *et al.*, 1995). In management consultancies these are positions in the areas of Change Management and Communications (Tyler, 2005). This behaviour however reinforces stereotypical understandings of men and women by tying masculinities and femininities to bodies, rather than regarding them as being in constant flux (Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

Research by Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) and Kumra (2010a) which is introduced in the next section reinforces the notion of the double-bind women working in male-dominated professions have to cope with: their identity as a female on the one hand and their identity as a member of a masculine profession on the other.

### **3.5 Women in knowledge-intensive firms**

According to Kumra (2010a) more and more women are attracted to occupations and careers in PSFs which, according to Kumra's understanding, include management consultancies. Crompton and Sanderson (1986) suggest that the combination of dual pressures of supply-side constraints and cultural orientations may support women's decisions to pursue a career in a professional environment rather than in general management. Crompton and Sanderson (1986) argue that in professional practices women have the opportunity to be both recognised and rewarded for their achievements since those are objectively measured against qualifications and work experiences. Further aspects positively impacting on women's decision to enter knowledge-intensive organisations such as management consultancies are far above-average salaries, respect, the status connected to being a professional, interesting work, international assignments as well as high rewards

and promising career opportunities (Rudolph, 2004; Alvesson, 2004). However, these aspects are likely to positively impact on both women's and men's decision to enter these kind of organisations (Alvesson, 2004).

Covin and Harris (1995, p.7) argue that "*the consulting world for women is very different from the consulting world for men*" since women are more prone to face discrimination within the organisational context of a consultancy due to being a woman. This is in line with this thesis which rejects the view that organisations are genderless places and instead recognises organisations, and management consultancies in particular, as places of male dominance which has a significant impact on women travellers in this male world (Marshall, 1984; Gherardi, 1996). Overall, Covin and Harris (1995) see discrimination taking place to an extent where women consultants are regarded as not as qualified as their men colleagues.

The following section illustrates the most crucial issues women face within the organisational context of knowledge-intensive organisations such as management consultancies. Research exploring PSFs in general and knowledge-intensive firms, such as management consultancies, in particular is considered since understandings of whether management consultancies are knowledge-intensive organisations or PSFs varies. However, women's experiences are likely to be similar due to comparable organisational contexts.

According to Coleman and Rippin (2000), Jonnergard *et al.* (2010) and Gorman (2005) within PSFs practices that appear to be gender neutral such as performance reviews, promotion systems and objectives against which performance is measured are largely based on masculine stereotypes and hence put women at a disadvantage. Alvesson (2004) adds that these firms are often characterised by a masculine notion of work and career which puts women at a disadvantage by supporting stereotypical expectations that women cannot or do not want to fulfil. This masculine work orientation assigns highest priority to work and the advancement of the individuals' career development whilst marginalising other non-career aspects of life (Alvesson, 2004; Eagly and Carli, 2007).

These patriarchal practices tend to place women professionals in social categories perceived as being lower than those in which their men colleagues are placed (Rudolph, 2004). This is especially the case in knowledge-intensive organisations and management consultancies in particular where, according to Staute (1996), up to the mid-1990s consultants were expected to be men and women consultants

were the exception. Although the percentage of women becoming consultants has increased over the last years, women represent 'latecomers' who are likely to take on lower-status positions and be provided with less attractive working conditions than the majority of their men colleagues (Wetterer, 1993).

Abott (1988) and Bolton and Muzio (2007) support this view by stating that a profession is represented by a privileged group with high social status which aims at protecting its profession from devaluation by inferior social groups, such as women, entering their profession. When the members of a profession cannot prevent these groups from entering they try to marginalise these latecomers by offering them positions which are less attractive due to less interesting tasks, lower payment and limited career opportunities (Abott, 1988; Bolton and Muzio, 2008). As a consequence, women, who have made equal investments in their formal education as men, have lower chances than their men colleagues to receive a pay-off from these investments through high salaries or career opportunities (Rudolph, 2004). Further, the majority of women working in professional firms tend to chose not to marry and not to have children due to their time-intensive and demanding jobs (Rudolph, 2004).

Research in auditing by Anderson-Gough *et al.* (2005) and Jonnergard *et al.* (2010, p.487) confirms that 'homosocial' structures within the PSF context cause recruitment, mentoring and performance evaluation processes to be based on the male norm. Men partners are likely to promote people with the same background not only in terms of perceived leadership and teamwork skills but also in terms of temporal commitment and level of integration into the organisational social life (Anderson-Gough *et al.*, 2005) which supports research by Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) introduced below. As a consequence, gender relations and male gender domination are reproduced not only in daily interaction but also in formal processes (Anderson-Gough *et al.*, 2005). By valuing and valorising what is connected to male stereotypes more than qualities which are traditionally connected to the feminine, women and their potential contribution to professional work is repressed and marginalised (Davies, 1996; Mavin, 2001a). Even if women manage to perform as well as their men colleagues or even outperform them they are likely to receive smaller incentives than their men colleagues (Kay and Gorman, 2008).

Rudolph's (2004) study of management consultancies in Germany shows that women are the object of stereotypical gender assessments on a regular basis. Whereas men are regarded as suitable for the job of a consultant by men managers,

women are regarded as too emotional and too weak to climb up the career ladder. However, the most important argument men managers named, in Rudolph's research (2004), to explain why only exceptionally a women consultant became partner was women's impeding motherhood and, connected to it, family responsibilities. These aspects, from the men managers' point of view, could not be combined with a career which typically involves long hours, intensive travelling and the blurring of business and private life due to the project-based organisation of work (Rudolph, 2004; Anderson-Gough *et al.*, 2005). The majority of top management of the consultancies involved in Rudolph's (2004) study further concluded that women would not remain in consultancies for long since they do not fulfil the 'ambitious profile' (Rudolph, 2004, p.12) of a consultant and cannot or are not willing to adapt to a sufficient degree. The outcomes of Rudolph's (2004) study as well as research by Kaplan (1995) also show that managers of the participating consultancies assumed that women consultants were lacking acceptance of the client, often without having any supporting feedback from the client side.

Overall, Rudolph (2004) argues that women are integrated to some degree but still remain segregated from their men colleagues. She connects this circumstance which she calls 'segregated integration' to 'filtering mechanisms' (Rudolph, 2004, p.13). Filtering mechanisms within the organisational context describe the arrangements and the organisational context which are based on stereotypical male life models (Rudolph, 2004). In terms of informal interaction, for example, women consultants were found to be excluded from activities outside of work where crucial information was exchanged and important issues were discussed which put them at considerable disadvantage (Rudolph, 2004). Through these filtering mechanisms the men consultants' status is supposed to be protected, in terms of the elitism and reputation and the myth of limitless availability connected to it, from being weakened and damaged by too many women entering this domain (Rudolph, 2004).

Unlike researchers such as von Nordenflycht (2007) and Starbuck (1992), Rudolph (2004) does not regard consultancy as a fully acknowledged profession like law or accountancy due to a lack of required status. To achieve this status, consultancies, from Rudolph's (2004) point of view, seek to copy characteristics of these professions such as formal closure and self-regulating entry requirements by pursuing exceptionally selective recruitment processes. These processes marginalise women since their assumed lower social status and outsider position in traditional professions impacts negatively on the consultancy business status. As a consequence, women have limited access to professions and even when they are

able to enter they are provided with limited possibilities to substantially advance their careers (Bolton and Muzio, 2008). Rudolph (2004) adds that the main problem for women is to cope with the costs which come with pursuing a long-term career in a consultancy context. Women need to adapt to traditional male life models in order to succeed which, for the majority of women, is a price too high to be paid over a longer period (Rudolph, 2004) which is confirmed by Alvesson (2004).

Rudolph (2004) concludes from her research on women in management consultancies in Germany that some positive quantitative changes in employment of female consultants have taken place while at the same time qualitative gender differences in the consulting branch persist.

Research undertaken by Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) on the promotion to partner process in an international consulting firm shows that the widely demanded strong career-orientation had a number of implications for the women working for this management consultancy. The implications arose in two main areas: First, the consultants were largely self-dependent when it came to advancing their personal careers since the majority of consultants usually spent their working time on projects at client sites away from their managers (Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008). As a consequence, consultants needed to self-promote their performance and achievements in order for it to be noticed by their management which was necessary to advance their careers. Second, whether a consultant was successful was measured against expectations based on masculinity (Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008).

Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) found that far more women consultants than men consultants deemed it not necessary or were not willing to self-promote their achievements since they relied on their managers recognising their outstanding performance and potential without them self-promoting it. This put the women at a disadvantage since the consultants' performance was usually not visible to their management which is supported by an earlier study by Singh *et al.* (2002). Whereas men are expected to compete with others and to differentiate themselves from others which also includes taking personal credit for their achievements, women are expected to cooperate and to build relations to others through sameness (Eagly, 1987; Janoff-Bulman and Wade, 1996). Even though they were aware of the importance of self-promoting for their career advancement women consultants avoided self-promoting their achievements in order not to behave in dissonance with these gender-stereotypical expectations (Singh *et al.*, 2002; Eagly, 1987) and

therefore being judged as unfeminine, over-ambitious and aggressive (Janoff-Bulman and Wade, 1996).

The second area where women consultants in this study appeared to be disadvantaged is the success criteria they were measured against. Those who were promoted to partner level were mostly very similar to the existing partners, mostly men (Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008) which is supported by Anderson-Gough *et al.* (2005). Singh *et al.* (2002) conclude that this subjective promotion system presents a barrier for women in male-dominated work environments where sex-role stereotyping continues to exist. Kumra and Vinnicombe's (2008) study also illustrates that women consultants were denied opportunities to gain skills and to demonstrate high performance since partners made flawed assumptions about what women were able to do and what not. As a consequence, they were often not assigned to projects in masculine environments which would have brought them high visibility but to sectors which were less visible such as no-profit or healthcare accounts (Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008).

Kumra (2010a) drew on the interviews of the study above in order to explore career choices of the women consultants which she characterised as 'work-centred women'. She reports that both networking and sponsorship were significant for career advancement in this firm. To the women consultants especially networking was not always in line with their preferred working style. However, even if they networked, they did it differently and often less effectively than their men colleagues. Either they preferred to be part of women networks or they experienced problems entering male-dominated networks. Thus, they were further disadvantaged when it came to advancing their careers. They also felt that they had to perform better than their men colleagues in order to being regarded as committed and their merit being acknowledged (Kumra, 2010a) which is in line with findings of research carried out by Kay and Gorman (2008).

Although the management consultancy explored in Kumra's and Vinnicombe's (2008) research and its organisational context, including aspects such as workplace social practices and career models, show evidence that they are based on meritocracy (Kumra, 2010b), Kumra and Vinnicombe's (2008) research outcomes suggest that the organisation is based on 'corporate masculinity' (Maier, 1999) which is taken forward in this study. This implies that the organisation reinforces the masculine worldview, often without being aware of it, and remunerates those who conform to it and subordinates those who do not who are mostly women (Maier,

1999). As a consequence of these interpretations, Kumra (2010b) understands merit not as an objective and rationale concept but as socially constructed implying that the benchmarks according to which the 'best person for a job' is selected depend on context. Within her study Kumra (2010a) found that in the management consultancy explored this benchmark included appropriate behaviour, total commitment, visibility, high ambition and self promotion. Individuals demonstrating these behaviours and therefore conforming to the benchmark were deemed as suitable for career advancement. Top management of most organisations and the partner level of the organisation in Kumra's (2010b) study are dominated by men which implies that benchmarks for the 'best person for the job' are based on masculine norms since those in power favoured a 'homosocial reproduction'. Hence, mostly men and only those few women who conformed to the male success model were able to advance their careers since this model did not accept deviance. The merit of those who did not conform to the benchmarks was not acknowledged and they were assigned to jobs where their merit and contribution became invisible (Kumra, 2010b). Kumra (2010b, p.5) concludes that since merit is determined by its context which is usually constituted by power relations the claim that merit is an objective concept to finding the 'best person for the job' is only a "*rhetorical claim designed to maintain the status quo*".

The results of Kumra's and Vinnicombe's study (2008, 2010) illustrate how the male-based norms in management consultancies may impact negatively on women's careers and their entire working experience. Their findings suggest that women in knowledge-intensive firms such as the organisation explored in this research are still travellers in a male world. Schein *et al.* (1996) argue that for women there is often tension between their identity as a women and their professional identity especially in a male-dominated environment since women need to adhere to managerial criteria for promotion which are based on male characteristics in order to be successful.

The outcomes of the research introduced in this section, and in particular Kumra and Vinnicombe's (2008) and Kumra's (2010a) work, provide a crucial background for the interpretation of the participants' experiences explored in this research since they suggest that the organisational context of management consultancies including their career models are based on 'corporate masculinity' (Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008; Maier, 1999). This corporate masculinity has a significant impact on women's work experiences in this study in general and also impacts on their individual gendered experiences of knowledge creation processes. Since the generation of

new knowledge is of essential importance to knowledge-intensive organisations creating new knowledge and therefore generating new business is an important achievement for consultants which can also impact on their career advancement.

### **3.6 Gendered knowledge in organisations**

As discussed in Chapter Two knowledge management and, in particular, the creation of knowledge have become increasingly important to organisations in order to stay competitive (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Garvey and Williamson, 2002). Durbin (2007) however suggests that some organisations fail to enable the unfolding of their female workforce's potential by not extracting and utilising their embedded knowledge. Reasons for that may lie in the gender-blind approach of researchers and practitioners in the area of knowledge management (Styhre *et al.*, 2001) which is challenged in this research.

Previous research on knowledge management and knowledge creation by researchers such as Choo and Neto (2010), Brivot (2011), Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), Nonaka *et al.* (2006) and von Krogh *et al.* (2000a, 200b) has partially acknowledged the importance of the organisation's context for activities related to knowledge management and knowledge creation. However, unlike in this research, it has neglected the impact of gender on the organisational context and, related to this, the impact of gender on these activities. Recently, researchers and in particular Durbin (2007, 2011) have started to introduce gender theories to the field of knowledge management and knowledge creation. This section briefly introduces previous studies related to the focus of this study which provide crucial insights for this research.

Styhre *et al.* (2001) conducted one of the first studies exploring the interrelationship between gender and knowledge management. The point of departure of their study was the question of whether knowledge is gendered or not. This departure point assumes that knowledge embodies qualities which can be regarded as either male or female. In detail, they explored whether the process of knowing is influenced or even informed by certain perspectives and ideologies that may be derived from a particular gender-biased view on organisational actions. As a result of their study of an international pharmaceutical company they suggest that *"the processes of knowing are always embedded in existing social and political, gendered assumptions and beliefs"* (Styhre *et al.*, 2001, p.65). They argue that practices which derive from a knowledge management programme undertaken in this company are gendered in terms of being informed by an economic framework which tends to

support largely male perspectives and objectives. As a consequence, knowledge is divided into legitimate knowledge (mostly male knowledge) and peripheral if not even non-legitimate knowledge (mostly female knowledge). They criticise that existing literature on knowledge management focusses on the conception of knowledge as possession which neglects that knowing is embedded in social practices that form organisations which implies that gendered practices are transferred to the practices of knowing (Styhre *et al.*, 2001). This research is carried out from a social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning which regards knowing as being embedded and created on social interaction and therefore addresses this criticism.

Connelly and Kelloway (2003) have found that, especially for women, the perception of management's support for knowledge sharing as well as a positive social interaction culture are crucial predictors of a perceived knowledge-sharing culture. This study shows that women are more sensitive to the social interaction culture of organisations, at least in relation to their willingness to share knowledge. A positive social interaction culture allows trustful relationships between co-workers to grow which seemed to be an important prerequisite for women in Connelly and Kelloway's study (2003) for being willing to share their knowledge. Hence, Connelly and Kelloway's (2003) study outcomes reinforce the gender binary divide. The study also supports the assumption taken in this research that the organisational context and organisational elements such as trust and leadership which are embedded in the organisational culture are crucial to foster knowledge and learning processes.

Durbin (2007) in her research on women in UK call centres concludes that while the nature of the work in call centres best suits female soft skills, women knowledge workers continue to be excluded from the networks that underpin crucial knowledge in these call centres which restricts their contribution. Durbin's (2011) theoretical analysis of knowledge creation through networks in a male-dominated environment through a gender lens introduces gender to the field of knowledge creation. In her work Durbin (2011) looks at female senior managers as potential knowledge creators and their participation in networks and concludes from her theoretical analysis that senior women seem to have only limited access to strategic informal networks and are often completely excluded from networks such as the old boys' network. Durbin (2011) regards female senior managers as being precluded from fully participating in knowledge creation processes and as having only limited access to organisational resources and power. She suggests that women can only essentially contribute to knowledge creation activities when the organisational

context reinforces social interaction and expressive behaviour. Throughout Durbin's (2011) analysis her main focus is on exploring formal and informal networks, how and why men and women network as well as how knowledge is shared and created through networks. She concludes that so far the understanding of how knowledge is created in social processes and how it is potentially impacted by aspects such as gender is underdeveloped (Durbin, 2011) which is supported by this thesis. The interrelation between Durbin's (2011) and this study is discussed in the next section.

This consideration of studies on gendered knowledge in organisations concludes the review of existing literature on gender in organisations. The next section considers the implications of this review for this current study.

### **3.7 Implications of review for this study**

As a result of this review of the literature on gender in organisations, understandings of and perspectives on the role of gender in organisations have been developed. This section summarises the key concepts identified within this review which will be taken forward to extend the theory base on knowing and learning set up in Chapter Two. This section ends by fusing the two theory bases to develop the theoretical framework of this research.

The key concepts informing the theory base on gender in organisations of this thesis are:

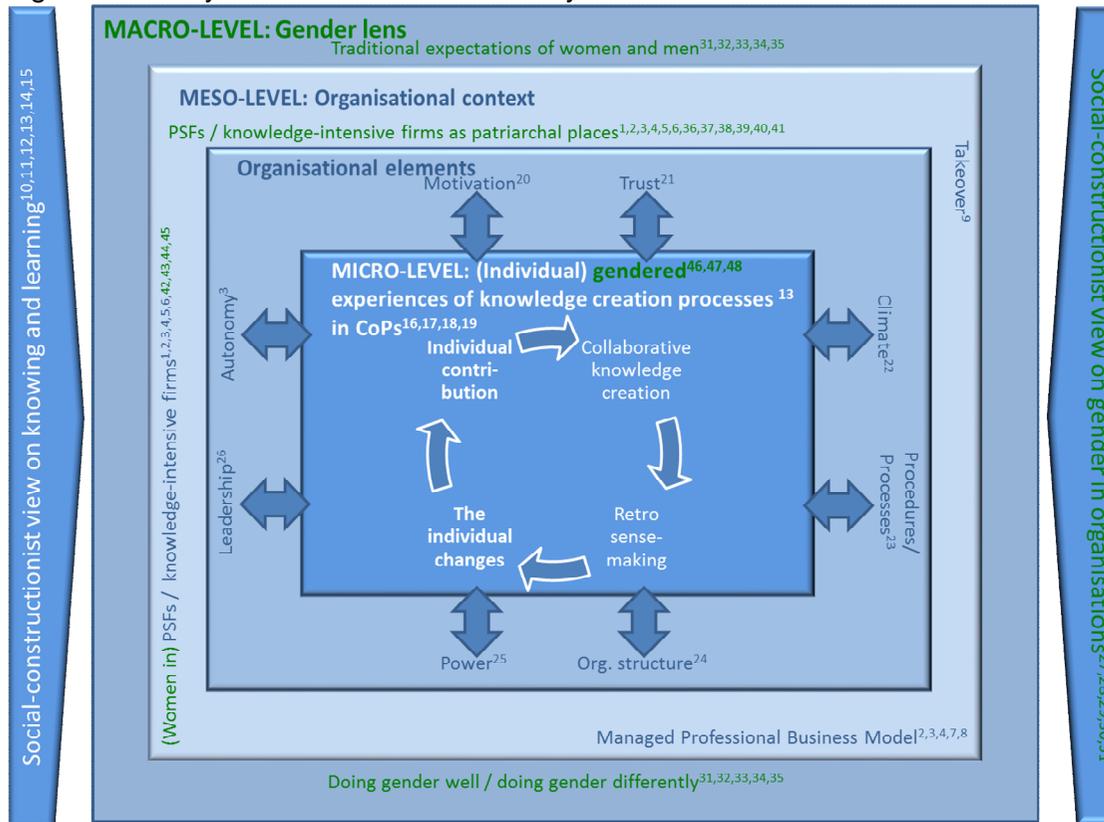
- *Gender as a social construction*: Gender is regarded as being socially constructed and not determined by an individual's biological sex. Gender is something individuals do in interaction with others and is constantly reshaped and negotiated in social interaction (Butler, 1990; Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Acker, 1992; Gherardi, 1994; Nicolson, 1996).
- *Traditional expectations of women and men*: Women are associated with femininity and men with masculinity which leads to women and men being positioned at opposite ends of a binary divide and therefore imprisoned in gendered sex-role stereotypes (West and Zimmermann, 1987; Gherardi, 1994; Gherardi and Poggio, 2001; Kelan, 2010; Mavin and Grandy, 2011).
- *Doing gender well/doing gender differently*: When 'doing gender' we act in line with expected gender behaviour or even perform exaggerated forms of expected gender behaviour which reinforces the gender binary. Individuals can also 'do gender differently' by concurrently enacting femininity and masculinity which

potentially unsettles the gender binary (West and Zimmermann, 1987; Gherardi, 1994; Gherardi and Poggio, 2001; Kelan, 2010; Mavin and Grandy, 2011).

- *PSFs and knowledge-intensive firms as patriarchal places*: Patriarchy endorses an organisational context that sustains male supremacy by providing men with power and in which men represent the norm and women, who deviate from the norm, are labelled as the other. Thus, women are regarded as being less qualified and not suitable for professional occupations. PSFs and knowledge-intensive firms are understood as patriarchal places since aspects such as their performance reviews, promotion systems and notion of work in terms of assigning highest priority to work whilst marginalising other aspects of life outside of paid work appear to be gender neutral but are largely based on masculine stereotypes (Walby, 1989, 1990; de Beauvoir, 1953; Maddock, 1999; Jonnergard *et al.*, 2010; Alvesson, 2004; Eagly and Carli, 2007).
- *Women in PSFs and knowledge-intensive firms*: Women in these organisations are still travellers in a male world. The male-based norms potentially impact negatively on women's entire work experience, including their careers. For women there is often tension between their identity as a woman and their professional identity in a male-dominated environment since women need to adhere to managerial criteria which are based on male characteristics in order to be successful (Marshall, 1984; Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008; Kumra, 2010a; Rudolph, 2004).
- *Gendered knowledge (creation)*: Knowing is embedded in social practices which are gendered, hence knowing, and inherent to it, knowledge creation, is gendered. Women can play a crucial role in processes of knowledge creation by contributing their full potential when the organisational context and culture reinforces social interaction and expressive behaviour (Styhre *et al.*, 2001; Connelly and Kelloway, 2003; Durbin, 2011).

Figure 3.1 illustrates the analytical framework of this study informed by the theory base on knowing and learning developed in Chapter Two fused with the theory base on gender in organisations developed in this chapter. This analytical framework is taken forward to synthesise and interpret the research participants' experiences within the context of a male-dominated knowledge-intensive organisation.

Figure 3.1 Analytical framework of this study



Von Nordenflycht (2007)<sup>1</sup>; Morris and Empson (1998)<sup>2</sup>; Starbuck (1992)<sup>3</sup>; Loewendahl (2005)<sup>4</sup>; Alvesson (2004)<sup>5</sup>; Ehin (2008)<sup>6</sup>; Cooper *et al.* (1996)<sup>7</sup>; Brivot (2011)<sup>8</sup>; Empson (2011)<sup>9</sup>; Chiva and Alegre (2005)<sup>10</sup>; Gherardi (1999)<sup>11</sup>; Blackler (1995)<sup>12</sup>; Jakubik (2011)<sup>13</sup>; Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2000)<sup>14</sup>; Cunliffe (2008)<sup>15</sup>; Lave and Wenger (1991)<sup>16</sup>; Wenger and Snyder (2000)<sup>17</sup>; Brown and Duguid (1991)<sup>18</sup>; Oster (2010)<sup>19</sup>; Szulanski (1996)<sup>20</sup>; Pfeffer and Sutton (2000)<sup>21</sup>; Lucas (2000)<sup>22</sup>; Popper and Lipshitz (2000)<sup>23</sup>; Ekvall (1996)<sup>24</sup>; Foucault (1980)<sup>25</sup>; Taminiau *et al.* (2009)<sup>26</sup>; Butler (1990)<sup>27</sup>; Billing and Alvesson (2000)<sup>28</sup>; Acker (1992)<sup>29</sup>; Nicolson (1996)<sup>30</sup>; Gherardi (1994)<sup>31</sup>; West and Zimmermann (1987)<sup>32</sup>; Gherardi and Poggio (2001)<sup>33</sup>; Kelan (2010)<sup>34</sup>; Mavin and Grandy (2011)<sup>35</sup>; Walby (1989)<sup>36</sup>; Walby (1990)<sup>37</sup>; de Beauvoir (1953)<sup>38</sup>; Maddock (1999)<sup>39</sup>; Jonnergard *et al.* (2010)<sup>40</sup>; Eagly and Carli (2007)<sup>41</sup>; Marshall (1984)<sup>42</sup>; Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008)<sup>43</sup>; Kumra (2010a)<sup>44</sup>; Rudolph (2004)<sup>45</sup>; Styhre *et al.* (2001)<sup>46</sup>; Connelly and Kelloway (2003)<sup>47</sup>; Durbin (2011)<sup>48</sup>

### **3.8 Chapter summary**

In this chapter the review of the literature on gender and organisations relevant to this research has added to the theory base on knowing and learning set up in the previous chapter. It has achieved this by fusing the two theory bases and therefore presenting the analytical framework for this research. By doing this it has outlined understandings of the concepts of patriarchy and gender complementing the concepts of the knowledge-intensive firm and knowledge workers. Next, the chapter discussed different approaches to gender and has highlighted that in this research gender is understood as a social practice and an integral and undeniable part of our everyday realities (Acker, 1990) before it provided a critical overview of different approaches to unsettling the gender binary divide. Organisations as gendered places as well as the role of gendered emotions have been explored before the chapter illustrated how women working in patriarchal and male-dominated organisations manage the double bind of both satisfying the social role expectations of being suitable for their job and of being a woman. Previous research on women in knowledge-intensive firms has been explored in relation to the impact the male-dominated organisational context has on women with particular focus on the impact on their career advancement. The chapter has then fused concepts of knowledge and gender in organisations before it considered the implications of this review for this study. The chapter ends with an illustration of the analytical framework of this research and by highlighting the theoretical contribution of this study that is the empirical exploration of the impact of gender on experiences of knowledge creation processes from a social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning. The chapter that follows introduces the epistemological and methodological choices taken which have shaped the design of this research study and the interpretation of the research participants' accounts.

## Chapter 4 Methodology and Methods

### 4 Introduction

The previous two chapters set the analytical framework for this research. This chapter provides an account of the ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches that formed this thesis including the case study strategy applied. Moreover, the gendered nature of this research and the concept of lens which enabled me to pay special attention to the gendered nature of knowledge creation are introduced. The chapter also illustrates the autoethnographic approach of this research before it introduces the methods that helped me to gain a meaningful insight into my own, as well as the consultants', experiences. It also discusses the approach which was chosen to interpret the data gathered. Further, this chapter reflects upon the ethical considerations that emerged throughout the research due to the social nature of this research. Next, criteria for and methods of establishing trustworthiness of this research are discussed. The chapter also introduces the concept of reflexivity employed in this project to reflect upon the role of the author as a researcher and researched and the research process. Finally, the implications of the methodological choices are discussed.

This chapter contributes to the third research objective to *develop and conduct appropriate methodology and methods to explore and interpret the individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive organisation.*

#### 4.1 Research philosophy

The choice of philosophy is an important starting point to any research project. The philosophy informs how research objectives are set up, research is conducted and results are interpreted and presented. The choice of philosophy is connected to the researcher's assumptions about reality as well as the kind of knowledge the researcher believes in (Crotty, 1998).

##### 4.1.1 Ontological and epistemological choices

According to Crotty (1998, p.10) ontological considerations are concerned with the notion of 'being' by looking at *"the nature of existence and the structure of reality as such"*. Epistemological considerations deal with *"the nature of knowledge"* (Crotty, 1998, p.8). Ontological concerns can be phrased as *"what is"* questions, whereas epistemological concerns look at the question *"what it means to know"* (Crotty, 1998,

p.10). Both philosophical concepts exist alongside each other and strongly influence each other. Together they form the theoretical perspective which describes how one looks at the world and makes sense of it by dealing with the question “*how we know what we know*” (Crotty, 1998, p.8). Since ontology and epistemology often surface together due to their interconnectedness (Crotty, 1998), thoughts on epistemology also encompass ontological issues in the subsequent text of this thesis.

From the beginning of this research I have been on an epistemological journey during which I have moved from a subjective standpoint captured by a social constructivist paradigm to an intersubjective standpoint supported by a social-constructionist approach within interpretivism. This section discusses the relevant epistemological positions and justifies the aspects integrated into and rejected from my research approach.

### ***A social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning***

The main aim of this research is to explore management consultants’ individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive firm. In line with this research aim the literature base on knowing and learning was critically reviewed in Chapter Two. In particular, this literature review has developed my own understanding of the concepts of knowledge and learning which conforms to the social-constructionist perspective of these concepts. This approach stresses the importance of social interaction and context to individuals in order ‘to come to know’ (Cook and Brown, 1999; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000). The term knowledge is replaced by ‘knowing’ in order to emphasise that ‘coming to knowledge’ (Cook and Brown, 1999; Gherardi and Nicolini, 2000) is a process rather than an outcome (Karatas-Ökzan and Murphy, 2010) and is equal to the process of learning (Gherardi, 1999). The importance of social interaction and the collective construction of knowledge in this perspective (Jakubik, 2011) stresses the essential role of language (Karatas-Ökzan and Murphy, 2010; Cunliffe, 2008).

### ***A social-constructionist epistemology***

According to Thorpe (2008) a social-constructionist epistemology regards explanations and interpretations as materialising from descriptions of social experiences either first hand, through participation in those particular experiences, or second-hand, through the study of narrative accounts. Social constructionism understands knowledge as constructed by individuals as they engage with each other and not as being discovered or possessed by individuals. Hence, the

interaction of individuals and their context as well as the process of relating to others is understood as fundamental to the construction of knowledge (Crotty, 1998; Cunliffe, 2008). The social-constructionist epistemology is in line with the research aim as well as the theoretical concepts chosen as the foundation for this research. This thesis aims at understanding individual experiences, second-hand through the narratives of my colleagues, but also first-hand in my role as a consultant which is reflected in the autoethnographic approach I chose. According to Crotty (1998) and Cunliffe (2008) an autoethnographic approach belongs to the methods and methodologies which are suitable for social-constructionist based research. Autoethnography offers me the opportunity to make the readers feel as if they had actually lived through the experiences themselves (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992).

The interaction of and conversation between individuals is at centre of the social-constructionist epistemology. Therefore, language plays a vital role. From a social-constructionist perspective knowledge which is created in social interaction is understood as 'linguistically influenced' (Cunliffe, 2008). This research addresses the importance of language by exploring the gendered nature of the language used in the interviews.

Not only were the individual experiences presented in this research socially constructed but their interpretations were too. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Tucker (1998) the significance and meaning of these experiences can only be understood within the research context. The importance assigned to interaction among individuals and with their context for the construction of knowledge of the social world implies that knowledge construction is understood as not taking place within an individual's mind (Dachler and Hosking, 1995). Research undertaken in line with this understanding turns away from a perspective of possessive individualism which has dominated organisational and management studies (Dachler and Hosking, 1995). Possessive individualism regards a knowing individual as an entity which creates knowledge and possesses it. Knowledge from this perspective is regarded as static and belonging to an individual (Dachler and Hosking, 1995; Thorpe, 2008). This perspective is in most case informed by an epistemology of objective truth (Dachler and Hosking, 1995).

Social constructionism is positioned far away not only from an objective truth but also from a subjective truth. In social constructionism the separation between a subject (individual) and an object no longer exists. Due to the "*radical interdependence of subject and world*" and the emphasis of the constant process of

becoming “no object can be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it, nor can any experience be adequately described in isolation from its object” (Crotty, 1998, p.45). In strong social-constructionist beliefs no truth exists externally and independently of the individual’s reality (Schwandt, 1994). I do not fully agree with this position in terms of the notion that there are no realities out there in the social world which implies a ‘radical’ relativism (Linstead and Thomas, 2002) due to which ‘anything goes’ (Watson, 2000). However, as noted by Crotty (1998, p.215), “we need not be so purist...picking and choosing...is legitimate enough”. Hence, in this research I rather focussed on achieving trustworthiness of the outcomes of this research than on aiming at making truth claims which is further illustrated in Section 4.7.

### ***From subjectivism to intersubjectivism***

At the beginning of this research endeavour I was oriented towards subjectivism through which, according to Crotty (1998), meaning is set on the object by the subject. I decided to draw on this approach since I could relate to its subjective view of the nature of knowledge that suggests that there is not one truth, but different truths for every individual dependent on personal experiences (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Further, I strongly agreed with Ellis and Flaherty’s (1992, p.1) understanding of subjectivity as “human lived experience and the physical, political and historical context of that experience” which implies that personal experience or subjectivity is always situated. I adopted the position that individuals from similar cultural and political backgrounds make sense of their experiences in a comparable way which results in similar versions of truth.

However, during the course of this research, after I had reflected upon the importance of social interaction and connectedness among individuals and their context, I have reconsidered my point of view. I now believe that a subjective approach reinforces the individual-possessive approach of separation between the subject and the object. Although the approach acknowledges the importance of social settings and context the individual’s mind is regarded as the main locus of sense-making (Cunliffe, 2008; Crotty, 1998) which contradicts the social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning.

Hence, I have moved on to take on an intersubjective approach which stresses that people create meaning “in conversations and interactions with those around us” (Cunliffe, 2008, p.129). According to Cunliffe (2008, p.129) we all live in a “web of relationships” in which individuals become intersubjective since they synchronise

their responses with each other. In this way individuals create meaning and understanding between themselves in an ongoing interaction which also means that *“knowing lies within action and action also lies within knowing”* (Cunliffe, 2008, p.133). Hence, the position that subjective knowledge is created in individuals’ minds is replaced by the notion of knowing coming into existence in interaction in an intersubjective approach.

I took on a social constructivist epistemology during the early stages of this research in order to capture the subjective standpoint of this research. Since I had moved on to an intersubjective standpoint I reconsidered that epistemology and finally modified it in favour of social constructionism. Whilst social constructivism recognises the importance of the socio-cultural dimension and the interaction of individuals with this context, it assumes meaning making happens predominantly at the micro-level of the individual’s mind (Schwandt, 2003; Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1999). Hence, this approach lacks attention to social construction processes (Corlett, 2009).

Table 4.1 summarises the epistemological journey the researcher has undertaken in this research.

Table 4.1 Epistemological journey of this research

Developed from Thorpe (2008)<sup>1</sup>, Crotty, (1998)<sup>2</sup>, Cunliffe (2008)<sup>3</sup>, Ellis and Flaherty (1992)<sup>4</sup>, Schwandt (2003)<sup>5</sup>, Gergen (1999)<sup>6</sup>, Burrell and Morgan (1979)<sup>7</sup>

<b>Dimensions</b>		
<b>Theoretical perspective</b>	<b>Interpretivism</b>	
<b>Ontology</b>	Subjectivism	Intersubjectivism
<b>Features</b>	<p>Subjectivity is human lived experience and the physical, political, and historical context of that experience<sup>4</sup></p> <p>Individual's mind is main locus of sense-making<sup>2,3</sup></p> <p>Meaning is set on the object by the subject<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Different truths dependent on personal experiences<sup>7</sup></p> <p><b>Reinforces the cognitive-possession perspective on knowledge and learning</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Journey</i> →</p> <p>Individuals create meaning in conversations/ interaction<sup>3</sup></p> <p>We all live in a web of relationships in which individuals become intersubjective as they synchronise their responses with each other<sup>3</sup></p> <p>Knowing comes into existence in interaction<sup>3</sup></p> <p><b>In line with the social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning</b></p>
<b>Epistemology</b>	Social constructivism	Social constructionism
<b>Features</b>	<p>Socio-cultural dimension and interaction of individuals with their context is important<sup>2,5,6</sup></p> <p>Meaning making nevertheless predominately takes place at the micro-level of the individual's mind<sup>2,5,6</sup></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Journey</i> →</p> <p>Explanations/interpretations materialising from descriptions of social experiences (first/second hand)<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Knowledge is constructed by individuals in social interaction<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Context and process of relating to others is fundamental for knowledge construction<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Knowledge is 'linguistically influenced'<sup>3</sup></p> <p>No separation between subject and object<sup>2</sup></p> <p><b>In line with the social-constructionist perspective on knowledge and learning</b></p>

## **4.2 Gendered research**

### **4.2.1 A gender lens**

According to Itzin and Newman (1995) a gender lens brings into focus patterns of women's experiences of their organisational life and enables the researcher to see and understand organisations as gendered places.

Recent research in the field of knowledge creation carried out by Durbin (2011) has introduced the notion of gender to it. In her theoretical analysis Durbin (2011) explores the relationship between knowledge creation, networking and gender in a male-dominated organisational environment through a gender lens. Apart from Durbin's (2011) theoretical analysis research in the field of knowledge creation research has been carried out without paying attention to the potential impact of gender on knowledge creation so far.

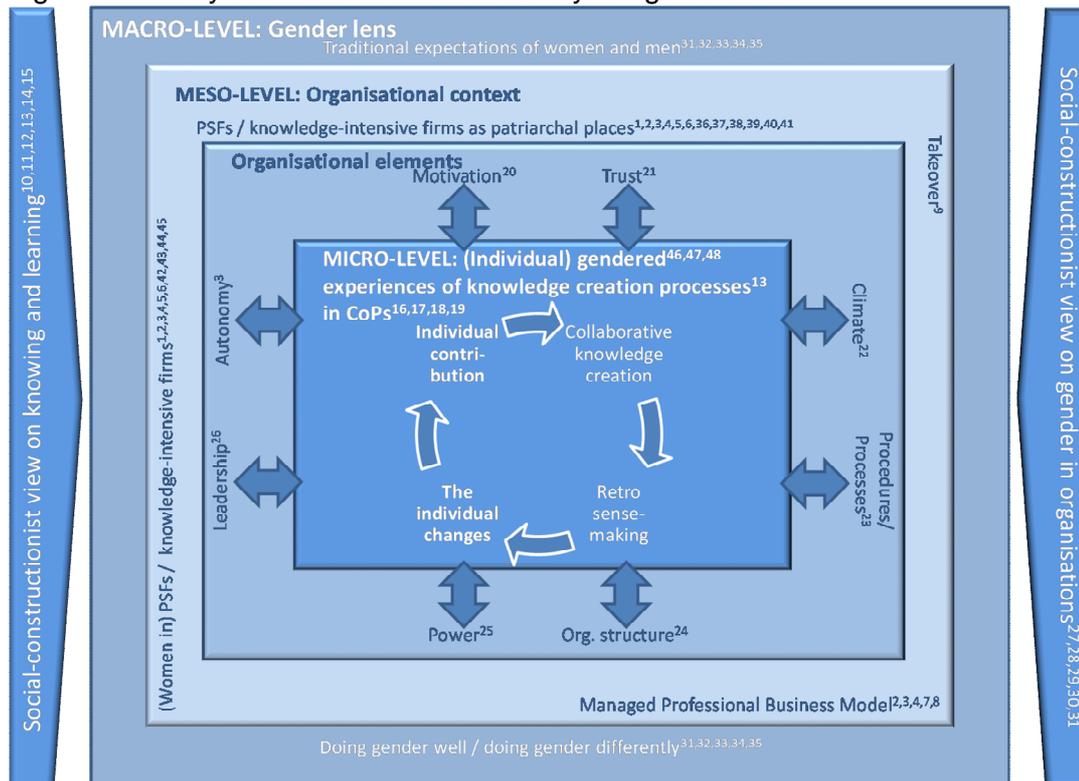
This research adds to Durbin's (2011) work by exploring the gendered nature of knowledge creation in an empirical study. The individual experiences of the research participants are explored through a gender lens on the second level of analysis of this study. Previously, this approach has mainly been used to look at organisational culture by researchers such as Williams and Macalpine (1995), Mavin (2001a) and Davies and Robyn (2002) and in the field of leadership by researcher such as Olsson and Walker (2003) and Patterson (2010).

In this research a gender lens enabled me to pay special attention and sensitivity to the role of gender (Collins, 2005) in the context of the individual's experiences of knowledge creation processes. Through a gender lens the individual's gendered experiences become visible. This approach not only provided me with a general view of the participants' experiences but also enabled me to explore and become aware of the women's and my own behaviour and its implications for the reflexivity of this study (Williams and Macalpine, 1995).

White (2006) describes a gender lens as a gender aware process in which 'a new set of spectacles' has been developed through which the world can be seen. This approach is not unproblematic in her view since gender-blind approaches replaced by a gender lens approach might lead to an analysis which 'reads in' gender differences where inappropriate or precludes alternative interpretations. Therefore, it was crucial for this research to carefully consider where and how 'to set' a gender lens.

By employing a gender lens in this empirical study on knowledge creation I aimed at discovering fresh views on the individual experiences of consultants of knowledge creation processes. The analytical framework of this research presented in Chapter Three (also see Figure 4.2) has set a gender lens for this study through which I explore the individual gendered experiences of knowledge creation processes on the second level of analysis of this research in Chapter Five. The next section further discusses the gendered nature of this research.

Figure 4.2 Analytical framework of this study – a gender lens



Von Nordenflycht (2007)<sup>1</sup>; Morris and Empson (1998)<sup>2</sup>; Starbuck (1992)<sup>3</sup>; Loewendahl (2005)<sup>4</sup>; Alvesson (2004)<sup>5</sup>; Ehin (2008)<sup>6</sup>; Cooper *et al.* (1996)<sup>7</sup>; Brivot (2011)<sup>8</sup>; Empson (2011)<sup>9</sup>; Chiva and Alegre (2005)<sup>10</sup>; Gherardi (1999)<sup>11</sup>; Blackler (1995)<sup>12</sup>; Jakubik (2011)<sup>13</sup>; Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2000)<sup>14</sup>; Cunliffe (2008)<sup>15</sup>; Lave and Wenger (1991)<sup>16</sup>; Wenger and Snyder (2000)<sup>17</sup>; Brown and Duguid (1991)<sup>18</sup>; Oster (2010)<sup>19</sup>; Szulanski (1996)<sup>20</sup>; Pfeffer and Sutton (2000)<sup>21</sup>; Lucas (2000)<sup>22</sup>; Popper and Lipshitz (2000)<sup>23</sup>; Ekvall (1996)<sup>24</sup>; Foucault (1980)<sup>25</sup>; Taminiau *et al.* (2009)<sup>26</sup>; Butler (1990)<sup>27</sup>; Billing and Alvesson (2000)<sup>28</sup>; Acker (1992)<sup>29</sup>; Nicolson (1996)<sup>30</sup>; Gherardi (1994)<sup>31</sup>; West and Zimmermann (1987)<sup>32</sup>; Gherardi and Poggio (2001)<sup>33</sup>; Kelan (2010)<sup>34</sup>; Mavin and Grandy (2011)<sup>35</sup>; Walby (1989)<sup>36</sup>; Walby (1990)<sup>37</sup>; de Beauvoir (1953)<sup>38</sup>; Maddock (1999)<sup>39</sup>; Jonnergard *et al.* (2010)<sup>40</sup>; Eagly and Carli (2007)<sup>41</sup>; Marshall (1984)<sup>42</sup>; Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008)<sup>43</sup>; Kumra (2010a)<sup>44</sup>; Rudolph (2004)<sup>45</sup>; Styhre *et al.* (2001)<sup>46</sup>; Connelly and Kelloway (2003)<sup>47</sup>; Durbin (2011)<sup>48</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Gendered research

This research dealt with individual gendered experiences captured by applying qualitative research methods which were informed by my intersubjectivity and social-constructionist epistemology. The autoethnographic approach (introduced in Section 4.3.1) chosen enabled me to be the researcher and the researched at the same time. As a consequence, I at no time was detached or objective during this research. According to Bruni *et al.* (2004) and Keller (1985) this form of research is of a feminine nature since it deviates from conventional research and knowledge production which can be characterised as male.

Western male mainstream research and knowledge production can best be described in connection with the concepts of objectivity, control, rationality, detachment, validity and generalisability. This kind of research aims at finding out

about the one truth which is valid in any situation at any time and solely accepts the application of quantitative research methods (Keller, 1985; Warren and Hackney, 2000; Oakley, 1981).

Carrying out this research by applying qualitative research methods researchers can only be successful if they give up objectivity and detachment and replace it by being sensitive and emphatic with research participants whom they regard as an equal partner and not the research object (Keller, 1985; Warren and Hackney, 2000; Oakley, 1981).

Gherardi and Turner (1999) add that in the discussion of social science the masculine quantitative research approach is often viewed as 'hard' social science whereas the feminine qualitative research approach is regarded as a 'soft' view of the world.

Even though I followed a feminine research process with a 'soft' view of the world, I did not follow a feminist approach in this research. According to Oakley (1984) feminists believe that women as a group share the experience that they are prohibited full participation in some areas of life and that feminists use every political opportunity to put women first.

In this research I looked at experiences of knowledge creation through a gender lens to explore the gendered nature of knowledge creation. I aimed at providing insights into women's experiences of knowledge creation processes alongside those of their men colleagues and with it to release these women from their 'second place' (de Beauvoir, 1953) in the organisational context. So far, the majority of research in the area of knowledge creation has been conducted in a gender-blind way, accepting the male experiences as the norm. This research aimed at giving women the same attention as men. However, I did not approach this research with the fundamental belief that women were excluded from fully participating in knowledge creation processes. In line with this belief and the discussion in Chapter Three, I did not have a feminist research agenda. I aimed at contributing to theory in the field of knowledge creation by completing the picture – adding experiences of women consultants to those which were already there – those made by men consultants. I did not aim at excluding men from this research.

Having discussed the gendered nature of this research the following section discusses the concepts of voice and visibility and their antithesis invisibility and silence, and their meaning for this research.

#### **4.2.3 Women's experiences**

In gender and organisation studies the concepts of voice and visibility have been used to analyse women's exclusion and inequality and to explore the nonexistence of women in organisational research (Simpson and Lewis, 2007).

Belenky *et al.* (1997) understand the term 'voice' as a metaphor which can be applied to many aspects of women's experiences. Researchers who have contributed to this stream of literature argue that previous research in organisation studies has neglected if not completely left out women's voices or presented women's experiences as abnormal or problematic for organisations. Women's voice literature has aimed at demonstrating that women are different from men, but not inferior (Fondas, 1997), and can possibly contribute assets to organisations which are associated with femininity and should be valued (Kanter, 1989; Alvesson, 1998).

In her research, Gilligan (1982) presents the contrast between female and male voices in order to demonstrate a distinction between two modes of thoughts and interpretations rather than presenting a generalisation of either sex (Gilligan, 1982). However, researchers such as Tong (1998) criticised her exactly for that: the promotion of sex-based generalisation and stereotyping. Lewis and Simpson (2007) add to Tong's criticism by arguing that although this approach highlights the female perspective and makes visible the gendered nature of organisations, which has often been neglected, it endangers research to 'essentialise' gender and to strengthen stereotypical views and, as a consequence, to reinforce the binary divide between masculinity and femininity.

Beside the concept of voice the concept of visibility has also been explored extensively. Following the ground-breaking work of Kanter (1977) on 'tokens' many researchers have followed this path and carried out research on women working in male-dominated organisations and occupations with particular focus on implications the women's visibility has on their relationships at work. Outcomes of these studies show that women are often disadvantaged by their status as tokens which implies that they are excluded from dominant group cultures, often male-oriented, and measured against stereotypical roles (Simpson and Lewis, 2007).

In order to further highlight the impact of gender on organisations more recent research has added the notion of silence and invisibility as antithetic to voice and visibility. By looking at men and masculinity this kind of research explores how masculine discourses silence other competing discourses which are based on values, such as emotions, relatedness and care, which deviate from the male norm. Whereas women are often highly visible men and masculinity often seem to be 'invisible' as the masculine stands for the norm and is taken for granted (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004). Since we cannot question what we take for granted, men and their power, which is derived from their positions of representing the norm, often remain hidden (Lewis and Simpson, 2007).

Lewis and Simpson (2007) regard the concepts of voice and visibility which are based on the assumption of inequality as surface conceptualisation whereas the antithesis, invisibility and silence, are understood as deep conceptualisation since these concepts explore the underlying processes which sustain silence and prevent specific issues from becoming visible. Women's voice literature has often been criticised for being based on the assumption of masculinity and femininity and the connection between gender and sex which also implies that presupposed attributes are assigned to the category 'man' and 'woman'. In contrast, deep conceptualisation regards the concept of masculinity and femininity as well as gender identity as a fluid and dynamic concept with some being more dominant and privileged than others. Recent work in line with deep conceptualisation understands gender as being constituted through daily social interaction in line with West and Zimmermann (1987, 2009) and not as a fixed attribute (Lewis and Simpson, 2007).

Overall, all approaches have in common that they focus on the difficulties women face in organisations due to the male dominance and the marginalisation of femininity.

This research offers insights into women consultants' experiences of knowledge creation processes alongside those of their men consultant colleagues. I aimed at giving these women consultants a voice and including their experiences into theory in order to release them from 'second place' (de Beauvoir, 1953). Further, I aimed at providing them with the same amount of attention their men consultant colleagues have received in previous research on management consultancies and knowledge creation which largely accepted the male experience as the norm. This research not only explores potential differences between women and men but also considers the differences within the women's and men's accounts. By doing this, the research has

moved away from the gender binary divide and addresses criticism of research giving dominance to women's voices (Simpson and Lewis, 2007). Since the research is carried out from a perspective in line with West and Zimmermann's (1987) focus on 'the gender we do' it also considers the fluidity of gender and looks beyond surface conceptualisation into deep conceptualisation.

I aimed at adding to research carried out by researchers such as Gherardi (1996), Mavin (2001a), Mavin and Bryans (2002), Bryans and Mavin (2003), Powell *et al.* (2009), Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) and Durbin (2011) who have contributed women's experiences to management theory by 'changing the subject' (Bryans and Mavin, 2003) in their work. These authors enhanced previously male-dominated theory by looking at organisations through the eyes of women and including women's experiences in organisational theory and research.

### **4.3 Methodological choices**

The choice of an appropriate research methodology determines the strategy and design of the research project. This research design informs the use of the research methods and links them to the desired outcomes of this study (Crotty, 1998). Besides introducing the research methodology this section also provides a rationale for the choice of methods in connection with the methodology and the desired outcomes.

#### **4.3.1 Characteristics of case study research**

The research strategy I applied for collecting empirical data was that of a case study. The use of the case study research strategy for the purposes of this thesis was consistent with the view of Hartley (2004) who outlines that case study research is most suitable for comprehending how the organisational context impacts on social processes. The case study research strategy is most useful for cases in which the boundaries between the phenomenon explored and the context around this phenomenon are not clear or not apparent which is often the case in research concerned with organisational behaviour (Yin, 2003). The main research question in this thesis was *What are individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of management consultants in an international management consultancy?*. In order to answer this research question, this research explores the consultants' experiences of organisational elements such as motivation. These organisational elements are understood as being embedded in the organisational context.

In this research the aim was an in-depth exploration and 'rich understanding' (Lee *et al.*, 2007) of the behaviour of the members of the organisation under exploration where the context was essential and could not be separated from the individual research participant.

The case under exploration in this study is InterConsult. This case cannot be separated from its historical background, the takeover of an international consultancy firm, referred to as Monday, and physical setting, being a sub-unit of InterIT. Yin (2003) offers two different designs within a single case study research. The holistic case study design is appropriate for research which explores the global nature of an organisation. This holistic approach is suitable when no sub-units can be identified or the study is interested in insights on the macro-level of the organisation. The embedded single case study design offers the researcher the opportunity to look at embedded sub-units of the case itself. By doing this the researcher is able to gain multi-faceted insights into the organisation. In this research I drew on Yin's (2003) embedded single case study design. I set up InterConsult as the specific case at the meso-level and the individual management consultants participating in this study as embedded multiple cases at the micro-level. The macro-level of this case was InterIT which represented the context of InterConsult. The main aim of this research was to explore the micro-level of the organisation under exploration, the experiences of consultants working for this organisation, including my own experiences. Hence, I did not simply regard them and myself as sub-units of the case but as cases in themselves. However, these experiences were inseparable from and embedded in their common context at the meso-level, InterConsult, and at the macro-level, InterIT.

Yin (2003) suggests that a rigid approach to case studies can overcome accusations of researchers from the positivist stance claiming that case study research is not scientifically valid. In his view generalisation of case study results and the construction of external and internal validity and reliability is possible. In the view of Lee *et al.* (2007) and Gummesson (2007) Yin's work offers a rather archaic and narrow range of use for case studies, mainly applied additionally to quantitative methods and measured against quantitative research standards.

This research did not fully conform to Yin's (2003) understanding of case study research which draws on positivism (Robertson, 1999). Instead, it followed an interpretative approach which emphasises the researcher's own subjectivity in the analysis and counters claims that biased views must lead to invalid findings

(Alvesson, 1995). This approach also acknowledges that there are some organisational phenomena that cannot be empirically validated but at the same time can be understood in a fascinating and meaningful way by applying a case study research strategy (Alvesson, 1995; Hartley, 2004). In line with Donmoyer (2000) the main aim of this case study research is not to develop theoretical generalisations about knowledge creation processes but to contribute relatively solid illustrations (Watson, 2003) of experiences of knowledge creation processes and interpretive insights (Cunliffe, 2008) to expand the variety of interpretations available to the research community. Stake (2003) calls this an 'intrinsic case study' where the researcher is interested in the case itself and 'thick description' of this particular case (Stake, 2003; Denzin, 1989). According to Hartley (2004) this research strategy enables an inductive approach and emergent theory.

To avoid misinterpretation of findings Janesick (2000) suggests viewing the case through the lens of crystallisation in order to recognise the many facets of the social world out there. The concept of crystallisation is introduced in Section 4.7.

Having introduced the case study research strategy the chapter next introduces the autoethnographic approach chosen to capture the experiences and insider view of the researcher.

#### **4.3.2 Autoethnography**

Since I wanted to give an insight not only into the experiences of others, but also into my own experiences as a member of the organisation explored, I applied an autoethnographic approach. In line with Reed-Danahay (1997, p.9) in this research autoethnography is understood as "*a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context*". This approach offered me the opportunity to integrate my personal story as a primary data source into the research (Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2004; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Ellis and Berger, 2001). I attempted to open a window through which the reader can view the experiences of some of my colleagues and myself (Humphreys, 2005). According to Anderson (2006) and Spry (2001) autoethnographic research is characterised by the full membership of the researcher in the research setting, visibility of the researcher as the researched in the text and commitment to developing some theoretical understandings of social phenomena.

According to Lewis-Beck *et al.* (2004) autoethnographic researchers use their own experiences to gain insights into a culture or group to which they belong. This approach has its origins in ethnography which emerged as a method for studying

and understanding others. It allows making the researcher's own experiences a topic of exploration in its own right (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000b). Hayano (1979) was one of the first authors to use the term autoethnography. Whereas Hayano (1979) regards autoethnography as neither a particular research technique nor a method or theory, but a combination of all three, Denzin (1989) and Reed-Danahay (1997) understand autoethnography as a method. In this thesis, autoethnography is understood as both a methodology informing the design and with it the selection of the research methods (Crotty, 1998) introduced in the next section and a method for capturing the researcher's own experiences as a consultant and the insider view available to her of the organisation explored.

In traditional objectivist research the first person 'I', referring to the researcher usually vanishes after the introduction and only returns in the conclusion of the work. Autoethnography provides the chance to write in the first-person voice and therefore to incorporate personal experiences on the research topic as well as the research process (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Hence, autoethnographic writing is the opposite of conventional research which privileges the researcher over the subject, decontextualises subjective accounts and searches for the one truth (Denzin, 1992, 1997; Ellis and Flaherty, 1992; Reed-Danahay, 1997). It provides the researcher with the chance to study a context without the need to be objective and detached from the topic and research participants (Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2004). It also enables the researcher to be personally involved which can lead to a deep understanding of individual experiences and feelings of participants which for an outsider is more difficult to achieve (Richardson, 2000a). This way the researcher can overcome the distant and removed role of an 'academic tourist' (Pelias, 2003).

When applying autoethnography the researcher permanently identifies herself with the group and perceives herself as a full member of the group. At the same time other members of the group accept the researcher as a homogenous member (Hayano, 1979). Whereas the ethnographic researcher joins a group for the duration of the study the autoethnographic researcher has already been with the group before the study and hence shares history and joint experiences with the group (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Denzin, 1989).

According to Denzin (1989, p.27) both ethnography and autoethnography belong to a group of writing forms which he calls 'biographical method'. Denzin (1989) understands autoethnography as blending ethnography and autobiography. Whereas as a traditional ethnographer the researcher adopts an objective outsider

position the autoethnographer incorporates her or his own life experiences when writing about others. Whereas in autobiography the researcher's own life experiences are at the centre of the writing, in autoethnography the other group members' life experiences are equally important as the researcher's.

Geertz (1988, p.77) adds that a researcher who has taken on an autoethnographic perspective is a boundary crosser, someone who "*sails at once in several seas*", meaning that she or he takes on dual roles – one as a researcher and one as the researched – at the same time (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

Following the understanding of Doloriert and Sambrook (2009) I have been both the researcher and the researched since I was connected with the research participants with a 'conceptual common denominator'. Before I started the research and after I re-entered the organisation after my sabbatical I, like my research participants, had been a full member of the organisation. During my sabbatical from 2005 to 2006 I was in a role of a participant observer, distanced geographically and emotionally, as I had developed my position as a PhD student of Newcastle Business School rather than holding an embedded consultant role. During this time I carried out the majority of the interviews. During my maternity leave from 2009 to 2010 I was, once again, distanced geographically and emotionally and had developed a new role as mother and someone who would most likely not return to this organisation as a consultant. I continued writing up after I had returned to the organisation in 2010 on a part-time basis, still working within the consultancy business but no longer spending the majority of time at client projects but on an internal position. Hence, I was back within the consultancy environment but in a different job and with a changed role. By using the first-person voice I have chosen "*to come out from behind the safe and comfortable mask of the third person hegemonic voice*" (Boje *et al.*, 1999, p.356). This made my research and my analysis deeply personal. I was not distanced and objective, but personally involved and accountable. On top of that I revealed myself by making my own experiences and emotions part of the research which made me vulnerable to anyone who might read this thesis (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009).

The advantages of subjectivity and involvement can present pitfalls such as taken-for-granted assumptions, self-indulgence and the blindness to issues in the culture explored (Hayano, 1979; Sparkes, 2002). Nevertheless, this approach can present "*a collage of voices from within*" (Hayano, 1979, p.103) like no other approach since

according to Reed-Danahay (1997) the autoethnographer is 'at home' in the research field.

This insider status of the researcher is essential for this research since I was able to give an insight into personal experiences and emotions of my colleagues which would probably not been that open to a researcher from the outside. I was not regarded as "*that researcher from the university abroad*" (Watson, 2011, p.210). Additionally, I was able to provide my own experiences and emotions as a consultant. However, it was important to give as much prominence to the other participants' accounts as to mine as the researcher in order to present a balanced picture. If not then the boundaries to biographical methods might have become blurred which was not the aim of this research (Denzin, 1997).

In this text, I as the researched, a consultant working for the organisation explored, become visible at different points. First, I introduce myself and my place in this research in the Introduction. I then 'disappear' in the literature review and for most of the methodology before extracts of my individual gendered experiences of knowledge creation processes captured in my research diary, which is further discussed in Section 4.4.3, are presented and interpreted alongside those of my colleagues in the findings chapters. In the closing chapter I then reflect on my experiences as the researcher and the researched.

The data collection methods as well as the method for interpreting the data were chosen in line with the interpretivist approach to case study research and are introduced in the following sections. The research participants are introduced in Chapter Five.

#### **4.4 Qualitative methods of data collection**

In order to explore the individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes within a knowledge-intensive organisation, I employed the following empirical qualitative data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and emotional recalls. Moreover, I captured my experiences as a management consultant and reflections on the research process as well as on my own role as a researcher in a research diary.

#### **4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews**

By using the semi-structured interview I aimed at seeing the world from the perspective of the interview partners and to understand how and why they came to their particular view of the world (King, 2004; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Semi-structured interviews allow us, the researchers, to share the world of others and to explore how people make sense out of their own experiences.

This form of interview can be viewed as a guided conversation which is characterised by a relatively open interview situation which provides the freedom of narrative and, simultaneously, a given structure to work within (Mavin, 2001a). This framework offers the interviewer the opportunity to focus on specific situations from the world of the interview partner and to let the participant do most of the talking (King, 2004). In order to learn about the individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes and how the participants make sense of them this approach seemed to be the most appropriate.

I changed my place from being a member of the organisation, and therefore a colleague to the participants, to the place of the researcher and a consultant on sabbatical for the duration of the first phase of this research project. In this phase the majority of interviews were conducted. This fact could have alienated me as a researcher from the participants since I was no longer a colleague but someone who talked to them with a research purpose. To minimise this threat, the semi-structured interview was regarded as most appropriate, since it is comparable to a conversation among work colleagues (Mavin, 2001a). Still, this approach could not compensate for all potential risks connected to the fact that I was their colleague before and a researcher for now. During the course of this chapter further risks are addressed and ways I tried to deal with these are introduced.

In the semi-structured interview approach, interviewees are treated as conversational partners and equal participants who can co-shape the interview process rather than as research objects (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Kvale, 1996; Fontana and Frey, 2000). Nonetheless, this method also increased the risk of bringing distance between me in my new place as a researcher and the research participants (Warren and Hackney, 2000) and therefore had to be planned carefully. An interview guide has been used to facilitate and support this process and to ensure that I as the researcher could lead the interview in a direction which enabled me to gain essential information without distancing myself from my interview partner.

In conventional research methods the interview partner used to be viewed as the 'research subject' with whom the patriarchal interviewer should have no relationship, but all power over in the interview situation (Fontana, 2003). Further the interviewer was supposed to be detached from the interview topic and not to communicate his own opinion, otherwise the 'data' gathered from this interview was regarded as being biased (Oakley, 1981). The qualitative interview represents the opposite of this by promoting the interviewee as a partner in this researcher-researched relationship who actively shapes the course of the interview rather than the interview being shaped by pre-set questions through the interviewer which also strengthened my position as a former colleague rather than a distanced researcher. Further, this provides the interview participants with a voice and the opportunity to describe their world in their own terms (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). At the same time, the qualitative interviewer acknowledges that there can be no relationship-free interview situation and incorporates the relationship which develops throughout the interview into the findings (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Warren, 2001).

In the interviews I shared my own experiences and emotions which, according to Oakley (1981), led to a non-hierarchical relationship that encouraged the participants to open up. This transformed the interviews into a conversation among equals in a climate of mutual disclosure which contributed to the social production of shared meanings in the interview and to richer accounts (Ellis and Berger, 2001; Douglas, 1985). It was also in line with the social-constructionist perspective taken in this research as well as in line with the autoethnographic approach which implies that the researcher brings in her own experiences and feelings about the research topics.

Kvale (1996) agrees to the advantages of an interview situation similar to a conversation, but argues that the interviewer still remains more powerful since he or she guides the interview by introducing the topic and follows up on the participant's answers. I as the researcher needed to be aware of this power and to attempt to minimise it by being open to the interview partners accounts, even if they did not completely match my research questions, and being reflexive in my analysis. I will discuss this in more detail later in this chapter.

Interviews are social encounters and, subsequently, produce socially situated activities which have to be analysed to the same degree as the accounts produced in those interviews (Dingwall, 1997; Holstein and Gubrium, 2004). The social nature of the interview and the context in which the interview takes place will be different

each time an interview is conducted. Consequently, the outcome of an interview conducted a number of times will always be different depending on the social interaction taking place and the context enclosing the interview (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Holstein and Gubrium, 2004; Alvesson, 2003).

Since I have known my interview partners for several years from my professional as well as private life I already had a relationship with them before the interviews were conducted. The nature of these relationships has, in some cases, made a turn during the interviews. Therefore, these relationships and their impact on the interview situation as well as their development in the aftermath of the interviews are of special interest for the findings. These turns are highlighted and discussed in the reflexivity part of Chapter Seven. Later on in this section I further elaborated the role of gender in my interviews.

### ***The interview guide***

In line with the qualitative approach the interviews I conducted were not based on a strict interview schedule which had to be followed, but on a more flexible interview guide (see Appendix 3), which covered the main topics I attempted to touch upon during the interviews. The content of the interview guide is based on different sources such as academic literature, my personal experiences as a consultant working for the organisation explored in this study and research which has previously been carried out in related research areas and contexts.

After the first interviews I went back to the interview guide and adapted it where necessary. During these first interviews the interview guide also gave me something “to hold on to” since I also experienced some insecurity due to my new role as researcher. The interview guide was set up in such a way that I expected that it would support me in making the interview partner feel at ease with the situation by starting off with some general questions regarding the interview partner’s background. The interview guide then went on to some macro-level questions about the current situation at InterIT before moving on to questions concerning the individuals and their attitude to and experiences of knowledge and learning and related topics. I added the notion of career to the interview guide in August 2005 after the first research participants had connected their experiences of knowledge creation processes to career.

I set up a list of indicative follow-up areas which helped me maintain the thread of the interview during the interview process while at the same time enabling me to

remain flexible in the interview situation (Briggs, 1986; King, 2004; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). This allowed the interview participants to direct the interview conversation to topics and issues which are important to them and enabled me as the researcher to gain in-depth and high-quality accounts (Johnson, 2001).

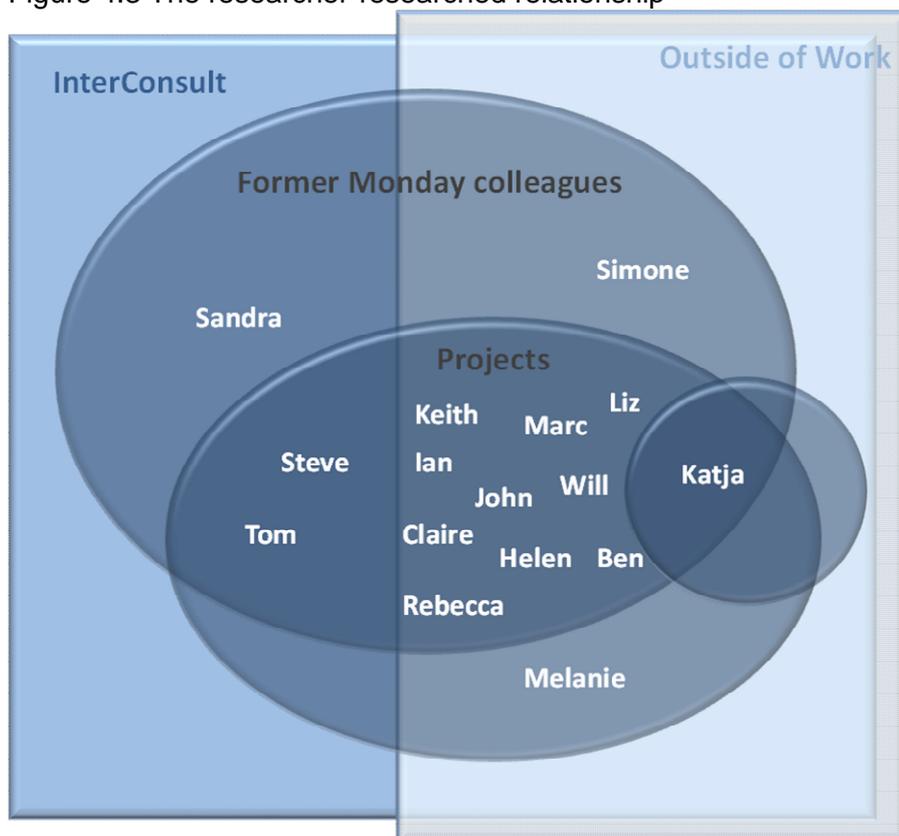
### ***Selection of participants***

Fifteen management consultants were selected as participants for the semi-structured interviews. According to Trigwell (2000) 15 interviews provide an adequate sample. As already mentioned the main criteria for their selection was a trustful relationship between me and the research participants and a joint project or at least client history. That was the case for all research participants apart from one with whom I had not worked and who I did not know very well before the interviews. At the time of the selection process I had not worked with any 'new' colleagues apart from one colleague who I invited to participate in this research. Hence, 14 of the 15 research participants were former Monday colleagues.

I selected peer consultants who I deemed to be open and interested in what was going on in the organisation in order to receive rich accounts from the interviews. I also aimed at interviewing consultants from different career levels within the organisation in order to present different views and experiences.

Figure 4.3 illustrates the relationship between me and the research participants. It shows which of the research participants were former Monday colleagues, with whom I socialised outside of work and worked with on client projects. More detailed information about the research participants is provided in Chapter Five.

Figure 4.3 The researcher-researched relationship



The number of interview partners was chosen with regard to accessibility to interview partners and manageability of the volume of narrative data resulting from the interview. The sample size was seen as appropriate to the research intention to gain ‘thick description’ and enable ‘thick interpretation’ (Denzin, 1989) of the single case. This is supported by Lieblich *et al.* (1998) who suggest a smaller number of cases in order to be able to consider the uniqueness of the narratives produced from each case in the interpretation process. I aimed at achieving an even number of female and male interview-partners in order to give women the same attention as men. I selected eight men consultants and seven women consultants. Equal numbers were achieved due to my interview account.

I applied convenience sampling to select the research participants. I first approached those former Monday peer consultants I had a trustful relationship with either in person or via e-mail. I then invited those colleagues with whom I had worked on different projects. I briefly informed them about the topic of my research and asked whether they would be willing to talk to me about their experiences in relation to my research topic in an informal interview which would take about an hour of their time. All of them agreed to participate in the study. Later on one initial man research participant withdrew his participation since he had left the organisation. I identified another colleague, Melanie, with whom I had not worked for

a long time at that time. However, since we had worked together very closely for a few months I invited her. She is the only participant who had not worked for Monday before the takeover. At that point eight men consultants participated in the study and six women consultants. Since I was not able to identify another women consultant within the German division I had worked with before and had built up a trustful relationship I invited a woman colleague, Sandra, with whom I was loosely acquainted and shared a joint client history.

### ***The interview process***

The interviews were conducted over a two-year period. As mentioned earlier, I chose my interview participants very carefully in order to receive rich accounts. The selection was made very early in the research process back in 2005. However, due to the geographic distance and travelling of most of the colleagues it took some intensive planning and re-scheduling for the interviews to take place. In between the interviews I wrote the interview transcripts and started the analysis of my first accounts as well as of the interview situations. This way I was able to further improve my interview skills especially with regard to how I interacted with my interview partners.

Janesick (2000) uses the metaphor of choreography to describe qualitative research design. In connection with this she compares a pilot study with 'stretching exercises' of a dancer. These stretching exercises give researchers the opportunity to practice interviews, to reflect on them and to refine their research instruments. As dancers need to do stretching in order to make their bodies more flexible researchers need to stretch their minds as well as their bodies – their minds to develop sensitive communication and understanding skills, their eyes for observation and their ears for listening. Due to time and local restrictions I was not able to find more than 15 interview participants for this research. In order not to lose any of the rich accounts I dispensed with a pilot study but spent more time on preparing for the two first interviews as well as for writing notes and amending the interview guide afterwards. I deliberately chose the two first interview partners to be people I knew very well and felt comfortable with.

For these two interviews I selected two men management consultants as participants. The interviews conducted lasted between one and two hours. As follow-up to these interviews I adapted my interview guide and was eager to improve my communication skills and interview techniques in order to be able to build rapport with my interview partners and to understand their experiences and feelings.

Each interview partner signed an informed consent form before the interviews commenced and agreed that the outcomes of their interviews could be used for my research. The interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of my interview partners. I then wrote the transcript which contained everything which was said from the introduction to the interview closure including my questions and the interview partners' responses as well as all interventions from my side. It was important for the analysis of the interviews to not only reflect what my interview partners said but also what I contributed to the interview since I acknowledged my active role in the social production of meaning in the interview process (Ellis and Berger, 2001; Douglas, 1985). I not only went through the questions in my interview guide but rather acted upon the situation and made encouraging and confirming comments, shared my experiences or asked further questions where necessary. I believe that these interventions had an impact on the participants' meaning making process and therefore needed to be considered when analysing the participants' accounts.

After completing the German transcripts I sent a copy to the participants in order for them to make amendments, corrections and comments. None of the participants made any substantial changes to the transcript. Mostly, they amended single words or sentences which were hard to understand from the record.

After all 15 interviews were conducted and interpreted I asked two interview partners whether they would be willing to feedback on my analysis. I provided them with an electronic version of my interpretations and asked them whether they resonated with their interpretations and if not how they would interpret the research accounts. I then arranged an informal meeting with each of the two during which I listened to their assessment of the interpretation before engaging in a discussion with them. This 'interpretation of the interpretation' (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000) is further discussed in the section on reflexivity.

Drawing on the feedback I have received, I can say that most of the consultant participants, women as well as men consultants, enjoyed the opportunity to share their experiences of knowledge creation processes and to step back from their daily routine to reflect on their situations. This feedback is in line with feedback Linstead and Thomas (2002) and Arendell (1997) received from their research participants.

Table 4.4 below provides an overview of the schedule of interviews, reviews of transcripts and feedback on interpretations.

Table 4.4 Interview and transcript information

Participant	Date/location	Words/lengths of interview	Transcript review
Helen	11.10.2007/meeting room client site	5,435/50 minutes	December 2007/ confirmed
John	28.10.2006/hotel restaurant	7,242/1 hour	Jan. 2007/ comments
Melanie	12.09.2006/meeting room client site	7,144/1 hour	Oct. 2006/ comments
Simone	28.06.2006/hotel restaurant	8,424/1 hour	Sept. 2006/ confirmed
Sandra	07.06.2006/meeting room client site	5,971/40 minutes	left InterIT/ lost touch
Tom	06.06.2006/meeting room client site	8,076/1 hour	June 2006/ confirmed
Claire	05.05.2006/Claire's home	5,398/50 minutes	June 2006/ confirmed
Ian	17.03.2006/meeting room InterIT office	8,320/1 hour	May 2006/ comments
Will	17.02.2006/meeting room InterIT office	10,937/1 hour 30 minutes	March 2006/ comments
Rebecca	03.02.2006/Rebecca's home	10,667/1 hour 30 minutes	April 2006/ confirmed
Marc	25.08.2005/meeting room client site	10,441/1 hour 30 minutes	Nov. 2005/ confirmed
Liz	29.07.2005/Café	8,963/1 hour	Aug. 2005/ confirmed
Steve	29.07.2005/meeting room client site	9,973/1 hour	Nov. 2005/ comments
Ben	25.07.2005/meeting room InterIT office	8,333/1 hour	Aug. 2005/ confirmed
Keith	18.07.2005/meeting room client site	12,056/1 hour 30 minutes	Aug. 2005/ confirmed

#### 4.4.2 The impact of gender on the research process

Gherardi and Poggio (2001) and Gherardi (1994) suggest that social interaction is gendered. Since interviews are regarded as social encounters in this research (Dingwall, 1997; Holstein and Gubrium, 2004) special attention needs to be paid to the influence of the gender of the interview partners as well as my gender as the researcher and the researched on the research process and its outcome (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004; Eriksson-Zetterquist and Renemark, 2005). According to Pullen (2006) the gendered nature of research is often insufficiently acknowledged.

According to Reinharz and Chase (2001) not all women can be regarded as being the same, but they share at least some common experiences, in this research working as a woman consultant in the male-dominated consultancy business. These common experiences can support understanding of the interview partner's sense-making process and fosters empathising with the research participant. Oakley (1981) adds that personal involvement with the topic as well as with the research participants increases the probability that the research participants admit the researcher into their lives. On the one hand this presented a potential benefit to this research, but on the other it also presented the potential risk of interpreting the researcher's story and opinion into the research participants' accounts (Norum, 2000). Reinharz and Chase (2001) emphasise that the female researcher has to understand and respect her research participants' experiences and opinions, especially when these are different from her own. Reinharz and Chase (2001) suggest that the researcher sharing her own experiences encourages female interview partners to feel at ease and to open up. However, interviewing women should nonetheless not be viewed as a 'one-size-fits-it-all approach' (Reinharz and Chase, 2001).

According to Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) it is not only an important source for the analysis of an interview what a men interview partner said but also how he behaved. Men are likely to fear losing their masculinity and power and being vulnerable. As a result they might attempt regaining power over the interview situation (Warren and Hackney, 2000; Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001) in order to send the woman researcher back to 'second place' (de Beauvoir, 1953). As a result, the quality of the interview and especially its outcome potentially suffer. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) suggest a number of actions in order to regain control of the interview as female researcher. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) recommend making concessions such as letting the male interview partner control the time and place of the interview, for instance letting him ask the questions and acknowledging him as an expert in order for him to feel safe and in control. Different strategies are offered on how to achieve a rich account. These strategies entail aspects such as stating how other men responded to personal questions to point out that other men shared personal information before. The strategy also advises the avoidance of the term 'feeling' and its replacement by the term 'thinking' (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001). The most important recommendation from my point of view was to bring the man interview partner to a place where he feels safe enough to disclose his feelings and emotions. This is achieved when the interview partner feels that he has created a sufficiently strong image of himself as a man or good person which will not be

shattered by showing weakness. Yet, I did not follow this strategy at any price. I did not avoid telling the truth simply to gain more data. If I had done this I would not have been following one of my guiding principles to treat my research participants as partners and not as objects (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

Chapter Seven reflects on the interview situation and the impact gender had on it.

#### **4.4.3 Research diary**

Keeping a research diary is a widely accepted method of data collection which has been used in many other studies (Mavin, 2001a; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002).

Diaries are of crucial importance for authors of autoethnographic accounts. In their research diaries they can capture their subjective experiences and go back to and reflect on them again and again. Those diaries are one source for the primary data of the research (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000b).

I kept a research diary throughout the course of this research in which I wrote down my experiences, feelings, emotions and reflections. Throughout the research process, I also reflected on my own experiences as a woman consultant of the organisation explored in relation to what the research participants and I talked about in the interview process. These reflections and ways of making sense of these experiences were also recorded in the research diary.

In the beginning the diary was split into two halves, one capturing my experiences as a consultant and the others focussing on my first experiences as a researcher. The part capturing my experiences as a consultant also helped me to “*emotionally recall*” (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.752) what happened before I changed roles from being an employee to being a researcher (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). According to Ellis and Bochner (2000) emotional recall describes a process during which a person goes back into a memory emotionally and physically and recaptures what happened back then and how the person felt about this. It is important to be able to ‘move around’ (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) in this past scene and try to take on different perspectives to prevent tunnel vision (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). By doing this I not only recalled my experiences and emotions but it also helped me to recall and understand my organisation and the social interaction taking place on a daily basis as well as the emotions and meaning my colleagues attached to events. These emotional recalls are by no means objective, but supported the qualitative crystallisation process mentioned above (Janesick, 2000).

However, the more the research advanced the less I was able to keep the two parts separated. My experiences and new role as a researcher on the one hand and the geographical and emotional distance from my role as a consultant on the other inevitably made me reflect on my subjective experiences as a consultant. Interpretations of incidents which happened before the research as well as the image I had of my self became blurred and I re-interpreted and often attached new meanings to incidents. The reflections on how the interview partners and I interacted with each other in interview situations as well as the accounts my colleagues delivered in these interviews often challenged my view of them. The more I detached myself from my role as a consultant and the more I learned about the research topic and analysis techniques I saw my colleagues and myself in a different light from a distant standpoint. This process was sometimes surprising in a good way, but often disillusioning and even painful.

After my sabbatical had ended I returned to the role of a consultant but wasn't the same person as before since I neither could nor wanted to abandon my role as a researcher. During this time the research diary became an important tool for writing down the 'new' experiences I made and how I made sense of them as a researcher at the same time. My maternity leave distanced me once again from being a consultant. Private life became more important than work. During this time the diary was an important aid to remember what was going on back then.

#### **4.4.4 Documentary analysis**

Secondary data was selected through documentary analysis. The documentary analysis has been undertaken to gain an understanding of how knowledge creation and its importance is perceived by the organisation; to explore whether management is actively engaged in fostering knowledge creation activities among their employees and how the importance of knowledge creation is communicated. The main sources have been the company's Intranet, company documents and electronic mails sent out to employees. The information gathered contributed to the qualitative crystallisation process which aims at offering views from as many different angles as possible in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the events taking place (Janesick, 2000).

Having introduced the data collection methods the next section will discuss the interpretation of the data gathered.

## **4.5 Framework for data analysis**

This section introduces the data analysis framework of this research. My understanding of narratives and stories is outlined before the data analysis approach chosen is introduced and the steps I took in this analysis process are discussed.

### **4.5.1 Narratives and stories**

There is no single definition of what narratives are. Yet, I agree most with the understandings of Cortazzi (2001) and Czarniawska (2004). In their views, narratives are co-produced in interviews by the interview partner and the interviewer.

Narrating is a major way of organising and making sense of past experiences and sharing these experiences with the outside world (Rhodes and Brown, 2005; Cortazzi, 2001; Bryant and Lasky, 2007). Narratives can give a voice to their narrators and the opportunity to be heard which is of special importance in organisational studies where the individual narrative can be different from the storylines centrally produced (Rhodes and Brown, 2005). These narratives are not 'subjectively spun' stories, but constructed in a conversation where those narratives are either accepted or rejected by the audience (Czarniawska, 2004). Narratives do not present one truth but different forms of 'reality presentations' (Bryant and Lasky, 2007), interpretations of the world around the narrator (Kohler Riessman, 1993). The use of narratives as sources for exploration of emotional and representative lives in organisations is often located within the social-constructionist framework (Boyce, 1996; Gabriel and Griffiths, 2004).

According to Czarniawska (1998) and Toolan (2001) a text has to contain an original state of affairs, a sequence of interrelated events, main actors and the resolution process of a crisis in order to be of a narrative nature. Conventionally, stories have been regarded as less valuable than narratives. A story is regarded as an exchange between two or more persons in which basically unshaped and fragmented story material which comprises events, characters and settings is told in plain chronology (Boje, 1991, 2001; Toolan, 2001). Someone telling a story intends to encourage others to listen and to empathise with the storyteller. The narrative performs what is missing in the story, it offers a plot and coherence as well as the interpretation and sense making of what has happened (Boje, 2001; Kohler Riessman, 2001; Cortazzi, 2001). However, many researchers do not differentiate between these two concepts anymore. In this research the participants often started with storytelling which then

transformed into a more structured narrative way to tell and interpret the stories they told before. Thus, I often was not able to clearly separate the stories from the narratives and therefore treated them equally.

In the interview process I mapped out my questions in a way which allowed and encouraged the co-production of stories and narratives. If, for example, I asked for a specific event during which the interview partners experienced being creative, I encouraged them to tell me details about reactions from the external world, and emotions they lived through. This way I aimed at providing the interview partners with the opportunity to 'tell their story' which I expected to be different from centrally produced stories at management level.

#### **4.5.2 Data analysis**

When I first engaged with the narrative texts I applied template analysis for the interpretation. Template analysis, also called the thematic coding approach, offers a set of techniques which help in thematically organising and analysing textual data (King, 2004). The result of this process is a list of codes or themes which emerge from the textual data, including narrative texts, and which, in sum, present the template. According to King (2004) this approach offers a set of techniques rather than distinct methodology and can be applied by researchers from different epistemological positions. It is also deemed appropriate for research based on the understanding that there is not just one interpretation of a phenomenon but that there are multiple depending on aspects such as the context of the phenomenon under exploration and the position of the researcher. This approach enabled my reflexivity, as the researcher, as the different perspectives of the consultant participants and the richness of the descriptions produced in the interviews could be appropriately considered in the interpretation process (Madill *et al.*, 2000). Template analysis is also understood to be helpful when a piece of research aims at exploring and comparing experiences of different groups or individuals within a specific context (King, 2004), which is the case in this study. Whilst offering a framework for the initial identification of similarities and differences between the narrative texts as well as the illustration of overall recurring themes, it provides sufficient flexibility to modify it according to the researcher's specific requirements (King, 2004). Hence, this approach was chosen for the initial engagement and interpretation of the interview outcomes.

Following the recommendations of Crabtree and Miller (1999) I commenced my engagement with and interpretation of the narrative texts from the interviews by co-

creating themes which are set up before the researcher engages with the interview in order to make it easier to find common themes in the interviews and, as a result, to answer the research questions (King, 2004). In line with King (2004) those initial themes were set up following the content and design of the interview guide. I organised these themes in a hierarchical order with groups of similar 'constituent themes' such as 'importance of knowledge creation' clustered together to produce more general high order 'master themes' such as 'knowledge creation' which allowed me to analyse the interview texts as varying levels of specification (King, 2004). The higher order themes gave me a picture of the general direction of the interview whereas the lower order themes allowed for a more detailed analysis both within one interview and between interviews.

I then worked through the complete transcripts of the interviews and identified text sections which were of importance for the research questions and assigned them to the appropriate theme. As recommended by King (2004) I went through the interview accounts at least three times to become familiar with the content and to be able to adapt the initial template in line with the interviews' content. During this process, I needed to be aware of important information relevant to the research's aims and objectives which did not fit into the initial themes and had to either adapt existing themes or set up completely new themes. At the same time I also had to delete some of the pre-defined themes since they were not relevant in the interviews. In other cases, I re-grouped or summarised constituent themes. Throughout this process, the initial template was further refined (King, 2004).

This process finalised the template which provided me with an overview of and first interpretive insight into the individuals' experiences, feelings and perceptions. I then moved on to further engage myself with the themes, trying to find similarities as well as contradictions in the consultants' experiences, feelings and efforts to make sense of them.

Although this approach was chosen to ease the first interpretation of the narrative texts it also entailed a number of potential weaknesses. First, there was the risk of starting with too many pre-defined themes which might have either caused me to overlook or prevented me from considering themes introduced and discussed by research participants within the interviews which conflicted with my assumptions based on which the pre-defined themes were set up. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews which made room for research participants to direct the interview conversation to topics which were not part of the interview guide but

important to them (Johnson, 2001) the emergence of new themes was highly likely. At the same time starting with insufficient pre-defined themes might have caused a lack of direction in terms of what to look for in the vast amount of rich data produced in the interviews which might have entailed the risk of getting carried away by topics which were interesting but outside of the scope of this research (King, 2004). Second, unlike in alternative analysis approaches such as grounded theory, limited literature on how to carry out the steps of template analysis is available (King, 2004).

The final result of this first part of the interpretation process was a template which gave me an overview of the themes covered in the interviews but this was overly descriptive and not analytical. With this template at hand I went on to further analyse the texts. In order to enable a deeper analysis and interpretation of the texts in general, and in particular in terms of the language used, the context in which the experiences were encountered and the influence of the individual participant's gender on them, I carried out further steps which are outlined in the next paragraph. These also enabled the inclusion of the research diary and the outcome of the secondary data analysis.

I not only compared the participants' narratives with each other but also with my research diary entries concerning the conduct of the interviews in order to make a connection between what was said in which context and how. This way I hoped to gain a fuller picture of each single interview. By placing the narratives into their specific context I was able to achieve 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 1989). At this stage I also paid special attention at the narrative texts produced in terms of the influence gender had on the individual experiences made as well as the sense-making process and the emotions connected to it.

In the next step, I focussed on the words and expressions used in the interviews to develop further insights into each single interview. I tried to be 'language sensitive' in order to explore why participants used specific language, what this language said about their realities and what they wanted to accomplish (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000).

The participants' interpretations of the organisation were then reinterpreted by me against the analytical framework of this study set up in Chapter Three. Still my main emphasis was not 'the one truth' about what was going on in the organisation but the exploration of the individual subjective experiences, feelings and perceptions of the research participants (Mavin, 2001a) which left room for emerging theory.

Although the steps were taken in the order presented above I often moved back and forwards between them when engaging with the interview accounts.

The steps are summarised in Table 4.5.

After I had selected the most meaningful extracts of the interviews and had interpreted them in the context of the respective account I translated the most important parts of the extracts into English. The translation process is illustrated and reflected upon in Section 4.8.2.

It is important to note that overall, I, the researcher, remained the person with the most power in the relationship between the researcher and the researched during the analysis process (Essers, 2009). I needed to be aware not to privilege my own voice over theirs. I aimed at preventing this by following a reflexive approach which can make the research account transparent to recognise potential privileging of some voices over others (Waring *et al.*, 2004).

Table 4.5 Steps of data analysis

Developed from King (2004), Denzin (1989), Alvesson and Deetz (2000), Geertz (1973)

Steps	Focus and method
<b>Step 1: Set-up of initial template</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-creation of initial themes based on content and design of interview guide</li> <li>• Themes are organised in a hierarchical order</li> </ul>
<b>Step 2: Engaging with the interview transcripts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarisation with interview accounts</li> <li>• Identification of sections relevant for study</li> <li>• Adaptation of initial template by               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Revision of existing themes</li> <li>○ Set-up of new themes</li> <li>○ Deletion of irrelevant themes</li> <li>○ Re-grouping of themes</li> <li>○ Summary of themes</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Outcome: final template</li> </ul>
<b>Step 3: Context-sensitivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on what they said in which context</li> <li>• 'Thick description' (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 1989).</li> </ul>
<b>Step 4: Gender-awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of gender on               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the individual experiences</li> <li>○ sense-making processes</li> <li>○ emotions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Step 5: Language-sensitivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usage of words and expressions in each single account ('language sensitivity')               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ why used by participants</li> <li>○ what does this say about their realities</li> <li>○ what do they want to achieve (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Step 6: Placement of interpretations into analytical framework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinterpretation of accounts in framework of existing and emerging theory</li> <li>• Still no emphasis on 'the one truth' but individual subjective experiences of research participants (Mavin, 2001a)</li> </ul>

Table 4.6 below illustrates the final template including both the master and the constituent themes which provided me with an overview of the themes over all interviews and first insights into the individuals' experiences and perceptions. Chapter Five presents the research extracts and their interpretations by addressing the themes provided by this template.

Table 4.6 Final template

Master themes	Constituent themes
<b>Communities of Practice</b>	Involuntary membership in top-down communities Voluntary membership in bottom-up communities Time-allocation for community work Community work and control Perceptions of Communities of Practice Informal networks
<b>Learning and training activities</b>	Training as investment Informal learning in social relationships Formal learning activities
<b>Knowledge creation</b>	Perceptions of knowledge creation Importance of knowledge creation Hidden knowledge creation Prerequisites for knowledge creation Knowledge creation and power Knowledge creation in 'think tanks' The organisation's competitiveness
<b>Impact of the takeover</b>	The organisational context and structure New colleagues Perceptions of the organisation's management Coping with the takeover
<b>Teamwork</b>	Working with former Monday colleagues Working with 'new' colleagues
<b>Knowledge</b>	Knowledge sharing and acknowledgement Knowledge sharing and trust Knowledge harvesting Resources for knowledge sharing
<b>People Management</b>	No sub-themes
<b>Motivation</b>	Sources of motivation Motivation and unfavourable conditions Loss of motivation The impact of low motivation
<b>Career</b>	Different perceptions of career
<b>Perceptions of gender</b>	No sub-themes

#### 4.6 Ethical considerations

The social nature of this research involves the interaction with and the obtaining of information from individuals (Kvale, 1996). I needed to attend to the potential ethical issues that might have arisen from the study. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and I informed participants that they could terminate their involvement at any time. No consultant invited to participate in the study refused to. The all seemed eager to tell their stories. For this purpose I set up an informed consent which also informed the research participants about the overall purpose of my research. Additionally, I set up a letter containing information about my study purpose as well

as the details of the conduct of the research to inform the management of the organisation and to obtain their consent. The interviews were conducted in locations where no third person could overhear us. After the interview I sent the interview transcripts to the participants for review purposes. All personal data gained (e.g. names of the participants) was anonymised and transcripts were treated confidentially (Kvale, 1996). Further, I incorporated observational data which I gained during my time as a consultant before this research. These observations took place without the consent of the consultants who were part of this observation. Consequently, I put special emphasis on not making this data assignable to the colleagues involved.

I was responsible for protecting the research participants as well as myself (Mauthner *et al.*, 2002). This was of special importance for this research since I had worked with the participants of the study for some years and obtained personal and in-depth information resulting from the trust which had been established between me and the participants during this time. Due to this personal relationship I probably gained information about the research participants no one else in the organisation has. This put me in a powerful position once I re-entered the organisation. Hence, it was my duty to treat this information as strictly confidential and not to abuse my insider knowledge. Since I and my experiences were part of the research process, I had also to consider protecting myself and not to take a place in the research process which might have compromised my return to my former place as an employee of the organisation once the research had been completed.

The main aim of this research was to analyse subjective data in order to contribute original knowledge to the theory base of knowledge creation and the theory base of gender in organisations by providing original insights to knowledge creation processes within a knowledge-intensive organisation. However, in the course of the research I realised that some of my colleagues who participated in the study saw in me someone who could speak up for them in public or at least in front of the organisation's management in order to alert them to the way consultants experience the working conditions. They saw in me a spokesperson or a 'partisan' who would provide the material for challenging the status quo and make use of it in order to do so (Silverman, 2001). However, I did not consider this to be realistic and therefore did not aim at trying to change the situation in the first place. Consequently, it might be that I unconsciously deluded some participants on the purpose of the study. Thus, I commenced communicating my research purposes clearly before the interview after one research participant had made me aware of it.

## **4.7 Establishing trustworthiness through crystallisation**

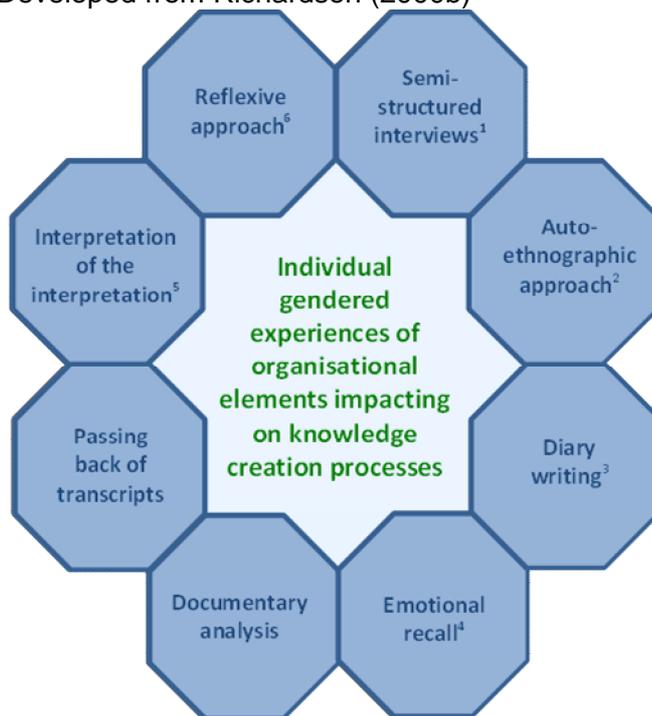
Flick (1998) states that good qualitative research is characterised by the use of a set of procedures that are open-ended and rigorous at the same time and that embrace the complexity of the social setting explored.

### **4.7.1 The idea of crystallisation**

I aimed at living up to Flick's (1998) statement by applying Richardson's (2000b) idea of crystallisation as a lens through which to look at the world. Whereas the concept of triangulation focusses on exploring the world from three sides (Denzin, 1978) the view through the crystal offers us an infinite number of views on the social life under exploration. The crystal exposes an infinite variety of shapes, substances and angles depending on how one holds it up to the light. According to Richardson (2000b) and Janesick (2000) through crystallisation researchers are able to recognise the facets of any given approach to social life. In this research a number of research methods supported the crystallisation process. Semi-structured interviews (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 2000), diary writing (Richardson, 2000b), emotional recalls (Ellis and Bochner, 2000), documentary analysis and the passing back of transcripts and the 'interpretation of the interpretation' (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000) by research participants (Kvale, 2000) added additional shapes to the crystal.

The concept of crystallisation also enabled me to give women the same attention that men have received. I aimed at contributing original knowledge to the theory bases in the area of knowledge creation and gender in organisations by providing original insights to knowledge creation processes within a knowledge-intensive organisation. By including the research participants into the reflexive approach (Janesick, 2000) and presenting different views through the crystal I tried to offer relatively solid illustrations (Watson, 2003) of experiences of knowledge creation processes and original interpretive insights (Cunliffe, 2008) from the data presented. Figure 4.7 below offers an overview of the different shapes of the crystal offered by this research.

Figure 4.7 The crystal  
Developed from Richardson (2000b)



Rubin and Rubin (1995)<sup>1</sup>; Ellis and Bochner (2000)<sup>2</sup>; Richardson (2000b)<sup>3</sup>; Ellis and Bochner (2000)<sup>4</sup>; Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000)<sup>5</sup>; Janesick (2000)<sup>6</sup>

In this research my major concern was not to 'mirror the world' out there (Riessman, 1993) or to find the 'one truth' (Warren and Hackney, 2000; Watson, 2000). Through offering different views through the crystal I aimed at achieving transparency and trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Riessman, 1993) instead. In order to assess the trustworthiness of this research I drew on Lincoln and Guba (1985) and their concept of naturalistic inquiry. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) trustworthiness can be achieved by meeting the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The following sections will assess this research against these criteria.

#### 4.7.2 Credibility

I aimed at establishing the reader's confidence in the credibility of the research process and the research outcomes, the interpretations of the research participants' accounts, by assessing them through informal member checks (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). First, I digitally recorded the interviews and transcribed the interview verbatim to ensure that I was not making any interpretations during the data collection (Patterson, 2011). I then asked all research participants to review and comment upon the transcript of the interview. I also invited two of the research participants to 'interpret my interpretations' (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000). I provided them with an electronic version of the interpretations and asked them to assess the

interpretations in terms of whether they resonated with it. In case they did not I asked them to provide me with their alternative views and interpretations of the account, if they were prepared to offer this. A few weeks after both had received my interpretations I met with each of them in an informal setting to receive their feedback and to discuss it. Lincoln and Guba (1985) support the importance of these member-checks by stating that when the research participants assess their accounts' interpretations as 'adequate representations' of their own realities then this contributes to the research's credibility.

Starting from an early point of the interpretation process onwards I have discussed my research experiences and initial interpretations with a former colleague who was not a participant in this research on a regular basis. He is an outsider to the organisation explored now but has worked as a consultant for Monday as well as for InterConsult. Hence, he was able to 'interpret my interpretations' from an insider position and encouraged me to go back to the interpretation a number of times in order to improve the coherence of my interpretations. However, since he had been an 'insider' of the organisation as well I needed to be aware of maintaining the anonymity of the research participants in our discussions.

I have engaged in peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) in two main ways. The communication with my supervision team throughout the research process provided me with the opportunity to discuss aspects of my research and the research process and presented me with the opportunity to look at aspects of my research from different angles encouraged by my supervisors. Also, I have made presentations about my study in the research community. I have presented at the annual postgraduate research conference, at a summer research school and at a doctoral workshop. I also published a paper on outcomes of this research in relation to Communities of Practice (Pastors, 2006). These occasions have been helpful to receive feedback and to reflect upon my research process. By incorporating this feedback I was able to further enhance the credibility and persuasiveness of my study (Hardy *et al.*, 2001; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

#### **4.7.3 Transferability**

This case study research acknowledges that the social and contextual nature of it makes transferability of its outcomes strictly speaking not possible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). However, readers can decide about the transferability of this study to their context. Transferability is usually determined by readers in relation to the degree to which the study outcomes resonate with their context and experiences

(Ellis and Bochner, 2000). The readers' resonance can be supported by providing 'thick descriptions' (Denzin, 1989) of the stories and narratives produced in the semi-structured interviews.

The purpose of this research is not to develop theoretical generalisations about knowledge creation processes from the interpretation of the interview accounts of the research participants of this study. What it does aim at instead is offering original knowledge to the area of knowledge creation by providing original insights to knowledge creation processes within a knowledge-intensive organisation. I aimed to achieve this by offering relatively concrete illustrations (Watson, 2003) of experiences of knowledge creation processes by the research participants, and interpretive insights (Cunliffe, 2008) from the data presented.

The transferability of the research outcomes can also be assessed by their 'utility' (Watson, 1994) in terms of their influence on management practice and whether they provide a basis on which future research on knowledge creation and its gendered nature can be conducted and generate new insights. I consider the 'utility' of this case study research to be in contributing in-depth insights into experiences of knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive organisation. However, ultimately, the reader needs to decide about the degree of 'utility' of the insights.

#### **4.7.4 Dependability and confirmability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.317) both dependability and confirmability can be understood as an 'inquiry audit' which assesses the 'fairness of representation' of the research. Credibility cannot exist without dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The dependability audit considers the 'process' of the research inquiry by focussing on how choices made over the data collection and the interpretations of these data are documented (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The confirmability audit is concerned with examining the product of the research inquiry in terms of how the interpretation and theorisation can be linked to the original sources (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

This chapter contributes to the 'audit' of this study by providing detailed information about data collection methods applied in this research and justifies their selection. It also offers a detailed account of the interpretation processes employed (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and the reflexive approach taken in this research. Subsequent chapters will add to the 'audit' by illustrating how I arranged the data into themes and how I analysed those themes against existing and emerging literature. The

thesis then concludes by reflecting on the research process and my role in this research.

In order to increase the persuasiveness of this research I passed back my interpretations of the research accounts to research participants which made the research product accessible to others. I also considered alternative interpretations of the interview accounts and supported my theoretical claims with extracts from the research participants' accounts (Riessman, 1993). The link I made between my interpretations and specific events illustrated by the research participants in their accounts increased the confirmability of this study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The actions taken to achieve credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are summarised in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Trustworthiness criteria

Developed from Lincoln and Guba (1985), Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), Ellis and Bochner (2000), Denzin (1989), Riessman (1993)

Trustworthiness criteria	Actions taken
<b>Credibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and passed back to research participants</li> <li>• Informal member-checks with two research participants</li> <li>• Peer debriefing with supervision team</li> <li>• Peer debriefing by presenting my work to the research community</li> <li>• Peer debriefing by the publication of a paper on my research outcomes in relation to Communities of Practice</li> <li>• Debriefing with a former 'insider' of InterConsult</li> </ul>
<b>Transferability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection of the case study research strategy focussing in-depth on individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes</li> <li>• Offering 'thick description' (Denzin, 1989) in Chapter Five</li> <li>• Informal member-checks with research participants</li> </ul>
<b>Dependability/confirmability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering details on data collection method</li> <li>• Offering details on interpretation and theorising processes</li> <li>• Linking interpretations to events illustrated in the research accounts</li> <li>• Supporting theoretical claims by interview extracts</li> <li>• Informal member-checks made the research product available to others</li> <li>• Considering alternative interpretations</li> <li>• Being reflexive on the research process</li> </ul>

The reflexive approach of this research, which is another vital shape of the crystal and can increase the dependability of this study, is introduced in the next section.

#### **4.8 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity considers that the conduct of research and, in particular, the interpretation of findings never takes place without the researcher bringing in herself as a person, her gender and her experiences which often happens unconsciously (Warren and Hackney, 2000; Finlay, 2002). During the research a relationship between the researcher and the research participants emerges where both sides influence each other and, inevitably, the research outcomes - the researcher cannot be distanced or objective (Orr and Bennett, 2009). Reflexivity can contribute to transparency of the research process for instance by exposing and challenging the privileging of the researcher's voice over the research participants' voices (Waring *et al.*, 2004).

Janesick (2000) compares the process of reflexivity with the 'cooling-down portion' of the dance movement. In her view the description of the role of the researcher plays a vital part in the written report of qualitative research. In order to be able to do this the researcher must become aware and reflect on her social, epistemological and physical location in the study (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) and has to sincerely probe her biases at the beginning of the study, during the study and at the end of the study (Janesick, 2000).

By being reflexive and combining this with the crystallisation method I aimed to provide more than 'just another story' (Pels, 2000; Janesick, 2000), something that readers can resonate with (Watson, 1994).

##### **4.8.1 Positional and textual reflexivity**

Macbeth (2001) distinguishes reflexivity into two general parts, positional reflexivity and textual reflexivity. The positional reflexivity leads the researcher to explore her place, biography and self in order to understand how these facts impact on the interpretation process. The textual reflexivity leads the researcher to explore and disrupt the textual representation.

In accordance with this approach, positional reflexivity was carried out on two levels in this research. First of all, I had to be reflexive about the research process itself, about the way I interacted with interview partners and interpreted my findings. On a

second level and in line with the autoethnographic approach I also reflected on my own experiences and me as self (Gergen and Gergen, 2000; Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

As an autoethnographer I was not only the researcher but also the researched. Therefore, positional reflexivity played a crucial role in the research process. To enable me to reflect on my subjective experiences and me as self, I not only kept a research diary, but I also asked myself the same questions I asked the participants in the interviews which made me reflect on my own biography and physical location in this research.

In order to ensure textual reflexivity with regard to the research process I undertook a number of actions. I taped all interviews and took notes during the interviews. Immediately after the interview I wrote the notes down in order not to forget any crucial details. The notes mainly dealt with observations I made during the interviews in relation to the interaction between me and the interview partner and the body language of the interview partner. I also wrote down my subjective feelings and emotions I experienced during the interview process. As soon as possible after the interviews I wrote the transcripts which I then passed back to the interview partners to give them the opportunity to correct and reflect on what they had said.

A further crucial aspect of the textual reflexivity has been presented by my insider position in this research. Since I was close to the topic explored in this research and had developed a strong standpoint on the issues discussed in the interviews I had to pay special attention to avoiding 'narcissistic reflexivity' (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010) which entails the interpretation of my opinion and experiences into what the participants said.

However, this was only possible in relation to the interpretation happening on a conscious level. The most difficult part in this regard was to include and interpret my 'interview account' in this research since I was only able to a limited degree to step back from and carry out an interpretation of it. In order to provide a further external source of reflexivity and therefore enhance the views through the crystal, I invited two of the interview participants to offer a 'third opinion' on my interpretations by reading and reflecting on my interpretations and discussing their assessment with me. In order to address their reflections and 'interpretations of my interpretations' (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000). I intended to go back to the accounts as well as to

my interpretations of them to reconsider these and to reflect on the coherence of my interpretation.

Chapter Seven further illustrates my reflexive thoughts on this process.

#### **4.8.2 Reflexivity on the translation process**

In terms of the textual reflexivity the translation of the German interview accounts has been essential.

The interviews were conducted in German since for 14 of the 15 research participants German was their native language. However, all of them are fluent in English due to their educational and working background. Nevertheless, I decided against conducting the interviews in English for a number of reasons: I wanted to prevent a further alienation of the interview situation, which was already difficult for them as well as for me since we knew each other quite well already before the research, which could have been created by using a foreign language while sharing the same native language. I also did not want to restrain them in expressing their views and telling their stories by imposing on them the use of the foreign language.

This decision had a number of consequences in relation to translation and interpretation of the accounts from these interviews. I decided against 'giving the data out of hand' to a professional translator or using a computer package to do the translation. To maintain my intersubjective epistemology throughout the entire research I translated the interviews by myself despite the fact that I am not a trained translator. I read some literature on translation in order to be aware of the main issues and pitfalls.

During the interpretation process I engaged with the German transcripts in order to avoid an 'unconscious interpretation' taking place during the translation process which would have distorted my analysis. As discussed more in detail in the following paragraph translation is never objective and without interpretation by the translator (Albrecht, 1973). If I had chosen the translated version of the transcripts as the basis for my analysis these data would no longer have been raw data from the interviews but data diluted by my interpretation during the translation process. The 'conscious interpretation' allowed me to look at the raw data which helped me to stay as close as possible to the participants' accounts. After I had identified the most crucial extracts of the interviews and had interpreted them in the context of the respective account I translated the most important parts into English.

However, translation never happens without interpretation since the production of a version equivalent to the original text in every detail is impossible. Different words, grammar and sentence structures only present the surface of translation. More complex and more deeply anchored in each language are culture and the value system based in the respective culture (Albrecht, 1973). Consequently, I not only had to remove specifically foreign elements from the German text, but I also had to put the transcripts into the specific English tone, which proved to be very difficult (Kelly, 1994), especially since I am not a native speaker and could not leave my German identity behind me for this translation (Albrecht, 1993; Kelly, 1994). At this point where word by word translations were not possible my personal understanding and interpretation of what the interview partner said became important and an objective translation impossible. Here translation leaves plenty of scope for ambiguity, obscurity and blurred boundaries (Nida, 1996). Cultural differences might have got lost in translation (Rabassa, 1996). I aimed to translate the participants' accounts as authentically as possible and at the same time to transfer their accounts and the meanings connected to them in a way which English speaking readers would understand. But ultimately these accounts will remain a foreign text to the reader, but faithful to the German research participants (Bassnett, 1998).

Nevertheless, I presented the voices of the participants as authentically as possible to enable a crystallisation process in which the readers not only have access to my interpretation of the findings but also to the sources of my findings. Still power over the research findings remains with me as the researcher since I decided which parts of the interviews are crucial for this research and left out what others probably would have regarded as crucial (Essers, 2009).

A complete interview transcript in English can be found in Appendix 4.

#### **4.9 Implications of methodological decisions for this research**

The overall aim of this research was to understand human subjectivity, not only the subjectivity of others but also my own. I did not aim to present a detached objective assessment of the research topic but to provide readers the opportunity to feel as if they had actually lived through the experiences described themselves (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992). Although the epistemological and methodological choices taken were the most feasible to reach my research aims and objectives they also brought with them a number of implications and limitations which are illustrated in this section.

The autoethnographic approach presented a number of risks. Due to my personal involvement in the organisation explored I had to be careful throughout the entire research process not to read aspects into the analysis of the findings which were in fact my experiences and the way I made sense out of them (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010). Also I needed to pay attention not to miss out other important aspects to which I was blind since I was a part of this organisation and had internalised certain contextual aspects for example (Hayano, 1979; Sparkes, 2002). By asking two participants to 'interpret my interpretations' (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000) and considering their feedback I tried to minimise these risks. My personal relationship to the research participants brought with it the advantage that they were probably more open to me than to a stranger (Watson, 2011). However, there was also the danger that the already existing relationship between me and each interview participant had an influence on the accounts the interview participants gave. In order to account for this risk I not only tried to capture in my research diary each interview situation but also any special occurrences during the interview. I also reflected upon my relationship to each interview participant and the potential influence this might have had on the interview process and give illustration in Chapter Seven. These measures added just another shape one can see through the crystal (Richardson, 2000b).

A potential limitation of the case study design was presented by the researcher being the primary 'instrument' of data collection and interpretation. My sensitivity to the topic as well as my integrity to the research participants essentially impacted on both aspects (Merriam, 2009). Another potential risk was that I as the researcher could have selected from among the available interview accounts anything I wished to support my desired outcome of this research (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). I addressed these potential implications of my methodology by engaging in reflexivity on the research process and my role in this research and my considering the 'interpretation of my interpretation' of the two research participants.

In order to be able to produce 'thick description' (Denzin, 1989) I chose to carry out semi-structured interviews. Each account produced in these interviews is unique to some degree depending on whether the interview guide I set up was followed or not which was dependent on the direction the interview participant wanted it to go. Moreover, the situated nature of the interviews and the personal relationship between me and the interview participants further influenced the interviews which again minimised if not even completely ruled out the external validity of this research project.

#### **4.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter has introduced and justified my epistemological and ontological choices which are grounded in intersubjectivism. It also put into context social constructionism which provided the opportunity to explore the consultants' individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes and to incorporate my own subjective experiences as the researcher and the researched. The concept of a gender lens has been introduced which enabled the gendered nature of the individual experiences of knowledge creation processes to be explored. The chapter has introduced the case study research and the methods applied and discussed how the methods were derived from the epistemological and methodological choices made. Further, the chapter outlined the autoethnographic approach which allowed this research to be a highly personal project including not only my reflexivity on the research process but also my experiences as a consultant and the reflections I made on these as a source of primary data. It also introduced and discussed the framework of analysis employed to interpret the research participants' accounts. The concerns and steps taken to protect the research participants as well as me the researcher were shared. Further, criteria for establishing trustworthiness were introduced and related to the crystallisation approach followed before the reflexive approach of this research was discussed. The chapter concluded with considering the implications of the methodological choices for this study.

Overall, this methodology chapter provides the framework for the research and informs the remaining chapters. The findings of the study are presented in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5 Individual Gendered Experiences of Knowledge Creation Processes

### 5 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the research methods chosen to gather data on individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, briefly introduced the research participant selection process and also discussed the analysis steps taken to interpret the research participants' accounts. This chapter introduces the organisation under exploration and the research participants before it provides details about the research participants' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes.

The chapter commences with introducing the reader to the organisation under exploration. After providing an overview of relevant recent developments of the organisation and the organisation's values and their strategy the chapter moves on to the organisation's approach to consultancy and the role of consultants. After providing an overview of the organisation's view on women the chapter presents the approaches to learning activities, knowledge management and knowledge creation pursued by the organisation. Next, the chapter introduces the research participants and reminds the reader of the analytical framework developed and applied to explore the participants' experiences. The chapter then moves on to the meso-level stage of analysis of this study which provides details about and interpretations of the research participants' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes within the organisation. This interpretation of the consultants' interview accounts supports answering the sub-questions of this research *What organisational elements impact on knowledge creation processes?* and *How do these organisational elements impact on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes?*. This first level of interpretation ends by considering the implications that the illustrations and interpretations of the research participants' accounts have for this study.

At the macro-level stage of analysis of this study the consultants' experiences are then further explored through a gender lens in order to make explicit the gendered nature of these experiences. Next, the gender lens focusses on the language the research participants used in the interview accounts. This second level of interpretation of both the individual gendered experiences of the consultants and the language supports answering the sub-question of this research *Are individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes gendered?*. Following the autoethnographic approach of this research this chapter

will also draw on my experiences (Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2004) as a consultant in the organisation explored. The chapter concludes by discussing the implications of the illustrations and interpretations of both the meso- and the macro stage of analysis of the consultants' experiences for this research.

Thus, this chapter contributes to the fourth and fifth research objectives

- *to provide, through interpretations of the consultants' accounts of their experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, theoretical insights into knowledge creation;*
- *to provide, through a gender lens interpretation of the consultants' accounts of their experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, theoretical insights into the gendered nature of knowledge creation.*

## **5.1 The organisation under exploration**

### **5.1.1 Introducing the organisation**

InterIT is an IT hardware and software company with approximately 400,000 employees in 170 countries (company intranet, 16.04.2011). In 2002 InterIT acquired an international consultancy firm, referred to as Monday. Following accounting scandals in the United States the former owner decided to untangle their consulting and auditing businesses. Originally, it was planned to transform the consultancy business into an independent entity. However, these plans were revised and in October 2002 the consultancy unit was sold to InterIT (company intranet, 30.05.2006).

With this transaction InterIT significantly extended its portfolio in order to be able to offer their clients not only technology for improved business performance but also consulting services for solving clients' business issues. The combination created the new business unit, InterConsult, comprising more than 30,000 employees of InterIT and 30,000 consulting professionals from the former consultancy. Today, InterConsult is a management consultancy with 80,000 consultants offering consulting services in areas such as Strategy and Transformation, Supply Chain Management, Finance Management, Client Relationship Management, HR Management and Application Management. InterConsult's revenue makes up to 50% of InterIT's overall revenue (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

### 5.1.2 Values of the organisation

InterIT's values, which are supposed to shape what all employees do and every choice which is made on behalf of the organisation, are:

- *Dedication to client's success;*
- *Continuous innovativeness;*
- *Trust and personal responsibility.*

(company intranet, 16.04.2011)

Of special importance for this research is the second value. In detail, this value promotes employees as being "*forward thinkers*" who "*love grand challenges, as well as everyday improvements*". No matter what the problem is and in which context it occurs every employee should "*tackle it creatively – to be an innovator*". In everything they do employees are asked to "*take informed risks and champion new (sometimes unpopular) ideas*" (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

### 5.1.3 The consultant

According to InterConsult's understanding of the main role of their consultants they support clients to realise business benefits by helping them make faster and smarter decisions; reduce risks; leverage core competencies; learn about competencies and increase return on investment. In order to be able to achieve this consultants are required to "*conduct research, data collection, analytics and synthesis to prepare, present and deliver **innovative recommendations** and solutions to clients*" and to "***create and use intellectual capital to solve diverse business issues in innovative ways***" (company intranet, 16.04.2011, emphasis added by the author).

In order to be able to fulfil these responsibilities successfully, consultants are required by the organisation to demonstrate the following capabilities and characteristics (company intranet, 16.04.2011, emphasis added by the author):

- *Subject matter expertise;*
- *Enabling and driving change;*
- ***Creativity and innovation;***
- *Strategic focus;*
- *Leadership.*

In relation to 'creativity and innovation' (company intranet, 16.04.2011) consultants are required to demonstrate 'intellectual curiosity' and the ability to think 'outside the

box' in order to be able to recommend new and innovative solutions and approaches to clients (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

#### **5.1.4 The consultant's career development**

In order to grow a career within InterConsult consultants are required to build up depth and breadth of experience, skills and capabilities. There are a number of tools to plan and monitor this development which is deemed especially important since the project nature of the consultancy business means very often consultants do not work alongside their managers. These career tools enable a career plan, document the career development and the consultant's performance on client and internal projects. All tools are interlinked and build the foundation for career advancement and pay rises (company intranet, 16.04.2011). The organisation's management states that significant value is placed on the ongoing development of their employees since employees who can develop their full potential are more engaged, motivated, knowledgeable, and committed to the success of the company (company intranet, 16.04.2011). However, generally, turnover rates in the consulting industry are higher than in other industries.

#### **5.1.5 Women within the organisation**

InterIT bases its approach to gender on meritocracy on the one hand and on the notion of difference on the other which is illustrated by the two quotes below:

*"Men and women will do the same kind of work for equal pay. They will have the same treatment, the same responsibility and the same opportunities for advancement."* (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

*"InterIT recognises that women bring different skills and strengths to the work environment which complement those offered by men. The result is strong teamwork."* (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

Today the German division claims that management acknowledges in their hiring policy that female graduates have better degrees, that highly-skilled resources are rare and therefore the organisation needs to attract more women. According to company documents in Germany, within InterIT 25% of all employees are women; about 14% of all managers are female and women make up 12% of the executives (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

### **5.1.6 The organisation's approach to learning activities**

In their internal documents the organisation's management emphasises that in today's competitive global market the skills and expertise of their employees are crucial in order to make the organisation a leader in the market (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

InterIT claims that *"eighty per cent of what an employee does on the job is learned on the job"* (company intranet, 16.04.2011). As a consequence, managers are asked to shift their focus from formal classes to *"work-enabled activities, such as experiential, on-the-job learning"* (company intranet, 16.04.2011) when considering how to develop their employees. By organising job shadowing or job rotation programs within or across business units as well as internship-like opportunities at client organisations managers are expected to keep their employees challenged and to ensure continuous learning (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

However, the organisation also offers a vast amount of classroom training and e-learning. A number of different online tools such as a corporate university are available to provide various services to employees. On a regular basis, these tools for example provide an overview of class-room training and e-learning courses which support the development of the individual's skills and capabilities. Overall, these tools are supposed to enable the employee to plan, gain and track his/her career development (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

In order to attend class-room training, consultants need their manager's approval which is usually granted in cases where the development of this particular skill is based on a business need and the project engagement of the consultant leaves enough flexibility for the consultant to drop out for the duration of the training course. Further, budget for the course fees must be available.

### **5.1.7 The organisation's approach to knowledge management and knowledge creation**

The organisation claims to have recognised the importance of its employees' knowledge and therefore to place strong emphasis on knowledge management activities. Most knowledge management activities are carried out in electronic 'team rooms' where project knowledge can be stored and accessed. Consultants take on the role of the knowledge management officer and become responsible for collecting, storing, organising and disseminating the content of the team room (company intranet, 16.04.2011). In these activities the consultancy business unit in

Germany is supported by its Knowledge Management Team. Overall, the Knowledge Management Team is responsible for enabling and supporting the exchange and reuse of knowledge within the business unit and for ensuring high quality of the content of knowledge databases (company intranet, 16.04.2011). However, Communities of Practice are regarded as the most crucial tool to exchange and reuse knowledge and, most importantly, to build or create new knowledge. At InterConsult a Community of Practice is understood as

*cross-organization network of highly skilled subject matter experts focused on the design and implementation of leading edge methods and solutions. A Community of Practice is established in order to build and exchange knowledge of a specific area of technology, develop members' capabilities and provide leading edge thinking. A Community of Practice is a powerful means for InterConsult practitioners across the world and across lines of business to develop their capabilities as well as build and exchange knowledge (company intranet; 16.04.2011).*

A Community of Practice is seen as an informal and self-organising group of individuals from different business units who share a common identity and interest around a specific business topic. These Communities of Practice are sponsored by the business which recognises the value to members and to the organisation. Participation in a Community of Practice should take place repeatedly and should be beneficial to all participants. According to the organisation's intranet participation in a Community of Practice is voluntary (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

The organisation expects Communities of Practice to deliver value in terms of providing, supporting and promoting activities, values and behaviours that are essential to the business such as encouraging collaboration and the development and reuse of intellectual capital to enable rapid deployment and delivery of services to clients. Communities of Practice locate and deploy expertise and support the leveraging of knowledge. Communities of Practice are also expected to advise the business on early signs of change in the particular capability domain and to develop knowledge on demand to sustain the organisation's competitive advantage at the same time (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

Members benefit in various ways. They develop expertise, build and redefine skill competency and capability as well as having access to the most current knowledge in the Community of Practice capability domain. They also gain exposure through participation as subject matter experts (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

Having introduced the case study organisation the next section introduces the research participants and the interpretation process.

## **5.2 Interview participants and interpretations**

### **5.2.1 The interview participants**

The interview participant selection process has been documented in Chapter Four. Since the personal relationship between the interview participants and me, their colleague and researcher at the same time, impacted on the interview situation (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Warren, 2001), Table 5.1 below offers not only a 'pen portrait' of the research participants but also a brief description of the relationship between them and me, the researcher, in order to further set-up the context of this research.

Table 5.1 'Pen-portraits' of research participants

Research participant (age)	Pen-portrait
<b>Helen (40)</b>	Helen is a Senior Managing Consultant. She has a Business Administration background and has been with the organisation for eight years. She mainly works in the area of Strategy and Transformation as a Change Manager. My relationship with Helen has evolved over a number of years during which we have worked closely together on the same project and is characterised by trust and mutual understanding.
<b>John (35)</b>	John is a Managing Consultant. He graduated from Industrial Engineering and worked in different positions in Marketing before. He has been with the organisation for seven years. He is a Strategy and Transformation Change Manager. We have not worked together closely but know each other well due to being part of the same social network of (former) colleagues.
<b>Melanie (27)</b>	Melanie is a Consultant who has been with the organisation for two years. She joined the organisation immediately after she had graduated from Industrial Engineering. Melanie is the only consultant who joined the organisation after the takeover. She works in Supply Chain Management. We worked together very closely on a project away from our home base and therefore spent much time outside of work with each during which we developed a trustful and open relationship.
<b>Simone (31)</b>	Simone is a Senior Consultant with a Business Administration background. She was with the organisation for seven years during which she mainly worked in the areas of Production, Plant Maintenance and Quality Management. She handed in her notice one day before the interview took place. We have not worked together but are part of the same social network of (former) colleagues.
<b>Sandra (31)</b>	Sandra is a Consultant with a Business Administration background. She has been with the organisation for five years. She works in the area of Process Optimisation. Sandra and I do not share a long history of joint project work but met at a client site and were acquainted through common colleagues.
<b>Tom (32)</b>	Tom is a Consultant with a Business Administration background who has been with the organisation for six years. He is a SAP Finance consultant and we met at a client's site five years ago and have worked together for a couple of years on a number of projects since then.
<b>Claire (31)</b>	Claire is a Senior Consultant with a Business Administration Background. She has been with the organisation for six years and is a SAP Finance consultant. Claire and I worked together on one project a few years ago. Although we are only in loose contact we resonate very well with each other.
<b>Ian (35)</b>	Ian is a Managing Consultant with an Industrial Engineering background who has been with the organisation for six years. He is a SAP Supply Chain Management consultant with whom I have worked together for a couple of years. We get along very well on an informal basis.

<b>Will (35)</b>	Will is a Senior Managing Consultant who has an Industrial Engineering background and who had left the organisation to be self-employed a few years ago before he returned to the organisation. Overall, he has been with the organisation for nine years. He is a Process consultant for Logistics and Procurement. He is someone I have known from a number of projects and who I turn to for advice.
<b>Rebecca (36)</b>	Rebecca is a Senior Managing Consultant who has been with the organisation for seven years. She graduated from Applied Linguistics and Business Administration and is a Strategy & Transformation Change Manager. We not only share a long project history at the same client site where we worked together very closely but we also socialise outside of work. She is also someone I turn to for advice.
<b>Marc (32)</b>	Marc is a Senior Consultant with an Industrial Engineering background who has been with the organisation for six years. He has mainly worked for oil and utility companies in the Retail and Finance area. He has been my team lead on a number of projects. Outside of work we are part of the same social network of (former) colleagues.
<b>Liz (40)</b>	Liz is a Senior Consultant who graduated from Chemistry and has been with the organisation for four years. She is a SAP Finance consultant I have worked with on a number of projects. Our relationship is trustful and open.
<b>Steve (29)</b>	Steve is a Consultant with a Business Administration background who has been with the organisation for four years. He is a Strategy and Transformation Consultant. We have worked at the same client site for some years.
<b>Ben (33)</b>	Ben is a Senior Consultant who has been with the organisation for four years. He has an Industrial Engineering background and does not work at the client site but supports a Global Relationship Partner. We know each other from the InterConsult office and socialise outside of work.
<b>Keith (28)</b>	Keith is a Senior Consultant with a Business Administration background who has been with the organisation for four years. He is a Process consultant who mainly works in Supply Chain Management for utility and oil customers. We have worked together very closely for a couple of years during which we have developed a trustful relationship.
<b>Katja (35)</b>	Katja is a Managing Consultant with a Business Administration background who has been with the organisation for nine years. She has is a Strategy and Transformation Change Manager. Katja is the researcher and the researched of this study.
	<b>All interview participants have international work experience.</b>

### 5.2.2 Presentation of research participants and extracts from their accounts

Only a selection of biographical data is presented in order to ensure the anonymity of the research participants. The two research participants I carried out member checking with stated that they did not recognise any of their colleagues based on the pen portraits provided. Further, pseudonyms are used for the interview participants in order to enable connections between different extracts from the same research

participants and their biographical data. In the presentation of the extracts (...) indicates missing text. In some cases this part of the text was not substantial to the interpretation whereas in other cases this part of the text would have risked the anonymity of the research participant. The interview extracts are presented by separating and indenting them from the main body of the text.

In line with the autoethnographic approach of this research the following sections also include my interview account, which is referred to as Katja, and draw on extracts of it for interpretation. In order not to privilege my voice, the style of presentation of the extracts from my interview account is in line with the presentation of the other voices.

### **5.2.3 Analytical framework**

The analytical framework of this thesis (Figure 5.2) emerged from the literature review of the theory bases, in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, on knowing and learning and on gender in organisations. The fusion of knowing and learning and gender in organisations through a gender lens provides the overall focus of this study on *individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of management consultants in an international management consultancy*.

The theory base on knowing and learning emerged from the literature review of the concepts of knowledge, learning and knowledge creation as well as of knowledge-intensive firms and their employees, knowledge workers, in Chapter Two. The theory base on gender in organisations emerged from the literature review of the concepts of patriarchy, gender, organisations as gendered place as well as of women in knowledge-intensive organisations and the gendered nature of knowledge creation in Chapter Three. In particular, the theory base on gender in organisations adds the concept of patriarchy and the concept of gendered knowledge creation to the research context. Knowledge-intensive firms in general and the management consultancy explored in this research are regarded as patriarchal places which set up and reinforce the gender binary divide. Knowledge creation is regarded as gendered because social interaction plays a major role in knowing and learning processes and that social interaction is informed by gender (Durbin, 2011; Gherardi, 1999; Acker, 1990).

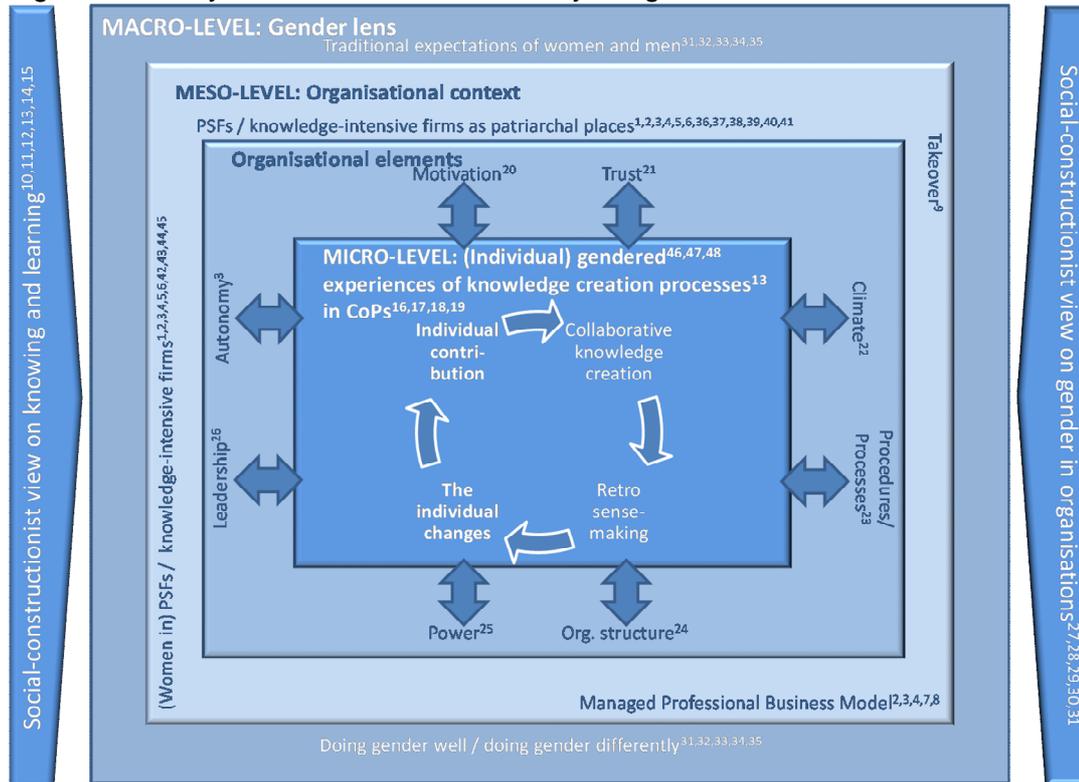
The fusion of the two theory bases provides the analytical framework which is outlined below (Figure 5.2). The purpose of this analytical framework is to explore

how knowing and learning processes, and therefore knowledge creation, and gender are interlinked and how research participants experienced them within the context of a patriarchal knowledge-intensive organisation. This analytical framework offers the focus for both stages of the analysis, the meso- and the macro-level.

At the meso-level stage of the analysis the individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of management consultants in an international management consultancy are explored to answer the research sub-questions *What organisational elements impact on knowledge creation processes?* and *How do these organisational elements impact on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes?* in Section 5.3.

The exploration of the gendered nature of the individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in Section 5.4 presents the macro-level stage of the analysis. Hence, a gender lens set up by the analytical framework is suitable to answer the overall research question *What are individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of management consultants in an international management consultancy?*

Figure 5.2 Analytical framework of this study – a gender lens



Von Nordenflycht (2007)<sup>1</sup>; Morris and Empson (1998)<sup>2</sup>; Starbuck (1992)<sup>3</sup>; Loewendahl (2005)<sup>4</sup>; Alvesson (2004)<sup>5</sup>; Ehin (2008)<sup>6</sup>; Cooper *et al.* (1996)<sup>7</sup>; Brivot (2011)<sup>8</sup>; Empson (2011)<sup>9</sup>; Chiva and Alegre (2005)<sup>10</sup>; Gherardi (1999)<sup>11</sup>; Blackler (1995)<sup>12</sup>; Jakubik (2011)<sup>13</sup>; Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2000)<sup>14</sup>; Cunliffe (2008)<sup>15</sup>; Lave and Wenger (1991)<sup>16</sup>; Wenger and Snyder (2000)<sup>17</sup>; Brown and Duguid (1991)<sup>18</sup>; Oster (2010)<sup>19</sup>; Szulanski (1996)<sup>20</sup>; Pfeffer and Sutton (2000)<sup>21</sup>; Lucas (2000)<sup>22</sup>; Popper and Lipshitz (2000)<sup>23</sup>; Ekvall (1996)<sup>24</sup>; Foucault (1980)<sup>25</sup>; Taminiau *et al.* (2009)<sup>26</sup>; Butler (1990)<sup>27</sup>; Billing and Alvesson (2000)<sup>28</sup>; Acker (1992)<sup>29</sup>; Nicolson (1996)<sup>30</sup>; Gherardi (1994)<sup>31</sup>; West and Zimmermann (1987)<sup>32</sup>; Gherardi and Poggio (2001)<sup>33</sup>; Kelan (2010)<sup>34</sup>; Mavin and Grandy (2011)<sup>35</sup>; Walby (1989)<sup>36</sup>; Walby (1990)<sup>37</sup>; de Beauvoir (1953)<sup>38</sup>; Maddock (1999)<sup>39</sup>; Jonnergard *et al.* (2010)<sup>40</sup>; Eagly and Carli (2007)<sup>41</sup>; Marshall (1984)<sup>42</sup>; Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008)<sup>43</sup>; Kumra (2010a)<sup>44</sup>; Rudolph (2004)<sup>45</sup>; Styhre *et al.* (2001)<sup>46</sup>; Connelly and Kelloway (2003)<sup>47</sup>; Durbin (2011)<sup>48</sup>

The research participants' extracts and their interpretations are presented utilising the analytical framework whilst addressing the themes identified in the template analysis process (Table 5.3). Table 5.3 provides an overview of the sections in which the individual constituent themes are explored.

Table 5.3 Final themes

Master themes	Constituent themes	Reflected in
<b>Communities of Practice</b>	Involuntary membership in top-down communities Voluntary membership in bottom-up communities Time-allocation for community work Community work and control Perceptions of Communities of Practice Informal networks	5.3.1 5.3.1 5.3.1 5.3.1 5.3.1 5.3.1
<b>Learning and training activities</b>	Training as investment Informal learning in social relationships Formal learning activities	5.3.2 5.3.2 5.3.2
<b>Knowledge creation</b>	Perceptions of knowledge creation Importance of knowledge creation Hidden knowledge creation Prerequisites for knowledge creation Knowledge creation and power Knowledge creation in 'think tanks' The organisation's competitiveness	5.3.2/5.4.3 5.3.2 5.3.1/5.4.3 5.3.8/5.4.3 5.3.4 5.3.2 5.3.2
<b>Impact of the takeover</b>	The organisational context and structure New colleagues Perceptions of the organisation's management Coping with the takeover	5.3.3 5.3.5 5.3.7 5.3.4
<b>Teamwork</b>	Working with former Monday colleagues Working with 'new' colleagues	5.3.5/5.4.4 5.3.5/5.4.4
<b>Knowledge</b>	Knowledge sharing and acknowledgement  Knowledge sharing and trust Knowledge harvesting Resources for knowledge sharing	5.3.10/5.4.3/ 5.4.6 5.3.6/5.4.3 5.3.9 5.3.10
<b>People Management</b>	No sub-themes	5.3.7
<b>Motivation</b>	Sources of motivation Motivation and unfavourable conditions Loss of motivation The impact of low motivation	5.3.9/5.4.5 5.3.9/5.4.5 5.3.9/5.4.5 5.3.9/5.4.5
<b>Career</b>	Different perceptions of career	5.3.10/5.4.6
<b>Perceptions of gender</b>	No sub-themes	5.4.2

### 5.3 Consultants' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes

In line with the analytical framework and the interview themes, the individual experiences within the context of Communities of Practice, in which knowledge creation is understood to take place (Jakubik, 2011), are presented and interpreted first. The participants' statements regarding their individual perceptions and experiences of learning and knowing activities, and inherent to it the creation of knowledge, within the organisational context are then illustrated. The chapter then

moves on to present and interpret the individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes more in detail. The organisational elements are understood as being interconnected and therefore it is not possible to illustrate their impact on the experiences of the research participants separated from each other at all times. The organisational elements are regarded as being embedded in and inseparable from the organisational context. Hence, this context which is informed by the professional service orientation as well as the knowledge-intensive nature and the turn to a Managed Professional Business is considered when exploring and interpreting the impact of the organisational elements on the individual experiences. The takeover is also considered in the interpretation process. Although the former Monday consultants had been with InterConsult for about three years at the time of the interviews they still considered InterConsult to be in a transition phase. In their accounts the consultants often connected their experiences of knowledge creation processes to the takeover, which therefore presents a significant context to their experiences, and how they perceived the 'new' organisational environment.

### **5.3.1 Communities of Practice**

To guarantee the exchange of knowledge and creation of new knowledge the organisation aimed at creating and sustaining "*cross-organisation*" communities or networks in which employees from different client sectors within InterConsult came together (company intranet, 16.04.2011). In line with Brown and Duguid (1991) the organisation regarded Communities of Practice, also called 'Knowledge Networks', as the most crucial tools for the sharing as well as the building of knowledge.

#### ***Involuntary membership in top-down communities***

Some consultants reported that they were enrolled for top-down created communities by their managers; because management was convinced that membership in a particular community would be beneficial for the consultants' as well as the organisation's development. Even though these consultants wanted to develop in a different direction they were enrolled for top-down communities since their interests were either not what the market was asking for or there were already enough consultants working in this specific area. As a result of being assigned to a community **Tom** withdrew by not being actively involved in the community work.

*"We are all assigned to a Community of Practice but I am absolutely not active."*

Some consultants were assigned to communities or knowledge networks without being informed about it. These assignments were usually carried out by management which resulted in members often being assigned to topics in which they were not experts which diminished the benefit to the individual and other community members.

*“Sometimes you get questions regarding Supply Chain via e-mail sent by a Supply Chain network, I don’t know how I got on the distribution lists. The content of these questions is often so far away from what you are doing right now that you are probably looking at it briefly but you cannot do anything with it really.” (Simone)*

According to Lesser and Storck (2001) membership in communities should mostly be voluntary and topics should develop in relation to the interest and knowledge of its members. The way the organisation forced consultants to become members of communities appeared to be hampering the ‘natural’ interest in topics and the development of consultants. In line with Fontaine (2001) the consultants’ accounts suggest that the organisation diminished successful outcomes of communities when allocating employees to communities since members did not develop ownership of the topics but tended to experience the community involvement as additional workload.

Authenticity of management further decreased since the company documents stated that membership in communities was voluntary (company intranet, 16.04.2011). This resulted in a further diminishing of the trust the consultants had in their management (Dovey, 2009) and less motivation to contribute to knowledge creation activities.

Members were only prepared to contribute, if at all, if they were able to gain something from their participation, either new knowledge or a reputation as a subject matter expert. Since the consultants were not experiencing passion or enthusiasm for the community topic it was a prerequisite for their participation that they would be externally rewarded for it (Saint-Onge and Wallace, 2003). Without being rewarded for their contribution, they felt exploited (Lucas, 2000).

**Liz** for example felt that her contribution would be exploited without her being able to gain any benefit from it.

*“Someone told me that I am a member of a community, but I don’t even know which one it is. I am certainly not attending any meetings or conference calls in the current situation. That would mean even more hours*

*on top I am not getting paid for. And I can't see the benefit of it. This is only another tool to tap knowledge from employees to bring it back into the market without acknowledging what the individual has contributed."*

Consultants' experience was that the amount of resources allocated to communities by the organisation were dependent on whether they were introduced top-down or emerged from a common interest in a topic from a group of employees. Top-down created communities were regarded as more important by the organisation since the topics they dealt with were perceived by the organisation as positively influencing profits and fitting into the overall business strategy (Brown and Duguid, 1991).

### ***Voluntary membership in bottom-up communities***

There were also topics like a Change Management Tool for instance in which employees were interested but which were not directly linked to the organisation's business strategy. Bottom-up communities emerged from informal networks of consultants who were interested in topics like this when more and more colleagues joined these networks (Fontaine, 2001). **Katja's** experience was that members of these communities were often more committed to the community work and motivated to invest time and effort independently of whether this positively impacted on their career or not.

*"I feel that most of the German colleagues who are voluntary members in a Community of Practice do this because they are genuinely interested in the topic and they feel valued and not in order to promote their career."*

This is supported by findings of Iaquinto *et al.* (2011) that communities which emerged bottom-up were likely to be much more effective than top-down communities due to their members' genuine interest in the topic and passion for it. Potentially, the organisation had a critical view of informal bottom-up communities since they were not able to control their outcomes and ensure that knowledge built there was made available throughout the organisation. Also, they might have sought to prevent consultants spending their time on community work which they could otherwise have dedicated to clients (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000).

### ***Time allocation for community work***

Community members who were prepared to contribute to a community by setting up a database or a paper from which colleagues 'outside' the community would have benefited were often not allocated any time to actually work on this despite the importance the organisation assigned to Communities of Practice. **Rebecca** reported

*“For two years now our project sponsor has tried to get consent from the management to get the core community members away from our projects for a few days in which we could come together and work on a best practice document which we would like to make available to colleagues outside the community. No chance. It seems no one is interested in it although we would all benefit from it.”*

The consultants believed that the organisation was expecting them to work on topics outside their regular working hours which was a sensitive issue due to the high workload consultants were already facing due to their project work. Being an active member of a community from the consultants' point of view implicated even more workload. At Monday consultants belonging to communities had been compensated through career opportunities, pay increases and bonuses but at InterConsult that was no longer the case. Hence, many consultants seemed no longer prepared to spend their weekends on activities such as community work. Some expressed their concern that neither their experience nor their creative ideas were anyway appreciated in the organisation. As a result, some had given up and refused to put any more effort into 'forced' communities.

### ***Community work and control***

Consultants experienced that their work in communities was controlled by the organisation by introducing strict communication plans, community roles and responsibilities as well as standard virtual team rooms and platforms the communities had to stick to. During the interviews some consultants expressed that they had appreciated the provision of tools and clear roles and responsibilities in the past, especially when the majority of community members, mostly the new colleagues from InterIT, were relatively new to the concept of communities. However, they also formulated their concern by raising the point that probably those given frameworks were not able to respond to individual needs of communities and may even hamper the community members in their creative thinking right from the launch of a new community. Some consultants stated that they were not highly motivated to maintain those tools or take over community roles which had been forced onto the community and individual members. According to **Keith** the main issue seemed to be that consultants did not establish any form of ownership and were already beyond their capacity due to their project assignments.

*“Something that doesn't work very well within the oil community is the harvesting of knowledge and the maintaining of knowledge databases. There are only a few people who are actively involved in this topic. Mostly, we have one person per project who is responsible for the harvesting. But they often just copy the project drive and this is not sufficient. We need*

*each sub team to decide what is useful and important on a more detailed level. Unfortunately, people are too busy or don't see the benefit of it."*

These statements support previous findings that individuals need autonomy and flexibility in order to share and create knowledge (Hislop, 2009). These activities are highly intangible and therefore cannot be 'pressed' into rigid frameworks such as inflexible role or communication prescriptions.

However, a role in a community, such as the subject matter expert, often provided a new identity and visibility within the organisation which was usually hard to develop and sustain since consultants mainly worked at clients' sites. In particular after the takeover, visibility within the organisation had become a prerequisite to advance one's career. It appears that taking on a role in a community gave them an identity, an opportunity to become a part of the new organisation and to advance their careers (Hislop, 2009).

*"Being a subject matter expert in a community also improves your status in the organisation." (Keith)*

### **Perception of Communities of Practice**

Overall, the majority of the consultants viewed community activities as positive. They saw that the organisation had developed a thoughtful and complex approach and put in place a high number of tools and other frameworks to support communities. However, they expressed their strong opinions that this approach did not take into account the special conditions of a management consultancy, where consultants have to be extremely flexible, up-to-date in their competence area, spend most of their time outside the organisation's office and work long hours. **Will** criticised

*"The community was more active when we were still working on the same project at the same location. Since the people belonging to the community cannot come together anymore, at least not physically, a lot gets lost."*

Will's statement is supported by Levin *et al.* (2002) who state that trust, which is regarded as the foundation for knowledge sharing, can only be established through sufficient face-to-face time.

Some of the consultants also hesitated to participate in community work since they regarded the organisation's attempt to connect people 'across silos' as failed. They experienced the communities as working rather isolated from each other without

exchanging their knowledge and ideas. For **Will** this was connected to the immense number of communities in the organisation.

*“There are 20,000 communities but they are not interlinked.”*

Overall, in this research participation of individuals in Communities of Practice is regarded as a vital prerequisite for participation in social knowing and learning processes and therefore in knowledge creation (Jakubik, 2008). Hence, it was important for the organisation that their consultants experienced the community contexts in a way that encouraged them to actively participate in community work. However, the research participants appeared to prefer working in informal networks which in this research are understood as just a different form of communities (Newell *et al.*, 2009).

### ***Informal networks***

Consultants stated that they were quite active in collaborating with colleagues, particularly Monday colleagues, in informal networks.

*“I am not actively engaged in a community. I have no idea how I could contribute and I am also lacking the motivation to spend extra time on these kinds of activities. I can’t see the benefit. To me it is much more important and valuable to be part of informal networks.” (Ian)*

Instead of participating in formalised Communities of Practice the interview participants often tended towards their personal networks of former Monday colleagues when they had a question, needed advice or were searching for partners to discuss and develop their ideas.

*“Networking is really important in terms of getting help from colleagues when you have particular questions.” (Steve)*

Knowledge created in these informal networks or communities usually remained unnoticed and therefore unused by management. Often these informal networks consisted of consultants who had worked alongside each other in teams. Since the consultants felt comfortable in these networks they did not aim at building up new networks with their new colleagues which is further explored in section 5.3.6. As a consequence, both sides missed out on critical input they would have been able to provide to each other by bringing in their skills and experiences to joint knowledge creation activities.

### ***Hidden knowledge creation***

Some consultants implemented their creative ideas although these ideas had previously been rejected by the organisation. They engaged in knowledge creation activities because of their motivation to deliver high-quality work results without expecting to achieve any recognition from the organisation for it.

*“Although my ideas were not accepted I implemented them in one of my projects and the client was very satisfied. This is the way we do things around here. We try to work our way around the system. (...) My intrinsic motivation drives my creativity.” (Marc)*

*“We do develop individual solutions for clients and try to generalise these solutions in a way which make them applicable for other client projects as well. The problem is that we only feed them back into the oil community. They are not available to the rest of company outside of the oil community.” (Keith)*

Oster (2010) refers to these individuals as ‘underground innovators’. Due to their informal personal networks, also understood as informal Communities of Practice in this thesis, they were able to draw together colleagues who together with them were able to generate new knowledge. Marc and Keith’s statements suggest that they chose this way since they were motivated to help their clients by satisfying their needs which sometimes was not possible with existing services and processes. They either decided to bypass innovation procedures because they regarded them as being too time-intensive or because their ideas were previously rejected. Due to organisational processes which were regarded as unsuitable for innovation processes or lack of trust the consultants did not expose their work to management. This way the organisation lost the potential to make the innovative services or products available to the entire organisation (Oster, 2010).

The next section illustrates how the research participants perceived the creation of knowledge, and inherent to it knowing and learning processes, within the organisational context and how these perceptions impacted on their experiences.

### **5.3.2 Knowledge creation**

#### ***Perceptions of knowledge creation***

In the interviews the participants expressed different perceptions of the conception of new knowledge as well as the degree to which knowledge creation was necessary in their roles. Whereas some consultants identified their work as being creative, others regarded creativity, and in connection with it, the creation of

something new as being located more in the area of art. Hence, they used different terms when describing what they were doing.

*"I think what we are doing is bundling activities rather than being creative."*  
(**John**)

*"I mainly work on software implementation projects where we do challenge approaches and change ways of how things are done. But I don't think that there is much space for creating new knowledge."* (**Steve**)

The perception of some of consultants that they were not creative and did not create new knowledge probably stemmed from their understanding that knowledge creation equals the transformation or even replacement of existing knowledge. However, knowledge creation in the organisation explored, understood in this research as being a Managed Professional Business, is mostly of a rather incremental nature meaning that existing knowledge, for example in forms of standardised methods approaches, is being modified (Cooper *et al.*, 1996; Hislop, 2009; Brivot, 2011) to specific client needs which the consultants reported to be happening on a regular basis. Taminiau *et al.* (2009) support this by stating that particularly in consultancies the understanding of innovation varies. Whereas some speak of innovations when a product or service offers something completely new, others speak about an innovation when an existing standard product or service is applied in a different industry or simply to a different client. These different understandings had an impact on how the research participants experienced their own and their colleagues' knowledge creation activities which is illustrated in the next section.

### ***Importance of knowledge creation***

The interview participants felt that they neither had the opportunity to engage in knowledge creation activities anymore nor that the organisation was fostering their creative activities which was at dissonance with the management's communication. In their communication, the importance of knowledge creation and innovation for the organisation was strongly emphasised (company intranet, 16.04.2011).

The consultants assumed that management was no longer interested in their contribution to knowledge creation since they clearly assigned the responsibility for the creation of new knowledge to 'think tanks' and the Research & Development department. Some participants were convinced that the organisation wanted to ensure that consultants spent their entire time on projects in order to be billable and bring in maximum profit.

*“From my point of view no one within InterConsult aims at generating knowledge or educating employees or taking care of us being market leader due to our knowledge. What I have understood though: it’s all about charging the client as many hours as possible.” (Melanie)*

Melanie’s view is supported by Taminiau *et al.* (2009) and Brivot (2011) who state that the reward system of Managed Professional Businesses such as the organisation explored is based on indicators such as the maximisation of billable hours and therefore does not enable consultants to undertake knowledge sharing and knowledge building activities.

**Marc** concluded that consultants did not get the opportunity to be creative anymore because

*“Creativity needs space to unfold which I don’t see at InterConsult.”*

Others such as **Ben** felt that without been given the opportunity to build new knowledge he was no longer of value to the organisation other than as a sales person for IT products. This was a widespread perception of why InterIT had bought the consultancy among the consultants.

*“At Monday one was given freedom and space to create ideas which were needed. Now it feels as if I am selling IT products and I don’t know anything of value anymore.”*

Especially due to tight project deadlines and the pressure of maximising billable project hours the research participants missed the opportunity to jointly step back to reflect on and make sense of their work experiences and the mistakes they made in order to rethink their approaches which is necessary to generate knowledge for example in the form of new improved ways of doing things (Jakubik, 2011). Even when they did find the space they were often not allowed to take the risk to implement innovative approaches since the organisation deemed the risk of failing to be too high.

*“You are moving from one project phase to another without any time granted to learn from the previous phase. And even when you do this it’s too dangerous to change the approach in an ongoing project and therefore we go on like before.” (Liz)*

According to Cannon and Edmondson (2001) learning from mistakes is vital in learning and knowing processes in order to generate new knowledge which improves processes, procedures and products.

For some of the consultants being creative was however necessary in order to adapt standard approaches and methods to clients' needs and to master everyday challenges on clients' projects and therefore essential for successfully implementing client projects.

*"Nobody is re-inventing the bulb here. But people are creative everyday in order to be able to cope with the challenges projects bring with them."  
(Katja)*

*"My job is creative, every day." (Will)*

They regarded it as a substantial part of their everyday work-life and not something which they needed extra time and autonomy for.

Most of the research participants would have appreciated being able to express their creativity at work to a larger extent than they did. **Ben's** statement is supported by Maister (2003) who suggests that being creative and challenged presents a major source of motivation for consultants.

*"Recently, I have created a profile of myself and one of the aspects which has the highest priority in my job in order for me to be happy is the opportunity to be creative."*

As a consequence of feeling not acknowledged and valued they were afraid or no longer prepared to express their ideas or to invest extra effort of any kind into the organisation. **Liz** for instance lived out her creativity outside of work which again implied a loss of potential to the organisation.

*"In general I am creative, but I am not sure whether this is true as well when it comes to my job."*

### **Knowledge creation in 'think tanks'**

**Rebecca** perceived the consultants' knowledge creation activities as not being important to the organisation since other units of the organisation were supposed to build new knowledge which then could be made available to the entire organisation.

*"InterIT as an organisation does not foster creativity. It seems that management does not consider it our job to be creative. This is something the people in R&D are responsible for."*

Rebecca's view is supported by **Keith** who reported on InterIT's structure and the implications for knowledge creation activities.

*“InterIT is still divided into functional divisions. On the one hand we have people who work in sales and distribution, some people who do project delivery and then you have people who are responsible for innovations. Beginning of this year I met someone from the so called ‘think tanks’. It seems that they deliver a lot of new solutions, but most of them we cannot implement at the client’s side. They don’t know about the real world out there. And this is because they are not listening to us who know what the clients need because we are working together with them!”*

New business topics which were developed in ‘think tanks’ by colleagues not regularly facing the client were negatively perceived by the interview participants. Consultants were supposed to bring these topics to the market in the form of standardised methods and approaches but often experienced that these topics were not customised and did not address what the client needed. This reinforced their belief that they were the ones who should at least have been involved in the development since they worked at the clients’ sites and had the necessary insight into the clients’ needs.

*“They set up new topics and ask us to sell this to the client. No matter if the client needs this or not.” (Will)*

Management seemed to perceive the knowledge developed in dedicated ‘think tanks’ as more valid than the consultants’ knowledge since the ‘think tank’s’ knowledge was valued as expert knowledge (Yanow, 2004). This may have resulted in knowledge being created which did not fully meet the clients’ needs since the ‘think tanks’ worked largely disconnected from clients. The consultants however most likely had developed local knowledge through interaction with their colleagues who shared the same work practice. Since the social practices usually took place on clients’ projects this local knowledge could be regarded as specific to the context and therefore closely linked to clients’ needs which management often did not acknowledge. This way the opportunity to maximise the client experiences of their consultants, which could have led to the enhancement of their competitive advantage, remained largely unused. Additionally, the consultants’ feeling of self-worth was further diminished. Whereas at Monday the consultants’ knowledge was most valued and given attention, at InterConsult the knowledge which could be disseminated as standardised approach throughout the organisation generated by people positioned at a high level in the hierarchy or people from the Research and Development department was viewed as more legitimate.

### ***The organisation's competitiveness***

**Melanie** expressed her concern that due to not fostering or even inhibiting consultants' drive to build new knowledge the organisation was not ready for the future.

*"Everything InterConsult is able to offer lies in their people. And the most important thing is that you can cover the demand of the market. And the best situation is to have the capabilities and people ready before the demand arises. (...) This means we should be very innovative. On the one hand you have to see which trends are developing and on the other hand you have to take care of getting the people up to speed. And I think this is where InterConsult completely failed."*

Melanie's statement is supported by von Nordenflycht (2010) who states that to sustain their competitive advantage management consultancies were reliant on their consultants to continuously build new knowledge.

### ***Training as investment***

In this research learning is understood as grounded in prior experiences which help to make sense of new situations and experiences and to transform these experiences which leads to the construction of new knowledge (Jakubik, 2011). As a consequence learning, knowing and knowledge creation are inseparably intertwined processes. Hence, learning and training activities also impacted on the consultants' knowledge building activities.

In their accounts, the consultants assessed enabling and supporting employees' involvement in learning and training activities as investment into 'new' knowledge. They stated that they regarded learning as an activity which was crucial for the organisation to stay competitive but also as an activity which they enjoyed and needed in order to remain satisfied and motivated. This is supported by Maister (2003) and reinforced by **Melanie**

*"Life-long learning is not something I have to do, but this is what I really want to do."*

### ***Informal learning in social relationships***

The consultants reported that they not only linked learning to formal classroom or online training but also to more practice-based activities. This is in line with Gherardi (1999) and Jakubik (2011) who understand learning as a way of being in the world and as 'coming to know' as well as Lave and Wenger (1991) who introduced the term 'situated learning' which understands knowing as mainly taking place in social relationships through active participation. **Rebecca** explained

*“Things I learn in practice I can remember much more easily than knowledge I obtained in training courses.”*

Some consultants regarded learning on a project to be more sophisticated than classroom training since they had more time to internalise it and mostly the opportunity to immediately apply it. **Melanie** said

*“Practical learning is very effective, because they throw you into cold water and you either have to have or gain the capabilities to get out of the cold water again.”*

These extracts are in line with the organisation’s approach to workplace learning which focusses on “work-enabled activities, such as experiential, on-the-job learning” since “eighty per cent of what an employee does on the job is learned on the job” (company intranet, 16.04.2011). The organisation’s approach focusses on workplace learning since management deemed this form of learning to be most effective. This is supported by Davenport (2005, p.160) who claims that consultants “learn best from each other”. To the organisation, workplace learning also meant less costs for formal training courses and less absence of consultants from client projects for formal training activities.

### **Formal learning activities**

Almost no training courses were taking place at the time at which the majority of interviews were conducted, in 2005. In order to be granted approval for training the consultants either had to prove that the skills they could acquire in this course were underrepresented and could improve the organisation’s portfolio or that their current client required them to obtain skills trained in the respective course. **Keith** reported

*“Classroom Training is very rare at the moment and it is not easy to get a signature for it from your People Manager. You have to write a really convincing business case to be able to attend classroom training. As a result, I have attended one training course over the last two years.”*

**Ben** experienced that due to not generating any revenue on a client project he was not able to attend a training course.

*“Since I am working on internal projects and don’t generate revenue at the moment, I have no chance to attend training courses anyway.”*

Where there were insufficient training participants, it was regular practice to cancel the training without offering a replacement. Consultants expressed their frustration

about this situation which made it almost impossible for them to attend a training course. **Katja** stated

*“Projects always come first. So when you are on a project you don’t have the time to attend a training course. When you are not on a project there is no business reason for you going on a training course so you don’t get the approval.”*

Overall this situation negatively impacted on their motivation. The consultants regarded training as an incentive for good work and as a sign of being acknowledged by management which was reinforced by **Liz**

*“Training has an extremely low priority at the moment. There will be no training in the first quarter of this fiscal year. InterIT understands training as similar to the payment of incentives: you can only get it when the business results are good.”*

According to Chang and Hampson (2008) formal classroom training can provide time to focus on learning which would have been vital to the consultants, for example in order to step back and reflect on how projects were delivered and whether there would potentially be room for improvement. Additionally, these courses might have helped learning about emerging topics of importance for future project assignments. Classroom training could also have provided the opportunity to engage in collaborative learning and knowledge creation activities with other experienced consultants away from projects and their tight deadlines (Jakubik, 2011). The consultants’ statements also suggest that they felt that not granting them classroom training implied that to the organisation they, as resources, were not important enough to invest in, they were not worth the money. This supports Alvesson (2004) who states that consultants regard training as an incentive similar to high salaries and therefore an essential tool for retaining consultants.

In summary, the consultants felt strongly inhibited in their knowledge building activities through participation in learning and knowing processes due to the limitations they experienced.

The following sections explore in detail how the organisational elements impacted on the participants’ experiences touched upon in this section.

### 5.3.3 Organisational structures and procedures and processes

#### *The organisational context and structure*

The consultants experienced the organisational context at InterIT as being essentially different from the organisational context at Monday which they characterised as 'easy', 'extremely open' and 'young' whereas they often used terms such as 'processes' and 'barriers' when they talked about InterIT's organisational context.

*"To me Monday times were somehow easy and nice; InterIT is about processes and barriers that I don't get."* (Sandra)

In their eyes InterIT's organisational structures were too tight and inflexible and therefore unsuitable for a successful consultancy business which is in line with Starbuck (1992) who suggests that consultants are difficult to manage due to their strong affinity to autonomy, informality and flexible structures which to them are prerequisites for delivering high-quality projects. The consultants were not used to such strict procedures and tight control which diminished the consultants' motivation and negatively impacted on their self-perception as consultants.

**Melanie** assessed the organisation not to be able to foster and enable its employees to become or remain successful consultants.

*"There is no such thing as an InterConsult-consultant."*

The research participants regarded their negative perception as being reinforced by the difficulty of the transition phase after the takeover during which they described themselves as working on an 'island' in the middle of the organisation largely disconnected from the rest of it. However, the consultants also noticed improvements taking place and were also aware that the transition needed time especially in an organisation of this size and history. **Keith** commented that he was not sure though whether he would be willing to stay until the transition had been completed.

*"The structure and culture we have at InterIT today still stems from the days when InterIT wasn't a service organisation. It will take an awful long time to crack this. The question is how an organisation of this size can change and how long this will take. However, when this change arrives at my desk I will probably not be a member of this organisation anymore, I am afraid."*

The following section explores the impact of power on the participants' individual experiences.

#### 5.3.4 Power

##### *Coping with the takeover*

Overall, the consultants' experiences left the impression that they felt powerless in the aftermath of the takeover since the majority of what happened was out of their control. **Liz** stated that she felt that she had to accept everything that happened to her.

*"The basic difference is that I have chosen Monday and InterConsult simply happened to me without me having been asked."*

**Tom** even felt as if he as a person was sold to InterIT.

*"I didn't apply at InterIT, InterIT bought me."*

At the same time they felt left alone and not supported by management in this transition phase as **Liz's** statement illustrates.

*"We were like puppets hanging around each for itself."*

In their accounts some of the interview participants made assumptions about InterIT's motivation to acquire Monday. Some expressed their concern that InterIT was only interested in 'eliminating' Monday instead of being truly interested in integrating the consultancy into their organisation and benefiting from its consultants' skills, capabilities and knowledge which negatively impacted on their motivation and increased their mistrust towards the organisation. **Tom** reckoned that

*"InterIT wanted the clients and the business. And now they make everything kaput."*

After a first period during which they had to cope with the transition some consultants sought to escape the role of the passive victim and to regain control and power to a certain degree. They did this by looking for the positive aspects of working for this organisation and by trying to figure out in which ways the organisational strategy and context had to change from their point of view and how they could impact on it.

*"The organisation is also us. So it's also up to us." (Will)*

*"I had a really negative attitude towards InterIT in the beginning but then I started thinking: okay, stop being so negative because this doesn't lead*

*anywhere. (...) So I started to consider what the organisation could do for me in a positive way.” (Steve)*

Once they had realised that they were not able to improve things significantly without the support of their management they started bemoaning the loss of their times at Monday. Others focussed on what they personally could get out of working for InterConsult in terms of having a safe job or being on projects close to home.

### ***Knowledge creation and power***

In order to get acknowledgement for their knowledge creation activities and to get newly generated knowledge applied in the organisation, consultants reported that they had to face serious resistance. This came not only from management but also from their colleagues who suspected that their knowledge would be replaced by the innovative concept which would have brought with it a loss of their image and power. Management appeared to be anxious about taking the risk of implementing an innovative but untested thought.

**Katja** recalled an incident where she and her colleagues built new knowledge and were confronted with various barriers before they were able to implement it.

*“We had to get the client on our side to get through with this new approach. But in the end everyone understood that the other approach wouldn’t have worked. However, the client moved on to the next country implementation of the same project and despite extensive lessons learnt sessions, our more senior colleagues managed that the client went back to the old approach.”*

Although they implemented it the new knowledge was not reused since those in power did not acknowledge this knowledge. This is in line with Kirkebak and Tolsby (2006) who regard power as a means through which those who are in power can inhibit the common acceptance of knowledge throughout the organisation in cases where the new knowledge prevents those in power from achieving their goals.

Within InterIT structures seemed to be used as a tool to keep control over employees (Jackson and Carter, 2000). Due to the size of the entire organisation consultants experience was that tight control was regarded as the only way to remain in power over what was going on. Employees were forced to work strictly within the framework of given structures and to work in line with the prescribed processes.

*“Following procedures and processes seems to be more important than delivering value for the client.” (Ian)*

Within these tight rules, knowledge creation often did not take place since there was hardly room for the consultants to be reflective about their work in order to learn from mistakes or to engage in knowledge creation activities with other colleagues who probably did not work on the same project. Even if new knowledge was created it often got ‘lost’ within the processes of this big organisation (Rashman *et al.*, 2009) or due to the consultants’ time constraints which prevented them from pushing their ideas forward.

**Marc** reported that an incremental innovation he proposed was not paid any attention because the people in power, management, did not know his name and therefore his knowledge was not worthy of consideration.

*“My People Manager was thrilled when I presented my concept and forwarded it to the European Strategy and Change Leader. And this guy never came back to me. I heard that he didn’t know my name and therefore didn’t consider my idea to be worth it to tend to.”*

This showed that at InterIT power and knowledge were strongly interrelated. Those in power did not only have the possibility to deny individuals the space they needed to learn and create knowledge but they were also able to control which creative ideas or new knowledge could turn into commonly accepted knowledge in the organisation (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000; Storey and Barnett, 2000).

In the next section the impact of the organisational climate on the individual experiences of knowledge creation processes is explored.

### **5.3.5 Climate**

The scope of the interpretation of the organisational element climate focusses on the individual experiences of the climate in relation to teamwork given by the research participants’ interview content. The consultants’ extracts showed that a positive teamwork atmosphere positively influenced the research participants’ willingness to create and share knowledge through social interaction with their colleagues.

#### ***Working with former Monday colleagues***

Since consultants typically moved from one project to another which often not only implied a change of the workplace environment and the client but often also a local

change from one city to another the team was regarded as 'second family' which played an important factor in terms of providing emotional stability in stressful project situations.

*"We jointly survived divorces and welcomed babies, we were like a family."*  
(Sandra)

Often the team remained more or less the same over a number of different projects due to the consultants' skills and assignment to the same industry. Since most of the consultants spent the majority of their work time in a foreign city, they also spent a substantial part of their free time during the week with each other. Ex-Monday consultants mostly shared a similar background in terms of their education, international experiences, age, interests and career aspirations.

Most of the consultants said that due to being very much alike they developed friendships over time with many of their colleagues. **Ben** for example enthusiastically described the team spirit on some projects which meant that colleagues not only became friends but also took the time to share knowledge.

*"On some projects we had a really good team spirit. Everyone had time for his or her colleagues to share knowledge and to bring everyone to the same level of knowledge. Those were fantastic projects and lots of friendships were built."*

Ben's statement supports Argote *et al.* (2003) who state that friendship among colleagues has a positive impact on knowledge sharing. Friendship or close ties in many cases eased teamwork since the colleagues usually knew each other quite well and had developed a trustful and open relationship which contributed to an open and positive climate on the project (Ekvall, 1996). This positive environment could set free creativity (Ehin, 2008) which is in line with **Marc** who reported that

*"At Monday teamwork among colleagues was very open and we had the time and space to try out new things."*

Teamwork was also a motivational factor to most of the consultants. **Simone** even stated that teamwork was the only thing she truly enjoyed in her job.

*"In the end I live for team work. This is the only thing that is fun."*

**Simone** perceived that many achievements were only possible because of the team, especially building new knowledge.

*“Mostly, building new ideas is a team effort, not something which you can achieve by yourself.”*

Teams consisting of former Monday colleagues provided a trustful and open climate in which the research participants felt safe to share their ideas and expose themselves to others without being afraid of negative consequences (Meyer *et al.*, 1995; Schilling and Kluge, 2009) as well as to listen to others (Andrews and Delahaye, 2000) which increased their participation in knowledge creation activities. At the same time the satisfaction of achieving something as a team increased their motivation which also positively impacted on their participation in knowledge creation activities.

### ***Working with ‘new’ colleagues***

Working together and socialising with their new, former InterIT, colleagues was perceived differently by the interview participants.

*“You don’t go out for drinks with such people.” (Claire)*

*“At Monday we had a very young culture with young colleagues. The average age was 35. Now, our new colleagues are between 40 and 50 and most of them are nice, but you don’t meet for drinks with them after work. Probably that sounds strange, but this was very important at Monday.” (Ben)*

Often the new colleagues were older, more settled and from different, more technical and less client-oriented backgrounds. Socialising with them did not seem as popular as it was with former Monday colleagues. However, the majority of interview partners seemed to adapt themselves to the situation and tried not to overestimate the initial difficulties.

*“I would clearly prefer to lie under palm trees but there are harder things in life than working together with my current colleagues.” (Ian)*

The majority of interview participants believed that the new colleagues lacked the necessary social skills and experiences to handle clients appropriately. Some consultants even felt superior to their new colleagues not only in terms of their social skills but also in terms of their appearance.

*“Many of the new colleagues have good technical skills but what they are missing are social skills, a suit and a pair of black shoes. This is why they are separated from the old consultants and don’t have a chance against them on client projects.” (Melanie)*

A trustful climate, which is regarded as the foundation for knowledge sharing and knowledge creation (Andrews and Delahaye, 2000), can only exist when people know each other and share a common goal (Levin *et al.*, 2002). This was the case amongst Monday colleagues. However, in teams where the research participants worked together with new colleagues, the research participants did not feel completely comfortable and missed what they called the 'consultancy spirit'. Consequently, they might also have missed the motivation and confidence to share their experiences and to express ideas without being afraid of receiving negative feedback or being rejected (Levin *et al.*, 2002) which was probably equally likely for the consultants of the new organisation.

However, the interview accounts also illustrated that the majority of the consultants were equipped with fairly high self-confidence. Their self-assertive demeanour might have negatively impacted on the new colleagues' willingness and motivation to contribute to effective teamwork and to share their experiences and ideas. The interview participants seemed to perceive their former organisation as more prestigious than InterConsult and potentially feared that their reputation with the client had been damaged through the takeover (Empson, 2001).

In summary, the lack of relationship between the interview participants and their new colleagues resulted in an unsatisfactory climate in project teams which hampered knowledge building activities (Empson, 2001). The different backgrounds and organisational contexts the two groups of consultants came from further added to the difficulties they experienced in their teamwork.

The importance of trust, briefly illustrated in this section, will be further explored in the following.

### **5.3.6 Trust**

#### ***Knowledge sharing and trust***

The majority of the participants were still mainly working together with former colleagues from Monday and therefore did not have many opportunities build up trustful relationships with their new colleagues.

*"I have met some of the new colleagues but have not worked with any of them on a project so far." (Claire)*

Since trust is an important basis for knowledge sharing as well as knowledge creation in terms of providing individuals with the confidence to draw attention to

themselves and to express ideas without being afraid of receiving negative feedback or being rejected (Levin *et al.*, 2002) it rarely took place with new colleagues.

Instead, the research participants were keen to continue mingling with each other and therefore informal knowledge sharing took place mainly between colleagues who had worked together for years, had built personal networks and shared not only similar backgrounds but also a similar attitude to work and trustful relationships (Davenport, 2005). **Steve** supported this by saying that he always got in touch with his old colleagues when he had a question since he felt most comfortable with them and since he did not know which new colleague could help him and whether he or she would be willing to.

*“I feel much more comfortable with my old colleagues. Therefore, they are the first ones I contact when I need to know something. I know who is an expert in what and can simply give them a call on their mobile. When I contact a new colleague I don’t know whether he or she is willing to share knowledge and whether I can trust this source.”*

With these ‘old’ colleagues the consultants were willing to actively engage in knowing and learning processes including the sharing of knowledge without any guarantee of being rewarded for it. What they hoped for was that these colleagues would also help them out when they needed help which is in line with Saint-Onge and Wallace (2003) who describe that individuals who share knowledge within trusted relationships are usually satisfied when they are rewarded by enjoyment and mutual trust for their activities.

*“When I share knowledge with my colleagues from Monday I am glad that I am able to help them and do not expect anything in return for it.” (Simone)*

Due to their lack of relationship to their new colleagues the research participants were not able to build trust and therefore rarely engaged in knowledge sharing and generating activities. Hence, the organisational context hampered the research participants’ involvement in joint knowledge and learning processes with their new colleagues (Dovey, 2009).

The next section will further explore the impact of trust in relation to leadership on the participants’ individual experiences of knowledge creation.

### 5.3.7 Leadership

#### ***People Management***

A direct manager, called a People Manager, was assigned to each consultant. Among other responsibilities, People Managers are supposed to provide leadership in a way that motivates employees to fulfil fully their jobs, to meet frequently with their people, to keep an open mind to ideas independent of the source and to support their employees' development (company intranet, 25.04.2011).

In many cases the People Managers to whom the interview participants were assigned were also former Monday colleagues who were, according to the consultants' accounts, often not able to efficiently support their employees since they were neither familiar with the new organisation's culture nor with processes and the way things were done at InterIT. As a consequence, **Liz** stated

*"I feel like I am managing myself."*

Consultants said that although they preferred to be largely autonomous they would have appreciated some guidance and advice on how to adapt to the new organisation in terms of procedures, career and training issues for example which the People Managers were often only able to provide to a certain degree. This is in line with Ekvall (1996) who states that even creative people need a goal or framework to work within beside autonomy and flexibility.

Many consultants did not work on the same project as their People Manager. This resulted in a situation where contact between People Manager and employee was only sporadic. Overall, People Managers appeared to lack time to develop a trustful relationship with their employees by meeting them face-to-face on a regular basis (Dovey, 2009).

**Katja** reported that in order to find stability and advice, she turned to informal networks and project teams.

*"Due to the People Manager being responsible for a number of consultants beside his project work there is a certain distance between me and my manager. And that makes sensible coaching difficult if you see each other only one or two times a year. And this is why people search for stability and orientation in their teams."*

Some consultants shared in the interviews that resulting from several restructurings they were assigned to new People Managers a number of times during the first

years after the takeover. This further impeded the consultants in building up a trustful relationship with their People Managers which prevented them from turning to their People Managers for guidance and advice (Dovey, 2009). Because People Managers often did not know their employees well enough to further promote their skills and careers, the interview participants did not perceive them as a source of motivation, inspiration or support, which, according to Mitchell and Meacham (2011), are regarded as crucial to fostering engagement in learning and knowing processes. **Liz** for instance did not expect any form of support from her People Manager.

*“I haven’t even met my new People Manager. He doesn’t even know what project I am working on and what my areas of interest are. How is he supposed to support me?”*

Some consultants complained that their People Managers in many cases rejected their creative ideas since it would have meant additional workload for them to attend to the ideas and to follow them up. Overall, the participants felt that they could not rely on their People Managers in this regard. **Katja** assumed that her creative input mainly meant extra work for her People Manager.

*“My manager does not have the time to look at my suggestions for improvement. This is extra work for him.”*

Previous research by Taminiau *et al.* (2009) suggests that managers play a vital role in knowledge building activities. This is supported by the research accounts which illustrate that management inhibited, by their leadership approach, the development of innovative ideas into new knowledge. Consultants were missing autonomy and time in which they would have had the opportunity to engage in learning and knowledge activities (Switzer, 2008; Dvir *et al.*, 2002) as well as acknowledgement of their contributions which would have positively impacted on their motivation.

### **Perceptions of the organisation’s management**

Overall, all interview participants expressed their disappointment about the new organisations’ top management. Not only did they feel that management had not kept their promises to integrate them as former Monday consultants into InterConsult but they also judged that management was not genuinely interested in improving the current conditions. They concluded that unlike at Monday the consultants and the consultancy’s performance on client projects were no longer the centre of attention but instead shareholder value was the most important point all efforts were focussed on.

*“Either those at the top don’t know about all this or they accept it. Probably they do it on purpose to demotivate people. (...) And this is why no one trusts executive management anymore. (...) It’s all about shareholder value; there are no other values anymore.” (Will)*

*“They only care about the quarterly results. I think they don’t care about us at all.” (Simone)*

As a consequence, the consultants did not trust the organisation’s top management anymore but accused them of not being authentic. There was a considerable dissonance between the organisation’s communication and the consultants’ experiences of how the content of this communication was converted into practice.

*“Top Management has to become more authentic. When I attend one of these meetings where top management speaks about the organisation and praises our achievements I feel as if I was working for a different organisation. What they are talking about has nothing to do with what is going on in our division.” (Katja)*

Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) state that it is important for organisations that their employees can trust their management. Mistrust as mentioned above is often established through management not being authentic or not keeping their word or acting in dissonance with the organisation’s strategy and communication. Mistrust can easily turn into fear which in this context can among other things lead to the inability or unwillingness to share ideas.

The importance of autonomy in connection to the consultants’ experiences of knowledge creation mentioned in this section is further illustrated in the next section.

### **5.3.8 Autonomy**

Being provided with autonomy was important to the majority of consultants in relation to their engagement in knowing and learning processes. McKenzie and van Winkelen (2004) understand autonomy as the degree of trust management has in individuals to act independently. Consultants needed autonomy in relation to their work patterns as well as time and location in which they pursued knowledge sharing and knowledge creation activities which was often denied due to the rigid and tight procedures and processes within the new organisation.

**Sandra** for example expressed that

*“... InterIT is about processes and barriers that I don’t get.”*

The consultants perceived the organisational structures as too tight and inflexible and hence not suitable for a management consultancy which supports Starbuck (1992) who regards the delivery of high-quality projects by consultants as only being possible if they are provided with flexible structures and autonomy.

### ***Prerequisites for knowledge creation***

Some of the consultants felt that they were not able to participate in knowledge creation activities without being supported by the organisation in general and their people manager in particular by being provided with aspects such as autonomy instead of control by tight structures.

*“I have to say that the organisation is the beginning and the end to your creativity” (John)*

**Will** supported this view by stating that

*“The most important thing is to free people from constraints. If the organisation offers security without anyone being in fear of being fired, if you know that you are allowed to make mistakes then creativity develops by itself.”*

Even within formal Communities of Practice which were set up by the organisation with the aim to provide consultants with a space to create new knowledge the consultants felt constraint and lacking autonomy due to prescribed communication plans, community roles and responsibilities and standards they had to adhere to in their activities.

In **Melanie**'s case the lack of time and autonomy affected her in a way which made her feel that she was not working intellectually anymore.

*“Intellectually I am not challenged at all.”*

However, for **Will** being creative was a substantial part of his everyday work-life for which he did not need to be equipped with autonomy .

*“My job is creative, every day.” (Will)*

Overall, the lack of autonomy led to a decrease of knowledge creation activities of the research participants.

The organisational element motivation is explored in the next section.

### 5.3.9 Motivation

When the interview participants talked about their experiences of knowledge creation and in particular their participation in knowing and learning processes most of them closely linked their level of participation to their motivation. The consultants often used the terms 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' motivation. Alvesson (2004) states that consultants are highly intrinsically motivated. This research appreciates the consultants' distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and will preserve it. However, the two concepts are not regarded as being strictly separated from each other and drawing from completely different sources but as interconnected and constituted by similar sources.

#### **Sources of motivation**

**Steve** stated that he derived his motivation from career, income and enjoyable project work, aspects which impact on the extrinsic motivation according to Alvesson (2004), and colleagues due to whom he was able to further develop his skills and with whom he enjoyed working, aspects which are related to intrinsic motivation according to Walker *et al.* (2006).

*"I derive my motivation and level of satisfaction mainly from three sources: career which implies the ability to move up the career ladder within a few years, and the financial aspect related to it; working on interesting projects which help me to develop myself and my skills and the people which bring me to enjoy my work and who I enjoy being with because they have similar preferences and similar stories to tell."*

The majority of interview partners such as **Tom** stated that, in the absence of organisational sources of motivation, they derived their motivation extrinsically from positive client feedback.

*"My main motivation is that the client is satisfied and gives me positive feedback."*

The decrease of extrinsic motivation was regarded as critical but the consultants were convinced that this could be absorbed by their intrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation was regarded as being crucial for the high-quality delivery of projects. According to **Rebecca** her colleagues still wanted to contribute as best as they could to their team's effort.

*"An observation I have made is that our 'old' colleagues still do their very best although they are not really satisfied and do not fully agree with the InterConsult culture. I have the feeling that everyone has a very high level of intrinsic motivation and tries to give her or his very best in their teams."*

**Keith** emphasised that

*“Of course the intrinsic motivation plays a major role on the one hand, but on the other hand one accepts the challenge to be able to deliver a project and to emerge from this as an expert for a certain topic. (...) On top of that I have experienced the emerging of a group dynamic which makes individuals see the big picture and motivates them to implement projects successfully as a team and not everyone by him- or herself.”*

The consultant’s statements are in line with Alvesson (2004) and Walker *et al.* (2006) who state that intrinsically motivated individuals are more likely to be persistent in achieving their goals despite a lack of extrinsic motivation or external obstacles.

### ***Motivation and unfavourable conditions***

The consultants who were intrinsically motivated to a degree that unfavourable conditions did not prevent them from building new knowledge did not focus on external rewards but were satisfied by simply seeing their ideas being transferred into practice. **Sandra** considered herself ‘lucky’ simply because she was granted the opportunity to engage in building new knowledge and to make it available to others without being either acknowledged nor rewarded for the outcome.

*“I was lucky last year at a point where I didn’t have a project. Together with a graduate I got the chance to work on a Component Business Model. We sat there for three weeks and worked on it. (...) The results are now in a database. Our names are shown nowhere but that doesn’t matter, it is there and the next people dealing with it can use it.”*

**Helen** talked about how she had developed a toolkit which equipped colleagues with crucial Change Management knowledge she and other colleagues had gained in previous projects. She and her team developed this toolkit out of their intrinsic motivation to improve things and to prevent the re-invention of the wheel on client projects, mostly in their free time.

*“We developed a toolkit which we can equip the people with. We have been on numerous Change Management projects over the last years and especially on the big projects activities are quite similar. Who ever wants it can get this toolkit in order to have a better knowledge foundation. (...) Well, the development of it happened mostly during the weekend.”*

Some consultants felt that despite the organisational environment, which they mostly experienced negatively, their intrinsic motivation was still there and made them continue their jobs more or less as before. It seemed that they could not help it

and, in some ways, felt either exploited or even more disappointed because from their point of view no one took notice of their contribution.

*"I would bend over backwards for this company (...) but no one is interested."* (**Melanie**)

*"Meanwhile, the consultants give more to the organisation than the organisation gives to them in my opinion."* (**Helen**)

Others suspected that the organisation was aware of the consultants' intrinsic motivation and knew that the consultants would still perform well even without being extrinsically motivated.

*"They know that the people carry on doing their jobs."* (**Will**)

### **Loss of motivation**

Other consultants felt exploited in the sense that the new organisation extracted the skills and experiences which they had built up throughout the last years without investing into the further development of it, particularly after the takeover. **Liz** reported about being assigned to a formal Community of Practice.

*"(...) This is only another tool to tap knowledge from us to bring it back into the market without acknowledging what the individual has contributed and without giving something back like for example a training course."*

### **Knowledge harvesting**

The consultants' motivation to share knowledge was further diminished due to their perception that the organisation did not particularly value the consultants' knowledge. Consultants were let go without management attempting to retrieve either the consultants or at least their knowledge. Further, management appeared to lack interest in knowledge gained on client projects.

*"In many cases colleagues have left the organisation without handing over their knowledge to others, but taking it with them. Often, no one even made an effort to debrief them."* (**Ben**)

*"Although this was the first time we worked on a SOX-project and we gained some really important information no one was interested in our knowledge. No one asked us to harvest any knowledge."* (**Claire**)

As a consequence, some consultants were no longer motivated to and therefore hesitated to participate in knowledge sharing activities on top of their project work without receiving anything in return which would increase their extrinsic motivation.

This is in line with Lucas (2000) who stated that employees who do not feel that they get anything of equal value in return for their activities may feel exploited which might lead them to resist actively participating in learning or knowing processes.

Others such as **Rebecca** felt restricted by the organisational culture to a degree that no longer allowed them to perform well despite their intrinsic motivation.

*“What really demotivates me is that I cannot do a good job, I don’t get the opportunity. I could do it but they won’t let me.”*

**Marc** articulated that if there was no extrinsic motivation the consultants’ high intrinsic levels would not be sufficient to keep them in the organisation. He pointed out that the organisation lost crucial knowledge this way.

*“At some point the negative extrinsic motivation will probably outbalance my intrinsic motivation and then I will have to leave. That is what has happened to many of our colleagues already. InterConsult is not only losing crucial staff this way, but they also lose knowledge.”*

The consultants’ high level of intrinsic motivation enabled them to deliver high quality projects but diminished due to them feeling neither valued nor challenged by their management. The majority of them were willing to accept a decrease of external motivation to a certain degree. However, most of them were not prepared to accept a decrease in their intrinsic motivation due to unchallenging work, an underutilisation of their skills and experiences, and a lack of acknowledgement. These statements are in line with Maister (2003) who regards that consultants need to be constantly challenged in order to keep up their intrinsic motivation.

### ***The impact of low motivation***

For the participants, motivation was a crucial drive for everything they did in their jobs, especially for their participation in knowing and learning processes. The organisational elements explored in this study all impacted on both their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, mostly negatively due to the unfavourable organisational context at InterConsult. When the research participants talked about participating in knowing and learning processes the majority described those activities which they consciously decided to do such as community work, lessons learnt and improving ways of project delivery. The more their motivation decreased the less they were willing to engage in these activities since doing so meant additional workload on top of their project work. Since these kinds of activities were no longer acknowledged by management the consultants did not regard them as being part of their daily work as

knowledge workers anymore. Consequently, they contributed less of their skills and experiences and less knowledge was generated, especially when they were about to leave the organisation. A large part of the consultants' potential remained unused (Alvesson, 2000).

Career prospects and acknowledgement were closely linked to the consultants' motivation and are explored in the next section.

### **5.3.10 Career and acknowledgement**

#### ***Different perceptions of career***

All consultants had in common that they perceived career as being important to them. This became apparent because the research participants continuously linked their statements in the interviews to career. However, their understandings of career differed considerably. Whereas a few participants named classical career aspects such as staff responsibility and an above average income as central to their perception of career, others named more individual aspects such as being acknowledged or being promoted and challenged. Overall, the research participants put career on a level with finding gratification in their work.

*“Career to me means to be at a certain point at a certain point of time. But for me it is really important to be challenged and to be promoted at the same time. And that is how I find my self-fulfilment in my daily work.”*  
**(Melanie)**

The majority of the consultants came to the organisation with the expectation that they would be able to advance their careers quickly and receive salary increases as well as high annual bonuses on a regular basis. For many graduates and experienced hires, these are the main reasons for joining management consultancies in the first place whilst accepting that these are connected to long hours, travelling and high stress levels (Maister, 2003; Loewendahl, 2005).

The interview accounts suggest that career prospects and advancement had a major impact on the consultants' motivation to participate in knowledge and learning processes. **Keith** for instance stated that

*“To a certain degree I share knowledge in order to advance my career.(...)”*

#### ***Knowledge Sharing and acknowledgement***

Knowledge sharing with colleagues for example was part of the consultants' annual targets against which every consultant was assessed at the end of the year. Hence,

they were able to document their efforts in their project assessment which could have a positive impact on their career advancement. However, very often this did not happen.

**Helen** reported that she was promised that her career would benefit from the extra effort she invested into knowledge activities which in the end did not turn out this way.

*“I have led the development of our Change Management Toolkits for a number of years on a voluntary basis. Although they always promised me that this would advance me in my career not so much has happened.”*

Beside these activities being reflected in their career development it was at least equally important to the majority of consultants to be acknowledged as the source of the knowledge when they shared it to enhance their reputation for being an expert throughout the organisation or simply by receiving acknowledgement by their colleagues. Missing acknowledgement led to a further decrease of contribution to knowledge and learning activities.

**Keith** expressed that he deliberately shared knowledge to promote his career and to have the opportunity to get the same in return from the person he shared with.

*“To a certain degree I share knowledge in order to advance my career. When colleagues ask me to support a proposal with my expertise I might not only contribute some information but also provide more sophisticated help. I don't have a problem with this, especially when I like these colleagues. But if someone then pretends that all this is his or her knowledge, I don't appreciate this. Of course I know that when I help someone this person is then more willing to help me when I need some help, but nevertheless, the sources of knowledge should be acknowledged. Of course this also enlarges your expert status within the community. It's all about give and take.”*

However, the participants found, particularly after the takeover by InterIT, that career steps took longer or didn't happen at all. They also experienced that promoting their career was not in their hands but dependent on their managers who in many cases, from their point of view, did not act in favour of the consultants. Some consultants were even at a point where they had stopped believing in the possibility of having a consultant career at InterConsult altogether. **Ian** reported that he had to threaten leaving the organisation in order to be enabled to take the next career step.

*“You have to threaten leaving the organisation before something moves regarding your career.”*

Other consultants such as **Claire** experienced that being on a project made them invisible to the organisation's management since they hardly ever worked in the InterConsult office and therefore had almost no contact with those who were in a position to promote them. This is in line with findings of Kumra and Vinnicombe's (2008) research on promotion processes in a international consulting firm.

*"If you want to promote your career you have to sit in the office to be visible which is not possible when you are a consultant and supposed to work on projects at the client site."*

As career opportunities diminished the participants reconsidered whether they were willing to continue working over-time during the nights and the weekends and thereby jeopardise their work-life balance when they felt that they did not get anything in return from the organisation.

*"I work until 11 pm and start at 7:30 the next morning and I bend over backwards for this organisation and, as a reward, I get kicked in my buttocks."* (**Tom**)

Since their career prospects essentially deteriorated after the takeover, they were less and less prepared to invest additional working hours into activities beside their project work such as community work since they were not rewarded for it. Additionally, the consultants felt that their contributions would not have become visible anyway since those who decided about their promotions, their People Managers, were not working alongside them at InterConsult, unlike at Monday.

Alvesson (2004) supports these accounts by stating that even consultants who are likely to be equipped with high intrinsic motivation need to maintain a certain level of extrinsic motivation which most of them derive from aspects such as satisfying job roles and career prospects. If these conditions are not provided, consultants lose their motivation and, therefore, their willingness to go the 'extra mile' which to the majority of consultants was their engagement in knowledge and learning activities such as community work.

Apart from those who were still highly intrinsically motivated, overall, the lack of career opportunities led consultants to diminish their participation in knowledge and learning processes.

### **Resources for knowledge sharing**

The consultants' experiences suggest that it was more important to be billable on a project than to engage in knowledge sharing and creation activities. Some consultants such as **Helen** reported that even if they were willing to feedback their project experiences into the organisation they lacked the time for it and in the end did not share their experiences.

*“Due to project work I just don't have the time to share all the knowledge I have gained on projects over the last years by putting it into some database or by orally sharing it with my colleagues.”*

The consultants' experiences are in line with Taminiau *et al.* (2009) and Brivot (2011) who state that the reward system predominant in most consultancies is based on measuring success on the amount of billable hours at the clients' site which therefore neither supports nor rewards the participation in knowledge and sharing activities of individual consultants. Although InterConsult communicated that knowledge management, and in relation to it, the sharing of knowledge was essential for the organisation's success their career model did not support this. As a consequence, consultants neglected these activities in favour of project assignments.

The next section summarises the main theoretical insights and implications derived from the consultants' accounts presented in this section.

#### **5.3.11 Implications of the meso-level interpretations for this study**

The consultants were strongly impacted by the takeover three years before the interviews were conducted which became visible in the interviews by the way the consultants often linked the current situation at InterConsult to the takeover. In the new organisation the consultants felt restricted and controlled by strict procedures and tight control. This supports Starbuck (1992) who states that consultants need to be given autonomy, informality and flexible structures to deliver high-quality work results. Not being offered these conditions made them feel unacknowledged, powerless and not trusted. Additionally, they felt disconnected from their 'new' colleagues and unwelcomed by management which led to the consultants not being able to build up trustful relationships, regarded as the basis for knowledge sharing and knowledge generation (Dovey, 2009), with either their colleagues or management.

Because of the lack of acknowledgement by the organisation's management the research participants were not motivated to share their skills and experiences with their

new colleagues and management unless they received something in return such as career advancement. This supports that employees who do not feel rewarded for their skills and experiences may feel exploited instead when sharing knowledge and therefore hesitate to participate in knowing and learning processes (Lucas, 2000). Since career advancement or financial rewards were not offered by management the consultants diminished their formal knowledge sharing activities such as contributing to Communities of Practice and participating in lessons learnt. This led to a considerable decrease of their engagement in knowing and learning processes with new colleagues and therefore also in knowledge creation.

The consultants stated that they preferred sharing knowledge in their personal networks of former colleagues instead of in formal Communities of Practice which were introduced top-down by the organisation's management. This supports Fontaine (2001) and Saint-Onge and Wallace (2003) who claim that these formal communities often lack successful outcomes since members do not develop ownership or passion for the community. In their personal networks and project teams consisting of former Monday colleagues they were able to engage in knowing and learning processes since they felt acknowledged, had developed mutual trust and shared similar backgrounds which formed a substantial base for the sharing and creation of knowledge (Levin *et al.*, 2002; Schilling and Kluge, 2009).

When the research participants talked about learning and knowledge creation activities they to a large degree referred to activities which they consciously participated in such as community work and lessons learnt. Usually, they did not consider that they also shared and created knowledge by socially interacting with their colleagues, mostly former Monday colleagues, on a daily basis. However some of them, such as Melanie and Rebecca, acknowledged the effectiveness of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). They reported that what they learnt with and from other consultants in their daily environment within informal communities was more effective and easier to apply compared with what they learnt from classroom training. This also supports Gherardi's (1999) understanding of learning as a process of coming to know.

At InterConsult the consultants participating in this study felt that they were supposed to maximise their billable hours at the client site and that the generation of new knowledge was not regarded as being their responsibility by the organisation's management. This perception is in line with Taminiou *et al.* (2009) and Brivot (2011) who state that the reward systems of Managed Professional Businesses such as the consultancy under

exploration in this research are usually based on the maximisation of billable hours and therefore there is not much space for the consultants to engage in knowledge building and sharing activities.

The research participants regarded being innovative and therefore the creation of knowledge as a substantial part of their role and felt that in the current situation their skills and experiences were not acknowledged anymore. To them being challenged in terms of being required to constantly generate new knowledge was important and made their job interesting, which is supported by Maister (2003). Whereas some consultants were intrinsically motivated to a degree which made them overcome the unfavourable context, determined by strict procedures and lack of autonomy, and continue their engagement in knowing and learning processes and therefore in knowledge creation which they regarded to be a substantial part of their daily work, others withdrew from these activities. Those who continued often developed new knowledge customised to a client's problem without the knowledge or permission of management since they did not trust management. Oster (2010) refers to these individuals as 'underground innovators'. The knowledge created by underground innovators was mostly not made accessible to the organisation, which lost potential. Consultants experienced that those in power, the organisation's management, not only aimed at inhibiting their knowledge creation activities by maintaining strict procedures and processes but also prevented new knowledge which was not in their interest to be disseminated throughout the organisation, which is supported by Coopey and Burgoyne (2000). The consultants also perceived their direct managers as not being supportive since they did not provide them with the autonomy and support they would have needed to foster their knowledge creation activities (Switzer, 2008). This, again, led to a decrease of knowledge creation and sharing activities of the research participants since they also experienced the lack of autonomy which was a sign of the management's lack of trust in them.

The interview accounts suggest that, beside trust and acknowledgement, the organisational elements of motivation and career had a major impact on the experiences of knowledge creation processes of the research participants.

The consultants' motivation was a main driver for the consultants' participation in knowledge creation activities. Organisational elements such as the takeover, the relationship with their new colleagues and management, acknowledgement of both their colleagues and management and the organisational context as a whole impacted on their motivation. The consultants stated that they were no longer extrinsically motivated due to the overall unfavourable organisational context.

However, as long as they still felt intrinsically motivated they were keen to participate in knowing and learning processes which is in line with Walker *et al.* (2006). Whereas some consultants managed to keep up their intrinsic motivation, others lost it since they experienced that management did not only not foster the consultants' activities but also actively inhibited them. They felt that neither they nor their skills and experiences were acknowledged at InterConsult. Consequently, they contributed less and less to the creation and sharing of knowledge within the organisational context.

Career prospects were one of the aspects with the most influence on the consultants' motivation to participate in knowing and learning processes. The majority of the research participants joined a management consultancy in the first place since they expected to advance their career quickly. This helped them accept long hours and stressful project assignment, which is supported by Loewendahl (2005). Since their career prospects essentially deteriorated after the takeover, they were less and less prepared to invest additional working hours into activities outside their project work such as community work since they were not rewarded for it. Additionally, the consultants felt that their contribution would have not become visible anyway since those who decided their promotions, their People Managers, did not work alongside them at InterConsult, unlike at Monday. This is supported by research carried out by Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008). Overall, the lack of career opportunities and lacking acknowledgement led to consultants, apart from those who were still highly intrinsically motivated, not being highly involved in knowing and learning processes.

The notions of career and acknowledgement have not been given special importance in previous research. Hence, this research offers a theoretical contribution by adding career and acknowledgement to the organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes.

In sum, the organisational elements explored in this research impacted negatively on the research participants' experiences of knowledge creation processes. Consequently, the research participants diminished their contribution to knowledge creation activities.

During the interpretation process it became apparent that the consultants' experiences as well as how they made sense of these experiences was often paradoxical. Especially in relation to the key organisational elements motivation,

intrinsic as well as extrinsic, and career and acknowledgement the consultants' statements made at different stages of the interviews contradicted each other at times. Whilst stating that they perceived themselves as being intrinsically motivated for example they at the same time assessed the organisational context as negatively impacting on their motivation to a degree which made it impossible for them to continue their participation in knowledge creation processes. The majority of consultants said in the interviews that to them career was very important but when they provided further details on what was important to them they negated the importance of career-related aspects such as pay-rises and managerial responsibility but rather focussed on the importance of being acknowledged for their work. Further, some of the consultants talked about not being willing to invest long hours anymore due to their diminishing motivation but then stated, at a later point of the interview, that they worked until late in the night and during the weekends.

Overall, they seemed to experience tensions in how they perceived the organisational context and the impact it had on them and their perceptions and expectations of themselves as management consultants and their identity connected to it. The analysis of the impact of the organisational context on the consultants' identity is beyond the scope of this thesis and is therefore not further explored here. However, the identity literature recognises that such contradictions and agreements may take place simultaneously (see Alvesson, 2001).

#### **5.4 Consultants' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes through a gender lens**

I embarked on this research journey with the purpose of exploring the individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of myself and my colleagues within the organisation under exploration. After I had carried out the first two interviews I began engaging with the participants' accounts by transcribing the interviews. It was then that I noticed that the research participants' accounts in some parts differed. Differences included how participants made sense of their experiences and how they sought to present themselves as well as the language they used to do so. By moving back and forwards between the different interview accounts and my research diary, my first interpretations indicated that these differences might be related to gender. I then decided to offer a second stage of analysis at the macro-level in this study by making explicit the gendered nature of these experiences through a gender lens.

Employing a gender lens enables me to place special focus on and be sensitive to the role of gender in my research endeavour (Collins, 2005). Furthermore, a gender lens makes visible the gendered nature of the individual participants' experiences. A gender lens not only provides a view of the individuals' experiences but also enables their individual backgrounds and context to be incorporated into my interpretations.

In line with White (2006, p.60) it is important to avoid using this 'new set of spectacles' to turn a previously gender-blind approach into an interpretation which 'reads in' gender differences when inappropriate or precludes alternative interpretations. By feeding back my interpretations to two of the research participants I aimed to avoid this potential pitfall. We jointly reflected on the illustrations and my subjective interpretations of them. I then went back to my interpretations once again to 'interpret my interpretations' (Alvesson and Sköldböck, 2000).

By applying a gender lens to the individuals' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes I aim to provide fresh views on the field of learning, knowledge and knowledge creation.

#### **5.4.1 Unsettling the gender binary**

In order to unsettle the gender binary, the extracts from the interview participants' accounts are not only explored in terms of potential differences between men and women but also in terms of differences within the women's and within the men's accounts. This corresponds to the understanding of gender of this thesis that the categories male/female and masculine/feminine are "*traits or forms of subjectivities that are present in all persons*" (Billing and Alvesson, 1997, p.85). Hence, women cannot be portrayed as being a homogenous group and neither can men which would be reinforced if the interpretations in this section were limited to a comparison between the group of men consultants and the group of women consultants.

The illustrations of the gendered nature of the consultants' experiences are presented utilising the analytical framework whilst addressing the interview themes. Thereby, the focus is on those elements of the analytical framework and on those themes of the interviews in which the impact of gender became visible through a gender lens. In some cases the interpretations of themes were merged in order to enable a comprehensive analysis.

Following the analytical framework and in order to set the context of the gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, an insight into the perceptions of women in knowledge-intensive organisations such as the organisation explored in this research is presented first. The chapter then moves on to the participants' gendered perceptions and experiences of knowledge creation processes, and inherent to it learning and knowing activities, within the organisational context. Next, the chapter explores the impact of the organisational elements on the individual gendered experiences of knowledge creation processes. In line with the autoethnographic approach of this research the following sections include interpretations of my interview account. Overall, I selected those interview extracts which demonstrate the gendered nature of the experiences most vividly. Some of the illustrations have already been presented in Section 5.3, others are introduced here. The extracts which have already been presented in Section 5.3 are indicated by the comment '(see Section 5.3)'. In a second step, Section 5.4.8 explores the relationship between the language used by the research participants and their gender. Here, I draw on the illustrations from both Section 5.3 and Section 5.4.

#### **5.4.2 Women in knowledge-intensive firms**

##### ***Perceptions of gender***

The extracts from the research participants' accounts presented in this section illustrate the patriarchal organisational context of the consultants' gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes within the knowledge-intensive organisation explored.

Some research participants, mostly men consultants, expressed their opinion about gender issues at work, in particular regarding the role of women in the organisation explored. Many participants knew about my research topic in advance due to our close working relationship as well as the private contact I had with the majority of them. I felt that I could not deny them information about the research since this would have demoted them to a research object instead of an equal partner in the research process. Consequently, the research participants were aware of the gendered nature of my research question. This may have created a bias since otherwise the participants probably would not have paid as much attention to the gender issue as they did.

Some of the men consultants who commented on the role of women in the organisation, such as **Ben** and **Keith**, stated that they did not differentiate between

working with men or women and appreciated it most when women 'blended' into teams and organisations. According to their statements, they did not appreciate when women wanted to be seen as something special or asked for special attention by dressing provocatively or behaving ostentatiously.

*"I prefer the type of woman who simply integrates herself. Better than a woman who always thinks that she has a special role or more rights. She should simply be another colleague. (...) If you want to be fully accepted being a woman than you have to play the role of the colleague and not the one of a sex symbol."* (Ben)

*"I try to see everything under the aspect of professional competence and try not to make a difference between men and women. I don't see any difference related to the gender of a colleague. Some male colleagues might have a problem with a female team lead. Therefore, it might be that a female manager has to prove more than a male colleague before she is accepted and people trust her. (...) Women are too young, too good-looking or not good-looking enough or too blond. There is always a reason. But it hardly has anything to do with missing qualifications."* (Keith)

At first, these statements suggest that the men consultants' attitudes towards their women colleagues were in line with the notion of meritocracy. Meritocracy is based on the sameness of women and men which implies that access to powerful positions is determined by aspects such as talent, skills and the ability of individuals independent of the individual's gender (Scully, 2003; Sealy, 2010). However, especially Ben's account illustrates that women were supposed to blend in by behaving like other men consultants in order to be integrated. He did not want women to cause any form of disturbance or to require any special treatment. His account suggests that he regarded masculine behaviour as the norm and required women to adapt their behaviour to this norm. Such expectations implied that the women consultants needed to suppress their femininity in order to behave in masculine ways and to blend in. Consequently, the women might have faced a dual challenge; if they behaved in masculine ways they were labelled unfeminine, but if they demonstrated more female behaviour they were likely to be regarded as unsuitable and out of place (Mavin, 2009; Evetts, 1997; Powell *et al.*, 2009). Women consultants who did not perform accordingly were most likely neither able to become full members of the organisation nor able to substantially advance their careers (Powell *et al.*, 2009). Women consultants most likely were confronted with the double bind since they were expected to behave in ways perceived as feminine in order to live up to the gender social role expectations of being a woman and in ways perceived as masculine to fulfil their role as consultant (Gherardi, 1994).

**Keith** acknowledged that women consultants in lead positions might need to perform better than men consultants in comparable positions to be accepted in the same way. This implies that women and men consultants were not treated equally but women always needed to prove that they could do as well as their men colleagues (Maddock, 1999). Keith added that women were very often judged by their outer appearance which was either too sexy or not sexy enough. His statement is in line with Gherardi (1994) who states that to men it appears to be difficult not to see women as a sexual object which faces women with the double bind to behave like men without being one and to behave unlike a woman although being one in order to be successful.

**Steve** reported that he perceived women and men to be different for instance in terms of how they solved problems. He brought up the notions of emotions and facts in relation to problem solving and stated that it was related to personalities rather than gender on which one person draws in order to solve an issue. When talking about team roles he seemed to regard being a woman as a role in itself.

*“It may sound a bit dull, but my own experience is that women and men have different ways of approaching problems, whether more based on emotions or facts may be related to personality as well. (...) Like it is important having someone in your team who is moderator and another one who is the idea generator it is also important to have a woman in your team.”*

His account suggests that he might have been about to say that women focus on emotions whereas men focus on facts when solving problems which would have reinforced sex-role stereotype thinking. However, in the end he seemed keen to relativise his statement by linking those two notions to personalities instead. Steve appeared to view adding a woman to a team as equivalent to an additional role. This statement suggests that he regarded women as being outsider, as being ‘the Other’ (de Beauvoir, 1953) deviating from the norm represented by men which implied that he marginalised his women colleagues’ contribution (Mavin, 2001a; Martin, 2006).

**Ben** appreciated the women’s contribution to the team in terms of improved communication but at the same time did not appreciate when women stood out for example by ‘bitching around’.

*“If women are part of the team then men make an effort in terms of communication for example. And I think the climate is also better. But if you have two or three women who are bitching around then it gets really exhausting.”*

In line with Mavin (2008b) Ben might have interpreted women as being assertive and competitive when describing them as 'bitching around'. These women might have done some elements of gender differently by performing more in line with notions of masculinity which are closely linked to stereotypical behaviour of men and hence did not fit Ben's understanding of women. Since these women colleagues most likely challenged the established gender order Ben labelled them as 'bitches' (Mavin, 2008b). However, in terms of improving communication within the team, women did gender well in Ben's eyes since he most likely connected communication skills with the notion of femininity and therefore with the stereotypical behaviour of women.

Women also commented on their own role as a woman consultant as well as on the roles of their women colleagues.

**Liz** recalled an incident with her woman team lead after Liz spoke up to her in a project meeting and made assumptions about how a man team lead would have behaved in a similar situation.

*"She was personally offended and didn't talk to me anymore. You know, a man would have come to you and would have said: Listen that was crap. Probably to make a mark, but at least he wouldn't have ignored me."*

In this incident Liz's woman team lead behaved in accordance with sex-role stereotypes and therefore did gender well. However, Liz regarded her as reacting inappropriately and commented that a man manager would have reacted much more directly and without being resentful. Liz's perception of this incident is in line with Mavin (2009) and Powell *et al.* (2009) who state that women, especially in male-dominated organisations, face the challenge that if they behave in masculine ways, direct and rather unemotional in this case, they are labelled as unfeminine, but if they demonstrate apparently female behaviour they are likely to be assessed as out of place and incompatible with their role.

However, **Liz** at the same time reported that working together with other women in equal positions made life much easier to her.

*"In a team which has only female members there is no one who has to show up and demonstrate how important she is. I feel that women integrate into a team and are willing to subordinate themselves to the given structures much more than male colleagues. (...) I am not saying that women are not competitive, but they express this in a different way."*

In the context of teamwork not only men consultants but also women consultants stated that they appreciated sex-role stereotypical behaviour of their woman colleagues. Attributes such as modesty and subordination, collaboration, pleasing others and being group-oriented, which are traditionally linked to femininity, fit together well with a harmonious climate within a team (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Gilligan, 1982; Maddock, 1999).

In both men's and women's accounts gender and sex were used interchangeably, supposedly unconsciously in the majority of accounts, which implies that women as well as men consultants linked women to notions of femininity and men to notions of masculinity which in many cases led to sex-role stereotyping in the women's and men's sense-making processes. Hence, the interview participants 'essentialised' gender (Billing and Alvesson, 2000) which entailed the risk of regarding men and masculinity as the norm (Wilson, 1996) in the male-oriented organisational context of the organisation under exploration. Women and femininity were viewed as 'the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1953) deviating from the norm which marginalises their potential contribution to the organisation (Mavin, 2001a; Martin, 2006) as well as their contribution to learning and knowledge processes.

The next section illustrates the research participants' gendered perceptions of knowledge creation within the organisational context and how these gendered perceptions impacted on their experiences.

#### **5.4.3 The gendered nature of knowledge creation**

##### ***Knowledge sharing and acknowledgement/knowledge sharing and trust/ perceptions of knowledge creation/hidden knowledge creation/prerequisites for knowledge creation***

In the male-dominated organisational context of the organisation explored, the engagement of consultants in knowledge creation processes was often not appreciated or was even rejected for a number of reasons. Some of the women participants shared in the interviews that, as a consequence of their ideas being rejected, they dared less and less to expose themselves by expressing and sharing their ideas although they considered themselves as creative outside of work. **Liz** for instance preferred to leave her creativity 'at home'.

**Liz's** account vividly illustrates how some of the women consultants felt in their work environment. Her perception is particularly concerning and extreme since she on the one hand seemed to be above average creatively but on the other hand felt

restrained and insecure to a degree that she was unable to express her creativity in her work setting. She seemed to trust neither the organisation's management nor her colleagues. She appeared to be not only afraid of being exposed but much more of losing her job and with it the foundation of her living. Her distinct mistrust even made her sceptical about her colleagues' and management's intention when she was approached to share her ideas.

*“When someone asks me for my ideas my first feeling is that this person wants to test me and as a reaction I take on a defensive position. But probably this is just me. As I mentioned before, I prefer to live out my creative side outside of work.”*

Liz in her account demonstrated an exaggerated gender performance by being overly emotional, sensitive and lacking self-confidence which can be linked to notions of femininity (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Mavin and Grandy, 2011).

However, other women consultants reported similar, if less intense, experiences.

**Katja** did gender well in her account since she stated that to her a trustful relationship with her management, as well as the feeling that she as an individual as well as her experiences and creativity were acknowledged and valued by the organisation, would have been vital to provide her with the confidence to share her creative potential within the organisational context.

*“Since I don't know my manager that well I hesitate to present my ideas – I simply don't know how he will react or whether he has the time to look at it and think about it or it will simply be forgotten due to time constraints.”*

Like a number of women consultants **Liz** did not regard herself as creative.

*“I am not a person who actively comes up with innovative ideas; I am rather reacting to certain situations. For instance if someone shows me a concept and tells me how they plan to do it then I am probably reacting to it by suggesting alternative solutions.”*

These women consultants did gender well by demonstrating that they were lacking self-confidence in their creative ideas and behaved rather passively in terms of coming forward with them. They also placed a special importance on being related to others through trustful relationships in order to make them feel comfortable enough to share their ideas. This behaviour is strongly linked to sex-role stereotypes of femininity (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Maier, 1999).

The majority of men consultants did gender well by stating that they mostly accepted rejection of their ideas without being personally affected by it. Their way of dealing with it was either not to make any further effort to contribute in knowledge creation processes anymore due to the perception that it was not worth the effort or to seek implementation of their creative idea into their project work without approval of management, which was introduced as the notion of the 'underground innovator' (Oster, 2010) in Section 5.3.1. Often this led to a higher satisfaction on the clients' side which endorsed the men consultants to keep their style of working in the future. Their reaction to their creative ideas being rejected suggests they were self-assertive to a degree which could not be negatively impacted on by the rejection of their ideas.

*"Although my ideas were not accepted I implemented them in one of my projects and the client was very satisfied. This is the way we do things around here. We try to work our way around the system." (Marc, see Section 5.3.1)*

Not only men consultants but also women consultants like **Katja** reported having found ways to turn their creative ideas into innovations without being dependent on their management's approval.

*"In order to achieve something new you sometimes have to elegantly bypass processes and rules."*

Katja's behaviour demonstrated that she did gender differently since she seemed to be self assertive about herself and her skills and experiences as well as new ideas which is more aligned with notions of masculinity than femininity (Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

**Rebecca** was not at all apprehensive about receiving negative feedback on her creative contributions. She even sought to irritate colleagues as well as management with her persistence when it came to her creative ideas being looked at.

*"I am not afraid of negative feedback on my creative ideas. (...) Rejection would not prevent me from trying it over and over. I am too much of a fighter to give up even if it had negative consequences for me. I provoke a lot. (...) This way I at least get a reaction."*

However, even Rebecca stated that she needed a positive work environment in order to enable her creativity.

*“When I don’t feel comfortable and cannot enjoy myself I am not creative. At the moment I am not enjoying myself very much.”*

Rebecca showed that she actively pushed her creative ideas and was not afraid of rejection but even more motivated by it to try again. Her provocative behaviour suggests that she had a high level of self-confidence. Overall she clearly did some elements of gender differently by performing in a way which can be aligned to sex-role stereotypes of masculine behaviour. However, at the same time she also did other elements of gender well by emphasising that she needed a positive environment for her creativity to unfold. Her statement suggests that she was sensitive to her environment and that emotions had a considerable impact on her knowledge creation activities, which corresponds more with the notion of femininity than masculinity. Rebecca moved in the ‘third space’ (Linstead and Pullen, 2006) where practices can swap positions. She blurred established gender binaries by performing multiplicity (Mavin and Grandy, 2011).

Other women consultants were genuinely interested in helping their colleagues. To **Sandra** it seemed to be sufficient that she and her colleague got the chance to develop and implement new knowledge and to make it available to a wider group of colleagues.

*“I was lucky last year at a point where I didn’t have a project. Together with a graduate I got the chance to work on a Component Business Model. We sat there for three weeks and worked on it. (...) The results are now in a database. Our names are shown nowhere but that doesn’t matter, it is there and the next people dealing with it can use it.”*

Sandra was self confident about the positive impact on other colleagues of the model she jointly developed with a colleague. However, not minding that she and her colleague were not acknowledged as the source of their innovative work results reinforces that she did gender well. Sandra’s modest and group-oriented behaviour suggests that she behaved in a way conforming to sex-role stereotypes of feminine behaviour (Maddock, 1999; Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

These illustrations show that the lack of trust between colleagues and in management as well as the lack of acknowledgement of the consultants, both women and men, and their skills as well as their knowledge creation potential by their management diminished the utilisation of the consultants’ knowledge creation potential. The lack of acknowledgement and its impact on the gendered experiences is further explored in Section 5.4.7.

The next section explores how the climate impacted on the individual gendered experiences of knowledge creation processes.

#### **5.4.4 The gendered nature of climate**

##### ***Working with former Monday colleagues/working with 'new' colleagues***

Both men and women consultants stated that a good climate in their team, independently of whether the team consisted of former Monday or new colleagues or both, was essential to them in terms of feeling comfortable in their work environment and achieving high-quality work results. However, whereas the men consultants often focused on the importance of a good team climate for good work results some of the women consultants emphasised the social side of the teams they worked in.

**Sandra** for instance compared her project team to a family.

*"We jointly survived divorces and welcomed babies, we were like a family."*  
(see Section 5.3.5)

Sandra's comparison of her team with a family and her focus on the interpersonal aspects of her team suggest that she did gender well in accordance with the notion of femininity (Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

**Simone** even stated that teamwork was the only thing she truly enjoyed in her job and for which it was worth spending long hours in the office (see Section 5.3.5).

*"In the end I live for team work. This is the only thing that is fun."*

Simone's account suggests that teamwork had the highest priority for her which implies that she subordinated herself to the team. This behaviour is in line with notions of femininity by feeling responsible for others, understanding oneself in relation to others and being selfless to a certain degree (Maddock, 1999). Hence, she did gender well.

**Ben** focused more on the advantages he experienced due to good teamwork (see Section 5.3.5).

*"On some projects we had a really good team spirit. Everyone had time for his or her colleagues to share knowledge and to bring everyone to the same level of knowledge. (...)."*

**Marc** regarded good teamwork as vital for knowledge creation activities (see Section 5.3.5).

*“At Monday teamwork among colleagues was very open and we had the time and space to try out new things.”*

Both Ben and Marc demonstrated behaviour which is more in line with notions of masculinity by connecting their team work and the team spirit to work results (Metcalfe and Linstead, 2003). Both did gender well.

Although the accounts suggest that men and women consultants focussed on different aspects of teamwork both men and women deemed good teamwork and a positive team climate as essential for high-quality work results and as a basis for knowing and learning processes.

The next section explores the impact of the notion of motivation on the gendered experiences of knowledge creation processes.

#### **5.4.5 The gendered nature of motivation**

##### ***Sources of motivation/motivation and unfavourable conditions/loss of motivation/the impact of low motivation***

The research participants regarded their motivation as a crucial driver for their work in general, but it was viewed to be of special importance to their participation in knowing and learning processes. All interview participants, regardless of being women or men consultants, stated that they in general regarded themselves as being highly motivated. Some of the men consultants such as **Steve** stated that their motivation was equally dependent on intrinsic as well as extrinsic aspects (see Section 5.3.9).

*“I derive my motivation and level of satisfaction from mainly three sources: career which implies the ability to move up the career ladder within a few years, and the financial aspect related to it; working on interesting projects which help me to develop myself and my skills and the people who bring me to enjoy my work and who I enjoy being with since they have similar preferences and similar stories to tell.”*

The majority of men consultants also emphasised the importance of the extrinsic motivational aspects on their overall motivation level. **Marc** for example said (see Section 5.3.9)

*“At some point the negative extrinsic motivation will probably outbalance my intrinsic motivation and then I will have to leave. That is what has happened to many of our colleagues already.”*

The women consultants in their accounts mostly focussed on aspects such as enjoying their work and being acknowledged for it when talking about influences on their motivation. Career advancement, if at all, only played a minor role.

**Helen** for example worked for almost three years in her free time outside work on a Change Management Toolkit, in which documents and other important information were stored for future project work, for her colleagues to use. During this time she was neither promoted nor received any form of financial or time compensation for her effort. Nevertheless, she remained motivated to continue dedicating her free time to it since she was convinced of the usefulness of this document and received positive feedback from her colleagues. However, after three years even her intrinsic motivation had diminished to a level where she was no longer prepared to continue.

*“I wouldn’t do that again. It was extremely time intensive and the benefit of it was in no relation to the effort.”*

Other statements by women consultants such as **Katja** and **Sandra** reinforced that women seemed to be more inclined to disregard strongly how they were treated by the organisation’s management and to focus on interpersonal acknowledgement of their work instead.

*“We still do our very best on projects no matter what management does or not. In the end, I am the one standing in front of the client and I have to answer for what I did or not.” (Katja)*

*“I am motivated for this project here.” (Sandra)*

Although women as well as men consultants stated that they were highly motivated there seemed to be different reasons constituting their motivation. In general, both women and men interview participants were management consultants who are commonly believed to be highly motivated (Alvesson, 2004; Mitchell and Meacham, 2011). Still, the majority of men consultants did gender well by placing higher importance on sources of motivation which were measurable such as career advancement, financial aspects and the enhancements of their skills. Their perceptions and behaviour are in line with traditional understandings of masculinity being linked to rationality and competitiveness (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Wilson, 2003). The women participants’ accounts suggest that the majority of women

engaged in doing gender by emphasising aspects impacting on their motivation which were very much linked to sex-role stereotypes of femininity including relatedness to others and taking care of others (Maddock, 1999), for example by creating a toolkit in order to support colleagues in their work without receiving any other benefit from it.

In summary, the men consultants' motivation was likely to be lower than the women's since aspects such as financial rewards and career advancement were scarce at the time of the interviews. The women's motivation was likely to be higher as long as they were able to work predominately with their former Monday colleagues since they were satisfied by being part of the team and by being able to support each other and being acknowledged for their work. As a consequence, the women's motivation to participate in knowing and learning processes seemed largely detached from the organisation's career model and reward system whereas the men consultants' participation was strongly linked to it. Although the consultants' motivation was one of the main drivers for their participation in knowing and learning processes this does not allow the general conclusion that the women participants contributed more to these processes since other organisational elements also impacted on both the men's and the women's participation.

As illustrated above motivation, career opportunities and acknowledgement were strongly interrelated in the interview accounts and therefore could not be interpreted completely separately here. The next section will further explore the impact of career and acknowledgement on the individual gendered experiences of knowledge creation processes.

#### **5.4.6 The gendered nature of career and acknowledgement**

##### ***Different perceptions of career***

Section 5.3.10 illustrates that career opportunities and acknowledgement had a crucial impact on the research participants' motivation and were therefore also essential for the participants' participation in knowing and learning processes.

When we touched upon the importance of career in the interviews many of the women participants stated that career in the classical sense of moving up the career ladder was not important to them. They either denied the importance of career at all or they had developed a different personal understanding of it. For example **Rebecca** and **Melanie** focused on personal acknowledgement and challenge rather than on titles, managerial responsibilities or salary increases.

*“No, I am not interested in having a career. I want to do a good job. Career to me is more about being acknowledged.” (Rebecca)*

*“Career to me means to be at a certain point at a certain point of time. But for me it is really important to be challenged and to be promoted at the same time. And that is how I find self-fulfilment in my daily work.” (Melanie, see Section 5.3.10)*

Their statements suggest that moving up the career ladder in this organisation was not something which the women consultants seemed to be keen on. Some woman consultants such as **Simone** perceived themselves as not being determined enough to advance their career.

*“I am not sufficiently career-oriented to actively advance my career at InterIT.”*

Others such as **Claire** and **Sandra** regarded the promotion of their career as not possible within the organisation under exploration but decided to remain within the organisation nevertheless and therefore to sacrifice their career aspirations at least for the time being for personal reasons which they perceived as being at least as important as work.

*“If you want to pursue your career you just can’t stay with InterIT. I didn’t stay because of my career but due to other reasons.” (Claire)*

*“I am in my home town; I can do what I want so it’s okay.” (Sandra)*

What they seemed to be keen on instead was to be respected and acknowledged for their work, as well as being satisfied about the content of their job and their performance which had an essential impact on their motivation.

*“I really like what I am doing a lot.” (Rebecca)*

This is supported by Section 5.4.5 which illustrates that being acknowledged for their work by their environment played a major role for the women participants in relation to their motivation whereas career, if at all, only played a minor role.

When the women consultants did not receive respect and acknowledgement and no longer enjoyed their work, they appeared to be no longer open-minded about and willing to engage in extra activities such as knowledge sharing and participating in community work.

Overall, the interview extracts suggest that the majority of women consultants placed high importance on feeling comfortable in their position, being acknowledged by their management and colleagues they worked with and that they rather neglected their career than their personal life. Advancing one's career in the organisation under exploration seemed to involve actively, and probably even aggressively, demanding to be supported which some of the women consultants did not appear to be willing to do. This can be interpreted as women doing gender well by drawing on traditional gendered norms according to which femininity is associated with being passive rather than active (Nicolson, 1996). Some women consultants emphasised that it was important to them to be acknowledged by their surroundings which corresponds with the notion of femininity which implies that women tend to identify themselves in relation to, as well as being connected to, others (Maddock, 1999; Billing and Alvesson, 2000). This was further supported by their statements that they needed to feel comfortable in their jobs and needed to like what they were doing in order to work efficiently since they tended to react sensitively to an environment or job which they experienced negatively (Gilligan, 1982). The women's prioritisation of their private lives over their career might again imply that those women did gender well by reinforcing societal perceptions of gender which connect femininity to the private sphere (Gherardi, 1994). It also implies that missing career opportunities did not necessarily impact negatively on their participation in knowledge creation activities on the one hand. On the other hand good career opportunities did not necessarily entail that women increased their participation in knowledge creation activities when they perceived their social context as negative.

Most men interview participants however had a distinctive understanding of what career meant to them or where they sought to get to in their career such as **Keith** who in detail illustrated what he was striving to achieve in his career.

*“To have a career is indeed important. (...). To me career is about taking over managerial responsibility, not only on a project but also in a hierarchical structure meaning to be responsible for staff assigned to you and their development. (...) Budget responsibility is another point which includes that you have a greater sum of money available for capital investments as well as sales targets which implies that you yourself have to acquire clients which can positively impact on advancing your career.”*

The emphasis on career might have been connected to the aspect that to many men consultants their job presented a substantial part of their lives and identity which is reinforced by **Marc's** statement

*“Of course I am motivated. (...) If I enjoy my job and do not only work to live, but also live in order to work then I am intrinsically motivated.”*

Keith and Marc in their accounts did gender in line with traditional understandings of masculinity as being competitive and career-oriented (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Maier, 1999) which is supported by extracts presented in Section 5.4.3 which illustrate that the majority of men consultants understood and consciously used knowledge as a tool to promote their careers.

However, some of the men consultants' perceptions of career were much closer to the women consultants' statements in terms of valuing personal aspects over career.

*“Career would be important to me if I was single and not working from my hometown.” (Tom)*

*“Family is at least equally important as career, or more important. (...) If it wasn't for the job security here I would definitely be long gone.” (Will)*

Tom's and Will's statements illustrate their emphasis on their private lives which is contradictory to traditional, sex role stereotyped understanding of men which inherently connects men to masculinity and therefore to being productive, competitive and career-oriented (Nicolson, 1996; Gherardi, 1994; Maier, 1999). Instead of conforming to this stereotypical understanding these extracts suggest that men were doing gender differently by performing more stereotypically feminine behaviour (Billing and Alvesson, 1997; Marshall, 1984; Messerschmidt, 2009).

Some women as well as one man consultant also appeared to be missing confidence in their own capabilities which made them doubt whether their performance was sufficient to 'deserve' being promoted. **Rebecca** described being selected for her job as management consultant after an extensive selection process as a 'coincidence' rather than acknowledging her own achievement. **Ian** hesitated to apply for a position outside of the organisation since he was anxious of not being sufficiently qualified.

*“I think that probably I am not good enough to be hired by someone else.”*

These illustrations conform to the men's and women's statements presented in the previous section dealing with the notion of motivation. Whereas the majority of the men consultants linked their level of participation in knowing and learning activities to its impact on their careers the women consultants did not value their career as

highly as being acknowledged, feeling comfortable and being able to maintain a balanced lifestyle. This was also the case for a few men consultants. As a consequence, the men and women consultants experienced the influence of career on their individual gendered experiences of knowledge creation differently. Whereas for the majority of the men consultants career strongly impacted on their experiences of knowledge creation processes the women's experiences were less impacted by career than by aspects such as acknowledgement.

This is supported by the participants' perceptions and experiences of knowledge and knowledge sharing as a means to promote one's career.

### ***Knowledge sharing and acknowledgement***

Taken as a whole, the majority of men consultants appeared to regard knowledge as an objective, a tool of power which could be useful to promote one's career or to claim other colleagues' knowledge if needed in return for sharing their knowledge. Being a subject matter expert and therefore knowledgeable in certain areas was something which they regarded positively and a state they were keen to achieve. However, as **Keith's** statement on page 201 illustrates, they were also willing to share knowledge with colleagues they liked as long as they were acknowledged as the source which then again had the potential to enhance their reputation as subject matter experts.

Overall, mostly men consultants reported that they actively participated in knowledge sharing activities to become known in the organisation as subject matter experts and to progress in their careers. The statements of the majority of the men participants suggested that men were doing gender well when it came to knowledge sharing. They seemed highly confident about their skills and rational in terms of investing their time primarily into learning and knowing processes in contexts which made them visible to management. In their behaviour they aligned well with notions of masculinity by being self-assertive, rational, competitive and in control of their actions (Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

**John** on the other hand stated that he was mainly interested in sharing knowledge in order to advance his ideas as well as the ideas of other members of his personal network or to jointly solve a problem. His account suggests that he did this for the sake of the specific issue since he enjoyed pushing ideas and achieving results.

*"If I have a spontaneous idea and don't know how to press ahead with this idea then I activate my personal network in order to see who is able to*

*really help me. And this is what you get back. And I think this is the same for the majority of people I work with. We all know that speed is important and different people have different ideas and they like to help others to create something new.”*

John’s extract isolated from its context suggests that contrary to the majority of his men colleagues he was intrinsically motivated to engage in learning and knowing processes to build new knowledge without pursuing career aspirations by doing so. However, when looking at the context in which he worked, it becomes obvious that he was constantly in the presence of middle and upper management which made himself and his behaviour visible to those who had a great impact on how his career was developing. Hence he did gender well.

**Will** stated that, unlike other men consultants, he was interested in the personal aspect of knowledge sharing and did not have any other tactical purposes in mind when sharing knowledge.

*“(…) The moment I share knowledge I share knowledge with you or another colleague and not with the organisation but with a person I like, because the person is open and I like to work with this person.”*

Will’s focus on interpersonal relationships when sharing knowledge suggests that he drew from rather feminine notions of behaviour and therefore did gender differently (Alvesson and Billing, 2000) in relation to the sharing of knowledge.

The majority of women reported that they preferably engaged in sharing knowledge with colleagues they had built a relationship with. For these colleagues they were willing to take the time in order to provide their help to them.

*“Knowledge sharing works quite well, especially with the colleagues you have known for a few years. One takes the time then to help the other. Either in a face-to-face communication or by establishing contacts to third parties who have the knowledge that is needed.” (Katja)*

The women consultants regarded their participation in learning and knowledge sharing processes as a way to help others. They did gender well by being satisfied with being able to help in solving problems or creating new ideas. They did not consciously link their activities to promoting their careers. This conforms to sex-role stereotypes of feminine behaviour in terms of being caring and feeling responsible for others and the group as well as being selfless to a certain degree (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Maddock, 1999).

Liz however regarded knowledge as a double-edged sword. She stated

*“I feel that the more I know the more I become aware of my gaps and the things I don’t know.”*

Liz also saw participating in learning and knowledge sharing processes as a risk rather than as an opportunity to promote her career.

*“I sometimes hesitate to ask colleagues for advice since I always have the feeling that I don’t want to show in a bigger picture that there is something that I don’t know about in an area where it is expected from me that I have to know it. Probably that’s related to my insecurity. (...) Overall, it’s hard for me to share knowledge and to assess people in terms of how they will react to my criticism. It’s not worth it when in the end nothing is going to change anyway. The only one suffering from it is me in the end.”*

She linked her doubts to her insecurity. It might also be that she lacked trust in the other colleagues, which made her hesitate to open up and to make herself vulnerable (Dovey, 2009). Liz added

*“Sometimes I appreciate working in areas where I am not considered to be an expert, because that gives me a feeling of security. I am allowed to make mistakes and I can tell them: look, you cannot expect this from me because it is not written down in my CV that I can do this.”*

Liz’s account suggests that she exaggerated some elements of gender in line with Mavin and Grandy’s (2011) understanding, which regards exaggerated gender performance as overdoing expected gender behaviour. She seemed to overly lack self-confidence which made her turn a positive aspect, her skills and experiences, into a negative one by focussing on skills she was missing instead of appreciating and being self-assertive about her skills. In addition to her lack of self-confidence, she also seemed to lack trust in her colleagues. This made her hesitate to ask for support on the one hand and on the other even to share her skills and experiences. She regarded sharing her skills and contributing to the improvement of existing services or processes not as a positive thing which might also advance her career but as criticism which might not be appreciated by her colleagues and, as a consequence, held herself back. Instead of enhancing her expert status which might also have had a positive impact on her career she preferred to work in areas outside of her expertise and thereby to hide her skills and experiences in order to be able to make mistakes and not be made accountable for them. She thus overly aligned with the sex-role stereotypes of feminine behaviour by being overly emotional and sensitive (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Gilligan, 1982) about her participation in knowing and learning processes.

In contrast with the majority of her men consultants **Rebecca** regarded the status of being a subject matter expert not as a desirable condition but rather as a signal for moving on to another topic or role since she did not feel challenged any longer.

*“When I don’t need anyone’s help anymore then I am at a point where I think I could probably start something new now.”*

Rebecca’s account clearly differentiates from the statements of her men colleagues. It not only suggests that she did not link achieving an expert status to promoting her career but also actively wanted to move away from this status because to her this was a sign that she needed to move on to a new topic in order to be challenged again. She did gender well in terms of not being focused on promoting her career. However, she might also have been doing some gender elements differently by being competitive in her effort to gain more experiences and skills (Maier, 1999).

Overall, Rebecca and Liz’s accounts support the statements of the majority of women participants who did not regard being a subject matter expert as a highly sought-after position. They did not establish the importance of this in relation to their careers; none of the women participants mentioned knowledge sharing in connection with the notion of career. Whereas in Liz’s case this was mainly connected to her insecurity, Rebecca was interested in learning and moving on to a new challenge.

More in line with the statements by her men colleagues, **Claire** on the other hand, stated that she enjoyed being more knowledgeable than clients which made her feel superior.

*“It’s hard in the beginning of a new project to take on a lead expert role and you wonder whether you can do it. On the other side it is great to know that you are superior because of your knowledge. But this is what consultancy is about: always being one step ahead of the client.”*

Claire appeared to enjoy her expert status which made her feel ‘superior’ to others. Her strong self-confidence suggests that she did gender differently by aligning more with notions of masculinity than femininity (Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

Subsequently, although this might have not been the case, management as well as clients might have perceived men consultants as more knowledgeable than their women colleagues due to their more career-oriented attitude towards participation in learning and knowledge sharing activities.

#### **5.4.7 Illustrations of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes**

Table 5.4 below summarises some of the illustrations of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes discussed in Section 5.4. The extracts presented in this table were selected for their demonstration of how the consultants did gender well and differently in relation to their experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes. Table 5.4 also illustrates the areas in which women and men consultants did gender well and differently.

Table 5.4 Illustrations of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes – doing gender well/doing gender differently

Area	Doing gender well	Doing gender differently
Knowledge creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In general I am creative, but I am not sure whether this is true as well when it comes to my job. (...) In my private life where I don’t have any pressure I am writing short stories or poems. At work I feel so much under observation that I don’t dare to be creative. (...)” <b>Liz</b></li> <li>• “Although my ideas were not accepted I implemented them in one of my projects and the client was very satisfied. This is the way we do things around here. We try to work our way around the system.” <b>Marc</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In order to achieve something new you have sometimes have to elegantly bypass processes and rules.” <b>Katja</b></li> <li>• “I am not afraid of negative feedback to my creative ideas. (...) Rejection would not prevent me from trying it over and over. I am too much of a fighter to give up even if it had negative consequences for me. I provoke a lot. (...) This way I at least get a reaction.” <b>Rebecca</b></li> <li>• <b>None of the men consultants extracts illustrated men doing gender differently in connection to the notion of knowledge creation.</b></li> </ul>
Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We jointly survived divorces and welcomed babies, we were like a family.” <b>Sandra</b></li> <li>• “On some projects we had a really good team spirit. Everyone had time for his or her colleagues to share knowledge and to bring everyone to the same level of knowledge. (...)” <b>Ben</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>All research participants valued good teamwork. None of the women or men consultants’ extracts illustrated women or men doing gender differently in connection to the notion of teamwork.</b></li> </ul>
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We still do our very best on projects no matter what management does or not. In the end, I am the one standing in front of the client and I have to answer for what I did or not.” <b>Katja</b></li> <li>• “I am motivated for this project here.” <b>Sandra</b></li> <li>• “At some point the negative extrinsic motivation will probably outbalance my intrinsic motivation and then I will have to leave. That is what has happened to many of our colleagues already.” <b>Marc</b></li> <li>• “I derive my motivation and level of satisfaction mainly from three sources: career (...), and the financial aspect related to it; working on interesting projects which help me to develop myself and my skills and the people which bring me to enjoy my work.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>None of the women consultants extracts illustrated women doing gender differently in connection to the notion of motivation.</b></li> <li>• <b>None of the men consultants extracts illustrated men doing gender differently in connection to the notion of motivation.</b></li> </ul>

	Steve	
<b>Career and acknowledgement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I am not sufficiently career-oriented to actively advance my career at InterIT.” <b>Simone</b></li> <li>• “No, I am not interested in having a career. I want to do a good job. Career to me is more about being acknowledged.” <b>Rebecca</b></li> <li>• “To have a career is indeed important.” <b>Keith</b></li> <li>• “When I don’t need anyone’s help anymore then I am at a point where I think I could probably start something new now.” <b>Rebecca</b></li> <li>• “To a certain degree I share knowledge in order to advance my career. (...)” <b>Keith</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Career would be important to me if I was single and not working from my hometown.” <b>Tom</b></li> <li>• “Family is at least equally important as career, or more important. (...) If it wasn’t for the job security here I would definitely long be gone.” <b>Will</b></li> <li>• “(...) The moment I share knowledge I share knowledge with you or another colleague and not with the organisation but with a person I like, because the person is open and I like to work with this person.” <b>Will</b></li> <li>• <b>None of the women consultants did gender differently in connection to their perception of the notion of career and acknowledgement.</b></li> </ul>

The summary illustrates that the majority of both women and men research participants did gender well in terms of how they perceived knowledge and learning activities as well as the organisational elements that impacted on their experiences and how they acted upon their experiences. In particular the impact of the organisational elements of motivation, career and acknowledgement was perceived differently depending on the gender of the research participants. Neither the women nor the men consultants' accounts suggest that they did gender differently in relation to the perception of motivation. The same was the case for the women's perceptions of career and acknowledgement. However, Tom and Will had a different perception of career which was more in line with femininity and therefore they did some elements of gender differently. When talking about knowledge creation processes the majority of research participants did gender well with two exceptions, Rebecca and Katja, who demonstrated elements of doing gender differently. In relation to the notion of climate none of the interview participants behaved against sex-role stereotypes of gender behaviour (Mavin and Grandy, 2011). Whereas the women research participants valued good teamwork in terms of a positive climate, men research participants focused more on the outcomes of positive teamwork.

In summary, the majority of consultants did gender well whilst others did gender well and differently at the same time. In the next section, the gender lens explores the gendered nature of the language used in the interviews.

#### **5.4.8 Language in the interviews through a gender lens**

This section explores the language used in the interviews through a gender lens. The interview accounts suggest not only a difference in terms of how the interview participants made sense out of their experiences and presented themselves but also in terms of the language they used to do so.

The research participants either did gender well by using language which conforms to sex-role stereotypes of femininity and masculinity or they did gender differently in their talk by using language which was not in line with dominant gender norms. According to Coates (2004) language use is 'dynamic' which allows both women and men to chose between aligning themselves with dominant gender expectations or resist those in their choice of language. These choices have a significant influence on their construction as gendered subjects. However, in this research it is argued that the language choice often happens unconsciously. This is supported by

Martin (2003, 2006) who states that gender practices are often performed unconsciously and without individuals being reflexive.

Assumptions about feminine and masculine language are closely linked to sex-role stereotype understandings which assign men to the public domain and women to the private sphere (Coates, 2004). The public domain, on the one hand, is traditionally characterised by a masculine language style reflecting assertiveness, competition, objectivity and rationality. The private sphere, on the other side, is traditionally characterised by a feminine language style reflecting gentleness, collaboration, subjectivity and emotionality (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003).

In order to explore whether there might be a relation between the verbal behaviour of the research participants in the interview accounts and the gender of the interview participants I again look through a gender lens which enables the gendered nature of the language to become visible. This section focusses on exploring some of the extracts already introduced in the previous and this chapter as exemplars of the different use of language that became visible throughout the entire research accounts.

The analysis does not provide a full picture of the language applied over all the interviews since language is not the focus of this research but was nonetheless viewed to be an important element of the overall picture on individual gendered experiences of knowledge creation.

#### **5.4.8.1 Doing gender well in language use**

Overall, the exploration of the language used in the interview accounts through a gender lens supports the interpretations of the previous section on the individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes that illustrated that the majority of both women and men participants did gender well by conforming to sex-role stereotypes of feminine and masculine behaviour. This section exemplifies how women and men consultants did gender well in their verbal behaviour in the interviews.

Most of the men consultants made use of rather formal and rational language in their accounts. The men consultants often said 'you' instead of 'I' when they were talking about themselves and seemed rather analytic about and distanced from their

experiences. Often they made their points in short sentences and were rather monosyllabic.

**Keith** and **Steve** made sense of their experiences by structuring their accounts using terms such as 'on the one hand and on the other hand' and 'I derive my motivation mainly from three sources'. Keith further aimed at appearing professional by using terms such as 'I try to see everything under the aspect of professional competence'. It seemed as if Keith in particular was trying to look at both sides of the story in order to provide an objective and analytical assessment of the picture on a macro-level and to make a very well informed impression. Keith and Steve's use of language conforms to more masculine behaviour (Billing and Alvesson, 2000) which suggests that they did gender well.

The language of some of the men consultants' accounts appeared to be not only formal but also abstract. **Will** for example used the metaphor of a machine and the need for the machine to be maintained in order to work properly when talking about the training needs of the organisation. His account proposes that he transferred his experiences onto a more rational level by employing the metaphor of a machine. This apparently allowed him to make sense of his experiences in an objective, detached and rational way which corresponds to rather masculine behaviour and therefore suggests that he was also doing gender well (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Wilson, 2003).

Some of the men interview participants used rather informal and harsh language such as **Tom** who reported that he felt being 'kicked in his buttocks' and **Ben** who advised women not to behave like 'sex symbols' and described the way they behaved as 'bitching around'. Their language use proposed that they performed exaggerated forms of at least some elements of gender behaviour (Mavin and Grandy, 2011) in terms of using harsh language and reducing women to sex symbols.

The majority of the women consultants expressed themselves by using rather emotional language which suggested that they were personally involved to a high degree in what went on in the organisation. They appeared to be trying to make sense of the events taking place in a strongly personal and emotional way by mainly using the first person when expressing the feelings and emotions they had during those events and in the aftermath.

Expressions such as 'self-fulfilment', 'bend over backwards' and 'family' used by **Melanie** and **Sandra** underline their involvement and group-orientation which according to Maddock (1999) is more in line with femininity. **Liz** and **Sandra** described their experiences by using expressions such as 'surviving', 'suffering' and 'dangerous' which also illustrates their degree of involvement and negative perceptions of what was going on in the organisation. This somewhat extreme language is more in line with sex-role stereotypes of feminine behaviour in terms of being involved and subjective (Billing and Alvesson, 2000). Sandra demonstrated rather passive behaviour by using expressions such as 'I was lucky' and 'I got the chance' for describing a work-related activity she voluntarily carried out and did not get acknowledged for which is again more in line with femininity than masculinity (Nicolson, 1996). Liz illustrated her insecurity by using expressions such as 'hesitate', 'I am not sure' and 'my first feeling'. She also tried to relativise her perceptions by stating that 'probably this is just me'.

Overall, the women's language was more informal than formal and seemed more suitable for the private realm which is in line with notions of femininity (Gherardi, 1994). Their language underlined how intensively they experienced what was going on. What was going on was neither abstract nor did they seem to be able to make sense of it in a detached and objective manner. All these forms of behaviour indicate a strong link to more feminine notions of behaviour (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Maddock, 1999). Hence, all three did gender well. Overall, the majority of women did gender well in their language use in the interviews.

Table 5.5 summarises the men and women consultants' extracts discussed in this section.

Table 5.5 Doing gender well in language use

Consultant	Illustrations of use of language – doing gender well
Tom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I work until 11 pm and start at 7:30 am the next morning (...) and, as a reward, I get <b>kicked in my buttocks.</b>”</li> </ul>
Ben	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “(...) If you want to be fully accepted being a women than you have to play the role of the colleague and not the one of a <b>sex symbol.</b>”</li> <li>• “(...) But if you have two or three women who are <b>bitching around</b> than it gets really exhausting.”</li> <li>• “Since I am working on internal projects and don’t <b>generate revenue</b> at the moment, I have no chance to attend training courses anyway.“</li> </ul>
Keith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Of course the intrinsic motivation plays a major role <b>on the one hand, but on the other hand</b> one accepts the challenge to be able to deliver a project and to emerge from this as an expert for a certain topic. (...)”</li> <li>• “<b>I try to see everything under the aspect of professional competence</b> and try not to make a difference between men and women.”</li> <li>• “<b>Being a subject matter expert</b> in a community also improves <b>your status</b> in the organisation.”</li> </ul>
Steve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “<b>I derive my motivation and level of satisfaction from mainly three sources:</b> career which implies the ability to move up the career ladder within a few years, and the financial aspect related to it (...)”</li> </ul>
Will	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Like a <b>manufacturing company needs to invest in new machines</b> InterIT needs to invest in its employees’ knowledge.”</li> </ul>
Melanie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “(...) And that is how <b>I find self-fulfilment</b> in my daily work.”</li> <li>• “<b>I would bend over backwards for this company</b> (...) but no one is interested.”</li> </ul>
Sandra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “<b>We jointly survived divorces and welcomed babies, we were like a family.</b>”</li> <li>• “I find it <b>quite concerning</b> that I would know more people on an event organised by the client I currently work for than on an event of InterIT.”</li> <li>• “<b>I was lucky</b> last year at a point where I didn’t have a project. Together with a graduate I <b>got the chance</b> to work on a Component Business Model. (...)”</li> </ul>
Liz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I sometimes <b>hesitate</b> to ask colleagues for advice since I always have the feeling that I don’t want to show in a bigger picture that there is something that I don’t know about (...) Probably that’s related to <b>my insecurity.</b> (...) Overall, it’s <b>hard for me</b> to share knowledge and to assess people in terms of how they will react to my criticism. It’s not worth it when in the end nothing is going to change anyway. The only one <b>suffering</b> from it is me in the end.”</li> <li>• “(...) And even when you do this it’s <b>too dangerous</b> to change the approach in an ongoing project and therefore we go on like before.”</li> <li>• “In general I am creative, but <b>I am not sure</b> whether this is true as well when it comes to my job.“</li> <li>• “When someone asks me for my ideas <b>my first feeling</b> is that this person wants to test me and as a reaction I take on a defensive position. <b>But probably this is just me.</b> As I mentioned before, I prefer to live out my creative side outside of work.“</li> </ul>

#### 5.4.8.2 Doing gender differently in language use

However, there are also extracts in both women and men consultants' accounts that illustrate that men and women did at least some elements of gender differently in their use of language in the interviews by using language which did not conform to sex-role stereotypes of gender behaviour.

**Ian** for instance used expressions such as 'I think', 'probably', 'I personally don't believe' and 'I am too disillusioned' which are rather informal and subjective. **Steve** stated the 'I feel much more comfortable' which is not objective and detached but instead suggests involvement. This use of language indicates that Ian and Steve did not remain detached, objective and rational all the time but became involved, sensitive and emotional which corresponds with more feminine attributes (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Maddock, 1999). Hence, their accounts suggest that they at least did some aspects of gender differently whilst, at the same time, doing others well (Risman, 2009).

There were also examples in the women consultants' accounts which suggest that the women consultants did gender differently. **Claire** for example illustrated herself as being 'superior' to clients. **Rebecca's** account was partially monosyllabic, especially when we touched upon issues within the organisation she seemed to be dissatisfied with and aggravated by. Also she used expressions such as 'I am not afraid' and 'I am too much of a fighter'. Claire and Rebecca's language indicates toughness, competitiveness as well as self-assertion which align to more masculine notions (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Gherardi, 1995). Hence, these women consultants also did some elements of gender differently whilst, at the same time, doing others well (Risman, 2009).

Table 5.6 summarises the men and women consultants' extracts discussed in this section.

Table 5.6 Doing gender differently in language use

Consultant	Illustrations of use of language – doing gender well
Ian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I think that probably I am not good enough to be hired by someone else.”</li> </ul>
Steve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I feel much more comfortable with my old colleagues.”</li> </ul>
Claire	<p>“(…) On the other side it is great to know that you are <b>superior</b> because of your knowledge.”</p>
Rebecca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I am not afraid of negative feedback to my creative ideas. (...) Rejection would not prevent me from trying it over and over again. I am <b>too much of a fighter</b> to give up even if it had negative consequences for me. I provoke a lot. (...)”</li> </ul>

Overall, the exploration of the language used in the interview accounts through a gender lens supports the interpretations of the previous section on the individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes which implied that the majority of women as well as the majority of men participants did gender well apart from occasional exceptions. The connection between the language used and the gendered nature of the participants’ experiences is further discussed in the next section and in Chapter Six.

#### 5.4.9 Implications of the meso- and macro-level interpretations for this study

By looking at the individuals’ experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes illustrated in Section 5.3 through a gender lens I aimed to make the gendered nature of these experiences visible in order to extend the interpretations of this study and to give new insights to the field of learning and knowledge with particular emphasis on processes of knowledge creation.

The accounts as well as my interpretations presented in this section suggest that there were some areas in organisational life which were perceived differently by the consultants depending on their gender. When looking at the accounts through a gender lens different perceptions and sense-making processes became visible in particular when it came to the organisational elements of motivation and career which were identified as key influence on the individual experiences in Section 5.3. Further, learning and knowing processes, including the sharing and building of knowledge, were experienced differently depending on gender. Closely related and inherent to these aspects the research participants experienced acknowledgement differently depending on their gender. Overall, the view through a gender lens indicates that women and men consultants perceived and acted differently in their

work environment, in particular in relation to the organisational elements impacting on their knowledge creation activities.

The majority of women focussed on interpersonal relationships and often their action appeared to be group-oriented, some of them seemed insecure about their skills and experiences as well as their value to the organisation and also demonstrated a high sensitivity to their environment in general. The majority of men consultants in contrast demonstrated an objective, analytical and sometimes even detached perception of their environment and seemed self-confident about themselves and their skills as well as career-oriented. These interpretations were reinforced by the closer look through a gender lens at the language used in the accounts. Whereas women consultants mostly draw on terms and expressions more related to the private realm in order to illustrate their experiences and make sense of them, men consultants used more formal language rather connected to a masculine work environment. Overall, women interview participants appeared more emotional in their accounts than the men consultants.

These findings could be interpreted by drawing on traditional understandings of masculinity and femininity which link femininity to emotions and masculinity to rationality (Bryans and Mavin, 2007). According to Ross-Smith *et al.* (2007) and Symons (2007) traditional understandings regard emotion as not suitable for the masculine world of rational organisations and therefore label them as 'the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1953). Gherardi (1994, p.595) assesses these concepts as two "*symbolic universes of meaning*" which are positioned at opposite ends which, according to Mavin (2008a), leads to men and women being imprisoned in gendered sex-role stereotypes. In order to avoid sex-role stereotyping in my interpretations I regard the men's and women's accounts as reflections of them doing gender whereby both men and women draw on traditional masculine and feminine gendered norms (Bryans and Mavin, 2007). This approach corresponds to Lewis and Simpson (2007) who emphasise that it is crucial to untie the strong association of emotions to the body of women in order to avoid the reinforcement of the binary divide between masculinity and femininity and therefore the reinforcement of stereotypical views.

The majority of women and men consultants did gender well by acting in correspondence with traditional notions of masculinity and femininity or even demonstrated exaggerated performance of some elements of gender whilst doing others well. Gherardi (1994) describes this form of doing gender as ceremonial work

which honours the symbolic meaning of gender and recognises the gender differences by demonstrating appropriate gender performances.

But there were also exceptions. Men as well as women consultants' accounts reflected that some of the research participants did some elements of gender well while at the same time doing other elements of gender differently whereby men behaved more emotionally and therefore in accordance with notions of femininity and women behaved more rationally and therefore more in accordance with notions of masculinity. In line with Linstead and Pullen's (2006) framework of multiplicity, these men and women consultants apparently moved in the 'third space' which regards gender as social and cultural practice. In the 'third space' practices can swap positions and therefore are able to blur established gender binaries. In this space women and men simultaneously do gender well in some elements and do gender differently in other elements and against their perceived sex category and the linked expected behaviour and therefore perform multiplicity (Mavin and Grandy, 2011). **Rebecca** for instance moved in the 'third space' by doing gender differently by being active and tough

*"I am not afraid of negative feedback to my creative ideas. (...) Rejection would not prevent me from trying it over and over. I am too much of a fighter to give up even if it had negative consequences for me. I provoke a lot. (...)"*

while at the same time doing gender well by being sensitive to her environment and rather emotional.

*"When I don't feel comfortable and cannot enjoy myself I am not creative. At the moment I am not enjoying myself very much."*

Still, the majority of men and women consultants acted in line with and hence reproduced traditional gender norms which corresponds to Bryans and Mavin's (2007) findings on mistakes made at work.

Some of the accounts suggest that women consultants were often confronted with the double bind of being expected to behave in traditional feminine ways and in traditional masculine ways at the same time in order to be viewed as women and as qualified and suitable for their jobs (Gherardi, 1994; Patterson, 2010). When women consultants did gender differently however they were sometimes labelled as 'bitches' (Mavin, 2008b) not only by their men colleagues but also by their women

colleagues. If men consultants however undid gender this was usually not only accepted but also positively assessed.

The theory base on knowledge management in general and knowledge creation in particular has so far largely been gender-blind. Overall, the interpretations of the accounts presented in this chapter support Martin's (2006) and Gherardi and Poggio's (2001) view that organisations cannot be viewed as genderless. Hence, this research extends the gendered view of organisations in relation to knowledge creation processes within them.

Previous research suggests that social interaction plays a major role in organisational learning and knowledge, since learning is considered a social and situated process. Social interaction itself, therefore, is informed by gender (Gherardi, 1994; Acker, 1990). Hence, knowledge creation processes are also influenced by gender. This chapter has demonstrated through the interpretation of the women's and men's accounts that knowledge creation processes are gendered. The elements impacting on knowledge creation processes are perceived differently depending on the individuals' gender. In addition, the perception that individuals have of themselves and the perception that others have of them, which strongly influence their understanding and practice of knowledge creation, is linked to the individuals' gender.

The gender binary implies that women and men can be portrayed as homogenous groups. By exploring not only potential differences between men and women through a gender lens but also differences within the men's and women's accounts I aimed to move away from this gender binary. The majority of accounts reinforced the gender binary by demonstrating that the women and men were behaving in accordance with expected gender behaviour and therefore did gender well in relation to their experiences of knowledge creation processes. However, the interview accounts also illustrated that at times the gender binary was unsettled by demonstrating gender behaviour that did not conform to gender behaviour expectations.

Overall, the view through a gender lens at the macro-level stage of analysis confirmed the interpretations at the meso-level in relation to the organisational context which was experienced negatively by both women and men consultants. Although the perceptions and experiences of the organisational elements differed both women and men regarded trust and motivation as key influences on their

knowledge creation activities. However, in relation to career and acknowledgement the experiences and perceptions differed significantly.

## **5.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter has introduced the organisation under exploration and the research participants and has provided illustrations of the research participants' individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes. The chapter began by introducing the organisation explored including the organisation's approach to learning activities, knowledge management and knowledge creation. The chapter then provided details about the research participants including the personal relationship between me the researcher and the research participants which impacted on the interview situation. After introducing the analytical framework of this research the chapter offered insights into the consultants' and my own experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes within the context of this organisation. These insights illustrated that the organisational elements of trust, motivation, career and acknowledgement particularly impacted on the consultants' experiences of knowledge creation processes. Overall, the organisational context in general, and the organisational elements in particular, impacted negatively on the individual experiences and knowledge creation activities.

The chapter then moved on to enhance the interpretations of the consultants' individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes by exploring them through a gender lens set by the analytical framework and thus making visible the gendered nature of these experiences. In order to move away from the gender binary, both the potential differences between men consultants and women consultants and the differences within the men's and women's interview accounts have been explored. The interpretations through a gender lens highlighted that the experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes were gendered in terms of the individuals' perception of and their behaviour within the organisational context. In particular, knowledge creation processes, the organisational elements of motivation and career and the notion of acknowledgement were perceived and acted upon differently depending on the individual's gender. These interpretations were amplified by the exploration through a gender lens of the language used by the research participants. The next chapter will further synthesise the insights gained in this chapter and will

highlight their contribution to the theory bases of knowledge creation and gender in organisations.

## Chapter 6 Theorising Individual Gendered Experiences of Organisational Elements impacting on Knowledge Creation Processes

### 6 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research participants' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes and offered insights into the gendered nature of these experiences through a gender lens. That chapter provides the foundation for this one, in which the theoretical insights are extended into individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, and specifically into the gendered nature of these experiences. The chapter commences by introducing the areas in which the theoretical insights of this study make a contribution to the existing bodies of knowledge in the fields of knowledge creation and gender in organisations. It then provides a framework which guides the discussion of these contributions. Next, the interpretations of the individual experiences at the meso-level and their implications are discussed before the chapter moves on to the second level of analysis at the macro-level, the interpretation of these experiences through a gender lens and their implications for this study. The chapter ends by fusing the outcomes of the two levels of analysis. This chapter supports answering the research question *What are individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of management consultants in an international management consultancy?*.

This chapter contributes to the fourth, fifth and sixth research objectives

- *to provide, through interpretations of the consultants' accounts of their experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, theoretical insights into knowledge creation;*
- *to provide, through a gender lens interpretation of the consultants' accounts of their experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, theoretical insights into the gendered nature of knowledge creation;*
- *to provide distinctive theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions through the research outcomes.*

## **6.1 Original contribution to theory**

This research makes a contribution to theory in three areas, by

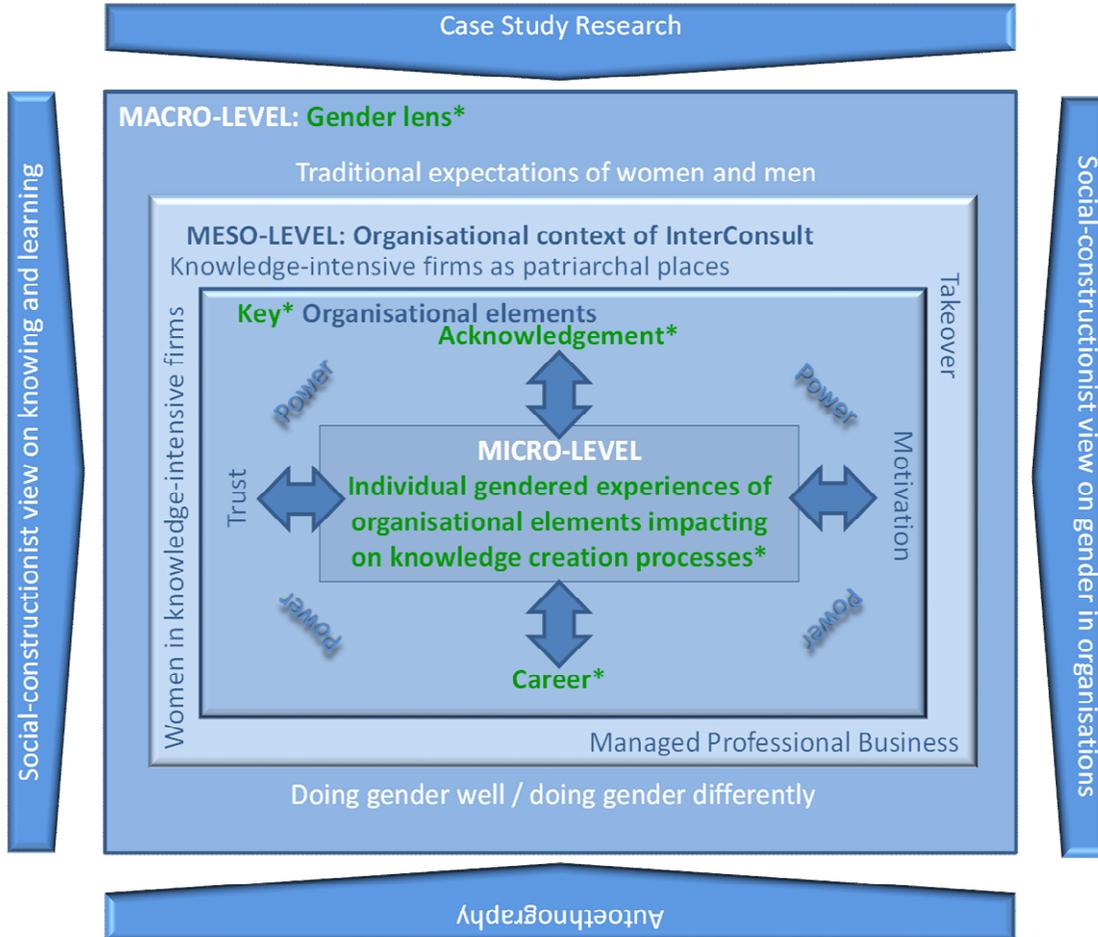
1. Adding to the field of knowledge creation a social-constructionist exploration of individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive organisation;
2. Adding to the field of knowledge creation the organisational element of career, and integrated with it the organisational element of acknowledgement, as an impact on knowledge creation processes;
3. Adding to the field of knowledge creation and to the field of gender in organisations a social-constructionist gender lens illustration of the gendered nature of knowledge creation in a knowledge-intensive organisation.

These potential contributions are discussed further in the following sections.

## **6.2 Framework of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes**

This framework (see Figure 6.1) further develops the analytical framework which provided the basis for the interpretations of the consultants' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes developed in Chapter Three. It illustrates the areas of contribution of this research which will be discussed in the following sections starting from the micro-level individual experiences of knowledge creation processes which are impacted by the organisational context, which comprises the meso-level, before then moving on to the macro-level by exploring the individual experiences through a gender lens.

Figure 6.1 Framework of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes



\* Original contribution

### **6.3 A social-constructionist exploration of individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes**

This research provides a contribution to the understanding of the role of social context in knowledge creation, which, according to Jakubik (2011) and Newell *et al.* (2009) has so far been addressed insufficiently.

This research has been carried out from a social-constructionist perspective which moves the locus of knowledge creation from the individual mind to the social interaction between individuals (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000; Cook and Yanow, 1993; Lave and Wenger, 1991). It therefore moves away from the cognitive-possession perspective on knowledge creation which regards the basis of knowledge creation to be the individual (Newell *et al.*, 2009; Nonaka *et al.*, 1998). In this study, the creation of knowledge is understood as being influenced by the organisational context which is neglected in previous work following a cognitive-possession perspective (Newell *et al.*, 2009).

The approach taken in this research is more in line with research by Jakubik (2008) who explores knowledge creation within Communities of Practice from a social-constructionist perspective acknowledging that individuals hold skills and experiences which they contribute to social knowledge creation processes. Jakubik (2008) looks at knowledge creation activities in a community comprised of members from various different backgrounds such as managers, students, teachers and subject matter experts dealing with a specified aim. Unlike Jakubik's (2008) study, this research focusses on experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes within the specific context of one knowledge-intensive organisation. Further, this study explores these experiences in both formal settings of identified Communities of Practice as well as in informal communities and therefore also offers insights into processes of unstructured knowledge creation. Whereas Jakubik (2008) focusses on the process of knowledge creation taking place in a specific Community of Practice without considering the context of this community this research places strong emphasis on the organisational elements embedded in the organisational context of the organisation explored and their impact on the individual experiences of knowledge creation processes.

The following section considers the potential contribution to existing theory by synthesising and theorising the interpretations of the individual experiences of

organisational elements, which are understood to be embedded in the organisational context, impacting on knowledge creation processes.

#### **6.4 Key organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes**

This research contributes to theoretical insights into knowledge creation processes by exploring the individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes within the context of a knowledge-intensive organisation from a social-constructionist perspective. The research has identified the key organisational elements and their impact on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes. Therefore, this research addresses Rashman *et al.*'s (2009) and Chiva and Alegre's (2005) call for research which looks at aspects such as social work practice, participation, power, organisational politics and conflicts in order to explore knowing and learning processes and to gain insights into knowledge creation processes from a social-constructionist perspective.

The interpretations of the research participants' interview accounts at the meso-level show that the organisational elements of trust, motivation, career and acknowledgement are key influences on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes in the knowledge-intensive organisation under exploration. The organisational element of career and, integrated to it the organisational element of acknowledgement, has not been explored in previous research and this research therefore adds to the theory of knowledge creation.

This research has combined organisational elements explored separately in previous research as a base for exploring the sub-questions *What organisational elements impact on knowledge creation processes?* and *How do these organisational elements impact on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes?*. Unlike research carried out by Taminiau *et al.* (2009) the research participants of this study share a common organisational context since they work for the same organisation.

The social-constructionist perspective of this research means that the individual experiences of knowledge creation processes at the micro-level are inseparable from the organisational context, the meso-level, in which knowledge creation processes take place. Beside the organisational elements which are embedded in the organisational context there are three crucial aspects that are important to the

specific context of the researched organisations at the meso-level. One influential aspect of the organisational context is the takeover of Monday, the organisation the research participants worked for before the takeover, by InterIT, the organisation of which InterConsult, the management consultancy explored, is a business unit. The other two aspects are the knowledge-intensive nature of InterConsult as a management consultancy and the development from a partnership model to a Managed Professional Business.

The organisational elements are understood as being interlinked and therefore cannot be looked at completely separately from each other.

Previous research by Merx-Chermin and Nijhof (2005) identified the 'factors' of structure, procedures and processes, organisational climate, autonomy and motivation as potentially impacting on knowledge creation activities but did not explore what their impact was on knowledge creation in their research. Other researchers explored the impact of organisational elements on individuals in the organisational context in general or focussed on knowledge-intensive firms (for instance Lucas, 2000; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000; Cannon and Edmondson, 2001). In turn, other studies looked at the impact of single organisational elements and their impact on knowing and learning processes including the creation of knowledge (for instance Coopey, 1999; Kirkebak and Tolsby, 2006; Taminiau *et al.*, 2009). Taminiau *et al.* (2009) identified the support of management and an organisational context that promotes knowledge sharing as crucial organisational elements for innovations in their social-constructionist study of management consultants working for different management consultancies.

In the following sections the organisational elements of trust, motivation, career and acknowledgement, which have been found to be the key influences, are discussed and the potential implications of the findings for theory are considered. Power as an organisational element was only rarely explicitly mentioned in the interview accounts. Nevertheless, it inherently impacted on the consultants' experiences and is therefore discussed after the key organisational elements.

#### **6.4.1 Trust**

As illustrated in Figure 6.1 this research has found trust to be a key influence on the willingness and ability of the research participants to participate in knowing and learning processes. The research participants understood trust to be bilateral.

Trustful relationships with their colleagues were identified as a foundation for joint participation in knowing and learning processes since it provided consultants with the confidence to draw attention to themselves by expressing and discussing their ideas without fearing negative feedback or rejection (Dovey, 2009). Trustful relationships also made them share knowledge with colleagues without expecting a reward for it. Consultants felt rewarded by being able to help someone and by establishing and maintaining mutual trust. Due to their trustful relationship they expected that these colleagues would in return help them out when they needed help. Due to a lack of trust in their new colleagues the research participants missed out on critical input they would have been able to provide to and receive from their new colleagues by sharing their skills and experiences in joint knowledge creation activities (Empson, 2001).

Trust in their management, People Managers and senior management, was found to be another vital aspect. Without a trustful relationship the consultants did not consider sharing their ideas with their managers since they did not expect to be supported, for instance through provision of resources, in advancing their ideas. Again, the takeover impacted on trust in management, with consultants developing mistrust. This mistrust was further increased since consultants experienced the dissonance between the organisation's strategy and management's behaviour as inauthentic.

Their mistrust negatively affected the consultants in their willingness and ability to participate in learning and knowing processes (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000). Some consultants diminished their input in knowing and learning activities. Others, identified as 'underground innovators' (Oster, 2010), continued their engagement in knowing and learning processes but no longer participated in formal processes such as Communities of Practice but in informal networks without management being aware of it. Consequently, new knowledge was not made widely available to other consultants.

Furthermore, the consultants perceived senior management as not trusting them, as consultants. Their perception was based on the strict procedures and lack of autonomy related to the tight control over them. The consultants perceived their perceived lack of autonomy, which they regarded as vital for their work (Starbuck, 1992), as lack of trust from their management to be able to act independently which is supported by McKenzie and van Winkelen (2004). Due to the lack of autonomy the consultants were not provided with time and space to participate in knowing and

learning processes. Hence, lack of trust in their colleagues and management and from them negatively impacted on the individual experiences and diminished their participation in knowing and learning processes.

#### **6.4.2 Motivation**

Motivation was another organisational element identified as a key influence on individual knowledge creation activities as illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Notions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation cannot be regarded separately from each other since both are closely interlinked and impact on each other.

Nevertheless, the distinction is retained here since it seemed important to the consultants to distinguish the sources of their motivation and the impact these two different kinds of motivation had on their experiences of knowledge creation processes.

This research supports Alvesson's (2000) and Mitchell and Meacham's (2011) statement that consultants regard themselves as being intrinsically motivated due to the high status they connect to their occupation as management consultant, to their enthusiasm about their work and to the high expectations they set upon themselves. Intrinsic motivation was found as helping them to overcome organisational barriers to their participation in knowing and learning processes such as strict procedures and processes and unsupportive leadership. Their intrinsic motivation also countered the level of extrinsic motivation which had diminished due to an unfavourable organisational context characterised by limited career opportunities and low pay-rises and rewards. Although the consultants continued 'doing their job', contributing to knowing and learning processes, they felt exploited since no one seemed to acknowledge or reward their intrinsic motivation.

However, at the time of the interviews, the consultants' intrinsic motivation was negatively impacted by the aftermath of the takeover, lacking acknowledgement and an underutilisation of their skills and experiences. This supports Maister (2003) who states that consultants need to be challenged on an ongoing basis in order to maintain their intrinsic motivation. Some consultants were found to derive their motivation from a positive climate in the teams they worked, mostly with former Monday colleagues, and challenging projects instead. Others were no longer willing to contribute to knowing and learning processes.

The consultants' motivation was strongly impacted by the organisational element career.

### **6.4.3 Career**

As illustrated in Figure 6.1 the notion of career was also found to be key to the individual knowledge creation activities. The research participants discussed career at different stages of the interview in relation to motivational elements as well as directly in connection to participation in knowing and learning processes.

Career has not been acknowledged in previous research as an organisational element impacting on individual knowledge creation activities. However, Taminiau *et al.*'s (2009) research on innovations in management consultancies concluded that organisations' reward systems, which are closely linked to the consultants' career, are often based on billable hours on clients' projects. This current research shows that InterConsult's career model was also primarily linked to billable hours and not to participation in knowing and learning processes. The missing link between engagement in knowledge sharing and creation activities and career opportunities was perceived by the interview participants in this research as a lack of value by the organisation in knowledge creation.

The research outcomes support that career is particularly important to management consultants (Maister, 2003). A lack of career opportunities negatively impacted on the consultants' motivation which was a main driver for their participation in knowing and learning processes. Further, missing career opportunities for them implied a lack of acknowledgement of their work, which is further discussed in the following Section 6.4.4. The consultants felt that they were no longer of high value for their employer after the takeover. Overall, these aspects of missing career opportunities led to a decrease of participation in knowing and learning processes.

At times where the consultants perceived their organisational context as negative the importance of career opportunities increased. A reason to stay with the organisation despite a negative organisational context was the potential advancement of one's career within the organisation. The consultants' willingness to engage in learning and knowing activities such as community work was linked to the impact of these activities on the consultants' career advancement. The low impact of their knowing and learning activities on their career advancement negatively impacted on the consultants motivation to contribute to formal knowing and learning

processes. However, this was not the case for all research participants which will be further discussed in Section 6.5.

In particular after the takeover the research participants no longer felt in control of their careers. At Monday they had been able to actively manage and advance their careers for instance by being engaged in community work or by improving services offered to clients through creative ideas. Their efforts had been recognised and rewarded. At InterConsult some of the consultants, although they had previously experienced that their effort was not rewarded in terms of a career step, continued being actively involved in activities such as community work because they remained optimistic and were convinced that at some point their careers had to benefit from their contribution. However, over time they also realised that their activities only slightly impacted on their career advancement if at all which negatively impacted on their motivation to further contribute to knowing and learning processes.

Further, the participants' perception of their career opportunities was found to be at odds with the organisation's communication of the importance of the career development of their employees which resulted in a loss of the organisation's authenticity from their point of view. As a consequence, the interview participants lost trust in their management which would have been vital for their willingness to expose their creative ideas (Garvey and Williamson, 2002; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000).

This research has highlighted the importance of the organisational element of career. Whereas a link between knowing and learning processes and an organisations' career model can emphasise the importance of knowledge creation and motivate individuals to contribute to knowledge creation activities, a lack of career opportunities can diminish the consultants' willingness to participate in learning and knowing processes.

#### **6.4.4 Acknowledgement**

Acknowledgement was identified as another key influence on individual knowledge creation activities as illustrated in Figure 6.1. The consultants were found to experience a lack of acknowledgement based on their perception that the organisation neither valued them nor their skills and experiences. This lack of acknowledgement negatively impacted on their willingness to participate in knowing and learning processes.

The perception of lack of acknowledgement was further amplified by the lack of encouragement by management to create new knowledge and the limited attention and support of management when the consultants came up with new ideas. Since they were not rewarded for their activities in knowing and learning processes and contributions to knowledge creation the consultants felt exploited (Lucas, 2000).

Acknowledgement is related to the organisational elements of career and motivation which are discussed in the preceding sections. In the absence of career opportunities and monetary rewards, acknowledgement impacted on the consultants' motivation to participate in knowing and learning processes. Acknowledgement in terms of valuing and developing the individuals' skills and experiences as well as their input into knowing and learning processes, was found to impact on the consultants' motivation.

The consultants' perception of not being acknowledged by the organisation's management led to an underutilisation of the consultants' potential contribution to knowing and learning processes as they tended to engage only with their former Monday colleagues.

However, in addition to acknowledgement by management, acknowledgement of other colleagues was important. When consultants received acknowledgement from their colleagues, for instance in a community context, this impacted positively on their willingness to contribute independently of acknowledgement by management or career prospects.

The organisational element acknowledgement has, like the notion of career, not been explored in previous research. It adds to theory as integrated with career and motivation since it is closely linked to both.

#### **6.4.5 Power**

Although it was rarely mentioned explicitly by the research participants in their accounts, power impacted on the consultants experiences of knowledge creation processes.

The takeover presented a turning point for some of the research participants. When reflecting on the pre-takeover period, the consultants felt in power of their career, their work and their time allocation due to the autonomy and freedom they were

provided with at Monday. This environment enabled and motivated them to engage in knowing and learning processes and to create knowledge. After the takeover the power balance shifted as they were constricted by senior management of the new organisation. Senior management imposed strict procedures and processes on the consultants and denied them the autonomy which the consultants deemed indispensable for their occupation as management consultant (Maister, 2003; Alvesson, 2004). They also experienced being limited in their career advancement by their senior management. As a consequence, the consultants felt powerless and out of control of their situation. They were no longer able to self-organise themselves which, in line with Ehin (2008), is essential for them to unleash expansive and resourceful thinking in interaction with others which also enables the creation of new knowledge. **Marc's** account for instance demonstrates that those in power, management, were able to deny him as a regular consultant the necessary power to contribute to organisational debates without which he could not contribute to knowledge creation activities (Jackson and Carter, 2000). Hence, being powerless also caused a decrease in their knowledge creation activities. Overall, power was found to be inherent to all organisational elements impacting on the research participants' experiences of knowledge creation processes (see Figure 6.1).

The next section considers the implications of these interpretations for this study.

#### **6.4.6 Implications of individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes for this study**

The exploration of the individuals' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive firm aimed to provide theoretical insights into knowledge creation.

This research has highlighted that in particular the organisational elements of trust, motivation, career and acknowledgement, which are understood as being embedded in and inseparable from the organisational context, impact on the individual knowledge creation activities.

Trust was identified as a foundation for the individuals' participation in the social processes of knowing and learning. Trust made the research participants confident to expose and discuss their ideas without being afraid of rejection. However, the research participants regarded trust as bilateral. It was important for them to be able

to trust others, colleagues and management, but also to be trusted by them. A lack of trust especially by management became apparent through limited consultant autonomy and strict procedures and processes which the consultants had to follow. This lack of trust in their management negatively impacted on the individuals' willingness to contribute to knowing and learning processes.

Motivation in general was found to be a key driver for the consultants' contribution to knowing and learning processes. The research participants' intrinsic motivation was found to be able to compensate for missing extrinsic motivation. However, aspects such as lack of acknowledgement, missing career opportunities and underutilisation of the individuals' skills and experiences negatively impacted on both their extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

This research found that in some cases career opportunities impacted on the consultants' motivation in general which also affected their preparedness to contribute to knowing and learning processes. In other cases the consultants linked their knowing and learning activities to their potential impact on their careers. In the absence of a positive organisational context the importance of career increased. The consultants inferred, from the missing link between the organisation's career model and knowledge creation, that knowledge creation was not valued in the organisation. Further, missing career opportunities implied, for them, a lack of acknowledgement of their work by management. This tended to limit the consultants' participation in knowing and learning processes.

General acknowledgement from both management and colleagues of the individuals as skilled and experienced and specific acknowledgement of their contribution to knowing and learning processes contributed to their motivation, in particular during times at which career opportunities and financial rewards were largely missing. The consultants did not link acknowledgement primarily to financial rewards. To them acknowledgement implied that their contribution was appreciated by the organisation and that the organisation made further investments in their development such as in training activities. The absence of acknowledgement negatively impacted on the consultants' motivation to contribute to knowing and learning processes.

The research found that apart from a few exceptions the organisational elements discussed were perceived negatively by the consultants participating in this study. These negative perceptions were amplified by the consultants' experiences of

feeling powerless in the aftermath of the takeover. Even the intrinsic motivation of consultants was not sufficient to compensate for the negatively perceived social context of the organisation.

Due to the understanding in this research of knowledge creation as occurring in and through social interaction between individuals the consultants were strongly impacted by the organisational context and therefore by the organisational elements in their knowledge creation activities. Consequently, their negative experiences of the organisational context led to overall negative experiences of knowledge creation processes within the organisation explored.

Previous research exploring the impact of the organisational context on knowledge creation activities has largely looked at single organisational elements (for instance Szulanski, 1996; Naot *et al.*, 2004) or has considered a range of different organisational elements (for instance Merx-Chermin and Nijhof, 2005) but not explored their interrelationship. This research found that all organisational elements were interlinked and impacted on each other. In particular the organisational elements of motivation, acknowledgement and career were found to be inseparable from each other. Career and acknowledgement strongly impacted on the organisational element of motivation. This implies that individuals' knowledge creation activities are not influenced by single organisational elements but by an interplay of different elements.

Throughout the interpretation process the at times contradictory nature of the consultants' statements and their sense-making processes of their experiences became visible. The interpretations of their accounts suggest that their perception of the organisational context of InterConsult and its impact on their work and how they perceived themselves as management consultants created tension. The connection between the organisational context and the participants' identity was not further interpreted since identity is outside of the scope of this thesis. However, these findings are in line with the identity literature which points out that contradictions and agreements may take place at the same time (see Alvesson, 2001).

The next section considers the interpretations of the individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes through a gender lens.

## 6.5 The gendered nature of knowledge creation processes

This study makes a contribution by adding a social-constructionist exploration of the gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive firm through a gender lens at the macro-level of analysis. Durbin (2011) suggests that understanding of how knowledge is created in social processes and how it is potentially impacted by gender is underdeveloped.

By employing a gender lens, this research has fused theoretical perspectives on knowledge creation and gender in organisations.

This research adds to Durbin (2011) through its empirical study of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive organisation which is characterised by a predominantly male context. This research is based on the understanding that knowledge creation occurs during knowing and learning processes which take place in the social interaction and conversation between individuals (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2000; Cook and Yanow, 1993; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Social interaction is influenced by the organisational context (Newell *et al.*, 2009). According to Gherardi (1994) and Acker (1990) the organisational context as well as social interaction is shaped by gender and thus knowledge creation processes as well as the organisational elements impacting on them are also gendered.

Interpretation of the research participants' interview accounts has supported that individuals' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes differ according to the consultants' gender which implies that processes of knowledge creation are gendered. Men and women consultants did gender well in their accounts of the organisational elements that impacted on their knowledge creation activities. In particular the organisational elements of motivation, acknowledgement and career were constructed differently depending on the consultants' gender which reinforces the gender binary. Also the perceptions that the research participants had of themselves and the perceptions that their colleagues and management had of them which strongly impacted on both their understanding and practice of knowledge creation were linked to the individuals' gender.

Limited existing research has focussed on the impact of gender in the areas of knowledge, knowledge sharing and creativity which, from a social-constructionist perspective, are closely intertwined with knowledge creation. Styhre *et al.* (2001) for

instance conducted a study exploring the interrelationship between gender and knowledge management whereas Durbin (2007) found a relationship between gender and access to knowledge. However, previous research in the field of knowledge creation has until recently been carried out from a gender-blind perspective. Durbin's (2011) theoretical analysis on the relationship between knowledge creation, networking and gender in a male-dominated environment has recently introduced the notion of gender to the field of knowledge creation. Durbin (2011) concludes from her theoretical analysis that women can essentially contribute to knowledge creation processes when the organisational context reinforces social interaction and expressive behaviour.

The subsequent sections further consider the potential contribution to existing theory before the interpretations of the gendered nature of the individual experiences of knowledge creation processes are synthesised and theorised. The interpretations answer the sub-question *Are individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes gendered?*.

### **6.5.1 Interpretation and theorisation process**

The gender-lens interpretation of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes has extended theorising beyond the micro-level of individuals' experiences within a specific organisational meso-level context to the broader social macro-level. A gender lens is also employed to explore the relationship between the language used in the interviews by the consultants and their gender. This exploration adds two further aspects to the organisational context at the meso-level. It makes visible the patriarchal nature of the organisation explored and the position of women in this knowledge-intensive organisation.

Through a gender lens, established by the analytical framework introduced in Chapter Three, the gendered nature of the individual consultants' experiences became visible. Unlike previous research such as Durbin (2011) this research has explored not only the potential differences between women and men but also considered differences within the women's and men's accounts to move away from the gender binary.

With the notable exception of Durbin (2011), research in the field of knowledge creation within knowledge-intensive organisations has predominantly sent women to 'second place' (de Beauvoir, 1953) by regarding the men's experiences as the norm

(Wilson, 1996). By selecting equal numbers of research participants and by regarding all experiences, regardless of whether they related to women or men consultants, as gendered this research has provided women with the same attention as men have received in previous research. Hence, this research releases women from their 'second place' (de Beauvoir, 1953).

The interview extracts explored through a gender lens in Chapter Five were selected since they highlight the gendered nature of the experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of the individual consultants. In the following sections the main findings of the interpretations of these extracts are discussed and the implications of the findings for theory are considered.

The organisational element of acknowledgement is not discussed separately in the following section but as an integral part of the organisational elements of motivation and career.

### **6.5.2 The gendered nature of the experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes**

#### ***Women in knowledge-intensive firms***

Overall, the interpretation shows that in the male-dominated context of InterConsult both men and women consultants for the most part viewed masculine behaviour as the norm and appreciated women who made an effort to 'fit in' by adopting masculine behaviour and suppressing their femininity. Consequently, the women consultants faced the double bind of being regarded as unfeminine when they performed in line with masculine behaviour but were not conforming to gender social role expectations on the one hand and being assessed as unsuitable for the profession of a consultant when they behaved in ways perceived as feminine on the other hand (Gherardi, 1994). **Ben** for instance compared women who did not blend in to 'sex symbols' on the one hand and women who did blend in by behaving more in line with notions of masculinity as 'bitching around'.

Both men and women consultants largely used gender and sex interchangeably, supposedly unconsciously in the majority of accounts, which suggests that women as well as men research participants linked women to notions of femininity and men to notions of masculinity which in many cases led to sex-role stereotyping in their sense-making processes. The interview participants 'essentialised' gender (Billing and Alvesson, 2000). This implied the risk of regarding men and masculinity as the

norm in the male-oriented organisational context of the organisation explored whereas women and femininity were viewed as 'the Other' (Wilson, 1996; de Beauvoir, 1953) deviating from the norm. This marginalised their potential contribution to the organisation (Mavin, 2001a; Martin, 2006) also in terms of their contribution to learning and knowing processes.

### ***Knowledge creation***

When it came to the perception of knowledge creation itself both women and men consultants did gender well apart from isolated exceptions. The women and men consultants shared the perception that knowledge creation of individual consultants was not appreciated and in some cases even rejected by their management. However, the consultants' reaction to this rejection differed in relation to the individuals' gender.

The women consultants largely did gender well by demonstrating a lack of self-confidence in themselves and their potential to contribute to knowledge creation and by being rather passive in terms of coming forward with their ideas which corresponds to notions of femininity. As a reaction to the rejection of their ideas the women consultants less and less dared to expose themselves by expressing their creativity although they considered themselves to be creative, mostly outside of the organisational context. Often they only expressed their creative ideas when being directly asked for them and when they as a person felt valued by their counterpart.

One of the women consultants, **Liz**, demonstrated exaggerated gender performance (Mavin and Grandy, 2011) by being overly emotional, sensitive and lacking self-confidence which is linked to notions of femininity (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Gherardi, 1994). She appeared to be creatively above average but felt too restrained and insecure among her colleagues and management to express her creativity in the work setting. She not only feared to expose herself but even to lose her job and therewith the foundation of her living.

The men consultants however largely did gender well by demonstrating that they accepted their ideas being rejected without being personally affected by it due to their strong self-confidence. As a consequence, they either stopped contributing to knowledge creation processes altogether or they turned into 'underground innovators' implementing their creative ideas without their management's approval.

However, **Rebecca** was found moving in the 'third space' and enacting multiplicity (Linstead and Pullen, 2006) by doing some elements of gender well while doing other elements differently against their perceived sex category and the linked expected behaviour (Mavin and Grandy, 2011). Her reaction to the rejection of her ideas demonstrated self-assertive behaviour which is more aligned with notions of masculinity than femininity. She actively pushed her creative ideas and was not afraid of rejection but instead was even more motivated and determined after her ideas had been rejected to express them again which suggests that she obtained a high level of self-confidence. At the same time, Rebecca stated that she needed a positive work environment in order to enable her creativity.

Some women did gender differently in relation to their perception of knowledge creation but none of the men consultants demonstrated that they did gender differently.

### ***Motivation***

Motivation was identified as one of the key organisational elements influencing the individual knowledge creation activities. The exploration of the perception of motivation through a gender lens showed that the majority of men and women consultants did gender well in relation to motivation.

Both women and men consultants regarded themselves as being intrinsically motivated. However, the aftermath of the takeover, lacking acknowledgement and an underutilisation of their skills and experiences negatively impacted on their intrinsic motivation. When it came to the sources for extrinsic motivation the women and men derived their motivation from different sources.

Men consultants were doing gender well in relation to the organisational element of motivation. The motivation of the men consultants who did gender well was found to be low at the time of the interviews due to missing career opportunities and monetary rewards. Since motivation was found to be the main driver for the consultants' participation in knowing and learning processes their contribution diminished. For the majority of men consultants the level of their extrinsic motivation was mainly linked to tangible and measurable aspects such as career advancement and monetary rewards which is in line with traditional understandings of masculinity being linked to rationality and competitiveness (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Wilson, 2003). If these conditions were no longer given, the men consultants' motivation despite their intrinsic motivation diminished to a point at which they considered

leaving the organisation which negatively impacted on their contribution to knowing and learning processes.

The women consultants also did gender well. Their sources of motivation were found to be strongly linked to rather feminine notions of relatedness to others and taking care of others (Maddock, 1999). Their motivation was connected to opportunities to help others for example by setting up a Change Management Toolkit for their colleagues or to contributing to high-quality results on client projects. It positively impacted on their motivation when they were able to enjoy their work and to help others. As long as they experienced their immediate surrounding as positive, career prospects hardly impacted on their motivation. Overall, this again amplifies that women did gender well since their accounts are more in line with notions of femininity in terms of being rather emotional and irrational and focussing on interpersonal relationships (Billing and Alvesson, 2000). The women consultants primarily experienced enjoyment of their work and the reward of helping others when they worked together with their former Monday colleagues. Hence, the women primarily engaged in knowing and learning processes with former Monday colleagues with whom they shared trustful relationships.

The interpretation shows that neither the women consultants nor the men consultants did gender differently in their perception of the notion of motivation.

### ***Career***

Career was another organisational element identified as one of the key influences on participation in knowing and learning processes. The interpretation of the consultants' accounts through a gender lens illustrates that the majority of women and men consultants did gender well in relation to career. This largely reinforces what was found in relation to motivation.

To women consultants career in the traditional sense was less important than feeling comfortable and being acknowledged by their management and their colleagues. It also became visible that the women consultants valued their personal life over the advancement of their careers which seemed only possible by actively or even aggressively demanding to be supported. The women consultants were not willing to act accordingly, which supports findings by Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008), and did gender well by drawing on traditional gendered norms according to which femininity is linked to being passive rather than active (Nicolson, 1996). Their need to be acknowledged by their management, and in particular, by their colleagues

further reinforced that the women did gender well since this behaviour could be interpreted as women being prone to identify themselves in relation to others as well as being connected to others which strongly corresponds to the notion of femininity (Maddock, 1999; Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

Women primarily engaged in knowing and learning processes to help others, to contribute to positive work results and to be acknowledged and not to advance their careers for instance by becoming a subject matter expert. The women consultants did not link their engagement in knowing and learning processes to making a contribution to their expert status since the majority of them did not aspire to one. Being a subject matter expert did not match their perception of career and therefore was not a highly sought-after position. In general, the women consultants did not link their activities in the area of knowledge sharing to career. However, if they were no longer acknowledged for their participation in knowing and learning processes their willingness to further contribute decreased.

Most of their men consultant colleagues also did gender well. Career was important to them which was reinforced by their statements about the degree of their participation in knowing and learning processes which some of them linked to the impact these activities had on their career advancement. This is in line with the notion of masculinity in terms of being competitive and rational in their behaviour (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Maddock, 1999).

The men consultants largely regarded knowledge as something they possessed and could use to promote their career. Their participation in knowing and learning processes was often linked to the purpose of enhancing their reputation as subject matter experts and with this to advance their careers. Hence, men consultants predominantly participated in formal knowing and learning processes such as in Communities of Practice in order to make themselves and their skills and experiences visible throughout the organisation. These interpretations reinforce that men did gender well in relation to their perception of the link between their participation in knowing and learning processes and career.

However, the interpretation process also illustrated that some of the men consultants perceived the importance of career more similarly to their women colleagues than to their men colleagues. The importance they assigned to their private lives made them accept missing opportunities to advance their career. This perception is contradictory to traditional sex role stereotyped understandings of men

which automatically connects men to masculinity and, as a consequence, to moving in public and being productive and competitive (Nicolson, 1996; Gherardi, 1994; Marshall, 1984). Instead men were doing gender differently by performing more feminine behaviour (Billing and Alvesson, 1997; Marshall, 1984; Messerschmidt, 2009).

Whereas some of the men consultants did gender differently in connection to at least some elements of gender, none of the women consultants did gender differently in connection to how career impacted on their understanding and practices of knowledge creation.

The following section considers the impact of the organisational element of motivation, which is closely linked to career, on the gendered experiences of knowledge creation processes.

### **6.5.3 The gendered nature of language in the interviews**

The interpretation of the language used by the women and men interview participants reinforces the interpretations above. The women and men interview participants did gender well for the most part. Women consultants in their accounts mainly expressed themselves by using rather emotional language and the first person which suggests that they were strongly personally involved in what was going on in the organisation. This use of language is robustly linked to sex-role stereotype notions of femininity (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003). Men consultants in their accounts however used formal, analytical and rational language and often used the second person which suggests that they tried to distance themselves from what was going on and therefore behaved in line with notions of masculinity.

The different verbal behaviour of women and men consultants illustrates that women and men followed a different sense-making process, men more rational to a large degree and women more emotional. Further, the traditionally more masculine language predominately used by men consultants was more in line with 'public domain language' (Coates, 2004) whereas the more feminine language largely used by the women research participants was more related to the private sphere. Consequently, women were again at risk of being positioned as 'the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1953).

#### **6.5.4 Implications of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes for this study**

The interpretation of the individuals' accounts through a gender lens illustrates the subjective gendered nature of knowledge creation and provides new insights into knowledge creation as a gendered process to the field of knowledge creation and to the field of gender in organisations.

This research has shown that the individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of the research participants as well as the process of knowledge creation are gendered. The research participants perceived the organisational elements and their impact on their knowledge creation activities differently depending on their gender. Also the perception of themselves which also impacted on their understanding and practice of knowledge creation was found to be linked to the research participants' gender. Both men and women consultants predominately did gender well.

In particular in relation to the organisational elements of motivation, career and, inherent to it, acknowledgement, the gendered nature of knowledge creation became visible. Apart from a few exceptions both men and women research participants did gender well in relation to their perception of these organisational elements by acting in correspondence with traditional notions of masculinity or femininity. Some exceptions demonstrated exaggerated performance of gender. There were also exceptions of research participants doing gender differently. In these exceptional cases men for instance were found to behave more emotionally and therefore in correspondence with notions of femininity and women were found to behave more rationally and therefore more in correspondence to notions of masculinity (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Maddock, 1999). Still, the majority of men and women consultants did gender well and hence reproduced traditional gender schemas and gender norms. This was supported by the interpretation of the language used.

The interpretations of the research accounts show that both men and women consultants in their sense-making process reinforced sex-role stereotyping and 'essentialised' gender when they talked about other colleagues and their general expectations of and opinion about the behaviour of themselves and other women and men colleagues (Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

The gendered perceptions of the organisational elements not only led to a different understanding but also to a different way of acting in relation to knowledge creation in the organisational context. Whereas the majority of women consultants was more likely to participate in knowing and learning processes despite missing career opportunities they tended to engage in these activities in informal communities with colleagues they trusted. Men also enjoyed engaging with colleagues they knew and trusted. However, they focussed their participation in knowing and learning processes on areas where they were more visible, such as formal Communities of Practice, since they linked their activities to their career advancement. Hence, men consultants were recognised as more active in terms of their contribution to knowledge creation than women by their management. As a consequence, men were more likely rewarded for their contribution in the traditional sense of monetary rewards or career advancement if available.

At the same time, most women consultants tended to diminish their engagement in knowing and learning processes when their contribution was rejected. They appeared to experience the rejection more emotionally than men by feeling the affects more strongly and longer and by feeling rejected as a person. The majority of men dealt more rationally with rejection and either ceased their participation or became underground innovators. Hence, the majority of research participants did gender well by acting in line with sex-role stereotypes which tie emotions to women (Ross-Smith *et al.*, 2007; Symons, 2007). According to Ross-Smith *et al.* (2007) and Symons (2007) emotion is still regarded as unsuitable for the masculine world of organisations. Hence, women being emotional risked being regarded as 'the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1953) and not fulfilling their role.

Even as underground innovators men most likely remained more visible at least to their clients and were rewarded for their knowledge creation activities, by an extension of their assignment for example. Overall, women largely remained invisible in their knowledge creation activities since they mostly engaged with internal colleagues and did not insist on being acknowledged as the source of new knowledge. The patriarchal nature of the organisation rewarded those who acted in line with male norms – being competitive, rational and focussed on career (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Maier, 1999). Those, mostly women, who were more interested in the overall benefit of their contribution than rewards were punished since they deviated from the norm (Wilson, 1996; Maier, 1999). Even though the women participants seemed not particularly keen on career and monetary rewards they still faced negative consequences. Due to the invisibility of their contribution they most

likely did not receive acknowledgement by their management which negatively impacted on their motivation. Further, women were at risk of appearing less active in knowledge creation processes than their men colleagues to their management due to the lack of visibility of their activities. As a consequence, they might not have been considered for certain projects or Communities of Practice. Hence, the women might have faced their contribution being marginalised which supports Mavin (2001a) and Martin (2006). Also they were likely to be denied participation in some formal knowing and learning processes which again put them at disadvantage since they missed out on expanding their skills and experiences which may have resulted from their participation. This again might have negatively impacted on their future potential contribution to knowledge creation.

Both the majority of women's and the men's accounts show that women who behaved in a more masculine way were labelled as 'bitches' (Mavin, 2008b) since they challenged the established gender order. Hence, these women faced the double bind of being expected to behave in ways perceived as feminine in order to conform to gender social role expectations and in ways perceived as masculine to fulfil their role as consultants which supports Gherardi (1994) and Martin (2003). If they challenged the gender order to live up to the expectations set upon them as consultants by behaving in a more self-assertive and competitive way in their knowledge creation activities they risked being labelled as 'bitches' (Mavin, 2008b). If they behaved in accordance to social role expectations and did not promote their knowledge creation activities or focussed on knowledge creation activities which were satisfying to them but less likely to become visible to management they were regarded as 'nice' and were labelled as 'babes' (Mavin, 2008b). At the same time they were punished by being not rewarded and potentially not considered for formal knowledge creation activities since they were regarded as 'the Other' (de Beauvoir, 1953) not suitable for being a consultant. The interpretations suggest an ongoing lack of gender fluidity in the male-dominated organisation explored (Linstead and Pullen, 2006).

Overall, the interpretation suggest that to the majority of women research participants their experiences of knowledge creation processes within the male-dominated management consultancy explored were a 'vicious' cycle of negative incidents.

The gender binary divide was hidden on the first level of analysis at the meso-level on the individual experiences of knowledge creation processes and only became

visible through this second level of analysis at the macro-level through a gender lens. I aimed to move away from the gender binary in this research. However, the majority of men and women research participants reinforced the binary divide by doing gender well in accordance with expected gender behaviour. But at times the research participants unsettled the gender binary by demonstrating gender behaviour that did not conform to gender behaviour expectations.

Despite different gendered experiences and different reactions to these experiences, the organisational context, including the organisational elements discussed, negatively impacted on and diminished both women and men consultants' participation in knowing and learning processes. In this point the macro-level analysis supports the meso-level analysis. The consultants were not able to engage in knowledge creation activities outside of the organisational context since knowledge creation occurs in and through social interaction between individuals embedded in the organisational context.

## **6.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter has synthesised and theorised the interpretations of this research, discussed their implications for this study and highlighted the distinctive theoretical contribution to the theory base in the area of knowledge creation and gender in organisations. The chapter commenced by illustrating the areas in which the theoretical insights of this study make a contribution to the existing bodies of knowledge in the fields of knowledge creation and gender in organisations. The chapter has suggested that this research contributes to theory on knowledge creation a social-constructionist exploration of individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive firm and the organisational element of career, and integrated with it the organisational element of acknowledgement, as an impact on knowledge creation activities. The chapter has further proposed that this research contributes to existing theory in the area of knowledge creation and gender in organisations by making visible the gendered nature of knowledge creation in a knowledge-intensive organisation through a gender lens. The chapter then discussed the interpretations of both levels of analysis, the individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes and the gendered nature of these experiences, and their implications for this study. The next and final chapter will include an evaluation of the theoretical contributions highlighted in this chapter and of the methodological contribution made by reflecting on the research as well as the

research process. The chapter will also provide an update of what has happened in the organisation under exploration since the interviews were carried out.

## Chapter 7 Research Reflections

### 7 Introduction

The previous chapter has synthesised and theorised the findings of this research and highlighted their implications and distinctive theoretical contribution to knowledge. The purpose of this final chapter is to reflect on this research and the research process. The chapter commences with reviewing the research aims by drawing together the threads of the central argument offered throughout the thesis. This is achieved by evaluating whether and how the research objectives have been achieved and by stressing the study's contribution to the theory bases of knowledge creation and gender in organisations. The chapter further adds to the reflexive approach of this research by considering my insider status of the organisation and its impact on both the interview and interpretation process. The chapter also reflects upon the meaning of this research to me as the researcher and the researched. The discussion about the limitations of this research then leads to consideration of potential areas for future research. The chapter concludes with a brief update on what has happened in the organisation under exploration since the interviews were conducted.

Thus, this chapter contributes to the sixth and seventh research objectives

- *to provide distinctive theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions through the research outcomes;*
- *to maintain a consciously reflexive approach throughout the research process.*

#### 7.1 Review of central arguments, research objectives and contributions of this thesis

The thesis has argued that organisational elements impact on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes. Interpretations of the research participants' accounts have confirmed this argument and identified trust, motivation, career and acknowledgement as key influences impacting on the individual knowledge creation activities of consultants. It has also argued that processes of knowledge creation are gendered. The interpretations of the research participants' accounts have confirmed this argument by concluding that the consultants demonstrate different understandings of these elements and are also differently affected by them in their knowledge creation activities which is largely connected to their gender.

This section draws together the central arguments of this thesis, by discussing and evaluating accomplishment of each of the research objectives. It further illustrates how accomplishment of the research objectives has answered the research sub-questions and has generated theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions by further evaluating the contributions in the following sections.

Chapter Four suggested criteria for establishing trustworthiness of this study and for evaluating its outcomes. The criteria for transferability and the importance of a reflexive approach throughout the research are illustrated here. In this research I have not aimed at developing theoretical generalisations about individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes from the interpretations of the consultants' research accounts. Instead, I have aimed at providing relatively concrete illustrations (Watson, 2003) of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of the research participants and interpretive insights (Cunliffe, 2008) from the data presented.

In line with Corlett (2009) I as the researcher acknowledge that the extracts presented in this thesis and the interpretations derived from them are incomplete, biased, context-dependent and influenced by my personal relationship with the interview participants as well as my personal experiences and beliefs. The extracts are incomplete since they present only a fraction of the research participants' accounts of their individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes. The accounts and therefore the extracts are biased since the interview partners were aware of my theoretical interest in their experiences and since I with my authorial power selected the extracts from their overall account in line with my particular research interest. The extracts are context-dependent and unique since they were taken from data which were gathered in the context of the research interviews and were influenced by my personal relationships to the research participants. Although I tried to avoid choosing only those extracts which supported my own experiences and the sense I made out of them as the researched I could not possibly leave these influences behind me during the selection process. Hence, interpretations of these extracts and knowledge derived from it are situated (Janesick, 2000). Section 7.2 on reflexivity will further discuss these issues.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) one criterion to evaluate the research process as well as the trustworthiness of the research outcomes is transferability.

Transferability can be determined in relation to the degree to which the research participants' accounts and their interpretations resonate with the readers' experiences and their context (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Further, the transferability can be assessed by the research outcomes' utility as a basis on which future research can be conducted and generates further new insights (Watson, 1994).

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of this research I took up Richardson's (2000a) idea of crystallisation. The view through the crystal offers an infinite number of views on the social life under exploration (Richardson, 2000b; Janesick, 2000). In this research I applied techniques such as diary writing, emotional recall (Ellis and Bochner, 2000), semi-structured interviews, interpretations of my interpretations (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000) and the passing back of transcripts in order to support the crystallisation process and therewith to provide the reader with multiple understandings and interpretations of this research. Eventually, however, only the reader can decide about the trustworthiness of this research (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008).

The outcomes of this study are presented in the sections that follow.

### **7.1.1 Perspectives on knowledge and learning**

The first research objective focussed on locating this study through critically exploring individual and organisational level conceptual understandings of knowledge, learning and knowledge creation in organisations. This objective evolved from the complexity of the subject area which has been approached from different angles in the fields of management studies, sociology and organisational theory as well as human resources (Dodgson, 1993; Karatas-Özkan and Murphy, 2010; Antonacopoulou and Chiva, 2007).

This first objective is addressed in Chapter Two. The discussion in Chapter Two set a social-constructionist theory base of the concepts of learning, knowledge and knowledge creation on which this thesis and its interpretations of the individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of the research participants are based.

The review of the existing literature, which I revisited after an initial interpretation, has confirmed that the organisational element career was not considered in previous research by researchers such as Taminiou *et al.* (2009), Merx-Chermin and Nijhof (2005), McLaughlin *et al.* (2008), Levin *et al.* (2002) and Kirkebak and Tolsby (2006)

looking at barriers impeding and factors enabling processes of knowing, learning and knowledge creation. The review has also confirmed that previous research on knowledge creation and innovation conducted from a social-constructionist perspective by Jakubik (2008) and Taminiau *et al.* (2009) did not focus on the case of one specific organisation.

### **7.1.2 Gender and gendered knowledge in organisations**

The second research objective focussed on critically exploring gender and gender relations within the context of organisations as well as the gendered nature of knowledge. This research objective evolved from the research aim to enhance the exploration of individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes through a gender lens by exploring whether and how individuals' experiences of knowledge creation processes are impacted by gender.

This second research objective is addressed in Chapter Three. The exploration and critical discussion of concepts of gender, gender relations and gendered knowledge within the organisational context provided the theory base on gender in organisations which was then fused with the theory base on knowing and learning to become the analytical framework of this study. Hence, Chapter Three set the framework for this thesis and its interpretations of the individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of the research participants.

This review of existing research has confirmed that Durbin (2011) only recently introduced the notion of gender to the field of knowledge creation. Durbin (2011) conducted a theoretical analysis of the gendered nature of knowledge creation in networks through a gender lens. The literature review has also confirmed that there is still little research on how knowledge is created within social processes (Durbin, 2011). Previous research has not moved beyond comparing women's against men's accounts by also considering differences within the women's and men's accounts in order to move away from the gender binary divide.

### **7.1.3 Appropriate methodology and methods**

The third objective of this research was to develop and conduct appropriate methodology and methods to explore and interpret individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a

knowledge-intensive organisation. This research objective is addressed in Chapter Four.

As outlined in Chapter Four the design of this research has been suitable to its aim of exploring individual gendered experiences of consultants working in an international management consultancy. Carrying out this research from a social-constructionist epistemology, in combination with the notions of intersubjectivity and emergent social realities created with others through interaction and conversations, was consistent with the key understanding of this thesis of knowledge as 'knowing'. This stresses the processual nature of coming to know which equals the process of learning and emphasises the importance of social interaction between individuals in the process of knowledge construction (Chiva and Alegre, 2005; Gherardi, 1996).

However, in strong social constructionism beliefs no truth exists outside and independent of the individual's reality (Schwandt, 1994). I did not fully agree with this 'radical' relativist (Linstead and Thomas, 2002) position which implies there are no realities 'out there' in the social world and an 'anything goes' (Watson, 2000) approach. As Crotty stated (1998, p.215), "*we need not be so purist...picking and choosing...is legitimate enough*".

In this research, I aimed at achieving trustworthiness of the outcomes of this study instead of focussing on its truth claims. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that trustworthiness of a study can be achieved by the degree of its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Due to the social and contextual nature of this research transferability is strictly speaking not possible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Still, readers can decide on the transferability of this study by assessing whether the study's outcomes resonate with their experiences and context (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Further, the transferability of the outcomes can be assessed by their 'utility' in terms of their influence on management practice and whether they provide a basis on which future research on knowledge creation and its gendered nature can be conducted (Watson, 1994). I aimed at achieving transferability of this research and, as a consequence, trustworthiness by providing relatively solid illustrations (Watson, 2003) of experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes and interpretive insights (Cunliffe, 2008) from the data presented.

In order to explore the gendered nature of knowledge creation I interpreted individuals' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation

processes through a gender lens set by the analytical framework of this research. The gender lens enabled me to be particularly sensitive to the role of gender (Collins, 2005) and therefore to make visible the gender impact on individuals' experiences as well as the gendered nature of knowledge creation. In previous research in the field of knowledge creation so far only Durbin (2011) has applied a gender lens in order to carry out a theoretical analysis of knowledge creation through networks. Hence:

*This research, through its gender lens exploration of individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, has made a distinctive methodological contribution.*

In order to facilitate the integration of my own individual gendered within the organisation under exploration it was appropriate to adopt an autoethnographic approach. This also enabled me to become personally involved and to develop a deep understanding of the participants' experiences and emotions which for an outsider, a 'distant academic tourist' (Pelias, 2003), would have been difficult to achieve (Richardson, 2000a). Unlike in traditional objectivist research where the researcher is detached and objective, autoethnography enabled me to write in the first-person voice and to incorporate my personal experiences on the research topic and the research process (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Overall, I regarded this approach to be the most suitable for the exploration of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes. It presented me with the opportunity to provide "a collage of voices from within" (Hayano, 1979, p.103).

The exploration of previous studies has confirmed that the majority of previous research looking at barriers impeding and factors enabling processes of knowledge, learning and knowledge creation (such as Taminiau *et al.*, 2009; Merx-Chermin and Nijhof, 2005; Levin *et al.*, 2002; Kirkebak and Tolsby, 2006) was conducted from an outsider position. McLaughlin *et al.* (2008) carried out their research as insiders of the organisation but did not apply an autoethnographic approach. Therefore:

*This research, through its autoethnographic approach, has made a distinctive methodological contribution.*

This research applied a case study research strategy which enabled me to provide an inside view from within a particular management consultancy dominated by a

male organisational culture and therewith to produce 'thick description' (Denzin, 1989) of this single embedded case. The case study research strategy further acknowledged the personal relationship between me as the researcher and the research participants and the unique interview situations in which knowledge was socially constructed. The semi-structured interviews conducted allowed me to see the world from the research participants' perspective and therewith to explore how the research participants made sense out of their experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes. In the semi-structured interview the research participant and I could develop a conversation-like interview situation (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Mavin, 2001a) which felt more natural to both me the researcher and my colleagues as the research participants. It also endorsed me to bring in my own experiences and therefore fostered the social production of meaning within the interviews (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Still, I, as the researcher, could direct the interview. This enabled me to gain essential information without distancing myself from my interview partner. However, the interview guide, which is an integral part of the semi-structured interview method and less strict than an interview plan, proved to be helpful, whereas a strict interview plan would have not only alienated the interview situation but also risked missing out particular topics which were not directly linked to the research topic (Johnson, 2001). As an example, during the first interviews, I might have missed out on the importance of the organisational element of career to the experiences of the research participants if I had applied a strict interview plan. On the other hand, the interview guide helped the researcher and research participants maintain a focus which might have been lost due to our prior relationship and joint project experiences which provided plenty of topics for discussion. Still, as the interviewer, I remained more powerful since I set the interview topic and followed up my colleagues' responses (Kvale, 1996) which is important to be considered in my interpretations. This research method was in line with the social-constructionist epistemology of this research and the autoethnographic approach applied.

I selected equal numbers of men and women research participants and understood all experiences, whether relating to the women or men consultants, as gendered. By doing this, I aimed at giving women the same attention that men have received in previous research. Hence, I have added to theory by releasing women from their 'second place' (de Beauvoir, 1953).

In line with the argument made that social interaction and conversations are central to the production of knowledge, it was appropriate to employ template analysis to

interpret the situated interview accounts and the knowledge created within these interviews. In this thesis it is perceived that the narratives in the interview conversations were co-produced by my research participants and me (Cortazzi, 2001; Czarniawska, 2004). I have regarded the analysis of the narrative texts produced in the interviews as crucial since they gave voice to the narrators and provided their realities (Rhodes and Brown, 2005) which in many cases were different to the storylines centrally produced by the organisation under exploration as well as different to outcomes of previous research carried out from an outsider position. My choice was supported by Boyce (1996) and Gabriel and Griffiths (2004) who suggest the use of narratives as source for exploration of lives in organisations.

Following an autoethnographic approach another source of primary data for this research has been my research diary which captured my subjective gendered experiences as the researcher and the researched of this thesis and helped me to go back to them in order to emotionally recall and reflect on these experiences (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000b; Janesick, 2000). Taking on a reflexive approach was most appropriate in this research since interpretations never take place without the researcher bringing in herself as a person, her gender and her own experiences which in this study has been amplified by the autoethnographic nature of it. The reflexive approach acknowledges that during the research process a relationship develops between the researcher and the research participants which inevitably impacts on the research process and therefore is in line with the intersubjective paradigm and the social-constructionist epistemology of this research.

The documentary analysis enabled me to add to the context of the individual experiences of the research participants by illustrating aspects such as the organisation's strategy, understanding of the consultants' role and approach to knowledge management in general and knowledge creation in particular which were not covered in the interview accounts. These insights contributed to the qualitative crystallisation process by offering another view through the crystal to provide a fuller picture of the events taking place (Janesick, 2000).

Further evaluations of the outcomes of reflexivity in adopting this methodology in terms of limitations and risks are discussed below in Section 7.2 on reflexivity.

#### **7.1.4 Theoretical insights into individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes**

The fourth research objective centred on providing, through interpretations of the consultants' accounts on their experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, theoretical insights into knowledge creation. This research objective is addressed in Chapter Five.

The illustrations in Chapter Five confirmed the central argument of this thesis that organisational elements impact on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes. The meso-level interpretations of the interview accounts suggest that the organisational elements of trust, motivation, career and acknowledgement present the key influences impacting on individual knowledge creation activities of both women and men.

Trust was identified as a foundation for the individuals' participation in the social processes of knowing and learning. Trust was not only of crucial importance for the interview participants on the level of interaction with other colleagues but also impacted on their experiences in terms of the bilateral trust between them and their management. The research has shown that the research participants perceived their management's demeanour as dissonant to the organisation's communication and therefore regarded their management as not being authentic which led the consultants to mistrust their management. Mistrust in this regard can easily lead to the inability or unwillingness to share ideas and to create knowledge (Dovey, 2009). Overall, the interpretation of the consultants' accounts further illustrated that they not only perceived it as important to be able to trust other colleagues as well as their management but also that their management trusted them. Being controlled by strict procedures and processes and therefore not being endowed with autonomy meant, in their eyes, that the management did not trust them which further decreased their willingness and motivation to engage in learning and knowing processes.

Motivation in general was found to be the key driver for the consultants' contribution to knowing and learning processes. The decrease of extrinsic motivation due to unfavourable and unsatisfying conditions within the organisation was found to be critical but at the same time could be absorbed by the consultants' intrinsic motivation, at least to a certain point.

Acknowledgement from both management and colleagues was found to essentially contribute to their motivation to participate in knowing and learning processes, in

particular during times in which opportunities for career advancement and financial rewards were scarce. The interpretation of the research participants' accounts suggested that the employees did not feel acknowledged for their activities but exploited instead.

This research has illustrated the importance of career as a further key influence impacting on individual knowledge creation activities. The importance of career advancement for management consultants is supported by Maister (2003) and Alvesson (2004). Despite the consultants' intrinsic motivation, missing career opportunities could negatively impact on their willingness and motivation to participate in knowing and learning processes. In absence of high levels of motivation caused by not being acknowledged but even hindered in their participation in knowing and learning activities, the interview consultants turned to alternative sources of motivation such as career, which increased the importance of this organisational element. If the perception of this organisational element was negative, similar to the perception of the other key organisational elements, this further decreased the consultants' participation in knowing and learning processes.

As summarised in Section 7.1.1 the review of existing literature has confirmed that the organisational element of career, and integrated with it the organisational element of acknowledgement, was not considered in previous research. Therefore:

*This research has contributed by adding the organisational element of career, and integrated with it the organisational element of acknowledgement, to the field of knowledge creation.*

#### **7.1.5 Theoretical insights into individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes**

The fifth research objective of this research was to provide, through a gender lens interpretation of the consultants' accounts of their experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes, theoretical insights into the gendered nature of knowledge creation. This research objective has been addressed in Chapter Five.

The illustrations provided in Chapter Five have supported the central argument of this thesis that knowledge creation is gendered. The macro-level interpretation in Chapter Five made visible that the research participants experienced the

organisational elements and their impact on knowledge creation activities differently depending on their gender. This was especially the case for the organisational elements of motivation, career and acknowledgement. These gendered perceptions not only led to a different understanding but also to a different way of acting in relation to knowledge creation in the organisational context.

As summarised in Section 7.1.2 the review of existing literature has confirmed that only recently the gender aspect has been introduced to the field of knowledge creation (Durbin, 2011) through a theoretical analysis of the gendered nature of knowledge creation in networks. Hence:

*This empirical research has extended existing theory by adding a holistic view on gendered experiences of knowledge creation processes within a knowledge-intensive organisation.*

The interpretations also confirmed the thesis' argument that not all women and men behave in line with stereotypical gender behaviour. Whereas the majority of women and men did gender well by performing in line with traditional notions of femininity and masculinity or by demonstrating exaggerated performance of some elements of gender there were also exceptions. The research accounts demonstrated that different research participants did some elements of gender differently. In these exceptional cases men for instance were found to behave more emotionally and therefore in correspondence with notions of femininity and women to behave more rationally and therefore more in correspondence to notions of masculinity.

As summarised in Section 7.2.2 previous research on the gendered nature of knowledge creation (Durbin, 2011) has not moved beyond exploring the potential differences between women's and men's accounts. Hence:

*This research has, by not only exploring the potential differences between women and men but also considering the differences within the women's and men's accounts, provided a distinctive theoretical contribution by moving away from the gender binary.*

This research supports Gherardi and Poggio's (2001) and Gherardi's (1994) view that organisations as well as social interaction within the organisational context are gendered.

### **7.1.6 Contributing to knowledge creation and gender in organisations**

The sixth research objective centred on providing distinctive theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions through the research outcomes.

This research objective is addressed in Chapter Six and in this chapter.

Chapter Six synthesised and theorised the findings of this research and highlighted their implications for and distinctive theoretical contributions to knowledge. The preceding sections of this chapter have summarised the theoretical contribution and outlined the empirical and methodological contributions of this study. Hence, this research objective has been achieved.

In summary, the exploration of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive organisation, as in this research, has provided further insights into knowledge creation and gender in organisations.

The foregoing discussion of this chapter has also reviewed and evaluated the central arguments of this thesis, accomplishment of its objectives and of the research outcomes in the form of distinctive theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions to the existing literature. Overall, this thesis contributes to theory by

- applying an autoethnographic approach which enabled a view of the organisation from an insider position;
- adding the organisation element of career, and integrated with it the organisational element of acknowledgement, to the field of knowledge creation;
- adding an empirical insight into individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive organisation;
- making visible the gendered nature of the individuals' experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes by employing a gender lens;
- moving away from the gender binary divide by not only exploring the potential differences between women and men but also considering the differences within the women's and men's accounts.

Through achievement of the research objectives and the generation of the research results, the research question and sub-questions are considered to have been addressed. The discussion and evaluation of the seventh research objective to maintain a consciously reflexive approach throughout the research process, has not yet been made. Achievement of this objective is considered in Section 7.2.

## **7.2 Outcomes of reflexivity**

Janesick (2000) uses the metaphor of choreography to describe qualitative research design. In line with this metaphor the process of reflexivity in this research is understood as the 'cooling-down portion' of the dance movement (Janesick, 2000). In this 'cooling-down portion' it has been vital for me as the researcher to become aware of and to reflect again upon my role and my place in this research in terms of my social, epistemological and physical location (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) and how these aspects impacted on the research process. By combining my reflexivity and the crystallisation method I have aimed at offering more than 'just another story', an outcome which might be 'truer' (Pels, 2000; Janesick, 2000).

Macbeth (2001) offers a twofold concept of reflexivity containing positional reflexivity and textual reflexivity which I have followed in this research. I have discussed these processes and my position in this research at particular points earlier in this thesis. For instance I have discussed my place in this research in the introduction and have evaluated my role as the researcher and as the researched as well as the textual reflexivity in Chapter Four on methodology. This section builds on these illustrations by providing further insights into the reflexive processes in which I have engaged. During the positional reflexivity, which will be covered in Section 7.2.1, as the researcher, I explore and reflect upon the interview process and how I impacted on it. In a next step, covered in Section 7.2.2, I comment on what this thesis means to me as the researcher and the researched. In Section 7.2.3 the textual reflexivity has led me to explore and disrupt the textual representation and interpretation.

### **7.2.1 Reflexivity on the interview process**

The reflection on my position in this research is twofold. On the one hand, I need to reflect upon my position as the researcher and the research process in terms of how I interacted with interview partners during the interviews. On the other hand I also need to reflect on my own experiences and me as a self since I was also the researched in this study (Gergen and Gergen, 2000; Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

In this research I as the researcher and my colleagues, the research participants, already had a personal relationship before the interviews took place. This needs to be considered in the reflection of the interview process since this relationship influenced both the researcher and the research participants and therefore the research outcome (Orr and Bennett, 2009). This section contributes to an understanding of how the interview participants and I presented ourselves in the interview process and how they and I constructed meaning throughout the interview process. In order to reflect on my experiences and emotions during the interview process I drew on my research diary as well as emotional recalls (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.752). This helped me to not only recall my experiences and emotions but also to recall and understand the social interaction taking place on a daily basis in the organisational context and the emotions and meaning my colleagues attached to it.

Not only my insider position was crucial to this research but also my gender as well as the gender of my research participants impacted on the social interaction in the interview process and therefore on the research outcome (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004; Eriksson-Zetterquist and Reneberg, 2005). Exploring the social interaction in the interview process through a gender lens enabled me to make the gendered nature of this social interaction visible (Williams and Macalpine, 1995). According to Pullen (2006) the gendered nature of research is often insufficiently acknowledged.

Most of the women as well as men consultants stated that they enjoyed the opportunity to share their experiences and to step back from their daily work in order to reflect on their situations; this is similar to feedback Thomas and Linstead (2002) and Arendell (1997) received from their research participants. None of the women consultants I asked to participate in my research refused to do so. The opposite was the case; they were very keen to participate. In several interviews I had the impression that they felt empowered by having the opportunity to tell their side of the story and it was easier for them to do this since they talked to another woman who had similar experiences which is supported by Oakley (1981). However, Reinharz and Chase (2001) argue that in particular well-educated and high-achieving women in traditional male-dominated professions may also feel that agreeing to participate in research studies is part of their responsibility to other women (Reinharz and Chase, 2001).

Overall, I got the impression that the personal relationships and shared work backgrounds helped both me the researcher as well as my colleagues, the research

participants, to open up in the interview and to make sense out of incidents and experiences we partly shared. Still, each interview situation was unique. In most cases the relationship between me, the researcher, and my colleagues, the research participants, created an open climate in the interviews which enabled the creation of rich accounts. However, despite the semi-structured interview approach which is similar to a conversation (Mavin, 2001a) between two equal partners (Oakley, 1981) I still represented not only their colleague in this situation but also the researcher. This meant that I determined the main topic of our conversation by asking the questions and following them up (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) which some of the research participants seemed to find strange, at least in the beginning of the interviews.

### ***Interviewing the women consultants***

The majority of women research participants did gender well in the interviews. The interviews with Liz and Rebecca for instance were characterised by a very open climate and mutual rapport due to having spent a number of years on the same projects as well as being friendly with them. The interview situations were informal and not only dealing with the research topics, but in the case of Rebecca's interview also mixed up with the exchange of private as well as work-related news. Both often drew on incidents or referred to colleagues both of us knew which made it easier for me to follow their sense making process. The semi-structured nature of the interview which can be regarded as a guided conversation between two equal conversation partners supported this open climate (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Kvale, 1996). Still, the beginning of the interview appeared unnatural to both me the researcher and my colleagues since this form of guided conversation was quite different from our usual conversations. In line with Reinharz and Chase (2001) I, especially in the beginning of the interviews, shared my experiences which seemed to make my women research participants feel more at ease with the interview situation and with sharing their experiences.

Especially **Liz** seemed to feel safe enough in the interview to open up about sensitive issues. Liz connected her sense making process to several incidents and told various stories which presented the context for her sense making process which mainly focussed on emotions and interpersonal relationship rather than the bigger context of the organisation. Once she had opened up she became quite talkative without the need for me to inquire after further details. Whereas at work she appeared to be serious and rather unapproachable she presented a different side of herself in the interview which was more like I knew her from outside of work. Her

account vividly illustrated that through her demeanour at work she aimed at protecting herself and covering her insecurity. It was fascinating to observe and to be part of her sense making process in the interview which at some points appeared to be a revelation to herself. After the interview Liz stated that she enjoyed the interview very much. According to Oakley (1981) my personal involvement with the topic by being a woman consultant like the research participants as well as the personal relationship to the women research participants made it possible that Liz in particular as well as the other women consultants 'admitted me into their lives'. In the interview process Liz drew on rather feminine notions of being emotional and insecure which suggests that she did gender well in the interviews (Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

Whereas Liz shared insights in the interview which she most likely would not have shared in a larger group or with a person she did not know well I would expect that **Rebecca** would also share many of her experiences and the way she made sense out of them in a larger group. She appeared self-confident to a degree which allowed her to openly communicate positive as well as negative experiences and feelings. In the interview she stated her very strong opinions about the organisation as well as about her own strengths and weaknesses, sometimes by extensively elaborating on topics and sometimes by being rather monosyllabic especially in cases where she had a negative opinion about things. Since she had already made sense out of many of her experiences the social production of meaning between her and me mainly took place through my way of phrasing questions and through the way I followed up her answers rather than through the sharing of my experiences. Nevertheless my insider position and our similar client and project role background as well as our personal relationship helped me to develop an understanding of her experiences and sense making processes which an outsider would probably have found difficult to achieve (Pelias, 2003). In the interview process Rebecca did some elements of gender well by sharing private and work-related news at the beginning of the interviews which demonstrated that she felt connected to me (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Maddock, 1999). At the same time she did some elements of gender differently by demonstrating self-assertiveness and by not being afraid of negative consequences to the strong opinions she expressed (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Marshall, 1984).

**Sandra** was not well connected within the organisation but working by herself rather than in a project team of consultant colleagues which is unusual in the consultancy business per se and in the organisation under exploration as well. Hence to her the

interview process also offered the rare opportunity to share her experiences with a colleague. I found it difficult to connect to her in the interview process since her personality in contrast to the other women interview partners was very different from mine. Since we had not worked on the same project before the majority of what she shared was new to me. Hence, I was largely dependent on her portrayal of aspects such as what she had been working on and who she was which made me less of an insider in her interview. I was also irritated by the language she used and therefore found it difficult to build rapport with her and to be responsive to her statements. That we both were women consultants was not sufficient to provide a common basis for the social production of meaning (Kohler Riessman, 1987). But Sandra appeared to neither perceive nor share my perception of the interview since she was very engaged in the interview and very open. Sandra did gender well in the interview by being rather emotional in the way she talked about her experiences which is in line with notions of femininity (Alvesson and Billing, 2000).

The majority of women interview partners seemed willing to talk openly not only about positive experiences but appeared to be keen also to share their negative experiences despite the risk of portraying weakness which reinforces that the women were doing gender well in the interview accounts. All of the women interview partners displayed an open and relaxed body language once we were a few minutes into the interview. The personal relationship between me and the women research participants as well as the mutual disclosure contributed to the creation of rich interview accounts (Ellis and Berger, 2001; Douglas, 1985). **Melanie** for instance in her account stated that she felt that she could be honest and did not need 'to say anything which wasn't true' which indicates that she did not feel the need to protect herself and her position within the organisation.

Still, some women seemed to be trying to avoid expressing an opinion which could have a negative impact on the relationship between them as participants and me as the researcher in case I had a different opinion of this topic. This, again, illustrates that women were doing gender well since their behaviour suggests that they aimed at pleasing others and at being connected to me as the researcher (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Maddock, 1999). Although they seemed to appreciate the opportunity to share their experiences they probably were also afraid of them as a person or their opinion and experiences being heard or becoming visible. This is something which might have been different if the researcher had been an outsider and had no insight into the organisation. However, in this research I was the researcher and an insider at the same time. On the one hand, that provided an

advantage since I was able to understand and comprehend what the interview participants experienced and had a trustful relationship to the majority of women consultants (Pelias, 2003). On the other hand, there was also the chance that research participants would hesitate to express their experiences in order to protect themselves in case we would again work together in the near future.

Overall, I felt more at ease with interviewing my women consultant colleagues. Apart from the interview with Sandra I experienced the interview situations as pleasant and open. I perceived it to be easier to build rapport with my women consultants. This was especially the case with women consultants like Helen and Liz with whom I was friends. I enjoyed sharing my experiences as well as my emotions related to these with them, not cautious of admitting weakness, and also appreciated the perception of being related to the other women colleagues. When I went back to the interview transcripts I noticed that I often agreed with them in order to please them and to make them open up further. Hence, I behaved in accordance with rather feminine notions and did gender well in the interviews.

### ***Interviewing the men consultants***

The majority of men research participants did gender well in the interviews.

Amongst the men consultants I had the longest and closest common project history as well as personal relationship with Marc and Keith. Due to this close relationship especially with **Keith**, which was also characterised by a high level of mutual trust and respect, I consciously conducted my first interview with him. He had written his Masters dissertation about a topic similar to this research and was personally interested in it. The interview situation was very open and he seemed to enjoy our exchange of experiences of what was going on in the organisation. Due to his theoretical knowledge, however, he seemed rather analytical about his experiences and preferred to analyse and to comment on the bigger picture. I aimed at phrasing my questions in a way to make him refocus on his personal experiences at various times, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. Although we already had a good relationship I felt that after the interview Keith took me more seriously on a professional basis than before. Keith's behaviour in the interview suggests that he was doing gender well since he behaved in accordance with sex-role stereotypes by being analytical and rational (Billing and Alvesson, 2000).

The relationship to **Marc** made a turn due to the interview. Marc usually worked on more senior project positions than me and I had the impression that, although he

seemed to like me and appreciated my work, he felt superior to me and I as a woman consultant could never achieve the same level of seniority as he and his men colleagues in his eyes. In his presence I often felt slightly insecure about my skills and my demeanour which was not how I usually felt at work. Although I felt anxious before the interview, I quickly became more and more confident moving through the interview once I had realised that I was more familiar with the topic than he was. At the beginning, Marc's behaviour suggested that he himself felt generous in making time for the interview in order to tell me something about my research topic. During the course of the interview Marc's behaviour changed and suggested instead that he did not feel comfortable with this situation anymore and aimed at regaining control over it by a number of actions. Like Keith he took on a consultant-style by avoiding displaying emotions and rather reporting about his perceptions and experiences in an analytical style by using short sentences in which he communicated clear statements. Further, before commenting on my questions Marc a number of times corrected the way I asked my questions for instance by saying 'I would like to divide your question into two'. Instead of answering the questions, at various times he commented on the theoretical concepts behind it and offered different understandings of it:

*"I consider 'knowledge management' to be the wrong term for this. I prefer the term 'intellectual capital' which also includes the capability to apply knowledge and the experience, how to apply knowledge in different social-cultural environments or organisation-specific environment."*

By doing this Marc tried to regain power over the interview situation (Warren and Hackney, 2000) and to send me back to my proper place, 'second place' (de Beauvoir, 1953). It seemed to me as if he tried to impress me with the knowledge about my research topic. To me this appeared to be another attempt to demonstrate that he was superior and to put me in 'second place'.

Not much social meaning production took place in this interview since Marc seemed to have analysed his experiences before-hand and it was important to him to present his analysis in the interview situation. Nevertheless, his interview account provided valuable insights for this research.

Marc did gender well in the interviews by behaving in line with sex-role stereotypes according to which men are analytical, rational, detached and self-assertive (Billing and Alvesson, 2000). He also performed exaggerated gender behaviour by being overly active, almost aggressive and very competitive and concerned about losing

control over the interview situation. However, a few weeks after the interview he stated that he was very impressed by how I conducted the interview and that he would as a result see me in a different light.

The interview situation with Marc was exceptional. Due to our prior relationship in which I often felt insecure and inferior I was rather apprehensive in preparation of the meeting. Due to some comments Marc made when I commenced my research I already suspected that Marc might use the interview situation to test me and probably to send me back to my proper place, 'second place' (de Beauvoir, 1953). I nevertheless decided to ask him to participate since I acknowledged his experiences as a consultant and assumed that this would be an opportunity to prove him wrong in relation to his perception that I could not be as good as he was as a management consultant. Beforehand, I figured that the only way to accomplish this and at the same time to gain a rich and insightful research account from this interview was to be well-prepared in terms of my questions and my subject area as well as acting assertive and proactive in the interviews. Whereas at the beginning of the interview I only acted self-assertive I soon also became self-assertive once I realised that I was the one who was more knowledgeable in the subject of our conversation and the one who was asking the questions. In preparation of the meeting I behaved in accordance with rather feminine notions and hence did gender well. During the interview however I demonstrated a more active and assertive behaviour which was more in line with masculine notions and hence did at least some elements of gender differently. Overall, I did not fully act in accordance with the principles of the semi-structured interview in Marc's interview though.

The interview situations with **John** and **Will** were characterised by an open and very relaxed atmosphere. Like the majority of interview participants, they seemed to be interested in my research topic and appeared to enjoy the opportunity to share their experiences. Similar to the interview situation with Keith it was sometimes difficult to get them to talk about their personal experiences instead of reporting on their views on the organisation's strategy and the macro-level. But once we arrived at the micro-level both were open to share their experiences. Overall, they as well were analytical rather than emotional in the interview situation and hence did gender well.

**Steve, Tom** and **Ian** appeared to feel uncomfortable at the beginning of the interviews. All of them stated that they needed time to adjust to the unusual interview situation which me, their colleague, as the researcher but warmed up after the first questions and after I had disclosed some of my personal experiences with

them (Oakley, 1981). Their behaviour reinforces that they also did gender well in the interviews. Their behaviour suggests that they felt uncomfortable in the beginning of the interview situation since they did not know what to expect and felt not in control of the situation.

Overall, the men research participants appeared to have come to the interview with a 'pre-defined' view on what was going on in the organisation. Further, men consultants like Keith and Marc demonstrated a rather distinct self-assertive perception of themselves as management consultants supported by emphasising their positions as a (successful) management consultant. This was reinforced by them using formal and analytical language and short sentences, by speaking up and by taking on an almost provocative posture.

Whereas most women consultants seemed to be willing to talk openly about negative experiences despite the danger of appearing weak in the eyes of the researcher, the majority of men consultants participating in this research seemed to be keen to avoid admitting any weaknesses because of the researcher being a woman and a colleague. It appeared as if they aimed at avoiding losing their power and masculinity by denying their vulnerability (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001). As a consequence, some bypassed personal questions by referring to the bigger organisational context in their answers whereas others seemed to pretend not to understand what I meant by my question. This again supports that the majority of men did gender well in the interviews. Some men consultants like Ian however, appeared to find it easier to share their experience and emotions connected to it to me in particular because I was a woman (Warren and Hackney, 2000). He stated after reporting about an incident which he had to cope with: *"I have to admit that this is not easy for me"*. Ian's behaviour suggests that he did some elements of gender differently by opening up and showing weakness and emotions, which he was probably able to do since I was a woman (Warren and Hackney, 2000). At the same time he might have done some elements of gender well by feeling less threatened by me, a woman, than by another man colleague.

It may be that the men consultants did not disclose as much of their emotion as the women consultants since they did not want to demonstrate vulnerability, especially when talking to a women researcher who, at the same time, was also their colleague. Alternatively, they may perceive their organisational context less emotionally than their women colleagues. Drawing on Bryans and Mavin (2007) men consultants might have been as emotional as the women consultants but might have

displayed their emotions differently by drawing on traditional masculine gendered norms. Whereas women consultants did gender well in the interview by recapturing events in a very emotional way, therefore drawing on traditional feminine gendered norms, men consultants might have done gender well by distancing themselves from their experiences by making sense of the bigger picture of the organisation in an analytical and rational way. However, due to less disclosure of the men consultants in terms of their emotions I felt that I missed out on some valuable insights on the emotions men consultants attached to the events.

When men consultants commented on their women colleagues or women in general it seemed as if the men consultants were convinced that they regarded their women consultants as equal whereas their accounts in most cases suggested that they did not. In some cases they made statements which were more in line with seeing women as different to them. It appeared that they wanted to be regarded as tolerant and open towards women consultants, probably partly also in order to please me the researcher. Some of the men consultants overall left the impression that they still regarded women to be 'the other consultant', deviating from the norm and therefore not suitable for being a management consultant (Maddock, 1999). Being a management consultant to them was linked to rather masculine notions of being assertive, competitive, rational and career-oriented which is in line with Alvesson (2004). Women behaving in this way were perceived negatively since they did not act in line with expected gender behaviour. If women however behaved in line with expected gender behaviour they were regarded as 'nice' and 'pleasant to work with' since they did not threaten the men consultants. But being 'nice' and pleasant to work with at the same time implied that the men consultants regarded them as 'the other consultant'.

Overall, I found it more difficult to interview my men consultant colleagues. I appreciated feeling related to my research participants which in the interview situations with the majority of the women consultants was achieved by sharing experiences and admitting emotions and weaknesses. This behaviour suggested that I was more inclined to do gender well. However, in order to achieve meaningful insights into the men consultants' experiences I needed to behave in a more assertive and interrogative way at times which is more in line with masculinity and hence suggests that I did at least some elements of gender differently in the interviews with the men consultants. I also did some elements of gender well at the same time by being sensitive and sympathetic in order to bring the research

participants to a place where they felt safe enough to disclose their emotions and weaknesses (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001) such as with Will and Ian.

In line with the interpretations of the research participants' interview accounts and the language used in the interview this reflection on the interview processes illustrates that the majority of both women and men consultants acted in correspondence with sex-role stereotypes and hence did gender well. They reinforced the gender binary divide. At the same time some consultants in some aspects of their behaviour did gender differently and with it unsettled the gender binary divide.

The next section reflects on what this thesis means to me as the researcher and the researched.

### **7.2.2 Reflexivity on my position**

The aspects of my autoethnographic position which positively impacted on the interview processes clearly prevailed. However, my dual role of the researcher and the researched made this research deeply personal and included revealing myself and my own experiences and emotions as part of the research which made me vulnerable to anyone who might read this thesis (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Doloriert and Sambrook, 2009). My position also implied the risk of taken-for-granted assumptions (Hayano, 1979) and self-narcissism (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010) as well as the blindness to issues in the culture explored (Sparkes, 2002). Although I shared with all interview participants that we worked as management consultants in the same organisation I had more in common with the women research participants since we shared being women in the same consultancy characterised by 'corporate masculinity' (Maier, 1999). This alleviated the opportunity to comprehend and empathise with the women's experiences and feelings but also endangered me as the researcher to interpret my story into their accounts (Norum, 2000). In order to avoid this I handed over my interpretations to two of the research participants which is further discussed in Section 7.2.3.

Since I not only shared the research participants' work experiences and background but also made myself part of this research as one of the research participants I had both unconsciously and consciously developed my standpoint regarding the topics covered in the interview process which resulted in a biased attitude towards the interviews. It proved to be difficult to share my experiences with the research

participants in the interview situations and at the same time remain cautious not to phrase my questions as well as answers and follow-ups in a way which pushed them in a certain direction. In an interview situation with **John** I asked him about creativity and was not satisfied with his answer. In order to get more details on his perception on the role of creativity in the organisation I rephrased my question and shared my own experience by saying 'I completely agree with you. However, the organisation could support their employees in their creative activities or might it be that it is inconvenient to the organisation if employees are creative?'. By phrasing my questions like this I not only implied my own perception of the situation but also pre-formulated a potential answer to which he could simply have agreed. In order to minimise these kinds of risks I went back to the interview records after each interview in preparation for the next to become aware of these issues and to try to avoid them in the following interviews.

In the interview situation it was important to me to be acknowledged by the men consultants. I had already felt acknowledged by the majority of the women participants in advance of the interviews. However, I perceived that some of the men consultants did not fully accept me as a management consultant. Partly this might have been related to me being a woman whom they probably did regard as 'the other consultant'. Whereas the majority of the men consultants had a technical SAP-background I was working in Change Management which was perceived by the majority of men consultants as a typical area in which women consultants were working although I also had a technical SAP-background and dealt with the system on a regular basis. Being a Change Manager within the male-dominated organisation explored was commonly connected to aspects like being caring and sensitive to others since it deals with the 'human side' of organisational change, a typical role for women in relation to sex-role stereotypes (Tyler, 2005). Hence, I as a Change Manager acted in line with expected gender behaviour and therefore was perceived as 'nice' and not 'threatening' by the majority of male research participants. However, when I commenced my research and invited the men consultants to participate in the research I became more active and more assertive, especially in the interview situations. The men consultants might have labelled my behaviour as unfeminine and negative since it challenged the established gender order. However, since my research was not directly linked to my behaviour at work where I continued being a Change Manager, I did not experience, at least not consciously, negative consequences. What I did experience however was that in some cases such as with Keith and Marc the interview presented a turning point in our relationship. It appeared that by my assertive demeanour in the interview and

my advantage in terms of being more knowledgeable in the subject of my PhD than the research participants changed their perception of me to a certain degree.

In line with the autoethnographic approach of this research my account has been presented and interpreted alongside the accounts of the research participants. In sum, I, like the majority of research participants, did gender well in my perceptions in relation to the experiences of knowledge creation processes most of the time but also did at least some elements of gender differently at some times.

Overall, the research process to me meant that I have become more aware of what is going on at InterConsult and how the organisational context impacts on the consultants' experiences in general and in relation to gendered knowledge creation in particular. I have also become more sensitive to gender issues at work. The research accounts of my research participants and myself and their interpretations have negatively impacted on my motivation and on my participation in knowing and learning processes since they did not offer a very promising insight into the organisation I am working for.

The next section reflects upon my interpretations of the research interviews.

### **7.2.3 Reflexivity on my interpretations**

The translation process is discussed in Chapter Four and is only briefly summarised here. The interviews were conducted in German, since for 14 of the 15 research participants German was their native language. After I had selected extracts and interpreted them I translated them into English. Since translation cannot take place without interpretation (Albrecht, 1973) my personal interpretations as well as experiences impacted on the translation which was therefore prone to ambiguity (Nida, 1996). Also my German identity impacted on the translation process (Albrecht, 1973; Kelly, 1994) and cultural differences might have got lost in the translation process (Rabassa, 1996). Although I aimed at keeping the authenticity of the text and at the same time making it possible for English-speaking readers to understand, the text will at least to some degree remain a foreign text to the reader (Bassnett, 1998).

Even though I attempted to provide the participants' accounts as authentically as possible, I have been in power since it was my decision which extracts were included and which were excluded from the translation and the presentation in this

thesis (Essers, 2009). Hence I decided which parts of the research accounts became visible to the reader and part of the crystallisation process. As already discussed in Section 7.2.2 I also needed to be aware of not interpreting my opinion on the topic as an insider into the participants' accounts (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010; Norum, 2000).

To provide another source of reflexivity which provided a further view through the crystal (Richardson, 2000b) I gave my interpretations to two research participants and asked them to feed back to me whether they were able to resonate with the interpretations. Both research participants expressed that some of the interpretations, especially those of their own accounts which were the only ones they were able to recognise, were in some cases almost a revelation. They appreciated being able to look at their experiences and those of their anonymous colleagues from a different angle. Especially the view through a gender lens offered a completely new way of interpreting their experiences. In their feedback both suggested only minor changes in relation to some of the contextual background information provided on the research participants but no changes to the interpretations. Instead they expressed that they would be interested in a deeper analysis of the gendered nature of management consultancies.

In this section I have demonstrated how I have acknowledged the influences on the research process as well as the interpretations of this research and have reflected on them. However, I can only reflect on those influences which I am aware of which implies that there are still unconscious influences which will remain hidden and therefore not addressed (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). Further, my decision about the selection and presentation of the accounts has influenced the outcomes of this study. Hence, this research process provides only one of many and potentially different views through the crystal. The next section considers other possible research outcomes that may have resulted from choosing to take a different approach to the topic of this research.

### **7.3 Limitations of the thesis**

In the beginning of this research I took on a subjective paradigm captured by a social constructivist epistemology and since then have moved to where I am today – an intersubjective standpoint supported by a social-constructionist epistemology. The journey I undertook is illustrated in Chapter Four. This approach is congruent with my values and positions in relation to gender and knowledge creation which I

have expressed from the beginning of this thesis. The social-constructionist approach will have influenced how I have paid attention to some aspects and ignored others. This section considers the potentially different paths this research may have taken without denying my ontological and epistemological persuasion. These paths are considered with reference to the individual gendered experiences of knowledge creation processes and by drawing on the identification of research gaps of recent research in related fields.

### **7.3.1 Philosophical orientation, level of engagement and epistemological interest**

This research has been conducted based on an intersubjective paradigm following a social-constructionist epistemology and has explored, at the micro level, the individual gender experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes. The research outcomes present insights from within the organisation under exploration through the eyes of the individual research participants. In order to be able to interpret the individual accounts within their organisational context, the meso-level, the organisation's approaches to aspects such as knowledge management, training and career were provided. Although this thesis has acknowledged the organisational approaches it could have explored the impact of organisational strategies on knowledge creation processes at the meso-level. One exception where this was done was the top-down implementation of Communities of Practice. Some of the interview participants, such as Keith, offered their view on meso-level aspects such as the organisation's strategy in general and specific implementations of approaches related to knowledge creation. Keith's and other research participants' accounts suggest that they had analysed not merely what had happened with immediate effect to them but also the bigger picture which seemed to come naturally to them since analysing organisations was one of their regular tasks on client projects. Hence, the research participants most likely would also have been appropriate interview partners for a study dealing with knowledge creation processes at the meso-level. This could provide an interesting level of study in future research.

### **7.3.2 Organisational elements**

This thesis has argued that a range of different organisational elements impact on individual knowledge creation activities. In particular the elements of trust, motivation, career and acknowledgement were identified as key to the individuals' activities. Instead of exploring the full range of organisational elements emerging

from the interview accounts the research could have taken a less holistic approach by focussing on one of the key elements instead. This would have provided the opportunity to explore this specific organisational element's impact more in-depth by following them up separately in a second interview phase for example.

Marc, for instance, in his account referred to the two dimensions of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic, and the importance of these for the consultants to remain within the organisation. Although this research has acknowledged the importance of the notion of motivation in relation to the consultants' experiences of knowledge creation processes and has also briefly discussed the two dimensions, extracts like Marc's would have provided the opportunity to explore the potentially different sources as well as the impact of the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of motivation in more detail. The notion of motivation has been identified as crucial to knowledge creation processes by previous research carried out by Merx-Chermin and Nijhof (2005) and Szulanski (1996) among others and has also gained special attention in research on knowledge workers since they are regarded as being highly motivated (Alvesson, 2004; Mitchell and Meacham, 2011). However, this research aimed at providing a comprehensive insight into how the organisational context impacted on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes in the organisation explored and therefore considered all organisational elements emerging from the interview accounts.

### **7.3.3 The gender aspect**

The interpretations of the research participants' accounts confirmed the central argument of this thesis that knowledge creation is gendered. This research aimed at exploring individual experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes through a gender lens in order to pay special attention to the women's experiences and to therefore make them equally important to men and their experiences to release them from their 'second place' which would enable them to fully contribute to knowledge creation (Mavin, 2001a). To move away from the gender binary and the assumption that both women and men are a homogenous group I explored the individual gendered experiences by not only looking at women consultants but also including men consultants, the differences between women's and men's experiences as well as the differences within the women's and men's interview accounts. This research could have instead entirely focussed on women and therefore would have had the opportunity to give voice and visibility to the women's experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation

processes to a higher degree than this research was able to (Simpson and Lewis, 2007).

#### **7.3.4 The takeover's impact**

The first interviews with the research participants were carried out a few years after the organisation under exploration had acquired Monday in order to combine the Monday consultants with their consultants to form the new business unit InterConsult. Since I had originally worked for Monday and deemed it important to choose interview partners I had a close relationship with I only invited former Monday colleagues to participate in this research, apart from one research participant, Melanie, who had joined the organisation after the acquisition. At the time of the interviews the consultants were still undergoing a transition phase which seemed to be especially difficult for the former Monday colleagues. This seemed mainly connected to the cultural clash they experienced in their new organisation which was for instance connected to experiences of less autonomy, less career opportunities and less acknowledgement of their work. Some of the research participants stated that they felt they were no longer working for a 'classical' management consultancy. Other interview accounts vividly illustrate that the consultants felt that the takeover had been out of their control which made them feel powerless.

The impact of the takeover on the consultants' experiences in general and in particular in relation to their experiences of knowledge creation processes has been acknowledged as an essential part of the organisational context and incorporated into this research. Still, the research could have taken a different direction by providing a more in-depth exploration of the impact of the merger for instance by focussing on a comparison of the consultants' experiences of knowledge creation processes before and after the takeover. Research by Empson (2001) demonstrated that if employees of knowledge-intensive firms undergo a difficult transition phase during which they are not supported appropriately this can negatively impact on their willingness and ability to share their knowledge. This can minimise the biggest potential benefit of mergers between knowledge-intensive firms, the improvement of the overall innovativeness which stresses the importance of the acquisition for this research.

Other possibilities for future research arising from the research accounts generated by this current study are considered in the next section.

#### **7.4 Possibilities for future research**

The review of the achievement of the research objectives suggests the following possibilities for further research.

This thesis has identified the organisational elements of trust, motivation, career and acknowledgement, which are embedded in the organisational context, as vital to individual knowledge creation activities within the organisation under exploration. However, as already mentioned in Section 7.3.2, the elements were not followed up in detail. A two-stage interview process either in this organisation or in a different organisational setting, ideally within a knowledge-intensive firm, may provide further insights by first identifying the most crucial elements in a first interview before then following up these elements in a second interview to explore their impact on individual knowledge creation activities in more detail.

The organisational element career identified in this research has added to theory on knowledge creation. In line with Taminiau *et al.* (2009) this research proposes that instead of linking the organisation's reward system and therefore indirectly the career model for management consultants to billable hours, a link to knowledge creation needs to be established in order to increase the importance of knowledge creation activities. Research in different organisational settings of other knowledge-intensive firms may provide an insight into career models in terms of whether these organisations acknowledge knowledge creation activities in their career model or how this could be achieved.

Researchers such as Alvesson (2004) and Maister (2003) state that the consultant's identity is often closely linked to their profession which not only concerns their identity as an employee but often also reflects how they view themselves as a complete person, including work and their private lives. Keeping up this identity as a professional offers a major intrinsic motivation (Alvesson, 2004). In the research accounts the interview participants stated that their experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes negatively impacted on their identity. Identity was outside of the scope of this research but future research in this area may offer insights into the relation between consultants' knowledge creation activities and its impact on their identity.

The fields of knowledge creation and gender in organisations have only recently been fused. So far only Durbin (2011) has explored, in a theoretical analysis, the role of gender in knowledge creation through networks. Hence, this research

contributes to theory by providing an empirical study which confirms that individual experiences of knowledge creation processes are gendered. The knowledge economy which stresses the importance of continuous knowledge creation and organisations being part of it offers a wide range of further research in other knowledge-intensive firms. In particular, it may be of interest to explore whether the individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes of women and men employees differ as significantly in organisations which are less influenced by 'corporate masculinity' (Maier, 1999). As already mentioned in Section 7.3.3 a future study in this area could also entirely focus on women to provide women and their experiences with a voice and visibility to a higher degree than in this research.

In order to move away from the gender binary (Mavin and Grandy, 2011) this research has, besides exploring the potential differences between women's experiences and men's experiences, also explored the differences within men's accounts as well as the differences within women's accounts and therefore contributed to theory in the fields of gender in organisations and knowledge creation. Other researchers might adopt this approach in order to enhance the outcomes of their research on gendered knowledge creation and to replace the traditional understanding of masculinity and femininity as being tied to the bodies of men and women respectively by the perception that masculinity and femininity are accessible to both women and men permitting a social flux in which both sexes can enter cross-gender spaces and thus occupy a dual presence (Patterson, 2010).

Finally, the autoethnographic approach taken in this research has enabled an insider view presenting accounts of individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes with insights an outside researcher would have found difficult to provide. Due to a lack of understanding and trustful relationships with the research participants the researcher would potentially have been just another 'academic tourist' (Pelias, 2003; Richardson, 2000a). Researchers might adopt this research and find it fruitful to explore their own organisation instead of turning to organisations as research sites to which they are an outsider.

## **7.5 What has happened since then?**

The interviews were carried out between 2005 and 2007. Since then 10 of the 15 interview partners, four women consultants and six men consultants, have left the

organisation, the majority to continue working as a management consultant either for another consultancy or as freelancers. Five of the research participants (Helen, Liz, Claire, John, Tom) and me the researcher, remain with the organisation until today. All women, including myself, and Tom have made one step up on the career ladder since the interviews were conducted. John has become part of the management team of InterConsult. The majority of those who left did so because of scarce career opportunities, a lack of motivation and missing opportunities to further develop their skills.

Overall, the organisation's knowledge management and training approaches have remained the same. Attending classroom training is still rather rare. Since many former Monday colleagues have left the organisation in the meantime the formerly rather separated groups of Monday consultants and consultants who had been with the organisation before the takeover have mixed and now frequently work together in project teams at the client site. The organisation is no longer able to provide certain topic areas to clients since the subject matter experts have either left the organisation or the organisation has missed out on developing relevant skills for these topics. It appears as if lacking financial and time investments into learning and knowing activities have begun to show.

In recent conversations with the research participants who are still with the organisation I have brought up the aspects of trust, motivation, career and acknowledgement which were identified as organisational elements crucially impacting on individual knowledge creation activities. In the eyes of the research participants no major improvements have taken place since the interviews were conducted. Knowledge creation activities are still neither fostered nor appreciated. Since the level of motivation has further decreased the majority has apart from small underground innovations ceased investing time in formal knowledge creation activities.

## **7.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter has completed this thesis by reflecting on this research and the research process. It has provided an overview of the central outcomes of this thesis. These are that trust, motivation, career and acknowledgement present the key organisational elements impacting on individual experiences of knowledge creation processes and that knowledge creation is gendered. Reflexive in style, the chapter has discussed the achievement of the research aims and objectives and how these

have made theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions to the theory base of knowledge creation. These contributions are a view of the organisation explored from an insider position through the autoethnographic approach, a refinement of theory in the field of knowledge creation by adding the organisational elements career and acknowledgement, an empirical insight into individual gendered experiences of organisational elements impacting on knowledge creation processes in a knowledge-intensive organisation making visible the gendered nature of the individuals' experiences by employing a gender lens and a move away from the gender binary divide by not only exploring the differences between women and men but also considering the differences within the women's and men's accounts. The chapter then moved on to reflect on my position as the researcher and the researched and its impact on both the interview and interpretation process. It also reflects upon the meaning this research has to me before reflecting on the limitations of this research and suggesting areas of future research. The chapter concluded by providing an update on what has happened in the organisation under exploration since the completion of the interviews.

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## **Appendix 1 Confirmation Case Study Organisation**

### **Confirmation of PhD Study**

To whom it may concern:

This is to confirm that InterIT gives consent to the execution of the study Katja Pastoors will conduct as part of her PhD in Business Administration at Newcastle Business School/University of Northumbria.

Within the scope of this study we agree to the following proceeding:

- Execution of interviews with 15 consultants
- Exploration and usage of InterIT documents.

We approve the recording of interviews.

Katja has to ensure that there are no foreseeable risks with this research. Participation has to be entirely voluntary and participants may terminate their involvement at any time. Participants do not need to answer particular questions if they do not want to.

All data has to be completely anonymous and has to be used for research purposes only. Names of participants must not be connected to information.

To ensure the coherence of the interview transcript Katja has to assure that each participant will receive a copy of her or his interview transcript to read and to feedback in case of any discrepancies.

InterIT agrees to the publishing of the results.

Kind regards,

## Appendix 2 Informed Consent Form

### Informed Consent Form

The following interview is part of a study exploring the individual experience of knowledge creation in a transnational organisation. It is performed as a partial fulfilment of the requirements of the researcher's PhD in Business Administration at Newcastle Business School/University of Northumbria.

Your experience as a consultant working in a knowledge-intensive environment, where most work is of an intellectual nature, is of particular importance for this project.

There are no foreseeable risks with this research. Participation is entirely voluntary and participants may terminate their involvement at any time. You do not need to answer particular questions if you do not want to. All data is completely anonymous and will be used for research purposes only. Names of participants will not be connected to information.

The interview will be recorded. To ensure the coherence of the interview transcript you will receive a copy of this document for you to read and I would appreciate it if you would feedback to me in case of any discrepancies. Also, you are more than welcome to add any further thoughts about the answers you gave and the impact the process has had on your thinking.

In case you are interested in the outcome of this study, I am happy to provide you with detailed information once the research has been completed.

Meanwhile, I want to thank you very much indeed for dedicating your valuable time.

If you have any further questions please contact me.

Please sign the informed consent at the bottom of this page.

-----  
I agree to participate in this research project and have understood the points mentioned above.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

### Appendix 3 Interview Guide

Question/topics to cover	Indicative follow-up areas
Start of interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research topic</li> <li>• Signing of informed consent</li> </ul>
Tell me something about you as a person and your background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age, position in the organisation</li> <li>• Subject Matter Expert</li> <li>• Job role on current projects</li> <li>• Importance of career (added 08/2005)</li> <li>• Involvement in knowledge management initiatives at InterIT</li> </ul>
How are learning, creativity and innovation valued in this organisation from your point of view?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training &amp; development activities</li> <li>• Sharing of knowledge</li> <li>• Encouragement and gratification for knowledge creation by management</li> </ul>
How is the climate at InterIT? How do you perceive the relationship with your colleagues?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sympathy/understanding among consultants</li> <li>• Sense of being member of a team</li> <li>• Supportiveness of management</li> <li>• Opportunities for knowledge exchange</li> <li>• Relationship to clients</li> </ul>
How about yourself? Do you perceive yourself as someone who likes change and is keen to try new things?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal motivation to learn new things</li> <li>• Perceptions of rules &amp; regulations</li> <li>• Perception of own creativity and creativity of colleagues</li> </ul>
Tell me about a situation where you have been creative/Is this typical for the way in which creativity/knowledge creation is handled at InterIT?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge creation in social interaction</li> <li>• Reaction of colleagues</li> <li>• Reward</li> <li>• Dissemination of new knowledge/innovation</li> <li>• Motivation to continue activities</li> </ul>
Tell me about a typical working day at InterIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proportion of knowledge-intensive work to routine work</li> <li>• Required flexibility</li> <li>• Percentage of team work with colleagues/clients</li> <li>• Frequency of exchange of experiences/ideas with colleagues during lunch or coffee breaks</li> </ul>
Has anything changed since the takeover?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context/Climate</li> <li>• Processes</li> <li>• Appreciation of creativity/innovation</li> </ul>
Do you have any suggestions for improvements? (added 08/2005)	na
Is there anything you want to add, any thoughts on the topic we haven't covered up to now or questions you want to ask me?	na
End of interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passing back of transcript</li> </ul>

## Appendix 4 Interview Transcript

### Interview with Liz on July 29th, 2005

(originally conducted in German)

**Note:** Names that could identify colleagues or the organisation as well as the names of clients and employees have been replaced with '...'.

**Katja:** Thanks for taking the time for this interview today. Please tell me about yourself and your professional and private background.

**Liz:** My name is Liz; I am 40 years old and did my A-levels in 1984. I studied chemistry and am thus a graduated chemist. When I finished university it was quite difficult to find a job. I received the diploma in 1991 and started a dissertation which I did not finish however. At some point I had to decide what I wanted to do, the prospects on the job market were really dim and even chemists with a really good summa cum laude diploma had difficulties on the job market.

**Katja:** Wasn't that the time when many became teachers? Because we had quite a few teachers like that.

**Liz:** Well, put it this way, I don't know of anybody who became a teacher. There has always been a demand for natural science teachers. Well, could have been but I don't know. Well, what should I do – why not work in consultancy? I have to add that you don't deal a lot with people when studying chemistry. You can spend the whole day in front of your tests and simmer as it takes quite a long time until you see the result of your work – sometimes even weeks. And to be honest; I don't have the patience for that and wanted to work with people and therefore consultancy seemed quite sensible. I started with SAP-consultancy in the construction business. They were looking for graduates without previous knowledge of SAP and without knowledge of the construction processes which I personally found quite frustrating. They were of the opinion that they could teach everything as long as the graduates were intelligent, had a university degree and were ready to learn. Considering SAP everything was fine but not considering the processes in the construction business. You can't send someone in a meeting with a client who has been working with those processes on a day to day basis while you start at zero. You are not an equivalent counterpart because you can't offer something when you have no idea of the processes. Therefore I looked for another job. I also wanted to work in a bigger company with corresponding training opportunities and ended up with Monday. That was in 2001. I started in a project with the software JDEdwards of which I had no clue until three days before the start of the project but I knew the processes in the part of the project in which I had to deal with the software. And the previous process knowledge proved to be more useful as if I would have known the JDEdwards software but would not have had the process knowledge which however was not my decision. Thus I could sit down and have a look: which processes do I have and what is the module supposed to represent and where do I find this. Of course I also knew how SAP is working and could thus do the transfer. It was definitely better; I was in the project for half a year and then the project finished for me and I changed to the ... project. For two and a half years I worked in projects dealing with similar

questions concerning the set-up of Accounts Payable or Accounts Receivable processes or rather gap analysis. We were doing an integration with a newly acquired company and had to establish the existing processes because they all had to be converted to ... products: where are gaps, where can processes be trimmed to the client's products and where are new processes needed which are connected to certain configuration changes in the system. And at the end of the day data migration with which I had not dealt before. However, the approach was quite easy for me because it is a very logical system. You were there as well so you know all the staff. You have some data and some structures which have to be entered and you have to find a way how this can be done. That was quite easy because on the customer side I had a colleague who knew everything about the processes and from whom I received a lot of input and on the development side ... who was not a pure developer who could only talk in charts and programs but someone to whom the business idea was not foreign and therefore I had two contacts who also helped me to fill the gaps I had at the time so I could reach a level where I could work on my own, which I did in parts in the last project with .... The customer, in this case ..., dealt with a part of the problem in Accounts Payable/Accounts Receivable while I dealt with the other. We always had to swap information but that was quite ok.

**Katja:** Would you consider yourself to be an expert in this area?

**Liz:** Meanwhile yes, on the technical side in any case, process-wise I am on the way. At InterConsult I am already seen as a Subject Matter Expert in this area and I think it wouldn't be a big problem. But I feel that the more I know the more I become aware of my gaps and the things I don't know. Half a year ago I might have said: yes, I consider myself as an expert but now, as I know more I think: yes, but there is still a lot missing.

**Katja:** Not many people deal with this here, right?

**Liz:** I don't think so because the Resource Management is not really concerned about me. When I report about a month before the end of a project to ask whether I am still employed I usually get the answer that it shouldn't be a problem with my skills. Yes, apparently there are not many around but I don't know why - maybe people specialise in areas which are fancier and more en vogue. Account Payable/Account Receivable is the basis but you get around without it. However, I am not too sure how useful this is for the career development.

**Katja:** Does it help you with your career development, at least within InterConsult?

**Liz:** It depends. When I could establish myself in lead positions then it would also be possible in this topic but I would need more knowledge in order to understand the big picture. And I have to say so far InterConsult and also Monday have not been very helpful because considering what I wanted to do the training courses I got can be counted on one hand and I would say I have not received them in the areas required and thus I would never say that I could take over the finance lead now. I could certainly do teamlead for Accounts Payable/Accounts Receivable and I would also have the organisational skills. Of course I would still consult with someone more experienced but I know how to deal with people, to be more accurate I learnt from rather negative examples; you know whom I mean but we won't say any name here.

**Katja:** As we are talking about career – is that important to you?

**Liz:** Well, yes.

**Katja:** Do you think that you have a career with InterConsult?

**Liz:** Well, I believe that I have a better standing than a year ago; you know the story about the assessment, when I banged the fist on the table and ... intervened. At the moment it is rather the other way. All of a sudden ... addressed me at the InterConsult University when he was drunk and I received a totally different feedback to the one a year ago when we did not know each other and which was out of the context even so he does not know me a lot better now. He knows it is a matter of perception. He does not really know what I can do but at the moment I have a better standing because I thumped the table.

**Katja:** As we are talking about the working atmosphere, what do you think, we just touched upon training. How is InterConsult communicating regarding the importance of training, learning, innovation, is it important for them? How is the communication and how do you see it from your point of view? What is really happening regarding trainings etc.?

**Liz:** Training has an extremely low priority at the moment. There will be no training in the first quarter of this fiscal year. InterIT understands training as similar to the payment of incentives: you can only get it when the business results are good. Training and incentives are two different kinds of shoes, I think. However, I would say for incentives and other awards you are responsible up to a certain degree and depending on your position in the company yourself but trainings are a basis and an asset to get where we want to be. Nearly every week I receive an invitation to web-seminars which take place if anything around lunchtime when I would like to go for lunch next to the project work for example and I think that InterConsult is of the opinion that they provide certain electronic means to help people along. But I rather have the feeling that they tap what is there or what they expect should be there but they don't do anything. They don't give people trainings; I heard that trainings had to be cancelled due to the company results. I don't think that trainings rate high for InterConsult; at least not in the area I am working now. When I think about the communication I had with my manager, even so I do not know whether that's symptomatic, concerning his managerial skills he is certainly not one of the worst, he is just passing on information he receives from the top and when the budget allows for it he is sending people to trainings because it might be in his target agreement that his employees have to attend three trainings a year for example. However, if no money is available he just tells me that he is in the same position and to wait and see and that he would inform me as soon as he would learn something new.

**Katja:** But would he stand up for it?

**Liz:** He would never stand up for it; when something is possible or coming from the top, ok. But this has to do with the InterConsult culture. If he would get back to me to tell me that it is important but that there are budget problems at the moment and that they are working on it - that would be ok. But that does not happen and I would at

least like to know the priorities in this area. Once the company results are good again there will be trainings but not before. And for me that's nonsense.

**Katja:** Let's talk about community meetings. Are they advocated? Are they important? This is communicated but is it happening?

**Liz:** Someone told me that I am a member of a community, but I don't even know which one it is. I am certainly not attending any meetings or conference calls in the current situation. That would mean even more hours on top I am not getting paid for. And I can't see the benefit of it. This is only another tool to tap knowledge from employees to bring it back into the market without acknowledging what the individual has contributed and without giving something back like for example a training course. At least that's my point of view. Maybe I have not paid enough attention and I would be careful to generalise but that's my impression.

**Katja:** You are saying your People Manager would not come up to you and say: listen, I have this or that training for you?

**Liz:** We had development talks and trainings were an integral part of those. But they have been postponed which means I can forget about them. And of course he has a certain idea of the direction he wants me to go and I have a slightly different one i.e. for me it would still be useful to combine it with a procedure to be the link between a developer who has to do something and has different requirements for example and up to now this has been working quite well. However, I would not do something retrograde from the system because I think there are my strong points and from my background knowledge I see no more opportunities to develop further with InterConsult. I don't even have the feeling to be able to say: listen, in this area I am not that strong. He has an idea, he has his community, I have been assigned to his team and therefore I have to have the knowledge; whether I really have it or not is a different story. I got the task to set up a kind of white paper for some specialist or so which can be combined with the purchase order processing. I only learned in passing that there is still a problem with the operating department. As far as I know material prices etc. are included. That's a very complex topic and he just says: From here it is yours, get on with it and call this and that person. For me another community about process improvement in connection with technology which rather corresponds to the area I am covering would have been better. But there are too many people already and thus I can't do that.

**Katja:** You can't do it because there are sufficient people already?

**Liz:** That's right. He also wanted to organise a training course about international accounting in our division but so far nothing happened. And I still have an Excel sheet we still use despite all the tools used at InterConsult in order to document and record and in this excel sheet is stated what I am supposed to develop in this direction. To be honest it was rather his idea and also against the background that certain training programs are available which of course were not available. In a way I manage what I can do or not. I feel like I am managing myself. I don't have the feeling that I get any support from management. Remember how we felt especially after the takeover. We were like puppets hanging around each for itself.

**Katja:** Is your People Manager a former Monday employee or someone from InterConsult?

**Liz:** He is a former Monday employee.

**Katja:** How would you rate him as a person? Is he someone who takes a narrow view of things according to the rules or is he more flexible?

**Liz:** I am not sure. I haven't even met my new People Manager. He doesn't even know what project I am working on and what my areas of interest are. How is he supposed to support me? I don't talk to him that often. I think that there is some helplessness on his part as well, that he is also under pressure just like the whole middle management and that he is just passing on this pressure which is quite normal in a way. He is very involved in the operational business. He has told me that he had been working till 10, 11 pm and was back at work by 9 am the next morning. He has really long working hours.

**Katja:** So they are not really given the opportunity by InterConsult?

**Liz:** At least not him – no. I also know of managers who sit in the office most of the time because they are of the opinion: the operational business or certain subareas with which they dealt before are not their strong point and thus they rather do that. Apparently that's not possible in his case. That's also a reason why I don't really see him as a manager. He is sitting in the same boat. He is working on the project and on top he got the burden of managing me.

**Katja:** One gets the feeling that this is dealt with by the way at InterConsult and that personnel development and coaching of employees is not really taken seriously or what's your impression?

**Liz:** As I said that would match with my impression: they tap what's available and give the employees some guidelines about what is expected after so and so many years but they don't do anything. That's a very passive attitude. At least what I can say from my personal experience and the people I talked to like project colleagues etc. most have a similar point of view. I haven't heard of anyone who has been enthusiastic and who has agreed with everything and I have really benefited from that. That I have not heard anything does not mean that it is not possible. However, it is not my personal experience and I have not received that impression in my close working environment.

**Katja:** As we are talking about the closer working environment: how would you describe the atmosphere amongst colleagues and with former project colleagues and the atmosphere in general in the projects. Is there an exchange of knowledge and how is the atmosphere in the projects from your point of view?

**Liz:** I would say it depends a lot on the individual. My experience is that the more colleagues have the feeling that they depend on you regarding knowledge the more ready they are to pass on something. It is a matter of give and take and one expects something in return. But it can't be coordinated or structured in the sense that I had the feeling it would be something everyone would do on his own. It is very selective. It is not like we would sit together and say: we have certain contact points because after all it is not like you are working on an island and you can deliver a little work

package without considering other areas. I have the feeling that many people think about their module only but maybe that applies especially for the SAP or the IT area. I deal with processes in the purchasing department and I am not really interested in what I pass on to finance. And it does not happen often that someone is asking: tell me, what are the consequences? That's not happening. But as a matter of principle, apart from ... people are quite willing to pass on information. Of course people have different talents. One might be more talented on a didactic level and can give you an overview from which you can continue working quite well while others don't have this talent. Basically there is a readiness but it is not like we would communicate regularly within a project.

**Katja:** Does that apply to the Account Payable/Accounts Receivable area or to the whole project team and all sub-teams?

**Liz:** That applies to the whole project team. Currently, I am in a project dealing with data conversion. Due to experiences I have made myself I asked whether they consulted with this or that team regarding certain issues because when you don't it might lead to problems. My colleagues then retreated to their tasks, not only due to ill will but also due to shortage of time. I had to deliver and everything else was negligible. I have the impression that nobody is interested in what's happening beyond one's own nose. Because then you would see that a lot more has to be done and one would have even less time for the single tasks and thus one does not want to see that. And when you don't point it out to your colleagues then they won't come up and demand it from you. And in the end you can say "you did not tell me about it; that was not my task" and you can withdraw to that.

**Katja:** Do you perceive a difference; is there a cultural difference whether you are working in Germany with mainly German colleagues or in London in the international team? Does it make a difference? Do you think the colleagues in England and America work different than the colleagues in Germany? I ask that because I was of the opinion - I mean I work in a different area than you – but I always had the feeling that we are all nice to each other and from what I hear from the American and English teams they are more career oriented and deal different with each other. Is that true?

**Liz:** Well, it depends. I work in a team with a strong American emphasis concerning the teamlead. The main teamlead is American and the sub teamleads are American, Mr. ... is also in the team. Well I would agree to what you say but I have to say that he is standing up for his team. I do not know whether this is typical or not. He is the only one I experience at the moment. However, I have the feeling that you can argue and still go for a beer afterwards which is different to most German teams.

**Katja:** Do you think it has been a difference that many women were in the team and that the teamlead in your last project in Germany was a woman. Did it make a difference concerning the teamwork?

**Liz:** Well, if I refer not only to InterConsult I think it certainly had an influence. Even so I see ... as extreme. Could be that it makes a difference. In a team which has only female members there is no one who has to show up and demonstrate how important she is. I feel that women integrate into a team and are willing to subordinate themselves to the given structures much more than male colleagues. In

case of doubt it includes how they sell it or how they make demands or that sometimes they are afraid to stand up for something which might be not so good for the individual but good for the team. You don't have so many individuals showing off a resolute attitude first of all. I am not saying that women are not competitive, but they express this in a different way. With female colleagues for example I did not have the feeling that I had to demonstrate my professional competence all the time. You don't have the feeling that there is always someone trying to undermine your position by telling others "well, that wasn't really that good" instead of saying it directly. Well, I think it's wrong to talk behind one's back like career oriented women do sometimes when they are afraid of losing something and I would judge ... like that, it's certainly different. Because they have to establish themselves in a male dominated world and because they always have the feeling that they have to demonstrate their competence while at the same time there might be the thought "well, as long as I am the only woman or one of the few female executive managers", because the percentage is still very low and thus you want to keep the female competition at a distance. And in case of doubt when everything goes wrong with the men you can always back out to the female attitudes and flirt a little bit or so. When one woman is doing this it's ok but if everyone would.

**Katja:** It would not longer be working?

**Liz:** Exactly.

**Katja:** This executive manager we were talking about, do you think she has distanced herself from the other women deliberately? For whatever reasons.

**Liz:** That's difficult to assess. I have the feeling that she appreciated male opinions in principle higher and she showed this in many details. I can't judge whether she did it consciously because I talked about her mainly with my male colleagues. But I know that mostly female colleagues complained about her.

**Katja:** How would you judge her management style?

**Liz:** In some circumstances she acted very female. In one situation but that's now second hand information, she was afraid that another colleague would be put above her and that she would lose her position as teamlead and possibly would have to take over a project staff position without the teamlead function. In this situation she apparently acted like a small child by throwing her pen on the table in a meeting. To those below her she always dished out. For me that's always a sign of insecurity and even so I was not less peeved at her I would still say it was a rather female behaviour simply because it was on a personal level. Once in a meeting she had the feeling that I was telling nonsense but she did not come up to me but ignored me more or less which extended to ... as we were working together. She was personally offended and didn't talk to me anymore. You know, a man would have come up to you and would have said: listen that was crap. Probably to make a mark, but at least he wouldn't have ignored me. He would not sulk and ignore the other, that would be rather unlikely.

**Katja:** Did she have an influence on your work? Did she give you some space or did she keep tabs on everything?

**Liz:** She certainly wanted to keep tabs on us but it did not work. Because in the end she dealt with people who had a clear idea of what they had to do and who did not really like to take advice from someone else. To pick out one situation: there was a deadline to deliver a certain list and several people told her that it would not be possible due to certain reasons. I was not present but she got all worked up that we could not deliver. According to ... she stamped her foot and took it personal. I am not a specialist in that area but when I have to place a not yet existing printer to a list and the list would only be complete with this printer, well than this is a simple reason not to deliver but that did not get through to her. As I said it was this rather personal approach. When something did not work it was less about the factual reasons but rather something she took as a personal affront. As I said for me that's a rather female characteristic and I experienced that less with men but I did not work with many female executive managers.

**Katja:** So when we stay with the projects and the positive and negative aspects to the team and the role of ... who also has a lot of experience, how was the work in the team? Did you have a daily exchange of knowledge; did you work out new workarounds etc.? Did you learn what you know now mainly in these projects by teamwork and exchange?

**Liz:** Yes, I would say so. The starting point was, well it was a mixture, but the things I can talk about today are things with which I had to deal myself in different project situations and where I had to deal with other people; especially things where I made mistakes due to my lack of knowledge. Well, there are certainly things I would not do any more. Due to experiences I made myself I would now call for help if I would see that someone else is doing something that can't be done here.

**Katja:** How have the mistakes you made been perceived by InterConsultant and the customer?

**Liz:** Half a year ago I was on a client project. There was a situation where I was told: you as consultant should have told the employee what's right and all I said and that was due to a certain lack of knowledge was: "please make sure or check once more whether you really don't need it; technically it's not a problem but I have to know it." And he said: "Well then we leave it or we don't have to do it" and then a colleague of mine came up in the testing phase and said: "how could you do that?". That's what I mean: an exchange between team areas which really have intersections is not systematic. It becomes apparent in certain situations and lands on your feet and then accusations are involved.

**Katja:** How do you see it now as you are no longer on the project? How is the contact to people you met in projects before and do you use these contacts, if they still exist, today?

**Liz:** To customers rather not. I sometimes hesitate to ask colleagues for advice since I always have the feeling that I don't want to show in a bigger picture that there is something that I don't know about in an area where it is expected from me that I have to know it. Probably that's related to my insecurity. That's the really important issue i.e. when I would know what others expect of me. If someone would give me a clear idea what is expected of me, with which areas I should have dealt, then I would at least be more relaxed in asking about issues I am not sure. Sometimes I

appreciate working in areas where I am not considered to be an expert, because that gives me a feeling of security. I am allowed to make mistakes and I can tell them: look, you cannot expect this from me because it is not written down in my CV that I can do this. Today I had such a situation again: Data Conversion is known to me and I think I could manage it all in all with the Cutover Plan and everything but I am only responsible for certain objects. The programs are written and specified but now many questions from individual countries implementing it first come up and I do not feel competent enough and kept it to myself for three days or so and then I told myself that I have to tell my teamlead that I do not know how they got the idea that I could do that. And today I had another meeting. At first with the InterConsult teamlead, a Swiss lady with whom it is working out quite well. I told her that I have to tell it now, because if I wait another week or so it is mine and then you look how I deal with it and nobody cares that I had no idea in the beginning because I could have called for help. And that's not what I need. Thus she arranged a meeting with my immediate client teamlead and the lead for the whole area and we tried to shift the task accordingly because so far it is not yet an official topic and now we have to try to find a substitute for me who can cover the subject so we do not shipwreck.

**Katja:** Would there be no possibility to give you a training course or to team you up with someone from the organisation who could convey it to you?

**Liz:** Well, interesting enough the client is of the opinion that now that I made it official and it is on the records that I just need more time to familiarise with the topic. More time is planned to bring me up to the state of things even so I do not think that their idea of the time needed corresponds with my expectation. But of course they have certain budget restrictions. So far I really did a good job where I knew my stuff. That has been acknowledged insofar as they extended the three months of the project which is now running to the end of the year. My former boss in the client project told me that if I had difficulties with the new teamlead, before I pack up and go to Hamburg that I should first have a look and talk to him and that we would find a solution because he had the impression that I was needed on the project i.e. at least there is the idea that what I did so far was good. As I said that's why I told them that I can't do that and maybe due to the reputation I built up so far they did not say right away: "ok, then we need someone else but let's look what we can do so she can deal with this task."

**Katja:** Ok, that's something.

**Liz:** Well, at the end of the day it remains to be seen whether it is working out with their budget. Maybe I am an extreme example but others also feel overwhelmed. First there had been the topic of affiliation but now we are dealing with the implementation, Data Conversion etc. and what they did. They not only shifted the corresponding data objects or training objects but also the people which is common-sense and therefore there is a lot of knowledge transfer if you want to put it this way, from objects someone dealt with and there are a lot of transfers and not everyone feels safe and I am afraid that others might no longer have the time to give on information like some specifics needed once they are too busy with their new tasks. Maybe it was extreme in my case or I called for help the loudest, I don't know but I am not an isolated case so to say and I believe that there will be quite some trouble in this issue.

**Katja:** Do you think that at InterConsult management and consultants learn from project phases or incidents like this?

**Liz:** No, you are moving from one project phase to another without any time granted to learn from the previous phase. And even when you do this it's too dangerous to change the approach in an ongoing project and therefore we go on like before.

**Katja:** If we come back to the topic of innovation or creativity. Do you have opportunities at work where you want to do something different or that you say: well, I would like to do this another way and is it accepted or do they give it a thought or is it refused right away because they know how to do it and they have to save time and this would take time and is thus out of the question? Maybe you could give me an example.

**Liz:** Let's say it like this and again I can't say whether it depends on the general set-up or on me and the experiences I made independent of that and which I still carry around with me: But when I look at the new project organisation, there are a couple of people I would contact and tell them that this or that was not good due to these or those reasons and that I would do it differently and I have at least, I would say ideas which could be taken as a basis. Not an elaborate concept but ideas which originated rather out of my own needs. But then I tell myself maybe my InterConsult teamlead botched it up which I don't know at the moment but at the end of day she is writing my project appraisal and do I imply with that also "that her job was not good"? Some people can deal with constructive criticism. Whether this criticism is indicated or not is another story. You have people you can tell as a matter of principle that you find something not good and then you talk about it and either everything remains or it will be implemented or set up differently but you also have people who can't handle criticism. Overall, it's hard for me to share knowledge and to assess people in terms of how they will react to my criticism. It's not worth it when in the end nothing is going to change anyway. The only one suffering from it is me in the end. I also find it quite difficult ... like for example when I have ideas I sometimes think who cares, I just do it this way but when I have an idea I am certainly not the first one to say: hey, I have an idea, let's discuss it.

**Katja:** Can you give me a practical example when you thought forget about it, I am not up to that because that's leading nowhere anyway?

**Liz:** Yes, I can. At the ... project for example. We dealt a lot with the takeover of the suppliers as there was a lot in disorder. We had to take over outstanding items; sorry, I meant not suppliers but customers, and thus we depended a lot on the master data. When I realised what they had planned; that they said: everything which will be set up in the next three months will be maintained by someone manually I said: you can't do that for these or those reasons but I did not believe that I could convince the client project managers. I have more or less instigated the business a little bit. We said we do it this or that way and therefore you have to do this and that even so we knew that they could not accept it. Thereupon a change happened. But that was a rather indirect method.

**Katja:** You want to say that if you would have talked to someone it would not have worked?

**Liz:** No, in this case it would not have worked. I made the experience when I said “why should we do it this way, let’s do it that way” and at the end of the day the project management decided something that was either useful or not but had nothing to do with my input.

**Katja:** And would you consider yourself as creative, as someone who likes to change something and to get involved?

**Liz:** Yes, even so I do not really know. In general I am creative, but I am not sure whether this is true as well when it comes to my job.

**Katja:** Because there is no opportunity with Account Payable/Accounts Receivable or because you are not motivated?

**Liz:** I am not a person who actively comes up with innovative ideas; I am rather reacting to certain situations. For instance if someone shows me a concept and tells me how they want to do it then I am probably reacting to it by suggesting alternative solutions. Others either accept it or not. I am not sure and I would refer that rather to the job.

**Katja:** Well, I would consider you as a personality who is rather creative and varied.

**Liz:** In my private life where I don’t have any pressure I am writing short stories or poems. At work I feel so much under observation that I don’t dare to be creative. I feel that there is too much at risk such as my salary, my job, even my existence. Probably I experience pressure more intensely than other people. As a consequence, I am really careful. It is hard for me to figure out how other people perceive me at work. There is this story, it is quite an old joke about a man who ends up in the nuthouse because he thinks that he is a mouse. When he has been cured he has a final talk with the psychologist who asks him: “So, you no longer think that you are a mouse then?” “No, I am human but the question is, do the cats know it as well?” That’s how I feel sometimes.

**Katja:** A more elementary question: are you happy in your job? Do you have the feeling that you can be yourself in your job?

**Liz:** No. It depends on the personality, how I personally communicate with people, depends a lot on the personalities I am dealing with. On a professional level I am cautious but when dealing with people I am quite easy. Sometimes I can be quite informal. To a customer who told me about ten indecent jokes I said that if I wanted to be rich I would sue him and if I would live in the USA I would be a millionaire and could hand in my notice. Things like that are possible. As regards content, well when someone comes up to me and says: “you did this or that a couple of times already as well; did you think about this or that as regards content” my first reaction is that I don’t even hear what is said but feel pressured to say something. I only function again when the first shock passed and I think about it rationally and tell him we can’t do this and we have to do it this or that way or I don’t know. But first of all there is this defensive demeanour: When someone asks me for my ideas my first feeling is that this person wants to test me and as a reaction I take on a defensive position. But probably this is just me. As I mentioned before, I prefer to live out my creative side outside of work.

**Katja:** This is very different from how I have experienced you in your private life. Anyway, we just talked about creativity etc. and I would like to know whether there is a typical every day work life and whether you could describe it. Is it governed by routine activities or rather by external influences? Is there a typical every day work life and if so how does it look like?

**Liz:** No, I would not say so. Or if only partially because first of all you change your customers or your team every once in a while and secondly the project situation is always different. The only thing always creeping in is that I am never in the office before 9 or 9.30 AM. And within the projects – well the situations are very different. You have different project phases with different requirements and there are always surprises that change the every day work life. Situations arise in which I have to be in the office by 8 AM because something unforeseen happened or because something has to be finished by the next day. Therefore I would say there is no typical work day simply because the work load is too varied and there are also phases where I spend an hour on the internet which brings me to ... We met in the cafeteria in London and he asked me what I was doing there and I just stood there like frozen and only when he turned away I told him that I was working for SAP. "Ah, nice that you are on board" he said and took off. That was really weird.

**Katja:** I also met him there recently after ages. Do you spend your day with very tiring work where you have to invest a lot of knowledge and energy or is it also a lot of routine work where you think that someone else could do it?

**Liz:** It's more or less balancing each other. There are a lot of things where I have the feeling that I have to experiment and nobody else can do that for me because I have to work on the system and to test what will happen when I do something differently before I can give someone an answer to a certain question. There are some formalities where I can say that's not necessary but I would say that's not a lot because there are no recurring activities arising at certain times. Therefore to a certain point certainly. But in the end things have to be ready and there are also phases where you can't work self-determined but when you just have to deliver this or that and where you have to prepare this or that slide deck. And at the end of the day you just have to deliver. Some people try to exert influence which I myself find idiotic but for the most part I have plenty of free rope in organising my day.

**Katja:** How was it with Monday and how is it now with InterConsult? Is there a big difference?

**Liz:** In the beginning, I would say in the first year, I would have said that there is no difference but meanwhile I have the feeling that it is tried very hard to introduce the InterConsult structures. I think you can also remember this sentence in all possible languages to prepare us for the big step and where everyone said that Monday or rather the consulting team of Monday would be the engine or the initiator within InterConsult but I don't feel that any more. The basic difference is that I have chosen Monday and InterConsult simply happened to me without me having been asked. Hence I would always feel differently but at the moment I have the feeling that everything is geared to the InterConsult structures which have not a lot in common with the consulting as we know it or is not adjusted to it well. And because nobody is asking the question how, oh the best example, I don't know whether you have seen it but there was this CD with our CEO in conversation with a consultant and I asked

myself whether we don't have other problems. You got the feeling that the boss of the business division consulting knew not a hell of a lot about the consulting business. At least I had the feeling. I can't assess what ... did or not. I mean, when he is imposing a total travel freeze and I have to adhere to that, I think: great, you are based in Stuttgart. I am travelling half the world and for me it is of interest that I have to make a request for every trip to the customer or that I have to invoice the trip I started on June 30 on June 30 as there will be a big problem otherwise.

**Katja:** Do you think the atmosphere amongst the colleagues changed? Do you have many contacts with InterConsult employees?

**Liz:** Only to those who have been here. I know mostly the client people with whom I had to deal but for the most part when we had been working on projects together. And then you realise that you worked together for some time which makes quite a difference. I would not hesitate to call our former Monday colleagues but the idea to contact any of my new colleagues would not even come to mind. That's what I would say.

**Katja:** Great, thank you very much.