Summary

Organizations regularly engage in initiatives to stimulate knowledge sharing and integration in order to improve coordination, collaboration, efficiency of interaction, and enhance the innovative capabilities (Grant, 1996). Organizations for example attempt to introduce formalized knowledge networks in which professionals from different disciplines come together to talk and share knowledge. More recently organizations have started to introduce enterprise social media (ESM), which are technologies similar to popular social media that provide the technological means for professionals to share knowledge independent of time and place. Unfortunately, such initiatives often fail or face significant problems as many organizations forego the inherent tacit and practice based dimensions of knowledge (Duguid, 2005; Swan et al., 1999) and conceive of knowledge as something tangible that can be actively managed. The knowledge of professionals such as technicians (Orr, 1996) or doctors (Tagliaventi & Mattarelli, 2006) is highly entwined with their practice. Hence trying to actively manage that knowledge, or make people engage in knowledge sharing initiatives is highly complex and often problematic (Hislop, 2002; Schultze & Stabell, 2004). The knowing that is entwined with practice can be shared in so-called communities and networks of practice (COPs and NOPs) (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown & Duguid, 2001). These are collectives where professionals with a shared practice come together voluntarily to discuss experiences, share local problems, and learn from each other (Brown & Duguid, 1999). As research shows that actively managing such communities and networks is often problematic, I argue that it is more fruitful to talk about “self-organizing for knowledge” because it focuses our attention on the ways in which professionals in organizations engage in knowledge sharing and integration through their own efforts. It emphasizes that knowledge sharing is not something that organizations can actively manage but rather something that managers must provide the right conditions for.

Interestingly, existing research has often addressed knowledge management initiatives from a managerial perspective, by for example studying how managers can successfully influence knowledge sharing in NOPs (Agterberg et al., 2010; Soekijad et al., 2011) or how ESM are introduced (cf. Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). Because knowledge sharing remains such an emergent process that depends on the professionals in practice, I focus on the role of the professionals themselves. More specifically, by focusing on the experiences, motivations, and
knowledge sharing and integration activities of employees we can expand our understanding of the conditions under which self-organized knowledge sharing and integration flourishes, and how ESM can be used in those processes. Hence, the research question that is addressed in this doctoral dissertation is as follows:

*Under what conditions do professionals engage in self-organized knowledge sharing and integration, and how can ESM facilitate these processes?*

To answer the research question of my dissertation I collected data at two organizations: CareInstite, a healthcare organization, and ItCon, a multinational IT consultancy organization. In particular, in this dissertation I focus on four interrelated conditions for knowledge sharing and integration: relational, sociotechnical, organizational, and institutional conditions. Because these conditions are interrelated, each of the three empirical studies reported in chapter 2, 3, and 4 covers several of these conditions.

The first empirical study, discussed in *Chapter 2*, focuses predominantly on the relational and organizational conditions at CareInstite that affected knowledge sharing and integration. I studied the role of communities and networks of practice where knowledge can be discussed and developed. Existing research has repeatedly highlighted the importance of both communities and networks of practice within organizations as spaces where professionals can connect and share knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 1999; Erkelens et al., 2015; Pyrko et al., 2017). For this dissertation I studied the ways in which new knowledge, that is entangled with and emerges in practice, becomes adopted throughout an organization.

To study the process of moving from individual experience to organizational knowledge, I studied the ways in which therapists at CareInstite exchange experiences, learn from others, and collectively share and integrate knowledge. With an infrastructure of communities, networks, and slack resources CareInstite supports the interaction among therapists, and facilitates that new ideas that emerge in practice can go through what I identify as a process of validation that consists of two sub-processes: experiential and evidential validation. Because individuals and their peers within a community learn by building upon their shared practice and experiences, new methodologies become accepted within a community through experiential validation. Because members of NOPs cannot draw from the same situated practice, more evidence is needed before members of a NOP accept a
new methodology. Hence, new methodologies become accepted in NOPs through a process of evidential validation. When an idea for a treatment goes through both processes successfully, it becomes ‘accepted’ by the therapists and the organization as a new valid treatment. The first empirical paper discusses the conditions that are necessary for practice-based knowledge to be discussed, shared, and re-developed through and across communities and networks of professionals, and how through those processes practice-based knowledge can become integrated into the organization.

In the second study, discussed in Chapter 3, I focused on the sociotechnical and relational conditions that provide fruitful grounds for ESM to emerge and become domesticated in practice. Existing research on ESM has studied and discussed the different ways that these technologies afford knowledge sharing (e.g., Leonardi et al., 2013; Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). Interestingly, most of these studies discuss the introduction and use of technologies that were introduced from the top down, by management. Because ESM are increasingly introduced bottom up, by employees (Colbert et al., 2016; Aral et al., 2013), I theorized that there are different conditions that support the adoption of such a technology. I considered the adoption and use of ESM to happen through a process of domestication (Faraj et al., 2016).

To understand the conditions under which ESM become adopted into the daily work of therapists, I conducted a second study at CareInstitute. This second study shows that, over time, an ESM platform (i.e., Yammer) becomes integrated into the daily work of the therapists as it affords them the ability to find, share, and integrate knowledge: the therapists use the technology to locate relevant expertise, share and discuss complex client cases and new methodologies, and engage their community of committed professionals. Hence, this second empirical study highlights the importance of several relational and sociotechnical conditions that together assure the domestication of an ESM platform that facilitates knowledge sharing and integration throughout the organization.

The third empirical study, discussed in Chapter 4, focused mostly on the institutional, organizational, and sociotechnical conditions. This third study builds on existing research that has discussed that technologies ‘have’ certain affordances (Gibson, 1986) that represent action possibilities that depend on the interrelation of material features and actor intentions. When we consider the use of ESM, scholars have discussed that these technologies have certain affordances for knowledge sharing (Treem & Leonardi, 2012; Leonardi & Vaast,
2017). At the same time however, we also know that the behavior of actors is informed by various institutional logics (Thornton et al., 2012; Friedland & Alford, 1999). In this third study I therefore propose that to understand the extent to which ESM can actually facilitate knowledge sharing and integration, we need to consider the institutional influences on the ways that affordances are enacted (Seidel & Berente, 2013). Hence, in this study I focused on understanding the extent to which affordances (for knowledge sharing) are enacted in practice. I conducted a study at ItCon where management had decided to introduce an ESM platform, intended to promote collaboration, innovation, and overall efficiency of communication. Initially, the professionals adhered to a profession logic that informed them to appropriate the technology in a way that would allow them to exchange knowledge with other professionals. Management however, imposed a corporate logic during the implementation of the technology, and as a result the professionals ended up only using the technology for strategic reasons: connecting mostly with the strategically “right” people, discussing only non-sensitive topics, and attending only to management-related information. This third study thereby shows how different institutional conditions affect how actors enact ESM.

Drawing on the studies conducted for my doctoral dissertation, the findings from Chapter 2 show that self-organized knowledge sharing and integration happens under the relational conditions that professionals are highly motivated to share and integrate knowledge with professionals from other communities and networks. Next to that, the organization provided the right conditions for professionals to engage in self-organized knowledge sharing and integration which made it possible for knowledge from practice to become organizational knowledge. Both processes of experiential and evidential validation show that knowledge sharing happens under the conditions that professionals have an infrastructure of communities, networks, and resources to engage in knowledge sharing and integration with others. For organizational knowledge to emerge, professionals need to be highly motivated to engage in conversations related to their daily practice (and thereby share knowledge) and also have access to organizational resources.

Subsequently, the findings from Chapter 3 describe the conditions under which ESM may facilitate self-organized knowledge sharing and integration among professionals. And, in line with the findings from Chapter 2, the findings from Chapter 3 show that knowledge sharing and integration happens among professionals who want to discuss things that happen
to them during their work. Because the professionals experienced the right sociotechnical conditions they engaged in self-organized knowledge sharing and integration. By sharing experiences and talking about practice-related problems both in situ and through ESM, professionals share knowledge and are able to do (parts of) their knowledge intensive work.

In the last empirical study, the findings from Chapter 4 describe the conditions that influence whether ESM may or may not facilitate self-organized knowledge sharing and integration. Whereas Chapter 3 showed the conditions that favored the use of ESM for knowledge sharing, the findings of Chapter 4 identify the institutional conditions that actually stymie self-organized knowledge sharing and integration. Because the professionals experience conflicting institutional conditions, they refrain from self-organized knowledge sharing and integration.

Drawing on the findings of the three studies discussed in this doctoral dissertation, my research contributes to scholarly understanding of the conditions under which professionals engage in self-organized knowledge sharing and integration.

Finally, this dissertation holds several practical implications that may inform managers to provide their professionals with the resources with which those professionals themselves may choose to engage in activities that cultivate knowledge sharing and integration. First of all, to facilitate the emergence of networks for knowledge sharing and integration, I suggest managers to provide resources (e.g., time and finance) to allow the creation of networks of professionals. I also suggest that management does not prescribe any goals of such networks as professionals have to be able to engage in self-organized knowledge sharing and integration without managerial intervention. Second, I suggest managers to allow professionals to engage in self-organized knowledge sharing and integration initiatives. My findings show that it can be fruitful when management trusts their employees, supports bottom-up initiatives, and refrains from active involvement. For employees working in knowledge intensive organizations, I suggest to be explorative and open to the potential of new digital technologies. Third, and last, I suggest managers to consider the potential that any attempt to introduce ESM by actively stimulating employees to start sharing their knowledge can result in counterproductive behavior.
References for summary


