Against Organizational Forgetting:
How Organizations Continuously Recreate their Memories

Research on organizational memory (OM) lacks a dynamic perspective that shows how OM is continuously recreated and enacted over time. This is echoed by Argote et al. (2003: 579) who call for more research "on how knowledge is embedded in an organization's memory", which reflects the dynamic process of the OM's recreation. Hitherto, only Birnholtz et al. (2007) with their study on the recreation of the organizational character of a summer camp have provided a first approach to capture the recreation of OM. This paper provides a response to this call for more research in this field and extends current orientations towards understanding OM by focusing on the role of staff induction and socialization practices.

OM is predominantly conceptualized in relation to the organization's ability to recall knowledge and experience 'on demand', whereby organizational rules, routines, cultures, structures, technologies and individual members are considered to be central knowledge repositories (Argote, McEvily, & Reagans, 2003; Feldman & Feldman, 2006; Huber, 1991; Moorman & Miner, 1997, 1998; Walsh & Ungson, 1991). Currently there are limited studies that examine the ways OM is continuously recreated as new members deliberately and unconsciously learn to perform in a collective manner. Staff induction and socialization practices represent the main way in which the firm's OM is recreated through individual and collective learning.

A state of the art review of the staff induction and socialization literature (see Antonacopoulou and Güttel 2010) highlights the importance of exploring the connections between staff induction, socialization and organizational recreation by focusing in particular on learning and knowledge. It also highlights the inter and intra practice dynamics of staff induction and socialization as part of a wider field of HRM practices that can provide a basis for a more consistent and coherent approach to organizational development. These issues reveal that central to the process of organizational recreation are a range of tensions that underpin the dynamism also inherent in OM. This paper extends the review of the literature, by providing empirical findings to account for the contribution of staff induction to organizational recreation. We therefore pose the following research question: How do staff induction practices influence a firm's OM recreation?

The study we report in this paper explicates first that in pursuing the specific research question outlined above we adopted an in-depth qualitative approach. Our objective was to both to enrich the prevailing theoretical understanding of staff induction and the recreation of the OM (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) and at the same time to offer rich descriptions of the ways in which staff induction practices were performed. Hence, a case study approach was deemed most appropriate (Yin, 2003). We selected 3 firms in 3 industries (financial service, management consulting, bio-pharma) in the United Kingdom that perform either an institutionalized or an individualized induction program (Van Maanen and Schein 1979; Jones 1986, Ardts et al. 2003). A theoretical sampling-logic (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), thereby, governs the selection of both case studies and key informants (managers, co-workers, HR staff, and inductees). For a period of two years (2005-2007) we engaged in an intensive programme of data collection and analysis. The case study research strategy was based on interviews (88 face-to-face interviews with key actors lasting between 90 and 120 minutes each) and on an analysis of reports and documents (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003) following the suggestions of Miles & Huberman (1994) for qualitative content analysis. The lens of Antonacopoulou's (2006, 2007) practice framework was used to analyze induction practices and to re-construct the firm's OM recreation.

Our findings point to three recreation mechanisms which transform newcomers into knowing employees: Adjustment pressure, demonstrative learning and knowledge provision. Firms embed these recreation mechanisms in different modes to endow employees with knowledge to perform organizational routines. Firstly, *individualized* induction on the level of the working group enables an immediate integration into the working environment and forces inductees to learn practical knowledge in operative business. Work group pressure, the use of role models in the working environment and specific knowledge provision characterize recreation forces. Secondly, *formal* induction programs (institutionalized induction) seek to develop a broader perspective by providing information and by using role models (mentors and experts in formal induction programmes). Thirdly, *laissez faire* induction modes do neither offer sufficient information nor role models or a pressure to adapt, resulting in a high likelihood to fail to integrate newcomers into the firm's memory structure.

Against this theoretical and empirical background, our analysis contributes to existing research on staff induction and the OM's recreation in two ways: *Firstly*, we extend research on organizational recreation by extending Birnholtz et al. (2007) notion of demonstrative learning and knowledge provision. Our findings point to adjustment pressure as the main mode for integrating newcomers into the firm. Inductees do not only follow the suggestions and instructions of experienced colleagues and team leaders voluntarily, which has been the case in a non-profit setting (Birnholtz et al. 2007). Instead, firms seek to guide the integration of newcomers often tightly, in particular in cases where inductees lack sufficient background knowledge for task performance. *Secondly*, we empirically show how newcomers develop a transactive memory (Yoqing et al. 2006) as idiosyncratic knowledge architecture of an organization. Our results indicate three memory domains – technical knowledge, social network knowledge and cultural knowledge – in this context. Institutionalized induction programs, thereby, support the development of a firm-wide orientation to new employees. More importantly, the learning process on a team level facilitates the establishment of a mental map of how these three memory domains interact and how they contribute to organizational functioning. By learning the firm's knowledge architecture, inductees internalize existing formal and social expectations from different groups within the firm that mark the boundaries for deviations from the status-quo.

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