Knowledge Management and Contract Professionals

A study of contingent employment and knowledge sharing in organisations

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Sujatha Rao
ABSTRACT

An organisation’s knowledge base is a valuable asset that serves as a source of sustainable competitive advantage for the firm. Organisations have become increasingly reliant on the application of knowledge work and the contributions of professionals to the creation of valued organisational knowledge. Implicitly, the literature has assumed permanency in the employment relationship between professionals and organisations and focused on issues such as organisational identification and commitment, and extra-role behaviours of professionals as impacting on their knowledge sharing behaviours. However, the nature of professional or expert employment has become more transient. There has been a marked increase in the use of professionals in contractual roles where the association with the organisation is often temporary and contingent. But the organisational implications of such practices remain largely unexplored. In particular, there is a dearth of research examining the impact of contract professionals on knowledge flows within the firm and on their motivations to participate in knowledge sharing within organisations.

This dissertation addresses this gap in the literature. This study examines the knowledge sharing practices of contract professionals in contemporary organisations. Conceptualising knowledge as socially situated and constructed, this qualitative study examines professionals employed as contractors in two large organisations: a large bank and an insurance company; and, based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with contractors and managers, considers why and how professionals engaged as contractors choose to share what they know with the contracting organisation. Engaging with research literatures from knowledge management, professional identity, newer career forms, and psychological contracts, the study generates a typology of contract professionals that suggest distinct knowledge sharing orientations.
The study constructs three categories of contractors: Free Agents, Specialists and Consultants, identifies factors that influence and inhibit the knowledge sharing motivations of these categories of contractors and provides recommendations for a more holistic knowledge management strategy for organisations utilising contract professionals. The findings from this doctoral research show how identity work can have practical implications for knowledge management. For example, by exploring the dynamics of professional identity and image construction, the research shows how identity and image influences both the contractor’s knowledge sharing behaviours and the organisation’s knowledge management strategies. Exploring new areas of professional contingent work, this research aims to make a significant contribution to the understanding of knowledge sharing, professional identity and the management of contract professionals within organisations.
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NOTATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Notations

The names of the research participants and the two case study organisations have been changed in accordance with confidentiality agreements.

All quotations from transcribed recordings and field notes are indented in slightly smaller font size.

“Double quotation marks” are used to identify participants’ statements within the body of the text. *Italics* are used conventionally to indicate emphasis.

Acronyms and abbreviations

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERP</td>
<td>Enterprise Resource Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOREX</td>
<td>Foreign exchange</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and communication technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>KM</td>
<td>Knowledge management</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Within organisational and management studies, knowledge has increasingly been viewed as a source of sustainable competitive advantage to organisations and the management of knowledge within the firm as vital for a firm’s success (Barney, 2001). Literature on knowledge and its management in organisations has revealed the ambiguities and complexities involved in the management of knowledge in the workplace (Alvesson and Karreman 2001; Alvesson, 2000), while at the same time researchers have placed individuals in organisations at the very core of the knowledge creation cycle (Tsoukas, 1996; Nonaka, 1994; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Consequently, understanding how individuals participate in knowledge work within firms and how such work can be managed have been topics of interest to researchers (Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough and Swan, 2002; Heaton and Taylor, 2002; Starbuck, 1992).

Contemporary organisations have employed professionals as knowledge workers and understanding the nature of professional work within organisations and the management of professionals and professional work within firms have become important sites of research (Cohen, Finn, Wilkinson, Arnold, 2000; Crompton, 1990). Within this domain, attention has been focused on understanding the professional-organisational relationship and on understanding the nature of knowledge work that professionals engage in within organisations (Heaton et al., 2002; McAuley, Duberley and Cohen, 2000; Bloor and Dawson, 1994). Consequently, professionals have come to be viewed as a core part of the organisation’s human and intellectual resources, and human resource strategies have increasingly focused on issues such as the development of loyalty, commitment and organisational identification of such professionals in return for providing them with opportunities for enhanced learning, career growth and long term rewards within the organisation (Doolin, 2002; Grey, 1998; Wallace, 1995).
However, over the last several decades, organisations have begun to increasingly use such professionals in contractual roles, signalling a change in the nature of the employment relationship between professionals and organisations from long-term careers within organisational boundaries, to short-term “boundaryless” contingent careers. This change in the nature of the employment relationship has been influenced by employer demands for flexible staffing and by professionals themselves increasingly seeking greater control over their careers (Briscoe and Hall, 2005; Barley and Kunda., 2004; Lautsch, 2002; Pink, 2001; McGovern and Russell, 2001; Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). This shift in the nature of the employment relationship highlights the need to understand the knowledge consequences of the employment of such contract professionals, particularly their impact on knowledge flows within organisations.

The need for the study, research aims and objectives

Despite the increasing acceptance of knowledge as being critical to the success of an organisation and interest in the study of knowledge and knowledge workers and professionals in organisations, knowledge sharing motivations of contract professionals has been given very little attention in the management literature. Most of the research on knowledge and knowledge management in organisations has implicitly assumed permanency of employment, focusing attention on knowledge sharing amongst permanent employees in organisations and on the creation and transfer of new knowledge from outside the organisation and dissemination of such knowledge within the firm (Jarvenpaa and Staples., 2001; Szulanski, 1996; Constant, Kiesler and Sproull, 1994).

However, the increasing use of professionals in contractual roles (Barley et al., 2004) necessitates a questioning of such an implicit assumption. We might expect that contract professionals differ from permanent professionals for a number of reasons, such as the contractors’ need to be self managers and actively participate in self management at work (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Brisco, Hall and DeMuth, 2006; Fenwick, 2006); the construction of their professional identities and the impact that such identities may have on their behaviours
at work, including knowledge sharing behaviours (Cohen et al., 1999; Alvesson, 2001); and the implications that contracting may have for the construction of the professional-organisational relationships and the implied psychological contracts and commitments formed at work (Anderson and Schalk, 1998; Gallagher and McLean Parks, 2001; Van Dyne and Ang, 1998; George and Chattopadhyay, 2005).

Therefore, the basic premise underpinning this research is that the contractual nature of employment, the professional identities, psychological contracts and relationships at work may influence the knowledge sharing motivations of professionals working as contractors. The socially constructed and situated nature of knowledge has long been recognised and suggests that the social setting, along with the organisational knowledge sharing environment, influences the knowledge creation cycle at work (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Wenger, 2000, Tsoukas, 1996). The willingness of employees to share their knowledge and expertise with the organisation forms a key element of the knowledge creation cycle, and studies have indicated that employee commitment to, and identification with, the organisation, their professional identities, loyalty, trust and reciprocity they feel in employee-employer (professional and manager) relationships influences those knowledge sharing behaviours (Constant et al., 1994; Thomas-Hunt, Ogden, Neale, 2003; Bock, Zmud, Kim and Lee, 2005; Borgatti and Cross, 2003).

However, relatively little is understood about what influences contract professionals to share their knowledge with the organisation, and how such knowledge sharing occurs. Studies of contingent employees have offered ambiguous findings about their commitment and loyalty to the organisation in which they work (Van Dyne et al., 1998; George et al., 2005); studies on professional careers indicate that contract professionals’ identities are influenced not only by their profession but also by the macro socio-economic environment in which they operate and the insecurities of the contracting world (Barley et al., 2004). This research, therefore, aims to make an important contribution to existing knowledge by exploring the world of contract professionals and the ways in which being a contractor influences their willingness to share their knowledge and expertise with organisations. Further, this study also aims to examine
whether existing knowledge management strategies, designed with the implicit assumptions of permanency of employment, are appropriate for employees in such contingent employment.

Thus two fundamental questions are examined in this research:

- What are the factors influencing the contract professional’s willingness to share knowledge and how do these factors influence the knowledge sharing process?
- What are the factors influencing the organisation’s ability to acquire knowledge from contractors?

The overarching objective of this research is to understand the factors that influence the knowledge sharing behaviours of contract professionals at work. The study therefore aims to identify and describe factors that impact on the contractors’ willingness to share their knowledge and expertise with organisations. From a managerial perspective, the research also seeks to apply the findings from the research towards the development of organisational knowledge management practices that focus attention on the differing employment relationships at work. This will assist in developing knowledge management approaches that recognise knowledge as socially constructed and integrate employee work experiences and identities as part of the knowledge sharing process.

Situating the study

This study sits at the confluence of three broad research domains: professional work, knowledge management, and contingent employment. Within these domains, specific sub-domains of interest include: the study of contract professionals in two professions, information technology and financial services, who constitute the sample for this study; processes of professional identity construction; knowledge sharing behaviour; knowledge management approaches and strategies; and the concept of contracting careers.
The knowledge sharing motivations of contract professionals has yet to be empirically researched within an organisational setting. Although there is a substantial body of research that has examined the way knowledge can be managed in organisations, this research has overwhelmingly focused on knowledge management approaches favouring either personalised or automated approaches to capturing and utilising knowledge at work (Alavi and Leidner, 2001). The limited research that exists on knowledge sharing at work has focused almost exclusively on knowledge sharing amongst permanent employees (Thomas-Hunt et al., 2003; Constant et al., 1994). Studies of professional work have focused extensively on the professional-managerial relationship and on issues relating to managing professionals at work (Cohen et al., 2003), with little attention paid to contractual employment relationships and the impact that they may have on the professional-managerial relationship.
The experience of contract professionals has been largely overlooked with few studies focusing on the contracting experiences and work lives of such professionals (Barley et al., 2004). Domains of knowledge sharing and professionals in contingent employment have remained separate and the subjective knowledge sharing experience of contract professionals remains unexplored. This thesis addresses this gap in the literature and bridges studies across knowledge sharing and contract professionals. The thesis provides in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of knowledge sharing from the perspective of contract professionals as a means of identifying the factors that influence their knowledge sharing behaviours at work. The thesis also explores new areas and avenues for future research on knowledge management and professional work within firms. Engaging with literatures on knowledge creation and management in firms, professional identity and regulation, newer forms of professional employment and psychological contracts, the study identifies and constructs categories of contract professionals, each influenced differently by issues of professional identity and image, role, self management and the construction of psychological contracts to participate in knowledge sharing within firms. The thesis also studies organisational knowledge management strategies and factors that influence the organisation’s ability to acquire this knowledge from contractors and presents a holistic model of knowledge management for firms employing professionals as contractors.

The structure of this thesis

The thesis consists of ten chapters which, put together, provide an understanding of professionals in contingent employment and their knowledge sharing motivations at work. Chapter One consists of this introductory chapter that situates the research and provides a rationale for the study of knowledge sharing behaviours of contract professionals. This is followed by three chapters that together provide a review of the literature in the areas of knowledge management, professional work, and professionals in boundaryless careers respectively and presents the theoretical foundations on which the empirical study is based.

Chapter Two (Knowledge and its management in organisations) seeks to provide an understanding of the research in the area of knowledge management in organisations and
highlights the complexity of the phenomena being studied. Specifically, the chapter identifies knowledge sharing as a key element in the knowledge creation process in organisations and from a social constructionist perspective, highlights the role of individuals and relationships at work in shaping knowledge sharing behaviours in organisations. The chapter also provides an overview of knowledge management strategies adopted by organisations, influenced by the various perspectives and taxonomies through which knowledge in organisations is studied. The chapter highlights gaps in the literature and charts out a research agenda highlighting the need for the study of knowledge sharing behaviours of professionals in organisations.

Chapter Three (Professionals and organisations) outlines why the study of professionals in organisations is vital to the management of knowledge within firms and discusses the complexities involved in managing professionals in organisations. The chapter focuses on issues of organisational context, roles, professional identity and regulation and psychological contracts as key factors influencing the dynamic nature of the professional-organisational relationship. The chapter suggests that understanding professionals at work in contemporary organisations requires understanding how they engage in knowledge work and active self-management within organisations and raises issues surrounding the professional-organisational relationship that needs addressing.

Chapter Four (Professionals working as contractors) seeks to build on the issue of managing professionals at work by focusing on the increasing use of professionals as contractors. The chapter highlights the changing nature of work and work relationships in organisations and focuses attention on the complex nature of the contracting world and its influence on the identity and image construction, self management and psychological contracts of professionals. The chapter raises a number of questions on the impact that these factors may have on knowledge sharing behaviours of contract professionals and summarises key research questions that have remained unanswered in the literature.

Chapter Five (Research design and methodology) summarises the research questions that this thesis addresses and provides a description of the research methodology and introduces the two case studies. The overall objective of this chapter is to provide the theoretical underpinnings
for the thesis and explain the methodological approaches that have guided this research. This chapter also provides the necessary background information on the case study organisations, explains why the case studies were chosen, and provides an overview of the manner in which the research was conducted and data analysed.

*Chapters Six and Seven (Interviews of contractors and managers)* present the findings from the case studies and analyses the interviews of the contractors and managers in the two case studies. Chapter Six focuses on the findings from the interviews of contractors and examines six themes that, put together, provide an understanding of professionals as contractors. These themes focus on the meaning making activities of these contractors and on their perceptions of themselves as contract professionals, their image and identity construction. Specifically, the chapter highlights the issue of self-management as a key theme emerging from the narratives of the contractors. Chapter Seven focuses on the findings from the interviews of managers and team leaders in the two case study organisations and provides an understanding of the knowledge management strategies of the case study organisations, the contractor-manager relationship at work and the impact that the relationship has on the construction of contractors’ professional identity and image and knowledge sharing motivations.

*Chapter Eight (Interpretations)* presents my interpretations of the findings examined in the previous chapters and provides an in depth analysis of the factors impacting the professional lives of these contractors. Specifically, this chapter discusses the emergence of three categories of contract professionals and examines how each category of contract professionals constructs professional images, identities, and psychological contracts at work. The chapter identifies three factors that have a strong influence on the contractors’ willingness to share knowledge and examines how particular categories of contractors are influenced differently by each of these factors. The chapter also compares and contrasts the knowledge management approaches of the two case study organisations and examines how these approaches influence knowledge sharing behaviours in the two organisations.

*Chapter Nine (Knowledge management implications for organisations)* critically examines the implications of these findings for the development of organisational knowledge management
strategies focused on contract professionals. Specifically, the chapter examines five factors that influence an organisation’s ability to motivate contractors to share knowledge and compares and contrasts these factors within the two case study organisations. The chapter presents a holistic model of the factors that influence knowledge sharing in organisations and concludes with a discussion on the different strategies that organisations need to adopt when employing professionals in contractual roles.

Chapter Ten (Conclusion) provides a general conclusion to the thesis and reiterates the main empirical and conceptual findings from the research. The chapter summarises the research and addresses the issue of how the research questions posited at the beginning of the thesis have been answered. The chapter also illustrates the contribution that the thesis has made to a number of domains of research including: identity studies, particularly professional identity construction; knowledge sharing in organisations; and understanding the construction of psychological contracts and their influence on knowledge sharing within organisations. It also highlights some of the practical contributions of the research. The chapter concludes with an exploration of possible future areas of research, including suggestions for generating a better understanding of professionals, their knowledge and its management in organisations.
CHAPTER TWO

KNOWLEDGE AND ITS MANAGEMENT IN ORGANISATIONS

Introduction

There is an increasing acceptance amongst management theorists and practitioners that knowledge is a critical factor in determining an organisation’s competitiveness and success in a rapidly changing socio-political and economic environment (McKinley, 2005; Donaldson, 2001; Bollinger and Smith, 2001). The study of knowledge and its management as a critical area of research has drawn attention from diverse fields such as management studies, organisational studies, psychology, economics and sociology. Most of the research has two primary aims: firstly, to examine what constitutes knowledge in organisations; and secondly, to examine whether such knowledge can be managed. For those organisations that are considered knowledge-intensive, this focus is more pronounced. On the one hand, such organisations depend upon the innovation, creativity and expertise of the knowledge workers that they employ, and on the other, organisations typically seek to control and manage that expertise to the advantage of the firm.

The literature on knowledge and its management in organisations is extensive, diverse and often contradictory. Much of the debate is shaped by the different epistemological view points and theoretical perspectives from which the research is conducted. This chapter considers some of the main issues in the area of knowledge management in organisations, in particular: the differing perspectives on the nature and characteristics of knowledge and its importance to organisations; organisational knowledge creation and the impact of individuals on knowledge exchanges within firms; and the influence that these debates have on knowledge management strategies in practice in organisations. Adopting a social constructionist perspective, I approach knowledge as a socially situated and constructed phenomenon and pay particular attention to the process of organisational knowledge creation in firms and the conditions and factors which impact upon this process.
The chapter begins by examining four strands of research that have helped establish the study of knowledge as an important domain within management and organisational studies. These are: knowledge as a resource providing sustainable competitive advantage to firms; changes in the nature of work and use of knowledge workers within organisations; understanding learning in organisations; and the increasing use of technology and information systems within firms. I then examine the various perspectives underpinning research on knowledge including the characteristics of knowledge, and discuss how these have influenced knowledge management strategies used in organisations. Using Nahapiet and Ghoshal’s (1998) theory of social capital I examine the process through which organisational knowledge is created and identify the factors that mediate knowledge exchange in firms. Highlighting the socially situated nature of knowledge, the chapter provides evidence to suggest that understanding the social characteristics of knowledge is essential to understanding knowledge and its management in organisations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the key research areas that emerge from a review of the literature on organisational knowledge creation and knowledge management in firms.

**Knowledge as a field of study in management**

The last two decades has seen an enormous interest in the study of knowledge and its management within firms both academically as well as amongst practitioners. An industry survey (KPMG, 2000) of 423 leading organisations in the UK, USA and Europe indicated that over 81 percent of the surveyed companies had or were considering a knowledge management (KM) programme as an accepted part of the business agenda of the company. Seventy-nine percent of these companies stated that they considered KM played a significant role in providing them with a degree of competitive advantage and over three-quarters of the respondents indicated that they experienced real benefits through the implementation of KM programmes such as better decision making (71 percent), faster responses to key business issues (68 percent) and improvements in customer service (64 percent).

Knowledge management in organisations refers to “the process of identifying, capturing, and leveraging knowledge to help the company compete” (O'Dell & Grayson, 1998: 154). It refers
to those managerial practices that are implemented with the aim of creating, storing, disseminating and exploiting organisational knowledge (Davenport and Prusak, 1998). As the KPMG survey indicates, there is tremendous interest within organisations on understanding how knowledge can be managed to provide organisations with a source of competitive advantage.

This interest in managing knowledge is also evident in the academic literature and in studies on the use and management of knowledge in organisations. The debates surrounding the nature and management of knowledge in organisations became vigorous and sustained in the 1990s partly in response to economic and social changes such as globalisation and fast-changing economic environments, and partly due to the ubiquitous use of information technology and the ‘knowledge-centric’ view of the firm (Prusak, 2001: 1002). Four strands of research have significantly contributed to this extraordinary interest in knowledge and its management in organisations. These include: strategic management and the rise of the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991); rapidly advancing changes in technology and the prevalence of the use of information systems in organisations (Hansen, Nohria, Tierney, 1999; Hildreth, Wright and Kimble, 1999); changes in the nature of work and the rise of the knowledge worker (Alvesson, 1993; Scarbrough, 1999); and an increasing interest in how organisations learn and adapt to rapidly changing environments (Brown and Duguid, 1991)

**Knowledge and strategic management**

The idea that knowledge is a resource that can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage has provided a justification for understanding knowledge and how it is managed in organisations (Earl, 2001; von Krogh, Nonaka, & Aben, 2001; Nahapiet et al., 1998; Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Spender, 1996a; Spender & Grant, 1996; Davenport, Jarvenpaa, & Beers, 1996). In the context of this research, a prevailing theory has been that of the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, Wright, & Ketchen Jr, 2001; Barney, 2001; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Barney, 1991; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Wernerfelt, 1984, 1995). This theory argues that in order to survive, grow and succeed in global markets, firms need to utilise resources in a way that is unique to each firm and difficult to replicate by competitors. Barney (1991:101) defined such firm resources as “all assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes,
information, knowledge, etc, controlled by a firm that enable the firm to conceive of and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness”.

The resource-based view of the firm suggests that firms gain competitive advantage by uniquely combining their physical, organisational and human assets (Barney, 1991). In order for an asset to be considered a source of competitive advantage, it must be rare, valuable and difficult to imitate by competitors. Authors such as Earl (2001), Spender (1996a), Spender & Grant (1996) and Davenport, Jarvenpaa, & Beers (1996) have argued that organisational knowledge or capabilities must be considered a strategic asset for organisations because it meets these requirements: it is unique, valuable, rare and difficult to replicate. The knowledge based view of the firm is a framework that can be used to illustrate these three aspects of knowledge and is discussed below.

Kogut and Zander (1992: 396) conceptualised firms as a “repository of capabilities, as determined by the social knowledge embedded in enduring individual relationships structured by organizing principles”. This implies that an organisation’s knowledge results from its own particular history and experiences of internal and external interactions of individuals within the organisation and how these interactions are organised. Consequently, a firm’s knowledge is also representative of what the firm has learnt at any given point (Levitt and March, 1988) and in that sense becomes valuable to a firm. Second, because each organisation’s experiences are different and no two organisations experience the same events in the same manner, what knowledge the organisation possesses is rare; the knowledge is path-dependent (Kogut et al., 1992). Further, the conceptualisation of a firm’s knowledge as “resting in the organizing of human resources” (Kogut et al., 1992: 385) suggests that this knowledge is socially constructed; it is embedded in a complex network of both formal and informal interactions between individuals and in a shared context of understanding with unique, often unspoken, norms and systems of beliefs. Knowledge therefore is dispersed within organisations (Tsoukas, 1996) and this makes such organisational knowledge difficult to imitate by competitors and consequently of value to the firm.
Kogut et al. (1992) therefore conceived of an organisation as a social community whose primary role was the creation and transfer of knowledge at speeds that made it a viable advantage to the firm. Thus organisations have the capability to allow for and encourage their employees to create and share knowledge, and this knowledge can provide firms with strategic advantage. Using such a view of the firm, Nahapiet et al. (1998) developed a theory of social capital: that which creates and enhances the intellectual capital of the firm, leading to competitive advantage. They defined social capital as “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (pg. 243), and intellectual capital as “the knowledge and knowing capability of a social collectivity, such as an organisation, intellectual community, or professional practice” (pg. 245). The basis of the development of these knowledge resources therefore lay in the relationships developed in and through organisational settings. The concept of social capital and its contribution to the intellectual capital of a firm has also served to further cement the belief that knowledge, as a resource, provides an advantage to organisations. As argued by Grant (1996) the development of the “knowledge-based view” of the firm emphasises the idea that the management of knowledge is vital to the economic success of organisations and consequently understanding how knowledge is managed in organisations is a vital and necessary area of research within management studies.

Knowledge and the rise of information technologies

The ubiquitous use of technology in organisations gave rise to conflicting perspectives on its use in organisations for the capture and storage of knowledge. Two approaches exemplify this conflict. The first, the information systems approach, focused on the pervasive use of technology in business, and reinforced the idea that it was possible for technology to capture, store and utilise the information required for an organisation to compete successfully in a global market. In fact, much of the investment in information and communication technologies (ICT) over the last few decades, particularly in large businesses, has been driven by the conviction that managing information, repackaging, codifying and manipulating data, will result in business process changes leading to innovation and strategic success (Anand, Manz and Glick, 1998, Davenport and Prusak, 1998). The view that information systems can be designed and constructed to “assemble and enhance corporate memory and continuous learning
in organizations” (Croasdell, 2001: 8) is a much favoured and often repeated idea in the information systems literature. As surveys indicate (KPMG, 2000) many companies still perceive knowledge management purely as a technological solution. This technology focused approach to knowledge management is also partly a result of the marketing by advocates and vendors of enterprise-wide ICT systems such as ERP systems and Database Management systems who have projected a technologically deterministic view that such systems have the ability to transform how work is performed and managed in organisations.

The second strand of research has argued that the focus on technology as the solution of managing knowledge in organisations has obscured the socially situated nature of knowledge and hidden the complexities and ambiguities of managing knowledge in organisations (Hildreth and Kimble, 2002). Influenced by the conceptualisation of knowledge as socially situated, and by the contention that individuals learn within social systems through interactions with each other, these authors argue that information systems do not replace the necessary social systems required for learning. Further, researchers such as Grant, Hall, Wailes and Wright (2006) have indicated that in contrast to the knowledge management panacea that ERP systems offer, the implementation of these systems has not delivered the promised results. Instead, the social systems, dialogue, change management process, and resistance of individuals within organisations to the implementation of the ERP systems impact decisively on the success of these systems. Often employees fail to use the new systems, or integrate them in their daily tasks. They may also not share what they know with co-workers because they do not see a personal benefit from sharing knowledge (KPMG, 2000). In fact, Aladwani (2001) indicates that the failure to manage employee resistance to the implementation of these systems is a key reason for the failure of ERP systems in the workplace.

Changes in the nature of work and the rise of knowledge workers

The increasing use of professionals in organisations (Cohen et al., 2003; Wallace 1995; Crompton, 1990) has also focused attention on knowledge management within firms. The rise of professional work has compelled organisations to think differently about the management of significant numbers of highly-skilled, highly-knowledgeable workers (Donaldson, 2001; Davenport, Jarvenpaa, Beers, 1996). Increasingly, the work that professionals performed in the
workplace was described as “knowledge work” and professionals themselves as “knowledge workers”, and organisations that utilised such professionals referred to as “knowledge intensive companies” indicating the importance of intellectual capital as a resource within these organisations (Scarbrough, 1999; Blackler, 1995; Blackler, Reed, Whitaker, 1993)

There has been ongoing debate about the definition, usage and applicability of ‘knowledge workers’ and ‘knowledge intensive firms’ (Blackler et al., 1993, Starbuck, 1992). However, for the purposes of this research, we can conceive of knowledge work as intellectual in nature, requiring expert knowledge, creativity and autonomy and recognise that such knowledge work has moved beyond traditional professional occupations such as accounting and medicine to include newer occupations such as advertising, software development, and even contemporary occupations such as event management (Alvesson, 2004; Scarbrough, 1999; Starbuck, 1992). Knowledge workers have been conceptualised as those who have the required expertise to perform complex work; and knowledge intensive firms as those where a majority of the employees are such knowledge workers (Alvesson, 1993, 1994, 2000; Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough, & Swan, 2002; Starbuck, 1992). However, the issue of managing such knowledge workers has been contentious. While authors such as Alvesson and Willmott (2002) have suggested that organisations seek to manage such workers through regulating their identities through processes such as recruitment, induction, performance appraisals and discourses within organisations encouraging conformity to organisationally-imposed performance norms, other authors have portrayed the management of such knowledge workers as either conflictual (Ackroyd, 1996), with employees resisting control at work, or subservient, with employees generally deferring to managerially imposed controls (Derber, 1982, cited in Cohen, Finn, Wilkinson and Arnold, 2003). The conflicting nature of these debates has underlined the need for research examining how professionals and knowledge workers engage with organisations (Dawson, 1994).

Organisational learning and learning organisations

During the 1970s and 1980s considerable interest in the issue of how organisations learn and adapt to changes in the environment emerged (Argyris, 1977; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Cangelosi & Dill, 1965; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Schon, 1975; Senge, 1990). In this
research, the focus was on how organisations constantly identify new features in their environment and respond to them in a manner that is effective and efficient, suggesting that if an organisation managed the learning process better, in particular the tacit understanding of what it does and how it operates, then it would become more efficient.

The process of understanding how organisations learn underlined the dynamic nature of learning itself. The use of terms such as “Deutro-Learning” (Schon, 1975), and “Double-Loop Learning” (Argyris, 1977) reinforced the idea that organisational learning is a continuous, deliberate process of error detection and correction. This process of error detection and correction meant that organisations had to become aware of their current practices, including gaps and inadequacies, so that they could learn to improve what they do - in essence identifying and analysing what they know about themselves. The literature on organisational learning paved the way for the emergence of “knowledge management” and its study in organisations. One could argue that the term “knowledge management” merely replaced the terms organisational learning and learning in organisations, a “fad” that has captured the imagination of researchers and practitioners. Perhaps the epistemological aura that “knowledge” commands lends to it an interest that mere “learning” fails to evoke. In that sense, the rhetoric associated with knowledge management, both from practitioners as well as researchers, has also contributed to the immense amount of interest in this field (Alvesson, 1990, 1993, 1994, 2000, 2001; Blackler et al., 1993; Watson, 1995).

Research on the learning organisation led to renewed interest in the issue of how individuals within organisations learn and to a concept of organisations as social learning systems, i.e. organisations as communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Our understanding of knowledge and its management in organisations will be enhanced if we knew more about how individuals acquired knowledge and identities that enabled them to become members of a community of practice and how they participate in knowledge work within organisations (Wenger, 1998, 2000).
The study of knowledge in organisations

The view of knowledge as a strategic resource suggests that the value of knowledge for organisations lies in the manner in which organisations create (acquire) knowledge, assimilate that knowledge through its effective transfer and sharing throughout the organisation and apply appropriate knowledge as required within the firm. Social capital theory (Nahapiet et al., 1998) argues that it is in the network of relationships that are constructed in organisational settings that knowledge as a resource is developed and utilised. This has important implications for understanding knowledge flows in firms. It implies that understanding relationships between individuals within organisations (units, teams, divisions, communities of practice) become necessary to understand how knowledge as a resource can be utilised by firms. Research on knowledge workers indicates that the expert and ambiguous nature of their work makes controlling and managing their performance at work a difficult and complex task for managers (Alvesson, 2000). Therefore, research focusing on how such workers engage with organisations in a manner that enhances their knowledge contribution to the firm is necessary if firms are to gain value from employing such workers.

Studies on learning organisations and communities of practice underline the socially situated nature of knowledge itself and suggest that knowledge acquisition occurs as individuals learn through practice – participation within a community of practice and through the process of constructing identities for themselves as members of that community (Brown and Duguid, 2001). Consequently studies that examine individuals’ participation in teams, divisions and units within organisation and the process through which they construct their identities within those communities are important areas of research that could further our understanding of knowledge, its creation and utilisation within firms. Finally, the debate surrounding the use of information systems and technology in firms suggests that studies focused on knowledge sharing activities in practice is necessary to determine the effectiveness of the use of such systems for managing knowledge in firms, particularly the impact they have on knowledge sharing within organisations.
Organisational knowledge and knowledge management

While the literature recognises knowledge as a valuable resource to organisations, its study in organisations, particularly organisational theories of knowledge is a contested terrain with the literature presenting sharply contrasting and often contradictory views of its management. Knowledge has been variously described as explicit and tacit (Nonaka, 1994; Spender, 1996a); as know-how and know-what (Kogut and Zander 1996) and sticky and leaky (Szulanski, 1996; Leibiskind, 1996). These various views of knowledge have been influenced by the approach taken to studying knowledge in organisations; for example, studies focusing on the inherent properties of knowledge itself or studies focusing on the context in which knowledge is constructed (Brown and Duguid, 2001) and by the ontological and epistemological viewpoints from which knowledge has been examined (Crotty, 1998). These diverse perspectives have influenced the conceptualisation of organisational knowledge and its management in firms.

Degrees of articulation and aggregation

The most widely expressed, yet debated, organisational theory of knowledge seeks to establish a taxonomy to represent both the epistemological and ontological differences in conceptualisations of knowledge (Lam, 2000). Cabrera and Cabrera (2002) referred to this as degrees of articulation and degrees of aggregation. Degrees of articulation refer to how well knowledge can be communicated and epistemologically views knowledge as two kinds: tacit and explicit. Degrees of aggregation refer to distinguishing knowledge ontologically as individual verses collective forms of knowledge. These two dimensions are discussed below.

Degrees of articulation distinguish between tacit and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge has been conceptualised as that which is implicitly understood, hard to articulate, contextually dependent, and rooted in an individual’s personal experiences and mental paradigms (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Explicit knowledge, in contrast, is knowledge that can be articulated and is therefore easier to communicate, such as facts, procedures, frameworks and concepts. Others have referred to this divide as know-how (tacit) and know-what (explicit) or procedural and declarative (Kogut et al., 1996) and codifiable and complex. This suggests that there is one
kind of knowledge that is easy to communicate (‘leaky knowledge’ Liebeskind, 1996) and the other difficult to articulate (‘sticky knowledge’ Szulanski, 1996).

Lam (2000) perceived explicit and tacit knowledge to differ in three key areas. First the degree of codification and mechanisms through which knowledge could be transferred. Explicit knowledge could be codified because it could be abstracted and stored in an “objective world” (pg. 490) and such knowledge can be communicated and understood even in the absence of a “knowing object” (pg. 490). In contrast, tacit knowledge is intuitive and cannot be understood without its “knowing object”. This suggests that explicit knowledge can be stored, manipulated, coded and transferred across time and space while tacit knowledge needs interaction, trust and a shared context of understanding for its transfer. The second difference between explicit and tacit knowledge lay in the manner in which such knowledge could be acquired. Explicit knowledge could be acquired through formal study, logical deduction and reasoning while tacit knowledge could only be acquired through practical, hands-on learning within socially relevant learning contexts. Third, the two forms of knowledge differed in the manner in which they could be aggregated or appropriated. Explicit knowledge could be stored, codified, or captured without the active participation of the knowing object while tacit knowledge required the active and involved participation of the knowing object for its transfer and is always personal and contextual.

Degrees of aggregation (Cabrera et al., 2002) distinguish between individual and collective forms of knowledge i.e., pieces of organisational knowledge that are held by one individual as opposed to knowledge that is embedded in interactions amongst individuals. Individual knowledge was therefore that specialised knowledge and skills that resided in the brains of individual members of the organisation. These could be private or component knowledge (Matsuik & Hill, 1998) and that body of knowledge and skills that individuals could apply independently. Consequently, this knowledge has been considered movable: it moves across and outside of organisations with the individual and therefore has greater chances of moving outside the organisation i.e. of leaking. In contrast, collective knowledge referred to knowledge that was distributed in firms and held collectively or shared by members of an organisation. This knowledge was accumulated in the organisation’s collective memory (Walsh and Ungson,
and embedded in the routines, procedures, practices and norms that guide the interactions and sharing within members of the organisation (Kogut et al. 1996).

The combination of these two dimensions, the literature argues, creates four kinds of knowledge (Blackler, 1995; Spender, 1996a; Nonaka, 1994): Individual-tacit knowledge that Blackler (1995) referred to as embodied knowledge, individual-explicit (embrained knowledge), collective-tacit (encultured knowledge) and collective-explicit (encoded knowledge). In a similar vein, Spender (1996b), categorised organisational knowledge as conscious knowledge (individual/explicit), objectified knowledge (social/explicit), automatic knowledge (individual/implicit or tacit) and collective knowledge (social/implicit). Nonaka (1994) has in fact argued that it is in the interaction of these kinds of knowledge and the transformation between them that organisational knowledge is created and this is discussed in later sections of this chapter.

**Sociocultural perspectives of knowledge**

In contrast to studies that have focused on the inherent properties of knowledge itself, sociocultural accounts of knowledge have instead focused on the context or environment in which organisational knowledge is created, assimilated and utilised. Research drawing on constructionist epistemologies has viewed knowledge as inherently social, situated and shared within a context, and influenced through a shared process of learning (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001; Alvesson, 2000; Wenger, 2000). This approach to the study of knowledge in organisations has viewed knowledge both as a state of mind of the individual (Chalmers, 2004) as well as a process of knowing and doing (Brown et al., 1991; Cook & Brown, 1999; Nonaka, 1994; Wenger, 2000). Knowledge as a state of mind considers knowledge as that which is held in the mind of individuals and that which they believe to be true. Hence from this perspective, knowledge exists within individuals and is gained through the individual’s observations, reflections and experiences of life and meaning making activity resides within the individual’s mind.

However, these experiences and reflections occur through the individual’s “participation in complex ‘social learning systems’ ” (Wenger, 2000: 226). The content and methods of learning
as well as individual identities are perceived as constituted by, and reflective of, the social systems in which individuals operate. They influence the way individuals comprehend a book, listen to music, converse, observe and reflect. Competencies (knowing) are seen as developing in line with the values of particular communities and their definitions of these competencies. For example, if an individual is to be considered a knowledgeable doctor, then the individual must reveal herself to be a competent doctor as defined by the medical community. Here, in the process of learning, individuals are seen as acquiring social identities, i.e. not only do they obtain facts about the world they also learn the ability to act in this world in socially recognised and accepted ways (Brown and Duguid, 2001). Thus knowledge becomes socially situated and constructed and individuals learn socially, by developing identities through participation in social networks, communities of practice and in the practice of “doing” within contextually relevant knowledge domains.

Proponents of the sociocultural approach to organisational knowledge have critiqued the dualistic divide of knowledge as tacit/explicit and individual/collective and have argued that knowledge consists of both tacit and explicit components that are interdependent (Brown and Duguid, 2001; Tsoukas, 1996). The discourse on the dualistic nature of knowledge often cites Polanyi’s (1966) tacit-explicit dimension to suggest that there are two kinds of knowledge. In The Tacit Dimension, Polanyi (1966: 4) states “we know more than we can tell”. This incommunicable component, Polanyi referred to as the tacit dimension. Many authors have used this to suggest that there are two kinds of knowledge – one tacit and the other explicit (Nonaka, 1994; Spender, 1996a; Osterloh and Frey, 2000). However, others (Brown and Duguid, 2001; Brown et al., 1991) have argued that Polanyi (1966) conceptualised all knowledge has having both tacit and explicit elements to it, i.e. there is always knowledge that cannot be articulated without an understanding of its tacit underpinnings. Authors such as Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001: 975) have therefore declared that since “all knowledge has its tacit presuppositions, tacit knowledge is not something that can be converted into explicit knowledge”. Consequently, these studies have focused not on the conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge, but on organisational practices that enable the tacit underpinnings to be acquired for the explicit components of knowledge to be understood.
Tsoukas’s (1996) integrationist perspective of knowledge views it as dispersed and “inherently inderminate” (pg. 22) is complimented by Orlikowski (2002) who suggests a perspective that focusing on organisational ‘knowing’ rather than knowledge; that highlights human agency in knowing how to get things done within organisations i.e. knowing in practice. Informed by sociological and anthropological works (Giddeons, 1986; Lave, 1998) that conceptualise human beings as acting knowledgeably, reflexively and consciously as they participate in everyday life, she outlines an approach that views knowing not as a static, pre-determined competency, but an ongoing, evolving “social accomplishment” (pg. 249) that is constantly reconstituted as actors engage with their social system in practice. This perspective views knowledge and practice as “reciprocally constitutive” (pg. 250) suggesting that knowledge is knowing in action. It is through everyday action and interaction amongst individuals as they get things done that knowing competencies develop. Her empirical study of product development work within a globally dispersed multinational organisation suggested that through practice of its members, organisations could develop and sustain a collective and distributed knowing. Orlikowski’s perspective of knowing in practice is another useful and complimentary socio-cultural perspective of knowledge, focusing attention on knowing as constituted by and through the situated action of individuals within workplaces; suggesting that such knowing is flexible, dynamic, constantly evolving, growing, changing and adapting. It is the knowing that is situationally enacted, modified through everyday actions of individuals within workplace through practice that organisational capabilities are developed.

These contrasting approaches to the study of knowledge have influenced different organisational knowledge management approaches and the next section focuses on the conceptualisation of organisational knowledge and how it is managed in firms.

**Organisational knowledge management approaches**

Organisational knowledge management approaches can be broadly categorised into two domains based on the perspectives from which knowledge has been studied. Dualistic taxonomies have viewed knowledge as explicit/tacit, collective/individual and this has influenced how knowledge is studied. For example, studies that have approached
organisational knowledge as being individualistic and objective assume that it is capable of being articulated and made explicit, and codifiable (Croasdell, 2001; Hansen et al., 1999). Consequently, they have looked for ways in which knowledge conversions can occur, modifying tacit-individual knowledge into explicit-collective knowledge (Herschel, Nemati, Steiger, 2001; Nonaka, 1994). Other researchers such as Wenger (2000), Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), Garvin (1993) and Brown et al. (1991) who have viewed knowledge as socially constructed and situated have focused on the practices that allow for interactions amongst individuals within organisations as the means through which organisational knowledge is created and utilised in firms.

**Knowledge management approaches based on characteristics of knowledge**

Knowledge management approaches based on properties of knowledge have either been concerned with the development of information technologies that focus on capturing knowledge within the firm, i.e. through a process of codification or have attempted the conversion of tacit into explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994; Herschel et al., 2001). The information technology (IT) approach to managing knowledge in organisations is underpinned by the concept of knowledge as different from information (Schulz and Jobe, 2001) as well as a hierarchy of ‘data’ (raw facts) at the lowest level, ‘information’ (processed data) at the middle level and ‘knowledge’ (contextual, validated information) at the highest level. Data therefore, are pure facts, that when put together in a meaningful form, become information, and when this meaningful information is acted upon in a particular context, it becomes knowledge. Although very evident in the IT literature on KM, this differentiation between data, information and knowledge is found in other fields as well. The literature on strategic management also focuses on differentiating knowledge from pure data, as evident in the works of authors such as Davenport & Prusak (1998) who claim that knowledge is neither data nor information, though related to both. However this data-information-knowledge hierarchy has been questioned by authors such as Tuomi (1999/2000: 107) who have argued there are no “isolated pieces of simple facts”: facts are created using existing knowledge, and data and information are formed in response to the deconstruction of knowledge into forms that can be modelled or processed independently. Despite this criticism, IT-based approaches to knowledge management have
continued to view knowledge, information and data as separate and have argued that codification of data and information lead to knowledge gains within the firm.

From a non-IT perspective, Nonaka’s (1994) theory of knowledge creation also differentiates between tacit and explicit knowledge but conceptualises knowledge creation as occurring through a cycle of conversions instead of codification. Rather than a taxonomy or hierarchy, Nonaka’s (1994) theory of knowledge creation in organisations relies on a continuum with tacit knowledge at one end and explicit at the other. He viewed knowledge creation as comprising a spiral of knowledge conversions – tacit to tacit (“socialization”), tacit to explicit (“externalization”), explicit to tacit (“internalization”) and explicit to explicit (“combination”). His model viewed knowledge creation as dynamic, moving from the individual to group to organisational levels, thus converting individual knowledge to collective and then organisational knowledge. The “socialization” process was the conversion of individual tacit knowledge to shared tacit knowledge through social interactions and shared experiences, in a sense creating social or collective tacit knowledge (for example, apprentices learn from observing the master). “Externalization” referred to the process by which tacit knowledge could be articulated (for example, a training session on best practices or a seminar on “lessons learned”) and hence converted to explicit knowledge. “Internalization” was the process by which explicit organisational knowledge was converted to new tacit knowledge through reflection, discussion and acceptance of the new knowledge. “Combination” was the process through which existing explicit knowledge was reclassified, added to, modified or articulated so that new explicit knowledge was created. These four knowledge creation processes or modes were not distinct, but interrelated and interdependent, in that each contributed to, and depended on, the other modes for its own growth. While the knowledge creation cycle conceptualises knowledge as tacit/explicit, individual/collective, Nonaka (1991, 1994) has however, also acknowledged the tacit dimension present in all knowledge. He states “making personal knowledge available to others is the central activity of the knowledge-creating company” (1991, pg. 98) and suggested that in order for organisational knowledge to be created, individuals must first possess a shared contextual understanding, a process that he argues involves the use of metaphors, analogies and models that help in the conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge.
**Practice based approaches to knowledge management**

Practice based approaches towards organisational knowledge highlights the significance of individuals and their participation in social networks in the knowledge creation process in organisations. Individuals gain knowledge through their interactions within a social setting, acquiring the language of the community of which they are a part and through their own reflections, study and observations. Because the learning occurs within a shared social context, the social setting itself becomes a site for both the production, as well as the assimilation, of new knowledge. From this perspective, organisational knowledge management is concerned with expanding the base of individual knowledge so that individual expertise can be applied within the setting of the organisation.

Research on communities of practice (Brown et al., 1991), learning organisations (Wenger, 2000) and the social capital of the firm (Nahapiet et al., 1998) have all conceived of knowledge as being socially situated and constructed. For example, communities of practice have been conceptualised as “social containers” (Wenger, 2000: 229) that house the competencies that make up a social system (such as a profession). By participating in such communities, individuals learn the competencies of their profession and develop an understanding of what it means to be a member of that community. This idea of communities of practice brought into focus the socially situated and constructed nature of knowledge and learning in organisations and also highlighted the need to understand the process of how individuals within organisations acquired knowledge. Situated learning theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991), as theorised within the communities of practice literature, therefore argues that individual learning and consequently organisational knowledge creation occurs through a process of participation in the activities and practices of a community; and through the process of individuals constructing identities that enable them to become members of that community. Consequently knowledge management initiatives based on these approaches have focused on practices that encourage knowledge sharing amongst individuals within social contexts that facilitate such sharing. The next section considers the various knowledge management strategies in organisations and focuses on factors that have impacted the success of these various initiatives.
Knowledge management strategies in organisations

Organisations pursue different knowledge management strategies and approaches depending on the type of knowledge that they consider valuable, the business model of the firm and the competencies within the firm that make the management of such knowledge viable (Hansen et al., 1999). Consequently some organisations have focused on codification and the use of technology as the prime drivers of knowledge management initiatives and others have focused on creating networks amongst individuals that have enabled interactions amongst employees within the organisation to occur. Hansen et al. (1999) in fact argued that the “choice between codification and personalization is the central one facing virtually all companies in the area of knowledge management” (pg. 107). Companies with a strong internal focus on information technology such as Accenture and Ernst and Young have focused on codification of knowledge using a people-to-code approach, i.e. knowledge is “extracted from the person who developed it, made independent of that person, and reused for various purposes” (Hansen et al., 1999, pg. 108). The KM approach in these organisations has been to generate revenue through the re-use of solutions and methods across a number of clients across industries. These organisations adopted what Earl (2001: 218) refers to as the “technocratic approach” to knowledge management where the focus was the use of technology to support, co-ordinate and manage the everyday activities of employees. Databases, data repositories, ERP systems, Customer Management Systems and automated data processing are some of the technologies used by companies that focus on the codification of knowledge as their main knowledge management strategy.

In contrast to this, other organisations, particularly management consulting companies, have adopted the personalisation approach towards knowledge management. For example, companies like Bain Consulting, McKinsey and Boston Consulting have emphasised dialogue between individuals as the key strategy towards managing knowledge (Hansen et al., 1999). Here, the approach towards generating revenues through the effective use of knowledge lay in these companies customising solutions for their clients and consequently, the interactions amongst their consultants allowed for ideas and experiences to be shared resulting in unique solutions for each of their clients. This approach can be aligned with Earl’s (2001: 218)
“behavioral school” of knowledge management, where the focus is on knowledge sharing and the pooling of knowledge capabilities across employees. These companies use technologies but they are used as aids to enable networking and dialogue amongst employees. Companies such as Siemens and Xerox, for example, use technology as aids to enable greater interactions amongst its employees, using intranets, portals and web based video and audio conferencing that allowed individuals to share experiences, discuss best practices and enable geographically dispersed employees to interact with each other (Voelpel, Dous and Davenport, 2005; Earl, 2001).

**Factors impacting on the success of KM strategies in firms**

As organisations increasingly began to design and use knowledge management systems, attention was turned towards identifying the effectiveness of these systems, i.e. to identify factors that contributed to the success of knowledge management strategies in organisations. The literature indicates that this area remains contested (Alavi et al., 2001) because of the difficulty associated with the identification of such factors. This was partly because of the complex, ambiguous and dynamic nature of knowledge itself (Alvesson, 2000), and partly because the measurement of the value of intangible assets in organisations such as human and intellectual capital itself remains difficult (Teece, 1998). Consequently, surveys of organisational knowledge management strategies and practices remain the most common method of obtaining information about these factors.

Gold, Malhotra and Segars (2001), who surveyed over 300 senior executives from a number of different firms in various industries, indicated that a key factor for the success of knowledge management strategies in organisations was the firms’ capability to develop technologies, structures and cultures that allowed for the development of social and intellectual capital within the firm, i.e. allowed for the development of relationships, networks and interactions amongst individuals within the firm. Similarly, research by Pemberton, Stonehouse and Francis (2002) on the knowledge creation and management process at Black and Decker’s European Design Centre, revealed that amongst the key barriers that inhibit the success of knowledge management systems in the organisation were: the inability of the organisation to develop a culture that encouraged or integrated knowledge sharing across the organisation; the perception
amongst employees that incentives and rewards for individuals and teams to share knowledge were absent; an inability of the organisation to highlight the personal and organisational benefits of knowledge sharing; and an organisational culture that valued objectified knowledge embedded in processes and systems rather than knowledge developed as a “product of social interaction” (pg. 187). These findings are supported by others such as Roberts (2000) whose studies suggested that while information and communication technologies enabled codification of knowledge considered explicit, the abilities of such technologies to assist in the transfer of tacit knowledge was restricted, because such tacit transfers required trust, mutual understanding and face-to-face contact amongst the parties involved.

Other studies by Pemberton and Stonehouse (2001) have suggested that for a number of organisations, such as Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, Skandia, and British Petroleum, the process of becoming a knowledge-centric organisation required them to focus on the socio-technical approach to knowledge management, focusing on the development of a knowledge culture that encouraged and empowered individuals within the organisation to contribute rather than withhold knowledge. The authors argued that it was this necessary and vital first step, and the creation of an organisational culture that encouraged such sharing, that allowed these organisations to effectively use KM technologies. The importance of organisational cultures in determining the success of KM is also supported by McDermott (1999) and McDermott and O’Dell (2001) whose study revealed that companies that successfully implemented KM did so by building the KM approaches around existing organisational cultures. Other exploratory studies such as surveys of self-reported participation in knowledge exchanges conducted by Cabrera, Collins and Salgado (2006) have suggested that factors such as openness of experience, perceived support from colleagues and supervisors, self-efficacy and to a lesser extent organisational commitment all influenced increased self reports of participation in knowledge sharing.

These findings are supported by other industry surveys. Managers in the KPMG study (2000) indicated that lack of time to share knowledge (62 percent of the respondents), difficulty in capturing tacit knowledge (50 percent) and the organisation’s failure to grasp the cultural implications of knowledge management initiatives were the main stumbling blocks to the
effective utilisation of knowledge within their companies. These studies suggest that the success of an organisation’s knowledge management strategy is dependent on the management of people within these organisations. Critical factors in this success include mapping sources of internal expertise, creating networks among knowledge workers, establishing knowledge roles, changing people’s behaviour towards knowledge sharing and understanding the value of knowledge. Further, there is evidence to indicate that while a number of knowledge management strategies commence with the implementation of technology related processes to capture, codify or store “information”, (Grover and Davenport, 2001) once these projects commence, there seems to be widespread recognition that effective knowledge management is possible only when employees share. Therefore understanding the situated nature of knowledge in organisations (Nidumolu, Subramani and Aldrich, 2001) and creating organisational cultures that are knowledge-oriented and encourage knowledge sharing amongst employees (Grover and Davenport, 2001) are key to developing effective KM systems in organisations. The pervasive use of technology in organisations and the increasing market appeal of enterprise-wide IT systems have often led organisations to develop knowledge management initiatives that focus on the technology rather than on an understanding of how these systems impact on the nature of work and the socio-cultural aspects of knowledge in organisations (Kelleher & Seekings, 2000). Although technology allows for distributed knowledge to be accessed by individuals in an organisation, an over-reliance on technology, with less attention paid to the social and cultural aspects of knowledge, has led to knowledge management being seen as synonymous with information systems (Hildreth et al., 1999). However, as the abovementioned studies have indicated, the success of knowledge management strategies and organisational knowledge creation often rests on the knowledge sharing behaviours of individuals within the organisation, and the socio-cultural frameworks and relationships that encourage knowledge exchanges amongst individuals at work. How these factors influence knowledge creation in organisations is considered in the next section.

Knowledge exchanges and organisational knowledge creation

Nonaka and von Krogh (2009) define organisational knowledge creation as the “process of making available and amplifying knowledge created by individuals as well as crystallizing and
connecting it to an organization’s knowledge system” (pg. 635). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998: 245), referring to this organisational knowledge as intellectual capital, state that this is “the knowledge and knowing capability of a social collectivity such as an organization”. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) have argued that this new intellectual capital or knowledge is created through two processes: combination and exchange. Combination and exchange are at the core of other theories of knowledge creation such as Nonaka’s (1991) dynamic theory of knowledge creation and in Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notions of learning within communities of practice. These definitions and conceptualisations of organisational knowledge imply that knowledge creation in firms is a process by which knowledge that was previously unconnected becomes connected – knowledge residing in individuals dispersed within the organisation (Tsoukas, 1996), or knowledge available within communities, units and divisions within and outside organisations, combine to create new organisational knowledge. Thus fostering the sharing of ideas, experiences, and knowledge in a variety of forms amongst individuals and groups in organisations enables organisational knowledge creation in firms. The communities of practice approach (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Brown and Duguid, 1991), and other works such as Orlikowski (2002) and Carlile (2002) have conceptualised knowledge and knowing as inseparable. Carlile (2002) refers to this pragmatic view of knowledge as being “localized, embedded and invested in practice” (pg. 445), and conceptualises boundary objects as playing a key role in establishing a process through which knowledge can be “represented, learned and transformed” (pg. 454) across boundaries of communities of practice.

All of these approaches have viewed the creation of knowledge in firms as transformational processes through which dispersed, unconnected knowledge come together and transform into new organisational knowledge. A useful framework that can be adopted to understand the creation of such knowledge or intellectual capital in firms is the social capital enabled framework described by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). The authors articulate four conditions or preconditions required for the creation of intellectual capital. First, that there is opportunity and access available for exchange of knowledge, ideas and experiences amongst all parties within the organisation, i.e. opportunities exist for engaging in the practice of doing and knowing in the activities of various communities and parties in the organisation. Second, the value of exchanging and combining knowledge or intellectual resources must be anticipated by
the parties involved, i.e. they need to perceive the exchanging and combining of these values as producing something worthwhile even if they remain “uncertain about what will be produced and how” (pg. 249). Third, the parties must be motivated to participate in such sharing and combining because they perceive it to provide some value or benefit to them, i.e. it is worthwhile for them to participate in such combination and exchanges. Fourth, even if the above mentioned three conditions exist, the capability to combine and exchange such resources must exist within the firm i.e. the organisation must have the combination and absorptive capability (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990) to recognise new knowledge being created and absorb it. This creation of intellectual capital is facilitated by the social capital of the firm, the networks of strong “personal relationships developed over time that provide the basis for trust, cooperation, and collective action” within firms (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998: 243). Social capital, through its structural, cognitive and relational dimensions affects the conditions required for the creation of intellectual capital.

The structural dimension of social capital

The structural dimensions of social capital such as network ties (the social relationships and links that have been established with individuals), network configuration (the density of ties established, weak and strong ties, networks rich in information, or networks across organisational hierarchies) and appropriable organisation (the portability and transferability of social networks built in one context being transported to another context) influence the opportunity and accessibility available for combination and exchange of knowledge, ideas and experiences and the anticipated value of such combination and exchanges.

Network ties and configuration

Network ties provide access to knowledge resources and enables new knowledge bases to be identified and complex knowledge to be exchanged (Granovetter, 1973; Krackhardt and Brass, 1994; Hansen, 1996; Song, Almedia and Wu, 2003). Networks establish communication channels which make the search for, and identification of knowledge quicker and more cost effective. Physical proximity, for example, affects the probability of greater communication between individuals (Krackhardt et al., 1994) and the likelihood that knowledge exchanges will
be faster. Empirical studies such as those conducted by Borgatti and Cross (2003) indicate that individuals are more likely to seek knowledge from others when they are aware of what the other individuals know, when they value that knowledge, when they are able to gain timely access to that knowledge and when they perceive that seeking such information from the other person would not be too costly. Network ties enable individuals to make these decisions based on the configuration of the network as well as the strength of ties between members of the network. Early access to such knowledge (as in Granovetter’s 1973 study of job seeking behaviours) positively impacts on the value associated with gaining such knowledge, thereby making it more appealing to participate in knowledge exchanges. Network ties also provide information to individuals about knowledge resources available elsewhere within the network (i.e. outside of the immediate network of the individual). They are a source of referrals enabling individuals to seek out and access those with distant relationships within the network. Such referrals may also involve establishing the reputations of individuals and such reputations can enhance the value of the anticipated knowledge exchange and motivate individuals to participate in such exchanges. Lucas (2005) argues that the reputation of individuals, both seeking knowledge and providing knowledge, influences the participation of both parties in the knowledge exchange. Thus network ties may also act as normative forms of control (Fenwick, 2007), establishing norms of behaviour that could encourage knowledge exchanges within organisations.

While network ties act as channels of information, network configuration, the density, structure, and strength of ties also impact on the creation of intellectual capital in firms. Strength of ties influences the manner in which knowledge exchanges occur. Hansen’s (1996) empirical study indicated that strength of ties impacted on the ability of organisational units to learn from one another. Weak intra-unit ties motivated greater probing amongst units for knowledge that could be shared and learnt while strong ties facilitated the transfer of knowledge considered complex. While weak ties may positively influence greater knowledge probing, knowledge exchanges between distantly connected members of a network may be negatively impacted by such weak ties. This is illustrated in Empson’s (2001a) study of knowledge transfer in mergers between professional service firms. Her study suggested that when two organisations merge, recipients resist absorbing new knowledge from members of
the merging organisation because of a fear of contamination based on the perceived differences between the images of the two firms. Such a fear of contamination (‘we are better than them, so why learn from them’) may dissuade recipients from participating in knowledge exchanges and absorbing new knowledge. Hence network ties can influence access and motivations to participate in knowledge exchanges within firms.

Spaces for interaction
The condition of having access to knowledge as a prerequisite for creating new knowledge has been explored in complementary ways by other researchers. Nonaka and Konno (1998) explored this through the conceptualisation of spaces within organisations that facilitated interactions amongst individuals that allowed opportunities for knowledge, ideas and experiences to be shared. They referred to this shared space as “ba” (pg. 40) and argued that knowledge was embedded in such spaces: without ba, a space for facilitating the construction and maintenance of shared relationships, knowledge was mere information. In other words, the shared space metaphorically indicates the shared contextual understanding, the tacit underpinnings required for knowledge to be exchanged and combined to create new organisational knowledge. This idea of a shared space, or opportunities to interact, also resonates with the literature on communities of practice (Brown et al., 1991; Cook et al., 1999; Heaton & Taylor, 2002; Wenger, 2000), the firm as a distributed knowledge system (Becker, 2001; Tsoukas, 1996; Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001; Un et al., 2004), organisational learning and the learning organisation (Argyris, 1977, 1991; Schon, 1975; Senge, 2003; Tsang, 1997). Orlikoswki’s (2002) work suggests that the practice of “interacting face to face”(pg.25) constitutes a knowing of the people and players within the organisation that enable the building and sustaining of social networks that support and aid in the building of distributed products. Through face-to-face interaction, individuals build trust, gain credibility, share information and obtain commitment for the projects that they are involved with.

In addition, studies such as Gupta & Govindarajan’s (2000) study of knowledge flows within multinational corporations (MNCs), have identified accessibility to knowledge as a key determinant of the success of such knowledge exchanges. They identified the richness and quality of communication channels with characteristics such as openness of communication,
and frequency and density of communication between parties, as vital for successful intra-organisational knowledge transfer. These theories postulate that effective knowledge creation requires opportunities, spaces, relationships, channels of communication and interactions amongst individuals in a community, a team, project group, or intra-organisational divisions.

The cognitive dimension of social capital

The cognitive dimensions of social capital reiterate the prerequisite condition of a shared context of understanding for meaningful exchanges of knowledge to occur, by focusing on shared language, codes and narratives as influencing three knowledge creation factors: accessing knowledge, anticipating the value of the combined knowledge and the combination capability of the firm.

Shared language

Having a shared language facilitates discussion, enables individuals to seek out others for the knowledge they seek, enhances understanding and provides for a medium through which knowledge exchanges occur. Not having a shared language inhibits this process. As indicated in studies of mergers (Empson, 2001a), when there is an absence of a shared language, the value of the knowledge being exchanged is often not recognised. A shared language and code influences the perceptions that individuals have by providing them with common frames of reference from which to view the exchange of knowledge, thus enabling the value of the exchanged knowledge to be established. Similarly, Wenger (2000) argues that for individuals to participate in the practices of a community, individuals must have access to the shared language and repertoire of the community and they must have the competence to use that language appropriately. Syntactic approaches to the study of boundaries suggest that a shared and stable syntax enables accurate communication between sender and receiver across boundaries (Carlile, 2002). Finally, shared language enhances the combination capability of the firm by providing shared bases of understanding that enables overlaps and commonalities of ideas to be identified enabling greater knowledge gains to be made. As identified by Cohen et al., (1990) the absorptive capacity of a firm is largely dependent on the firm’s level of prior
related knowledge. Consequently, a shared language enables such prior related knowledge to be established enabling greater knowledge absorption and combination.

*Shared narratives*

Similarly, shared narratives, myths and stories also serve as powerful media for sensemaking (Atkinson, 2002; Weick, 1995) and within organisations they enable meaning to be constructed and preserved. Brown and Duguid (1991: 44) have argued that stories and their narration are reflective of the “complex social web within which work takes place and the relationship between the narrative, narrator, and audience to the specific events of practice”. Shared narratives and stories therefore help individuals to interpret meaning in new situations based on wisdom or knowledge accumulated over time and experiences, a characteristic of stories that Brown and Duguid (1991: 45) refer to as “repositories of accumulated wisdom”. This enables individuals to make use of collective experience in decision making. Consequently, as Orr (1990) suggests, sharing metaphors, parables and stories with seemingly insignificant details enables tacit experiences to be shared leading to the exchange and combination of knowledge to create new organisational knowledge.

*Relational dimension of social capital*

The relational dimension focuses on the nature and quality of the relationships in the network and describes these relationships in terms of interpersonal trust, norms, obligations and expectations and identification of individuals with others in the network. It greatly influences the third precondition for the creation of knowledge: the motivation to participate in knowledge exchanges, while also having an impact on accessibility to knowledge and anticipation of value through exchanges. Szulanski (1996), for example, argued that distant and arduous relationships between teams and units negatively impacted on knowledge exchanges between intra-organisational units. The relational dimension of social capital focuses on the relationships constructed by and between individuals within organisations and communities and highlights the link between social capital and the development of intellectual capital in organisations.
Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995: 712) defined trust as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party”. Trust is therefore a psychological state (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer, 1998) that involves the willingness to take a risk with the expectation that the other person, the trustee, will not exploit the vulnerability of the trustor. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) citing Mistzal’s (1996) work on trust in organisations argue that trust encourages individuals to seek access to knowledge from others and also increases the anticipatory value of such exchanges because implicitly both parties believe in the good intent of each other, believe in each other’s competence and capability, believe that both parties are reliable and that communication between them is open and honest.

The importance of trust in knowledge creation and knowledge sharing has been emphasised by others (Staples and Webster (2008); Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Hanson, 1999; McEvily, Perrone, & Zaheer, 2003; Menon & Pfeffer, 2003; Nonaka, 1994; Szulanski, 1996; von Krogh, 1998; Currall and Judge, 1995) whose work indicates that increased trust encourages individuals to seek and contribute to knowledge exchanges while a lack of trust hinders the process, leading to knowledge hoarding (Michailova and Husted, 2003). Increased trust between members reduces fear of exploitation (Empson, 2001a) therefore reducing the tendency to hoard or withhold knowledge and creates stronger ties between individuals. However, the development of trust between individuals is developed over time, with continued exchanges and interactions; and each such interaction influences the further development of trust between the two parties. For unconditional trust to occur, repeated interactions with each party behaving as the other expects them to behave, with reciprocal expectations being met, is essential. Until that occurs, conditional trust exists between the two parties, where each is willing to trust as long as behaviour is as expected (Jones and George, 1998). Thus for knowledge sharing and exchanges to occur, there must be trust between the parties and the development of this trust occurs over time. These repeated exchanges over time may lead to the development of norms of cooperation within organisations leading to greater knowledge exchanges amongst individuals.
Norms can be conceptualised as “beliefs as to the existence of social expectations regarding behaviour” (Cabrera et al., 2005: 721). They represent the consensus reached amongst a group of individuals within a social system regarding expected social behaviours within that group. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) and Cabrera et al., (2005) suggest that norms of co-operation and knowledge sharing established within social groups such as organisations positively influence individuals to participate in knowledge exchanges. For example, research by van den Hoof and De Ridder (2004) implies that individuals who frequently seek knowledge from others are also more frequently willing to share. Similarly, Ensign and Hebert (2010) suggest that the reputation of a co-worker, i.e. the assessment of how a co-worker has behaved in the past and behaves after receiving knowledge assistance influences knowledge sharing amongst colleagues. Their study suggests that employees remember knowledge exchanges and those employees receiving or taking more than they give are less likely to receive future information from colleagues. The establishment of norms of knowledge exchange in firms therefore positively influence knowledge creation in organisations. Expected norms of knowledge sharing in organisations may also influence individuals to exhibit organisational citizenship behaviour, which as Bolino, Turnley and Bloodgood (2002) suggest contributes to the development of social capital in the firm, i.e. impacts positively on structural, cognitive and relational dimensions of social capital, creating a cyclical process of individuals contributing to and willing to participate in knowledge exchanges within the firm.

The role of norms in influencing knowledge sharing among dyads has been examined by Quigley, Tesluk, Locke and Bartol (2002). Their study implied that individual level incentives alone for sharing knowledge without the development of mutual norms for knowledge sharing amongst the knowledge sender and recipient, was a poor influencer in knowledge sharing. This reiterates the notion that any structural means of influencing knowledge sharing, such as incentives, have to be reinforced and strongly supported by socio-cultural factors within the organisation that emphasise norms of knowledge sharing, open exchanges and reciprocity between individuals within the organisation.
Established norms within organisations may also deter individuals from participating in knowledge exchanges. When organisations have cultures that establish norms that view knowledge exchanges with suspicion, or when relationships between individuals and units in organisations is distant and strained (Szulanski, 1996), or when individuals fail to recognise the value of knowledge exchanges, then they may be dissuaded from seeking or contributing knowledge. This is exemplified in Menon et al.’s (2003) study which showed that individuals within organisations may be more motivated to learn from outsiders (and from outside the organisation) than from insiders, because of the perception that internal knowledge was less valuable, because it was common and easily available while external knowledge was rare and therefore more valuable. Thus norms have a mediating effect on knowledge exchange both in terms of individuals seeking knowledge as well as those contributing to knowledge within firms. This is particularly relevant when organisations focus on structuring incentives to encourage employees to share knowledge and organisational norms view transferring of knowledge as economic rents (Wolfe and Loraas, 2008). In such organisations, when the environment promotes knowledge hoarding, individual self assessment of incentives to share knowledge are increasingly deemed insufficient to participate in knowledge sharing. Thus norms may influence both the willingness of the individuals to participate in knowledge exchanges as well as mediate the effect of incentives that individuals deem sufficient to motivate them to share knowledge.

The potential of relationship norms to influence learning and knowledge creation has also been emphasised in the literature on communities of practice. From this perspective, Wenger (1998, 2000) states that communities are built through mutual engagement between individual, establishing norms and “relationships of mutuality” (Wenger, 2000: 229) that reflect the relationships that members of the community have established with each other. He argues that to be considered a competent member of the community, an individual has to establish those norms of exchanges that establish the individual as engaging in the community as a trusted partner. This engagement is achieved by doing things together, talking, or creating artefacts and the norms of such engagement shape the identities of individuals within such social systems. Hence norms influence knowledge exchanges by mediating how individuals engage
in communities of practice as well as by shaping their identities, i.e., norms influence how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others in the community and the world at large.

*Obligations and expectations*

While norms provide social frameworks for expected behaviours in the organisations, between individuals, personalised relationships develop over time depending on the configuration of the network, and knowledge exchanges that occur. These personalised relationships create obligations or commitments for the parties to conform to expected behaviours. Further, once established such commitments lead to expectations that each party will behave in a predictable manner. Blau’s (1964) social exchange theory argues that individuals regulate their interactions and relationships with other individuals based on a self-interested analysis of the costs and benefits of the relationship. This cost-benefit analysis considers not only the immediate benefit gained out of the interaction, but probable benefits to be accrued in future and norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). Such reciprocity influences knowledge sharing not only among individuals working in close proximity with each other, but also amongst individuals working in virtual teams as Sun, Ju, Chumg, Wu and Chao’s (2010) work suggests.

The notion that individuals’ attitude towards knowledge sharing is positively influenced by expected reciprocal benefits has been supported by research such as Bock, Zmud, Kim and Lee’s (2005) empirical study of 27 Korean organisations where expected reciprocity greatly influenced positive attitudes towards knowledge sharing. Individuals may therefore participate in knowledge exchanges not just because it is expected of them, but also because they expect some future benefit in such exchanges. These expected benefits of knowledge sharing may include future reciprocity, or expected status at work, job promotion or security at work (Davenport and Prusak, 1998). Other benefits that individuals may expect from knowledge sharing include the status implications of learning from outsiders (as has been identified in Menon et al’s (2003) study) and consequently, such expectations may influence them to favour knowledge exchanges from outside the organisation rather than from within. Further, when recipients show little motivation to seek and absorb new knowledge, then the knowledge donating behaviours of individuals may be affected (Van den Hoof et al., 2004), i.e., they are
less inclined to participate in knowledge exchanges. Thus obligations and expectations could also negatively influence knowledge exchanges in organisations by limiting exchanges when individuals expect little benefit to be gained from them or when they perceive that seeking information would be too costly for them (Borgatti et al., 2003).

Janowicz-Panjaitan and Noorderhaven (2009) have suggested that learning of tacit knowledge in an interorganisational perspective are influenced strongly by the unique learning-related roles of boundary spanners at two different levels in the organisation are considered: at the corporate level and at the operating level. The authors suggest that at the corporate level boundary spanners, being responsible for the developing and protecting the competitive position of the firm that they represent are more motivated by calculated costs and benefits and rational choice involved in tacit knowledge sharing than trust and relational based factors. In contrast, operating level boundary spanners, deal with members of the partnering organisation on a face-to-face basis, trust and relational factors motivate their knowledge sharing behaviours. This perspective has two implications to consider: first, that boundary spanners, such as contractors, influence the extent to which an organisation seeks to learn or obtain knowledge from outside the firm (including partnering organisations); second the role that individuals occupy within the firm influences whether they are motivated more by calculative rational-choice or relational, trust based factors in participating in knowledge exchanges. This suggests that while obligations and expectations need to be considered for understanding knowledge exchanges, the organisational roles, particularly of boundary spanners, need to be studied to understand role level variations in knowledge sharing motivations.

Interdependence theory (Kelley and Thibaut, 1978; Constant, Kiesler, Sproull, 1994) suggests that during exchanges, individuals may act differently when representing themselves and differently when the exchanges are influenced by the individuals’ social and organisational contexts. While rational self-interest and self-benefit dictates the exchange in the first instance, in the second, broader socio-organisational benefits influence the exchange. Consequently, while refusal by one party to participate in exchanges in the first case may lead to retaliatory behaviour by the other party, such retaliatory measures may be more muted or non-existent in
the second instance. Individuals may continue to participate in exchanges because they see such exchanges as contributing to the greater good of the organisation.

Individuals’ participation in knowledge exchanges for the benefit of the organisation or exhibiting knowledge hoarding behaviours may be influenced by their beliefs about who owns knowledge in organisations (Constant et al. 1994). Literature on knowledge management in organisations, particularly information systems approaches to managing knowledge have implicitly assumed that the organisation owns the knowledge created by individuals within the workplace. However, the issue of ownership of knowledge is a more contested issue than what the literature portrays it to be. Studies have suggested that different actors may behave differently and may have different assumptions about ownership of knowledge depending on their beliefs on property rights, belief in self-ownership and is influenced both by the culture of the organisation as well as the individual’s own relationship with the organisation (Jarvenpaa and Staples, 2001; Kinnie and Stewart, 2009). When individuals believe that their information work is “really not his or hers to give or withhold selfishly, but must be used to satisfy organizational goals” (Constant et al., 1994: 404) then they implicitly believe that knowledge created in organisations is jointly owned by the organisation as well as by the individuals involved in its creation and therefore engage in knowledge exchanges. The influence of perceptions of ownership on knowledge sharing has been confirmed by other studies such as those conducted by Jarvenpaa and Staples (2001). However they also suggest that organisations create cultures and norms where joint ownership of knowledge is acknowledged and individuals place high importance on knowledge creation, and consequently participate in such knowledge exchanges for the greater benefit of the organisation as well as themselves.

While these studies suggest that individual perceptions of ownership of knowledge influence knowledge sharing, these studies have focused attention on permanent employees within organisations. The influence of contingent employment on beliefs of ownership of knowledge remains relatively unexplored. As indicated by agency theory, employees in contingent employment may have differing notions of ownership of knowledge, influenced by their transient and limited engagement with the organisation, and lower levels of organisational identification and commitment. Thus ownership of knowledge may be a factor that influences
knowledge sharing behaviours amongst contingent employees as the choices they make in relation to sharing or hoarding knowledge may influence their participation in knowledge exchanges within firms.

Identification

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998: 256) define identification as “the process whereby individuals see themselves as one with another person or group of people”. This identification with a group or a perception of “oneness with a group of persons” (Ashforth and Mael, 1989: 21) can be conceptualised as social identification and as Ashforth and Mael (1989) argue such social identities enable individuals to locate themselves within a social environment and perceive a degree of oneness or belongingness with that social group. Applied within an organisational context, such social identification can be referred to as organisational identification.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) imply that individuals with a high degree of social identification participate in activities that are congruent with and support the ideals of the social group or organisation. Further, Alvesson (2000) has suggested that organisation-based social identity promotes loyalty amongst individuals within the organisation. Consequently, organisational identification influences individuals to act in ways that benefit the group, including participation in knowledge exchanges. Higher organisational identification implies that individuals would be more open to opportunities for knowledge exchange and would also perceive such exchanges to be of value and benefit to them as well as the organisation. This is supported by empirical evidence (van den Hooff et al., 2004; Bock et al, 2005) which has indicated that loyalty to the organisation positively influences knowledge sharing. In contrast to this, where organisational identification amongst individuals is low, and the group presents conflicting and distinct identities, individuals may be less willing to participate in knowledge exchanges (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Further such conflicting identities may actually present barriers for interactions and communications amongst group members consequently inhibiting knowledge creation within the firm.
The social identification that individuals may have not only shapes their perceptions of group members, but also influences their perceptions of non-group members. Strong social identification with one group may lead individuals to view other groups as dissimilar to them, view them less positively or perceive them as less trustworthy (Jetten, Spears and Manstead, 1996). This is exemplified in cases of acquisitions and mergers where employees of one organisation view employees of the other with distrust (Empson, 2001a). Consequently, individuals with strong social identification with team members or members of their occupation may view others in the organisation with distrust and fail to participate in knowledge exchanges with them. Hence occupational identification could negatively impact on their motivations to contribute to knowledge exchanges and combination in organisations.

Social identity theory maintains that individuals associate themselves with various social groups including maintaining strong professional memberships. Thus professionals in organisations would likely also identify with their professions as well as with the organisation. Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian and Samuel (1998) present compelling evidence to argue that organisations attempt to manage and control the professional identification of professionals in order to transform them into organisational members, a process often met with resistance by professionals in these firms. This suggests that professionals often have strong professional identities that influence their behaviour and the manner in which they conduct themselves at work (Grey, 1998). Attempts by organisations to manage their professional identities may dissuade professionals from participating in knowledge exchanges as a form of protest.

Conversely, strong organisational identification decreases the organisational-professional conflict that professionals may perceive (Bamber and Iyer, 2002). As professionals in organisations are defined not only by their organisational membership, but also by what they do (Pratt, Rockmann, Kaufmann, 2006), the roles that professionals occupy at work and their status within organisations may also impact their knowledge sharing motivations. Ibarra (1999) has implied that roles that professionals occupy in organisations influence the construction of their professional identities, and professionals often experiment with interim identities that serve as trials or models for future professional identities. Consequently, individuals with strong professional identification may view their participation in knowledge exchanges as
representative of their status within the organisation (as knowledge experts) and consequently be motivated to participate in such exchanges. Hence professional identification impacts on the self-image and self-worth of individuals influencing their willingness to participate in knowledge sharing activities in the firm.

The self image and self-worth of individuals may also influence differently the manner in which they view different kinds of knowledge. For example, Constant et al. (1994) suggested that people attach different meanings to different kinds of information, and these meanings influence sharing behaviour. The authors argue that individuals view information as different to expertise and are more willing to share information, as it is viewed as a commodity and follows reciprocal exchange and social transaction models. Expertise, however, is not viewed as a commodity, but as part of the self-identity of the individual and reflects self-worth. Therefore individuals would be more likely to share expertise for personal gain such as recognition, appreciation and for increased self-worth rather than for purely extrinsic rewards such as monetary reward or incentive. Similarly, Osterloh and Frey (2000) suggest that intrinsic motivations such as an individual’s perception of self-benefit or personal satisfaction motivate the exchange of tacit knowledge while adding extrinsic motivators such as monetary compensation may actually “crowd out” (pg. 546) the effects of intrinsic motivators of individuals to participate in knowledge exchanges. These studies suggest that the professional identities of individuals, their status and self worth, and how they perceive their knowledge and expertise, all impact on their motivations to participate in knowledge exchanges within organisations.

From the perspective of situated learning and communities of practice understanding how individuals construct identities that influence their participation in the practices of the community becomes important for understanding knowledge exchanges between individuals. Wenger (1998: 4, emphasis in original) suggested that the central principle of communities of practice was individuals becoming “active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to those communities” and identified five characteristics that linked practice and identities. First, that identity is a negotiated experience and individuals define who they are through participation in the social world and by the process of reification
by self and others. Two, identity is also defined by community membership which suggests to us what is familiar and unfamiliar. Third, identity is defined by an individual’s learning trajectory; i.e. those experiences that help define the individual. Fourth, identity is also a nexus of relationships, the result of individuals’ attempt to reconcile various identities that they may have into a cohesive whole. Fifth, individuals define locally their relation to a broader global world and society. Wenger (1998: 149) argues that how individuals engage in the practices of the community is profoundly impacted by the construction of their identities, i.e. the formation “of a community of practice is also the negotiation of identities”. Consequently how individuals negotiate the construction of multiple identities (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) mediates their participation in knowledge exchanges within organisations and impacts the creation of organisational knowledge in firms.

Gaps in the literature and research questions

Literatures on social capital theory, intellectual capital creation in organisations, communities of practice and other social constructionist approaches to organisational knowledge provide an understanding of knowledge as created in organisations through interactions amongst individuals within the firm. Specifically, the framework discussed here has focused on outcomes of social capital for the creation of intellectual capital predominantly at the level of the organisation. Similarly, communities of practice perspectives view knowledge exchanges at the level of the community, and through the lens of participation of individuals with that community. While this provides a strong foundation for examining knowledge exchanges in organisation, some gaps remain.

First, there is a need to know more about individual-level behaviour in knowledge exchanges. As suggested in the literature, knowledge exchanges are mediated by trust, obligations and expectations, and the identities of individuals in organisations. While networks and communities establish an individual’s position in relation to the network or community at large, knowledge exchanges between individuals are relational: they involve individuals interacting with other individuals in reciprocal relationships, some of which may be dyadic; such as between supervisors and subordinates, or between colleagues. Such relationships may
influence the nature of the exchanges to a much greater extent than the literature suggests (Bolino, Turnley and Bloodgood, 2002). In communities of practice, how individuals engage with the community may be influenced to a greater extent by the individual’s immediate supervisor, manager or colleagues than by the community at large. This is an issue that has yet to be addressed in the literature.

Related to the issue of dyadic/reciprocal relationships and their impact on knowledge exchanges is the issue of power and its impact on knowledge sharing. Commentators such as Contu and Willmott (2003) and Roberts (2006) have argued that the communities of practice literature provides an insufficient explanation of how power mediates an individual’s participation in learning and in communities of practice. Power, it has been argued, influences the willingness of the individual to engage meaningfully in the practices of the community and thereby impacts on the individual’s willingness to participate in knowledge exchanges within the community of practice. Focusing on individual-level analysis of the motivations influencing knowledge sharing may help focus attention on power relations between individuals and the impact that such relationships have on motivation to participate in knowledge exchanges.

Third, both social capital theory, as well as the communities of practice literature suggests that the identities of individuals impact on their motivations to participate in knowledge exchanges (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2000). However, how conflicting identities may mediate knowledge exchanges remains unclear. This is particularly relevant for understanding knowledge sharing motivations of professionals in organisations. The literature suggests that professionals often face conflicts of interest at work, and struggle with multiple identifications that make it difficult for them to engage fully with the organisation (Grey, 1998; Covaleski et al., 1998; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, Ibarra, 1999). A key area of research is to examine the relevance of professional identities and their impact on knowledge sharing. Would professionals with strong professional identities see self-benefit in knowledge sharing? Would professional identities conflict with organisational identities when organisations seek to control professionals by controlling and managing their identities and would such conflicts negatively impact on knowledge sharing?
The literature on knowledge sharing and organisational knowledge creation implicitly assumes that individuals engage with organisations in a relatively fixed and stable manner: i.e. individuals engage with organisations as permanent employees of the firm. Consequently, researchers have focused attention on factors that motivate permanent employees to engage meaningfully with organisations and on organisational structures, processes, and cultures that enable such engagement, i.e. focusing on the organisational-level determinants of the building of social and intellectual capital in firms. The increasing use of professionals in contingent employment necessitates a questioning of these assumptions. What motivates contract professionals to engage in knowledge exchanges within organisations? Does the contingent status of their employment decrease their organisational identification and does this influence their knowledge sharing motivations? These questions remain unanswered in the literature.

Studies on contingent employment amongst professionals (Barley and Kunda, 2004; Fenwick, 2007) reveal that such professionals navigate a complex world of relationships, networks, obligations, reciprocity and self-interest. More studies exploring the impact of these factors on the contract professional’s motivations to participate in knowledge exchanges are needed within organisational studies. The literature has suggested that professionals often choose contingent and alternate forms of employment as a means of self-managing their careers outside of organisational boundaries and controls (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe and Hall, 2005). This suggests that professionals in contingent employment may engage with organisations seeking self-management and greater autonomy at work and may choose roles within organisations that offer them such autonomy. Further, they may be resistant to organisational notions of identity control (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) as a means of regulating their behaviour and may chose to withhold their participation in knowledge exchanges as a form of protest. The engagement of contract professionals with organisations and the impact of their contingent status on their motivation to participate in knowledge sharing need further empirical exploration.
Summary and research directions

This chapter presented an overview of knowledge and its management in organisations from a diverse range of literature encompassing various perspectives. It is evident from the literature that knowledge is a complex, ambiguous, multidimensional concept and management of knowledge in organisations is a contested issue. However the idea that knowledge is central to the success of an organisation has persisted over time and shows no signs of abating.

Knowledge and its management has been conceptualised in various ways, reflecting divergent theoretical perspectives that underpin the academic research in this area. Different taxonomies of knowledge have viewed it as tacit or explicit, as residing in individuals and collectively in social systems such as groups and organisations. From a social constructionist perspective, knowledge is conceptualised as being constructed intersubjectively: individuals learn socially, through participation in social networks, communities of practice and in the practice of “doing” within contextually relevant knowledge domains.

The literature also indicates that organisations choose a variety of knowledge management strategies to manage knowledge within their firm. Although the information systems approach to managing knowledge drove many of the early knowledge management initiatives in organisations, it is through the creation of an organisational culture that values and encourages knowledge sharing amongst employees and provides for interactions amongst individuals that organisational knowledge management strategies are most effective. The chapter conceptualised organisational knowledge creation as a process of the combination and exchange of knowledge resources within the firm. Adopting a social constructionist view of knowledge, Nahapiet and Ghoshal’s (1998) framework of intellectual capital in organisations has been reviewed and analysed. The theory argues that four preconditions are necessary for the creation of intellectual capital in organisations: First, that parties have access to each other for combining/exchanging knowledge; second, both parties anticipate the value of such combination and exchanges; third, individuals are motivated to participate in such combinations and exchanges because they perceive some benefit in it for themselves; and fourth, the organisation has the capacity to recognise such knowledge exchanges and
combinations. Social capital theory presented three factors that mediated this knowledge exchange and creation: structural, cognitive and relational dimensions of social capital.

The structural dimension, with its focus on networks, strength of ties, and configuration of networks, influences the ability of individuals to access knowledge resources and on the anticipated value of such combination and exchanges. Cognitive dimensions of social capital impact on the accessibility of knowledge, the anticipated value of the combined knowledge and on the combination capability of the firm. The relational dimension of social capital influences the motivation of individuals to participate in knowledge exchanges. Interpersonal issue such as trust, reciprocity, norms, obligations and expectations and identification with the organisation, occupations or profession mediates the knowledge exchange process.

This review of the literature on knowledge management reveals a number of gaps in current research that warrant further study. Social capital theory and the communities of practice tradition have not focused sufficiently on the dyadic relationships of individuals participating in knowledge exchanges in firms. Further, power and its mediating effects on knowledge sharing remain relatively neglected areas of study. Extant literature also indicates that knowledge sharing amongst individuals in organisations has focused on permanent employees within organisations. Understanding the knowledge sharing motivations of individuals not permanently attached to organisations is an important but neglected area of research. Therefore we need to understand more about how individuals in contingent employment build and construct relationships with organisations and how their contingent status affects their commitment to, and identification with, the organisation.

The literature on communities of practice suggests that understanding how individuals participate in the practices of a community and how their membership in that community shapes their identities and consequently their relationships, commitments and knowledge sharing behaviours, are all important areas of research. Understanding the participation of contingent workers, particularly knowledge workers, in organisational knowledge work is needed in order to understand how their contingent status affects their participation in the activities of the organisation and how this impacts on their identity. The scarcity of empirical
studies focused on understanding the potential influence of identity on knowledge sharing (Lucas, 2005), particularly of such contingent workers, makes this study a timely and relevant contribution to the current academic literature. The increasing use of professionals in organisations suggests that we need to first understand how professionals engage with organisations before attempting to understand how contract professionals may engage in knowledge exchanges within the firm. The next chapter focuses attention on studies of professionals in organisations and discusses debates about their management and their potential to contribute to the knowledge base of organisations.
CHAPTER THREE
PROFESSIONALS AND ORGANISATIONS

Introduction

Academics have long been interested in the relationship between professionals and their work settings, particularly the organisations in which they work (Ackroyd, 1996; Mintzberg, 1989; Hall, 1968; Sorensen and Sorensen, 1974; Reed, 2000; Dawson, 1994). However there is a growing consensus in the literature that the assumptions about professionals and professional work in organisations that have been held over the last few decades are undergoing significant changes (Dent and Whitehead, 2002). From the traditional conception of medicine and law as professions, the concept of a profession has grown increasingly ambiguous and fluid (Watson, 2003). The diversity of settings under which professional work is performed has increased considerably in the last two decades. Hence contemporary notions of professionals include marketing, advertising, accounting, information technology professionals; to the extent that “professional” has simply come to mean that someone is “occupationally competent” (Watson, 2003: 95), whatever that occupation may be. These changes have indicated that traditional notions of the professional enjoying elite status and autonomy at work in return for providing a valued service to the organisation are disappearing. In its place, is ambiguity about the relationship that professionals construct with organisations and the increasing relevance of managerialist agendas in the workplace. Dent et al., (2002: 1) in fact argue that “as the notion of professionalism has become reconfigured, emerging as a ubiquitous, compelling icon for all organizational players, so has the ideology/discourse of managerialism risen to ascendency”.

The emergence of managerialist agendas focusing on “managing” professionals at work has raised questions about the extent to which professionals will be able to retain their status as “exclusive and privileged” (Dent and Whitehead, 2002: 1) and how far they can “retain their exclusive access to, and control over, abstract, formalized knowledge and the operational skills and routines it facilitates and legitimates” (Lyotard, 1984: 12). This implies that professionals
may face a conflict between their desire to retain and control access to their knowledge as a means of preserving their elite status within organisations, and organisational discourses and managerial processes that seek to regulate and control that knowledge. This therefore raises the issue of knowledge sharing amongst professionals and the factors that would motivate or dissuade them from participating in knowledge exchanges within the firm. Second, literature has presented a picture of professionals as traditionally ambivalent towards management within organisations; i.e. professionals either submit to managerially imposed notions of control or attempt to resist such controls, but are ultimately removed from and disinterested in the process of management (McAuley, Duberley and Cohen, 2000) seeking only to be allowed to practice their profession within organisations. However, managerial agendas increasingly seek to subject all employees, including professionals to sophisticated modes of accountability (Dent and Whitehead, 2002) implying that professionals cannot remain isolated from being managed or managing others. Consequently, contemporary professionals in organisations may take an active interest in managerial and regulatory processes within organisations. These changes in the workplace consequently have an impact on the professional-organisational relationship, although what relationships have now emerged or are emerging remain unclear and contested (Cohen, Finn, Wilkinson and Arnold, 2002). However, by focusing on issues that the literature suggests influence the relationship between professionals and organisation, a greater understanding of how professionals engage with organisations and their impact on knowledge exchanges within these firms may be obtained.

I begin this chapter by examining the notion of professionals as knowledge workers providing value to the firm. I then focus attention on theoretical approaches that have viewed the professional-organisational relationship in fundamentally opposing ways: either conflictual or cooperative and examine some of the criticisms surrounding these debates in understanding contemporary professional-organisational relationships. Keeping in mind the changing notions of professionals and professional work, I then examine three key factors that seem to mediate the new professional-organisational relationship: the increasingly diverse organisational contexts in which professionals work; professional identity and roles that professionals occupy in organisations; and the notion of psychological contracts. I examine how each of these factors
influences the professional organisational relationship, their impact on knowledge exchanges within firms.

Professionals as knowledge workers

Professionals have the special privilege of freedom from the control of outsiders. Their privilege is justified by three claims. First, their work entails such a high degree of skill and knowledge that only fellow professionals can make accurate assessments of professional performance. Second, a high degree of selflessness and responsibility characterizes professionals, so they can be trusted to work conscientiously. Third, in those rare instances in which individual professionals do not perform with sufficient skill or conscientiousness, their colleagues may be trusted to undertake the proper regulatory action. These claims support the professional’s attempt to avoid submission to conventional bureaucratic controls when he works in an organization. (Friedson and Rhea, 1965: 107)

Professions are socially constructed. As argued by Friedson and Rhea (1965) the social construction of an occupation as a profession, allow members of that occupation, professionals, to project themselves as possessing qualities that make them elite within an organisation (Watson, 2003; Alvesson, 1993; Roth, 1974). Professionals, the literature suggests, obtain this elite class status within organisations because they are perceived to possess an exclusive body of knowledge that makes their application of that expertise valuable to organisations. Empson (2001b: 843) suggests that the professional’s “technical knowledge and client knowledge is his or her primary source of value to the firm”. While the literature has reflected a great deal of ambiguity about how this knowledge and its value can be defined and measured in organisations (Alvesson, 2001), there has been an implicit acceptance of the notion that professionals typically participate in knowledge work within firms and provide value to the firm through the application of their expertise (Mintzberg, 1989). Specifically, the two occupational categories being studied in this research, information technology and finance have been referred to as ‘knowledge-intensive’ occupations (Alvesson, 2004; Reed, 2000; Starbuck, 1992) with the use and application of intellect, creativity, and expertise at work is seen as an essential component of the work that individuals in such occupations perform. A suggested by Alvesson (2004), this category of knowledge workers overlap and include the notion of professionals, although it is broader, with little emphasis on traditional features
ascribed to a profession such as a code of ethics, but encompass almost wholly the notion of professional work as requiring the application of expert knowledge at work.

Three strands of debate have examined this conceptualisation of professionals as knowledge workers in different ways. The literature on the sociology of professions has focused on the essential traits and characteristics that define a profession and professionals as experts (Greenwood, 1973 as cited in Bloor and Dawson, 1994; Hall, 1975; Slocum, 1966, Wilensky, 1964; while critics of the trait approach (Crompton, 1990; Roth, 1974, Klegon, 1978) have instead focused on the social basis through which particular occupational groups are allowed “first to claim, and then perpetuate their claim to holding special expertise” (Klegon, 1978: 268). Finally, critical researchers have focused on the inherent ambiguity of the notion of professionals and have focused on the rhetoric and image building activities of professionals in seeking to establish themselves as elites in organisations (Alvesson, 1993, 2000; Alvesson and Willmott, 2003, Watson, 2003).

The earlier sociological debates on professional work (Greenwood, 1957; Wilensky, 1964, Moore, 1970; Hall, 1975) focused on identifying the characteristics or attributes of occupations that exemplified them as profession assigning specific characteristics to occupations that took on a professional status. Amongst these, certain key characteristics emerged as defining features of professional work. The first characteristic was that professionals made claim to competence over a unique and often narrow body of knowledge and skill. This gave the professional the right to isolate the problems and determine the means for their solution. Because their work demanded a high degree of skill, knowledge and expertise, it was implied that only other professionals could accurately assess performance (reiterated by authors such as Freidson and Rhea, 1965; Hall 1968). There was therefore a belief in collegial control of competence. Second, there was a belief in self-responsibility, the notion that the work being done was an indispensable service to the public and that the professional could be counted on to work zealously and conscientiously. The third feature was autonomy, which was primarily an independence to define problems and generate solutions without pressure from customers, non-members of the profession or the employing organisation. The distinguishing features of a
profession were therefore – expert knowledge, collegial examination of performance, service to the public and autonomy at work.

However, critics of the attributes approach argued that the assumption these characteristics were unique to professions was misplaced (Crompton, 1990; Klegon, 1978; Roth, 1974): many occupations shared these characteristics, but were not considered to be professions and many professionals displayed few of the characteristics that defined a profession. These researchers focused on understanding the process of professionalisation and the manner in which professionals constructed elite status within organisations. This process of professionalisation (Bloor and Dawson, 1994) has been described as overlapping phases or events that transform an occupation into a profession. From an early functionalist perspective, the centrality of what constituted professional work was the client-professional relationship and professionalisation involved the guarantee or sanctity of that relationship (Crompton, 1990). From this functionalist perspective, certain norms of professionalisation such as intensive education and knowledge (protection for the client), credentialing, a code of ethics and other norms that guaranteed the client-professional relationship were highlighted.

These models of the study of professions, in different ways, contributed towards establishing norms of professions and what being a professional meant. Consequently, for an occupation to be considered a profession, and its members as professionals, it became essential for the characteristics of the occupation as well as that of its members to conform to generally accepted criteria of what constituted a profession (Bloor and Dawson, 1994). Therefore, image building became an integral part of the process of professionalisation (Forsyth and Danisiewicz, 1985) and the nature of the service-task performed by the occupation needed to be perceived as essential (serious importance to the client), exclusive (practitioners having a monopoly on the service or task), and complex (use of discretionary knowledge) for that occupation and its members to be seen as professional. This model of professionalisation was largely based on the concept of professional power, defined along two lines of autonomy – from the client as well as the employing organisation. Forsyth and Danisiewicz (1985) have argued that power in professional occupations was often manifested in the degree of autonomy that professionals exhibited and that the ‘most professional’ occupations would be those that
had members exhibiting the highest levels of autonomy from both clients as well as employing organisations. Consequently, for an occupation to be considered a profession, image building was vital. It involved efforts by members of the occupation to portray the service-task as essential, exclusive and complex to the public and the acceptance of that image or belief by the public. If these efforts were successful, then an occupation obtained the status of a profession.

Critical researchers have viewed this image building and its impact on the perception of professionals as the central focus of their inquiry (Watson, 2003; Alvesson, 2000). These authors have argued that the inherent ambiguity surrounding the concept of knowledge and professionals has necessitated professionals to seek refuge in rhetorical aids seeking to establish themselves as experts within these ambiguities. For example, Alvesson (1993) argued that rhetoric within organisations and professional groups included statements that projected professionals as elite, having specialised knowledge and were different to other employees within the organisation. Further, authors such as Grey (1998) and Covaleski et al., (1998) have suggested that organisations have used the notion of the professional organisation (Mintzberg, 1989) to suggest that employees of such firms possess the expertise, skills and knowledge that makes their services to the organisations’ clients valuable and unique. Reed and Anthony (1992: 596) have argued that these rhetorical devices and ideological resources have been used by professionals to “legitimate the claims various expert groups and their representatives make on society’s material and cultural resource base”.

Despite their differences, these varying perspectives on professionals have all highlighted professionals’ conscious attempts to obtain elite status within organisations by establishing themselves as knowledge workers. This has led to organisations believing that it is in the strategic management of this knowledge that professionals bring value to the firm (Empson, 2001b). Consequently, professionals’ knowledge engagement with organisations and organisations’ attempts to manage this knowledge have been the subject of ongoing interest and debate. In the following section, I discuss and critique traditional conflict theories of professionals and organisations. I then review literature on organisational contexts, roles, identities and identity regulation of professionals and the notion of psychological contracts. This is in order to gain a better understanding of the professional-organisational relationship.
and the manner in which these factors influence the knowledge contributions of professionals and to highlight gaps in the literature that warrant more attention.

Conflict – cooperative theories of professionals and organisations

Traditional theories of the professional-organisational relationship have viewed this relationship as fundamentally conflictual (Ackroyd, 1996; Leicht and Fennell, 2001). The prevailing assumption within these approaches has been that there is an inherent conflict between organisations seeking to control professionals and professionals seeking autonomy and freedom at work. While the literature is vague on how this tension is manifested (Dawson, 1994), these theories nevertheless imply that as professionals increasingly seek careers within organisations, they will experience an inevitable tension between the demands of their professional ideals and ethics and the commercial demands and goals of the organisation.

The effects of such a conflict has been theorised differently by continuity theorists and transformation theorists. Researchers such as Ackroyd (1996) have argued that professionals have the capacity and the resources to adapt and absorb these threatening socio-economic changes while continuing to preserve their expert status and autonomy at work, i.e. through their adaptation strategies, they may continue to experience the privileges accorded to their profession. Ackroyd (1996) claims that such adaptation strategies include dominant professional groups within organisations claiming expertise to a broader body of knowledge while excluding “groups with a narrow identification” (pg. 612). Other adaptation strategies include choosing to work for organisations with structures that enable them to preserve their autonomy. The ‘professional organisation’ as conceptualised by Mintzberg (1989) best describes such an organisation where the professional maintains his/her authority and the manager’s role is that of a facilitator, without any financial or strategic control over the professional, but enabling the professional to achieve established goals (Dawson, 1994).

In contrast, transformation theorists have contended that organisational structures and managerial agendas necessitate the transformation of professionals, by reducing the status of the professional in the organisation to that of a wage labourer under the control of the
organisation (Derber, 1982, cited in Cohen et al., 2003). From this perspective, it is managers who now enjoy the traditional privileges associated with being a professional, i.e., autonomy, status and control over work (Leicht and Fennell, 2001). Transformation theorists therefore argue that the status of professionals in organisations will inevitably erode while continuity theorists have argued that professionals change and adapt to organisational conditions to preserve their status.

**Critique of conflict theories**

These two ‘conflict’ theories of the relationship between professionals and organisation remain ambivalent and often silent about the knowledge impact of managing professionals within firms. Continuity theory argues that professionals choose organisations that enable them to maintain autonomy and privileged access to knowledge, suggesting that professionals may withhold sharing knowledge in order to establish their elite status within organisations. However, in order to establish their status as knowledge workers with privileged access to an exclusive body of knowledge, they may need to exhibit such knowledge in the firm, including participating in knowledge exchanges. How professionals therefore manifest their knowledge status within organisations remains unclear in this literature (Dawson, 1994). Similarly, transformation theory suggests that professionals’ status within organisations will continue to erode and increasingly, their work will be controlled. How professionals exhibit their expertise in increasingly controlled work environments also remains unclear. If they submit to organisationally imposed norms of work, to what extent can they engage in knowledge work that is often tacit, complex and ambiguous (Alvesson, 1993). Traditional theories leave these questions unanswered.

These theories have been critiqued by researchers on a number of other grounds. They argue that professionals and organisations have a greater reciprocal relationship than these perspectives allow for and that such theories present for a static and rigid view of both professionals and organisations (Cohen et al., 2002; Dawson, 1994). Instead, critics have argued that the relationship between the professional and the organisation is more negotiated than conflictual (Dawson, 1994). Here organisations and professionals are seen as dynamic and evolving and relationships between professionals and managers established through discourse
and discussion. Further, contemporary professionals work in a wide variety of organisational settings and in a wide variety of roles within organisations (Alvesson, 1993) and consequently, it has been argued that issues of organisational context, roles and identity greatly influences the professional-manager relationship (Wallace, 1995), issues that traditional theories have neglected.

While transformation theorists have argued that the changes in the nature of work will result in the proletarianization of professionals, theorists such as Leicht and Fennell (2001) have suggested that managers in organisations are also engaged in professional projects that seek to establish them as the professionally dominant group within the organisation. They argue that “managers are oriented towards maximizing their own autonomy and that this explains their behavior more readily than control orientations, especially with regard to managing professional employees” (pg. 228). This argument is not far from Ackroyd’s (1996) contention that professionals seek to present dominant versions of themselves in comparison to other groups/occupations in organisations to claim the status of a professional. Professionals, as managers, therefore may seek to establish their own jurisdiction within the organisation and exclude other professionals from this elite status.

Therefore, as argued by Dent and Whitehead (2002), the lines between managers and professionals may be increasingly blurred suggesting that the dualistic view of professional versus management may need to be revisited. Further, traditional dualistic views of professional-organisational relationship leave unanswered important issues of knowledge sharing and participation in knowledge exchanges within firms. Consequently, studies focusing on the dynamic nature of this relationship may provide greater insights into understanding professionals at work. The notions of organisational context, identity work and regulation and psychological contracts are three factors that appear increasingly relevant for understanding both the dynamic professional-organisational relationship and the knowledge contributions of professionals in firms.
Organisational context

The diversity of organisational settings in which contemporary professionals work and the variety of roles and positions that they occupy in organisations (Wallace, 1995; Leicht and Fennell, 1997; Cohen et al., 2003) has served to focus attention on the manner in which professional-organisational relationships are constructed and the impact that these have on managerial agendas of controlling professionals at work. Cohen et al., (2003: 8) suggest that “social actors are situated, making sense of and responding to the context in which work is constructed and the opportunities and constraints presented”. Therefore work settings and organisational contexts influence how professionals make sense of and engage with organisations, including participating in knowledge exchanges. The variety and diversity of work settings in which contemporary professionals work is evident from the literature (Wallace, 1995; Alvesson, 2000; Cohen et al., 2003). They work in public and private sectors, in professional and non-professional firms, in large and small corporations across a number of professions and occupational categories. Such diverse work settings may influence differently the relationship and work place behaviours of professionals suggesting that the study of organisational contexts and its related dimensions may offer greater insights into the professional-organisational relationship.

Studies on organisational contexts suggest that different work settings influence the professionals’ notions of organisational commitment, autonomy, career opportunities and work satisfaction differently. Predominantly researchers have focused attention on professionals working in two kinds of work settings: professional and non-professional organisations. Professional organisations (Mintzberg, 1989) have been conceptualised as those where the majority of employees are professionals, where the content of their work is central to the mission and purpose of the organisation and the goals of the professional and organisation are largely consistent with each other (Wallace, 1995). Within professional organisations, managers play an enabling role, facilitating professionals to work with autonomy to achieve organisational goal. Other authors have referred to these organisations as autonomous professional organisations or professional bureaucracies (Hall, 1968; Scott, 1965; Sorensen and
Sorensen, 1974). Non-professional organisations are those where in professionals represent a minority of the employees, working in divisions or departments within the larger more bureaucratic organisation. Traditional conflict-cooperative theories have argued the professional-organisational conflict has emerged predominantly from professionals working in such non-professional organisations, where in professionals would inevitably face conflicts between professional identities, commitments and ethics of their profession and the commercial demands of the organisation seeking organisational commitment and loyalty.

While these issues suggest that organisational context influences the professional-organisational relationship, there is a paucity of empirical research examining this issue. One of the few studies to examine this notion of professional commitment in professional and non-professional firms was conducted by Wallace (1995). Her study compared structural dimensions of professional and non-professional organisations that were critical to performing professional work. Her study indicated that professionals’ commitment to organisations was greatly dependent on perceived opportunities for career advancement, collegiality and distribution of rewards within the firm and professionals’ in non-professional firms had significantly less commitment to the organisation in comparison to professionals working in professional organisations. Her study suggested that structural characteristics of the work settings in which professionals worked had less of an impact on their organisational commitment, in comparison to other factors such as collegiality and prospects of growth within the organisation.

Work on perceived work experiences of professionals in public and private sector organisations have also shown differing levels of professional work satisfaction. Research by Aryee (1992) on professionals in public and private sector companies in Singapore showed that private sector professionals perceived their professional expectations to be met more highly and were more satisfied with their jobs. In contrast, professionals in public sector firms had lower levels of professional work satisfaction because of the bureaucratic nature of controls within those organisations.
Implications of organisational context for understanding professional-organisational relationship and knowledge sharing amongst professionals

Wallace’s (1995) study suggests that levels of organisational and professional commitment are less dependent on levels of autonomy and control at work and are more dependent on the career opportunities, collegiality and co-worker support that professionals experience in the workplace. Professionals perceive professional organisations to provide them with greater opportunities for career growth within that organisation and consequently have higher levels of organisational commitment. Research on knowledge sharing suggests that higher levels of organisational commitment influence positively the willingness of employees to share knowledge for the benefit of the organisation (van den Hoof et al., 2004; Bock et al., 2005). Consequently, it can be implied that professionals working in professional firms may be more willing to participate in knowledge sharing. In contrast, professionals seek autonomy and control over work when they are in the minority in non-professional firms; perhaps to establish elite status and control over an exclusive domain of knowledge that may underpin their relative status compared to other employees in the organisation. This suggests that professionals in non-professional firms may hoard knowledge as a means of establishing their expert status within the organisation and their lower levels of organisational commitments may dissuade them from participating in knowledge exchanges for the greater benefit of the firm. Similarly, the private and public sector differences (Aryee, 1992), suggest that professionals may feel excessive controls as burdensome when they have little organisational commitment. Consequently, professionals’ perceptions of autonomy and control at the workplace may be subject to broader socio-cultural influences and the professional’s own career aspirations. Professionals seeking organisationally bounded careers, particularly within professional firms, may be more willing to be subjected to managerially inspired norms of control, and continue to participate in knowledge exchanges as they may see potential benefits in working with a professional body of colleagues and engaging in work that resonates with the norms of their profession, than professionals in boundaryless careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996).

However, this does not account for those professionals seeking boundaryless careers or those seeking careers that are self-managed (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe and Hall, 2005).
Because professionals in boundaryless careers are less focused on developing careers within a single organisation, their behaviours at work, including submitting to control and loss of autonomy at work and participation in knowledge sharing needs to be examined. This raises the following questions that the literature remains unclear about. In the case of professionals in boundaryless and contingent careers, in comparison with permanent employees, would their professional commitment be much stronger than their organisational commitment? How would the variety and diversity of work settings that they engage with influence their notions of professional and organisational commitments? Would they seek to maintain greater control over their autonomy and knowledge as means of establishing their status within the firm? Would they engage willingly with all organisational activities, including participation in knowledge exchanges, that may require them to relinquish their hold over “abstract, formalized knowledge” (Lyotard, 1984: 12)?

These are issues that have yet to be explored. While it can be inferred from the literature that organisational context may have an influence on the professional-organisational relationship, identity studies focusing on how organisations influence the construction of the identities of professionals also serve as suitable sites of inquiry to better understand the professional-organisational relationship.

**Professional identity, roles and identity regulation**

Identity refers loosely to the question of “who am I?” and consequently on “how should I act?” (Alvesson, Ashcraft, Thomas, 2008: 6). Social identity theories have suggested that individuals position themselves within social environments such as organisations, and perceive degrees of oneness or belongingness with that social group (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Wenger (1998) has suggested that identity construction is a negotiated process through participation in a social world and through a process of reification by self and others in that social world. Further, he argues that identity is influenced by membership in communities of practice that establish norms on how to act in relation to that community. It is this identity that enables individuals to
make sense of their environment and act in ways that enable them to be perceived as members of that social system or environment (Weick, 1995).

Therefore, researching identity helps us to understand how professionals perceive themselves in relation to a social system, such as an organisation, and how they seek to act in that environment. Professionals, as conceptualised in the literature, are seen as those carrying out highly critical organisational functions (Ibarra, 1999) and whose application of specialised knowledge provides value to the firm. Consequently, it is important to understand how professionals construct identities that impact on their relationship with organisations.

Interactionist perspectives on professionalism (Grey, 1996; Fournier, 1999) suggest that being seen as a professional in an organisation and the construction of their self-identities as professionals is influenced by the manner in which they conduct themselves at work, and the discourses within organisations that suggest that being a professional requires certain conduct and appearance at work. Fournier (1999) suggests that these discursive resources serve as disciplinary measures, particularly within new occupations, controlling appropriate work identities and conducts amongst its members. Interactionist perspectives suggest that how professionals construct their identity based on dominant professional discourses at work, as well as how professionals are regulated through that discourse both influence the professional-organisational relationship.

How professionals construct professional identities therefore is an important site for research. As Pratt et al., (2006) argue, while organisational identity is influenced greatly by where the individual works, in contrast professional identity is influenced by what one does. While literature on professionals and knowledge workers have suggested that professionals engage in expert work within organisations and seek to maintain their class status as privileged members of the organisation, the process through which professionals construct such identities has been left relatively unexplored (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). Further, the increasing influence of managerial agendas at work suggest that if professionals need to maintain their class status, they would need to “find new privileged knowledges and practices, that is if they are to retain acquire some degree of status and associated protection” (Dent and Whitehead, 2002: 3). How
professionals therefore engage with the changing nature of work in organisations, and participate in knowledge exchanges may also be influenced by the manner in which their professional identities are constructed.

Literature suggests that the roles professionals occupy in organisations and the manner in which their identities are regulated are areas of research that help understand the process of identity construction of professionals (Alvesson et al., 2009; Pratt et al., 2006). The following section examines these two factors and discusses their impact on the professional-organisational relationship and raises key questions on the issue of professionals and knowledge exchanges within firms.

**Roles**

Many authors have argued that organisational roles influence the construction of the professional identities of professionals and provide a greater understanding of the dynamic process of identity construction amongst professionals (Simpson and Carroll, 2009; Pratt et al., 2006, Ibarra, 1999). The manner in which roles influence the construction of professional identities can be examined through the notion of roles as intermediary objects influencing identity construction; through a study of the adaptation process of professionals in career/role transitions; and through studies examining how professionals adapt and discard temporary identities influenced by the roles that they occupy in organisations.

The conceptualisation of roles as intermediary objects (Simpson and Carroll, 2009) suggests that roles serve as reflective mirrors (Mead, cited in Tice and Wallace, 2003) for professionals to shape their identities. Simpson and Carroll (2009) have argued that roles facilitate the meaning making activities of individuals by helping in the translation of messages and feedback that flow back and forth between actors. Roles therefore constitute the in-between identities of individuals, shaping how they see themselves in relation to how others view the role and their expectations of it. Roles, therefore can be conceptualised as “a vehicle that mediates and negotiates the meanings constructed in relational interactions” (Simpson and Carroll, 2009: 34), and in this process, roles themselves are constantly subjected to the process of reconstruction, being shaped and influenced by the sense making process of individuals
occupying those roles. Roles therefore are not identities in themselves; they mediate the meaning making process through which identity is constructed.

Conceptualising roles as intermediaries in the process of identity construction suggests that investigating changes in identities of professionals as they change or transit through roles may provide evidence of how such identity construction occurs. Professionals in organisations not only need to acquire the skills required of that role, they also need to exhibit those social norms and rules that are accepted of that profession and that role (Covaleski et al., 1998; Alvesson, 2000). Not exhibiting or conveying those expected social images diminishes the effectiveness of the professional in that role and may even result in the professional losing the right to enact that role (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Thus impression management, or self presentation, the process by which individuals “attempt to control the impression that others have of them” (Leary and Kowalski, 1990: 34) is an important part of the process through which professionals acquire their identities, and this may require professionals to act the part or enact the role that is expected of them. Such enactment could involve professionals participating in knowledge exchanges as a means of establishing their expert status within the firm. Further, as members begin to identify themselves with particular professions, they develop images corresponding to the notion of being “a professional” within that occupation or profession. They shape their behaviour based on expected norms of behaviour within that profession (Grey, 1998). They dress in particular manners, their rhetoric reinforces their membership to the profession, and they attempt to construct professional images in particular ways that identify them as professionals.

Roberts (2005: 687) defines professional image as “the aggregate of key constituents’ [i.e. clients, bosses, colleagues, subordinates] perceptions of one’s competence and character”. To that extent, professional image is not self identity. Its location is external; a public persona that is based on how an individual believes the world sees him or her. Professionals desire particular professional images and use their understandings of their perceived image to modify, mould and reconstruct their professional image such that their perceived image and desired image grow closer. Roberts’ (2005) study indicated professional image construction to be a dynamic and recursive process of self analysis: of presenting an image, judging its impact on
viewers and modifying the image as more socio-cultural and organisational cues became visible. Her study also indicated that members of different professions may use different strategies to create a ‘professional’ image – because the definition of professional and competence varies across different professions. To a large extent then, being a professional also means being seen as a professional (Covaleski et al, 1998)

Studies focusing on career and role transitions draw attention to this issue of professionals’ enactment of roles leading to the construction of their professional identities and images. For example, Hall (1971; 1995) has suggested that such career and role transitions influence changes in the identities of the individual, through a process that he refers to as changes in the “subidentities” (1971:50, emphasis in original). He argued that these subidentities enabled individuals to align their identities with the roles and adapt to the perceived demands of the role. Career and role transitions therefore suggest that professionals modify who they are in relation to the role that they occupy. This is evident in Pratt et al.’s (2006) study of the identity construction process of physicians, where in physicians modified their notions of who they were in relation to what they did. Pratt et al. (2006) therefore suggested that professional identity changes occur when the professionals’ idea of who they are does not match the work that they do. Referring to this as “work-identity integrity assessments”, Pratt et al. (2006: 241), suggest that the magnitude of the work-identity integrity violations influence the type of identity changes that occur. When professionals perceive mild integrity violations, they make sense of the violation through a process of identity enrichment, seeking to gain a greater understanding of who they are and what they do. When violations are major, then professionals make sense of the violations either through identity patching or identity splinting based on the current strength of their professional identities. Those with a strong sense of professional identity embark on identity patching, seeking to enhance or patch up holes that they see in their notions of self in relation to what they do. When professionals do not have a strong current identity, then they adopt a previously known identity as a splint to protect their growing professional identity in order to reduce work-identity integrity violations.

Other research supports this notion of professionals engaged in a process of constantly modifying and changing their identities in relation to the roles that they occupy. Ibarra’s
(1999), study for example, suggests that professionals adapt to changes in roles through the construction of “provisional selves” (pg. 764), that serve as trials for professionals to try out possible, but not fully elaborated identities. She argued that this trialling of possible identities involves observing role models to identify potential identities, experimenting with provisional selves and evaluating the experiments through one’s own internal standards and external feedback.

Implications of roles for understanding professional-organisational relationship and knowledge sharing

These studies suggest that the roles that professionals occupy in organisations influence their professional identity and image construction and consequently influence their engagement with the organisation. Professionals are involved in the process of constantly evaluating their identities against the perceived expectations of the role they occupy in organisations and modify their identities based on the role. Roles with perceived expert status in organisations, or roles with legitimised authority may enable professionals to construct professional identities of themselves as experts by actively participating in knowledge exchanges within the firm and reflect that image within the organisation. As Pratt et al.’s (2006) study suggests, if professionals experience a major mismatch between notions of who they are and what they are expected to do, they change their notion of self to match what they do. If for instance, professionals find themselves working in roles with little autonomy and perceived elite status, they may perceive this as being subjected to excessive regulation and control by organisations and they may choose to adopt interim identities as professionals actively resisting managerial attempts at controlling their work. Such identities may influence them to withhold knowledge as a means of resisting organisational attempts at controlling their work and expertise. The constructions of these identities are therefore also influenced by the relationships that professionals build with other organisational members. If roles serve as intermediaries between actors, then how professionals construct their image of the self is influenced by their perception of how others view them. If managerial agendas of control and proletarianization of professionals are increasing, then managers in organisations may view professionals as subservient to managerially imposed controls; and roles that professionals occupy as neither
expert not deserving of autonomy or elitist status. This may influence professionals to withhold or hoard knowledge and not participate in knowledge exchanges within the firm.

Thus, understanding professional identity construction and its impact on the professional-organisational relationship also entails examining how professionals build relationships with authoritative figures (such as managers) and how these micro-relationships influence the construction of their professional identities. These dyadic relationships can be usefully examined through the notion of psychological contracts which will be discussed in later sections of this chapter. The literature also suggests that professionals today no longer work in socio-economic environments that are stable and offer opportunities for life long careers. Instead, researchers have argued that the contemporary professional’s career is marked by portfolio work (Fenwick, 2006) or boundaryless careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) where work settings are dynamic and changing and professionals themselves anxious about their status within organisations. Simpson and Carroll’s (2009) conceptualisation of roles as intermediaries suggests that professionals are involved in an ongoing process of identity construction where they construct identities in unstable settings to answer the question “who am I” and collectively “who are we as a professional group” (Alvesson et al., 2009). Studies on identity work and regulation focuses attention on these increasingly unstable work settings and the processes through which individuals and professionals construct identities to deal with the ambiguities and complexities of working in contemporary organisations.

Identity regulation

The literature on identity work focuses on examining specific processes and influences that shape identities in organisations (Alvesson, et al., 2009). Identity work takes as its starting point the idea that individuals are constantly involved in the shaping of their identities in organisations influenced by discursive forces within the organisation (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). This may create anxieties and self-doubt in professionals when they perceive a mismatch between the dominant organisational discourse and their own notion of self. In the process of struggling with various discourses, professionals may create several “identity positions” (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003: 1165) rather than a single stable identity.
Identity work focuses on organisational discourse, events, transitions, specific encounters, or everyday stress that professionals encounter in the workplace and the self-doubt and anxieties that these events trigger leading to a re-examination of professional identities (Alvesson et al., 2008). These discourses, including managerial agendas of control, may influence professionals to construct various identities that impact differently on their engagement with the organisation. Alvesson’s (1994) study of advertising professionals in a Swedish advertising agency, for example, suggests that discourses within the organisation regulate the professional identities of these professionals through the use of expressions, symbols and talk within the organisation that support the professionals’ claim of competence and professional expertise. Thus professionals may use particular types of language and rhetoric in order to construct and project identities that establish them as acting within the norms of their profession.

The discourses within contemporary organisations suggest that increasingly firms seek to regulate professionals and their work. The purpose of such regulation stems from an organisation’s aim to transform “autonomous professionals into business entrepreneurs by duplicating the organization within the individual…aimed at the fabrication of a “corporate clone”, a distinct entity that nevertheless maps the goals of the organization” (Covaleski et al., 1998: 294). Authors such as Alvesson and Willmott (2002) have argued that such organisational control over professionals have taken the form of identity regulation, i.e. controlling professionals through appeals to their identity. They argue that increasingly organisations seek to control professionals through the “self-positioning of employees within managerially inspired discourses about work and organization with which they may become more or less identified and committed” (pg. 620). Such identity regulation includes organisational activities and processes such as induction, training, career growth and opportunities for promotion that are tied into the professional strongly identifying with the organisation and its core characteristics.

Studies suggest that professionals react to such identity regulation in different ways. For example, Covaleski et al.’s, (1998) study of identity regulation in the big six accounting firms suggested that the professionals’ discourse of autonomy fuelled their resistance towards conformity of identity or the conversion into corporate clones. Hewlin (2003) suggests that
professionals may choose to present facades of conformity or false representations to present themselves as having embraced organisational values while not internalising those values. This could lead to professionals experiencing psychological and emotional distress from the conflict arising from their expressed and felt attitudes. Kosmala and Herrbach (2006) suggest that professionals both conform to organisational norms of conduct while simultaneously distancing themselves from the organisation’s values, suggesting that professionals engage with organisational regulatory and control mechanisms with a degree of cynicism, following expected norms of behaviour while distancing their professional selves from internalising those norms.

Implications of identity work and identity regulation on understanding the professional-organisational relationship and knowledge sharing amongst professionals

Identity work and identity regulation suggests that identity construction occurs discursively within organisations. The identities that professionals construct are temporary, open for modifications, often multiple and shifting reflecting the context in which they work, the roles they occupy in organisations and the control mechanisms to which they are subject. How professionals perceive the alignment of their professional identity with organisational identity influences the manner in which they engage with the organisation. For example, several studies have suggested that when professional identities are perceived as strong, professionals develop weaker ties with the organisation. Alvesson (2000: 1109) argued that a person who “sees herself primarily as a professional - broadly defined - develops weaker ties to the company as such” (pp. 1109). Such weak ties may negatively influence the professional’s willingness to share knowledge with the firm. Others such as Bamber and Iyer (2002) have argued that the greater the organisational identification, the lesser the organisational-professional conflict, suggesting that a match between professional and organisational identifications may positively influence professional’s to participate in knowledge exchanges within firms as they see such knowledge sharing as representative of the norms of their profession and of benefit to the organisation.
Literature on identity work and regulation suggests professionals are engaged in this dynamic process of identity construction in organisations marked by resistance to organisational controls (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006) which also influences the professional-organisational relationship. Such resistance may include professionals presenting a façade of compliance to organisational norms of behaviour but distancing themselves from internalising those practices including resistance to participating in knowledge exchanges within organisations. Therefore, identity regulation may negatively impact on the professional’s willingness to share knowledge within firms.

Notions of identity regulation and resistance imply that professionals in organisations are active participants in the process of constructing their identities and are involved with the process of being managed (McAuley, Duberley, Cohen, 2000; Grey, 1998; Alvesson and Robertson, 2006). Authors such as Alvesson et al, (2006) have suggested that professionals are involved in the process of managing themselves by constructing elite identities and proactively negotiating and constructing personal and social identities and professional images that seek to portray them as self-managers (Roberts, 2005) actively seeking to manage their own professional careers (Leicht, and Fennel, 1997). This suggests that professionals in their quest for self management may seek careers that are not bounded to organisations; they may look for alternate employment relationships with organisations, relationships that are transient and fleeting rather than constant and enduring, where their status as a professionals rather than an organisational member remains relatively untouched.

Professionals, in seeking such status, may also construct their identities based on the dominant discourse within their professions rather than dominant organisational discourses. As discussed earlier in this chapter, professionals choose to model their identities based on role models within their profession (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al.,2006) and the dominant professional discourses and rhetoric in and about their professions influences the construction of their identities (Alvesson, 2000). These professional discourses on how to act as a ‘professional’ may conflict with organisational discourses on how to act as an organisational ‘employee’ and consequently, whether professionals submit to professionally imposed norms of identity regulation or organisationally imposed norms of identity regulation, may depend more on the
nature of the employment relationship that the professional has with the organisation, including issues such as transient and contingent employment. How these issues influence their organisational commitment and extra-role behaviours, such as knowledge sharing, remain unclear.

Identity regulation as a form of control seeks to mediate the professional-organisational relationship over time; through a process of socialisation involving the professional in processes of induction and training, and exposing the professional to dominant organisational discourses and practices, such as mentoring. Professionals reproduce or transform their identities based on a constant process of interpreting such discourses within organisations. This raises the question of temporality; and the time that professionals spend in particular organisations and how this impacts on the construction of their professional identities and its influence on the professional-organisational relationship.

Temporality is of particular relevance to professionals in contingent employment where association with organisations can be of limited duration. However, the literature remains silent on a number of issues associated with professionals in contingent employment. Key research questions emerge from this. To what extent does identity regulation impact on the construction of the professional identities of contract professionals? Do such professionals construct identities that are constantly modified influenced by the organisational contexts in which they work? Or do they construct dominant professional identities that influence the manner in which they interact with organisations? Further, to what extent do such professionals submit to organisationally imposed identities? Would they submit to such identity regulation, but do so with a cynicism and detachment that allows them to portray a level of conformance while internally distancing themselves from committing to the organisation? Would such behaviours include knowledge hoarding? These questions need exploring.

Earlier in this chapter, I had suggested that examining how professionals build relationships with authoritative figures (such as managers) and exploring the professional-managerial relationship were necessary to obtain a greater understanding of the professional-organisational relationship. I had suggested that these dyadic relationships could be usefully examined
through the notion of psychological contracts between professionals and managers. Identity work and regulation, within the macro context of managerially dominant discourses also suggest that examining the professional-managerial relationship is important for understanding the professional-organisational relationship in two competing ways.

First, Dent and Whitehead’s (2002) contention that professionals are increasingly expected to be managers in organisations, controlling and managing other professionals at work, suggests that contemporary managers may themselves be members of a profession. Such professionals may face a conflict between professional discourses that urge them to be representative of their profession and organisational discourses that encourage them to be representative of their status as organisational agents (Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2007) meant to pursue the interests of the organisation in employment relationships with other employees. These professionals may therefore be confronted with conflicting professional and managerial identities (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). How they react to such conflicts, may greatly influence their relationships with other professionals in the firm. If, as Hewlin (2003) argues, they fail to bring about a match between the expressed values of the organisation and their own professional values, professionals as managers, may experience psychological and emotional distress causing them to distance themselves from the organisation or be involved in a constant struggle to construct their identities and to “strive for comfort, meaning and integration and some correspondence between a self-definition and work situation” (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003: 1118). While struggling for meaning themselves, how such managers would be able to present dominant organisational discourses to other professionals within the organisation and to what extent they would be able to succeed in regulating the identities of other professionals in the organisation remain unclear.

Alternately, as Leicht and Fennell (2001) suggest, managers may themselves be involved in the process of representing themselves as professionals in organisations, seeking to establish themselves as “organisational icons” (Dent and Whitehead, 2002: 1): that privileged group of professionals who have the organisations best interest at heart. Here, managers may seek to regulate the identities of other professional groups through participating in discourses that reinforce the managers’ own status as privileged within the organisation. But in trying to
protect their status they may subordinate “employee interests to their own interests” (Hallier and James, 1997: 726). This suggests that the managers’ self-interest may influence how they manage their relationship with other professionals and how psychological contracts between managers and professionals are constructed. Imbalanced psychological contracts, with one party benefiting at the cost of the other, may have very negative consequences for the professional-organisational relationship and on the professional’s commitment to the organisation. Consequently, understanding the notion of psychological contracts and their influence on the professional-managerial relationship (Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2007) are important for developing a greater understanding of the professional-organisational relationship.

**Psychological contracts**

Having its roots in social exchange theory, psychological contracts are framed by the notion that social relationships are underpinned by reciprocal and often unspecified obligations and unequal power resources (Blau, 1964; Argyris, 1960; Cullinane and Dundon, 2006). Psychological contracts have been conceptualised as the implicit expectations and perceptions that employees and employers have of what they bring into the exchange and what they expect in return from the other party. In that sense, the psychological contract, in contrast to the legal contract, is established in the minds of the two parties – it is unwritten and implicit, but moulds and shapes how employees perceive their workplace and how employers (in particular managers) perceive employees at work. At its core is “perception of mutuality” (Rousseau, 1998: 666, emphasis in original) what one party expects in return for some deliverables. The concept of psychological contracts acknowledge that the relationship between members of an organisation goes beyond the formal employment contract – that social relationships, interactions and expectations influence the relationship between the parties (Anderson and Schalk, 1998; Cullinane et al, 2006). It recognises that there are two parties involved in the exchange process that often shapes the employment process. By focusing attention on psychological contracts, nuances of the employment relationship, often hidden in conflict-cooperative theories may be more readily visible and offer greater understandings of the professional-organisational relationship.
Rousseau (2004) suggests that the dynamics of psychological contracts are shaped by six defining features. First, psychological contracts are voluntarily entered into and therefore motivate people to fulfil or honour those commitments, i.e. commitments made voluntarily tend to be honoured. Second, the psychological contract reflects an individual’s subjective understanding of the commitments made with others, and individuals act on their understandings of mutuality. Third, psychological contracts are always work in progress, i.e. with the exception of very short term contracts, they are always incomplete and over time become more elaborate and complex. Fourth, multiple sources of information shape the individual’s psychological contract with employers and when conflicting information is obtained through multiple sources, the strength of the psychological contract erodes. Fifth, failure by one party to honour the commitments made in the psychological contracts entails “losses” (Rousseau, 2004: 121) that must be managed by both parties. Sixth, the psychological contract serves as a mental model for constructing enduring employment relationships. How these features influence the professional-managerial relationship is discussed in the next section.

Rousseau (2004) suggests that although psychological contracts share common features, they can take different forms depending on how employees and employers behave towards each other. Shields (200: 54) provides a summary of four different kinds of psychological contracts that can be constructed: “transactional”, “transitional”, “relational” and “balanced” contracts differing in terms of the desired duration of the employment and the expected performance of employees during that period. Figure 2 summarises the differences between the four kinds of contracts.
Transaction and transitional contracts have been conceptualised as contracts that focus on short-term exchanges where there is no implied assumption or promise of long-term employment by the organisation and where rewards are predominantly economic, financial and clearly linked to employee performance. Authors such as Alvesson (2000: 1111) have referred to such rewards as a way of obtaining loyalty as “instrumental loyalty”. Relational and balanced contracts, in contrast, focus on long-term exchanges. Relational contracts offer the promise of long term growth, learning and employment for employees in exchange for employee loyalty and commitment. Alvesson (2000: 1111) refers to employee loyalty obtained in this manner as “identification-based” i.e. loyalty that is gained by means of shared social bonds, perceived similarities and positive emotions between the employee and the organisation. Balanced contracts are hybrids of both relational and transactional contracts, which focus and emphasises both individual and group contribution and performance both in short-term as well as long-term exchanges.
Implications of psychological contracts for understanding the professional-organisational relationship and knowledge sharing

The notion of psychological contracts suggests that professionals in organisations implicitly construct assumptions about their relationship with the organisation through information obtained from a wide variety of sources, including their immediate managers. While these implicit assumptions of mutual responsibilities shape their behaviour at work, they are also constantly evolving and changing during the course of the professional-organisational relationship. Professionals may react to perceived breaches in these psychological contracts, by reconstructing their psychological contracts with the organisation and through a reassessment of their relationship with the organisation.

Identity work and regulation suggest that professionals are involved in a dynamic process of identity construction in organisations, influenced by various factors including dominant organisational discourses about “who they are” and “how they should behave” (Alvesson et al., 2008). But professionals are also influenced by dominant professional discourses of what it is to be a professional. The framework of psychological contracts suggests that professionals’ implicit assumptions of who they are and what they need to do at work may contrast with organisational norms of commitments and obligations and what it is to be a professional within firms. For example, Gunz and Gunz (2007) studied in-house lawyers of large corporations faced with ethical choices of acting as their ‘profession’ would dictate or acting as ‘employees’ for the benefit of the organisation at the cost of their professional ethics. Their study suggested that lawyers, at least partially, abandoned their professional ethical standards when faced with such ethical dilemmas. This suggests that organisational discourses of what it means to be an ‘employee’ of the firm may override professional discourses about what it means to be a professional. While this may account for the lawyers’ unethical behaviours in these corporations, it can also be argued that professionals will not always discard professional ethical norms of behaviour in deference to organisational demands. Consequently, professionals may view such implicit organisational assumptions as a breach of the psychological contract and react to such breaches by renegotiating their identities as
organisational members and constructing stronger professional identities and resisting organisational attempts at controlling their behaviours.

Therefore strength of professional and organisational identities may influence the construction of psychological contracts and reactions to perceived breaches of the contact. For instance, research by Heckman, Bigley, Steensma, Hereford, (2009) suggests that when professional identification was much higher compared to organisational identification, professionals reacted to perceived breaches of the psychological contract with lower levels of work performances. In contrast to this, when organisational identification was stronger than professional identification, professionals reacted to such breaches by improving work performance in order to win back approval and full-status membership of the work group they were associated with. This once again suggests that issues of collegiality and relationships between professionals and other employees in the organisation (Wallace, 1995) influence the manner in which they construct and react to breaches of the psychological contract. Professionals with strong professional identities, for example, may expect to be treated in particular ways, rewarded in a particular manner, expect membership of certain elite groups within the organisation, and seek certain levels of autonomy at work (Alvesson, 2000; Starbuck, 1992). They may expect to be involved in knowledge work within the organisation and to be able to use their expertise at work as well as exercise discretionary decision making powers. Managerial agendas of control that limit professionals’ autonomy, access to, and control over knowledge work could result in perceived breaches of their psychological contracts. As Heckman et al (2009) suggest, they may react to such breaches with poor work performance including knowledge hoarding, refusing to participate in knowledge exchanges or physically distancing themselves from the organisation.

Rousseau (2004) suggests that psychological contracts develop and change over time. Consequently, how professionals in contingent employment construct psychological contracts and react to perceived breaches of the contract need attention. Van Dyne and Ang’s (1998) study of professional contingent workers in Singapore suggested that contingent workers withheld organisational citizenship behaviours when they did not feel committed to the organisation or when they did not have positive perceptions about their psychological
contracts. The authors suggest that the affective commitment of such contingent workers may have been lower for two reasons: either they perceived a sense of inequality because organisations fail to invest in their growth and development or alternately organisational work may be less central to those choosing contingent employment. McLean Parks, Kidder and Gallagher (1998) suggest that how contingent employees’ view their psychological contract may be influenced by their perceptions of what obligations and expectations are mutually constructed. Traditional notions of obligations on the part of the employer offering career growth, training and advancement (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994) may not apply to contingent professionals. While there is a scarcity of research examining notions of psychological contract and contingent work, it can be implied that such professionals may expect other obligations on the part of the employer such as autonomy, status or “meaningful work” (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003: 309) within organisations, i.e. seek work that reflects the identity of the individual.

The studies discussed above focus predominantly on employee reactions to perceived breaches of the psychological contract. While these serve as useful resources to understand how professionals may react to perceived managerial breaches of the contract, critical researchers have argued that psychological contracts provide insufficient focus on employer reactions to perceived breaches of the contract by employees (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006). These authors argue that the mutuality emphasised in the psychological contract, in reality, is submerged within managerial agendas of control between parties with unequal power in the employment relationship. Further, employees in organisations constantly receive mixed messages, with managers rarely delivering consistent messages about expectations and obligations. As Rousseau (2004) suggests, multiple and conflicting sources of information erodes the strength of the psychological contract. A case in point is the study by Hallier and James (1997) of the enactment of psychological contracts between line managers and employees in an air traffic service organisation during a period of organisational change. The authors reported that managers constantly changed their expectations of what they demanded from employees in response to the pressures of change within the organisation. This suggests therefore, that while employees may construct implicit assumptions about their expectations from organisations, management may be more inclined to conceptualise the relationship as “owning the
employees' time and effort” (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006: 120) rather than as perceived reciprocity and mutual obligations.

These findings suggest that organisations may be involved in the process of reconstructing psychological contracts from one type into another. For example, they may seek more transactional and transitional contracts with professionals while professionals themselves may seek more balanced and relational contracts with organisations. How professionals react to shifts in the contract may potentially influence their knowledge contributions to the firm. Professionals unhappy with changes in the contract may choose to hoard knowledge or refuse to participate in knowledge sharing within organisations. Understanding the nuances of psychological contracts may therefore be useful in understanding knowledge sharing behaviours of professionals in organisations.

As Hiltrop (1995) argues, traditional notions of mutuality of obligations and reciprocity no longer exist in a socio-economic environment where self-reliance, flexibility and adaptability are seen as characteristics of corporate employment. Instead, she suggests, that the new psychological contracts are situational, based on the assumption that each of the parties are much less dependent on each other for growth and survival. Contemporary organisations cannot provide the job security, career and intellectual growth that traditional contracts offered. In its place are more pragmatic situational contracts where employees are expected to manage their own training and obtain skills that make them employable in any part of the organisation, accept roles that may be ambiguously defined and expect redundancies as part of the new work environment. In these circumstances, Hiltrop (1995: 290) argues the only way for organisations to shape perceived expectations is to make work challenging and interesting, involve employees in meaningful work and to switch incentives from “careers, status and promotion to personal reputation, teamwork and challenging assignments”.

These evolving contracts have implications for professionals. The traditional notions of professionals in organisations submitting to managerial agendas of control in exchange for the benefits of being valued employees no longer exist. Increasingly organisations expect professionals to be self-managers responsible for the development of their skills and expertise.
Evidence also suggests that professionals themselves are increasingly seeking boundaryless careers and are self-dependent for the acquisition of skills and expertise that provides them with “employability security” (Hiltrop, 1995: 290). In such instances, how professionals engage with organisations and construct psychological contracts needs examining, and this is discussed in the next chapter.

**Summary and research directions**

From the traditional sociological focus on describing the attributes of a profession, debate on professions and professionals has shifted to understanding professionals at work, however contentious the term “professional” may be. In particular, organisational focus on “performance”, globalisation and corporate downsizing has resulted in most firms today relying on the application of expert knowledge at work, the traditional domain of the professional. The issue central to organisations therefore is expert, professional knowledge as a strategic resource and the ways in which that resource can be tapped and used. In this regard, as Crompton (1990: 147) argues, the “concept of a profession does not describe a generic occupational type, but rather, a mode of regulation of the exchange of expert labour which has powerful universalist overtones”. Understanding this “exchange of expert labour” is necessary if organisations seek to utilise professionals as knowledge resources.

The chapter focused on three strands of research that have the potential to add to current understandings of the professional-organisational relationship: study of organisational context, roles and identity regulation and psychological contracts. These literatures suggest that the conflictive-cooperative characterisation of the professional-organisational relationship camouflages the dynamic and active participation of professionals in the professional-organisational relationship and the changing nature of professional work itself. Dynamic changes in the nature and organisation of work have led to the increasing use of professionals as contractors. Professionals themselves have also increasingly sought non-standard working arrangements and newer forms of careers as a means of engaging in active identity and self-management at work, shaping their careers and professional images. Understanding such non-
standard work arrangements between professionals and organisations and the impact that such work arrangements have on the exchange of expert labour within organisations are areas of research that have not yet been explored in depth and requires empirical investigation and focus. The next chapter focuses on professionals as contractors and illustrates why the study of professionals in non-standard employment deserves greater research attention and focus.
CHAPTER FOUR
PROFESSIONALS WORKING AS CONTRACTORS

Introduction

Understanding professionals in contingent employment, particularly professionals in contractual roles, and the impact that such work relationships have on the professional-organisational relationship is the focus of this chapter. The chapter begins by documenting the increasing use of professionals as contractors and suggests that both organisations and professionals seek such non-standard work arrangements for specific benefits and purposes. The chapter then focuses attention on understanding contract professionals by examining the notions of boundaryless and protean careers and suggests that such professionals can be conceptualised as being involved in knowledge building exercises throughout their careers. Focusing on the manner in which contract professionals engage with organisations, the chapter revisits three factors previously identified as impacting the professional-organisational relationship: the organisational context; roles, professional identity and identity regulation of professionals; and psychological contracts and examines the probable impact of these three factors on the construction of the contract professional-organisational relationship. The chapter highlights the paucity of research examining the nature of this relationship and articulates key research questions that need to be examined to develop a greater understanding of the knowledge sharing motivations of such professionals.

The rise of contingent employment

During the last several decades, organisations have increasingly made use of skilled contingent workers, in a variety of industries and roles, replacing skilled permanent employees with temporary and independent contractors. These market-mediated work arrangements (Abraham and Taylor, 1996) and the growing prevalence of contractors in the workplace (Pfeffer and
Baron, 1998) signal a shift in employment relations from the hiring of full time, salaried individuals having implicit job security, fringe benefits, paid leave and opportunities for career growth and advancement to the hiring of individuals on a temporary basis, with no implicit or explicit agreements for ongoing employment (Barker and Christensen, 1998). These contingent workers have been variously referred to as outsourced employees (Larson, 1996), technical contractors (Barley and Kunda, 2004), contractors (Bidwell and Briscoe, 2009), as workers with “boundaryless careers” (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), casual and fixed-term employees (Buchanan, 2004), and self-employed contractors (Waite and Will, 2001). Often the terms casual, contractor, part-timer and temporary have been used interchangeably indicating a category of workers with limited tenure and membership in organisations. However, the contingent workforce can be viewed as including some combination and subsets of temporary workers, casuals, independent contractors, dependent contractors, contract company workers, temporary workers and workers on call.

Because the term “contingent” encompasses a wide variety of employment relationships, it is necessary to first define what the term “contractor” refers to within the context of this study. Bidwell and Briscoe (2009: 1149) define contractors as “workers who provide services directly to a client firm on an explicitly short-term basis and without entering into a formal employment relationship with that firm”. This thesis adopts this definition of contractors, as it includes both independent contractors, as well as temporary agency workers employed by a third party staffing agency who are engaged explicitly on a short-term basis by organisations and who often lack strong relationships with the staffing agencies (Bidwell et al., 2009). This definition of contractors suggests that firms hire either independent contractors or temporary agency workers based on the legal hiring policies of the firm rather than any substantive differences in the nature of the employment relationship between temporary workers and independent contractors (Barley and Kundra, 2004; Bidwell et al., 2009).

The increasing use of contractors in the labour markets in the US, UK and Australia is confirmed by statistical data, although the actual percentage of the labour force employed as contractors is hard to establish. However, the increasing casualisation of the Australian workforce and the diversity of contractual employment is unambiguous (Campbell and
Burgess, 2001, Campbell, 2004). Both industry surveys as well as data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) confirm the increasing casualisation of the Australian workforce. The ABS survey (2008) indicates that as of November 2008, ten percent of the labour force, or one in ten employed people worked as independent contractors either in their main or second jobs. In total, there were an estimated 967,100 people who worked as independent contractors in their main job, and an additional 134,100 people who worked as independent contractors in their second job. In addition to this, the ABS (2008) survey indicates that a further 576,700 people or about five percent of employed people found jobs through labour hire/placement agencies of which 131,400 were paid by that labour hire firm/employment agency. The survey determined that out of approximately 10.7 million employed people, aged 15 years and over, around four million were employees without paid leave entitlements, or were independent contractors or were business owners and operators and a further 246,000 people with leave benefits were on a fixed-term contract with their employing organisation. Industry reports (Hudson, 2005) suggests that the contractor market represents about 28 percent of the labour force and growing at a rate of almost 20 percent per annum. If the current rates of growth continue, by 2015 a majority of the workforce in Australia could be contractors/casuals.

Reasons for the rise of contingent employment

The rise in contingent employment can be studied from the perspective of firms hiring contractors and from the perspective of workers in such forms of employment. From the perspective of organisations, researchers have identified a range of reasons for firms’ to engage contractors. These include: the need for organisational flexibility, to adapt quickly to changes in environment, globalisation and competitive pressures, shorter product cycles; the need to respond to changing market demands and sharemarket concerns; and the need to manage rising labour and manufacturing costs (Kalleberg, 2001; Abraham and Taylor, 2001; Magnum, Mayall and Nelson, 1985). To justify the hiring of professionals as contractors, organisations have often chosen to emphasise the costs and benefits of hiring such contractors. However, research generally suggests that organisations see benefits in hiring contractors in mainly four ways: the need to reduce labour costs and operate more cost effectively; the need for flexibility within the organisation particularly during times of economic uncertainty; the need for organisations to acquire specialised knowledge and skills; and supply-side factor trends such as
the increased availability of skilled workers as contractors (Barley et al., 2004; Lautsch, 2002; Masters and Miles, 2002; Kalleberg, 2001; Abraham et al., 1996; Davis-Blake and Uzzi, 1993). Added to this, authors such as Allan and Seinko (1997) also suggest that organisations use contractors as a means of trialling them; judging their capabilities and expertise to assess if they can occupy key roles within the organisation. These findings suggest that the reasons that organisations choose to hire contractors may have an impact on the nature of the relationship developed between contractor and organisations (Lautsch, 2002). For example, firms hiring contractors as a means of reducing costs may assign them non-critical roles or seek to limit their interactions with other team members, while firms hiring contractors for their expertise may assign them critical roles enabling greater interactions with other team members. Hence understanding why firms hire contractors may be a key variable shaping the contract professional-organisational relationship.

Commentators who have chosen to study contracting from the perspective of contractors have viewed contingent work as either inherently beneficial and productive for both workers as well as the organisation or have seen it as beneficial to firms but exploitative of workers; a social problem that needs addressing. Critics of contingent labour have argued that it offers little job security, benefits and on-the-job training, undermines the notion of stable employment and suppresses the workers’ voice in the workplace (Lautsch, 2002; Spalter-Roth and Hartman, 1998). They see it as representative of a secondary labour market characterised by less stable employment, poor pay, and lack of social benefits (Kalleberg, Reskin, Hudson, 2000), that is contributing to broader social problems that warrant greater regulation. Those who have considered contingent work to be beneficial to workers, the proponents of “free agency” (Pink, 2002) have argued that it provides individuals freedom of choice in determining their working lives, allows them work-life balance, and the ability to manage and market themselves in a job market that rewards them for their skills, freeing them from the constraints of organisational structures, systems and politics, so they can be “free agents” (Pink, 2002; McGovern and Russll, 2001; Reinhold, 2001; Van Dyne and Ang, 1998; Bridges, 1994). It can also be argued that the increasing numbers of professionals and knowledge workers seeking contracting careers is a manifestation of what Martin and Moldoveanu (2003: 36) term the “knowledge worker-led revolution in business”. As organisations increasing rely on knowledge to produce
wealth, the sources of such knowledge assets, the professionals, managers and knowledge workers, have become more valuable to organisations. This has enabled such knowledge workers to seek a greater share of the company’s profits, and they have sought out employment arrangements that allow them intellectual freedom at work and premium rates of pay. For example, Kalleberg et al’s (2000) study on non-standard work arrangement, identified that independent contractors did indeed obtain rates of pay that were higher than those of regular workers in full time employment.

The contrast between the two perspectives is striking because they focus almost exclusively on different kinds of contingent employees. The institutional employment relations scholars focus on contractors who are often low skilled and poorly educated seeking such contingent work in order to gain entry into the employment market. On the other hand, proponents of free agency tend to focus on highly-skilled and technically competent professionals, viewing them from an agency perspective that endorses the view that skilled professionals possess the autonomy to shape their careers as they so choose.

However, Lautsch (2002: 24) argues that commentators on both ends of this spectrum have tended to view contractual work and contingent employment as a “monolithic phenomenon” with universal characteristics that determine the effects of such contractual work. Instead, she argues that contractual work can have diverse outcomes and impacts depending on the characteristics of workers and their motivations to contract. Further, the organisational and occupational settings in which they work, the range of roles that they occupy and the willingness and desire of the contractor to voluntarily seek a career in contracting, all impact on how contractors interact with organisations. (Lapalme, Stamper, Simard and Tremblay, 2009; George and Chattopadhyay, 2005; Barley et al., 2004; Lautsch, 2002; Van Dyne et al, 1998; Matusik et al, 1998; Allan and Sienko, 1997; Pearce, 1993 ). Contractors work within a variety of work arrangements that are difficult to categorise precisely, because of the ever increasing variety in types of work relationships and the numerous variations or modifications of work arrangements that occur within each category. Contractors, for example, could be agency workers hired out to clients, fixed-term employees hired directly by the organisation wanting to fill short term roles, independent contractors and consultants running their own
enterprises or sub-contractors employed directly by specialist agencies, or combinations of these adding to the complexity of understanding professional contractual work.

**Professionals as contractors**

Because the literature has often used the terms contingent and contractors interchangeably (Barley et al., 2004; Bidwell, 2009; Gallagher and McLean Parks, 2001) establishing the percentage of technical or *skilled professionals* working as contractors is difficult. However, studies suggest that about 14 percent of all professionals in the United States worked through staffing agencies, or were independent contractors (Spalter-Roth et al., 1997). Studies from the US also suggest that such contract professionals may account for up to 30 percent of the technical workforce in places such as Silicon Valley (Benner, 1996 cited in Barley and Kunda, 2004). Data projections at the turn of the century forecasted that employment in professional occupations and service related occupations would grow the fastest in the period between 2000 and 2010 and would add the most jobs to the US economy, about half of all the jobs generated (Hecker, 2001).

Around the same time in Australia, around 48 percent of the temporary workforce was involved in white collar occupations, and over 80 percent of all temporary workers worked within the services industry (OECD, June 2002). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2008) annual survey of the forms of employment in Australia indicates 19 percent of male independent contractors and 32 percent of women independent contractors work under the category of professionals. In addition to this, over one million people are classed as business operators, of which managers and professionals accounted for 65 percent of male business operators and 31 percent of women business operators (ABS, 2008). Amongst those operating under the category of other business operators, 46 percent of men worked under the category of managers as compared to 31 percent of women; and about 19 percent of men and 15 percent of women worked under the category of professionals. Amongst the five percent of the labour force that obtained jobs through labour hire firms, professional occupational groups accounted for 20 percent of men and 23 percent of women. These statistics imply that understanding the
organisational implications of hiring professionals as contractors and how they engage with them are important issues for consideration.

A starting point for understanding how contract professionals engage with organisations is through a study of the literature on newer forms of employment. Research on career change provides insights into why professionals seek alternate careers and the impact that such careers may have on their professional identities and the psychological contracts that they construct.

As suggested in the previous chapter, studying organisational contexts, professional identities, roles and psychological contracts may add to current understanding of the professional-organisational relationship. This section first examines the notion of professionals in alternate careers and conceptualises contract professionals as engaging in knowledge-building exercises across a variety of organisational contexts. The next section discusses the organisational context, identities, roles and psychological contracts of the contract professional and highlights gaps in the literature that needs addressing.

**Boundaryless and protean careers**

Many researchers have argued that the meaning of ‘careers’ has changed substantially over the last two decades. Although ‘career’ has always been difficult to clearly define, a traditional ‘career’ was often implicitly understood as one where individuals, particularly knowledge workers and professionals, gained advancement within an organisational hierarchy, moving from humble beginnings to more senior positions within the organisation or occupation – the individual’s career often being bound to the organisation (Arnold and Jackson, 1997; Cohen and Mallon, 1999). However, during the early 1990s, commentators increasingly criticised such careers for stifling employee creativity at work and increasing employee dependence on organisations (Waterman, Waterman and Collard, 1994) and predicted the demise of such traditional careers and emergence of new career forms, in particular boundaryless and protean careers.

The boundaryless and protean career concepts offer interesting insights for the study of professionals in contingent employment. The concept of the *boundaryless* career as opposed to the *bounded* organisational career was first described by Arthur and Rousseau (1996) and
implied a career not dependent on a single organisation with stable and secure vertical promotion along a defined occupational path. Instead boundaryless careers “are the opposite of “organizational careers” (1996: 5) and include a range of “possible career forms which defy traditional employment assumptions” (1996: 3). The authors defined career as “the unfolding sequence of a person’s work experiences over time” (1996: 4). In contrast to the traditional structural view of career, Arthur and Rousseau’s notion of career lies with the individual and is temporal – it is the individual’s journey over time. The popular concept of the boundaryless careers thus indicates a movement away from organisational boundaries, where individuals seek out a variety of tasks, in a variety of settings, with the intention of self-managing their careers and avoiding dependence on a single organisation.

Arthur and Rousseau’s (1996) concept of the boundaryless career includes two dimensions – physical mobility and psychological mobility- and provides a framework for understanding why professionals choose contracting careers. They conceptualised six different meanings of the boundaryless career. These include: a movement across boundaries separating employers; careers that break with traditional notions of employment and career growth based on organisational hierarchy and advancement; careers that often seek out and receive validation from outside the employer (including enhanced marketability); career support obtained from external networks and information; accepting and/or rejecting career opportunities influenced by personal-family commitments; and finally the subjective interpretations of the individual who may see their career as boundaryless irrespective of the structural constraints placed on them (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Brisco and Hall, 2006; Sullivan and Arthur, 2006). The first two factors emphasise the physical mobility of the individual while the four other factors represent the psychological mobility associated with boundaryless careers. The notion of the boundaryless career encapsulates some of the arguments that commentators have made with regard to the reasons professionals choose to contract. This career model is one where the individual chooses the sort of roles they undertake and the kinds of colleagues with whom they work as well as the length of time they work for a particular organisation. They consciously manage the exchange value of their skills and knowledge, valuing the temporal and intellectual freedom they perceive contracting allows. Others such as Fenwick (2006:6) have referred to such boundaryless careers as “portfolio careers”, a form of self employment where in
individuals create and offer flexible packages or portfolios of their skills, knowledge and expertise to organisations and individuals.

The protean career, while similar to the concept of the boundaryless career, has an internal focus – a career that is shaped and driven by the individual guided by their own sets of values and subjective perspectives. Hall and Moss (1998: 25) conceptualise the protean career as “a process which the person, not the organization is managing”. Here the individual’s search for self-fulfilment influenced by their life experiences, including education and work experiences, drive them towards shaping careers that are defined by internal, psychological successes and individually set goals. The protean career is thus defined by the individual’s subjective perspective of success, rather than external trappings of success such as greater pay, higher rank or power. The protean career is both values-driven as well as self-directed in that the individual adapts to new learnings in order to shape and self manage their career.

Although similar in concept to the boundaryless career, the protean career notion focuses on the individual’s mind-set rather than the mobility (physical and psychological) emphasised by the boundaryless career; it reflects a career shaped on one’s own self beliefs and personal values. As theorised by Brisco and Hall (2006) the boundaryless career emphasises opportunity, that of the individual’s desire to be mobile, while the protean career emphasises agency, that of the individual shaping their career based on their own subjective values and internal success measures.

**Implications of boundaryless and protean careers**

Boundaryless and protean careers emphasise individual self management, an awareness that individuals show in rejecting traditional careers and shaping new ones. They suggest that individuals seek opportunities to utilise skills and expertise in “contracts” that allow them temporal and intellectual freedom. Individuals understand and value these skills and expertise and are able to network and seek information outside of the boundaries of organisations enabling them to market these skills to a variety of organisations and individuals. In this sense, the contractors’ notion of charging ‘fees’, not wages for work rendered, reflects the very roots
of professional work – as lawyers and doctors did practicing their skills in a variety of contexts and settings, and ‘trading’ on their skills and expertise, they are thus “free agents” (Pink, 2002).

The notion of self-management that these newer career forms emphasise has implications for managing professionals in the changing macroeconomic context of work and managerial agendas of control (Dent and Whitehead, 2002). The notion of self management implies that professionals seeking such careers are implicitly dependent on themselves for their growth and development. This suggests that the expertise, skills and formal body of knowledge that they possess are commodities of exchange that they offer to organisations for commercial gain. Consequently the issue of whether contract professionals would submit to managerial agendas of control and access to their body of knowledge or retain “exclusive access to” (Lyotard, 1984:12) that body of knowledge become issues for consideration. Why and how such professionals share their knowledge and expertise has not been explored in the literature to date and is a key area of research within organisational studies. Further, this self-management also suggests that they obtain those skills and expertise that establish them as valued members of their profession, conforming to professional norms of expertise. This has implications for the construction of their professional identities and how this influences their engagement with organisations. The professional identities of contract professionals are examined later in this chapter.

Critics of the notion of boundaryless careers have argued that the realities of contracting life contrast with the freedom and emancipation that the discourse on alternate careers portrays. Moreover, Sommerlund and Boutaiba (2007) argue that often boundaryless careers do have borders; that individuals involved in such careers do not necessarily break free from the shackles of organisational employment, but instead engage in a process of reconstructing these boundaries. Professionals in such careers reconstruct boundaries that often blur the boundaries between old and newer forms of employment. For example, they negotiate long term contracts with organisations, often seeking to re-establish themselves and “re-embed themselves within organisational worlds” (Cohen et al, 1999:346). They accept jobs that are non-critical roles and often seek to re-establish the kinds of relationships that they had built as permanent members of organisations. These arguments suggest that the literature on boundaryless careers
portraying professionals in such careers as being in control of their careers and self-managing it may need to be re-examined. Professionals may simply seek to manage the protean and boundaryless careers as best as they can within the dynamics of the environment in which they operate. It also suggests that if professionals in boundaryless careers seek to re-establish themselves within organisations, then they may exhibit extra-role behaviours such as knowledge sharing as a means of establishing themselves within organisations. How professionals therefore manage their protean and boundaryless careers may be greatly influenced by the macro socio-economic and organisational environments in which they operate.

Research on professionals in alternate careers suggests that they operate in an environment that is in a state of flux (Bidwell, 2009; Sommerland et al., 2007; Barley and Kundra, 2004; Evans, Kunda and Barley, 2004; Lautsch, 2002). This constant shifting in their work contexts and the macro economic conditions driving the demand for their services impacts on their inner world: their sense of self, their anxieties, identities and commitments (Kinnie and Swart, 2009; Fenwick, 2007; George and Chattopadhyay, 2005). They express anxieties over the need to manage their own finances, networks, time, learning, and competing demands from clients; and construct and negotiate identities in spaces both inside and outside the organisation. They straddle multiple worlds that demand multiple foci and multiple forms of commitment (Kinnie and Swart, 2009; George and Chattopadhyay, 2005); their sense of freedom in being able to choose a variety of roles offers them little opportunity to build deeper relationships and attachments at work; and their need to build and maintain their skills and expertise provides them with little “down” time (Evans et al, 2004). While they have the opportunity to choose jobs, financial constraints and the need to be “marketable” often reduces their freedom of choice. Moreover they often compare and contrast themselves with traditional workers and often seek to re-establish working conditions and organisational identification for themselves approximating what they left behind (Cohen et al., 1999).

This suggests that the uncertainty of the world that they occupy may influence the relationships that they build with organisations although what these emerging relationships are remain unclear and often contradictory in the literature (Gallagher and Mclean Parks, 2001). For
example, Van Dyne and Ang’s (1998) work suggests that in comparison to permanent employees, contingent employees engage in lower levels of organisational citizenship behaviours, have lesser expectations from the organisation and have lower affective commitment to the organisation. However, their study also indicated that in some instances, contingent workers exhibited organisational citizenship behaviour equal to and in some cases higher than regular employees. They stated:

When organizations treat contingent workers with respect and do not view them as peripheral, some contingent workers will have high commitment to the organization, positive views of their psychological contracts, and will engage in organizational citizenship-just like regular employees (pg.700-701).

Pearce (1993) in his study of a large aerospace company reported that there was no difference in the extra-role behaviours or level of organisational commitment between employees and contingent workers. While these divergent findings hint at the complex nature of contingent employment, they also illustrate the lack of research addressing issues of contract professional-organisational relationship.

These findings suggest that various factors impact on the contractor-organisational relationship differently. For example, Lautsch (2002) suggested that variations in organisational context, job definitions and wage rules influences this relationship, while others such as George and Chattopadhyay (2005) have suggested that perceived characteristics of the organisation and the social relations established within that organisation impact on this relationship. The impact of social relations is supported by others such as Lapalme et al., (2009) who have suggested that perceived support from supervisors and permanent employees of the organisation contributed to contractors’ perception of inclusion and such a perception of insider status led to higher levels of affective commitment on the part of contract workers. Others such as Allan and Seinko (1997) have focused on work tasks, and their study suggested that contingent workers have high work motivation when they perceived that their tasks enabled them to complete a whole and identifiable piece of work and when they obtained clear feedback about their performance. Similarly, Moorman and Harland (2002) suggested that the individual’s motivation for taking on an assignment, particularly the opportunity that a position provided to
learn new skills or gain important experiences, positively influenced them to exhibit organisational citizenship behaviours.

The diversity of these findings suggests that the nature of the contractor-organisation relationship is complex and influenced by a number of factors. In particular, extra-role behaviours such as knowledge sharing may be greatly influenced by factors such as the social relations that contractors establish within organisations, by their perceived status as insiders or outsiders, the support they receive from managers and supervisors or by the roles that they occupy in organisations that facilitate their involvement with knowledge work within organisations. However, given the current lack of research focusing on understanding contract professionals and their relationship with organisations, more studies contributing to an in-depth understanding of the motivations of contract professionals and the manner in which they engage with organisations are warranted.

A knowledge perspective of contingent careers

While boundaryless and protean careers focus on self-management as the key to understanding contingent work, an alternate theory from which to study professional contingent careers is to view careers from a knowledge perspective – to conceive of careers as knowledge building exercises. Bird (1994: 326) conceptualised careers as “accumulations of information and knowledge embodied in skills, expertise, and relationship networks acquired through an evolving sequence of work experiences over time”. In this regard, boundaryless or contingent careers can be re-conceptualised as, not merely packages of work experiences, but accumulated learnings and knowledge that individuals acquire through the process of various work experiences or by participating in various communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Brown and Duguid, 2001). As indicated by Moorman and Harland (2002), a key factor that positively influences the motivations of contractors is the opportunity that they perceive to learn and build on their expertise through their job assignments. Therefore, from a knowledge perspective, individuals are concerned with the content of their work experiences, what they learn within different contexts, how various work experiences are synthesised and internalised, how knowledge of one context can be reapplied to another and how learnings from one
organisation can be used in other organisations leading to creation of new knowledge and new experiences for the individual to absorb.

_implications of a knowledge perspective on contract professionals_

From a knowledge based view of the firm (Spender, 1996a) organisations can be seen as dynamic, evolving producers of knowledge, which when applied contextually serve as a firm’s unique competitive advantage, a resource that is hard to duplicate (Prusak, 1996). Thus organisations serve as learning fields for individuals by enabling them to be part of organisational knowledge creation (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). The social setting of organisations enables individual experiential learning to be shared and internalised by members of the organisation and this shared learning becomes absorbed as organisational knowledge, thus enriching the organisation’s own knowledge base. Contractors bring new knowledge into the firm, particularly best practices and knowledge available in the public domain (Matusik and Hill, 1998), thereby adding to the organisation’s knowledge base. From the perspective of contract professionals, organisations provide new contextualised learnings, that when internalised lead to new knowledge that could be reapplied across diverse organisational settings. From a managerial perspective, organisations would need to understand this learning process in order to be aware of the possibilities of firm-specific knowledge leaks occurring when contractors carry such firm-specific knowledge across organisational boundaries into other organisations and to the larger public knowledge domain (Matusik et al., 1998).

Traditional employment arrangements have been based on implicit assumptions that knowledge created by the individual at work is owned by the organisation (Jarvenpaa et al., 2001); that knowledge created or acquired by individuals at work is done using organisational resources and that organisations “own the labour of their employees” (Constant et al., 1994: 404) Consequently organisations have implicitly assumed that employees will engage in knowledge sharing behaviours because such behaviours are socially-expected workplace behaviours. Assumptions of employee commitment, loyalty and identification with the organisation, expectations of reciprocity (career advancement, promotions), organisational culture and task interdependence (employees’ dependence on each other for task completion)
contribute to this implied organisational ownership of individual employee knowledge and consequently on the assumption that employees will willingly engage in knowledge sharing behaviours at work (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998).

In the case of professional contractual employment, these assumptions need to be revisited. As contractors, professionals engage with organisations in employment arrangements that are different from traditional notions of employee-employer relationships. Contractors straddle multiple worlds and realities simultaneously; they are knowledge workers engaged in knowledge work, they are managers engaged in the self management of their careers; they are professionals engaging and networking with professional bodies and temporary employment agencies; they are active learners engaged in a conscious attempt to build on their intellectual capital; they are traders exchanging their skills and expertise in the labour market; and they are reputation builders actively seeking to put a price on the value of their knowledge and expertise. But how these issues affect the contract professional-organisational relationship remains unclear. While there have been some studies that have focused on the commitment, loyalty and organisational citizenship behaviours of contract professionals (Van Dyne and Ang, 1998) and ethnographic studies of contingent work (Barley and Kunda, 2004), there is hardly any research systematically examining how contract-professionals engage in knowledge work within organisations and identify the factors that influence their willingness to share knowledge. Would the contractor’s need to trade on their expertise in the market place dissuade them from sharing what they know because they perceive such sharing to dilute the value of the knowledge that they possess? Would their multiple commitments and foci negatively impact on the commitment they feel towards organisations? Would their focus on the role and task and issues of reputation positively influence them to participate in knowledge sharing? These issues and questions need to be explored.

The previous two chapters focused on the issue of knowledge sharing and professionals through social exchange and social identity theories. However, these frameworks are not adequate to explore factors that may impact on the contractor’s willingness to share knowledge. Two other theoretical perspectives – economic exchange and agency theory shed some light on this issue and highlight other factors that need consideration.
Knowledge exchanges are similar to economic exchanges in that there is an expectation of reciprocity – that the sharer will gain something in exchange for knowledge shared. However, researchers such as Kim and Mauborgne (1998) have argued that knowledge exchange differs from economic transactions because individuals have no clear understanding of the value of the knowledge that they share, and guided by social exchange principles, have no clear reciprocal expectations of future returns. Individuals often participate in knowledge exchanges to maintain social relations at work and their image, identity and power status at work. With contingent professionals, these assumptions need to be revisited. Contractors are often explicitly aware of the current market value of their knowledge; their rates of pay are based on their knowledge and expertise suggesting they have a clear understanding of the value of their knowledge and expertise. Therefore, the distinction between knowledge exchange and economic transactions drawn by Kim and Mauborgne (1998) may not be valid in situations where contractors are aware of the market value of the knowledge they possess.

Secondly, an agency theory perspective of knowledge ownership also needs to be considered, particularly for non-traditional employment relationships (Jarvenpaa et al, 2001). Agency theory essentially focuses on two issues that occur in an agency relationship (principal/client) – what happens when “the desires or goals of the principal and agent conflict and it is difficult or expensive for the principal to verify what the agent is actually doing” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 58). In relation to contractors, both issues are relevant. First, implicit assumptions about contractors’ identification with, and commitment to, organisational goals need to be revised. Contractors’ associations with organisations are often for a fixed duration, they often work with multiple clients (sometimes simultaneously) and they exhibit multiple commitments and foci including to professional associations, client organisations and project teams with which they are involved (Kinnie and Swart, 2009). This raises the question of potential conflicts of goals and purpose between the employing organisation (the principal) and the contractor (agent), and the manner in which such potential conflicts may be exhibited in the workplace. Would such a conflict therefore potentially dissuade contractors from participating in knowledge exchanges?
Professionals often engage in knowledge work that is ambiguous and difficult to monitor (Alvesson, 2000) thus making it difficult for organisations to control or monitor professionals at work. Literatures on professionals and knowledge workers suggest that they seek a certain measure of autonomy at work and seek elite class status within organisations exempting them from managerial control (Freidson and Rhea, 1965). Further, the notion of alternate careers suggests that such professionals are active participants in the construction of their careers, they spend time and effort obtaining the knowledge and skills that make them valued in the organisation (Bird, 1994) and consequently may not relinquish this knowledge to organisations. Thus from an agency perspective, assumptions of organisational ownership of knowledge and implied assumptions of knowledge sharing in the case of contractors need to be questioned. Also the ability of the organisation to capture such knowledge and manage it is also questionable. Further, agency theory views information as a commodity that has a price and can be purchased (Eisenhardt, 1989). Consequently, organisations work on the assumption that they can invest in information systems that control opportunistic behaviour of agents, while simultaneously being able to manage agents at work, by capturing the knowledge they possess through the use of such information systems. However, as research on knowledge work indicates (Alvesson, 2000; Jarvenpaa et al., 2001; Constant et al., 1994; Gallagher and McLean Parks, 2001) knowledge is viewed differently to information and knowledge sharing and its management in organisations is influenced by issues of identity, commitment, ownership, trust and loyalty – different to the sharing and management of information in organisations.

Notions of boundaryless and protean careers, conceiving of careers as knowledge building exercises and economic exchange and agency theories highlight a number of questions that have remained unanswered in the literature regarding how contract professionals engage with organisations. In the previous chapter, I highlighted three factors that seemed to mediate the relationship between professionals and organisations in a socio-economic environment where managerialism and its associated notions of control are increasingly relevant. In this section, I revisit those three factors: the organisational context, role and professional identity and psychological contracts to examine how these factors influence the contract professional-organisational relationship.
Organisational context

Initial research on contingent work focused on variations in outcomes of contingent work based on the individual differences amongst contingent workers (example, blue collared and white collar workers). However, authors such as Tilly (1992) argued that based on the labour markets in which they operate, and variations in the features of work within firms, contingent employment can have diverse outcomes. Therefore, organisational setting and its impact on contingent employment outcomes become an important factor for consideration. Lautsch (2002) conducted a study that focused on organisational context as determining outcomes of contractual employment relationship. Using internal labour market theory, and data collected from two comparative case study organisations, Lautsch (2002) developed four distinct models or subsystems of contingent employment: integration, separation, seasonal and two-tier, each approaching the management of contingent work differently based on managerially-defined performance objectives and production technologies of the firm. She argued that when the performance focus of the firm was on flexibility and the production technologies of the firm demanded contingent workers to have the same firm-specific skills as regular employees, then firms used integration as their model for managing contingent employees. In such instances, work practices such as job definition and wage rules are the same for both contingent and regular employees and opportunities for contractors to be hired permanently by the company exist. Such integration models lead to contingent workers having the opportunity to earn compensation equivalent to permanent employees, acquire skills and shift to permanent employment.

In contrast, in the separation model, the performance objective of the firm is on cost saving and the level of firm-specific skills required of contingent workers is lower than for regular workers. In such situations, firms offer contingent workers lower pay, simplified work, minimal training and no option for movement into permanent roles. Here, firms attempt to separate permanents from contingent employees favouring the creation of “stark boundaries” (pg. 36) between contingent and permanent employees. The seasonal model is apparent when firms’ performance focus is on flexibility and demand for contingent workers seasonal, but the skills required by contingent workers are lower than permanents and technologies enable the
firm to redesign jobs to add some cost savings to the need for flexibility. Here contingent work is defined by lower pay, limited training and limited opportunities for permanent deployment in the firm. Finally, the two-tier system is implemented when performance objectives are cost savings but technologies of production do not allow for the separation of the two work groups. Consequently, contingent workers work in similar roles, for which they receive similar training as do permanents, but are paid less, and with no opportunities for permanent deployment.

**Implications of organisational context for contractor-organisational relationship and knowledge sharing**

Lautsch’s (2002) study suggests that the contingent employment subsystem developed in organisations influence the manner in which contract professionals interact with the organisation. Organisations focused on cost savings may treat contractors differently to those focused on performance enhancements within the firm, suggesting that an inappropriate contingent employment subsystem can have very negative outcomes for both organisations and contractors. As previous studies have shown, how contractors perceive they are treated influence their levels of organisational commitment and loyalty and influence their engagement in extra-role behaviours within in the firm Lapalme et al., (2009). How contractors are treated, and how organisations chose contingent employment subsystems are also influenced by power and politics within the organisation (Lautsch, 2002). Power and politics influence the norms that are established in relation to “appropriate treatment” (pg. 39) of contingent employees and the reactions of permanent employees to such treatments and their consequent attempt to influence the contingent subsystems. Lautsch’s (2002) findings suggest that, across all subsystems, permanent employees sought to establish their status as higher than that of contingent workers through both symbolic measures, such as allocation of better parking places for themselves, and more active vocalising of resistance to contingent workers. The strongest negative reactions were exhibited by permanents in the two-tier model where contingent and permanents performed similar work and had similar training, but contingents were paid less; suggesting that permanents feared the economic advantages that these contractors offered resulting in conflicts between permanents and contingent workers leading to work results characterised as “disastrous”(pg. 35).
Research by Davis-Blake, Broschak and Gerorge (2003) supports these findings. Their study suggested that workforce blending (using standard and contingent employees for the same jobs) affected exit, voice and loyalty amongst permanent employees, by worsening the relationship between permanent employees and managers, decreasing their loyalty to the organisation, increasing their desire to leave the organisation or expressing their voice through unionization. Contingent workers, in such situations, felt undervalued and demotivated, leading to extensive turnover amongst them and resulting in deterioration of work quality. These studies suggest that the social relationships that contractors construct with permanents in organisations, shaped by power and politics within the firm, influence the manner in which they are perceived within organisations and consequently treated. Distant and arduous relationship between contractors and permanent employees may lead to contractors distancing themselves from the organisation and refusing to participate in knowledge exchanges within the firm.

Lautsch’s (2002) work also implies that the roles that contractors occupy and the performance expectations of those roles affect the manner in which professionals are treated in organisations, which in turn affects their engagement with the organisation. This issue of roles, identity, power and resistance hinted at by Lautsch (2002), needs further investigation before the impact of these factors can be identified and discussed.

**Professional identity, roles and identity regulation**

The previous chapter suggested that the identities of professionals influence the manner in which they engage with organisations. Organisations in turn, seek to regulate professionals’ organisational commitment and identification through regulating their identities. Thus understanding the process through which professionals construct identities is important to understand how they engage with organisations. Taking that as the starting point for the discussion of identity, it can be suggested that contract professionals’ identity constructions are more complex and dynamic. Unlike professionals in organisationally bounded careers, whose involvement with the organisation and their profession are the two primary influences in the
construction of their identities, contract professionals typically engage with a multitude of organisations, often across diverse contexts and in a variety of roles.

Qualitative studies focusing on career identities, particularly those focusing on career transitions of professionals from traditional, permanent, organisationally-bounded careers to independent, contractual and boundaryless careers provide opportunities for such insights (Cohen et al, 1999; Fenwick, 2007). These studies highlight the importance of understanding network identities and their construction as part of the process of understanding the professional identity construction of contract professionals. Fenwick (2007) talks about the in-between spaces that such professionals occupy– while they remain outsiders to contracting organisations, their work requires them to become part of the project and/or team and “become immersed in the networks of relations and practices within the organization, becoming temporary insiders” (Fenwick, 2004:510). To negotiate these in-between spaces, and to navigate between insider/outsider status, Fenwick (2004) argues that these workers immerse themselves in the process of connections – connecting themselves to various organisations, connecting people across various organisations, and connecting their values to those of the organisations, thereby developing a network of connections of actors as well as knowledge. This process of knowledge building and identity construction through networking closely aligns with Nahapiet and Ghoshal’s (1998) theory of the building of social capital, the creating and enhancing of intellectual capital, by individuals and organisations through contextually-relevant social interactions.

*Implications of role, professional identity and identity regulation for contractor-organisational relationship and knowledge sharing*

Simpson and Carroll’s (2009) conceptualisation of roles as intermediaries shaping the construction of identities suggest that the variety of roles that professionals occupy may differently influence their behaviour within each contract. For example, Bidwell’s (2009) study of IT professionals within a large financial services firm in USA suggested that permanent employees were more commonly used in positions that were considered critical to the firm or required more business knowledge. Bidwell (2009) argued that the allocation of these roles
was partly influenced by managers’ perceptions of contractors as less committed than permanents, suggesting that managerial beliefs about the importance of the employees’ commitment influenced the manner in which roles were allocated. This implies that assigning contractors to non-critical roles, or roles with perceived lower status, may negatively influence their notions of self (Ibarra, 1999). How this may impact on their knowledge sharing motivations remains uncertain.

Theories of newer forms of employment and conceptualisation of contract workers as being involved with knowledge building exercises suggest that contract professionals will seek out roles that provide them opportunities for learning and obtaining new skills and expertise. These opportunities, in turn, may positively influence them to exhibit organisational citizenship behaviours (Moorman and Harland, 2002), including knowledge exchanges. Consequently, the question can be raised as to how contractors would react in roles that do not provide them opportunities for learning or developing their skills and expertise, or roles which they perceive as less critical to the firm. While studies suggest that they react positively in roles with learning opportunities, how they react in roles without those opportunities is not well understood. They may continue to be associated with the organisation, fulfilling the contract, but distancing themselves mentally from the role (Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006).

The notion of network identities that contractors build, highlights other issues that need consideration. Fenwick (2004: 521) argues that while they build network identities for themselves, creating and immersing themselves in these networks, they do “not dissolve in them”. They are also actively engaged in resisting and subverting managerial attempts to control their work – by negotiating their own work boundaries, by choosing and rejecting work that they considered purposeless, by defining and managing their own work relationships, and understanding their activities as “generating and linking, not transmitting, knowledge” (Fenwick, 2007: 523). In this regard, the notion of network identities suggest that in their ability to connect people and ideas, contractors build their knowledge and their careers, while at the same time resisting managerial control over their work and knowledge. Consequently, contractors may react to organisational attempts at controlling their work by breaking the contract, or exiting the company because they see the strength of their networks as aiding them
to find roles and contracts that enable them to engage in meaningful work. Therefore, attempts at regulating their work may result in organisations losing contractors with the desired expertise or knowledge that firms seek.

However, other studies such as Osnowitz’s (2006) qualitative study have suggested that the very network identity that contractors develop acts as a form of normative control, perpetuating professional and occupational norms of commitment to work, accountability and reciprocity amongst colleagues. To that end, it can be argued, that networking exposes contractors to informal normative controls: they may participate in exchange of knowledge and expertise both because such exchanges are the norms of professional work, but also because such exchanges help build their reputations as professionals and enhance their marketability within their networks. Therefore in constructing network identities for themselves, contractors may simultaneously attempt to resist managerial control over their work, while exposing themselves and submitting to informal, normative forms of collegial control over their work and exchange of expertise and knowledge. Consequently, the relationships that the contractor builds with managers and members of the team may positively or negatively influence the manner in which they participate in knowledge sharing in the firm. These micro relationships can be better analysed through the framework of psychological contracts.

**Psychological contracts**

Literature on psychological contracts imply that most traditional employer-employee relationships operate under implicit assumptions of employee commitment, loyalty and satisfactory performance to the firm in return for continued employment, career growth and opportunities for learning and development at work (Rousseau, 2004). Within the context of professional work, such implicit contracts suggest that the professional will enjoy a certain level of autonomy and freedom at work that is required of his or her intellectual capital and expertise. However, these assumptions need to be re-examined in relation to contractors, given their transient organisational status.

Perhaps one way in which contract professionals construct psychological contracts may be through, what Anderson and Schalk (1998) refer to as, emergent forms of psychological
contract. Hiltrop (1995: 289) refers to this new emerging psychological contract as “one which is more situational and short term”, where the focus shifts from security and continuity of employment to future employability; and where market focus, saleable skills and abilities form the underlying basis of the contract, rather than traditional notions of fairness and social justice. Within this new framework employers become responsible for recognising and equitably rewarding the skills and knowledge of the employee while employees become responsible for displaying satisfactory performance, entrepreneurship and initiative at work; individuals become responsible for negotiating their own rates of pay commensurate with their skills and they become responsible for the development of their careers, seeking learning and growth even outside the boundaries of the organisation (Anderson et al, 1998).

*Implications of emergent psychological contracts for contractor-organisational relationship and knowledge sharing*

While these newer forms of psychological contracts may offer organisations a different paradigm for managing professionals at work, it is not yet clear what impact such new emerging psychological contracts may have on contingent professionals and their engagement with organisations, particularly on knowledge flows within firms. If, as Anderson et al., (1998) suggest, professionals become responsible for the development of their skills and knowledge, and invest resources in developing those skills, what would motivate them to share that expertise with the organisation? Would they not be justified in performing their roles ‘satisfactorily’, as understood implicitly in the new psychological contracts and resist from exhibiting extra-role behaviours or organisational citizenship behaviours that were expected within the older, reciprocity based, relational psychological contracts? As Van Dyne and Ang’s (1998) study of professional contingent workers in Singapore indicated, contingent workers do engage in lower levels of organisational citizenship behaviours, have lower expectations of their employees in their psychological contracts and show lower affective levels of organisational commitment in comparison to permanent employees. However, their study also showed that when contingent workers had positive attitudes about their psychological contracts with the organisation, they were more willing to engage in organisational citizenship or extra-role behaviours. This suggests that how contractors feel about the mutual obligations, benefits
and reciprocity implied in the psychological contracts may directly influence their engagement with the organisation. Therefore, understanding the factors that may influence the construction of the psychological contracts of contract professionals, may aid in identifying factors influencing their knowledge sharing behaviours. The previous chapter argued that the professional identities of professionals influence the construction of psychological contracts. While the impact of identity on the construction of psychological contracts of contract professionals has not been examined in detail in the literature, based on prior research on psychological contracts, some tentative questions about the manner in which identity influences these contracts may be constructed.

Factors that could impact on the construction of these psychological contracts are the multiple identifications and commitments that contractors hold simultaneously (Gallagher and McLean Parks, 2001). George and Chattopadhyay’s (2005) study of the organisational commitment of contract workers showed that such workers identified with both the employing organisation as well as the client organisation, based on organisational characteristics such as its distinctiveness and prestige, organisational values with which workers identified, as well as the social relationships developed at work such as the quality of relationships developed with colleagues and supervisors. Kinnie and Swart’s (2009) qualitative study of members of professional service firms also recognised that individuals operating in multiple worlds experience commitment and loyalty to different agents. This has the potential to influence knowledge sharing behaviours and such multiple commitments and foci may demand contradictory knowledge sharing behaviours.

For example, would contract professionals with strong professional identities perceive organisational attempts to regulate their knowledge sharing behaviours as a breach of the psychological contract? This is implied by studies such as those conducted by Heckman et al. (2009) where professionals with strong professional identities reacted most negatively, with lower work performances and forms of negative reciprocity, to perceived breaches in psychological contract (such as low organisational support for their work). Such negative reaction on the part of the professional may include knowledge hoarding, or at the very least, distancing themselves from knowledge exchanges within the firm. Alternately, contract
professionals may perceive their strong identification with the profession as influencing their knowledge sharing behaviours positively, because such sharing may be seen as representative of the norms of their profession.

Their professional images may also impact on the manner in which they engage with the organisation. If contractors come into an organisation with a perceived image of an expert, organisations may develop psychological contracts that have an implicit assumption that such contractors will display expertise at work. Further, what organisational reactions may be to perceived breaches of the psychological contract by contract professionals, for example displaying insufficient expertise in the role, needs clarification. As studies have indicated, how contractors are utilised in organisations and the roles to which they are allocated are also greatly influenced by managers’ perceptions of the commitment and identities of the contractors (Bidwell, 2009). This implies that understanding the dyadic relationship between managers and contract professionals may be an important factor in understanding the process of the construction of psychological contracts and their impact on knowledge sharing amongst contract professionals.

Other studies suggest that how contingent employees view psychological contracts may be influenced by their perceptions of what obligations and expectations are mutually constructed McLean Parks, Kidder and Gallagher (1998). Traditional notions of obligations on the part of the employer offering career growth, training and advancement (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994) may not apply to contingent professionals. They may expect other obligations on the part of the employer such as autonomy, status or meaningful work (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003) within organisations. How such contract professionals would react to perceived breaches in the psychological contract, and what its impact would be on their knowledge sharing motivations remain unclear.

**Summary and research directions**

Professionals in contingent employment straddle multiple worlds, identities, commitments and foci. They seek control of their careers through alternate employment forms, which involve
self-management and development through physical and psychological mobility, guided by their own search for independence and/or meaning, outside of organisational boundaries. Research on the management of professionals and knowledge workers has revealed the ambiguities of understanding and managing knowledge work as well as controlling knowledge workers. Contract professionals add an additional layer of complexity to this issue. Professionals seek such alternate careers as a means of moving away from organisationally bounded and controlled careers; seeking to immerse themselves in work, which enhances their intellectual capital and provides for them a measure of autonomy and control over their work. However, in order to secure such jobs, they necessarily engage with organisations – as employers and clients, and often have multiple commitments and foci, that may influence their propensity to exhibit knowledge sharing behaviours at work. Further, the network identities that these contractors construct for themselves may serve as normative forms of control, influencing their relationships and knowledge sharing behaviours at work.

The review of the literature on knowledge and its management in organisations, professionals and professional work and professionals working in contract roles indicates that the issue of knowledge sharing amongst contract professionals is an area of research that has not yet been empirically examined within organisations. Previous research indicates that understanding individual employees’ knowledge sharing motivations is vital for the creation of new organisational knowledge. The conceptualisation of knowledge as socially situated and constructed suggests that for knowledge sharing to occur, social factors such as trust, reciprocity, the strength of ties between the source and the recipient, shared contextual understanding and spaces for individuals to interact and communicate with each other are essential. Research on professionals and professional work places the knowledge and expertise that professionals possess at the very heart of professional work and in the process of professional identity and image construction. However, as research indicates (Handley, Sturdy, Finchman and Clark, 2006; Wenger, 2000) how individuals learn, obtain knowledge and construct their identities and images are themselves influenced by the social systems in which they operate.
For contract professionals, the experience of contracting and the contracting world in which they operate may influence the manner in which their identity is constructed. This in turn may shape and mould their contracting careers as well as their behaviour at work, including the construction of psychological contracts and perceptions of ownership of knowledge and knowledge sharing at work. Consequently, understanding professionals as contractors requires an understanding of how they perceive their contracting experiences and consequently on how they *perceive themselves* as contractors. Hence empirical studies of contract professionals and their contracting experiences are necessary areas of research for understanding their engagement with organisations. The next chapter provides an introduction to this empirical study of contract professionals and discusses the key research questions that this thesis seeks to explore in order to gain a greater understanding of the knowledge sharing motivations of such professionals in contingent employment.
CHAPTER FIVE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter begins by summarising the gaps in the literature, articulates the research questions and discusses why the study of contract professionals’ knowledge sharing behaviours is a much needed area of research. I then provide some background information about me, as the researcher, and outline the theoretical frameworks that underpin this research. I then discuss the methodology used in this research influenced by the research questions, my own motivations and learnings that developed through the course of this study. The two case studies employed in this study are then introduced and their relevance to the understanding of contract professionals at work and organisational knowledge management strategies in practice is discussed. I conclude with an explanation of how I collected and analysed the data, highlighting the role of narratives and narrative analysis within this research as key tool for understanding the sensemaking process of the participants.

Summary of gaps in the literature and research questions

Three strands of research were examined in Chapters Two, Three and Four: organisational knowledge creation and its management in firms; the professional-organisational relationship; and the increasing use of professionals in contractual roles and its potential influence on the professional-organisational relationship. A review of the literature in these three domains has identified gaps in the existing research that form the basis for the research questions that are the focus of this study.

Chapter Two focused on understanding organisational knowledge creation and the factors that influenced this process. Based on literatures related to social capital theory, intellectual capital
creation in organisations, communities of practice and social constructionist approaches to understanding organisational knowledge (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Wenger, 1998, 2000; Nonaka, 1991, 1994; Tsoukas, 1996), knowledge creation in firms was conceptualised as a process of knowledge exchanges and combination occurring through interactions amongst individuals within the firm. While this provided a theoretical framework to understand knowledge creation in firms, it raised issues that needed addressing. The chapter suggested that understanding individual-level behaviour in knowledge exchanges, as mediated by trust, obligations, reciprocity, and identities of individuals in organisations was a vital, but under-explored area of research. Second, the chapter argued that understanding such dyadic knowledge exchanges also necessitates understanding issues of power and identity in the workplace and how such issues impact on the willingness of individuals to participate in knowledge exchanges in the firm. Third, the issue of individuals’ identities and how conflicting and dynamic identities may impact on an individual’s knowledge sharing behaviours has yet to be adequately explored in academic research. For example, the issue of strong or weak professional identities and their impact on knowledge sharing needs to be examined. The chapter also raised the issue of professionals in contingent employment and argued that understanding the motivations of contract professionals to engage in knowledge exchanges within firms remains an unexplored, but much needed area of research. Questions such as what motivates contract professionals to engage in knowledge exchanges within organisations or in contrast, what motivates them to hoard knowledge remain unanswered.

Chapter Three focused attention on the changing nature of professional work in organisations in a macro-economic environment where managerial agendas of control and regulation of professionals are increasingly salient (Dent and Whitehead, 2002). This chapter examined three factors that seemed to mediate the new professional-organisational relationship: the organisational context; roles, identity work and identity regulation; and psychological contracts; and then identified some key questions that needed addressing (Cohen et al., 2003; Alvesson et al., 2008; Shields, 2007). The issue of organisational context, while hinting at the relevance of professional and non-professional firms for shaping the professional-organisational relationship, left unanswered questions about professionals increasingly seeking boundaryless careers and their relationship with such organisations. For example, would they
be willing to relinquish autonomy and control over their expertise or would they seek to maintain greater control over their knowledge as means of establishing their status within the firm? Some research suggested that the roles professionals occupied in organisations influenced their professional identity and image construction and consequently influenced their engagement with the organisation (Simpson and Carroll, 2008; Pratt et al., 2006). Contractors however, work in a variety of roles across diverse organisations. How this diversity of experiences affects their knowledge sharing motivations remain unclear. The constructions of these identities were also influenced by the relationships that professionals built with other organisational members. Consequently, how professionals build professional identities and engage with organisations (including knowledge sharing) may be influenced by notions of how they perceive others see them; including managers. Therefore understanding dyadic relationships in organisations could contribute to a greater understanding of the contract professional-organisational relationship. This area has however, has remained relatively neglected in academic literature.

Further identity studies suggested that identities are built over time influenced by the social context in which individuals operate. This raised the issue of temporality and how contract professionals build identities when their association with organisations is of a limited duration and the extent to which such identities influence their participation in knowledge exchanges within firms. The chapter also raised the issue of identity regulation of professionals and suggested that understanding how professionals react to such identity regulation may influence how they engage with organisations. Would contract professionals resist such regulation and refuse to share knowledge?

Finally the chapter examined the professional-organisational relationship through the framework of psychological contracts. The chapter suggested that professionals’ reactions to perceived breaches in the contract were themselves influenced by their professional identities. This, along with the emergence of newer forms of psychological contracts, where traditional notions of obligations and reciprocity no longer exist, indicated that understanding how professionals construct psychological contracts, influenced by their identities, and how this influences their engagement with organisations are important issues that need to be addressed.
Chapter Four focused attention on professionals in contingent employment through a study of boundaryless and protean careers and conceptualised, contract professionals as engaging in knowledge building exercises throughout their career (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Bird, 1994). The chapter re-examined their relationship with organisations through three key mediating factors: organisational context; roles, identity and identity regulation; and psychological contracts. The idea of boundaryless careers emphasised the notion of self-management as a key for understanding the contract professional organisational relationship. This suggested that professionals were active participants in shaping their careers and in the process of being managed in firms. This indicated that the expertise and knowledge that they possessed were commodities of exchange, whose value they appreciated and offered to organisations for commercial gains.

Therefore, the issue of whether contract professionals would submit to managerial agendas of control and allow organisations to access their body of knowledge emerged as a key research question. The chapter argued that there was a lack of empirical studies focusing on how roles, status, power and resistance influenced the contract professional-organisational relationship. Lautsch’s (2002) work implied that the performance expectations of the roles they occupied and their relationships with permanents in the organisation influenced how contractors were treated in organisations and this affected their engagement with the firm. This was highlighted in studies focusing on organisational commitment and extra-role behaviours of contractors (Van Dyne and Ang, 1998) which suggested that the levels of organisational commitment and citizenship behaviours of contractors were influenced by the manner in which they were treated. Such extra-role behaviours, including knowledge sharing, may therefore be influenced by the relationship that contractors develop with the organisation and by the manner in which they are perceived in organisation. Further issues of network identity (Fenwick, 2007) and multiple commitment and foci (Kinnie et al., 2009) raised questions about identities and commitments of contract professionals, but left unanswered the question of how these would influence their knowledge sharing motivations.
Together, the three literature review chapters raised a number of issues that warranted further attention. These literature reviews suggested that a number of diverse and sometimes conflicting factors could influence the contractor-organisational relationship. However, the paucity of research examining contract professionals at work and their impact on organisational knowledge creation, particularly an understanding of how and why they engage in knowledge exchanges within the firm suggested that isolating factors for examination may not be an appropriate model for this research. Instead, an exploratory study of contract professionals and their contracting world could provide greater insights into the variety of factors that may impact on their relationship with organisations. Consequently, this could provide greater insights into their knowledge sharing motivations and how organisations could create the necessary work environments that make such knowledge sharing possible. Therefore, this thesis focuses on two research objectives:

- First, to identify the factors influencing the contract professionals’ willingness to share knowledge and further to examine how these factors influence the knowledge sharing process
- Second, to identify the factors influencing the organisation’s ability to acquire this knowledge from contractors

Put together, these factors could provide a greater understanding of the relationship between contractors and organisations and the manner in which contingent employment impacts on organisational knowledge creation and enable theory building, linking issues of contingent employment, identity work, psychological contracts and knowledge sharing.

**Contextualising the research and theoretical underpinnings**

As Berg (1998) suggests, most research starts with an idea. I came into this research because of my own experiences of working with contract professionals and my experience in designing organisational knowledge management systems. As is the case with the construction of any body of research, this one too bears the mark of the “person who created it” (Riessman 1993: V). My career experiences included working within the human relations department of an IT
training and development organisation which increasingly used IT contractors in project based and non-project based work. Through my interactions with them, I began to get a sense of the expertise and knowledge that these professionals possessed and became intrigued by their desire to seek out contracting as a career option. Further, the often temporary nature of their work assignments raised the issue of how these contractors were to be managed, in particular understanding their knowledge contributions to the firm. I noticed that often, at the end of a contract, contractors were called back into the organisation to help sort out ‘system’ issues, or for specialist advice that other permanent team members could not solve. I therefore began to question the knowledge impact that such contractors made on the organisations in which they worked, and question traditional notions of knowledge sharing in organisations.

I brought to this research my own pre-existing understanding of the possible role of such knowledge workers and my own commitment and interest in the project was influenced by my work experience in human resource management and by my educational background in sociology and management. Further my reading of the literature surrounding knowledge management, knowledge work, professionals at work and contingent employment has influenced the direction and strategies used in this research.

Several theoretical assumptions have underpinned the overall research methodology and approach. In line with previous research on knowledge in organisations, I have conceptualised knowledge as socially situated and constructed and inherently complex and ambiguous (Nonaka, 1994; Alvesson, 2001; 2000). I have used Nahapiet and Ghoshal’s (1998) theory of the creation of intellectual capital in firms, enabled by its social capital, as the basis for developing an understanding of organisational knowledge creation. Professional work has been conceptualised as knowledge work and professionals, as seeking self-management at work (Alvesson, 2001; Arthur et al., 1996) influenced by their relationships at work, the construction of psychological contracts and their own identities when involved in knowledge seeking/sharing activities (Fenwick, 2006; Jarvenpaa et al., 2001; Anderson et al., 1998; Constant et al, 1994)
My own research goal then, was to develop an understanding of what was relevant to the contract professionals as they experienced the phenomena of knowledge sharing and how they experienced their contracting life, and to examine how organisations (in particular, managers and team members) perceived the role of contract professionals in organisations. A key focus of this study was the analysis of the sensemaking activities of these professionals as they sought to understand what it meant to be a contractor and how this impacted on their professional and organisational lives. Further, understanding how managers and team leaders perceived contractors was necessary to understand how contractors and managers constructed psychological contracts that could have an impact on the knowledge sharing motivations of contractors. Managers, while representative of the organisation (Coyle-Shapiro and Shore, 2007) are also involved in processes of identity construction and negotiation at work (Dent and Whitehead, 2002; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) that influences the professional-managerial relationship. Studies by Vickers (2008) suggests that understanding managers’ voices, often silenced or ignored by hegemonic managerialist narratives, provides much greater insights into managerial behaviours and helps focus attention on diverse voices within organisation. Hence I adopted the view that in order to understand the dynamics of knowledge sharing in organisations, it was necessary to understand the interpretations and perspectives of the individuals (both contractors as well as managers) involved in the phenomena of knowledge sharing in organisations.

**The Case study approach**

The multiple case study approach provided me with an effective means of organising and conducting this research. Case studies allow for an in-depth understanding and examination of complex phenomena (Miles, 1979) while enabling the building of theories based on the evidence in the case studies. Specifically, the use of case studies allowed me to explore a number of factors that impacted on the knowledge sharing process while also enabling multiple accounts (of the participants) to be expressed. It also allowed the phenomena to be examined and constructed in a number of different ways (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). This was particularly important given the complexity and ambiguous nature of understanding knowledge in organisations. Further, situating the study in organisations allowed for the examination of
organisational knowledge management practices, enabling focus on the second research problem – what factors influence the organisation’s ability to acquire this new knowledge from the contractor. Therefore, to understand holistically the complex social and organisational phenomena of knowledge sharing and meaningful real-life characteristics, the case study methodology was most suitable for this study.

The financial services industry was chosen as a suitable context for this research as this industry is dominated by knowledge-intensive, professional organisations (Grey, 1998; Starbuck, 1992). I made a range of initial enquiries to organisations in this sector to seek access, and two departments within two organisations agreed to participate in the research – the first, the foreign exchange (FOREX) department of a large bank; and the second, the information technology (IT) department of a large insurance company. Contract finance professionals within the FOREX department of the bank and contract IT professionals within the IT department of the insurance company, and managers and team leaders within both these departments, were the participants in this research. The multiple-case design also allowed for the phenomenon of knowledge sharing to be examined in two different and diverse settings, amongst two categories of professionals (financial services professionals and IT professionals) and permitted cross-case comparisons (Yin, 1994). I examined finance professionals within a bank, where they were representative of the vast majority of members of the organisation and the professional content of their work was central to the mission of the organisation. I also examined IT professionals in an insurance company, where they represented a minority of the employees in the organisation, and their work was not central to the mission of the organisation. By exploring these two categories of contract professionals in both professional and non-professional organisations (Wallace, 1995), I also sought to draw attention to the probable impact of organisational context on the contract professional-organisational relationship.

The Cases

Case Study 1: FOREX department at ABC Bank

The first case study, ABC bank is one of Australia’s largest banks employing over 35,000 employees. The site of the study was the financial markets department, FOREX, a core
department of the bank, located in Sydney and focusing on foreign exchange trading around the world. The FOREX department is a 24 hour operation, with the bank handling foreign exchange and trading deals from New York, London, and Asia (Hong Kong and Tokyo). The department was organised into teams, each focusing on a specific geographic area such as London, Hong Kong etc. and all employees were involved in non-project based work.

As the FOREX department operated on a 24 hour basis, all employees of this department worked non-standard working hours. Their work was fairly knowledge intensive with all employees assigned key portfolios to monitor, and required to apply specialist foreign exchange trading knowledge. All the participants for the study were drawn from this department. Contractors formed about 25% of the total department and comprised both short-term (three-four months contract) and long-term contractors (six months and above). The contractors participating in this study worked in shifts that included late evening and night shifts. Twelve contractors and nine managers participated in the case study and worked in the New York, London and Hong Kong teams of the FOREX department. Their role was to minimise operational risks through accurate monitoring of foreign exchange transactions and to ensure that transactional procedures were followed accurately. Nine of the contractors had a number of years of experience in banking and finance and had worked previously in similar roles. Nine contractors had formal university degrees and three of them had advanced degrees in finance and accounting. Eight of the contractors had banking experience obtained overseas, particularly in the UK and Asia, and for four of the contractors, this was their first contracting job in Australia, although they had previously worked as contractors overseas. This department had a comparatively higher reliance on contractors compared to other departments in the bank, primarily because of the difficulty of obtaining qualified, experienced people to work non-standard hours. The company dealt primarily with two placement agencies specialising in banking and finance, although a number of its contractors were referred by permanent employees or other contractors already working for the company. However, all contractors had to be employed through an agency and therefore contractors selected directly by the company were routed to one of the two agencies for administrative processes.
Case study 2: IT department at Ozinsure

The second case study, Ozinsure, is a large multinational company specialising in insurance and financial services located in Sydney. The site of the study was the IT department. The department was involved in the development and maintenance of all IT related services to the business departments of the company and had positioned themselves as application service providers to the entire organisation. Its aim was to support the operations of the different business departments of the organisation.

The participants in the study were all IT professionals involved in project-based IT work. All participants worked fairly standard working hours with minimal shift work involved. Their work was knowledge-intensive with key specialist positions requiring specialist or “domain” knowledge and expertise. Contractors formed about 40% of the total department and were hired for the duration of the project, normally between six to eighteen months. The participants included a cross-section of twelve contractors working as IT architects and system solution specialists, and eight permanent employees including the departmental head, the chief architect and six project managers. All of the contractors had a number of years of experience as IT contractors. All of them had professional qualifications in IT and all of them were considered domain experts by the organisation. The contractors were predominantly obtained from one specialist IT consulting and placement agency, although the organisation had included a second agency in its preferred list at the time the project commenced. A few of the contractors interviewed were placed through the second agency. Some of the contractors acted as subcontractors, contracting out their services through specialist IT consulting and placement companies. All of the administrative processes, including processing of pay, were organised through the employment agencies. The contractors were contracted to the organisation for the duration of the projects, which was typically six to twelve months. There was generally no renewal of contracts or conversion to permanent expected to occur at the completion of the projects.

Table 1 provides a comparison of the salient features of the two case studies
### Table 1 Salient features of the two case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>ABC Bank</th>
<th>Ozinsure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry category</strong></td>
<td>Financial Services/ Banking</td>
<td>Financial Services/Insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation Size</strong></td>
<td>• Large, employing over 35,000</td>
<td>• Large, worldwide employees – 55,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Australian operations – around 1000 employees</td>
<td>• Australian operations – around 1000 employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Focus Department</strong></td>
<td>• Financial Markets Department (Focusing on FOREX trading around the world)</td>
<td>• Application Service Provider department</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• This is a core business department</td>
<td>• Providing IT services to business departments</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The whole department is the focus of the research</td>
<td>• This is a business support department</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Two project teams will be the focus of the study – one already established and running and the other to commence operations in June 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Team characteristics</strong></td>
<td>• Non-Project Based</td>
<td>• Project Based Teams created for specific requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Department divided into teams working different shifts and focusing on different geographic areas e.g. London Market, NY Market etc)</td>
<td>• Fairly standard working hours</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Non-standard working hours (24 hr operation with shift work)</td>
<td>• No shift work</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Knowledge intensive work with key specialist positions</td>
<td>• Knowledge intensive work with key specialist positions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contractor Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>• Contractors form up to 25% of the department</td>
<td>• Contractors could form up to 40% of team</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Mixture of long-term and short term contractors</td>
<td>• Hired for duration of project</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Contractors hired for “domain expertise”</td>
<td>• Contractors hired for “technical expertise”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agency Dependency</strong></td>
<td>• A few contractors are employed by and through agencies</td>
<td>• Most contractors are hired through agencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data collection

The focus of the study was the knowledge sharing motivations of contract professionals and the impact that organisational (managerial) perceptions of contract professionals had on the contractor-organisational relationship. I found three methods of data collection appropriate for this study, within the broad case study design. These were:

1. Semi-structured interviews with contractors and their managers and team leaders in both the organisations.
2. Participant observation within the context of their work settings.
3. The study of organisational documents relating to organisational knowledge management strategies.

The organisational settings provided access to study participants and served as the site for participant observations and collection of secondary data such as organisational documents relating to knowledge management strategies. I observed participants at work and my field notes and observations formed part of the secondary data. Organisational documents related to knowledge management took two forms: formal procedural documents relating to organisational induction and training policies; and intranets relating to project communications and procedures. Access to some of the documents was only made available on-site and company policy documents relating to knowledge management and project management were made available with the condition that they not be removed or copied from the workplace.

The focus of this research remained, however, on what Bryman (1989) refers to as the interview-based study. Consistent with a long line of research in organisations (Pettigrew, 1985), the study employed semi-structured interviews as the key data-gathering strategy. Conceptually, I regarded the interview process as: a joint meaning-making activity (Elliot, 2006; Mishler, 1986) for both the respondents as well as for me, the interviewer; and a part of the social and cultural world that we inhabit (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002). Accordingly, I have viewed the respondents in the study as active subjects, constructing versions of their realities, guided by the interview questions and themes being discussed in the interview setting;
the interview in a sense providing the participants with the opportunity to explore and construct the meanings of their everyday experiences of being contractors and managers. Therefore both the form as well as the content of the interviews served as a resource for analysis.

In seeking to do an interview-based study, I have followed Warren’s (2002) qualitative interview process. Themes based on the topic of interest and previous research and literature were identified, compiled and analysed and interview questions based on these themes designed. However, as indicated, these themes served as guides during the interview process, with an open-ended approach towards interviewing being employed, allowing the conversations and participants to guide the flow and order of the questions. In seeking to find respondents from the two case studies, I made presentations to both the organisations explaining the study and seeking contractors to participate in the research. All contractors from the two departments volunteered to participate in the study and were provided with information about the project, my background as a researcher and organisational member, the nature of the study, the data collection method, and were assured of both confidentiality and anonymity (Appendix 1 provides details of participant information sheet and consent form handed out to all participants). I consequently interviewed all contractors from both the case studies. Managers and team leaders of the participating contractors were then approached and asked to participate in the study, resulting in the final sample of twenty-four contractors and seventeen managers and team leaders. Off the twenty one participants in ABC Bank, six contractors and one team leader were women. Off the twenty participants in Ozinsure, one project manager and two contractors (one each in project A and project B) were women.

The interviews were set up and conducted in the premises of the two organisations, during working hours, except in the case of two contractors who had to be interviewed outside of work. The interviews were approximately one and a half to two hours long, and all interviews were audio taped with the permission of the participants. A number of participants continued to talk after the audio recorder was switched off and these ‘unrecorded’ comments have also been viewed as an integral part of the interview. I made notes and observations during the interview and these notes and observations along with the interview, were transcribed after the completion of each interview. All respondents are referred to by pseudonyms. Appendix 2
provides a detailed list of the participants in the case study. Table 2 summarises the interviews conducted in the two case study organisations

**Table 2 Interviews conducted in case study organisations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Participants (Interviewees)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC Bank</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Team leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOREX London Contractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOREX Hong Kong Contractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOREX Japan Contractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FOREX New York Contractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ozinsure</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chief Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IT Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contractors in project A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contractors in project B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, I began the interviews with preliminary questions and then moved on to the main questions. Follow-up questions and probes were used to clarify answers. I framed questions using everyday language and participants were invited to talk about specific situations and specific times within their contracting and managerial careers, particularly in relation to knowledge sharing such as “Can you tell me about situations at work when you were first approached for advice?”, “Can you tell me about a time when you were in-between contracts and how you felt about it?” Appendix 3 provides detailed summaries of the major themes and questions discussed during the interviews for both contractors as well as managers.

**Interpretations (data analysis)**

As indicated in the previous section, I conceptualised the meaning-making activities of the participants as arising from the “interaction between human beings and their social work, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998: 42). Within the
interview context, I was an active participant in the construction of that meaning. As I began the process of talking to participants, I realised that their efforts to understand the experiences of contracting and knowledge sharing took narrative forms: they used stories to recount their experiences; and that I was listening to their stories about being contractors, knowledge workers and managers. Consequently, I conceptualised the participants’ responses in the interviews as narratives. I perceived this narrative stance within the interviews as a natural form (Atkinson, 2002) through which participants attempted to make sense of their work experiences.

**Interviews as narratives**

Weick (1995) has argued that it is through the use of words that individuals generate sense that conveys meanings about everyday experiences. These words that individuals use are drawn out from a larger collectivity; i.e. they draw from a number of vocabularies the words they need to make sense of their experiences. People therefore draw on cues within larger, more abstract frames of reference as that enables them to make sense of the occurrences and events in their lives. It is when individuals are able to make connections between past moments of experiences (frames) and present moments of experiences (cues), that Weick (1995: 111) argues, “meaning is created”. One such powerful vocabulary that enables individuals to make connections between past and present moments of experience, is the use of stories, or as Weick refers to it “vocabularies of sequence and experience” (1995: 127)

When individuals tell stories about their lives, they do so in a manner that edits and filters their experiences. This ‘editing’ occurs because stories and narratives are constructed in hindsight; individuals know the ending of the stories, the outcomes, and consequently structure accounts retrospectively in an attempt to find causal linkages between the various events leading to that specified outcome. Consequently, the essence of storytelling lies in its sequencing and it is in this sequencing that sensemaking becomes possible.

Narratives exemplify this sequencing. Hinchman and Hinchman (cited in Elliot, 2006: 3) conceptualise narratives as “discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offers insights about the world and/or people’s
experiences of it.” Three dimensions of narratives emerge from this – they are chronological, meaningful and inherently social. Narratives provide a representation of a series of events or experiences and rather than describing a state of affairs, they communicate the meaning of events or experiences through the temporal configuration of events. They are usually told in a specific social context for a particular purpose.

Atkinson and Delamont (2006) argue that the key to narrative analysis is not to privilege it as access to ‘undiluted truth’ but to conceptualise it as a social phenomenon, one form through which social life is enacted and therefore, to subject it to systematic analysis. I began my interpretations of the data by an iterative listening, reading and re-reading of the interview and the interview transcripts and subjecting the narratives to both holistic as well as structural analysis. In analysing the narratives, I was conscious of a few fundamental assumptions about my conceptualisation of narratives: first, that the narratives were embedded in interactional and organisational contexts and that the sharing of stories served important social functions such as establishing status and professional authority, and that storytelling rights were as important as the stories themselves; second, that as social phenomena, narratives would need to be looked at within a social context and not as isolated individual stories; third, although intensely personal, these stories were shaped and influenced by social and cultural conventions and collectively shared experiences of a community or group of individuals.

Narrative Analysis

I subjected the narratives of the participants to two processes of analysis: the first a process of structural analysis based on Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) model and the second, a holistic reading of the narratives identifying themes and motivations based on Baumeister and Newman’s (1994) framework of studying motives that shape narratives.

Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) framework suggests that by beginning with the form or structure of a narrative, focus purely on the content can be avoided. All narratives have formal structural properties and patterns that recur within the narrative which allow for the analysis of each
element, enabling a chronological, meaningful interpretation of a narrative. They described narratives as having six structural properties as listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract (A)</th>
<th>Summary of the subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation (O)</td>
<td>Setting the time, the place, the context, the participants in the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicating Action (CA)</td>
<td>Information about what happened and what happened next</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation (E)</td>
<td>What the event meant to the narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution (R)</td>
<td>How the event was resolved and how it ended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda (I)</td>
<td>Returns the narrative perspective to the present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Elliot, 2006: 42)

The structural model allowed me to make sense of the participants’ sensemaking in a number of specific ways. First, I understood the sequencing of the stories by studying the complicating action that signalled to me how the participant had made sense of the flow of events; i.e. how they related events in the past to present experiences. This was the very essence of sensemaking as conceptualised by Weick (1995). Second, the evaluative component demonstrated to me the meaning the particular event had for the narrator. It enabled me to empathise with the manner in which the participants made sense of the world. This sense of empathy enabled me to make greater sense of how they viewed their experiences and led me to construct themes or frames of reference that the participants used in their sensemaking effort. Third, the structural analysis helped me draw and make connections between stories that participants narrated during an interview. Participants often linked one event to another, one story to another and the structural elements of the model enabled me to make connections between the resolution of one event and the complicating action of another; it also allowed me to draw causal linkages between events and to be able to predict outcomes of other events. This was a very important step in my understanding of the participants’ sensemaking. It suggested a causal order of events that otherwise could have been perceived as unrelated and enabled me to
construct themes and differentiate between the participants, leading to my final categorisation of the contractors and the factors that impacted on their knowledge sharing behaviours.

The following extract from an interview with an IT contractor at Ozinsure illustrates the analysis I undertook. He was asked what motivated him to first get into contracting:

**Figure 3: Example of codification of interview transcript using structural model**

```
I- Can you tell me then what made you choose a contracting job rather than a permanent one when you came back from New Zealand?
A Many things, one of them was
E there is more money in contracting.
O/CA The security factor rather the insecurity well, so there was more money in contracting at that time
E There was the sort of skills and experience I
R had lent themselves to contracting or consulting if you like.
E I had a broad range of skills across a broad range. I mean …
E I had a specific skill let’s say both technical and business management skills
R for implementation across organisations
E but there was a broad range of skills and experience across business sectors
R and a broad range of skills and experience across technologies.
R/C So the only way I could utilise all of that was to go out and consult or maybe work for large consulting firms.
CA So I just tried that and there was more money at that time
E and it was also an opportune time because I came back with a clean slate there was nothing else to do.
E/C So the main thing was the money, my background the skills and experience I had and the other one was the challenge to move forward and do something different and new
A they are probably the three main reasons I got into it.
```

Iteratively, the interviews were subjected to a process of structural analysis. Through this, I could identify themes that emerged within a single interview and could link stories together within interviews. For example, in the interview illustrated above, the participant spoke about jobs that were offered to him because of his “technical and management” skills”; he spoke about wanting to make “better use” of all his knowledge and managerial skills; he spoke about doing “something different and new”. These I could connect and link together as representing his desire to manage his intellectual resources and to seek out leadership roles within his
contract. Through this process, I was able to draw and make connections between stories that occurred within a single interview setting and also draw connections across interviews; i.e. between stories occurring across different interviews and participants. These connections and patterns across groups of contractors enabled me to identify and construct the final three categories of contractors within this study.

Although I found the structural model very useful as a tool for narrative analysis, it also had certain limitations. First, not all parts of the interview could be constructed as narratives and be rendered in a chronological fashion and respondents often provided multiple narratives that could not be analysed using the structural approach. Further, there were certain stories that did not have any causality or a clear sequence of event clauses, and hence identifying complicating actions and evaluating them proved difficult.

In order to gain a greater understanding of the sensemaking of participants, I therefore also applied Baumeister et al.’s (1994) psychological framework of studying motives in narratives. The authors conceptualised narrative modes of thought as “coherent stories about particular experiences, which are temporally structured and context sensitive” (1994: 677) and as a mode of thought that best expressed and captured intentionality – the reasons, intentions, beliefs and goals that individuals construct and act on. Hence narratives become a way for people to think about their social worlds, their needs, wants and goals.

The authors contend that narratives are influenced by two sets of motives. The first, interpretive motivations arise because individuals need to make sense of their experiences. Understanding that people have multiple needs for meaning guides the notion of interpretive motivations. People interpret experiences relative to purpose or goal fulfilment and thereby link events causally to show purpose or fulfilment of subjective aspirations in their narratives. They seek value and justification of their actions by constructing stories that depict their action as good and right and consistent with individual and social values and standards. They look for a sense of efficacy in their narrative, narrating stories that enable them to interpret their actions as indicative of their sense of efficacy and control over the events. They seek a sense of self
worth by constructing narratives that highlight and emphasise their self worth and esteem and enable them (and the groups to which they belong) to appear as competent and attractive.

The second set of motivations that guide the construction of narratives are interpersonal motivations, serving as a means of communicating their experiences with others. One set of interpersonal motives is the individual’s desire to seek rewards for themselves by constructing stories that reveal the individual in a particular manner, in order to motivate the listener to change their behaviour in a manner that rewards the narrator (such as presenting oneself as a helpless victim in order to induce the listener to offer support). Another set of interpersonal motives is the individual’s desire to have others validate identity claims, gain social acceptance and social reality of their own self identity (such as social validation that one is a good mother or organisational validation that the individual is a good employee). The third set of motives is the individual’s desire to attract others to them through the use of narratives that position them as being knowledgeable, attractive or funny. Finally, individuals construct narratives as a means of passing on information to other, such as a means of teaching and passing on the skills of one’s trade to others.

Although not all narratives contain all sets of motives, all narratives are driven by both interpretive and interpersonal motivations in order to make sense of the events and experiences in an individual’s life and to interpret them within a social context. Baumeister et al.’s (1994) theory of motives in narratives provided me with a framework to interpret the motives evident in the narratives of the respondents and better understand how they chose to make sense of their experiences.

I subjected the interviews of all of the respondents to an analysis of the motivations that influenced their narratives. By identifying both interpretive as well as interpersonal motivations, I could generate insights into their sensemaking activities. This enabled me to gain an understanding of how they made sense of their experiences and also how they chose to recount those experiences to me (as the researcher) and the motives behind the construction of those narratives and stories. It allowed me to make causal linkages between, and inferences
about, the manner in which they told particular stories and the events in their lives and the process through which the participants themselves made sense of those connections.

**Perspective and voice**

Before the interpretations of these narratives can be presented, one further issue needs to be highlighted – the issue of perspective and voice. Donna Luff (cited in Warren, 2002: 84) refers to perspectives as “fractured subjectivities”, in the sense that within a research context, both participants and researchers converse with each other not from fixed, stable or coherent stand points but from various perspectives. These perspectives are informed by the socio-cultural and historically-grounded roles and hierarchies of the society, of which they are a part and include gender, race and class perspectives. Therefore, in an interview setting, different social positions may emerge as the interaction proceeds between the interviewer and the participant. These perspectives are situational and shape the flow of the interview; they are relevant to the meaning making process and the co-construction of the meaning making and sensemaking activity that occurs within the qualitative interview setting. Therefore, a single interview participant can adopt different and distinct perspectives within the single interview and being conscious of perspective or voice becomes important for any meaning making activity to become relevant. Gubrium and Holstein (2002: 22) indicate that “the issue of voice is important because it points to the subject who is assumed to be responding in interviews”. It allows for questioning who or what subject is speaking to us during the course of an interview and the voice being expressed.

In taking a reflexive approach as suggested by these commentators, I therefore needed to question the various subject positions taken by respondents, such as – Is the participant speaking to me as a contractor, as an ex-manager, as a mother, as an expert or as a professional at the peak of her career? All of these are possible and, on occasion, occurred in the course of a single interview and emerged out of the immediate interaction between me as the researcher and the participant, because of the topic(s) being discussed and the socio-cultural context within which the conversation occurred.
The participants in this research spoke not from fixed, coherent, single standpoints but, from varying perspectives. The voices in which they spoke indicated the various subject positions that they assumed during the interview. They took on different roles, they spoke about different roles and they voiced their perceptions in those roles. This is illustrated in this remark made by Pat, a project manager in Ozinsure:

As a manager what I look for when I am hiring a person on contract is their past record and their level of expertise. You know what they have worked on before and how they did in their previous contracts. So in a sense I find out about them, I ask around and see what people think of them. And when I was working as a contractor, I was aware that companies did this you know, I mean I would have previous clients call me and say that they were asked about my work by the company that I was thinking of contracting to. So as a contractor I was very aware of this happening, and now as a manager I actually do the very same thing.

Pat spoke to me as a manager, he also spoke to me as a contractor and he spoke to me as a professional; that is, his perspective shifted as he spoke about his contracting experience and his own identity as a professional and as a manager in the organisation.

The issues of voice, subject positions and perspective arose in all the interviews with participants. They spoke to me as professionals, as managers, as family men and women, as musicians, artists, experts, consultants, workers and as contractors. I have presented this multitude of voices as a collective story by first acknowledging and understanding that such multiple perspectives and voices are present within the same individual. I have been conscious of identifying voice changes, and have been alert to shifts in perspectives, which, in turn, have provided me with greater sensemaking opportunities. It indicated that their identities, their perceptions of who they were and how they operated within organisations were influenced by any number of these subject positions, and that they chose to act in particular ways because of these influences. They were also influenced by their own socio-cultural frameworks – by their gender, their education, their social status, their professional status and their occupational role and status. Their responses were also influenced by my presence – as a researcher, as a woman, by my ethnicity and by my research project and frameworks.
In recognising that a single participant has provided me with multiple perspectives and that he or she has spoken to me in a multitude of voices, there is acceptance that the dialogue that I have had with the participants has been co-constructed. They have responded to me and to my questions; and yet within these multitudes of voices, there are some shared themes and motivations. It is this that I begin to interpret in the next chapter.

**Summary**

While previous research on knowledge sharing in organisations has implicitly assumed permanency of employment, the increasing use of professionals in contingent employment and the changing nature of professional work arrangements in organisations make the study of contract professionals and their knowledge impact on organisations a timely and necessary one. Two organisations served as sites for the study: the first, the FOREX department of a large bank; and second, the IT department of a large insurance company. I examined two categories of professionals within the two organisations: finance professionals in the bank and IT professionals in the insurance company. Clearly located within the tradition of case study enquiry in organisational studies, the multi-sited case study approach adopted in this research enabled the complex phenomena of knowledge sharing to be studied in depth and for causal inferences to be drawn. The research questions focused on the meanings that individuals attached to their experiences and how those meanings and experiences impacted on their behaviours at work. Therefore, I conceptualised the interviews of the participants as narratives and this provided me with a rich source of data for researching and understanding contract professionals and their contracting lives within an organisational context and, more broadly, within a social context.

Further, within the two case studies, managers’ experiences of working with and managing contract professionals revealed insights into how organisations perceived and managed knowledge contributions from these contractors. My use of secondary data, observations, field notes and organisational documents also provided me with the added benefit of exploring the phenomena of knowledge sharing in a multi-faceted manner. In the next two chapters I discuss the findings from the narratives of the contractors and the managers, explain how professionals
and managers construct and understand the contracting world and how this understanding impacts on contract professionals’ knowledge sharing motivations within organisations.
CHAPTER SIX

CONTRACT PROFESSIONALS

Introduction

In this chapter and the next, I present the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with contractors and managers in the two case studies. This chapter focuses on the findings from the interviews of contractors in both the case studies – ABC bank and Ozinsure. I thematically group these findings into six key issues or themes: why these professionals choose to be contractors; how they select contracting roles; how they secure these contracts; the differences they perceive between contracting and permanency; their perspective on why organisations use contractors; and their perceptions of the organisation’s knowledge management strategies and their role and participation in knowledge sharing within that organisation.

The themes that I construct in this chapter are a result of my interpretations of the narratives of the contract professionals. The themes explored here help focus attention on the experiences of professionals in contingent employment and have been influenced by previous ethnographic studies on contractors such as the work by Barley and Kundra (2004, 2006). Consequently they help in understanding how contingent work status impacts on their relationship with organisations, influences the construction of psychological contracts at work, shapes their identities and motivates their knowledge sharing behaviours. Each section begins with a brief introduction to the theme being explored, presents salient findings and concludes with an analysis of the commonalities and differences between the findings in the two case studies.

Theme 1: Choosing to be contractors

The contractors in both the case studies spoke about triggers that first encouraged and motivated them towards contracting. I have conceptualised these triggers as factors influencing
professionals to choose contracting careers. I have grouped these triggers into two sets – push factors that motivated these professionals to move away from permanent roles and pull factors that motivated them towards contracting roles. Factors such as an increasing desire and need to “control” their career, their desire for autonomy at work, the “opportunity” to “choose” work assignments and being able to select roles that they felt were “interesting’ and utilised their skills, the opportunity to place a higher “monetary value” on their work as compared to those in permanent employment and the opportunity they felt contracting offered them to balance work with non-work activities were some of the factors that motivated them towards contracting as a newer career option. Factors such as retrenchment of permanent roles, disenchantment with their permanent roles within organisations, their perceptions of being unable to participate in knowledge work within organisations, their disenchantment with organisational politics, their inability to shape their professional careers in domains that excited them, and their perceptions of an increasing imbalance in work-life commitments were some of motivations that influenced respondents to move away from permanent roles.

Although I have categorised these triggers into two sets, this is not to suggest that these two sets of factors are separate or distinct and operate in isolation. Contractors are motivated by both push and pull factors in their choice of contracting careers, and often push and pull factors interact with each other creating the necessary mind sets that influence professionals to move into contingent employment. Each of these motivations is explored in depth in this chapter.

In addition, not all contractors in the case studies voluntarily chose contracting as a career option. While a majority of the contractors spoke of triggers that motivated them to move out of permanent roles into contracting, a small group of contractors, particularly in ABC bank, saw contracting as a means of entry into the organisation until they could find permanent roles for themselves within the organisation. This was particularly relevant to migrants (as evident in ABC bank), who saw contracting as the only means of gaining entry into the Australian employment market.
I think it was a few things really that made me move to contracting. The money seemed to be good, and I had just come back from travelling overseas and I really did not want to go back to the same old stuff that I was doing you know, so I thought why not a new start? I’ll give this a try (Sean, contractor ABC Bank).

Pull factors

A number of contractors in ABC bank spoke about specific pull events or triggers that first motivated them to look towards contracting as a career option. These pull events included a desire to balance work and non-work activities and manage their time more effectively; wanting to “get out of the daily grind” and embarking on sabbaticals and travels; securing higher rates of pay; the opportunity to learn on the job through interesting roles and assignments; becoming “free” from involvement in people management and organisational politics.

Many contractors in this group spoke about their desire to manage their time more effectively as a key reason for contracting, to be flexible about working hours and durations and their need to balance work with non-work activities, passions or hobbies. For example, Andrew, a foreign exchange dealer, spoke about his desire to travel as a reason for choosing contracting. Similar sentiments were echoed by Marc who felt that contracting was the way for him to balance work with another passion in his life – music.

I am really into music. I mean I am part of a band and we do night clubs and everything. So I need to work and earn money and then I need time to do this music. It’s very important to me and contracting allows me to do both.

The need to balance work with family commitments was a key motivator to contract and contractors spoke about how contracting provided them with the “ability” to do that - in particular the non-standard working hours that they worked in their current role at the bank provided them with the means to earn a good rate of pay while still ensuring that they had
sufficient time during the day to take care of domestic responsibilities. Contracting at night meant that they had day time hours to spend with family, children or participate in other activities that otherwise, they felt, would not be possible. Cynthia, a contractor, and mother of young school aged children spoke about this need to balance work and family:

See for me this contract is good. I work late night to early morning, get home, sleep until 7am and then get the kids ready for school. I can get house stuff done and pick the kids up from school you know take them for activities and stuff. I would never have been able to spend so much time with the kids, and still get other stuff done and work if I didn’t do this kind of work. I mean I get paid much more for doing the same job so I can’t see any reason not to contract.

The third key factor that I identified as influencing their decision to contract was their perception that contracting offered them higher rates of pay in comparison to permanent roles. The ability to place the value of their work at a higher level, economically, seemed a key motivator in their decision to contract. Contractors seemed to perceive the demand for their services as greatly influencing their rates of pay as well as providing them with opportunities for contracting, consequently influencing their decision to contract.

I realised that I was getting paid more to do the same job that I was doing, but now as a contractor. Also, banks constantly need contractors with my kind of experience, so there are so many roles available to choose from. So for me, that was a big reason to keep on contracting, the pay that I was drawing and also because there is so much demand for contractors (Sam, contractor).

A few contractors also spoke about the opportunities that they had for learning on the job and upgrading their skills, while continuing to earn higher rates of pay as contractors. They perceived this opportunity to enhance their skill while working as a key motivating factor in their choice of a contracting career. They spoke about the opportunities that contracting offered them to work in a variety of roles and to acquire new knowledge and skills. They felt that contracting provided them the means to be constantly updated with changes in their profession while allowing them to absorb technical and process improvements as they occurred in the workplace. Contracting for them seemed to be a means of controlling their “professional” lives – being able to choose a variety of roles that utilised their expertise and offered them
opportunities for growth and learning that they found missing in their previous permanent roles.

See I always felt that being permanent meant that you were sort of pigeon-holed into one role, you had to wait a long time to move or get promoted or do stuff that was interesting, professionally I mean. Whereas with contracting, I can choose roles that appeal to me the most in terms of new things that I could learn, or roles that were more interesting and also I could see where companies were heading with financial practices and stuff. So contracting is good that way, I can see things happening in a number of companies while those who are just working for the same company never see that, you know what’s around the corner (Marion, contractor).

Some contractors spoke about all of these triggers as influencing them to contract. They spoke about “getting paid more” or “drawing a higher salary” “wanting to learn new things” and “working within a number of different environments” as reasons for choosing to be contractors.

*Push factors*

Contractors also spoke about *push factors* or triggers that motivated them to move out of permanent roles. Many contractors spoke about wanting to be “free” from organisational obligations, conflicts and organisational politics and “just minding my own work”, not wanting to be “involved with politics” as some of the reasons to move away from permanent roles.

See now that I contract, I walk in, do my job and leave. I don’t have to hang around solving people issues; you know all those things that crop up when you are permanent. Now I am not concerned about productivity issues or who is not talking to whom, and what I have to do to make the boss happy. Those things were really getting to me you know, I wanted to leave all that behind and just manage my own work. I mean, as a contractor, I just have to do my job well and I do that. Plus I get paid a lot more for the same technical stuff and I don’t have to muck around with anything else, so contracting for me was an easy decision to make (Sean, contractor).

Others spoke about losing jobs or being retrenched as the motivation for them to move towards contracting. Justin a contractor, who had previously worked in permanent positions in a bank, indicated this as he spoke about why he decided to become a contractor
See when there were lay-offs happening, I was wondering what I should do, you know. Should I start looking for another bank? Then this friend of mine who was contracting put me in touch with this agency and then the next day they offered me this contract – much more money for an interesting role and so I thought why not? And then I really liked it and that’s how it began really.

Not all of the contractors chose contracting voluntarily. For some, contracting was a route of entry into the workforce – it provided them with the means to be part of an organisation and employed. This theme was echoed particularly in the *narratives of migrants* who had moved to Australia and were seeking to establish themselves professionally. William, a contractor, who had migrated to Australia after previously working in Hong Kong in banking and finance, expressed his contracting choice thus:

I could not get any permanent roles and I needed a first break into banking. So contracting was my way in. I mean I was not particularly looking to contract, I wanted a permanent role but I could not get any because of my lack of Australian experience. Then someone (a friend) suggested I contract, and I got into this bank. And although the role is junior to what I had been doing in Hong Kong, it’s still a good role. And I am now getting the Australian experience that I need. Also the bank has indicated to me that they are always looking to make good contractors permanent so for me that’s an even better deal.

These contractors did not foresee a career in contracting, for them it was merely a temporary arrangement until they could find something “better”. Similarly, participants who wanted to return to the work force after a professional break also saw contracting as a means of re-entry into the workforce. These participants had taken a break from paid employment to raise a family, or travel or were seeking entry into the profession and they felt contracting provided them with an easier path of re-entry into the workforce as compared to obtaining permanent roles that met their professional requirements.

**Ozinsure**

All of the contractors spoke about *push and pull factors* that led to their decision to contract such as retrenchments from permanent roles, return to the work force after a sabbatical, travel or career break to raise a family.
Pull factors

Many contractors in this case study spoke specifically and repeatedly about the need they felt to manage their expertise and their professional skills and about the opportunities that they perceived contracting offered them to acquire those skills and expertise in a variety of roles. In contrast, in permanent roles they felt they were “stagnating”. Therefore, among the contractors in Ozinsure, a key reason to contract was their perception that contracting offered them the opportunities to work in a variety of different roles and obtain assignments that were interesting and varied. All of the contractors talked about the opportunity of working with new technologies and systems as a contractor, while indicating that this was often not the case when they worked as permanent employees.

See one of the big things about working as a contractor is the variety of roles that you get to work on and the kinds of technologies that you are exposed to. Often as permanents you get to do the same role for extended periods and you don’t get to use or learn new technologies that quickly. But with contracting, you get to work on different systems and platforms and for me that is very important (John, contractor).

This perception of variety was closely linked to their desire to work with technologies and systems that were cutting edge or market-leading technologies and the opportunities that contractors had to be exposed to these systems before permanent employees had access to them. They spoke about the opportunity to be market leaders in specified technologies and platforms as a key reason to contract. They viewed contracting as an opportunity for them to learn on the job, i.e. obtain on the job training for new technologies and platforms while still getting paid for that learning. Bruce (IT contractor) indicated this opportunity, while at the same time referring to what he called “bleeding edge” technologies and the need to stay away from them.

See contracting sets you on the edge of what’s happening; really leading edge stuff you know that you get to check out before others. So that’s great. But you need to stay away from bleeding edge ones, you know that they are risky systems, only used by a small group and may not be viable, so you need to stay away from them. But as contractors you can chose roles with technology leaders and learn the trends before it hits the market. That’s great about contracting.
Some of the contractors also spoke about contracting as providing them with the opportunity to utilise specific technical skills. These contractors specialised in particular technological areas within software development and contracting provided them roles that required specific technical expertise. For instance, contractors spoke about “open source” technologies such as Java and Linux and their impact on the IT work space and then narrated instances of how contracting enabled them to develop expertise in that technical arena.

I first got into contracting because I wanted to get into open source and I thought that the role would be ideal for that. And that’s opened up this avenue for me wherein my technical expertise is in demand and I know how to work around java beans and open source is really the way to go forward. So being a contractor got me that chance while I just did not see that happening before (John, contractor).

Other contractors commented on the opportunity to utilise a wider range of generalist skills as a contractor while still understanding technology. They spoke about the depth of their experience within their industry and more specifically the management and generalist experience they gained while working as permanent employees. They felt that contracting offered them the opportunity to “consult” and put their variety of experience, people management skills and knowledge of the industry to good use. Andrew (contractor) talked about this:

I got back from New Zealand and I thought what next. Then I thought that I have these years of experience, I have a good sound technical background but I also have this solid management experience and how can I combine both of these and then consulting seemed to be the way. So I got into a contract with the telecom industry that I was familiar with but then chose to move into other areas - public sector, banks, and really contracting was the way to use all my years of experience.

As with ABC bank, contractors spoke about the demand for contractors in the market place as influencing their decision to contract. However, more contractors in Ozinsure spoke about the demand for contractors with specific skills and expertise and perceived that the willingness of the market to place a premium on their services and pay them higher rates of pay as compared to their counterparts in permanent roles, was influenced by this perception of expertise that they brought into the firm. Their perception of their skills and expertise as being “in demand” also influenced their decision to contract.
See I thought about contracting when a friend of mine took up a contract and when he told me what he got paid for doing the same job that I was doing, I thought to myself why not? I mean I have the same qualifications and experience that he has. And contractors were being offered this money because they had worked on these technologies. And so I jumped. And it has been really rewarding. Sure, I have had some down times but the roles and the pays have been really good (Bruce, contractor).

Contractors also highlighted their ability to control and balance work and non work activities with flexible work options and the ability to choose and manage down times at their convenience as key reasons to contract. Contractors indicated that they planned down times to suit school holidays or vacation periods and many of them stated that working from home was an added benefit of contracting as a number of roles allowed for development work to be done off-site. This, they felt, further allowed them the opportunity to balance work and non-work activities.

Push factors

Amongst push factors influencing them to contract, these contractors also spoke about their desire to move away from “organisational politics” and administrative responsibilities as another reason to move into contracting. This “freedom” that contracting offered them, they felt, enabled them to focus on their work and the technical complexities of the role without having to be concerned about “people management” issues. They indicated that the organisational politics and “power games” that they experienced while working as permanent staff reduced their focus on their work while contracting offered them the opportunity to earn more while doing work that was interesting and yet removed from such organisational politics. They spoke about “not worrying about people stuff”, not needing to “keep the boss happy”, or having to “worry about who is getting promoted and who is not”, and instead being able to just focus on their work.

Summary

The contractors in both the case studies spoke about specific push and pull “triggers” that first motivated them to move towards contracting. They cited push triggers such as job
retrenchments, or dissatisfaction with organisational politics as reasons to choose contracting and pull factors such as life cycle demands (raising a family, study, and work-life balance), travel, returning to the work force or seeking work as new migrants as some of the motivations for them to move into contracting. There were also clear references to motivations such as “higher rates of pay”, the desire they felt for autonomy and control of their work lives that induced them to move towards contracting. All of the contractors also spoke about work-life balance and the opportunities that they felt contracting offered them to be able to achieve that balance. These motivations are similar to both sets of participants – ABC bank and Ozinsure.

There are however, some differences in the motivations between participants in ABC bank and Ozinsure. In ABC bank, a number of contractors spoke specifically about moving into contracting as a means of better managing their work-life balance. They spoke about their desire to control the manner in which they work with their ability to participate in non-work related activities. In comparison to ABC bank, most participants in Ozinsure spoke specifically, repeatedly and passionately about their desire to manage their expertise and knowledge better as a key reason to seek contracting. They seemed to perceive the contracting career as giving them the efficacy to utilise their expertise in a manner that they saw fit. They spoke repeatedly about wanting to work with “leading” technologies, be “ahead of the market” and utilise the broad range of specific and generalist skills they possessed. Many of them saw permanent roles as underutilising their skills or as not providing them with the opportunity to excel in their area of expertise. This desire to manage their expertise effectively was a key reason for contractors in Ozinsure to choose contracting and there were fewer participants in ABC bank who expressed this same desire.

**Theme 2: Selecting contracting roles**

Contractors in both case studies spoke about choosing and selecting contracting roles as a means of building successful contracting careers. The interviews of the contractors suggested that they were conscious of the influence that their choice of roles had on the effectiveness of their contracting careers. They showed an awareness of the influence of roles on the building of their reputations and images and the manner in which the right roles allowed them to
manage work and non-work activities, obtain higher rates of pay and build on their skills and expertise. Each of these motivations is discussed in this section.

**ABC bank**

A key factor influencing the choice of roles amongst a majority of the contractors was their perceived familiarity of the role and mastery over skills and expertise required for that role. They spoke about choosing roles that enabled them to “hit the ground running”. These roles were favoured for two reasons: first, they involved very little down time for the contractor in terms of time spent in learning new technologies, processes and procedures and gave them the opportunity to “practice what they know best”; and second, it enabled contractors to “show” organisations that they possessed the expertise to perform the job and consequently were of value to the firm. Contractors therefore indicated that they repeatedly sought out familiar roles in organisations to prove their value to the firm by “getting on with the job” as efficiently and effectively as possible.

I look for kinds of work that I have done before, you know, things that I know I can do well. That way I just go in and get on with it and always the manager will come and ask around about how you are doing, and so it’s good to show them that you are not wasting anytime. So you know you are quickly on top of the work (Tanya, contractor, ABC bank).

Associated with this “familiarity” of roles, contractors also perceived that working within the same industry enabled them to acquire the knowledge and skills that the industry required and enabled them to “show” their expertise in their contract. Many of them spoke about the advantage this “familiarity” with the industry and roles offered them.

See most banks follow one another in terms of procedures, and regulatory requirements are pretty much the same. So if you are familiar with one bank, then you are pretty much in demand; you know either with that bank or with one of the others. You sort of know your way around the systems and then you get to know the people and so you sort of become an “expert” at banking systems. So it’s a pretty safe bet that you will get another role once your contract runs out (Janelle, contractor, ABC bank).
Contractors also spoke about choosing roles requiring fairly *generalist* experiences rather than very *specific or technical* skills. They perceived these roles to be more widely available in the market and the demand for these roles in turn reduced their levels of anxieties about contracting. They therefore, did not express much anxiety about contracting and spoke with confidence about the opportunities found in contracting.

See in about 4 years now, I have only had about a week or maybe about two weeks when I wanted to contract but could not get a role. There is so much demand for contractors with banking experience, particularly FOREX and because I have experience in these kinds of roles, normally I just walk out and walk in (into another contract). It’s not a big deal; you know the end of a contract. You just call the agency and let them know you are available and the next role is there for you. It’s not that I seek out specific roles, you know I can fit into a whole range of general banking roles, so yeah it’s not that tough (Juliet, contractor).

A few of the contractors talked about roles as providing them the opportunity to learn something new and expand on their knowledge base. When offered a choice of contracting roles, they spoke about taking on new roles that offered them the opportunity to learn a new technology, or process or enabled them to work in an area of the bank in which they had not previously worked.

Sometimes, I ask the agent to try and get me a contract in a new role, something that I have not done before. Like I got a role in wealth management recently, which was great because that gave me a chance to sort of learn something new and also it beefs up my resume. So, I do try and look for variety in my roles but also roles that offers me some learning (Janelle, contractor).

Contractors perceived an *economic value* in contracting; getting paid more for the same role as compared to permanents. Many contractors selected roles purely on the basis of the hourly rates offered, and routinely selected roles that offered them the higher rate of pay even if the role itself was “not that interesting”. One of the key reasons for their acceptance of their current contract working non-standard hours was the higher rate of pay that it offered, coupled with facilities such as meals and transport that were provided to them. They indicated that being “flexible” with roles and working hours allowed them to choose and plan down times and yet ensured that they obtained contracts regularly. Their higher rates of pay also allowed
them to compensate for the loss of paid leave, sick leave and other privileges associated with permanent employment, giving them a greater sense of control over work and non-work activities.

**Ozinsure**

Contractors in this case study also spoke about choosing roles requiring their technical expertise and roles in which they could “hit the ground running” and minimise down time. They also selected roles that offered them higher rates of pay, and the opportunity to balance work with non-work interests. Contractors indicated that given a choice between two similarly technical roles, they chose the role that offered them the higher rate of pay. By choosing roles that were more lucrative, contractors planned downtime and leisure time with more confidence.

The variety and technical expertise required in the role was a key motivator in the selection of contracts. Contractors spoke about actively searching for roles with greater levels of complexity, expertise and variety; and roles that provided them the opportunity to be creative and work with technologies in which they had already developed high levels of expertise. Mary Ann, an IT contractor, indicated this while talking about how she chose her contracts:

I look for roles that require my skill set, you know some open source development or roles that I know I can do well because I have done similar ones in the past. But they also have to be challenging, in that I want to be exposed to new stuff and technologies that are taking off. So that level of technical complexity is something I always look for.

Somewhat in contrast to the narratives of the contractors in ABC bank, many contractors in Ozinsure spoke about seeking roles that provided them with an opportunity to further their learning or expertise in a particular technical domain or niche area. They chose roles that allowed them to work in a variety of technical platforms and software languages and although they looked for familiarity of technical knowledge in these roles, they also selected these roles for the new knowledge that they gained and the opportunity it provided them to increase their technical knowledge or repertoire.
I see what I can learn from the role, is it exciting, will it challenge me, and is it a new platform? These are things that will increase my chances of getting my next role and I get the chance to learn some new technologies. And variety, I mean different industries or different projects that keep me on my toes (Andrew, contractor).

Some contractors spoke about looking for roles that provided them with the opportunity to use more generalist skills and roles that enabled them to move away from a single technology, or industry. By consciously taking on such roles, they felt that they expanded their range of options in terms of employability, such as enabling them to move across industries and technical fields.

I keep it fairly broad; I don’t have criteria for industry or technology because one of the conscious decisions I made when I went into contracting is that I have got these broad skills and I cannot align myself with a particular industry nor can I align myself with a particular technology. So what I did was very much bolster my skills and experience that would not change irrespective of the industry or technology that I was in. So that’s why I moved into this whole implementation consultancy services. So anything that would lend itself to any organisation, any business sector, any technology and that was a conscious decision (Derek, contractor).

Although these contractors sought to enhance their intellectual growth at work, they were also conscious about selecting the right technologies with which to work. They were conscious about wanting to work with new technologies while at the same time they were cautious about acquiring niche expertise whose market value was still unknown. Brian, an IT contractor working on an open source platform, expressed this as follows:

I want to work in leading technologies but not bleeding edge ones. And there is a fine line between them. What is a fad today may turn to bust tomorrow and then no one wants to touch you. So you have to choose correctly.

The importance of choosing roles that allowed them to participate in the success of the project was highlighted by a number of contractors. They chose roles in projects that had top management support, were adequately financed and genuinely demanded their expertise and skills. They also looked at the project drivers and their influence within the organisation and were conscious of the reputations and professional images of the project team members. They
felt that these elements contributed to the success of the project and this was vital for them to enhance both their reputation as a contractor as well as ensure that they obtained suitable contracting roles in the future. All of the contractors indicated that choosing roles in projects that had a poor outcome influenced their own chances of securing lucrative contracts in the future.

I look for top management support, whether they have the money, who is driving it and whether there is a need for me. I also look at the project team, you know have I worked with any of them, because I don’t want to take on a role with shabby people and then have the project go over time or budget. See that affects me because I need to use this job to get the next one, so I make sure that I am needed and that they have the resources to carry through with the job (John, contractor).

**Summary**

Contractors in both case studies indicated that they were conscious of the choices that they had made while selecting roles. They chose roles that allowed them to “get on with the job” as quickly as possible. They perceived their role as contractors as one that provided the organisation value for money – effectively performing the job with minimal down time and errors. They therefore, were quite often focused on roles that they felt they had the expertise to perform well. Monetary incentives motivated them to choose between two similar roles and this allowed them the sense of control over their working lives – both in their ability to manage their time between contracts as well as enabling them to have a work-life balance.

However, the contractors in the two case organisations indicated different motivators for their choice of roles. In ABC bank, the focus for a majority of the contractors was on their ability to take on familiar roles that allowed them to spend minimum time learning on the job and roles that allowed them to control work and non-work activities better. Money and familiarity of roles were the prime motivators in the choice of roles and they saw efficiencies in this in two ways. First, the efficiencies that they provided to the organisation - they were able to get on with the job straight away with minimal time spent on learning and their familiarity with transactional process and procedures allowed them to minimise processing errors. Second they saw efficiencies in this for themselves – they were able to obtain higher rates of pay for
minimal learning, they were able to utilise their existing knowledge without the “expenditure” of learning new technologies and processes and thereby minimised down times for themselves. Their ability to be flexible about the roles that they accepted, and their willingness to work non standard hours, provided them with greater confidence in their ability to constantly find contracts, giving them a greater sense of efficacy over their work and non-work lives.

Somewhat in contrast to ABC bank, in Ozinsure the contractors focused on their ability to control the effective utilisation of their expertise and their ability to develop their expertise in their chosen field or technical domain. They chose roles in which they had the opportunity to not only utilise their skills, but to further them. They were conscious of selecting and participating in projects that would reflect their own contributions to the success of the project. They deliberately chose roles that would enhance their reputation as experts within their fields (“cutting edge”) and avoided those that would make them too niche to be marketable (“bleeding edge”). They were conscious of themselves as “professionals” who were contracting and hence focused on roles that allowed them to grow and develop as professionals in their field. There was a strong desire to manage their professional careers and their choice of roles and their decision to accept certain roles and not others, indicated that they saw each role as an opportunity to not only earn money as contractors, but to develop their expertise in their chosen professional fields.

**Theme 3: Securing contracting roles**

This section explores the means and methods through which contractors secured their contracting roles. Contractors in both the case studies referred to networks and agencies that they used to obtain suitable contracts, the efforts that they made to maintain these networks and contacts and the process through which they obtained contracting roles in a manner that suited their need to balance work and non-work demands. I discuss these job hunting strategies of the contractors, and highlight some differences in the methods in obtaining suitable contracting roles between contractors in ABC bank and Ozinsure.
ABC bank

Contractors obtained most of their contracts primarily through the use of employment agencies, particularly agencies specialising in banking and finance. They registered with multiple agencies (in most cases about two to three agencies) and indicated that obtaining suitable roles through these agencies was a fairly mechanistic process; they contacted the agency prior to the completion of their current contact and selected from one or more roles that the agencies offered to them. A majority of the contractors maintained a fairly formal and remote relationship with the placement agencies in that their relationship with the agencies did not extend beyond the formalised process of seeking and obtaining roles. This pointed to fairly weak links and relationships with specific agents working in these agencies. However, this formal relationship was in conflict with their dependence on these agencies for obtaining contracts. On the one hand, their perception that their skill sets and expertise was always in demand allowed them to develop a casual relationship with their agencies (“any agency will do”). Yet they also spoke about obtaining roles primarily through these very same agencies; hence to a large extent, they were dependent on the agencies to find them suitable roles.

Normally I give the agency a call about a week before I am done and someone there will get back to me on suitable roles. Sometimes I have to interview with the client, so they fix times for me and I go and interview with the client. Sometimes, the interviewing is just done by the agency and once you take up a role with them, then they have you on record and you just go on to the next contract (Andrew, contractor).

I don’t call anyone particular in the agency; I mean a lot of them move around. I just call the couple of agencies that have my CV and update them on the contract and tell them that I am finishing up here. So they sort of keep me in mind for the next role that comes up, so it’s pretty straightforward (Marcel, contractor).

These individual contractors did not necessarily go back to the agencies through which they had obtained previous roles, but rather responded to advertisements issued by prospective clients as well as other agencies. In response to a question of whether Janice (contractor) always contacted the agency with which she has previously worked, she stated:
No not necessarily. I mean sometimes I do, but other times I get a call from some other agency or I see an ad about a contracting role so I just go for it. I mean the agency that I contract through, sometimes call me before the end of a contract and ask if I am looking for something else, but other times they don’t bother. I just put the word out or scan what’s available and usually in a day or two something comes up.

There was a strong perception amongst this group of contractors that there was sufficient demand in the marketplace for contractors with their specific skill set and experience. Their perceived ability to obtain “any role” that they thought suited them reduced the levels of insecurity that they felt in their ability to obtain roles and consequently their efforts to maintain and build relationships with agencies and other networks were reduced. They did not perceive the need to put in the effort to build or maintain these relationships beyond the fairly mechanistic process of indicating their availability to take on a contract.

In contrast to this, a smaller group of contractors within ABC bank spoke about using networks of former employees or clients to obtain roles. These contractors spoke about contacting former clients or companies for whom they had worked to enquire about opportunities and indicated that they sought referrals from current clients in order to seek out and apply for contracts. They did not refer specifically to professional bodies or associations as a means of obtaining contracts. However, even amongst those contractors who spoke about maintaining ties with previous clients, they continued to contact agencies for suitable roles and this was still their predominant means of obtaining contracts. However, they indicated that they made attempts to network amongst professionals in their field in order to gain information about and obtain suitable contracts.

**Ozinsure**

All of the contractors in Ozinsure actively used the services of specialist employment agencies to obtain suitable roles. These were agencies that specialised in domains and technologies within IT, project management or consulting services. All of the contractors indicated that they dealt with one or two agencies with whom they had built a relationship over time. These were agencies that often specialised in particular technologies or platforms in which the contractor
was interested and they sought to build long term links with these agencies. For example Bruce, who had been contracting through a single agency for the last two years said:

I first approached them because a friend of mine had got a really interesting project through them. That’s the area that I wanted to get into and so I sent them my CV and met them and they offered me this role at (company x). I enjoyed that and when that finished they offered me another role and I have not had to move beyond them. So sometimes they call me before the end of a contract and tell me what else they have got or else I give them a call and they know me and I know them and it’s worked out pretty much.

Most of the contractors in Ozinsure spoke about the time and effort they spent in “keeping in touch” with their agencies and agents. The effort and time that they put in to establish links with these agencies rewarded them with suitable contracts. These contractors spoke about these agencies as the prime source of information on new and cutting edge technologies that appealed to the contractors and indicated that by building links with the agencies, they obtained opportunities to work with those leading edge or cutting edge technologies.

I normally send them Christmas cards and I call the agency up you know once every few months, even if I am on a contract and find out what’s happening out there. You know they get to know about some things before we do, like what’s happening with technologies or who’s heading a new project or a new launch. So I try and keep in touch because that gives me a heads up when I am looking for interesting projects (Mary-Ann, contractor).

Some of the contractors spoke about their anxiety about obtaining future contracts and the role that the agencies played in reducing those anxiety levels. Jo (contractor) indicated this while talking about how she managed to get contracts:

If you specialise in a particular area then sometimes you may not get the right role in your field. I mean you have to move with new technologies but they take time to learn and for me agencies are a fall back. If I don’t get a contract in my area, I can always call up the agency and go for more generalist IT roles. So that way they are quite important as fall backs as well.
Not all of the contractors felt the need to build relationships with agencies. Some contractors in Ozinsure perceived little benefit in maintaining strong links with employment agencies. Instead, they actively looked at other sources to obtain interesting roles

I sort of send them my updated CV and occasionally will give them a call. But agencies are only one way you know of finding the right role. There are other avenues that I have to tap if I want to be in this game (Bruce, contractor).

This active sourcing of work through other means was a theme that echoed in the interviews with all of the contractors in Ozinsure. They constantly scanned the environment to identify new opportunities and roles that were being offered to contractors. They used print media such as newspapers, technology magazines, specialist periodicals and other media such as the internet, blog groups, discussion and chat forums, technology sites to scan for and apply for positions. For most contractors this conscious scanning of the environment formed a part of their daily routine. Yogi (contractor) spoke about this “routine” of being a contractor:

Normally I spend some time reading up on what’s happening and then looking at sites where they ask for contractors. I also contribute to an open source blog where we get lots of information on roles that are being offered. I read IT magazines and I have in the past obtained roles through them. So this is, I mean, something I do almost every day. I don’t spend too much time thinking about it, I just do it. I guess it’s a bit like surfing the net or reading the paper or watching TV. It’s just part of your daily life.

Amongst contractors who indicated that they positioned themselves for generalist and managerial contractual roles, more active use and participation in professional networks to secure contracting roles was established. They indicated that they called up previous clients when they were finishing contracts and often obtained roles in companies in which they had previously contracted. They also actively networked with their colleagues and other contractors and obtained information on roles that were available within the industry. They were confident of obtaining suitable and interesting roles through the maintenance of such networks and contacts and many of them had obtained contracting roles through word of mouth recommendations as the following comments by Anthony (contractor) indicates:
Sydney is a small place and everyone knows about everyone. So you have to always keep in touch with former clients and contacts and people who have contracted with you. I mean you never know where your next role is coming from. I got this role through Keith, and he had worked with me before in Qantas and when they wanted a Linux guy, Keith put them onto me. And my contract here has been renewed twice. So agencies are fine but it’s your networks and people who you have worked with who really get you those meaty roles.

These contractors stressed that they spent time and effort in maintaining and developing these contacts. Their commitment towards maintaining and developing these contacts also indicated the anxieties that these contractors felt with regard to their ability to obtain a constantly supply of work. This anxiety was also reflected when they spoke about how they used their “reputations” to help them find suitable roles. They spoke about having to develop and maintain their reputation as experts within their field and their use of their “reputation” as a marketing tool to obtain interesting and well paid contracts.

Here you are only as good as your last job. If you mess up then people will come to know about it and then how can you call them ask for referrals. That’s just gone. I came here because they had heard that I was good at this stuff and if I come in and do nothing; well I can kiss this one goodbye and probably the next few ones as well. So my reputation is all that I can trade on and that’s very important (John, contractor).

Anthony (contractor) also indicated the importance of reputation and the role that it played in helping him obtain suitable contracts:

Your reputation, I mean you live and die by that. It can really let you grow you know, get you better and bigger jobs, but it can also kill you. If word gets around that you don’t know what you are doing, who is going to hire you? And everyone talks to everyone, it’s a small world out there and so you have to deliver on what you promise every time, all the time. That’s what I mean by reputation finding me my job. It could also cost me big time.

**Summary**

Contractors in both the case studies indicated that, to a large extent, they were dependent on employment agencies to secure them contracting roles. They sought out specialist agencies,
that focused on their occupations/professions and a majority of their contracts were obtained through these agencies. However, it was not limited to these agencies alone. They used a variety of means to obtain roles that were of interest to them. They used their networks of contacts, previous clients, contracting colleagues and people they have worked with to network and obtain roles.

However, there were a few differences between the two cases. Amongst a number of contractors in ABC bank, there seemed to be the perception that contracts were “easily available” in the market and the effort required to move outside of placement agencies to find suitable roles seemed to be quite minimal. They were fairly confident about the demand for their skills in the marketplace and in the ability of placement agencies to find suitable contracts for them. Even with agencies, they indicated little need to build or maintain relationships that went beyond the bare minimum of sending them updated resumes and contacting them when a contract was expiring. They showed less insecurity about contracting and showed markedly less fear about issues relating to their “professional reputation” as compared to contractors in Ozinsure. The exception to this, were those contractors who saw themselves as technical specialists within their domains, who actively sought roles that allowed them to be work in different areas of the bank and offered them opportunities to learn. These contractors spent time and effort in maintaining relationships with agencies and with former clients and peers with whom they had previously worked.

Contractors in Ozinsure, on the other hand, spoke more about their anxieties in relation to obtaining suitable roles and seemed more *active* and *involved* in their search for suitable roles and their need to manage their contracting career. They attempted to more actively market themselves for roles, maintained stronger links with agencies and made more attempts to build links and network with professional colleagues, bodies and communities. Their narratives indicated that they were conscious about the need to maintain a profile within these networks and they were very conscious about the need to maintain and develop their reputation as experts within their fields. By developing their “reputation” within their professions they spoke about obtaining interesting contracts. They showed greater anxieties about obtaining roles as compared to contractors in ABC bank, and this insecurity about finding suitable employment
seemed to further focus their attention on building and maintaining their reputation, networks and their profile in the marketplace. Their conversations indicated that, although they felt the IT contracting market in Australia was a fairly small one, and this did cause them some concern in terms of their chances of obtaining suitable roles, it also provided them with the opportunity to network and market themselves more easily and develop their reputation as experts within their fields.

**Theme 4: Building identities as contractors**
*(Differences between permanents and contractors)*

The narratives of the contractors suggested to me that they were involved in a process of differentiating themselves from professionals in permanent employment. When speaking about the choice of a contracting career, or the manner in which they selected and secured roles and when talking about their relationship with organisations, contractors were involved in a process of differentiating who they were and what they did from permanent employees and consequently building identities for themselves as contract professionals. This section focuses attention on these “differences” that contractors perceived— in terms of role expectations, insecurities of contracting, performance expectations, self management, self identity and perception of contractors in the workplace. Thematically, this section highlights some of the conflicts that contractors faced in their contracting careers – between their perceptions of the “freedom” of contracting life and the realities of being a contractor.

**ABC bank**

Almost all of the contractors spoke about the *variety* that contracting offered, in terms of the roles and organisations for which they could work. They contrasted this with permanent roles which they saw as “routinized” or “lacking in variety”. They also contrasted contracting with permanency in terms of the *flexibility* that contracting offered, being able to choose working times, roles and ability to combine work and non-work activities.
However, many contractors, while commenting on the “flexibility” associated with contracting, also spoke about its “inflexibility”. While contracting did offer them the opportunity to work in a variety of roles and the potential to choose working times, in reality this was not always possible.

Sometimes as a contractor, it’s just hard to take time off when you need it. I mean you cannot get time off in the middle of a contract and often you may have to take on another contract just as one finishes because you feel that the market is a bit shaky, you know. So it’s not always possible to take off and that’s one of the things that first sort of took me to contracting you know that I could choose when to work and when not to. So yeah that’s something I see as something different because at least with permanent roles you get sickies (sick leave) and annual vacation and stuff (Justin, contractor).

While on a contract, they felt that they were obligated to work continuously without having the “privilege” of paid leave such as sick leave or annual leave; between contracts, they had to manage their down time so they did not have long breaks in their employment history. Thus although one of the reasons for them to choose contracting as a career option was the perceived flexibility it offered them in terms of work-life balance, the reality was that they often had very limited choice in terms of choosing working and non working times and periods of leave and vacation.

Most contractors in ABC bank mentioned freedom from the “shackles” of office or organisational politics as a distinct advantage of contracting, in that they could be a part of a work environment while still being removed from issues such as people management, team politics etc. They made references to not having to “manage the boss” or “be involved with office politics” and not having to “worry about who is getting the next promotion”.

However, almost all the contractors also mentioned the necessity for them to learn to get along with other members of the team and to “not rub anyone the wrong way”. Sean illustrated this when he spoke about what it meant to be a successful contractor:

You know, I spoke about not worrying about all the people stuff but it’s also really important that you try and get along with everyone you know, that you try and help out and generally try and be part of the
team. It’s those contractors who don’t do that, you know not be part of the team, who don’t get their contracts extended. I think that’s important if you want to be successful as a contractor.

Most contractors mentioned “pay rates” as an advantage in contracting, i.e., they were paid higher rates compared to permanents for doing similar roles. However, many also felt that this was offset by their loss of income in case they fell sick or could not attend work on a particular day. So although “money” was initially mentioned as an advantage to contracting, they indicated that this was offset by their inability to access paid leave while on a contract.

Another key issue that all contractors raised as a major difference between being permanent and contracting was the issue of self-management and its importance for being a successful contractor. They spoke repeatedly about the need to be responsible for their own knowledge management, to be able to “hit the ground running” and the issue of managing their time and on-the-job training effectively to keep their skills and knowledge updated. Many contractors perceived this need to be responsible for their own training and development as a disadvantage in comparison to permanent employees. They spoke about permanent employees having the “luxury” of being trained at the expense of the organisation while their own commitment towards learning and acquiring of knowledge took additional effort and expense. Hence contractors felt that they exerted greater effort in acquiring their skills and knowledge and that they had to use opportunities for on the job training wisely to build on their skills and acquire new knowledge.

You have to try and update yourself on what is happening, you know and you are responsible for that yourself. If you don’t take the time to do it, at your job, then you have to do it outside work. That’s one big difference for me, because when I was with (company x), I was sent to regular training programmes especially regulatory stuff. Now I have to keep abreast of that myself and I pay for the sessions that I attend, you know, not the company (Janelle, contractor).

They also spoke about having to manage their finances and administrative issues much more methodically than permanent employees. A lot of time was spent in issues such as down time planning, financial planning, administrative and tax issues, organising training programmes for oneself etc. The contractors perceived contracting to be more demanding than permanent
employment in terms of self-management of time, finance and professional or intellectual capital.

**Ozinsure**

Contractors in Ozinsure spoke about the “variety” and “flexibility” and higher rates of pay that contracting offered – choice of roles, working hours, management of leisure time, working part time, or limited hours and choosing downtime to suit school holidays or other domestic commitments. They also perceived the need for effective self-management and management of time, and skills and knowledge as essential for the success of a contracting career.

Contractors in this case study also faced a conflict between the perceived “freedom” and flexibility that contracting seemed to offer and the insecurities of contracting itself: both in terms of their need to continually seek new contracts and in terms of the choice of roles available to them and the demand for their skill set and expertise. There was a conflict in terms of their need to choose interesting and demanding roles while at the same time ensure that “down times” were kept to a minimum. Their ability to choose their down time or leisure time between contracts was largely a function of the marketplace and the demand for their particular expertise and knowledge. So although the contractors indicated that choice of roles and working time flexibility were some of the advantages to contracting, these choices were very much restricted by their own anxieties and fears about being “unemployed” and the demand for their particular area of expertise.

So initially I thought that I would take some time off after I finished my contract with (company x), but then I realised that there was a downturn with the airline industry and there were not that many contracts going for someone with my experience. So I started looking around straight away but it took me about 4 months before I could get something similar to what I was looking for. So that was quite stressful, I mean you have to be prepared for some period of unemployment if you are a contractor, but that was a bit scary. You can’t always choose roles because they may not be going around and also what you know may not be in demand in the market at that time. So you need to retool yourself or take on any role and then wait it out. So yeah, that’s a bit scary about contracting, but I guess it’s also there in permanent roles, I mean people get retrenched when they are no longer needed (Yogi, IT contractor).
Although the themes were similar across both case studies, contractors in Ozinsure were much more emphatic about their perceived need to be “self managers” in that they spoke repeatedly about the need to “manage” their choice of roles, to accept roles that allowed them to “perform” on the job, to manage their expertise and knowledge, to upgrade their skills and be familiar with current technologies and changes in technologies, and to manage their time effectively so they had time to learn and update their skills. They projected themselves as individuals who would get the job done as efficiently and “professionally” as possible. In contrast to permanent employees, contractors perceived the need to be self-starters and exhibit initiative as vital to their success.

You have to come in and show them that you know your job straight away. No training period or slack time. That’s the big difference I feel, that companies feel he is a contractor and I am paying him big bucks. He has to come in and get on to it straight away. So you need to be a quick learner and what you don’t know you try and get on top of that as quickly as possible (James, IT contractor).

Contractors in Ozinsure spoke about contracting as offering them opportunities to work with a variety of technologies and to choose projects that were interesting and varied and to build on their portfolio of skills, thereby obtaining vital on the job training which could help them obtain future roles. They repeatedly spoke about how contracting offered them the opportunity to work with cutting edge technologies and exposed them to the forefront of technological advances in their profession. The opportunity to work with such technologies enabled them to choose future roles that used these technologies while commanding a higher premium for their services. This also enabled them to develop their reputation as experts and market themselves better in their field/profession. Damien (contractor) indicated this:

Working with leading technologies and software that I know companies will adopt over the next two to three years is what I see as the big advantage to contracting. See companies will not migrate or move to different platforms easily. It’s a lot of money and training and stuff and so as a permanent, well you do development work but it’s mainly customization of existing software and stuff. So your exposure to leading edge stuff is limited. With contracting, there’s an opportunity every few months or so for you to be exposed to such stuff. That’s great for me because I can put it on my CV and my next role will be based on that and you get paid more for having worked with technologies that people now want to implement. That’s one big advantage of contracting.
Contractors in this case study, felt that in comparison to permanent employees, they had to be focused about the management of their own reputation. They felt that contractors needed to focus on issues of professional reputation and expertise and manage expectations of employers much more effectively as compared to permanent employees. Their ability to obtain interesting and well-paid roles depended on their ability to develop their reputations as experts, i.e. someone with the technical expertise and experience to get the job done. They therefore needed to consciously spend time and effort cultivating and maintaining their reputations. They felt this also led them to manage their network of contacts more effectively and they indicated that the amount of time and energy that they spent in maintaining their reputation was much greater than that expended by permanent staff. Mary Ann (IT contractor) indicated this through this statement:

I think as a contractor I spend more time thinking about how to market myself to agents, to clients and how to sell myself in the IT market. I have to think about that consciously, I have to plan and skill myself and then I have to do well in roles so that I develop a reputation within my area. So if I am in web design, I have to get people to refer me when they want a web designer. So I need to build that over time and it’s something that I am very aware of. And it was not something I thought about much or worried about when I was a permanent. So this is really important, you know your reputation and how it can get you roles or lose you good roles. I mean a bad reputation means your career as a contractor is over and a good one can really get you roles that you want and pay you what you want.

Greater anxieties over the insecurities associated with contracting were expressed by contractors. Their ability to find roles and be continuously “employed” were influenced by their own specific skill set and specialisation areas, their reputation as well as the fads and trends within the industry that increased or decreased the demand for particular kinds of contracting roles and the use of particular technologies. Anthony (contractor) indicated this anxiety though this narrative:

As a contractor you need to see carefully what you are doing in terms of roles and skills. I have worked on projects that have failed and then found that my next role took a long time to come through. So there is anxiety about whether your reputation is good enough to get you roles and whether the technology that
you are working with will be around in two-three years’ time. So that’s something that contractors will worry about and consciously choose roles that they know will be in demand over the next few years.

Summary

In both case studies, I identified conflicting perceptions of the independence and flexibility contracting afforded to contractors versus the constraints they experienced in their working lives. Often contractors would begin differentiating themselves from permanents, but then find themselves contrasting the realities of their contracting lives from their perceptions of it. The need to be self-managers was a key differentiator between being permanent and being a contractor – all of the contractors spoke of the need for self management in contracting, the need to manage time, manage their intellectual growth and manage their performance at work which they felt differentiated them from permanent employees. The opportunity to work in a variety of roles and organisations and being “flexible” about working hours and times, securing higher rates of pay, and being “free’ from organisational politics were some of the other perceived advantages of contracting. Yet as they spoke about these advantages, they also found themselves talking about the “inflexibility” of contracting, of not being able to take time off as and when they wanted, of not having the privilege of paid leave and having to “find a way to work with everyone” in the organisation and inadvertently becoming a part of the “political” landscape of the organisation. They worried about securing suitable contracts, about becoming “unemployed” and of ensuring that they maintained continuity in their contracting careers while at the same time seeking a variety of interesting and challenging roles.

While there are a number of similarities between the two case studies, there are also some differences. Overwhelmingly, contractors in Ozinsure spoke about the need to manage their expertise and manage the expectations of organisations from contractors. While they recognised that they had to perform on the job, and that they had to update their knowledge and skills at all times, they also spoke explicitly about maintaining their reputations, and using that reputation to secure suitable future contracts. This management of reputation and expectations was an essential part of their self-management. They were more specific about the roles that they sought out and even within the variety that they looked for in contracting, they were quite
conscious about seeking roles that would allow them to succeed. In comparison to contractors in ABC bank they expressed greater anxieties about succeeding as a contractor and were more conscious of the immediacy of their performance as compared to permanent staff.

**Theme 5: The use of contract professionals in organisations**

*The contractors’ perspective*

Respondents were asked to reflect on why organisations used contractors and how they felt that they were perceived by the organisation in which they were contracting. The contractors spoke about the value that they brought into the organisation in terms of skill efficiencies and expert knowledge. They also spoke about the need that organisations felt to bring in people who were flexible with working times, and were able to adapt to new technologies and processes and their own perceptions of how they felt they were being viewed by the organisation – as someone who could come in and get the job done, and/or as experts bringing new and valued knowledge and expertise into the organisation. This section highlights some of the differences in the self identities of the contractors in the two case studies and the continuously changing processes through which this construction of identity occurs.

**ABC bank**

Respondents in ABC Bank suggested two predominant reasons for the use of contractors in organisations - the efficiencies that they felt they brought into their roles and the instrumental use of contractors within organisations. All of the contractors indicated that organisations primarily hired them because of their ability to get the job done as quickly and efficiently as possible. They saw themselves as “transactional experts”; they felt their experience and skill set enabled them to add efficiencies to the process, and they could complete their tasks quickly and with minimum errors. Joel (contractor) indicated this in the following manner:
They hire us so that we hit the ground running, get the job started and done quickly. And at the same time they don’t want to be correcting what you are doing, so you’ve got to be pretty confident and accurate with what you have been asked to do.

Many of the contractors in ABC bank spoke of organisations viewing them as “interchangeable resources”, in that it was not the specific contractor that organisations were interested in, but any contractor who possessed the required skill set and experience. In order to succeed as contractors, they had to exhibit their familiarity with the role and their expertise in their professional domain and this minimised down time and helped them obtain suitable contracting roles.

As a contractor they hire you to get on track quickly. If it’s not you then it’s someone else you know, one is the same as another (Joel, contractor).

Contractors also seemed to perceive that a lot of the organisations in which they contracted made the differences between contractors and permanent staff unnecessarily explicit. Contractors indicated that although they did not expect to receive the same privileges as permanent employees, the differences in treatment reinforced their perception of being outsiders. This was evident in Marion’s reflection on what it meant to be a contractor:

I remember this one Christmas, when I was on another contract you know, not here, when the entire team got tickets to the Disney on ice show. I was the only contractor there and I didn’t get one. And I had contracted there for almost 10 months, and some of the staff did not even know that I was a contractor. So when I did not get one, it was like oh, she’s not really part of us. I mean it was just a couple of tickets but that was the one time when I sort of felt like I was not part of the team. Normally you don’t even notice such stuff but this time I did.

While such perceived differences existed, contractors also spoke about their contract with ABC bank as enabling them to share a number of privileges with permanent staff. They had access to the same meals and rest facilities as did permanent staff, and they were constantly reassured that the company would try and offer them permanent roles if the opportunity arose. Because of their non-standard working hours and their geographical distance from head office, they felt much more a part of the team in which they were contracting rather than as part of the larger
organisation. In addition, the percentage of contractors within the teams was fairly large, and the increased numbers of contractors in each team further reduced the perception of contractors being outsiders.

See there are so many of us within the team that you don’t think he is a contractor and well she is not. Everyone does the same thing, and we share breaks and have access to the same free food and transport and also because we are sort of in our own zone here at night, we all gel together. You know sometimes we hang out socially and no one is thinking oh she is a contractor. We are just work mates and so I feel in this case in terms of work and other such stuff there is almost no difference whether you are a contractor or permanent staff (Denise, contractor).

Contractors also perceived that organisations hired them because of the administrative convenience involved in engaging them. Organisations could maintain an arms-length relationship with the contractor and invest very little in their training and development. They also spoke about the ease with which organisations could terminate contractors and this, coupled with the efficiencies and technical knowledge that the contractors brought into their roles, made hiring contractors an appealing option for organisations.

**Ozinsure**

Contractors’ roles were perceived primarily as those that provided value to the organisation through their knowledge, skills and familiarity with their roles and by their ability to deliver results quickly. They also spoke about the instrumental aspect of their use by organisations - the ease with which organisations could hire and fire them (“we get in and out really fast” and “they can ask us to leave any time and there’s no fuss about it”) and the fact that organisations could make use of experts with very little investment made in their learning and development (“we already know what to do so they don’t have to spend money and time on training us”).

Contractors spoke explicitly about the *expertise* that they brought into the organisation. They saw themselves as “experts” and their roles as requiring “expertise”. They spoke of organisations hiring them for this knowledge and expertise that they possessed. They perceived
organisations as lacking skills and expertise that they themselves possessed, particularly in specific domains.

See they were specifically looking for someone with my background and experience; you know financial management and also open source. There are not too many of us who do that and they needed someone with my specific skill set. So often companies will ask for specific people, people that they have worked with in the past or someone who they need to bring in because they don’t have that expertise in house. So that’s mainly why companies look for contractors, they are looking for expert help (Andrew, contractor).

Closely linked to this perception of themselves as experts, some contractors spoke about generalist and managerial skills that they brought in as contractors. They felt that their ability to deliver, and to manage complex projects and people was one of the key reasons they were hired by organisations. They spoke specifically about previous successes and how they were hired into their current contract on the basis of those previous roles and they perceived their role as contractors as being able to provide these successes to the organisation.

I got a call from my agent (placement agency) and she said that this company was launching a project similar to the one that I had just completed and that project was really quite a big success, with lots of stakeholder management and quite complex people-technology interface, and so this company were quite keen for me to join them. I had the kind of managerial experience that they were looking for and I was very familiar with the platform that they were working on, so they asked for me. I think that’s pretty much why I get hired into most of my contracts, you know because I have done this before and I know what to do and how to run projects (Chris, contractor).

Contractors in this case study did not explicitly talk about “perceived” differences between contractors and permanents in the workplace. Many of them indicated that as contractors they were often project head/leader and had in fact, many permanent employees reporting to them. However, they spoke about not being involved with non-project related organisational issues and other people management issues that permanent employees dealt with as a difference between being permanent and a contractor.
Summary

The contractors in both the case studies perceived their role as providing value to the organisation – they felt that they were able to get on with the job, with minimum instructions and errors. They also indicated, that for organisations, contractors could be hired and fired with ease, with minimum administrative and legal requirements and thus provided organisations with human resource flexibility. While a number of contractors in ABC bank viewed themselves as “interchangeable” resources, most of the contractors in Ozinsure saw themselves as quite unique and not interchangeable. They spoke specifically about the unique knowledge and skills they possessed and their perception that organisations hired them for those specific skills and knowledge. In comparison with contractors in ABC bank, they perceived their roles as experts within the organisation, and the unique and rare knowledge they possessed was the value they offered to organisations. This, they felt, was a key reason for organisations to hire contractors and shaped their own self perceptions of being experts within their fields.

Theme 6: Knowledge management and approach towards knowledge sharing

Contractors were asked to describe the knowledge management practices and strategies of the two case study organisations. They reflected on their own experiences of knowledge sharing within that organisation, instances and situations when such knowledge sharing occurred and the manner in which that knowledge was shared. They also reflected on their own learning from their current role and the manner in which they absorbed new knowledge during their contracts.

ABC bank

Perceptions of organisational knowledge management strategies

Most of the contractors in this case study spoke about the formalised, procedural, information systems based knowledge management practices of the bank. The contractors were instructed
on specific software systems and documentation procedures that the bank followed and they were expected to adhere to that process while on the job. There were procedure manuals available for the contractors to consult if required, but almost all the contractors indicated that they had learnt more about the way that the bank processed information by “shadowing” a team member or permanent employee or a more senior member of the staff. In that sense, although the bank had a formal computer-based repository or database, the contractors rarely made use of that system. Instead they learnt by observation, questioning members of the staff and learning their role on the job. Further, contractors indicated that the layout of the work space meant that they could all communicate with members of their team quite easily (they sat next to each other, with no barriers between them) and often just learnt by talking with other more experienced team members.

Knowledge sharing experiences

The contractors’ accounts of their own experiences of sharing their knowledge or expertise with the bank indicated differences in the way that individual contractors perceived both their role within the bank as well as their own interests and prejudices about sharing their expertise with the organisation.

A number of contractors indicated that they waited to be asked before they provided any new information or knowledge to the bank about how certain processes and procedures could be improved. They rarely, if ever, volunteered any of their expertise to the bank and would only reveal what they knew if specifically requested to do so. Some contractors indicated that the reason for not volunteering their expertise was that “there is nothing new to add” in the sense that they felt that “some procedures are slightly different but the job is the same”. Other contractors felt that it was not their role to contribute any new knowledge. The issue of being asked for their help or guidance rather than volunteering is also reflected in their statements about how they saw themselves within the organisation and their own identities as contractors.
don’t have the time to go out of my way and help them. They are paying me to do my role and that’s not part of it (Andrew, contractor).

I haven’t really been asked whether the system can be improved, you know I just come in and do my job and leave. They know that I have done this before and so sure if they asked me I might have a few suggestions. But as a contractor, I have to get the job done on time, you know time is money and they don’t pay me to tell them all these things. So really unless I am asked, and that happens really rarely, I don’t tell them anything (Marcel, contractor).

However, some contractors indicated that in previous contracts, they had volunteered and shared their expertise with the organisation. They indicated that in some of the previous contracts, they had perceived that the organisation expected them to contribute to the efficiency of the role and they had themselves perceived their roles within those contracts as experts. They were sometimes asked for advice or were asked to reflect on their experiences within the industry by their work colleagues and managers and would often volunteer their expertise in team meetings.

It’s not like I never volunteer, I mean there have been contracts before where the role was different. I went in to fix a specific problem and I was the one who knew how to do it. So in that one contract for example, I often spoke about how the issue could be fixed and what we needed to do. I sort of felt that it was my role to do that. And my manager would come and ask me to speak to others about it. So I guess it sort of depends on what you are asked to do. If you go in knowing something that others don’t and it’s a part of your job then I would tell without being asked. So yeah it’s the role I guess (Sean, contractor).

The issue of volunteering their knowledge and expertise also took on a different slant amongst those contractors who were seeking permanent roles within the bank. Kathy, a contractor actively looking to become permanent, indicated this in the following way:

See I know how this can work better, because in my country I have already done this. So I told my manager that we could change the form slightly so that the entire coding becomes easier and we don’t have to cross check deals, but he did not seem that interested. Maybe he felt that I should only do my job, I don’t know, but I told him this within a week of my coming in. But no one really listened, but once again I show him that I really know this work.
During informal discussions with other team members over meals or coffee, contractors indicated that they would sometimes talk about previous experiences if the topic revolved around those issues. They would recount instances of how they had handled certain issues in their previous contracts or how other banks handled similar processes and issues and how it differed from their current bank’s procedures. This knowledge sharing often took the form of narration of specific instances and episodes or events and contractors would often reveal their own part in contributing to the resolution of those events and episodes:

We all have our dinner together; you know the contractors get the same food and stuff. Sometimes we discuss what’s happening at work you know if there are big deals or FOREX trades then the topic comes up. And if there is something that I have done before, then I do tell them and we talk about it. Like the time when we had an over feed at London and we short sold on currency. I mean there was a huge panic and we had to fix it real fast. And I was talking to my team leader about it at dinner and he was really interested because they had a similar issue a couple of nights back and so I told him how we fixed it. But I mean we don’t talk about this every day, only sometimes (Denise, contractor).

When asked to reflect on their own learning from the bank and how they felt their current contract had contributed to their own knowledge base, a number of contractors indicated that most of their learning occurred on the job and by working on a variety of roles and moving across functional areas of the bank. They also spoke about their experiences working across countries and learning from working in different cultures and organisational settings. The contractors also spoke about learning by doing and observing on the job rather than being exposed to training programmes and computerised procedural manuals. They perceived such learning on the job to be vital for them to succeed as contractors.

When I move from one contract to another, the roles may be similar but the way in which these banks handle things are always different. So I learn from all the roles that I’m into and that’s probably why I keep getting contracts. You know they think oh he’s done that at Bank A and so he’ll be good at it. And I really don’t have that much time between contracts to read up and stuff so it’s all on the job. I learn a lot from each role (Marcel, contractor).
Perceptions of organisational knowledge management strategies

Contractors perceived the company’s knowledge management strategy to be a combination of the use of information systems as well as a personal approach to people interactions that resulted in knowledge sharing, assimilation and application of new knowledge. In this case study, contractors indicated that it was a requirement that all project related information had to be documented and saved and the company used intranets and project files to house this information. Contractors involved in the project were also expected to document the development of the application using standard files and documents that were available in-house to record the progress of the project. In addition, project managers had to document and record emails and other communications between project team members and these were also archived as part of the project documentation. The contractors indicated that this was a fairly routine procedure within the industry, as most projects they had worked on required project documentation to store information related to that particular project, as this statement from Bruce (IT contractor) reflects:

It’s pretty much standard practice to try and document everything about the project I mean the software differs or sometimes what goes into the project documentation may change, but overall the idea is to have some sort of database where information about the project is saved. So yeah, in almost all of the projects that I have worked on, that’s been the practice.

In addition to this, during project meetings and discussion forums often new ideas, information and know-how regarding the project were discussed and these could be both formal brainstorming sessions and informal discussion over coffee or lunch. The contractors perceived these discussions to be greatly beneficial in the sharing and assimilation of new knowledge and on-the-job learning and informal social processes of sharing knowledge were perceived as important to their success as a contractor.

Some of the best ideas often come when we just talk about stuff that is not quite working with the project. You sort of talk about past projects and then someone mentions something that they did or you
get to know of a solution and then you go back and try that and often it works. So there are formal project meetings where we will brainstorm or discuss issues and often that’s where the most progress is made but these casual conversations are really the brainstorm sessions. And stuff that you learn here you remember and take with you. So it’s all of these together (Mary-Ann, contractor).

**Knowledge sharing experiences**

Perception of their role within the organisation and their own interests influenced their knowledge sharing behaviour at work. Here, a majority of the contractors indicated that they *often volunteered* their knowledge or expertise during team meetings even if they were *not specifically asked* for guidance or advice. They would often come into meetings prepared to offer experiential knowledge and used these forums to establish their expertise within the project group.

I try and contribute as much as I can in team meetings, if it’s something that I have worked on before I tell them that this stuff is familiar to me, so they know that they can ask me about it if they get stuck. I talk to the team about some new technologies or something different that I have done in other projects so that if required we can move in that direction. I try and do that pretty much straight out of the bat, you know on my first day I talk to people and then in team meetings I sort of reflect on what I know (Anthony, contractor).

The willingness to volunteer new knowledge and establish their expertise within the team was influenced by their *desire to maintain their reputation* as experts within their field of expertise. They expressed anxieties in wanting to maintain and establish their reputation and part of that process of establishing their reputation was their voluntary participation in sharing their expertise within the team. The issue of reputation and its impact recurred throughout the interviews of the contractors in Ozinsure.

Reputation it’s absolutely vital you know critical. I mean you live on what you did yesterday and what you are going to do today. Someone is going to know and hear about it and you are much more wary of it than permanent employees. I mean permanent employees get assessed six to twelve months time and they too have to do a good job, but with us it’s much more immediate assessment, you know with contractors and consultants. Did you do what we wanted you to do yesterday, and today are you doing
what we want you to do now? So it’s constant this assessment, and that’s just the way it is. So reputation is vital (Chris, contractor).

Related to the issue of establishing and maintaining their reputation as experts, some contractors also spoke about the need to establish themselves as specialists within a particular area of the industry. They indicated that they took up roles that allowed them to work in those specialist fields, they contributed actively at the workplace in terms of new ideas and technologies and also made their presence felt in the marketplace through participation in technical blogs, wikipedia, internet forums and chat groups and consciously developed a mentality of knowledge sharing with their professional peers and within their industry.

I try and spend some amount of time everyday reading through technical blogs, and chat groups, open source forums; I try and contribute some articles whenever I can. See the open source movement looks at knowledge as growing when it is shared, you know you are developing the system as a group with lots of different ideas and no one person owns it. So that’s the way I see it at work. I use many of my open source contacts at work, I refer them to the project manager and that’s sort of the way I do things. And I am very aware that this media is important for me not only to update my skills, but also to get my name across the arena, you know I want people to talk about me when they talk about open source. So that’s what I mean by open sharing of knowledge (Bruce, contractor).

Many of the contractors in Ozinsure also spoke of themselves as “consultants” and not “contractors”. They indicated that being a consultant differed from a contractor in that they viewed themselves as being able to work across industries and occupations; they viewed their skill set as being fairly generalist rather than specialist and they considered their primary role within the organisation as that of an enabler, someone able to come in and provide advice and guidance to the project. They also saw their managerial skills and people management skills to be quite different as compared to contractors and indicated that being a consultant allowed them to take on senior roles within the organisation, even if such roles were purely transient and time bound. The issue of knowledge sharing amongst these set of “consultants” took on a slightly different slant as compared to contractors in that they spoke not only about their technical and managerial skills and expertise, but also spoke about “know who” and “know how” as an integral part of their role. They spoke about the “politics” of organisation and
indicated that in order to be successful at their role, not only did they need to establish their expertise within the organisation, they also needed to market themselves to the right people within the organisation and also effectively manage expectations within the team or project group of which they were a part. They seemed to indicate that knowledge sharing for them was two way – they needed to share their expertise with the team while at the same time they needed to develop an awareness of knowledge experts within the organisation and also identity power centres with the organisation in order to try and positively influence these people within the organisation. For them understanding the importance of organisational knowledge was seen as vital for their success. This is reflected in the following statement by Charles, an IT “consultant”:

See it’s all about people management, you know not just your team but upwards and sideward, you know people working in other parts of the company. I sort of go in with a pretty good idea of who’s who in the company and in the project team and what I don’t know I learn by talking to people. So when you asked me about knowledge sharing, this kind of knowledge is even more important; you know knowing who’s who and who has the power to approve budgets and who doesn’t get along with whom. So when I say I share what I know, I also learn at the same time. So for me it’s a two way street and that’s also part of this big knowledge is power thing, I think knowledge sharing is power. You have to know how to get along with people and as a consultant that’s very important.

**Summary**

The contractors in the two case studies indicated that KM strategies in both the organisations were a combination of formalised information systems and informal social systems. In both cases, contractors used formal and informal systems in order to understand work processes and requirements, become familiar with organisational systems and procedures and transactions. Contractors in ABC bank and Ozinsure also indicated that on the job learning was vital for them to grow their skills and competence and they used their roles in the contracts to further their knowledge and update their skills. Clearly, contractors perceived this on the job learning as providing them better contracting opportunities in the future. There are also indications that organisations expect contractors to follow the formalised procedures for understanding systems
within the company and contractors were aware of their role in utilising those systems and contributing to it through formalised documentation, project documentation etc.

There are, however, differences between the narratives of the two sets of contractors. Contractors in ABC bank indicated a reluctance to volunteer their knowledge and expertise to the firm, unless they were specifically asked. They seemed to perceive their current role with the bank, not as experts, but as transactional specialists, in that their role was to come in and get the job done as quickly as possible rather than suggesting process improvements. However, contractors who viewed their role as that of a specialist or those contractors who felt the need to obtain permanency in their roles indicated that they volunteered their knowledge. This suggested that to these contractors, self interest and role clarity influenced their choice of voluntarily sharing new knowledge with the organisation. Contractors in Ozinsure were in contrast, eager to establish their reputation as experts within the organisation and chose to do that through knowledge sharing. They spoke about willingly contributing their expertise and using opportunities to establish their reputations as experts within the organisation. They showed a much greater awareness of the need to knowledge share in order to establish their reputations as experts within their field.

Both sets of contractors also indicated that they used informal, social processes to obtain and share new knowledge. Contractors in both case studies indicated that they use informal meetings to share their expertise with team members and often this was done voluntarily. However, contractors in Ozinsure indicated a much greater awareness of the importance of understanding organisational knowledge; understanding “who’s who” and networks, power centres and influences within the organisation and they viewed this organisational knowledge as a core part of their knowledge base and expertise.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the interviews of the contractors, my own observations and study of secondary data such as organisational documents, I constructed six themes that illustrated how contract professionals made sense of their contracting careers and positioned themselves as
contract professionals within two professions – banking and information technology. These were: their choice of contingent careers; the kinds of roles they selected; the process through which they secured roles; their perceptions of how organisations viewed them; their perceptions of how contracting differed from permanent organisationally bounded roles; and their perceptions of organisational knowledge management strategies and knowledge sharing at work. By constructing these themes and studying them holistically, I could put together a picture of how these professionals became contractors.

I identified several similarities between the contractors in the two case studies. Both sets of contractors spoke about certain push and pull factors that influenced them towards contracting careers. Apart from triggers such as retrenchments and job losses, a key theme that influenced them towards contracting was self-management. The issue of self-management has previously been highlighted in studies of contract workers such as Barley and Kunda (2004, 2006) and this study strengthens the notion that these professionals seek to forge a new form of professionalism where independence and the desire to carve out careers not bounded by organisations are salient. Within this broader theme of self management, I identified four micro themes: the need to manage their careers and gain greater control over work and leisure; a desire to choose and work within a variety of roles across a number of organisational settings; disenchantment with organisational structures, control measures and politics that they felt “stifled” their ability to choose and work with leading technologies and practices; and a desire to capitalise on their expertise and obtain higher rates of pay for their skills and expertise.

Analysing the interviews, I perceived that contractors’ consciously chose roles that they felt comfortable performing and roles that allowed them to exhibit their expertise while providing them with opportunities for learning. They were also aware that as contractors, they needed to provide value to the organisation as quickly as possible and consequently choose roles in which they could minimise down time spent in learning. They used third parties such as employment agencies to help find these roles and they spoke about the need to network and manage these networks effectively in order to secure contracting roles. The contractors’ stories about the manner in which they obtained contracting roles suggested to me that although they sought contracting because of the perceived “freedom” that it offered them, the realities and
complexities of contracting were such that they sometimes had little choice in the roles they accepted, the times they worked and in the relationships they needed to build and maintain at work. They were also aware of the knowledge management processes of the organisation to which they were contracting and that they used both formal processes and informal processes to learn from the organisation.

I also identified a number of differences between the two case studies. While talking about why they chose to contract, a number of contractors in ABC bank spoke about their desire to manage their time and work-life balance as a key motivator in choosing to contract. I recognised this need for “managing time” occurring in the narratives of a number of contractors in ABC bank. In contrast to this, a majority of the contractors in Ozinsure spoke about their desire to manage their intellect and expertise as the key motivator to contract. Although both sets of contractors spoke about “freedom” in contracting, more contractors in ABC bank indicated that they chose contracting because of the temporal freedom that contracting offered them, while almost all the contractors in Ozinsure spoke of the intellectual freedom that contracting offered them (choice of roles, working with expert technology, choosing leading edge work) and their ability to manage their intellectual growth and expertise in a manner that they felt was appropriate and beneficial to them.

A majority of the contractors in ABC bank focused on the management of their time. They chose roles that required lesser amounts of time spent learning on the job and they were willing to work non-standard hours that allowed them time to focus on non-work activities. They also expressed lower levels of anxieties about contracting because they perceived that their skills and expertise were in demand within the banking sector that depended on contractors for a number of transactional and process oriented roles. These contractors spoke about being committed to maintaining their knowledge and expertise within their domain, however were less committed to enhancing or developing their expertise in newer domains or in areas that required them to spend more time learning on the job or during non-work periods.

In contrast, a number of contractors in Ozinsure spoke repeatedly about their reputation as experts within their field/domain as securing contracting roles for them. Consequently, they
focused on their intellectual growth and the development of their expertise. They spent time and resources updating their skills and knowledge and actively sought roles that could enhance their reputation as experts. They spoke about their reputation as professionals and experts enabling them to seek and obtain roles that would further their intellectual growth. They also expressed greater anxiety about obtaining suitable roles and consequently spent greater time and effort in establishing themselves as experts. They were conscious of the need to manage their networks and agencies through which they obtained their contracting roles, and were active participants in the management of their networks, spending time and effort maintaining and developing their networks of agents, clients and peer groups.

Through the study of the two cases, I have identified self interest, professional image and identity, reputation and role clarity as influencing the contractors’ knowledge sharing motivations. Contractors in ABC bank who were keen to establish their expertise (in particular, contractors seeking permanent roles) volunteered their knowledge while those contractors who were less anxious about establishing themselves as experts or obtaining future contracts expressed less motivation to share their knowledge. Similarly in Ozinsure, contractors who were eager to establish themselves as experts voluntarily participated in knowledge sharing activities. They perceived themselves as experts within the organisation and perceived the act of knowledge sharing as contributing to the development of their reputation as experts within their fields. How the contractors perceived themselves and their roles within the organisation and how they constructed their professional identity and images were also influenced by the organisation and the nature of the work that they performed such as: participation in project based and non-project based and market demand for their skills and expertise; managers’ perceptions of the contractors, their roles and professional images; and by the manager-contractor relationship at work. The next chapter presents findings from the narratives of the managers and suggests that the dyadic relationship between the manager and the contract professional greatly influences the identity and image construction of the contractors as well as their motivations to share their knowledge and expertise with firm.
CHAPTER SEVEN
MANAGERS AND TEAM LEADERS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings from the interviews of managers and team leaders in both the case studies – ABC bank and Ozinsure and discuss their perceptions on two key issues: first, why organisations use contract professionals and their role in organisations; second, the impact that these professionals have on knowledge flows within the firm, particularly the issue of knowledge sharing and the processes through which such knowledge sharing occurs. By exploring the themes in this section, I focus attention on how managers perceive contract professionals in organisations and their knowledge contribution to the firm; and the construction of the manager-contractor relationship. The implications of these findings on the construction of the contractors’ professional identity and the contractor-organisational relationship and its impact on knowledge sharing are then discussed in chapter eight. As in the previous chapter, each theme explored is briefly introduced, followed by a discussion of the salient findings and concludes with an analysis of the commonalities and differences between the findings in the two case studies.

Theme 1: Use of contract professionals in organisations

Managers and team leaders (hence forth referred to collectively as managers) in the two case studies were asked to reflect on the use of contract professionals in their industry and more specifically within their organisation. They recounted instances of when and how contractors were used within the industry, the kinds of roles for which they were hired, discussed patterns and frequency of use, norms of contractual engagement and why they felt that contractors would continue to be in demand within the banking and insurance industries. The key reasons for the use of contractors in organisations were: the need to meet fluctuations in operational demands; the ease and flexibility with which contractors could be hired and fired; flexibility in
costing and accounting practices that allowed the hiring of contractors; and organisational
requirement for professionals with specific skill sets and experiences to fill specific knowledge
gaps within the organisation. Managers also identified characteristics of contractors who were
perceived to be “good” and the two case studies reflect some commonalities and differences in
these perceptions. I explore each of these in detail in this section.

**ABC bank**

*Reasons for hiring contractors*

All the managers spoke about the need for contractors specifically within their department
because of the non-standard working hours under which they operated. The department found
it difficult to recruit qualified, experienced employees willing to work night shifts or other non-
standard hours for extended periods of time. It was easier for this department to hire qualified
contractors who were willing to work these non standard hours. Further, managers perceived
the higher rates of pay that these contractors were offered to be off-set by the efficiencies that
they provided, both in terms of shorter learning cycles (time spent learning on the job) and the
knowledge and skills that the contractors brought into the role. Managers indicated that the
specific requirements of their non standard working hours and the demands of the roles made
the use of contractors almost a necessity for them.

We need qualified, experienced people who have dealt with complex FOREX before. And because we
operate around various time zones - Asia, Europe, North America; in effect we are a 24 hour operation.
And normally people stay within teams, so if you are in the New York team for instance, you get to know
all of the American counterparts and we like for them to be in the team for an extended period because
otherwise we would need to constantly train new people. And New York works when we sleep so we
need people happy to do nights. We often get contractors who work for us for over a year and half and it
works out well for us in that they understand the operating conditions and we get qualified people
(Michael, Manager).

Within the financial services industry, particularly banking, managers perceived a bias towards
hiring contractors for roles that were process/transaction oriented. They used statements such
as “all banks run on contractors” and “we need them because we have a lot of transactional work and getting permanent staff instead would blow out the bottom line” to indicate the prevalence of contract labour within banking in Australia. There were clear indications that employing contractors allowed the banks to present a better bottom line to investors – accounting for contractors occurred under various other headings such as miscellaneous cost or project costs and did not fall under labour costs which were often scrutinised by the market as a sign of corporate efficiency. Using contractors therefore allowed the banks to increase their staffing, without adding to the “burden” of their labour costs.

Employing contractors also enabled managers to be “free of the administrative procedures” involved in employing permanent staff, including dealing with labour and employment laws, performance management, employee counselling and career management.

See normally when you hire someone you need to go through HR, get paper work done and once they’re employed and they are not good then it’s really tough to fire them. With contractors there are no such issues, you get them on the job straight away and then if you don’t like what they do, just ask them to leave. No legal stuff to handle (Steve, Manager).

The use of contractors within this department was used almost as a means of “road testing” possible future employees without having to go through the more formal options of legally hiring them, placing them on probation and so on. Further in the conversation, Steve spoke about this “testing” of contractors:

When we hire contractors we always let them know that we are looking to make them permanent if the role arises and if they are interested. And we try and do that, in fact we call them temps to permanent; they know that if they get on well, then we are looking to take them on. But the contracting period allows us to see how they are and will they fit in. If the role does not come about there’s no issue. So although it’s temporary to permanent, they know it’s a contract.

Managers also talked about demand fluctuations in the industry: the need for additional staff during certain seasons and financial periods and the necessity to maintain a lean workforce at other times. Using contractors was a way to effectively meet the fluctuations of demand and supply of labour within their profession.
Sometimes we need extra hands because we have deadlines or because APRA (Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority) has asked us to comply with something or we are launching a new product or initiative. Then we need more people, but we don’t want them on permanently, just to handle the work load. So contractors are the way out of this and all banks do this (Brian, manager).

**Roles occupied by contractors**

Managers were asked to reflect *on the kinds of roles* for which contractors would be suitable within their organisation and the kinds of roles for which contractors were normally and frequently hired. Almost uniformly, managers stated that these roles were process oriented and transaction based with tasks being perceived as non-complex. However, these roles did demand a level of familiarity with, and expertise in, banking processes and systems. For example Keith (manager) indicated:

> Most often we need them to look after daily transactions, you know with the FOREX department. We want them to be able to come in and look at the orders and process them and ensure that there are no errors in the processing. So it’s pretty straight forward. And we get the guys who have done this before because they know what to do and they are not worried about foreign currency transactions.

In terms of the knowledge and skill levels required to do these roles, managers indicated that it was previous experience working within banks that provided them with the skills to handle the transactions rather than formal qualifications.

> We look at their experience and whether they have done this before because that’s how you reduce errors. We don’t want to just pick anyone. Plus they need to be familiar with the whole banking set up, you know worked in banks or in the industry and if they also have FOREX experience, that’s who we want (Steve, manager).

**Perceived characteristics of effective contractors**

I asked the contractors to reflect on what they perceived to be characteristics of effective contractors. Managers indicated that those contractors who came in and were familiar with the
systems, required lesser training and adjustment periods, and those who could “get along” with other members of the team and were pleasant to work with were perceived to be “good” contractors. Those who took longer to “get on with the job”, made more transactional errors, were found slacking on the job and “display a really bad attitude” were those that were considered to be “poor” contractors and were often asked to leave. For example Brandon (manager) said the following:

See Sean for instance is what I would call a good contractor – he has worked here before, knows the way things get done around here, doesn’t waste any time and always comes in on time and gets the job done. Plus he works well with everyone, you know no attitude so he’s great and we want him to go permanent.

On being asked to describe a contractor who was asked to leave before the end of a contract because of poor performance, Carl (manager) provided this example:

Pretty much they are all decent. But one time we had this guy who did not seem interested, he came in on time, but took ages to get the job done and his attitude looked like he was doing us a favour by doing his job. It was tough with him and he didn’t get along so well with the others in the team. So he actually was asked to leave and we got the agency to give us another contractor and she was fine. So more than anything I think it’s the attitude you know, how you come in and work and get along with everyone that makes you a good employee, whether contractor or permanent.

**Ozinsure**

*Reasons for hiring contractors*

Managers in this case study also hired contractors because they had the ability to get the job done quickly and required very little on the job training. This, they felt, was particularly important when they had a surge in their work operations and needed people with experience and expertise to get on with the job and complete it as quickly as possible. They also indicated that hiring contractors was a strategic costing decision. They spoke of hiring trends within the industry that supported the hiring of contractors influenced both by the costing and economics of hiring contractors as well as by the fact that organisations needed to invest very little time and money in training and updating the skill set of the contractor. Similar to ABC bank,
managers also indicated that hiring contractors provided them with the flexibility to hire and fire at will, involved fewer legal and administrative issues and allowed them to “road test” future permanent employees without the administrative “hassle” of hiring permanent employees. Here too, managers felt that this allowed them to obtain additional qualified people when the organisation had a greater work load but allowed them to shed excess staff during down times. This, they felt, was particularly true in project life cycles, where people with different skill sets were required during different times and not everyone was required to be involved in the project from beginning to end.

See hiring contractors for projects helps because we get people who already know what they are doing and also because we may not require those skills once the project is complete. So it does not make sense to hire them permanently. They come in, do their job and then leave without us having to invest too much time in training them or monitoring their performance. And it takes care of manpower needs during specific stages of the project, we can get people in when we need them and take them out when we don’t. And the cost of contractors comes into project costs rather than labour costs and that always impacts on how the bottom line is presented (Chris, manager).

**Roles occupied by contractors**

Managers in Ozinsure also spoke about specific role requirements that the contractors were hired to fulfil and specific skills and knowledge that the contractors possessed, that the organisation lacked, as core reasons for hiring contractors. Managers spoke about trends within the industry, such as application development projects, that required people with certain technical skills and specialisations in particular technologies. Companies often hired contractors to fill these roles within projects. In order to fill these roles, companies often hired contractors through agencies that specialised in particular software applications, software development languages or vendor specific applications. Often, organisations did not have all of these key people in-house and the economics of project management implied that it would not be possible for organisations to hire permanent staff for individual projects. Hence the solution was to fill certain positions within the project team with permanent employees and hire contractors on a needs specific basis, with contractors coming in having specific skills or domain expertise and knowledge. Hence one of the key reasons to hire contractors was the
**project based** IT development that companies undertook and the demands of such project based development for employees with specific skill sets and expertise. Robert, an IT manager, spoke about this while commenting on the use of contractors in IT projects:

Normally when we start a project, we look around in-house and see what is available. And then we hire contractors to fill specific positions and that could be any position, even project manager. It has to be the best fit for the role. With this open source migration, we wanted people specifically with open source experience and other than our chief architect; no one else had that knowledge. So we contacted the agency and got some of their best guys to contract with us. So normally, we get contractors in for specific projects and roles because they have the expertise.

Related to the issue of specific domain expertise, managers spoke about hiring contractors with **specific vendor** application knowledge in order to customise vendor purchased software according to company requirements. Thus vendor application customisation was one of the most common projects undertaken by companies and hiring technical consultants or contractors to modify this application was one area in which contractors were most in demand.

See the most common approach towards development is to purchase something *off the shelf* and then modify it to suit our requirements. And normally when it’s a vendor product, we get a contractor from the vendor who knows the product really well to come in and customise it for us. That’s the most common approach and one place wherein we really do need contractors and that’s where we use them the most (Pat, IT architect, manager).

Further, software updates and system modifications were required periodically and organisations often had to hire external staff in order to upgrade systems, particularly vendor applications or software with specific technologies (such as open source, Linux etc.). Managers indicated that it would not be cost effective for companies to have employees with those skills and expertise permanently employed as these upgrades were sporadic and did not occur on a daily basis. Hence contractors were routinely hired to undertake software modifications, or upgrades as and when the need arose.

Managers spoke about hiring contractors to **fill specific knowledge gaps** within the organisation. These included technologies that the organisation wished to adopt, but was not
familiar with, or technologies that were at the cutting edge of development and required people with very specialised/specific knowledge that the organisation itself did not possess. Many managers spoke about the need to fill this knowledge gap as a key reason for hiring contractors.

When we started planning this project, we wanted someone specifically who had worked with Linux. We did not have any one here who could do that and we wanted to get that sort of knowledge into the company so that we could build on that. So we hired (contractor name) as our project manager and he is also required to train some of our permanent staff. That way we get to keep some of what he knows. I mean this is one area where we were really lacking (Robert, manager).

Perceived characteristics of effective contractors

Managers were also asked to reflect on what they considered to be characteristics that defined “good” contractors; i.e. those characteristics they found amongst contractors they perceived to be efficient and successful in their roles. As in ABC bank, managers indicated that those contractors who had experience and expertise and were able to hit the ground running, were familiar with organisational routines and those who were team players and easy to deal with were considered to be “good” contractors.

However, in this case, unlike ABC bank, managers’ specifically referenced “good” contractors as “actively contributing ideas” to the team, “sharing their experience” and “volunteering advice” and “providing guidance” to the project team. They spoke about the need for contractors to “share their knowledge and expertise” with the organisation and indicated that “good” contractors were those who made a “valuable knowledge impact” on the organisation.

Contractors who were perceived to be lacking in technical expertise required for their role or contractors who did not share their expertise with the team were considered to be “poor” contractors. Managers explained that often the decision to extend contracts or re-hire contractors was based on the perceived skill and knowledge contributions of the contractors and those contractors who were perceived to be inefficient or to have exaggerated their skill set
and did not perform on the job, were sometimes asked to leave before the expiry of their contract and were seldom hired again by the organisation.

The good ones are the ones who will come in, straight away see what needs to be done and then get on with the job. You know they will know who is who in the project, they have a good idea of time lines and budgets, they know their stuff inside out, I mean that’s why we hire them. They will tell you things about the project that you may not even be aware of, they will guide the project, and really add intellectual value to the project, you know. Those are the good ones, the ones who will keep coming back because they are value for money. The other ones are just techies, they will come and clock time and charge you for every extra minute, but don’t add value to the project. Those are the ones who don’t get called back (Mark, manager).

**Summary**

Based on the interviews with the managers, I identified three common reasons for the use of contractors in ABC bank and Ozinsure. In both the case studies, contractors were hired because of their ability to fulfil the requirements of the role quickly, efficiently and with very little time spent on “learning” the job. Managers perceived this as translating into work efficiencies for the organisation. Second, hiring contractors was a strategic costing decision allowing organisations to increase manpower without including it as “labour costs”. A third key reason for the use of contractors was the flexibility that contractors provided in terms of meeting labour demands during peaks and troughs allowing the organisations to be flexible about its human resource capability without the administrative and legal “procedures” involved in hiring permanent employees. Further, the two case studies used a lot of contractors because of the specific requirements of the organisations’ themselves, including the non standard working hours (specifically in ABC bank), the demands of project life cycles (Ozinsure) and the availability of skilled, experienced professionals working as contractors.

I also identified some key differences in the reason and use of contractors between the two case studies. In ABC bank, managers spoke about hiring contractors for roles that were transaction/process oriented, non-project based and non-complex. In contrast, managers in Ozinsure spoke about obtaining contractors to fill roles that required specific and specialised knowledge, project based and were considered complex. They indicated that they hired
contractors to fill specific knowledge gaps within the organisation and sought out contractors with professional experience and skills in specific technologies and platforms. Their focus on the knowledge, skills and experience that the contractors brought into the organisation was far greater than that indicated by managers in ABC bank.

Another point of difference between the two case studies was the managers’ perceptions on the characteristics that contributed to a “good” contractor. While both groups of managers spoke about the contractors’ ability to “hit the ground running” and get the job done as quickly as possible and work well in a team, managers in Ozinsure spoke specifically about the knowledge contribution of these contractors. Unlike in ABC bank, here the managers emphasised the need for these contractors to participate in team meetings, contribute ideas, provide advice and guidance to the project team and share their knowledge and expertise with the organisation - they felt these were key characteristics of “good contractors”. In contrast to this, managers in ABC bank rarely mentioned knowledge contribution, providing advice or guidance as characteristics of “good” employees. Their focus remained on the contractors’ ability to get the job done as efficiently as possible with short learning cycles and minimum down times.

**Theme 2: Perspectives on knowledge management and knowledge sharing**

The managers were asked to reflect on issues related to knowledge and its management within their organisation. They were also asked about the issue of knowledge sharing particularly between contractors and the organisation and the processes through which they felt that such knowledge sharing occurred. Managers in both case studies spoke about the predominant knowledge management strategy of their organisations, the process through which contractors learnt the operational requirements of the organisation, and the process through which knowledge sharing occurred in their respective organisations. Their narratives reflect differences in the way the managers in the two case studies perceived the value of knowledge sharing amongst contractors and the organisation and the process through which such knowledge sharing occurred. I discuss each of these in detail in this section.
**ABC bank**

*Perceived knowledge management strategy of the firm*

Most of the managers in ABC bank perceived the organisation’s knowledge management strategy revolved around “procedural knowledge” or “transaction knowledge”, i.e. events and processes that focused on increasing operational efficiency. The focus was on learning on-the-job, for new employees to learn by observing the work performed by more experienced staff members (shadowing) and referring to procedure manuals and documentation. Issues relating to efficiencies, error minimization, and procedures were also discussed regularly at team meetings and informally amongst team members during the work day. This included asking team members to help out during periods of stress or excess work, having team members check or monitor work done by newer team members. The process of “shadowing” or observing experienced team members perform their role was considered an integral part of the induction process of new employees. Contractors were also exposed to the same process of observation-learning and were asked to sit in with experienced staff in order to learn the peculiarities of the job and understand “the way in which we do things”.

Managers in ABC bank did not explain clearly their understanding of the organisation’s formal knowledge management strategy. The geographical location of their workplace (separate from head office) and the requirement of the department to work non-standard hours impacted on their understanding of the organisation’s knowledge management strategies and practices. When asked to describe it, Cynthia (manager) replied:

> It’s very hard to describe that when you are talking about the whole company, I mean I have always worked nights and here you are a bit isolated you know, so I am not sure what the formal policy is. But I believe you sort of watch and learn and then you turn around and ask when you don’t know.

The influence of working night shifts and a feeling of being removed or isolated from other parts of the organisation was also echoed in narratives of other managers and team members when asked to describe both their perceptions of the organisation’s KM strategy as well as
formal and informal communication patterns within the firm. Colin (manager) responded in this way:

See it’s difficult to talk about the whole company because I don’t know that much about what happens at head office. Here we try and buddy up and then if possible we try and rotate between teams; you know New York then Hong Kong and so on so you get a better idea of what everyone is doing. But the work is not complicated so knowledge essentially is knowing what to do and how to do that properly.

They also spoke about induction and training programmes as being part of knowledge management and here too echoes of isolation were heard. Further in her conversation, Cynthia (manager) spoke about this feeling of isolation:

I have only been to training programmes twice in about five years and they were compulsory programmes. See here we are not that aware of what happens in head office because we work nights and also because we are not situated in the city with them but here (a different geographical suburb). I have heard that in the city it’s different because you get to attend a number of seminars or programmes because they happen during the day also because at head office you get to know of things faster. Here we are a bit isolated and so we sort of do things amongst ourselves. We don’t have long inductions, just short ones so that people know what’s what, and then get on with the job.

Managers also indicated that there were certain training programmes that all staff was required to attend, and these programmes were mandated by institutions such as APRA (the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority) and other regulatory bodies. These training programmes led to qualifications that were legal requirements of the industry and contractors not having these qualifications were expected to attend these courses, paid for by ABC bank.

Managers were asked about their perceptions of the complexity of knowledge required to perform the roles for which contractors were hired. Almost all of the managers indicated that they perceived the roles to be “process intensive”; that the knowledge the contractors required to perform the roles effectively was transactional or procedural knowledge - knowledge that the contractors could learn through observation and doing. None of the managers indicated that tacit or expert knowledge was required for the roles for which contractors were hired. In terms of the complexity of these roles, most of the managers indicated that they were moderately
complex in that the contractors had to be aware of, and knowledgeable about, FOREX and financial transactions and needed to understand fundamentals such as money market operations. However the complexity was reduced by the standardization of the operations – there were set procedures that needed to be performed and efficiencies were derived by performing those standardized procedures with minimum errors. Thus complexity was minimised because of the use of automated systems that made the complex task fairly routine. Michael, manager spoke about this:

What they do is not rocket science, I mean it’s straightforward because the system will prompt them and correct them. But it is complex because you have to understand money markets and dealing with New York or London. So you need someone who has that knowledge or experience probably, but you can then teach them how to do it step by step here. It’s about following the procedure accurately.

Knowledge contributions of contractors

Managers were also asked to discuss the relevance and importance of the contractors’ knowledge base and whether it was essential for the organisation to tap into that knowledge. Most of the managers indicated that they felt that what the contractors knew or brought into the organisation would be similar to what the organisation already knew; there would be very minimal new knowledge to be obtained from the contractors. They indicated that because the roles were transaction oriented, the contractors would need to adhere to the process as implemented by the bank and there was little scope for innovation or creativity within the role that required additional or new knowledge from the contractor.

See we have pretty much developed this system to deliver the best efficiencies possible and we really don’t need to change too much here. The contractors are brought in to get the job done, not make any changes to the way we do things. I am not sure how much they can add to the role, I mean we really need them to get things done in a specific manner, all the forms are designed like that. So really what more can they add? They could maybe tell us how to get the work done a bit faster, but really that would be it. It would not be anything that we did not already know or practiced (Colin, manager).

Managers spoke about the issue of knowledge sharing between the contractor and the organisation and their perceptions of the attitudes of the contractors towards knowledge
sharing. While some managers indicated that some contractors would comment about the system and processes and indicate that they had worked on these systems before, other managers indicated that contractors were “rarely asked” for process improvement suggestions or asked about systems with which they had previously worked. Two reasons were provided for this: firstly, either the contractors were hired to get a specific job done or were hired to complete a set of transactions and there was no additional time to discuss issues such as process improvements; and secondly, the managers felt that the process and systems in place served them well, and that it was fairly efficient process requiring minimal changes.

Hence the need to actively question and seek out suggestions from the contractors was not perceived to be of any great significance amongst the managers and team leaders. Managers also indicated that sometimes contractors would offer some suggestions or recount experiences in other banks while performing on certain transactions or when the task was more complex. However, most managers perceived that contractors rarely volunteered new knowledge or expertise and they also indicated that this limited sharing occurred in informal settings such as over tea breaks and lunches and very rarely in formal meetings or formal settings. Angelo, manager, spoke about this when asked to describe an incident when a contractor shared something new with the rest of the team:

It doesn’t happen too often, you see most of the time they just get on with the job that they are hired to do. And very rarely do we get some information about something that we don’t already know. I mean all the banking transactions are fairly regulated and straightforward, so you cannot improvise there. But yeah, sometimes you know you are having coffee or something and then someone (one of the contractors) will tell you something about what they did in a previous job to sort out an issue or something like that and so you learn from that. But if you are asking me if there is a formal way in which this happens, then it’s not like that. Because we really don’t need them for that, you know, just to get the job done.
Ozinsure

Perceived knowledge management strategy of the firm

Managers, in this case study, focused on issues relating to expert knowledge and its management. They had a fairly clear understanding of the KM practices of their organisation. They indicated that the organisation, particularly for IT projects, followed a combination of an information systems approach and a personalised approach towards knowledge management. A lot of the processes involved in the design and implementation of the project were standardized and members of the team were expected to document procedures and store the information on project databases. Process related to design and delivery of systems was also documented and project members were expected to ensure that such standard documents were completed and stored accurately. The organisation had an intranet that provided quality assurance manuals, procedures and details of previous projects completed as well as lists of experts within the organisation; it also enabled e-mail tracking of all project related communication. Minutes of team meetings and formal discussions related to the project were also documented and stored in project folders. The organisation used these information systems fairly extensively for knowledge management.

We have very defined processes for how we run projects. Every project has a project drive that contains documents related to the project and all members have access to those documents. We insist on extensive documenting of the requirements, design and prototypes everything that has gone into that project. We have a system wherein emails related to the project can also be stored in separate drives so we can trace what has happened. So we use computerised systems a lot to ensure that we know what is happening and also when we get into the next project, all that knowledge is available, we don’t have to reinvent the wheel (Nathan, manager).

Managers also extensively spoke about the levels of informal communication that occurred between members of the project team, and team members’ use of such informal opportunities to share and absorb new knowledge. These informal “conversations” occurred during coffee breaks or after the completion of formal discussions and meetings, when team members would discuss future courses of action. Managers perceived this informal communication to be a great
source of identifying errors within the project; for brainstorming and coming up with new ideas; and identify use of new technologies to solve existing issues within the project. Managers acknowledged that *this informal communication was vital* for the success of the project and helped build a more cohesive project team and was a very important forum for transmission of new knowledge within the team. Adrian, IT manager reflected this sentiment in his narrative:

> If project members don’t talk to each other then it doesn’t matter how good your IT systems are; the project will fail. So we encourage that talk, you know across lunch or even just casual conversations when people walk around the office. It’s amazing how many breakthroughs come when we are just talking, not in the meeting room, but when we walk back to the station to catch the train. So that’s probably, in my opinion, the best way to share knowledge, you know talk to each other, listen to some new ideas and then you take it with you to back to your desk and work with it. We really encourage that here, and none of that gets captured onto databases. Some of the ideas will, once they are implemented, but the conversations don’t. So that’s why they are so important.

In terms of induction procedures, permanent members attended a company induction session followed by some on-the-job training where they were introduced to the company’s systems, quality procedures and standards of business operation. Similar to ABC bank, they were often paired with senior members of the team to observe and learn from them, although this was not done for any extended periods of time. The company organised training sessions for permanent employees as required and all permanent staff were expected to attend these sessions. In terms of contractors, as in ABC bank, managers indicated that they did not have any formal induction programmes for them. Contractors were received by the department head, introduced to the team, were shown around the office and housekeeping fundamentals explained to them. There were no formal training programmes or sessions that any of the contractors were expected to attend, unless they were project specific ones with which the contractor was involved.

*Knowledge contributions of contractors*

As in ABC bank, managers were asked to reflect on their perceptions of the knowledge intensiveness of the contractors’ roles and the relevance and importance of the contractors’
knowledge base for the organisation. All of the managers spoke of the roles that these contractors were hired for as “specialised ones” that demanded a fairly high level of expertise. They perceived these roles as fairly complex requiring specialist training, expertise and experience to perform them effectively. Managers spoke of all the contractors within Ozinsure as possessing these skills; contractors with a number of years of experience within their area of specialisation had been hired, some of them had reputations as experts within that arena and most of them had previously worked on similar projects and technologies with other organisations. There was a perception amongst the managers that hiring these contractors was essential both for the complexity of the role and for the specialised knowledge and experience that these contractors brought with them.

We hired John because he knew this system and we did not. So specifically we hired him for his knowledge and the role that he is playing within the project team is vital. So for us, how we manage John is important because we need to tap into that knowledge base that he has, because we don’t have that in-house (Shania, manager).

Unlike in ABC bank, these managers recognised that the contractors come into the organisation with knowledge and skills that the organisation itself lacked and that this knowledge was specialised knowledge that was rare and not easily available in the marketplace. They acknowledged that such knowledge commanded a premium and that it was beneficial to the organisation to hire such contractors and be able to absorb the new knowledge they brought with them. The managers were conscious both of the costs of hiring these contractors as well as the need to make sure that their expertise was accessed and absorbed by the organisation.

What I want to do is to be able to suck out everything that is in his head. What he knows, we don’t and that’s why we hired him. We need to make sure that when he leaves we have at least got from him part of what he knows. I mean, we pay him this huge amount of money and I don’t want to reinvent the wheel when he leaves. So we want to literally suck everything out of him. And how we do that is, is in my opinion the challenge of managing contractors (Nick, manager).

Within the IT department of Ozinsure, there was awareness that these contractors came in as experts. Team members, including managers and team leaders, perceived these contractors as
sources of information on organisational politics as well as events and trends shaping the
industry. Managers spoke of these contractors as “having networks of people through whom
they obtain knowledge” “understanding who’s who within the company”, “understanding
power centres and politics within the organisation” and as “sources of gossip”. These
contractors came into the organisation with established reputations as experts and as key
members of the IT profession. Adrian, a technical specialist and manager within the
organisation indicated this:

These guys are so clued in. You know they come in and often they will tell you what’s happening before
you get to know of it and you have been there much longer than them. I mean they know who is who,
they know whether the project has sufficient funds, they know people working on other projects and they
will tell you which jobs are going and what pay rates are being offered. So in that sense, they know much
more than just the technical stuff. They know agents and they can put you in touch with better jobs, so
sometimes it’s amazing. You know I can sometimes feel more of an outsider in the company than they do
and I am permanent. Yet they know so much about what is happening.

Managers in Ozinsure expressed a great willingness to learn from contractors. Managers spoke
of inviting contractors to share their experience in team meetings, and permanent employees
were often assigned as “shadows” with contractors. Mark, an IT manager, indicated that he
often specified to contractors that as part of the contract, they were to provide technical
training to permanent staff members. Managers clearly indicated that they actively sought out
contractors’ expertise during critical times within the project and involved contractors in high
level project management meetings.

Similar to ABC bank, contractors were also involved in informal discussions and coffee room
chats about the project and often contractors would speak about their experience in other
projects with members of the team, outside of the formal organisational settings. However, the
managers in Ozinsure clearly acknowledged the value of such informal discussions. Such
informal communication with contractors, over lunches, dinners and coffee breaks, provided
them with an opportunity to transfer knowledge from the contractor to members of the team
and this was encouraged. Managers also spoke of contractors socialising with members of the
team outside of working hours. Managers perceived these as opportunities to tap into the
contractors’ knowledge, particularly tacit knowledge. For example, Chris, a project manager, commented:

It’s amazing how much happens over coffee. You know you step out for a smoke or coffee and then start talking about stuff and a lot of these contractors will tell you about stuff they did in other projects, just talk you know. And then when you get back to work, you think that was not such a bad idea, maybe we should try that or something technical you know that is not documented. So it’s a way of getting inside their heads and that’s the most difficult knowledge to capture, what is inside people’s heads. And it always comes out in casual talk not in formal meetings where people guard what they say.

Managers in Ozinsure made explicit reference to contractual obligations of knowledge sharing on the part of the contractor. Often, it was specified to contractors that, as part of their contract, they had to provide extensive project documentation to the organisation. This was sometimes an unwritten expectation, but often this was specifically requested and confirmed as part of the formal contract. Such extensive documentation provided the organisation with inputs from the contractor and allowed them to retain part of the contractor’s knowledge, even when they left the organisation. Managers indicated that including such clauses in the contract and paying contractors for explicit knowledge transfer allowed them some measure of control over the knowledge transfer process.

I try and write it down in the contract that they have to document what they have done, how they have done it and if possible train some of my staff into the process itself. Not just the operations of the end product but how they got there in the first place. I guess it’s my way of trying to define the intangible, how else do you get what’s in their head into the organisation itself? So I pay them for that and then I formalise it. So that’s my way of doing it (Chris, manager).

Managers also indicated that contractors brought with them an awareness of the trends and movements within the industry and provided them with access to technologies and systems that were new and innovative. Contractors were active contributors to technical blogs, discussion forums and professional internet chat groups and they often provided organisations with insights concerning future developments. Managers indicated that such market awareness made it possible for the organisation to become familiar with technical systems and specialisations that could impact on its future technical growth and development. Managers also perceived
these contractors to be trend setters in that they were often the first to experiment with new technologies or with new vendor products; thus helping the organisation to choose future technical directions more wisely. Managers also indicated that such contractors published in technical magazines and influenced market opinion on the use of specific technologies and on vendor specific products. As Mark (Project Manager) commented:

> When we first decided to move into open source, we realised quickly that we had to get very good contractors in. I mean people who were known in the open source arena as experts. They were those who had written specific pieces of code and had helped shape the systems the way they are now. So that’s who we wanted to hire. And these contractors know the system, they know the vendors, they know how things are shaping up and what is going to happen in terms of future trends. So that’s who we wanted.

**Summary**

Based on the analysis of the interviews and my own workplace observations, I drew conclusions as to the level of awareness that managers in both the case studies had of their organisations’ knowledge management strategies and practices. Managers in ABC bank had limited knowledge of the organisation’s KM strategy and practices because of their physical isolation from the head office and, more importantly, because of their non-standard working hours. Most of the team leaders had not been exposed to company induction programmes and their KM activities were restricted to the management of their team, and the organising of work related training programmes for their team members. Their focus was on transactional KM systems and processes and their narratives were muted on issues such as tacit knowledge, expert knowledge and KM systems. They perceived the organisation as following a combination of an information systems approach (procedure manuals and databases) and a more personalised approach (shadowing, learning on the job through observation, team discussions) to knowledge management. Although there were computerised procedural manuals and databases, more focus and attention was given to learning through observation, shadowing and pairing with senior members of the team and informal discussions between team members.
I also inferred that the managers at ABC Bank did not perceive the contractors in their teams as experts; they viewed the contractors’ knowledge base to be procedural or transactional knowledge, knowledge that they felt the organisation already possessed. Therefore, they seemed to perceive that these contractors brought in very little new or rare knowledge into the organisation and hence they placed little importance on acquiring or soliciting any knowledge from the contractors and rarely asked the contractors for advice or guidance.

In contrast, managers in Ozinsure focused on issues relating to expert knowledge and its management. I found the managers’ understanding of the organisation’s KM strategy more explicit. They articulated clearly their reliance on information systems and project documentation to record information relating to projects and actively viewed contractors as sources of new and expert knowledge. Managers perceived these contractors to be experts in their fields (these contractors came in with reputations as experts) and viewed them as resources for the organisation and the projects in which they were working. They actively solicited the expertise of these contractors, asked for their opinions and guidance, and created opportunities for informal discussions and sharing of ideas that allowed for knowledge sharing to occur between the contractors and the project team members. They also consciously attempted to make the expert knowledge that these contractors possessed explicit by mandating extensive project documentation and by including payment for such explicit knowledge transfer in the contract. They indicated a greater awareness of the complexity of the role that these contractors performed and sought value in the hiring of these contractors by focusing on the knowledge and expertise that they felt these contractors had to offer. In comparison with managers in ABC bank, they were more explicit in their view that these contractors added value to the organisation and made an impact on the organisation’s collective knowledge store.

**Conclusion**

Managers in both the case studies sought value in the hiring of contractors. This value was obtained via the knowledge and expertise that the contractor brought to the role, as a result of the limited organisational effort involved in training the contractor and in the ease with which contractors could be hired and released. Further, industries such as banking and IT routinely
used professionals in contingent roles to fulfil both demands for intellectual expertise as well as “labour” for daily transactional work and specialist project based work.

Although these motives for hiring contractors were similar in both the case studies, I identified differences in the two case studies in the managers’ perception of the intellectual resources and expertise of the contractors and the roles that the contractors occupied within the organisation. This difference may have been influenced both by the professions of the contractors as well as the specific roles for which they were hired. Further, the two areas of professional practice under consideration (financial services and information technology) may themselves have an impact on how managers view these contractors. For managers in Ozinsure, the use of IT contractors in project based work requiring specific knowledge influenced their perceptions of the contractors as possessing “expert” knowledge. In contrast, for managers in ABC bank, the use of contractors was on non-project based work, requiring more generalist knowledge. Contractors were hired for transactional/process oriented roles requiring routine knowledge and hence managers did not perceive these contractors as “experts”.

Hence, the managers in ABC bank perceived the intellectual value and expertise of these contractors to be of little value to the firm. They therefore considered good contractors to be those who were efficient and could “hit the ground running” with minimum time spent learning on the job. The managers did not focus on knowledge gains that the organisation could make through learning from contractors.

In contrast to this, managers in Ozinsure perceived the specific knowledge and expertise that the contractor possessed as valuable and something that the organisation itself lacked. Consequently, they viewed the work that the contractors performed as complex and intellectually challenging. They therefore also viewed “good” contractors as those who actively engaged in knowledge sharing with the organisation and contributed to the organisation’s knowledge base. Managers in ABC bank were also isolated geographically and temporally from the organisation’s head office and this isolation impacted on their ability to understand and participate in the organisation’s knowledge management practices. Consequently, their knowledge management initiatives were focused internally – within the department; they
expected contractors to minimise transactional errors and consequently, managers and team leaders encouraged contractors to “shadow” more senior employees and learn from them. Therefore, much of the knowledge sharing that occurred in this department often remained from the organisation to the contractors.

Managers in Ozinsure were more explicit in their understandings of the organisation’s knowledge management practices and indicated that they relied on extensive project documentation and information systems to store knowledge in the organisation. However, they also indicated that they viewed informal conversations, discussion forums and dialogues between the team members as a key practice to create and share knowledge within the organisation. Team members were encouraged to actively seek advice from contractors and involve them in knowledge sharing activities within the project. Contractors were expected to participate in both explicit formal learning activities such as involvement in training programmes and delivery of extensive project documentation, and implicit, informal activities such as discussion forums, brainstorming sessions and social activities such as lunch or tea. Because the managers and team leaders perceived these contractors as experts, they saw value in the knowledge that the contractors brought in and consequently were more focused on getting contractors to actively participate in knowledge sharing activities within the firm.

My findings from the interviews of the managers and contractors in the two case studies provide a greater understanding of the contract professional-manager relationship at work and the impact that this has on the knowledge sharing motivations of contractors. In the next chapter, I present my interpretations of these findings and identify and examine the factors that influence the knowledge sharing motivations of contract professionals.
CHAPTER EIGHT
INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents my interpretations of the data analysed in the previous two chapters. Based on themes I identified in the previous two chapters, and study of secondary data such as organisational documents related to knowledge management and field notes and observations of the participants in the two workplaces, this chapter outlines the factors that have influenced the contractors’ professional lives and their knowledge sharing motivations. Specifically, the chapter highlights the professional identity and image construction of contractors and distinguishes between three categories of contract professionals – Free agents, Specialists and Consultants. The knowledge gains that the organisation seeks to make from contract professionals varies quite distinctly between the two cases and is influenced by the particular category of contractor being employed.

The study highlights three factors that have a strong influence on the willingness of contractors to share their knowledge with organisations: the professional image and identity of the contractor; perceived self-benefit from knowledge sharing; and the organisation’s willingness to acquire new knowledge from the contractors. These three factors are shaped by the roles that contractors occupy in organisation, the psychological contracts constructed between contractors and managers, and the organisations’ perceptions and treatment of contractors. The chapter begins with a discussion of the process of identity and image construction of contractors and discusses the development of the three categories of contractors in the two case studies. Factors influencing knowledge sharing amongst the three categories of contractors are then identified and analysed.
Constructing the categories of contractors (becoming contractors)

During the course of the interviews, contractors reflected on their career choices: their decision to contract, the manner in which they selected and secured contracting roles and the process of constructing contracting careers. Through a process of self-reflection, contractors attempted to differentiate themselves from professionals in permanent careers. While engaging in this process, contractors were involved in constructing their own identities through which they sought to define who they were and what they did as professionals, different from professionals in permanent employment.

Contract professionals constantly built and modified their professional identities and images influenced by the contracting life cycle; their interaction with organisations and organisational members; by the roles that they occupied in organisations; and by the broader marketplace dynamics of demand and supply for their skills. In seeking to construct their professional identities, contractors spoke repeatedly about being “self managers” – the need they perceived to look after themselves and manage their careers. They spoke about managing their careers through the effective utilisation of their knowledge and time, in contrast to permanent employees whom they perceived as dependent on organisations to manage these issues for them. This need to control and self manage their careers was expressed in three key areas – the way in which they managed their time (work and leisure); the manner in which they sought to develop and utilise their expertise/knowledge/skills; and the social resources they used (people, networks, contacts) to keep themselves “employed”.

I identified each of these three themes—managing time, intellect and people/networks— as occurring in varying forms in the interviews of all the contractors. Research on protean and boundaryless careers have indicated that the issue of individual self-management is a key feature of professionals in alternate and newer career forms (Arthur et al., 1996; Hall et al., 1998). Previous studies on contractors (Barley and Kunda, 2004) have also suggested that effective management of time (temporal capital), intellect (human capital) and networks (social capital) are vital for the success of the contractor’s contracting career. These themes were very evident in this research.
However, in addition, I constructed a more differentiated and nuanced view of the importance of these themes within this research. While all contractors have indicated that self management is vital for their success as contractors, not all contractors view the management of these three issues as equally important. For some, management of time is more important; for others, management of intellect and networks. I also identified the issue of *image management* - how different categories of contractors constructed and managed different professional images impacted their attitudes towards knowledge sharing. The chapter highlights the issue of image management as a core component of the self management of contract professionals.

I categorised contractors according to these dimensions because it seemed that their motivations to contract as well as their behaviours at work were influenced by how they perceived and responded to these issues. I constructed three categories of contractors responding differently to these issues: *Free Agents, Specialists and Consultants*. In the following section, I compare the three categories of contractors across themes that were discussed in the previous chapters: reasons for contracting, selecting contracting roles, securing contracts, constructing professional identities and images, constructing psychological contracts, and approaches towards knowledge sharing, and identify key factors that influence their knowledge contributions to the firm.

Although in this research, I identify and construct three categories of contractors, I do not wish to imply that the identities of these contractors are fixed or that contractors remain entrenched in one particular category throughout their contracting careers. The construction of their identities is a reflective social process; they redefine who they are and what they do influenced by the contracting life cycle, demands for their specific skills sets, the roles that they occupy in organisations and by their own management of their intellect, time and networks. The contractors’ narratives indicate that many of them move between these categories; for example, contractors in the specialist category spoke about moving into more generalist areas that offered them the opportunity to move out of their specialised or niche domains of expertise.
Involuntary contractors

I identified a fourth group of contractors that I have classified as reluctant or involuntary contractors. For this small group of contractors, specifically in ABC bank, the motivation to contract was primarily a desire to seek entry into the organisation through any form of paid work. These contractors spoke explicitly about their desire to obtain permanent roles or become ‘permanent’ and they did not seem to perceive contracting as a viable career option; instead they sought to use the contracting route to seek entry into permanent membership in the organisation. They expressed a desire to exhibit their skills and knowledge in roles with which they were familiar, and their focus was to gain permanent roles within organisations. They indicated that they volunteered their expertise to their co-workers and colleagues, exhibiting the kind of organisational citizenship behaviour or “going the extra mile” (Shields, 2007: 40), more often expected from permanent employees.

This research focuses on issues relating to knowledge sharing amongst professionals who have pursued a career in contracting voluntarily. The category of involuntary contractors seeks to move away from contracting towards permanent employment. Because the focus of this study is on professionals actively pursuing contracting careers rather than seeking organisationally bounded careers, this small category of involuntary contractors will not be studied further in this research. Instead, the focus of this research remains on the three voluntary categories of contract professionals and their knowledge sharing motivations.

Theme 1: Reasons for contracting and selecting contracting roles

Contractors spoke about their process of self discovery, of wanting to move away from the familiar and take on new challenges and build identities that reflected who they were as reasons for choosing to contract. Collectively, I grouped these triggers into five themes – disillusionment with institutional work arrangements including rates of pay, discontent with their sense of efficacy over the use and control of their expertise, frustration over having to deal with “organisational politics”, a desire to construct a life that better balanced work with leisure and family commitments, and finally for those for whom contracting was a temporary
stage in their career, the desire to be employed in any form. Contractors also spoke about moving into contracting through circumstances that were sometimes outside of their control – retrenchments, redundancies and migration. Although these motivations followed a similar motif, I identified differences in the degree of importance that the three categories of contractors placed on each of these motivations.

Based on their reasons to contract, I also identified five key factors that motivated their selection of contracting roles within organisations: selecting roles that allowed them to control the effective utilisation of their skills, knowledge and expertise (and develop their expertise further); roles that allowed them greater control over their remuneration; roles that offered them greater control over their working and non-working lives; roles that allowed them to establish their “value” to the organisation (through minimum down time, effective transactional processing and minimizing errors); and roles that allowed them to further establish and build on their reputation as experts. These factors are compared across the three categories of contractors and differences between the three categories of contractors are discussed below.

Free Agents

I labelled the first group of contractors as Free Agents, because their predominant motivation to contract was influenced by their desire to move away from institutional membership and be “free”. They spoke about contracting as a means of controlling their working lives; and to balance work and non-work activities. Contracting was perceived as freedom– as moving away from institutional settings where they perceived actions (particularly of managers) to be often self serving and their own ability to influence work processes minimal and marginalised. They expressed a great desire to manage and control their time in order to obtain a measure of work-life balance. They also viewed contracting as a career that provided them the opportunity to earn higher rates of pay in comparison to permanent employees in similar roles in organisations. Free agents, as a category of contractors, were present in both case studies; although within ABC bank, this was the largest group of contractors.
Free agents consequently focused on finding roles that established their value to the organisation by minimising time spent learning on the job. They also searched for roles that offered them higher remuneration and more control over working hours and times. They selected roles that allowed them to balance work with non-work activities, plan down time and holidays and roles that allowed them to “get on with the job” as quickly as possible. They made very limited references to wanting to control or manage their expertise or to establish themselves as experts within the field through the selection of their roles.

Specialists

For the second group of contractors, specialists, the desire to control the use of their expertise was the key motivating factor to contract. Specialists perceived an underutilisation of their skills and expertise within the organisational/institutional settings and moved into contracting as a means of gaining greater efficacy over the development of their knowledge and expertise. They spoke about wanting to work with leading technologies and to be exposed to cutting edge and complex work within a variety of work settings. They perceived contracting as providing them with the opportunity to gain control of the utilisation of their expertise. They made very marginal references to work-life balance or being able to choose working time and leisure time; instead their focus remained on choosing roles and selecting contracts based on the learning opportunities they could offer then. This group of contractors expressed frustration over what they termed “organisational politics” and company structures that inhibited their intellectual growth and they sought to find this intellectual growth through contracting. Specialists as a category were present in both ABC bank as well as Ozinsure, although I could categorise a more substantial number of contractors in Ozinsure as specialists.

Specialists consequently selected roles that allowed them to control the utilisation of their expertise and skills, provided them with the opportunity to further their learning and expertise within their specialised field and work within a variety of challenging technical environments. They looked for roles that offered opportunities to work with “cutting edge” technologies and creative freedom. They were less concerned about issues such as unfamiliarity with the role, balancing work and non-work time or the need to spend time learning on the job; instead they sought roles that allowed them this opportunity for learning and intellectual growth.
Consultants

The third group of contractors, *consultants*, moved into contracting motivated by their desire to utilise a broad range of both generalist as well as specialist skills within diverse organisational settings. They chose contracting after extensive periods of permanent employment, often in managerial and executive roles and viewed contracting as offering them the opportunity of building and developing reputations as experts within their fields and charging a premium for their services. They expressed a desire to be able to control and influence work processes within the organisation and spoke about the “freedom” that contracting offered – in terms of choice of roles, work domains and organisational settings. This group often referred to themselves as “experts” or “consultants”, expressed greater tolerance towards organisational politics, power and control issues, and spoke about managing these issues rather than perceiving contracting as a means of “escape” from organisational politics. A majority of them operated as independent consultants and often worked with specialised consulting/contracting companies as consultants. This category of contractors was only found in Ozinsure.

Consultants therefore chose leadership roles that allowed them to establish their value to the organisation through their expertise, knowledge and management skills. These contractors sought roles that enabled them to establish their reputation as experts within organisations. They looked for roles that they felt had senior management support, funding and explicitly required someone with their specialist as well as managerial skills and expertise. They were more conscious of issues such as role recognition within the team, reporting hierarchies and project success criteria. The consultants spoke emphatically about selecting roles that allowed them control over the management of their expertise, professional knowledge and reputations.

Theme 2: Securing contracting roles

Contractors spoke about wanting to be in control of the process through which they selected and secured contracting roles. However, they faced an inherent conflict between obtaining a sense of efficacy over their professional lives and the realities of contracting itself. Although they spoke about the “freedom” they possessed to choose and select contracting roles, yet their
narratives indicated to me that they were dependent on agents, networks, contacts and their own reputations to seek and obtain such roles. Further, many of them often had limited choices in the types of roles that they were offered and in choosing the timing of these contracts. Contractors across the three categories used different strategies to manage this conflict.

**Free agents**

Free agents perceived a high demand for their skills in the marketplace. They viewed their willingness and ability to take on any role as guaranteeing them contracting roles within organisations. They therefore saw themselves as eminently employable and their use of institutional agents such as placement agencies, networks and contacts was purely utilitarian. They used agencies to find them roles, the agents within the agencies were replaceable, and their need to maintain a relationship and invest time and effort in this relationship was minimal. They used these to advertise themselves in the marketplace, and they worked on the assumption that their familiarity with business operations would lead to contracts. This perception was partly fuelled by the market demand for their skills – their knowledge of organisational processes and transactions and their willingness to accept any “contract” rather than seeking specific “expert” roles within organisations.

**Specialists**

In comparison to the free agents, *specialists* displayed a much greater awareness of this inherent conflict they faced in contracting. They expressed anxiety about obtaining roles and placed more emphasis on their efforts to build and maintain relationships with institutional actors such as placement agencies. They also moved beyond agencies, seeking and establishing a profile in the niche marketplace by contributing to professional blogs, networks and technical journals and periodicals. They were also conscious of their performance on the job during a contract, often using this as a means of obtaining future contracts with the same organisation or using these contracts to build and enhance their technical reputation in the marketplace.
Consultants

The consultants explicitly spoke about this conflict they experienced and were very conscious not only of the insecurities in contracting, but also the importance of their ability to manage this conflict. They explicated the need they felt to build and maintain a network of “contacts” whose help they sought in obtaining suitable roles. They moved beyond agencies and agents (although they sought and maintained links with a few select agencies and agents), to the broader professional market in which they operated. They networked with specialist agents and former clients. They developed and maintained strong professional links with colleagues they had previously worked with in organisations. They maintained profiles in the market using tools such as blogs, intranets and contributed to professional magazines and newsletters. Some of them participated actively in professional associations and almost all of them indicated membership of some professional association. They scanned the organisation in which they were contracting to identify “who’s who and what’s what” and were often sources of informal communication and networks within the organisation. They actively sought to develop their reputation in the marketplace both as experts within their field and as team leaders having the ability to lead and complete projects successfully. They were aware that their success as “consultants” was dependent on their ability to manage institutions and institutional members effectively.

Theme 3: Roles contractors occupy – constructing professional identities and images

Different categories of contractors perceived their role within the organisation differently. This perception was influenced by a recursive process of how they viewed themselves professionally as well as by how the organisation viewed them and the roles that they contracted for. Lautsch (2002) had suggested that the roles that contractors occupy in organisations and the performance expectations of these roles influence the manner in which contractors are treated in organisations and this impacts their relationship with the organisation. Further Simpson and Carroll’s (2009) notion of roles as boundary objects suggested that roles were used to construct professional identities and images based on messages and feedback.
received from other organisational members. The findings from this study support these studies. In addition to this, I wish to suggest that the contractors’ identities and images were influenced by the diversity and variety of roles that they occupied as contractors over time. This supports the notion forwarded by Orlikoswli (2002) that knowing how to get things done in organisations is not static or fixed, but an ongoing social activity and accomplishment, where through each new contract, contractors learn how to enact their roles and how to perform in each of the roles that they accept. It is through the practice of the role that they are engaged in (Carlile, 2002) that contractors construct identities and images reflecting how they are meant to act and engage with organisations. Each contracting role contributed to the construction of their identities and images. Van Dyne and Ang’s (1998) study suggested that contractors exhibited high degrees of organisational commitment and extra-role behaviours when organisations treated them in a manner similar to permanent employees. This implied that how organisations treated and perceived contractors influenced their engagement with the organisation. My study suggests that the roles contractors occupied influenced organisational perceptions of contractors and consequently influenced how contractors were treated within firms. Consequently, both the contractors’ perspective of themselves, as well as the organisations’ perspective of the contractors were influenced by the variety of roles that they occupied in diverse organisations and this in turn influenced their knowledge sharing motivations.

The contractors’ perspective

Contractors in the three different categories had divergent perceptions of their roles within organisations. These perceptions of what they did were in turn influenced by their own constructions of their professional image and identity, i.e. who they were and what they did. All contractors perceived contracting to add value to the organisation – in terms of providing transactional efficiencies and by enabling organisations to access and acquire talent with limited expenditure on the part of the organisation (training, legal, administrative). This reflected the understanding that most contractors had of the value they offered to organisations while also reflecting their understanding of the latent insecurities present in contracting.
Literatures on socialisation and identity regulation, career and role transitions and identity work have suggested that the process of professional identity construction is a dynamic, recursive, constantly evolving process, influenced by an individual’s participation in professional work and the organisational contexts in which such work occurs (Pratt et al., 2006; Ibarra, 1999; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson and Wilmott, 2002, Wallace, 1995). Individuals reconstruct their professional identities when faced with work-identity integration violations (Pratt et al., 2006); in response to organisational efforts to regulate their behaviour through identity regulation and through processes of socialisation (Alvesson and Wilmott, 2002; Grey, 1998) and through their own reflections and experiences of working across diverse organisational contexts, roles and through career transitions (Hall, 1995; Nicholson and Arnold, 1987, Wallace, 1995).

During this process of professional identity construction, professionals are also engaged in constructing their professional images; a public persona or provisional self (Ibarra, 1999) that is more a reflection of how the individual perceives others to view him/her. Roberts’ (2005) study indicated professional image construction to be a dynamic and recursive process of self analysis: of presenting an image, judging its impact on viewers and modifying the image as more socio-cultural and organisational cues became visible. Her study also indicated that members of different professions may use different strategies to create a “professional” image – because the definition of professional and competence varies across different professions.

The findings in this study build on and extend these findings. What emerged was the importance of image management as a core part of the self management of contract professionals. The study implies that members within the same profession construct different viable professional images i.e. image construction varies not only across professions, but diverse professional images are constructed within the same profession and within the same occupational category. Different categories of contractors within both the case studies constructed different professional images and were engaged in a dynamic, recursive process of reconstructing those professional images. The images that they constructed were influenced by their own quest for meaningful work, the roles that they occupied within organisations, work-identity integration violations that they faced through their contracting career, and through the
organisations’ efforts at regulating their work behaviours. Their public images influenced the organisation’s perceptions of them and recursively influenced their own professional image and identity.

*Free agents*

For the group of *free agents*, a combination of organisational and career factors, along with self interest and personal aspirations, had led them to construct images of “general handymen” within their profession. Contracting for them was a means of controlling work-life balance, of avoiding “entrapment” in organisational politics, of being “employed” while pursuing other personal interests. Further their choice of roles within organisation, and their reluctance to engage in socialisation processes within organisations had led the two case study organisations to view them as “substitutable” resources – one contractor having the ability to replace another. Some of these contractors sought entry into contracting careers by taking on roles in organisations that were perceived as “non-expert” within the organisation itself. In their quest to be employed, these contractors had repeatedly taken on such roles, leading to organisations constructing images of them as “general handymen” and failing to recognise their expertise and professional knowledge. This image that they constructed was influenced by a number of factors: through their willingness to take on a variety of roles (work and task engagement), their motivation to balance work and non-work activities, advertising their work experience in similar roles and in their rhetoric and narratives highlighting their desire to be occupied, but not consumed by the profession in which they operate (“if it’s not this job, then it’s something else”). For this group, being a *contractor*, and controlling the manner in which they chose to engage with organisations was very relevant; in other words their identity as a *free agent* was stronger than that of being a “professional” or “expert”. Their identities were influenced by the organisations’ perception of them as “general handymen” and their inability to obtain roles that changed or modified the organisations’ perception of their professional expertise and knowledge.
Specialists

Specialists constructed images of themselves as “professionals” and “technical experts” within their field. They built this image by focusing their attention on developing their intellectual expertise or capital, by establishing their reputations as experts within their professions and by seeking out roles within organisations that required expert knowledge and specialist skills. In comparison with free agents, they were selective about the roles they accepted. Their rhetoric was filled with references to their own expert knowledge (“I specialised in open source systems, very few of us do that”) and they sought roles that were complex and demanded technical know how (“I felt that by contracting I could expose myself to roles where I could work on new technologies”). They expressed a desire to stay away from organisational politics while being conscious of it (“You need to get along with everyone, project leaders, team members, but really I just focus on my job and stay away from other stuff, you know just be pleasant and get on with your job”) and their motivations lay in their desire to further their expertise within their profession. The specialists identified strongly with the professional ethics and codes of operation of their profession.

The professional image that specialists constructed was also influenced by organisations seeking professionals with their knowledge and expertise in contracting roles. Particularly in Ozinsure, managers spoke about the specialists’ roles as “technical and complex” or as requiring “niche and specialist knowledge” and consequently, their desired and perceived image began to converge. By constantly seeking roles that were perceived as expert roles within organisations, specialists presented themselves as experts to organisations and the creation of this “professional” image in turn influenced the way they were perceived by the organisations in which they worked. Through a recursive process of seeking, securing and performing in specialist roles, these contractors constructed professional images that sought to establish their reputations as technical experts and specialists within organisations.
Consultants

Consultants viewed themselves as more than professionals or technical experts; they viewed themselves as *corporate experts or gurus*. They focused on developing images as experienced, seasoned, organisational consultant or guru. They chose roles that offered opportunities for leading teams and projects, they highlighted technical and managerial skills in their resumes, their rhetoric was peppered with references to their people management skills and explicit references to previous career successes. They consciously studied the organisation in which they were contracting, identified centres of power and control within the organisation, developed an understanding of ‘who is who’ within the organisation and became political players. They used media tools to market themselves as “consultants”, networked extensively with contacts, and constantly sought to establish reputations as experts within the organisation they were contracting. They were focused on establishing themselves as “management consultants” rather than “technical experts”, although much of their expertise was technical and often domain specific. In turn, organisations viewed them as more than technical experts – they were viewed as leaders and guides ("We hired him because we wanted to learn from him, and we wanted him to lead this project") and placed them in roles that demanded leadership and managerial skills.

As identity studies suggest, the professional image of an individual influences and is influenced by the construction of their identities. The narratives of the contractors reflected this process. They constructed particular images, influenced by personal, career and professional goals and through their interactions with organisations. They were actively involved with their self-presentation (impression management as suggested by Leary and Kowalski, 1990) attempting to control the impressions that organisations have of them. This impression management or creation of their desired professional image (Roberts, 2005) was a constant process of establishing themselves as contractors with specialist skills or as leaders or as contractors willing to take on any role. Their actions and strategies impacted on the construction of their professional images. They constantly appraised their perceived professional image (through the perceptions of the organisation in which they contracted, their co-workers, managers, through their choice of roles, their focus on the management of their
time, intellect, social networks) and constructed images that matched their desired professional image. It was a dynamic process of constant evaluation and re-evaluation and each category of contractors utilised separate strategies to enhance this image building process.

As evident in the two case studies, contractors who were perceived by organisations as having specialist or leadership skills were offered specialist or leadership roles, thereby enabling them to build on their images as specialists or experts. Those perceived as having transactional/business process skills were offered roles that the organisation did not perceive as knowledge intensive and this in turn influenced their image as “general handymen” or free agents.

**The organisations’ perspective**

Organisations seek value in hiring contractors – economic value in hiring people requiring minimum training and development; and intellectual value in hiring professionals able to bridge knowledge gaps within the organisation. Organisations also hire contractors to reduce payroll and formal labour costs through management accounting practices, listing contractor payments in categories such as “miscellaneous” rather than labour costs.

In the two case studies, managers’ perceptions of the contractor were influenced both by the perceived expert status and professional image of the contractor as well as by the perceived complexity of the role for which the contractor was hired. The value of the contractor to the organisation was viewed differently depending on the role the contractor performed as well as the reputation of the contractor. For transactional/process oriented roles (as in ABC bank), the perceived value of the contractor to the organisation was seen in the efficiencies that the contractor brought to the role – reduced learning time and fewer transactional errors. The managers did not view these contractors as resources for expert knowledge, and hence made little explicit reference to the intellectual value that these contractors could provide to the organisation.

In contrast, in Ozinsure the roles were viewed as requiring expert complex knowledge and managers perceived this knowledge to be rare and lacking within the organisation. They
therefore perceived the contractors in these roles as possessing that expert knowledge and focused on the intellectual value that these contractors provided to the organisation. They were conscious of the reputations of these contractors as experts and perceived this intellectual contribution of the contractors to be of value to the organisation.

The organisation’s perspective of the contractors influenced, and was influenced by, the professional image and identity of the contractors that they hired. In ABC bank, a majority of the contractors had images of being “free agents” or “handymen”, capable of performing a variety of generalist tasks, while not attempting to create images of themselves as experts within their field. The managers within ABC bank also viewed them in those terms. They did not see them as experts, adding intellectual value to the organisation, but as “substitutable resources” needed to get the job done. In turn the organisation’s perspective of contractors as “substitutable” only reinforced their professional identity as free agents rather than as specialists or experts. Those contractors within ABC bank who specifically positioned themselves as specialists, who volunteered their knowledge and expertise and repeatedly spoke about their expertise in previous roles were viewed more positively as “professionals” by managers, although there was still a perception that the knowledge such contractors brought in already existed within the organisation.

In contrast, in Ozinsure, the managers perceived the contractors as experts within their field, similar to the contractors’ own self image of a professional expert. Their image was influenced by, and influenced, the managers’ perceptions of their value to the organisation and in turn influenced the knowledge sharing processes between the contractor and the organisation.

**Theme 4: Construction of psychological contracts**

In both the process of professional image construction by the contractor and in the shaping of that process by the organisation, implicit understandings and expectations of the employment relationship were constructed. These expectations concerned the contractor’s contribution to the organisation as well as the benefits they gained from the organisation; and what the organisation expected the contractor to deliver and what they offered in return. There were
differences in these perceptions amongst the three categories of contractors and the managers’ perceptions of the contractors and their expectations from them. These expectations highlight the issue of psychological contracts and their influence on knowledge sharing behaviours amongst contract professionals.

The previous section highlighted the dynamic nature of the professional image construction of the contractor. Professionals embark on contracting careers for a variety of reasons. One of the most cited reasons for choosing to be contractors was the perceived ‘disillusionment’ with organisational politics and the inability to cope with ‘managerial agendas’. For example, Sean, a contractor with ABC bank spoke about this perceived breach when talking about why he chose to contract:

See my manager had sort of told me that I would move into private wealth management, that’s what I got into the bank for. But I spent a year in retail and they still did not move me. I kept asking him when and he kept saying wait out a bit. I began to sort of feel that it was never going to happen you know, that they were just saying these things to keep me on. So when the contract to move into FOREX dealings came along, I grabbed it. It was very frustrating waiting for the company to actually do what they had told me they would do.

Other contractors spoke about missing out on roles that they were promised, or not being offered positions in projects that they wanted to work on (“My boss knew that I wanted to work with open source, but I kept doing maintenance. How long could I do that?”). Clearly, contract professionals perceived organisations to breach psychological contracts, often regularly, and their movement towards contracting was influenced by this perception. For contract professionals, this movement away from permanent roles into contracting called for the construction of new psychological contracts –that shaped, and were shaped by, their professional image/identity as well as their contracting career. Because contractors worked in a variety of roles, across industries, with different work teams and working environments, their psychological contracts were modified with each new contract. Although their own professional image and identity and their desire to shape their contracting careers in particular ways influenced the construction of these contracts, they were also influenced by the environment in which they operated. For them, the working environment was much more
dynamic and temporary when compared to permanent employees. They were influenced by the socio-economic environment in which they operated (demand and supply for their skills and experience) and their own status as contingent workers. Consequently, in comparison to permanent employees, the formation of their psychological contracts was influenced to a much larger extent by their working environment as well as the broader socio-political and economic environments in which they operated.

The literature review chapter on professionals and contingent employment presented a theoretical framework that was used to analyse the construction of psychological contracts and the impact of breaches of such contracts (Shields, 2007). Four types of contracts were described – transactional, transitional, balanced and relational. The relationship between the three categories of contractors and their managers has been analysed and categorised in terms of the matrix described previously. The duration of the relationship (typically short term), the relationship between contractors and managers, the contractors’ expectations of the roles and their identity and image as contractors, and the managers’ expectations of the contractor influenced the construction of psychological contracts between contractors and managers in the two case studies.

**Category 1: Free Agents’ psychological contracts**

Free agents implicitly believed that they would walk into and out of organisations with ease. They expected rewards based on external market demands for their skills, roles that they were familiar requiring minimum on the job learning, and work life balance. They expected to work times and hours as stipulated in the contract and be insulated from organisational politics. In return, they provided organisations with operational efficiencies, worked with minimum time spent on learning and were willing to take on roles that permanent employees found unsuitable. They did not expect to socialise or build networks within the organisation nor did they expect to obtain future contracting roles through the organisation that they currently contracted to (although this did happen, they did not actively expect this to happen). When mapped against the matrix, these contractors seemed to form *transactional contracts*, with its focus on short term rewards for specific (often narrowly defined) deliverables. Such short term focus on narrowly defined performance goals negatively influenced their knowledge sharing
motivations. These contractors constructed a non-emotional, calculated commitment with the organisation, focusing on narrowly defined performance criteria with minimal implicit assumptions of adopting extra-role behaviours such as knowledge sharing.

Contractors in this category seemed to view employer breaches of contract as occurring when they were expected to exhibit affective commitment (Shields, 2007) requiring of them organisational citizenship behaviours that were in conflict with their more pronounced continuance commitment (Shields, 2007), i.e. a more calculative, non-emotional involvement with the organisation. These contractors spoke about resenting having to work hours longer than their prescribed contract (unless explicitly paid for it) or being asked to be involved with co-worker training or people management within their teams (“I am here to do my job as quickly and efficiently as possible, I really do not like getting involved with all the political stuff that goes on at work”). This, in their minds, constituted a psychological breach on the part of the contracting organisation. Their reaction to perceived breaches in the psychological contract was to distance themselves from the organisation including walking out of the formal contract and taking up a new contracting role (“What they said I would be doing is not what I was actually asked to do. So really I looked around and found another contract and then moved on”). Although this was not a frequently occurring phenomenon, contractors in this category exhibited less anxiety about job insecurity and seemed to perceive the cost of leaving the contract to outweigh the benefit in staying on with the role/contract when there was a breach in the transactional psychological contract. (“There are always some contracts available for someone with my skills so I may be better off with a new place.”).

The expectations of most managers hiring free agents seemed to be influenced both by the roles for which these contractors were hired as well as by the individual attitudes, motivations and images that these contractors exhibited. They expected these contractors to be able to walk in and start productive work with minimum down time and be able to perform their roles competently, but did not expect them to provide the organisation with value-added knowledge or expertise. They did not expect these contractors to exhibit high levels of organisational commitment, and consequently their commitment to these contractors was limited to the duration of the contract and was influenced by their on-the-job performance. For these
managers, a breach occurred when they perceived these contractors to exhibit poor procedural/transactional knowledge, when the time they spent learning on the job was beyond the manager’s expected timelines, and sometimes when they perceived the contractor to “slack” on the job (“He was really not producing and putting his bit in, you know we all felt that he was too slow with basic stuff. So when the initial three month period ended, we did not extend his contract”). Such breaches were met with minimal tolerance and managers did not hesitate to terminate legal contracts if they perceived these contractors were not meeting their implicit on-the-job performance expectations.

**Category 2: Specialists’ psychological contracts**

For this category of contractors, the psychological contract that they constructed was influenced greatly by their *expectations of the role* they accepted in organisations and their *own professional image* as technical experts or specialists. They expected their contracting roles to provide them with the opportunity of learning and increasing their technical expertise on the job. They expected minimal involvement with “organisational politics”, but were willing to tolerate it as long as it did not impede both their performance on the job, as well as their ability to learn on the job. They were more willing, implicitly, to work longer hours, work cohesively in a team and their focus remained on the success of the project and the technical aspects of the project with which they were involved. They also expected to form technical networks within the organisation, with the intention of using those networks to excel in their current contracts as well as a source of obtaining new contracts. They expected to be team players and expected to be rewarded for their expertise. Consequently, they were more willing and eager to participate in knowledge exchanges within the organisation. In terms of the matrix, these contractors seemed to form *balanced contracts*, with a focus on competency and contribution based rewards, although their temporal focus remained short term.

These contractors perceived a psychological breach to occur, when they felt that the organisation required minimal affective commitment from them for the *role* that they occupied; when they perceived that the role that they were hired for did not require their technical knowledge or expertise; when they perceived that their ability to enhance their expertise was limited in the contracting role; when their expertise was not solicited or when they were not
given opportunities to exhibit and contribute their technical expertise within the team; or when they were asked to perform roles requiring much greater leadership and political involvement than they implicitly assumed it would demand of them. They seemed to react to such breaches by limiting their active knowledge contribution to the organisation ("I don’t involve myself too much you know, if I am asked I try and help but otherwise I stick to my job"), by adopting a more continuance attitude to their commitment to the role and by modifying their psychological contract into a more transactional contract. They did not often break the legal contract or walk out of a role, because they perceived the cost of them leaving the organisation to be greater (in terms of their inability to get a good reference or find technical roles easily) than the cost associated with staying on in the role. Some contractors reacted to such perceived breaches by attempting to build more relational contracts with the organisation; they shared their knowledge and expertise with co-workers with the expectation that revealing such expertise would induce the organisation to recognise them as technical experts ("See I volunteer my experience in team meetings and often I have done stuff like this; that’s what they are kind of looking for"). If this did not happen, they seemed to revert to developing more transactional contracts with the firm and by limiting their knowledge contribution to the organisation.

Managers hiring these contractors constructed psychological contracts based on both the perceived level of expertise and technical knowledge that the role demanded and what they perceived the contractor brought to the organisation in terms of his/her expert knowledge. They expected these contractors to provide the technical leadership that the project needed, to be active contributors to the organisational knowledge base and to exhibit high levels of involvement with the role. For these managers, a psychological breach occurred when they perceived that contractors did not have the required technical expertise that they assumed they possessed, when contractors failed to contribute to the organisation’s knowledge base and when contractors showed greater levels of continuance commitment, focusing on hours of work rather than performance on the job. Managers seemed to react to such breaches by withholding references or recommendations, by limiting the tenure of the contract and in extreme cases, by termination of the legal contract.
Category 3 – Consultants’ psychological contracts

The third category of contractors formed psychological contracts greatly influenced by their own professional image as experts, and their choice of roles as leaders and people managers. They expected to be viewed as experts within organisations and to influence and shape the nature of the projects they are associated with. They closely aligned their professional reputations with the success of these projects. They expected their roles to have leadership traits and often implicitly expected to manage others in the team and be involved with senior management in decision making. They implicitly believed that they would be politically connected within the organisation and be able to network extensively, both within the organisation as well as with the macro business environment in which they operated. They saw value in such relationship building and expected to be rewarded both for the business knowledge and acumen as well as for the social knowledge that they bring into the organisation. In terms of the matrix, these contracts constructed relational contracts, although their loyalty and commitment was limited to the duration of the contract, and their willingness to show affective commitment greatly influenced their willingness to share knowledge with the contracting organisation.

For this category of contractors, psychological breaches occurred when they perceived the organisation to undervalue the knowledge and expertise that they brought into the role or when they perceived the organisation as unwilling to recognise them as experts. Perceived breaches in the psychological contract also occurred when this category of contractors perceived the role that they were hired for as lacking in leadership and management responsibilities; when their expertise and knowledge remained unsolicited by the organisation; or when they felt that their ability to influence the progress of the project was limited and/or blocked by managers within the organisation.

They reacted to such breaches by attempting to exhibit their expertise within the project teams in order to establish their reputations as experts, i.e. participate more actively in knowledge sharing and exchanges in organisation. They used rhetoric that identified them as experts (“I have worked on similar projects; so for me it’s very familiar”), they spent more time
networking within and outside the organisation with decision makers and influencers, and they volunteered their expertise to co-workers and managers. They sought to exhibit greater *affective commitment* towards the organisation in which they were contracting. If this strategy failed, they seemed to develop a *more normative commitment* to the organisation, constructing a more transactional contract with the organisation and often limiting the degree to which they shared their knowledge and expertise (“When I felt that perhaps what I was offering them was not what they wanted, I sort of focused on my role, not really guiding them or offering assistance”).

Managers hiring this category of contractors formed psychological contracts that were greatly influenced by the professional reputation of the contractor as well as the key demands of the role and its influence on the success of the project. They expected consultants to be experts, to provide leadership and direction to the project, to contribute actively to the organisational knowledge base, to bridge the knowledge gaps within the organisation, to be politically astute, to be able to network and influence a variety of organisational entities and to exhibit good people management skills. For these managers, a breach of the psychological contract occurred when the contractors failed to exhibit the above mentioned characteristics. They reacted to such breaches by campaigning for the removal of the contractor, by threatening to withhold recommendations or references, by devaluing their professional image within the team and by isolating them and limiting their influence over the team and their decision making capabilities.

*Impact of psychological contracts and professional image construction on the contractor-manager relationship*

Although psychological contracts have their analytical, cognitive and empirical limitations, (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006), viewing the contractual relationship through the lens of the psychological contracts provides for a more nuanced understanding of the behaviours and attitudes of both contractors and hiring managers. As previously argued by Hiltrop (1995) this study shows that contractors engage in the construction of psychological contracts that are situational and where the focus remains on future employability of the contractor. However, this study also focuses attention on issues of *professional identity and image as key*
components in the construction of psychological contracts between contractors and hiring managers.

This study suggests that the forming of the psychological contract, by both the contractor as well as by the hiring manager, was influenced by the professional image of the contractor, their professional status and the roles that they occupied within organisations. This study has conceptualised psychological contracts as dynamic, evolving and reconstructed with each formal contract that the contractor accepts and, for the hiring organisation, through each contractor that they hire. The dyadic relationship between the contractor and the manager as well as the perceived match between the contractor and the role influenced the shaping of the psychological contract. This also implies that the socio-economic environment in which the contractor operates (including demand and supply for their particular skill set) influences the manner in which they construct these contracts. The framing and re-framing of psychological contracts also impacts on the degree and ease with which contractors’ share their knowledge with the organisation. A re-framing of psychological contracts, on the part of the contractor can have a direct impact on knowledge flows within the organisation.

This study also provides evidence to suggest that employee (contractor) breaches of the psychological contract evoke explicit reactions from employers (managers) – including, but not limited to, legal penalties and in extreme cases, termination of the legal contract. Often ignored in the study of psychological contracts, this study makes evident the dynamic, dyadic aspect of the construction of psychological contracts as well as the impact of breaches of psychological contracts on employers.

**Theme 5: Approach towards knowledge sharing**

Contractors in both case studies were aware of the KM practices of the organisation to which they are contracting, although the degree and depth of that knowledge and awareness varied. Participants in ABC bank (both contractors as well as permanent employees) had limited knowledge of the organisation’s KM strategy as compared to permanent employees in Ozinsure. The non-standard working hours within their division, as well as the geographical
distance between their division and head office seemed to contribute to their limited awareness of the organisation’s KM practices. However, within the division, understanding transactional processes and sharing technical expertise were viewed as important for effective on-the-job performance. Contractors indicated that they were exposed to the “way things were done” within the organisation by being partnered with employees who knew how to get the job done. This “shadowing” technique was widely practiced within the division, and contractors were inducted into the division through this process of shadowing. Although computerised procedure manuals were available, they were of limited use. Learning occurred by sharing and observing processes on the job.

In Ozinsure, although permanent employees indicated a more in-depth understanding of the organisation’s KM strategies and practices, for contractors, learning on the job was similar to that of the contractors in ABC bank. They partnered senior members and learnt by on-the-job observation and through informal social conversation.

These findings have important implications for organisations’ knowledge sharing practices. First, contractors learn constantly from organisations. Knowledge sharing in this regard is knowledge flow from the organisation to the contractors. Contractors use contracts to further their own intellectual growth and expertise. Second, the socially constructed and situated aspect of knowledge sharing becomes quite clear. All of the participants indicated that they learnt by talking with co-workers, managers, colleagues and other contractors in a variety of informal and formal settings. The conversation over a cup of coffee or lunch served to provide a medium through which tacit knowledge was shared and then internalised through its application on the job. In this regard, there is very little difference between the two case studies. Both favour such situated, social, informal processes of knowledge sharing to the more codified information systems approach to knowledge management.

However, knowledge gains that the organisation sought to make through obtaining new knowledge from the contractor varied quite distinctly between the two cases. Based on my analysis, I have argued that the professional categorisation of the contractors, the roles for which they were hired in organisations, the psychological contracts that were constructed
between contractors and managers, their perceived expert status and professional image and the willingness of the organisation to recognise their expertise and acquire new knowledge from the contractors all impacted on the contractors’ willingness to share their knowledge and expertise with the firm.

This thesis has explored, in previous sections, some of the extant literature on knowledge sharing in organisations. The literature suggests that knowledge sharing is influenced by a complex set of factors, both individual and organisational factors and that it is often the combination of these factors that account for successful knowledge transfer within organisations. This study highlights three factors that have a strong influence on the willingness of contractors to share their knowledge and expertise with the organisation: the professional image and identity of the contractor, perceived self-benefit in sharing and the organisation’s willingness to acquire knowledge.

**The professional image and identity of the contractor**

As indicated previously, the study by Constant et al. (1994) showed that people view information and knowledge differently, and that expertise is closely linked to the self worth and self-identity of the individual. Studies by Thomas-Hunt et al (2003) also indicated that socially isolated members sought acceptance into a group by demonstrating their competence and sharing expertise through sharing of expert knowledge. These studies indicated that self worth, self identity and the status of permanent employee have a strong influence on willingness to share.

This research extends these findings and brings into clear focus professional image construction as influencing knowledge sharing. Contractors, who made contracting a deliberate career choice and sought to trade on their expertise, in particular the specialists and consultants in the two case studies, consciously built and maintained reputations as experts. It was evident that the rates of pay they could command were influenced by that reputation and their performance at the workplace. They had a strong sense of professional identity and consciously developed a professional image, both of which they highlighted by making deliberate attempts to establish their expertise though knowledge sharing. These contractors,
particularly in Ozinsure, made conscious attempts to volunteer their expertise to members of their team. These findings support studies that suggest that reputation influences knowledge sharing behaviours (Ensign and Herbert, 2010). Those contractors who consciously developed a reputation as experts, contributed actively to team discussions, built networks with other team members and at every opportunity, used the rhetoric of previous contractual experience and networks to establish themselves as experts. They offered to train permanent members of their project team and some of them led project teams on the basis of their expertise and experience in their field. Their volunteering was a conscious attempt on their part to establish their image as experts, even when not actively “asked” for advice from other team members.

There is also evidence to suggest that their social status as outsiders influenced them to be more active in volunteering their knowledge and expertise. Many of them spoke about the need to establish themselves within the team, to be able to people manage effectively, and to understand and manage organisational politics effectively. This was particularly evident when the contractor was also the team/project leader, as was the case with a number of consultants in Ozinsure.

The study also highlights the impact of weak professional identity and image on willingness to share knowledge. Contractors perceived as free agents showed weaker professional identity and professional image as compared to specialists and consultants. They also revealed lower willingness to share their knowledge and expertise. They spoke about waiting to be asked for advice before sharing their expertise, about “minding their own business” and “getting on with their own job” and did not volunteer their expertise, even in domains where they knew they possessed knowledge that the organisation lacked. They also expressed lower social needs to be accepted into the team/groups in which they were working, and this comfort with being a social outsider potentially dissuaded them from sharing their expertise with the team.

**Perceived self-benefit from knowledge sharing**

Bock et al’s (2005) synthesis of the motivational forces impacting on knowledge sharing identified three levels: 1) Individual benefit (such as personal gain, self-interest), 2) group benefit (such as relationship with others, reciprocal benefits), and 3) organisational benefit
(such as organisational gain, commitment, identity etc.). The stronger the organisational identity, commitment and loyalty of the individual, the greater is the willingness to share (van den Hooff et al., 2004). The more the individual perceives self-benefit in sharing, the higher is their willingness to share. An individual’s attitude to knowledge sharing is therefore primarily motivated by anticipated reciprocal relationships and subjective norms regarding knowledge sharing rather than extrinsic rewards such as pay (Thomas-Hunt et al., 2003; Constant et al., 1994). These subjective norms are themselves positively influenced by an individual’s self worth, and an organisational climate that is conducive to knowledge sharing. The findings in this study suggest a strong bias towards perceived individual self-benefit in knowledge sharing, which is only tempered by the organisation’s willingness to seek and acquire new knowledge from the contractors. The same norms that mark a contractor as an expert also regulate their knowledge sharing attitudes.

It appears that the primary motivation to share knowledge amongst consultants and specialists was the anticipated reward in terms of future contracts and higher market rates and their perception that knowledge sharing enhanced their reputation as experts. They also consciously linked their success with that of the groups (particularly project based work) and hence their self interest and benefit was aligned with the interests of the team/organisation. In this research, although ties with the organisation were weak and organisational identity weak, the perceived self-benefit in sharing motivated them to share their knowledge and expertise. Therefore, in contrast to studies on permanent employees indicating that weak organisational ties and identities may lead to decreased knowledge sharing (Alvesson, 2000; Hansen, 1999), this study indicates that perceived self-benefit in sharing overrides weak organisational identification resulting in a willingness to share their knowledge with the organisation. Such calculated approach to knowledge sharing is similar to Janowicz-Panjaitan and Noorderhaven’s (2009) study suggesting that different boundary spanner roles are motivated by different factors when participating in knowledge sharing. The contractors in this case study, particularly consultants and specialists are similar to what the authors refer to as corporate level boundary spanners, whose primary motivation to share knowledge is more influenced by rational calculative considerations than trust based considerations while participating in knowledge sharing.
This anticipated self-benefit in sharing is also predominantly influenced by the professional identity and image of the contractor. A comparison of the two cases indicated that those contractors who saw themselves as just ‘contractors’ or “free agents” rather than as professional “experts” had significantly less motivation to share knowledge primarily because they perceived fewer self-benefits in sharing. Their sense of security about their ability to find contracts in the market place, their willingness to take on any contract that they found suitable to their work-life balance and the demand for contractors within their industry (banking and finance) to a large extent negated their fears or anxieties of future unemployment.

Organisation’s willingness to acquire knowledge

One of the factors that was previously discussed as influencing knowledge sharing was the recipient’s willingness to acquire new knowledge from the source. This is related to the issue of the perceived value of the knowledge that they receive (Borgatti et al, 2003). The more valuable the knowledge is perceived to be, the greater is the willingness of the recipient to acquire new knowledge. Shared contextual base and familiarity with the knowledge being transmitted also enhances the receivers’ ability to absorb the new knowledge (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Nonaka, 1994, Wenger, 1998). Similarly, research conducted by Menon and Pfeffer (2003) indicated that recipients (particularly managers) placed greater value on external sources of knowledge than internal knowledge sources because of the status implications of learning from outsiders rather than insiders. In addition internal knowledge was perceived as more open to scrutiny and more readily available while external knowledge was scarcer and less readily available for scrutiny, thereby making it more valuable. Hence recipients would be more willing to seek out and absorb new contextual knowledge if they perceived it as valuable, rare and from an external source.

In the context of this study, the willingness of the recipient to absorb new knowledge and its impact on knowledge sharing was strongly influenced by organisation’s perceptions of the professional images of the contractors and the roles that for which they were hired. This therefore lends evidence to Van Dyne and Ang’s (1998) notion that how contractors exhibit extra-role behaviours and organisational commitment is a function of how they are treated and
perceived in organisation. The managers in Ozinsure, who perceived the ‘consultants’ as experts indicated a strong willingness to absorb new knowledge. They perceived that knowledge to be valuable and scarce and therefore made active attempts to solicit that knowledge from those contractors. In contrast, when the managers perceived the contractors as non-experts, and the roles as not requiring expert knowledge, they also perceived that knowledge to be common and easily available and hence made little attempt to actively solicit their expertise despite many of the contractors being hired by the organisation for their expertise and experience in similar roles. Even when contractors used rhetorical aids to project their expertise to colleagues and supervisors, little attempt was made to solicit their expertise. Thus it was the managers’ own perceptions of the contractors’ expertise levels that motivated their seeking new knowledge rather than the contractors’ explicitly stated expertise.

Moreover, Ozinsure indicates that contractors who traded on their status as experts made conscious attempts to volunteer their expertise to members of their team. They contributed actively to team discussions, built networks with other team members, and at every opportunity used the rhetoric of previous contractual experience and networks to establish themselves as experts. Their volunteering was a conscious attempt on their part to establish their image as experts, even when recipients did not actively ‘ask’ them for advice. In contrast, contractors with lower levels of professional status and identity did not volunteer their expertise, even in domains where they knew they possessed knowledge that the organisation did not. If they were not asked, they did not volunteer; the recipients’ lack of willingness to seek out their knowledge strongly influenced their desire to share knowledge. They perceived lower levels of self-benefit and reciprocity to be obtained from such knowledge sharing. This implies that in cases where the contractor had little to gain from knowledge sharing, the unwillingness of recipients to solicit expertise from them played a greater role in influencing them to hoard knowledge, overriding their need to establish their reputation as experts. However, if they perceived greater self-benefit in establishing themselves as experts, they chose to share knowledge even when explicitly not asked to do so. Once managers, specifically in Ozinsure, perceived the contractors’ knowledge as valuable, they attempted to obtain the knowledge through fairly explicitly stated contractual regulations. Contractors were expected to provide detailed project documentation as part of their contract and in cases where the knowledge was
perceived to be more tacit, the organisation used a combination of technology and people focused approaches- assigning an apprentice to the contractor or explicitly specifying that the contractor trained permanent employees before the expiry of the contract. Thus more explicit, codified approaches to capturing the tacit knowledge of the contractor were employed by in Ozinsure. There was also an assumption that there was a price to be paid for such knowledge transfer and managers spoke of “paying” the contractor to document such knowledge, although the data suggests that the most effective learning occurred through conversations, communications and observations during the course of daily work.

Summary

As previous research on professional identity indicates (Alvesson, 1994 1999, 2000; Covaleski et al 1998; Pratt et al., 2006) contractors engage in a continuous process of constructing their professional identities. They seek out contracting, initially as a process of rebellion against dominant institutional structures – seeking to control the utilisation of their professional knowledge and expertise. But the realities of the working world, and the relationships they form at work, particularly the manager-contractor relationship, influence and temper this “rebellion” and influence the construction of their professional identities and images. In this research, I have constructed three categories of contractors, each responding differently to the realities of the working world – free agents, specialists and consultants.

The category of contractors who were most vehement in their desire to see themselves as “free”, did so by devaluing organisational influence on their careers. They attempted to make organisations faceless; the roles that they secured were interchangeable. Through this process of devaluing what organisations offered them, they sought to retain a semblance of control over their professional lives. But in doing so, they devalued their work to the organisation. They become “faceless”, interchangeable resources for the organisation to utilise. Managers spoke of them as “any contractor”, their professional expertise remained “unseen” and consequently undervalued. This in turn, influenced the construction of their professional images as “handymen” and influenced the future contracting roles that they obtained and the manner in which they positioned themselves in the contracting marketplace. In seeking the freedom to
choose when, where and how to work, these contractors had limited the scope and potential of
the application of their professional expertise within organisations. They were rebels, but with
limited control over the growth and development of their “professional selves”. So their
capacity to influence knowledge flows within the firm remained limited.

The second group of contractors, the *specialists*, sought intellectual freedom. They learnt to
work within organisational control structures; for them, organisations served as mechanisms
for intellectual growth. They perceived organisations to provide them with the intellectual
resource for their own intellectual growth and saw themselves as intellectual entrepreneurs
within organisational boundaries. Since they perceived formal organisational membership as
limiting their ability to utilise and control the use of their expertise, they chose contracting to
obtain knowledge experiences over a diverse range of organisations and roles. In their desire to
be at the cutting edge of their professions, they selected roles that helped establish their
reputations as specialists within their fields or domains of expertise. This image of being
“knowledgeable” influenced the manner in which they were perceived by managers within
organisations. Managers perceived the knowledge they possessed to be of value to the
organisation and regarded them as experts, consequently influencing the construction of their
professional image as *specialists*. These contractors also perceived self-benefit in sharing.
Because they desired to learn in a variety of settings, knowledge sharing for them became a
means of improving their own knowledge and skill set. They shared what they knew,
technically, in order to benefit from reciprocity –through the process of working with other
professionals in organisations with leading technologies. They sought to distance themselves
from “organisational politics”, rarely seeking leadership roles, and focused their attention on a
limited area of expertise, but they understood the value of organisational work. They wanted
limited institutional membership, but valued intellectual autonomy. Consequently, their
expertise was recognised and valued by the contracting organisation. Their capacity to
influence specific areas of expertise within the organisation was high and their willingness to
contribute to the organisation’s knowledge base was strongly influenced by their own desire to
learn.
The third group of contractors, the *consultants*, influenced organisations through their capacity as experts as well as leaders. They accepted and understood organisational politics; and they sought positions of leadership within organisations, but such positions were obtained from the vantage point of being outsiders as well as experts. They were conscious about their reputations; they traded on their reputations and used it to influence work processes within organisations. To that extent, as Fenwick (2007) argued, their networks and the establishment of their reputations as consultants and experts through these networks acted as normative modes of control, influencing the manner in which they interacted with the organisation and their knowledge contribution to the firm. Managers within organisations perceived such contractors as possessing rare expert knowledge that the organisation itself lacked. They were perceived as “gurus” and this in turn influenced the construction of their professional images as consultants and the kinds of roles that they obtained in future contracts. These contractors were in a position to deeply influence knowledge flows within the firm. They learnt from the organisation, but in seeking to establish their influence and control within the organisation, they were also conscious about the need to share their knowledge and expertise. For them, the self-benefit in knowledge sharing was in its ability to establish them as leaders and experts within their profession, further allowing them to influence organisational work processes.

This study also examined the contractor-manager relationship through the lens of psychological contracts. As demonstrated by this research, the dynamic relationships between the different categories of the contractors and hiring managers within organisations, and the expectations that the two parties have of each other, also influences the knowledge sharing motivations of the three categories of contract professionals differently.

Table 4 provides a comparison of the three categories of contractors across the five themes that have been discussed:
Table 4: Comparison of the three categories of contractors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of contractor</th>
<th>Reason for contracting/ selecting contracting roles</th>
<th>Obtaining contracts</th>
<th>Professional images</th>
<th>Psychological contracts</th>
<th>Approaches towards knowledge sharing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free Agent</td>
<td>Manage and control time; seeking work-life balance, moving away from institutional membership and control. Selecting roles that minimise learning time on the job; establish their value to the organisation; allow work-life balance; familiarity of role</td>
<td>Primarily through employment agencies; functional relationship with agencies and limited use of networks to obtain contracts</td>
<td>General handyman</td>
<td>Transactional contracts; short term focus on rewards and engagement with organisation</td>
<td>Lesser perceived self-benefit in sharing; fewer instances of voluntarily sharing knowledge; professional image of non-experts; organisations less willing to seek out and absorb new knowledge from contractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>Manage and control the utilisation of their intellectual capital, seeking variety and technically complex roles. Selecting roles that offer opportunity for learning new technologies and specialist knowledge; opportunities for intellectual growth; establish reputation as technology leader and/or specialist</td>
<td>Primarily through agencies but greater effort made towards maintaining relationship with agencies and networks both within and outside the organisation; greater effort to market themselves within their profession</td>
<td>Professional, technical expert; niche knowledge specialist</td>
<td>Balanced contracts focused on competency and contribution based rewards</td>
<td>Greater perceived self-benefit in sharing; higher instances of volunteering new knowledge; professional image of technical/domain experts brought in to address specific knowledge gaps in organisations; greater organisational willingness to absorb new knowledge from contractors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>Utilise managerial and technical skills within a variety of settings; seeking to influence organisations as experts. Selecting roles with leadership positions requiring both technical/ managerial skills; opportunities for establishing their reputations as corporate experts and managers roles</td>
<td>Primarily through network of contacts including agencies, clients and organisations; establishing reputations as experts within their profession</td>
<td>Corporate expert: guru</td>
<td>Relational contracts focused on building and establishing reputation as experts</td>
<td>Very high perceived self-benefit in sharing; establish reputation as experts; high degree of volunteering new knowledge; professional image as experts; organisation very willing to seek out and absorb new knowledge from contractors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this chapter, I have highlighted three factors that impact on the knowledge sharing motivations of contractors: the professional image and identity of the contractor, perceived self-benefit in sharing, and the organisation’s willingness to acquire knowledge from the contractor (influenced by the managers’ perceptions of the value of the knowledge that the contractor possessed). Each of these factors was in turn influenced by the professionals’ experience of the contracting world, the roles that they occupied in organisations, by issues of self management and the contractor-managerial relationship and psychological contracts developed at work, and by the perceptions that managers had of their expertise. The next chapter considers the implications of these knowledge sharing motivations for the development of organisational knowledge management strategies within firms employing contract professionals.
CHAPTER NINE

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the categorisation of three types of contract professionals and looked at the various factors that influenced their willingness to share their knowledge and expertise with organisations. The professional image and identity of the contractor, the perceived self-benefit in sharing and the willingness of the organisation to acquire new knowledge from the contractor were presented as three key factors influencing the knowledge sharing motivations of contract professionals. Further, the construction of the professional identities and images of the contractors and the willingness of the organisation to acquire new knowledge from the contractor were influenced by the roles that contractors occupied in organisations, the dyadic contractor-manager relationship and the expectations (psychological contracts) that the parties had of each other. The study also suggested that the two case study organisations both favoured socially constructed and situated approaches to knowledge sharing.

These findings suggest that the organisational context and practices within the organisation may also influence the knowledge sharing motivations of contractors. In this chapter, I discuss five key factors that have the potential to influence an organisation’s ability to motivate contractors to participate in knowledge sharing. These factors are: knowledge sharing environments enabling knowledge exchanges, understanding the perceived value of the knowledge being received, creating permeable organisational boundaries, strength of ties between source and recipient and richness of communicative channels. The two case studies are examined against each of these factors and commonalities and differences between the two organisations highlighted. The chapter concludes with a model that summarises the key factors that may influence knowledge exchanges between contractors and organisations and suggests that, although knowledge
is emergent and influenced by the social and organisational world in which the contractors operate, understanding these factors enables organisations to gain a greater understanding of the contractor-organisational relationship and facilitate the process whereby greater knowledge exchanges between contractors and organisations can take place. Further, this model is compared with two other models of knowledge sharing, that highlights the differences between the knowledge sharing motivations of contract professionals and permanent employees in organisations.

**Organisational factors influencing knowledge sharing**

The previous chapter suggested that the professional identity and image of the contract professional influenced their knowledge sharing motivations. Previous research on professionals has studied the impact of organisational context on the identities and commitment of professionals (Wallace, 1995; Lautsch, 2002) suggesting that professionals with high degrees of organisational commitment would exhibit greater extra-role behaviours such as knowledge sharing. This study examined contract professionals working in both professional and non-professional firms (finance professionals working in a bank and IT professionals working in an insurance company). Based on previous research, a probable hypothesis of the influence of organisational context on knowledge sharing was that professionals working in the professional organisation (FOREX dealers in ABC bank) would have more pronounced professional identities and higher organisational commitment in comparison to professionals working in non-professional firms (IT professionals in Ozinsure). Professionals in these firms would more closely align themselves with the values and work processes of the professional organisation and would therefore participate more willingly in knowledge exchanges within the firm. In contrast, professionals in non-professional firms would strive for greater autonomy, and seek to protect their knowledge base as a means of establishing their status within the firm.

The findings from this study are ambiguous and inconclusive about the impact of organisational context on knowledge sharing motivations of contract professionals. The category of professionals who were least willing to participate in knowledge sharing, the
free agents, were present mostly in ABC bank (professional organisation). Further, they had lower levels of professional identification in comparison to the specialists and consultants and had lower levels of affective commitment to the organisation. This suggests that contracting itself, defined by an absence of career building within organisations, may have an impact on the professional identities and levels of commitment of contract professionals working within professional organisations. Further, specialists as a category were present in both the case studies, suggesting that organisational roles may have a greater influence on the professional and organisational commitments of professionals than the characteristics of firms, such as professional or non-professional. Finally, consultants, as a category of contractors, were present only in Ozinsure. These contractors were keen to establish themselves as experts and chose to do that through knowledge sharing rather than protecting their “jurisdiction of expertise within the firm” (Wallace, 1995, 248) through knowledge hoarding. Thus the influence of organisational context on knowledge sharing is not very evident from this study. Instead, five other factors seem to have a much greater influence on the ability of the organisation to acquire knowledge from contract professionals. Each of these factors and their implications for the development of organisational knowledge management strategies are discussed in the following section.

**Knowledge sharing environment (Shared spaces)**

This research has indicated that knowledge exchanges in organisation are influenced by the willingness of the individual employee (including contractors) to share their knowledge and expertise with others in their team. Extant literature on knowledge exchanges has suggested that shared contextual understanding of the knowledge being transferred and spaces within organisations that make interactions between individuals possible are necessary factors that facilitate knowledge exchanges and combinations in firms (Nonaka, 1991; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Nonaka and Konno (1998: 40) referred to these spaces as “ba”: the physical spaces (office space, physical work environment), mental spaces (shared mental models, ideas, experiences, ideals, goals) and virtual spaces (emails, teleconferences, video conferences) or combinations of such spaces that enable contextual knowledge to be shared through interactions amongst
members of a community, organisation or work group. The relevance of such shared spaces within organisations for encouraging knowledge sharing is evident in this study. *Ba* provides the spaces that facilitate individuals to share their thoughts, experiences and mental models in a shared context of understanding. Nonaka and Konno (1998) referred to those spaces that allowed for non-judgemental exchanges to occur as *originating ba* (pg. 46). In these spaces, individuals share knowledge through face-to-face interactions and shared activities and through the creation of an empathetic environment that allows for knowledge to be shared and understood amongst individuals. This *originating ba* occurs almost spontaneously through open interactions amongst employees enabled by open door policies and transparency in decision making that allows individuals to interact across organisational hierarchies and through practices such as shadowing and apprenticeship. There are also more consciously created spaces in organisations where people with specific skill sets, complementary skills and cross functional knowledge are brought together, allowing for dialogue and interaction to take place. Project teams created to work on innovative ideas, new technologies or cross functional teams brought together to solve organisational issues and problems are examples of such a space. Nonaka and Konno (1998: 47) referred to this as *interacting ba*. Within this *ba*, there is both active listening to the mental models of others while reflecting on one’s own mental model and beliefs. Through active dialogue, knowledge is shared and assimilated. Communities of practice, storytelling and learning organisations are different aspects of interacting *ba*, where the focus is on consciously creating the environment that allows individuals to participate in knowledge exchanges and reflect and assimilate the knowledge being exchanged and combined.

**ABC Bank**

*Originating Ba*

ABC bank provided an example of originating *ba*. All of the participants in the case study spoke about the importance of “shadowing” and having new employees of the organisation observe and learn from more experienced employees. The managers in ABC
bank spoke about observational learning as the most common method of knowledge transfer within the organisation. Such observations occurred through physical proximity between employees, where newer employees were seated next to more experienced workers.

Contractors in ABC bank also learnt about organisational processes through such observations. All of the contractors were assigned to “shadow” more experienced workers for a few days to understand work processes, in particular focusing on the “way things were done” in the organisation. Although they spoke about the availability of electronic procedure manuals, all of them indicated that they learnt about the organisation through the process of observation and questioning experienced workers.

In ABC Bank, the flow of knowledge occurred predominantly from the organisation to the contractor; the contractor learnt organisational procedures and processes to ensure that they complied with organisational requirements. There were few formal attempts or processes to acquire knowledge from the contractor. Most of the managers in ABC Bank seemed to consider the knowledge that the contractors possessed to be of little value to the organisation as this statement by Keith, a team leader indicates:

> With the contractors, we want them to come in and learn how we do things quickly because we want them to follow our procedures. They may have done similar roles in the past, but they have to sometimes unlearn, forget about how they did it somewhere else and get on with learning how we do things quickly. Really that’s why we hire them.

Further, the knowledge considered to be of relevance to the organisation was considered explicit and technical and focused on transactional processes (transactional knowledge), which the organisation perceived as being easily articulated and absorbed. Thus, although physical ba was present in terms of the work environment and physical proximity of employees, there was an absence of mental (shared ideals, mental models) and virtual ba. Knowledge exchanges that occurred were predominantly limited to what the contractors learnt from the organisation.
Within ABC Bank, those contractors who saw themselves as specialists attempted to create shared mental spaces within the work environment. They spoke about their previous work experiences with permanent employees; they volunteered their expertise in group meetings (without being asked) and attempted to build shared contextual models with members of the team, particularly with managers. Their attempt to do so also seemed to be influenced by their desire to be seen as experts and to have their knowledge perceived as valuable by the organisation to which they were contracting. However, most managers in ABC Bank seemed to indicate that they felt contractors had little to contribute to the organisation’s knowledge base. This perception only changed when managers indicated that they were considering offering permanent roles to a few contractors and when contractors were in roles that demanded leadership skills.

*Interacting Ba*

There is little evidence to suggest that ABC Bank provided consciously established interacting spaces for contractors and permanent employees. Much of the interaction between contractors and permanent employees was limited to discussions about daily transactions and processes. The specialised knowledge of different processes and systems that contractors possessed was not considered to be greatly relevant to the organisation. The contractors’ narratives reflected this when they spoke about “not being really asked” about what they knew. Hence there was little attempt to obtain such knowledge from the contractors. Although regular team meetings were held, there was little *conscious* effort made to actively engage contractors in a *dialogue* that would allow them to share their expertise with the team. Those contractors, however, who were keen for more demanding roles within the organisation, used team meetings and interactions with members of other teams to engage in dialogues that singled them out as experienced professionals. Janice, a contractor, spoke about this:

> I just tell them about how I did these things in my previous role and I tell them about how we can change the process a bit to make it faster. I mean I just volunteer this to let them know that I have quite a bit of knowledge and experience in these systems and that I can actually make a difference to the way they work.
These contractors also attempted to use informal settings such as food and coffee breaks to engage in dialogues where past experiences were shared and attempts made to link such experiences with issues currently being faced by the organisation.

Participants in ABC Bank indicated that they participated in regular team meetings where issues and problems relating to transactional processes were discussed. The meetings were also a forum to disseminate information about the organisation, changes in procedures, rules or organisational processes. The dialogue that occurred during such meetings provided contractors with the space to further their learning within specific areas. For example, changes in financial regulations or reporting requirements allowed contractors to “become up-to-date” with the legal requirements of their profession.

**Ozinsure**

*Originating Ba*

Within Ozinsure, contractors were hired to participate in work teams focused on specific projects with clear deliverables and time frames. The contractors were hired for specific technical and managerial skills and were often assigned specific roles within the project teams, including leadership and managerial roles. Here, clear evidence of originating *ba* was available.

Managers in Ozinsure spoke about the need to “learn” from contractors and spoke about permanent employees being assigned to contractors to learn from them by observing and participating in the tasks that the specialists and consultants were assigned to do. Project members were informed about the expert status of the contractor before he/she arrived and permanent employees often looked forward to the arrival of such contractors to help them solve specific issues within the project. Contractors also spoke about wanting to be part of the team, linking their own success to that of the project team’s (“I wanted this contract because they were migrating to open source and this was one area that I really wanted to get into”). They chose specific roles based on their own interest in learning
from that role and in the challenges that the role offered them to contribute to the success of the project. Thus there was a shared mental space created between the contractor(s) and the employing organisation, in particular between the contractor and members of the project team. Here knowledge transfer occurred both ways – from the organisation to the contractor and from the contractor to the organisation. By establishing shared mental models, through physical proximity at work and observations, both physical and mental bas were established to enable knowledge exchanges to occur between contractors and permanent employees.

*Interacting Ba*

Ozinsure provided examples of both formal and informal approaches to the development of interacting *ba* within the project team. Both these approaches were, however, consciously constructed. Managers in Ozinsure spoke about the need to “tap” into the expert knowledge possessed by the contractors and indicated that they used a variety of methods to do that. In the formal team settings, contractors were invited and expected to present their ideas (“We always ask the contractor to tell us how they handled other projects”), to share anecdotal experiences in team meetings, to document project deliverables in a manner accessible to organisational employees and to “teach” the team specifics of technologies in which the contractor specialised. Contractors engaged as project leaders were asked to present project progress reports, to engage the team in group learning and to extensively document project progress in formats available to other organisational members. Thus the organisation clearly recognised the value of the knowledge and expertise of these contractors and provided the spaces (physical, mental and virtual) that enabled the sharing of that knowledge with other members of the team.

Informal avenues for sharing of knowledge were also provided. Contractors and team members engaged in “storytelling” activities over lunches and teas and exchanged ideas through intranets and internal blogs. The contractors also networked extensively with professional members outside the organisation and shared these learnings with other members of the team in formal team meetings as well as informally through
conversations and dialogues. Team members often retreated to meeting rooms for informal brainstorming sessions that were captured and documented and such informal sessions often led to more formalised brainstorming sessions. Thus shared physical, mental and virtual \textit{ba} was provided allowing for tacit knowledge to be shared both ways between the contractors and members of the project team.

It was evident in Ozinsure that managers recognised the value of the knowledge (“we hired him because he is an acknowledged expert in open source migration”) that the contractors brought into the organisation and responded to that by making various channels available through which such expert knowledge could be accessed and acquired by the organisation. The specialists and consultants who formed the bulk of the contractors coming into Ozinsure also recognised the value of the knowledge that they brought into the organisation, but were equally conscious of the knowledge and learning that they could gain from the role and the organisation in which they were contracting. The shared expectation of knowledge gains provided for the creation of shared mental spaces that allowed for knowledge flows to occur between the contractor and the organisation in both directions, each expecting to benefit out of the knowledge exchange.

**Implications**

Providing a shared space (physical, mental, virtual) for contractors to share their knowledge or expertise with the team is essential if organisations seek to acquire knowledge from contractors. This shared space provides the anchor that allows contractors to share their expert knowledge and allows organisations, particularly managers and team members, to recognise and acquire that knowledge. In the absence of shared spaces, including shared mental models, and recognition of the knowledge held by the contractor, knowledge flow remains one way – from the organisation to the contractor, i.e. knowledge leaks from the organisation. The organisation itself makes very few knowledge gains from the contractor.
ABC Bank provided an example of both a lack of a shared mental space for the absorption of such knowledge as well as the lack of a conscious effort in establishing such spaces. This lack of consciousness was influenced by the inability of the managers to recognise the value of the knowledge that the contractor brought, by the perception that such knowledge already existed in the organisation, by the demands of the roles for which the contractors were hired (seen as transactional/process oriented roles, not requiring expert knowledge) and by the professional identities and images of the contractors. However, the need to create such shared spaces was felt by those contractors seeking to have their knowledge recognised by the organisation. They consciously attempted to create shared mental models through the use of dialogue, storytelling and participation in informal conversations, engaging in a process of knowledge sharing.

Ozinsure, in contrast, provided the shared spaces essential for such knowledge sharing. Here managers perceived the contractors’ specialist knowledge as knowledge that was scarce within the organisation and the roles the contractors were hired for were considered as expert roles. Consequently, managers made project teams aware of the expert knowledge that the contractors possessed; the team anticipated learning from the contractors and opportunities for interaction through physical proximity at work, informal meetings and forums for discussion of ideas were provided. This shared space provided contractors with opportunities to share and acquire new knowledge from the organisation. Here the knowledge flows occurred both ways – individual to organisations and vice versa. Hence for organisations seeking to acquire knowledge from contractors, providing “ba” or shared spaces, including shared mental models, becomes vital for knowledge sharing to occur.

**Perceived value of source knowledge/Contracting roles**

Previous research (Borgatti et al, 2003; Menon et al, 2003; Constant et al 1994; Thomas-Hunt et al, 2003) has indicated that a key factor influencing the knowledge transfer process is the recipients’ ability to recognise the value of the knowledge being received. Studies have shown that managers in organisations often value knowledge received from external sources (outside the organisation) more highly than internal sources, as they
attach greater status to knowledge possessed by outsiders. Studies have also shown that team members are more willing to receive knowledge from perceived experts within the group. Further, people attach different values and meanings to different kinds of knowledge: what is seen as information is perceived to be more readily available and therefore less valued and what is perceived to be expertise is considered rare and therefore valued by organisations.

**ABC Bank**

Managers in ABC bank did not perceive the contractors’ knowledge as unique or valuable. Instead, it was considered routine, procedural information that the organisation already possessed and was of little value to the organisation. In this case, the status of the contractors as external to the organisation had little impact on the perceived value of the knowledge that they brought into the organisation. Exceptions were when contractors were placed in leadership roles within the teams or when contractors were hired to fill specific technical requirements of a role. Therefore, the perceived value of the knowledge that the contractor possessed was influenced more by the roles that the contractor was hired to fill and managers’ perceptions of the value of the knowledge that they brought into the organisation than the status of the contractor as external to the firm.

Because the roles were perceived as process oriented and transactional within ABC Bank, little attempt was made by the organisation to highlight the contractors’ expertise to other members of the team. In most cases, contractors “shadowed” permanent employees in order to familiarise themselves with the operations of the business division, thereby reinforcing the image that the contractor had little knowledge to contribute to the organisation. The status of the contractor, as experienced and possessing expertise, was often not discussed in team meetings and contractors, particularly free agents, chose to keep such expertise hidden. They rarely volunteered their knowledge in team meetings, thereby failing to reveal themselves as experts. Hence members of the team, including managers, failed to perceive any expertise or expert knowledge within the contractor, resulting in lower perceived value of their knowledge. Because of the process oriented
nature of the roles, the expertise possessed by the contractor was considered routine, commonplace and easily available, further devaluing the expertise that they possessed.

**Ozinsure**

Managers considered the knowledge brought in by the contractors to be specialised, expert knowledge, rare and not available within the organisation. Managers commented on how contractors were hired based on specific areas of expertise that the organisation itself lacked and this reinforced the image of the contractor as experts possessing rare and valued knowledge. In this case, being external to the organisation and their exposure to a wide variety of organisations, technologies and projects enhanced their expert status.

Most team members were aware of the specialised knowledge or expertise of the contractor and were keen to observe and absorb such knowledge. Managers spoke to team members about incoming contractors, highlighting their specialised skills, experience and expertise so team members *consciously* perceived them as experts. They also viewed the knowledge the contractors possessed as expertise not easily available within the organisation and hence more complex, requiring them to be more vigilant in the learning and absorption of such knowledge. Team members solicited advice from contractors and asked their opinions. Specialists and consultants within project teams were often asked to make presentations to other team members on their areas of expertise and help train other project team members. These contractors also often volunteered their expertise at team meetings and discussions, thereby reinforcing their image as experts and increasing the perceived value of the knowledge that they brought into the organisation.

**Implications**

The perceived value of the knowledge that the contractor brought into the organisation greatly influenced the organisation’s willingness to learn from the contractor. The two case studies represented the contrasting nature of such perceptions and the impact that
they have on the organisation’s willingness to learn from the contractor. The study also shows that the contractor’s internal or external status to the organisation may not have a significant impact on the perceived value of the knowledge that they bring into the organisation. Instead, in these cases, the role that the organisation hired the contractor to fill and the managers’ perceptions of the expert status of the contractors influenced the perceived value of their knowledge.

If organisations make team members aware of the expert status of the contractor, they would be more willing to solicit knowledge from them. Organisations may also fail to recognise the value of the knowledge that a contractor possesses because of the role for which the contractor is hired. It therefore becomes essential for organisations to recognise the potential value of the knowledge and expertise that the contractor brings into the organisation, irrespective of the specific role for which the contractor is hired. The study also highlights the critical role that managers play in establishing the value of the knowledge that the contractors bring into the organisation. Managers should be aware of the expertise and knowledge that the contractors bring into the organisation and should provide the means and channels of communication to ensure that their expert status is recognised by other team members. The managers’ perception of contractors as experts greatly influences both their willingness to share their knowledge as well as the team’s willingness to recognise and absorb such knowledge.

Creating and managing permeable organisational boundaries

Research on communities of practice and the learning organisation has indicated that organisations gain competitive advantage by constantly scanning their operating environment and adapting themselves to reflect the changes in that environment. Organisations that adapt themselves to the changing demands of the environment in which they operate do so, by the process of external knowledge acquisition and internalization of such new knowledge. The literature on communities of practice and learning organisations (McGill & Slocum Jr, 1993; Waddell, Cummings, & Worley, 2004; Wenger, 2000, Garvin, 1993, Liebeskind, 1996; Senge, 1990) indicates that
organisations that are skilled at managing their boundaries and develop permeable boundaries are best equipped to acquire and benefit from such new knowledge.

Two issues concerning permeable boundaries arise for organisations using contractors. The first is the creation of permeable boundaries and the second is the management of such boundaries. Organisations using contractors need to create permeable boundaries that allow them to understand knowledge flows outside the organisation and to tap into the knowledge resources that contractors bring. For this, they need to be conscious of knowledge reservoirs within the organisation, be aware of knowledge lacunae within the organisation and consciously recruit contractors to fill those gaps. Organisations also need to be aware that because contractors learn from every organisation in which they contract, they will take the learnings from one organisation into another. Thus knowledge leaks from the organisation will occur, particularly when contractors are exposed to leading or cutting edge technologies and project innovations, the knowledge of which would be considered a premium.

**ABC Bank**

The focus of managers in ABC bank was to ensure that contractors worked efficiently in the roles allocated to them. Their focus was internal, aimed at ensuring process efficiencies and smoothness of transactions. Geographically, this division was isolated from the head office and temporally, employees in this division, including managers, worked non-standard hours. Managers often commented on this geographical and temporal isolation as this comment by Cynthia, a team leader, indicated when she spoke about training and induction programmes for employees:

I mean there is a basic induction program that the bank does on a day shift, but it's been difficult to get people to go onto these programmes after working nights. I have been here quite a while now, and I have never gone to head office for any kind of training or programmes; only once to attend a meeting. So when you work nights and you are away from everyone else, it does get a bit isolating. But then you focus on what your team has to do.
Because of this isolation, the division developed a culture that was focused internally on the division itself, rather than on the external environment or the organisational culture at large. They were consequently less aware of organisational knowledge gaps or lacunae.

Because of their internal focus, managers spent less time studying the organisation for knowledge lacunae or scanning the environment in which they operated for opportunities for new knowledge acquisition. They therefore also failed to recognise new, expert knowledge that the contractors possessed. Because the roles for which the contractors were hired were not perceived as requiring expert knowledge, managers did not perceive the contractors they hired to fill these roles as possessing such knowledge. Contractors who were hired for roles that could become permanent or contractors who were hired as team leaders were perceived to be more “knowledgeable”. However, there was little in the managers’ narratives to suggest that such contractors were hired to fill specific knowledge gaps in the organisation or that they brought in knowledge with them that was unique and rare, or knowledge that the organisation could absorb in terms of process or system changes.

The contractors hired into the organisation worked closely with permanent team members and consequently learnt more about the way “this organisation did things” from their exposure to other employees, observation and conversations with them. However, there was no explicit recognition from managers in this case study that such learning could result in “knowledge leaks” with contractors taking such procedural knowledge with them to other organisations including other banks.

**Ozinsure**

In comparison to ABC Bank, managers in Ozinsure were very conscious about the knowledge gaps within the organisation, particularly technology gaps that they wanted to fill. The project based work for which the contactors were hired was specifically focused on transforming the IT systems of the company, from a proprietary based system to an open source system. Managers indicated that they spent a considerable amount of time
scanning the environment to identify specific technological modifications to which the company would need to adapt in order to improve efficiencies within the organisation. By becoming aware of the knowledge gaps within the organisation, the organisation focused on hiring contractors with specific skill sets that would complement and add to the organisation’s knowledge base. The hiring of contractors was specific and focused; the organisation used professional networks and agencies to identify contractors who they perceived as having the right set of skills and knowledge that the organisation required. This process of hiring contractors was a conscious one; managers were aware of the external environment in which they operated and focused on addressing internal knowledge gaps through the management of their boundaries. The contractors were hired based not only on their qualifications, but also on their experiences of working with other organisations on the technologies that the company wanted to acquire. They therefore attempted to create permeable boundaries that allowed for such external knowledge transfer to occur.

Managers and contractors in Ozinsure were also aware of knowledge flows that occurred from the organisation to the contractor. While contractors were aware of the need to build on their skills and experience through the contracting role, managers were aware that contractors learnt on the job through interactions with other contractors, work teams and cross functional teams. They sought to limit the leakage of explicit knowledge by having contractors sign confidentiality agreements and by limiting contractor interaction with team members to project based discussions and excluding them from meetings and discussion forums focused on organisational issues at large. Ozinsure attempted to limit contractors’ access to organisational specific knowledge and limit organisational knowledge leaks.

**Implications**

This research suggests that there is a tension between some of the measures that organisations use to obtain new knowledge (through the use of contractors) and the need to restrict or control knowledge leaks that may occur, particularly when specialist or
consultant contractors are used and the contractors’ own motivation for obtaining new knowledge from their work assignments. From an organisational perspective, when managers were aware of the knowledge gains that they sought to make through the use of specialists or consultants, they were also more wary of the knowledge leaks that could occur through contractors absorbing organisational specific knowledge and transferring that knowledge onto other work places. However, managers not aware of the knowledge gains that could be made through the use of contractors were less concerned about possible knowledge leaks that could occur through transference of organisational specific knowledge to contractors. Consequently, the research provides evidence to suggest that organisations hiring contractors need to develop and manage permeable organisational boundaries if they are to try and maximise knowledge gains through the use of contractors and minimise potential knowledge leaks that could occur. While it is difficult to limit access to organisational specific knowledge completely, measures taken by managers can limit the extent to which potential knowledge leaks can occur because of the use of contractors.

First, becoming aware of the specific knowledge and expertise that the contractors bring into the organisation would enable managers to focus on maximising the knowledge gains they seek to make through hiring contractors. Contractors move quickly between organisations, creating networks and are a great source of external knowledge. Managers however, need to be aware of knowledge gaps within their own organisation in order to tap into contractor knowledge and fill these gaps. By becoming aware of knowledge lacunas within the firm, the organisation can hire contractors with the specific skill set and expertise that they require. The two case studies provide contrasting pictures on the development and maintenance of permeable organisational boundaries. For managers in ABC Bank, the focus remained internal and their lack of environmental scanning and internal knowledge assessment resulted in them overlooking the expertise and knowledge that the contractors possessed. In contrast, the managers in Ozinsure were conscious of knowledge gaps within the organisation and therefore focused on finding contractors who could fill these gaps.
Second, the use of contractors suggest that managers would need to take measures that limit, as much as possible, knowledge leaks that could occur through their presence. The evidence from ABC Bank suggests that when managers were unaware of the knowledge and expertise that contractors brought into the firm, they also revealed little anxiety about “knowledge leaks” occurring, with contractors being able to absorb and take in new procedural knowledge from the organisation. Because the managers did not perceive these contractors as knowledge resources, they also failed in recognising the potential danger of knowledge leaks that could occur. Consequently, there was little focus on the management of permeable organisational boundaries with limited attention on the management of the contractors’ contractual obligations and responsibilities.

In contrast to this, managers in Ozinsure were conscious of the knowledge status of the contractors that they hired and because of the nature of the role and the technologies with which they were dealing, the managers were also conscious of knowledge leaks that could occur with the use of such contractors and consequently limited the contractors’ access to organisational specific knowledge. They attempted to do this by explicitly including confidentiality agreements in the contracts, that specifically excluded contractors using proprietary or organisational specific knowledge, technologies or processes in other organisations. They restricted the contractors’ access to specific project based knowledge/technologies only and excluded them from meetings and workshops where other organisational specific technologies were discussed. They also, in some instances, specifically stipulated in the contractors’ contracts that they train permanent employees on the use of specific technologies and processes, i.e. knowledge that the organisation lacked. They therefore made greater attempts to manage both the acquisition of specific knowledge as well as restrict knowledge leaks from occurring. Therefore Organisations, seeking to effectively utilise contract professionals must understand, develop and manage permeable organisational boundaries such that they attempt to tap into the contractor’s external knowledge base while limiting organisational knowledge leaks, to the extent possible.
From the perspective of contractors, particularly specialists and consultants, they seek and obtain those contracts that enable them to further their intellectual capital. Consequently, they seek assignments that provide them with the opportunity for learning on the job. By providing them with roles that enable them to work with innovative processes and technologies, organisations can provide them with the learning opportunities that they seek. However, by limiting their access to non-project or non-role related expertise, organisations can limit the extent to which they appropriate and transfer firm specific knowledge.

This is an inherent tension in the use of professionals as contractors. While firms hire such contractors for the knowledge and expertise that they bring into the firm, there is an inherent danger of firm specific knowledge leaking. However, contractors bring in external knowledge into the firm that may itself provide opportunities for the organisation to develop new internal knowledge that may serve as a source of sustainable competitive advantage to the firm. Attempting a tight-rope walk between the use of contractors, their desire to learn from the organisation and restrict knowledge leaks from occurring is a key challenge for organisations and consequently managing and controlling their boundaries becomes vital if organisations seek to make knowledge gains from the hiring and use of professional contractors.

**Strength of ties between source and recipient**

The capacity of the organisation to absorb new knowledge is not only influenced by the perceived value of the knowledge that they receive, but also by the strength of ties between the parties in the knowledge sharing process and the relationship that exists between the two parties. Research by Szulanski (1996) revealed that an arduous or distant relationship between the source and the recipient was one of the factors that inhibited the knowledge transfer process. Similar research by Hansen (1999) also suggested that strength of ties between the parties in the transfer process influenced knowledge sharing. His study indicated that strong ties between the source and the recipient allowed for the transfer of more complex knowledge, as greater interactions were required for such complex knowledge to be shared and absorbed. Weak ties between parties slowed down
the transfer of complex knowledge because the parties were unfamiliar with each other and issues of trust and reciprocity were not yet established. Further sharing of complex knowledge required space, time and proximity which weak relationships have not yet established.

However, his research also suggested that weak ties between parties provided scope for seeking out and absorbing new knowledge that was unique or novel to the organisation. Because weak ties suggested that the parties were not completely aware of each other’s knowledge reservoirs, more active probing took place leading to the identification and recognition of knowledge that was unique and of relevance to the parties. Similar findings by Song et al., (2003) suggests that for technologically distant knowledge, organisations would learn best by hiring new employees who brought that new knowledge with them. Thus the relationship between the parties in the knowledge transfer process influences the organisation’s ability to absorb new knowledge, particularly knowledge external to the organisation.

Contractors typically come into organisations with fairly weak ties and distant relationships with the organisations to which they are contracting. The duration of the contract, the complexity of the roles for which they are hired, the expert status of the contractor, their relationship with managers and team members all influence the strength of ties that develop between the contractor and the organisation. This in turn influences the ability of the organisation to recognise and absorb new knowledge from the contractor.

**ABC Bank**

The relationship between the contractors and the organisation, particularly managers, in ABC bank remained fairly weak. First, the roles for which the contractors were hired were predominantly transaction/process oriented roles, which managers perceived to have less complexity. Further, the focus of the relationship was to ensure that contractors followed procedures and processes developed by the organisation; hence learning
predominantly occurred on the part of the contractors. Second, a majority of the contractors hired in ABC bank fell into the free agent category; that is, those who chose to maintain relationships with the organisation that were limited both in scope as well as in tenure. Their focus was on efficient completion of the allocated tasks and they chose to distance themselves from other organisational issues and rarely volunteered their expertise at meetings and discussion forums. Their relationship with the organisation, therefore, remained fairly distant and the strength of ties that they developed with the organisation fairly weak.

As indicated in previous research, this distant relationship and weak ties impacted on the ability of the organisation to absorb new knowledge from the contractor. However, unlike previous research that suggested that weak ties help identify knowledge different from, and external to, the organisation, the evidence here suggests that the organisation was unable to identify and recognise the expertise that some of these contractors possessed. The organisation’s focus on the role at hand, the internal focus within the organisation and the managers’ perceptions of the expertise and professional status of the contractor also limited their capacity to probe and identify knowledge that was new, novel, external and different to the knowledge held by the organisation itself. Hence seeking and absorbing new knowledge from the contractor remained fairly rare.

However, individual ties between the contractor and more experienced members of the team grew during the tenure of the contract. Contractors were expected to learn from more experienced members; they spent time observing the actions of other members of the team, interacted with them on a daily basis and indulged in casual conversations and dialogues revolving around work processes within the organisation. This further influenced the ability of the contractor to learn from the organisation, suggesting that at an individual level, as the strength of ties improved, knowledge sharing improved, but that the development of the relationship was influenced by what each party expected of the other, i.e. the psychological contracts that were formed between the contractors and the managers/team members. Contractors expected to learn from more experienced team
members, while managers perceived little to be learnt from the contractor. Consequently knowledge flows occurred predominantly from the organisation to the contractor.

**Ozinsure**

Ozinsure provides evidence that suggests that, although initially the strength of ties between the contractors and the organisation was weak, over time this strengthened. As suggested by previous research, initially contractors came into the organisation with fairly weak ties. The managers’ perception that these contractors were hired predominantly for the specialist knowledge that they possessed and knowledge that the organisation itself lacked, motivated them to encourage team members to probe and seek out such expertise from the contractors. The weak links promoted a more conscious seeking out of the contractors’ knowledge and expertise as the organisation was, initially, unsure of the extent of the expertise that the contractors’ possessed.

However, this transfer of knowledge from the contractor to the organisation developed over the tenure of the contract. It required stronger ties to be developed between the contractor and the organisation. The evidence from Ozinsure suggests that providing spaces for interaction, engaging in dialogues and recognising the expert status of the source all strengthened the relationship between the contractor and the organisation. Through strengthening of such ties, complex knowledge was shared between the two parties.

Contractors in Ozinsure, particularly specialists and consultants also sought to strengthen their ties with the organisation. For specialists, stronger ties allowed them to learn from the organisation, particularly from other team members and other contractors assigned to the project team. They spent time together, both formally and informally, engaging in dialogue and actively working together to solve problems and issues and this process allowed stronger ties to be developed between the contractor and other members of the team. For consultants, the desire to build stronger ties was also influenced by their leadership positions in the project team and their desire to ensure the success of the
project. They extensively interacted with team members, management and peers in other cross functional teams within the division and spent time developing and nurturing these ties. There was an expectation from both parties that each would learn from the other and this shared expectation furthered the development of the relationship between contractors and members of the project team. Hence the transfer of complex knowledge between the two parties was more successful because of the greater effort spent in developing and maintaining stronger ties and relationships between the parties concerned.

**Implications**

The strength of ties, the psychological contracts constructed and the management of the relationship between the contractor and the organisation are important if organisations are to absorb the knowledge brought in by the contractor. This research suggests that the expectations the two parties have of each other, and the psychological contracts that are constructed, influence the shape and direction of the relationship and the strength of ties between the two. For organisations to tap into contractors’ expertise, their knowledge must be perceived as valuable before the relationship can be built and strengthened. The managers’ perceptions of the value of the expertise and knowledge that the contractors bring into the organisation are particularly influential in this regard. This affects the direction and development of ties between contractors and organisational members and defines the expectations that the two parties have of each other.

Weak ties do provide opportunities for organisations to probe more closely the knowledge brought in by contractors, as was evident in Ozinsure. However, the sharing of new, expert knowledge requires the development of stronger ties between the two parties. Further, the research suggests that for complex knowledge to be shared such ties are built over time, given space and the opportunity for interaction. Successfully managing and developing the relationship and strength of ties between the contractor and the organisation, particularly team members, is essential for organisations seeking to absorb the expert knowledge brought in by the contractor.
Richness of communication channels

Previous research on knowledge sharing in organisations has revealed the importance of the different channels of communication available for the transfer of different kinds of knowledge. Channels of communication within organisations could be formal, informal, personal or impersonal or combinations of these. Research suggests that different kinds of knowledge require different types of channels of communication. Knowledge considered relatively non-expert, less complex (information) and knowledge that has a shared contextual basis for organisational members could be shared through formal, impersonal channels such as databases, procedure manuals, training programmes, emails and other codified repositories (Alavi et al., 2001; Hansen et al., 1999; Hanson, 1999; Zander et al., 1995, Argote and Ingram., 2000; Brown et al., 1991; Nonaka et al., 1998; von Krogh, 1998; Wenger, 2000). However, expert knowledge considered complex, rare and novel required informal, personal communication channels for knowledge transfer to occur. Thus research suggests different kinds of communication channels are needed for different kinds of knowledge to be shared, and the quality and richness of communication channels that the organisation provides influences the success of the knowledge transfer process within the organisation while limiting the leakage of knowledge from firms.

ABC Bank

ABC bank used a variety of channels for knowledge transfer within the firm. All new employees to the organisation, including contractors, had access to computerised procedure manuals, intranets and data repositories containing information on transactional processes. However, employees (permanents and contractors) were encouraged to gain information about processes and procedures through personal interaction and dialogues with other employees, ‘shadowing’ more experienced team members and observation at work. Employees, including contractors, were also exposed to training sessions that provided them with information on regulatory and legal requirements, changes in processes and software and system changes that impacted on processes and procedures within the division. Here, both formal and informal channels of communication for inducting employees, including contractors, were used.
The knowledge transfer process within ABC bank was focused on transfer of explicit transactional knowledge from the organisation to the contractor. The channels available for contractors to share their expert knowledge with the team were more limited. During team meetings and discussions, there was some opportunity for contractors to share their expertise in a formalised, but more personal setting. However evidence suggests that few contractors used this channel to share knowledge. A majority of the contractors indicated that when they shared their expertise, they did it on a one-on-one basis with colleagues in informal settings such as over lunch or coffee. However, there was little formal attempt to capture such learning from the contractors. It is unclear whether such informal sharing of knowledge translated into any organisational learning, as a majority of the managers indicated that they perceived the knowledge that contractors shared to be of little value to the organisation.

**Ozinsure**

Ozinsure used a variety of communication channels to transfer knowledge within the firm. There was extensive use of project databases with rich information on details of various projects completed within the organisation, a repository of project related documentation including emails and client communications as well as repositories containing detailed information on software used and vendor information relating to service agreements and contracts. Minutes of project meetings, brainstorming sessions and development sessions were also recorded and stored within the project related databases. This extensive computerised repository was made available to members of various projects, including contractors.

The organisation also made use of extensive personal, face-to-face interactions between project members for knowledge transfer. Project related meetings, discussion groups and brainstorming sessions allowed ideas to be exchanged and were often used as a forum for contractors to share their knowledge and expertise with other members of the team. Within Ozinsure, managers explicitly recognised the knowledge that the contractors
possessed to be rare, unique and of great value to the organisation. They also perceived such knowledge to be complex and indicated that providing contractors with forums for discussions allowed knowledge sharing to occur between the contractor and other team members. The organisation attempted to convert such personalised discussion forums into more formalised ones by storing minutes of such meetings and “white board” discussions in databases and repositories.

Contractors were also asked to maintain extensive project documentation including their use of specific technologies. Managers attempted to include the requirements of such extensive documentation as part of the contractual obligations of the contractor. However the success of this is debatable. Although contractors indicated that they participated in team meetings and brainstorming sessions and they maintained data about the project, contractors also indicated that it was impossible to store “their experiences” in databases and that often they only documented events and processes related to that specific project.

Some contractors were also asked to train permanent members of the team. This was done in two ways – firstly, a team member was assigned to shadow the contractor, interact with the contractor extensively at work, engage in dialogue and observe the contractor at work. Managers indicated that they felt such ‘shadowing’ allowed for the permanent team member to pick up the nuances of the contractor’s expertise and knowledge of particular technologies and systems. Secondly, managers also asked certain contractors, particularly the consultants, to organise and lead training sessions where the progress of the project was discussed, specific pitfalls addressed and the use of specific technologies highlighted and discussed with the team members. It is unclear, however, how much expert knowledge was shared in these sessions. Contractors revealed that they organised these sessions to fulfil contractual obligations and managers indicated that such training sessions were often followed by informal discussion amongst project teams and work groups.

Both managers and contractors commented on the availability of informal personal channels of communication such as discussions over coffee. Both groups highlighted the
relevance of these channels for knowledge transfer. Many contractors commented on their use of these channels to not only share their knowledge with the team, but also as a forum to add to their knowledge base. Contractors routinely interacted with each other in such informal settings, sharing ‘war stories’ about their experiences in different projects and contractors felt these to be of great relevance to them. Managers also indicated that such informal sessions were periodically followed by more planned, formal sessions where the ideas generated were discussed with other members of the team and often captured and stored in repositories.

Implications

This study extends previous research on channels of communication and provides further evidence to suggest that the availability of a variety of channels to transfer knowledge influences the kinds of knowledge that is transferred in organisations. The greater the variety and richness of channels available, the more successful the knowledge transfer. The research also indicates that for complex knowledge to be shared, personal interactions over extended periods of time are essential. Thus project based work over time, as evident in Ozinsure, allows for more personal interactions amongst contractors and other team members. The findings from Ozinsure also suggest that the initial transfer of complex knowledge, particularly knowledge that is rare and of value to the organisation, occurs during such personalised interactions. Using a more formalised, impersonal approach such as depositories and training sessions cannot be used in isolation or instead of these personal channels of communications. Instead organisations would need to use a combination of channels and would need to provide the space and opportunity for personal interaction between contractors and permanent team members if they seek to absorb such specialised or complex knowledge. However this study also suggests that if the knowledge possessed by the source is not recognised by the organisation, irrespective of the richness of channels provided, knowledge sharing remains minimal. ABC Bank provided evidence to suggest that when source knowledge remains unrecognised, the different channels available for knowledge transfer remain
underused. Although, in this case, contractors benefited in the knowledge exchange process, the organisation’s absorption of contractor’s knowledge was minimal.

### Emergent factors influencing knowledge sharing in organisations

The findings from this research highlight several important factors that influence knowledge management in organisations, in particular the framing of knowledge management strategies for organisations interacting with contract professionals. What emerges from this research is that there are two sets of factors that impact on the knowledge transfer process – one set of factors influences an organisation’s ability to absorb knowledge from the contractor and another set of factors influences contractors’ willingness to share knowledge with the organisation. Figure 4 provides a model of the key factors that seem to mediate the knowledge sharing process between contractors and organisations.

The findings from this research suggest that two sets of factors may influence the knowledge gains that organisations seek to make while hiring contractors. One set of factors influences an organisation’s ability to motivate and absorb knowledge from the contractor and another set of factors that influence contractors’ motivations and willingness to participate in knowledge exchanges within organisations. Figure 4 provides a model for understanding the knowledge sharing process in organisations employing contract professionals,
In this study, I highlighted the relevance of individual factors that impact on the willingness of the contractor to share his/her knowledge with the organisation. As suggested in the previous chapter, the different categories of contractors that I constructed are influenced by both external and internal factors and each category of contractor develops different sets of motivations that influence their knowledge sharing behaviours. In addition, contractors create and recreate professional identities and images that influence their willingness to share. These identities and images also impact on the construction of psychological contracts between the contractor and the organisation differentially influencing their willingness to share knowledge.

Because the construction of identities is an ongoing activity that is shaped by the complex social and organisational world that the contractors engage with in practice (Orlikowski, 2002), the relationships that contractors build with organisations are always emergent and
reconstituted through the everyday actions of contractors and organisational members as they engage in the practices of their profession. Consequently, knowledge sharing, while influenced by the different sets of factors highlighted in this study is also influenced by the complexities of the socio-cultural factors shaping diverse organisations. However, the factors highlighted in this study, serve as a starting point to a greater understanding of the complexities involved in the hiring and use of professionals as contractors in organisations and the knowledge impact of the use of such professionals.

**Comparison of the model presented with other models of knowledge sharing**

This study, in contrast to previous studies that have focused almost exclusively on permanent employees in organisations, has focused attention on the use of contract professionals and the factors that influence their knowledge sharing motivations. In this section, I compare briefly the model that I have described explicating the factors influencing knowledge sharing amongst contractors with two models that focuses on knowledge sharing amongst permanent employees to highlight similarities and differences between them.

Cabrera, Collins and Salgado (2006) conducted a survey of 372 employees of a multinational organisation to determine the factors that influenced individuals to engage in knowledge sharing within the firm. Employees of the Spanish operations of an information technology and systems company were surveyed and asked to self-assess factors that motivated them to participate in knowledge sharing within the firm. The authors examined three sets of factors that could influence this process: psychological variables, organisational variables and system-level variables. Three sets of psychological variables were investigated: personality of the individual; organisational commitment and role breadth self-efficacy. Three sets of organisational variables were investigated: an individual’s job autonomy; rewards for engaging in knowledge sharing; and perceived supervisory and peer support towards knowledge sharing. Finally two system level factors influencing knowledge sharing were examined: perceptions of availability of
knowledge management tools; and perceptions of the quality of the contents of the knowledge management system.

This study suggested that psychological factors had the greater influence on moderating knowledge sharing amongst these permanent employees. Amongst psychological factors, role breadth self-efficacy had the most moderating affect on knowledge sharing suggesting that a sense of personal confidence and competency seemed to be a requirement for individuals to engage in knowledge sharing. Further, an individual’s openness to new experiences also influenced them to positively engage in knowledge sharing. Their study also contradicted previous studies that attributed commitment as a key moderator in the knowledge sharing process by suggesting that commitment to the organisation was not a significant influencer in motivating knowledge sharing amongst individuals. In terms of organisational variables, they determined that when individuals perceived supervisors and colleagues to value their knowledge they were more inclined to participate in knowledge sharing. Rewards, both extrinsic and intrinsic, had a moderate effect on knowledge sharing, suggesting that rewards perhaps served to create and sustain a supportive environment for knowledge sharing. Finally, their study suggested that system level variables were least relevant factors influencing knowledge sharing behaviours.

The factors identified by Cabrera et al. (2006) can be extended by my model. First, Cabrera et al.’s “(2006) model suggests that a sense of self-efficacy greatly influences knowledge sharing behaviours. My study strengthens that argument by suggesting that the identity and image of the contractor influences their knowledge sharing behaviours. The identity and image of the contractor is constructed partly by the level of expertise and competence that the individual contractor sensed and seeks to portray and project in the work place. As indicated in this study, specialists and consultants more keenly participated in knowledge exchanges influenced by the notion of themselves as experts, possessing a specialist domain of knowledge. Their sense of self-worth influenced them to participate more willingly in knowledge exchanges. Second, this study also suggests that organisational commitment has little influence on knowledge sharing.
expected rewards in terms of future contractual work, and enhanced reputation in the marketplace influenced knowledge sharing amongst contractors. This study clearly identifies the impact of supervisors (managers) perception of the value of the knowledge that contractors brought into the firm as greatly influencing knowledge sharing behaviours amongst contractors. The more supervisors valued the knowledge that contractors brought into the firm, the greater the knowledge sharing motivations (for both specialists as well as consultants). The less they valued that knowledge, the lower the knowledge sharing motivations of contractors (particularly relevant for free agents). This suggests that social support for knowledge sharing clearly influences the knowledge sharing process. My study extends these findings to also highlight the influence of psychological contracts on the knowledge sharing process. The relationship between the contractors and managers, and the roles that the contractors are hired for and the identity and image of the contractor all influence the construction of the contractor-organisational relationship and influences their knowledge sharing motivations. Further, the contracting life cycle, the issue of self management of contractors and the roles that they occupied in organisations also influenced the knowledge sharing motivations of contract professionals.

The sets of factors presented in this study as influencing knowledge sharing amongst contractors can also be compared to the model described by Bock et al. (2005). Their study of factors influencing intention to share knowledge contributed to an understanding of knowledge sharing in three ways. First, it suggested that individual knowledge sharing motivations were influenced by an individual’s attitude towards knowledge sharing driven primarily by anticipated reciprocal benefits and their own subjective norms towards knowledge sharing; second, behaviours studied in cultures with strong collective action (such as Korea), subjective norms greatly influence knowledge sharing behaviours; and third, organisational climate influences knowledge sharing behaviours both directly as well as indirectly through subjective norms. Thus subjective norms about knowledge sharing influences an individual’s attitude knowledge sharing and these subjective norms themselves are influenced by the sense of self-worth of the individual as well as the organisational climate encourage knowledge sharing amongst individuals.
My study suggests that while anticipated reciprocal benefits in terms of future contracts and a sense of self-worth do positively influence knowledge sharing, subjective norms of knowledge sharing, within the organisation, have less influence in moderating knowledge sharing behaviours of contractors. This is perhaps reflective of the largely individualistic orientation of contractors and their strong sense of self-management and sense of responsibility for their own intellectual growth. Rather than any collective subjective norms of knowledge sharing influencing their knowledge sharing behaviours, their own sense of self-image, identity and self-worth influence their knowledge sharing behaviours. This study suggests that where individual orientations are stronger than collective action, an individual’s identity, self-worth and anticipated reciprocal rewards may more significantly influence knowledge sharing than collective subjective norms of knowledge sharing and exchanges. While organisational climate does influence knowledge sharing, amongst contract professionals, the relationship between the contractor and their manager, the roles that they contract for and the perceived value of the knowledge that they bring into the firm more significantly influence their knowledge sharing motivations.

**Conclusion**

Gaining a greater understanding of the factors influencing knowledge sharing enables organisations to have a greater understanding of knowledge as a source of strategic advantage to the firm. Two sets of factors seem to influence this process – factors influencing the contractors’ willingness to share and factors that influence the organisation’s absorptive capacity. Organisations would need to focus on both these sets of factors before formulating knowledge management strategies aimed at facilitating knowledge exchanges. The study highlights the socially constructed and situated nature of knowledge and suggests that organisations must create and provide for shared contextual space (physical, mental and virtual) for such knowledge sharing to occur. It also suggests that the perceived expert status, identities and images of contractors, the roles they occupy, the dyadic relationship between contractors and managers, the psychological contracts that are constructed between the contractor and the organisation.
(specifically managers) and the perceived value of the knowledge that contractors brings into the organisation influence this knowledge sharing process. Understanding these factors allows for the creation of a holistic approach towards knowledge management in firms.
CHAPTER TEN
CONCLUSION

Introduction

This research on banking and information technology professionals in two organisations – a large bank and an insurance company - has provided a number of insights into the understanding of contract professionals and the impact that such contractual work has on knowledge flows within the organisation. The focus of the thesis has been on understanding knowledge sharing motivations of contract professionals and I have explored how being contractors influences their knowledge sharing behaviours. As this thesis demonstrates, two sets of factors influence the knowledge sharing process. Individual factors that influence knowledge sharing include: the contracting experiences of professionals; the roles that they occupy in organisations; their identities, images and psychological contracts that they form during the course of their contracting careers; their perceived self-benefit in knowledge sharing and the organisation’s willingness to recognise the value of their knowledge and absorb that knowledge. A second set of organisational factors, such as the perceived value of the knowledge being received, channels of communication and shared spaces for interaction influences the manner in which organisations can acquire the knowledge that these contractors possess. The thesis has highlighted the dynamic, dyadic relationship between professionals and managers in organisations, illustrating the impact of that relationship on the identity and image construction of contract professionals, on the construction of their psychological contracts and on their knowledge sharing motivations. Further, the thesis has examined the relevance of organisational knowledge management strategies built on implicit assumptions of permanency of employment and has argued that such strategies need to be modified in the light of the contingent quality and temporary nature of the employment relationships that are common between professionals and organisations.
This concluding chapter begins with a discussion of the research process, reviews the main learning from each chapter and summarises how the research questions have been answered. This chapter discusses the evidence presented in the thesis relating to contract professionals in financial services and information technology broadly within three domains: knowledge sharing in organisations, professional contingent employment and the development of holistic knowledge management strategies in firms. These three interconnected domains provide an analytical template from which general conclusions and specific empirical and conceptual contributions of this research are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of possible future areas of research in the area of knowledge management and professional work in organisations.

The research process

I began this research with a desire to understand how professionals as contractors impact on knowledge flows within organisations. Specifically, I was interested in investigating the factors that motivated contractors to participate in knowledge sharing within organisations. I identified an implicit assumption of permanent employment underpinning organisational knowledge management strategies in both practice and research. Therefore the research began with a specific focus on understanding why and how contract professionals participated in knowledge sharing within organisations and what factors impacted on this process. Further, the study was also concerned with the identification of factors that impacted on the organisation’s ability to acquire such knowledge from contract professionals. Consequently, the study was designed as an empirical study of contract professionals within two professional groups – financial services and information technology and the two case studies, ABC bank and Ozinsure provided the organisational settings for the study.

Existing literature within three domains informed and influenced this research - knowledge and its management in organisations, professionals and professional work in organisations and the increasing use of professionals in contingent employment. Chapters Two, Three and Four focused on these three research domains and each of the chapters
concluded with findings that provided the research with its theoretical and conceptual underpinnings.

**Knowledge and its management in organisations**

This study was underpinned by the conceptualisation of knowledge as a socially situated and constructed phenomenon. Consequently, the research was shaped by the perspective that life experiences, participation in social networks and communities of practice influence both the knowledge that an individual gains, the construction of their identities as members of that community, and their willingness to participate in knowledge exchanges within firms (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Wenger, 2000; Cook et al., 1999; Nonaka, 1994). Aided by the literature on organisational knowledge creation (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), I conceptualised knowledge creation as occurring through processes of knowledge exchanges and combinations. This knowledge creation process is influenced by the social capital of the firm, including the structural, relational and cognitive aspects of the firms’ complex network of relationships amongst its members. Consequently, understanding how individuals participated in knowledge sharing activities within organisations became central to understanding how organisations managed knowledge as a resource within the firm. Chapter Two presented the complexities involved in the study of knowledge and its management and argued that for organisational knowledge management strategies to be effective, issues such as trust, shared contextual understanding, organisational climate, organisational commitment and strength of ties between individuals were vital factors. Highlighting literature that presented both the increasing use of professionals in organisations as well as the ambiguities involved in managing the knowledge work of professionals, the chapter argued that the paucity of research addressing the issue of contract professionals and knowledge sharing indicated that this research was a timely and very relevant project. The chapter concluded by suggesting that the increasing use of professionals in organisations in a variety of roles and differing employment relationships required a greater understanding of how professionals engaged with organisations, including studying issues of professional identities, commitments and organisational contexts that
could have an impact on their participation in knowledge exchanges in firms. This was the focus of attention in Chapter Three.

*Professionals and professional work*

Previous research in this domain suggested that professional work in organisations was knowledge work and the understanding of how professionals engaged in such work in organisations was an important area of research. Chapter Three focused on the dynamic relationship between the professional and the organisation, conceptualising it as influenced by the organisational context; the roles, identities and images of professionals; the manner in which their identities were regulated; and the psychological contracts they constructed within organisations. The study was informed by the notion that professionals were active participants in their own self management at work and therefore involved in the process and management of the exchange of their expertise and knowledge at work. However, how professionals influenced and participated in knowledge exchanges in firms remained unclear in the literature. Literatures on identity and identity regulation and psychological contracts suggested that how professionals constructed their identities and images, how their identities were regulated in organisations and the manner in which they constructed psychological contracts with managers influenced the professional-organisational relationship. However, the influence of these factors on knowledge sharing remained unclear suggesting that this was an under-researched area needing attention. In this chapter, I argued that one of the implications of the professionals’ need for self management has resulted in professionals increasingly seeking boundaryless careers and contingent employment and suggested that understanding the rise of professionals in contractual roles was necessary to understand how they engaged with organisations and their probable impact on knowledge flows within firms.

*Professionals in contingent employment*

Having concluded in the previous chapter that understanding the knowledge sharing behaviours of contract professionals was a neglected area of research, I began Chapter Four by revisiting the literature on professionals in boundaryless careers. This literature
revealed the increasing use of contract professionals in organisations, influenced both by the professionals’ demand for greater self management at work and by organisations increasingly seeking flexibility in employment options. In Chapter Four, I suggested that the complexities of the contracting world that they occupied and their contracting experiences influenced the construction of the professional identities, images and psychological contracts of these professionals. Evidence from the literature indicated that although these professionals move into contracting as a means of engaging in knowledge work that offered them a measure of autonomy and control over the exchange of their expertise, their freedom remained bounded and controlled by their need to necessarily interact with institutions: employers, clients and employment agencies. Further, the multiple commitment and foci that they possessed influenced both their identity construction as well as their relationships with those institutions. These were issues that I identified as requiring further study, particularly in relation to their influence on the knowledge sharing behaviours of these professionals. Earlier, in Chapter Two, I had situated individuals at the heart of the knowledge creation cycle in organisations. This implied that understanding how contract professionals’ perceived issues of identity, roles, self management, multiple commitment and psychological contracts as influencing their knowledge sharing motivations was an important, yet under researched area requiring in-depth attention and focus.

**Data Collection and Findings**

In Chapter Five, I summarised the key findings from the literature reviews and highlighted gaps in the literature that needed addressing. The chapter then discussed the methodology adopted and the empirical conceptualisation of the research and the rationale for the selection of the research methods. The focus of the research remained on understanding the meanings that professionals attached to their experiences of being contractors and how their being contractors impacted on their knowledge sharing behaviours. I conceptualised the knowledge that individuals acquired as occurring through participation in social systems and through the construction of their identities as members of a community of practice. Consequently, the focus of the research was on how those meanings and experiences impacted on their relationships and behaviours at
work, including knowledge sharing. The interviews with the contractors and managers provided a rich source of data for understanding how these professionals perceived themselves as contractors and how organisations perceived contract professionals. Chapters Six and Seven presented the findings from the interviews of contractors and managers respectively, and the themes discussed in Chapter Six reflected the process through which professionals became contractors. Further, the narratives of the managers highlighted in Chapter Seven, revealed insights into how organisations, particularly managers, shaped and influenced the construction of the professional identities and images of these contractors.

Based on the findings in these chapters, in Chapter Eight, I developed three categories of contract professionals: Free Agents, Specialists and Consultants. I identified several key factors that influenced the construction of the contractors’ professional identities and images. These included: the reasons professionals chose to become contractors; the manner in which they sought and obtained contracting roles; the macro socio-economic environment in which they operated; and the issue of self management. I suggested that each category of professional responded differently to the issue of self management, particularly managing time, their intellect, networks and reputations. The construction of their professional images was also influenced by the roles that they occupied within organisations as well as the managers’ perceptions of their professional status and identities. This influenced and was influenced by the manager-contractor relationship and the construction of psychological contracts between the two parties. The findings implied that the perceived self-benefit of the contractor in participating in knowledge sharing, along with their professional images and identities and the organisation’s willingness to absorb knowledge from them influenced their knowledge sharing motivations. These findings support the concept of learning as socially situated (Wenger, 2000), and further highlights the issue of identity and image construction as influenced by the institutions and communities of practice with which these professionals are involved.

Chapter Nine focused on addressing the factors that impacted on the organisation’s ability to acquire knowledge from these contract professionals and specifically
highlighted five factors: the need for organisations to create the spaces required for contractors and team members to interact and engage in shared contextual understanding; the managers’ perceptions of the value of the knowledge that the contractor possessed (which in turn was influenced by the roles that contractors’ occupied within the organisation and their professional images); the manner in which organisations managed and created permeable organisational boundaries; and the richness and variety of communication channels. Comparing the two case study organisations, I highlighted the need for organisations to develop stronger ties with the contractors to enable such transfer of knowledge to occur while also suggesting that developing multiple channels of communication made such transfer of knowledge possible. The chapter presented a holistic model of knowledge sharing in organisations, that specifically recognised the socially situated and constructed form of knowledge and learning in organisations. This model implied that organisations would need to transit from traditional models of knowledge management (based on implicit assumptions of permanency of employment and assumptions of knowledge sharing), to models that focused on the motivations of professionals engaged in knowledge work and self management at work.

**Conceptual and theoretical contributions of this research**

This thesis makes some important contributions to a number of domains of research within organisational studies: identity studies, particularly professional identity construction; knowledge sharing in organisations and issues of ownership of knowledge; and understanding the construction of psychological contracts and their influence on knowledge sharing within organisations. Each of the three research areas are interlinked and inform and influence the findings of each other. Although in this section, I discuss the specific contributions made within each domain, the study extends and bridges work across all these research domains.
Contributions made to identity studies

Identity studies make important contributions to understanding how professionals engage in knowledge work in organisations, and how organisations use identity regulation to mould employee identities to “fit” in with managerially designed objectives (Pratt, et al., 2006; Alvesson, 2000; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). However, almost all of the research in this area has focused on the identity construction of professionals within organisationally bounded careers i.e. professionals in permanent employment. This research, by focusing on contract professionals, highlights how the process of professional identity construction that occurs as individuals move across organisations, is influenced to a much larger extent by processes of socialisation and issues of professional image construction, diverse work experiences and participation in a network of communities. This is in contrast to previous studies that have highlighted the influence of organisations towards the shaping of professional identities through identity regulation and consequently on the identity work and self identity of the employee (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

Further, this thesis extends the findings made by Pratt et al., (2006) on the process of identity construction of professionals. Their study on the identity construction of physicians revealed that work-integrity violations (a mismatch between who the physicians perceived they were and what they did) triggered identity construction or, as the authors described it, a process of “identity customisation” (pg. 242) wherein the physicians customised who they were (their identities) to match what they did. This study of contract professionals indicates that professionals do reconstruct professional identities (and images) to match the work that they do in organisations (“the work was fairly complex and cutting edge, you know so they needed someone with my profile”), but it also reveals that professionals customise what they do to match who they perceive themselves to be (“Maintenance work is not the kind of work that I want to be involved with, I need to work with new technologies because that’s really were my interests lie”). This suggests that professionals who are not bounded and controlled by organisational notions of who they are and what kinds of work they should be doing, choose to define...
the work they do on the basis of their perceptions of their professional identities and images. It also strengthens the arguments made previously by researchers (Alvesson et al, 2006; Roberts, 2005; Leicht, and Fennel, 1997), that professionals seek to be active participants in their “management”; that they seek avenues of employment that allow them to be involved in their own self management. This therefore raises the issue, once again, of managerial assumptions about managing professionals at work. Instead, it can be argued that organisations would need to focus on understanding the identity construction of professionals in order to understand how they engage with organisations. For managers then, recognising the dynamic nature of identity regulation becomes one of the primary forms of engaging with professionals in organisations.

At a more micro level, it can also be argued that this study of the identity construction of contract professionals can be considered a study of the process through which professionals attempt to break out of organisationally imposed identity regulation as a means of controlling professional work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). The emergence of the categories of contract professionals suggests that professionals mould their identities and images through an iterative process of defining themselves or “who they are” influenced by the “work they do” rather than by “where they work”. It can consequently be argued, that professionals seek contracting careers (as evidenced in this study) partly as a means of breaking free from organisationally imposed constraints on the manner in which they work (identity regulation); seeking a greater fit between how they see themselves and consequently the work they do. However, as evidenced in this study, the construction of professional identities and images, sometimes in defiance of organisationally “enjoined” (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, pg. 619) self images, are themselves subjected to control by the social norms and realities of the contracting world, including organisational perceptions of who they are and what they should be doing. Further, the relationships they build with other agents such as employment agencies, network of contacts, former clients, other contractors and the contracting market place influence the manner in which they build professional images and personas and consequently on how they see themselves.
Therefore, in the process of constructing professional identities and images as emancipatory acts from organisational control, they subject themselves to implicit social and network control. Other institutions and agents replace the control mechanism that organisationally bounded professionals face. As indicated by previous studies (Fenwick, 2004, 2007), contract professionals do immerse themselves in the process of making connections and developing network identities influenced by their participation in contextually relevant social interactions. However, the various categories of professionals identified in this study also suggest that the construction of these network identities is itself influenced by the professional identities and images of the contractor and the manner in which they negotiate their status as contractors within broader social and institutional systems.

This process of identity construction is therefore influenced by the professional image that they construct i.e. how they perceive the world sees them. Different categories of contractors constructed different professional identities influenced by their professional images – the free agents image of themselves as “just contractors” willing to take on a variety of roles, but seeking the freedom to choose when and how they worked; the specialists image of themselves as “technicians” seeking cutting edge work that contributed to their intellectual growth; and the consultants seeking “influential” work that enabled them to participate in organisational politics, power and control while still remaining external to the organisation were all shaped by their perception of self, influenced by how they felt others perceived them. In that regard, this thesis makes an important contribution to the notion that professional image construction and identity construction are intimately linked to one another; they each influence the construction of the other. The research also identifies the issue of reputation as a key factor influencing the construction of the self image of these contractors. Their professional image is impacted by their “reputations” in the contracting world, and this in turn influences how their professional identities are constructed and reconstructed with each new contract.

From a methodological viewpoint, this thesis is one of the few studies that has focused on an in-depth empirical study of professionals in contracting careers based on semi-
structured interviews and participant observation. This has allowed for a detailed and nuanced understanding of how professionals become contractors and enabled the process of this identity construction to be examined in detail.

**Contributions to knowledge and its understanding in organisations**

This research makes a number of contributions to the understanding of knowledge and its impact on organisations. Specifically, the research makes some important contributions to the literature on communities of practice and highlights the importance of professional and network identity influencing knowledge sharing. Further, the research extends findings on economic exchange of knowledge in organisations and draws some conclusions on the issue of ownership of knowledge within firms.

This research, while not constructed as a critical reflection of the communities of practice literature, provides some interesting findings that contribute to the research on situated learning in organisations, particularly by offering a deeper understanding of the influence of power on such knowledge creation and transfer in organisations. The study has conceptualised knowledge and learning in organisations as socially constructed and situated. Thus findings from this study can be extended to literature on communities of practice that have a similar conceptualisation of knowledge and learning.

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) initial discussion of power within communities of practice has been criticised by researchers such as Contu and Willmott (2003) and Roberts (2006) as providing an insufficient account of how power influences individuals’ participation in a community of practice and on their learning. These authors have argued that power influences both the willingness as well as the ability of individuals to engage fully in the negotiation of meaning making and consequently impacts on knowledge sharing within organisations. This study supports those critical interpretations of the influence of power in knowledge sharing while highlighting the role that recognition of knowledge plays in influencing knowledge sharing.
Contractors, who perceived their status within the organisation (project team) as experts, participated in knowledge sharing to reveal their expertise, preserve their status, enhance their reputations as experts and consequently assure their marketability as experts and secure future contracts. In this knowledge exchange, they were aided by managers who perceived the external knowledge they brought in as valuable, and consequently were open and eager to receive that knowledge. The contractors’ participation in knowledge sharing was influenced by their own meaning making activities that positioned them as experts and by the organisations’ (particularly managers’) recognition of that expertise. They therefore became full members of the community, participating in the activities of the community to a much greater extent. The influence of recognition of knowledge was also evident in the study: when managers undervalued the knowledge that contractors possessed (as in the case of free agents) and dismissed such knowledge as being of little value to the organisation, contractors remained on the periphery of the community, and maintained a marginal form of participation in the community with very limited knowledge sharing. This study suggests that understanding power relations in organisations and understanding the importance of recognition of knowledge are both vital areas for understanding contract professionals at work, particularly knowledge sharing and highlights the study of power as an important area of research in knowledge sharing in organisations.

This study also makes important contributions to the literature linking professional identity construction to knowledge sharing in organisations. Osnowitz’s (2006) qualitative study of collegial exchanges amongst contract professionals suggested that contractors necessarily participated in networking, making occupational connections amongst colleagues, clients, agencies etc. as a means of mediating contingent employment. Further, her study revealed that this networking exposed contractors to informal normative controls; that they participated in collegial exchanges of information because they perceived it as expected occupational norms of behaviour. They participated in such exchanges to help them build reputations as professionals and enhance their marketability and future job prospects. This study extends those findings to discuss not
collegial exchanges amongst contract professionals, but *exchanges between contractors and permanent employees*.

As discussed previously, networking and other social systems do act as normative sources of control over contract professionals, particularly over collegial exchanges. However, exchanges between contractors and permanent employees, particularly knowledge sharing, is influenced to a much greater degree by the professional identity and image of the contractor, the expectations of the role and the psychological contracts constructed by the professional and the organisation. For those professionals who were less concerned about issues of reputation and its impact on their ability to find contracts and whose role in the organisation was perceived to require less expertise, knowledge exchanges between them and permanent employees remained rare. In contrast, professionals, who perceived their reputations as vital for obtaining future contracts and those whose roles were considered expert roles within the organisation, participated more willingly and frequently in knowledge exchanges. This study, while acknowledging that network identities and connections do mediate contingent employment, suggests that this is not sufficient to regulate contractors’ knowledge sharing behaviours. Instead, exchanges between contractors and permanent employees are greatly influenced by the role that the contractor seeks within organisations, their professional identity and image and by the expectations that the contractor and the organisation have of each other. These are issues that highlight the complexities of managing contractors, particularly monitoring the exchange of expert labour between the professional and the organisation.

This research also builds on theories examining the exchange of knowledge based on perceptions of ownership of knowledge and economic exchanges. Previous research on the issue of ownership of knowledge focused almost exclusively on permanent employees and consequently linked issues of ownership with organisational commitment, loyalty and joint notions of ownership. By focusing on contract professionals, this study provides an alternate approach to the study of ownership of knowledge, focusing on agency, self-benefit and identities as key determinants of ownership of knowledge.
The study revealed that contract professionals perceive the process of obtaining knowledge as *self-determined* i.e. it is in their efforts and self management of learning within a variety of contexts that they build their intellectual capital. Contractors, specifically specialists and consultants, actively seek roles that add to their knowledge of a domain, they invest time, money and effort in learning new practices and updating skills as required of their profession, they invest time and effort in developing their image as individuals with expertise and they orchestrate the movement of their intellectual growth. As conceptualised by Bird (1994) their careers can be viewed as knowledge building exercises, within a variety of organisational contexts. They are also aware of the economic value of the knowledge that they possess; knowledge thus becomes identified not only with who they are, but how much they are valued in organisations and this valuation has a monetary component attached to it. Clearly, this study suggests that for contract professionals, ownership of knowledge is relatively uncontested; they perceive it as belonging to them.

This study therefore provides a greater rationale for organisations to put aside implicit assumptions of organisational ownership of the professionals’ knowledge and instead conceptualise this knowledge as a part of the identity and self image of the individual. Consequently, it is not perceptions of ownership, but identity that regulates the process through which organisations can obtain such knowledge from professionals. This study extends the findings made in previous research (Constant et al; 1994; Jarvenpaa et al., 2001) that acknowledges the view of expertise as part of the self image and identity of the individual. It suggests that there is an iterative relationship between ownership of knowledge and the construction of professional identities. Knowledge sharing is influenced by professional identities and by notions of self-benefit that sees knowledge sharing as establishing their professional images, identities and reputation and impacting the monetary value of their expertise within the contracting marketplace.

*Understanding psychological contracts and impact on knowledge sharing*

The findings from this study extend the research on psychological contracts in three specific areas. First, the work of Rousseau and others (Rousseau, 1985, 1995, 2000;
Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000; Guest and Conway 2002) has, to a large extent, focused on the employee perspective within psychological contracts, particularly on the perceived employer breach of such contracts, while employer perspectives on perceived employee violation of such contracts have been relatively unexplored. This study, in addition to understanding psychological contracts from an employee perspective, also provided insights into the construction of psychological contracts from an employer perspective, in particular employing managers, and their reactions to perceived employee breach of such contracts.

Second, almost exclusively, the research on psychological contracts has been based on permanent employees. The management espoused framework of psychological contracts (Rousseau 1989) focuses exclusively on this. This study, in contrast, focuses on contractors, and seeks to extend the framework of the study of psychological contracts to include employees whose relationship with the organisation is typically temporary. While the focus of this thesis is not psychological contracts, viewing the contingent relationship through the lens of the psychological contract, enriches our understanding of the nature of the relationship between contractors and employing organisations and its significance for management effectiveness, particularly knowledge management of contract professionals.

Third, this study directs attention at some of the other sources of influence that impact on the building of psychological contracts. In particular, the study highlights the dynamic, micro, socio-cognitive relationships between professionals and managers and the influence of this process on the formation of these contracts, an area often neglected within the study of psychological contracts (Cullinane and Dundon 2006). Further, by examining the careers of contract professionals, the study also suggests that such professionals are influenced by a wide range of social, political and economic factors in constructing those contracts. Contractors occupy multiple worlds simultaneously, interacting with a wider variety of actors and institutions as compared to permanent employees. Consequently, this study more clearly highlights the social influences on the building of contracts and suggests that individuals carry with them experiences,
expectations and relationships from previous work experiences; they are influenced by broader socio-economic conditions of employability and labour market exchanges; and they have implicit assumptions of role expectations before they enter the organisation. Consequently, the construction of psychological contracts may have a much wider impact on understanding power exchanges/relationships in organisations and knowledge sharing. This suggests that the study of psychological contracts would benefit from more pluralistic approaches.

**Limitations of this research and future research directions**

This research, while contributing to a number of areas of research within organisational studies, reveals the importance of a much more nuanced and informed understanding of professional work, the professional-organisational relationship and identity construction of professionals in shaping knowledge management strategies in organisations. Future research, particularly on knowledge sharing, could expand on the findings and understandings of this research, especially in relation to the issue of identity construction of contract professionals.

One limitation of this research is that it was not conceived of as a longitudinal study of contract professionals. The interviews with the contractors and managers occurred at a time of economic prosperity and the demand for contractors with particular expertise and skills was quite high. This level of demand for contractors influenced their narratives and their own self-confidence about opportunities as contractors. Further, the anxieties that they revealed, their own professional images and the roles that they occupied within organisations were also influenced by the market place demands for contractors. The economic downturn in 2009, and the increasing unemployment rates in many of the developed economies, may have influenced their narratives differently. Further, longitudinal studies allow for examining a phenomenon over time and across differing contexts. For example, a longitudinal study of contract professionals could focus on how professionals transition from permanent roles into contracting roles, how identity and image construction occurs over time and across contracts, how psychological contracts
are shaped and influenced by each new contracting experience and how these issues impact on knowledge sharing behaviours at work. Longitudinal studies could examine issues of identities-in-transition; for example, whether professionals exhibit provisional identities (Ibarra, 1999) between contracts, or when moving from one contract to another, and how these shifting identities impact on their behaviour at work.

This study has also not explicated any gendered discourses on professional identity or image construction amongst the three categories of contractors. With the first case study, ABC bank, I was unable to identify clear differences in the responses between men and women contractors, although women contractors spoke marginally more about work-life balance. In the second case study, there were insufficient women in the sample to make a clear distinction. This is perhaps symptomatic of the under-representation of women within the IT profession (Trauth, 2002), and there were only two women contractors amongst the sample of twelve contractors in case study two. Future research on contract professionals could therefore also focus on gendered dimensions of professional identity construction to identify differences, if any, between professional identity and image constructions of men and women in contracting roles and their impact on knowledge flows within organisations.

This study has indicated the network of communities in which contract professionals participate as influencing their identity and image construction and the manner in which they engage in knowledge work within organisations. This research focused on the contractors’ interaction with the organisation as a community of practice. Future research could focus on their interaction not only with organisations, but on other social networks such as their interaction with communities of contractors, professional organisations and agencies to provide a more nuanced understanding of how professionals engage in networks and how this impacts on their identity construction and participation in organisations.
**Concluding remarks**

This research and its contributions are both important and timely as indicated by the growth of professionals as contractors and the increasing importance of understanding how professionals engage in knowledge work within organisations. By examining contractors and managers in the case study through the lens of identity and image construction, this thesis has highlighted the complex and dynamic interactions between identity construction, professional-organisational relationship, construction of psychological contracts and knowledge sharing at work. The thesis has demonstrated how professionals in contracting careers seek self management at work and how the process of self management influences and moulds the construction of their professional identities and images. Further, the thesis highlights the dynamic and dyadic relationship between contractors and managers as influencing both the process of identity construction as well as motivations for knowledge sharing.

The research contributes to the literature on identity work, identity regulation, communities of practice and the construction of psychological contracts at work. It suggests that understanding the macro socio-economic environment and the changing nature of professional employment is necessary for organisations to understand and manage professional knowledge work. Organisations focusing on the development of knowledge management strategies with implicit assumptions of permanency of employment, assumptions of employee knowledge sharing and organisational ownership of knowledge need to re-examine their knowledge management strategies. Further, organisations depending on information systems to capture and codify employee knowledge need to take into consideration the findings from this study to develop strategies that consider the centrality of individuals in the knowledge sharing process and focus on the socially constructed and situated nature of knowledge within the changing nature of professional work in organisations.
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Participant information sheet and consent form

A sample participant information sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Research Project

Title: Knowledge Management and Contingent Employment

(1) What is the study about?

The objective of this research is to investigate the knowledge management practices of the organisation and to investigate the impact of contingent workers on knowledge sharing practices within the firm.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by Sujatha Rao and will form the basis for the degree of PhD at The University of Sydney under the supervision of Dr. Richard Hall, Associate Professor

(3) What does the study involve?

The study involves the participation in semi-structured interviews with the researcher that will be audio taped.

(4) How much time will the study take?

The interviews are expected to take between one to one and half hours for completion.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent. You may discontinue your participation at any time.
(6) Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on the participants. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

(7) Will the study benefit me?

This research is an academic study, the results of which would be beneficial to the general understanding of the nature of work and management in organisations.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes you can. The findings of the study will be published as part of a PhD thesis and part of the study may be published in academic journals and presented in academic conferences.

(9) What if I require further information?

When you have read this information, Sujatha Rao will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Dr. Richard Hall at 9351 5621.

(10) What if I have a complaint or concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811.

This information sheet is for you to keep.
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, ................................................................., give consent to my participation in the research project: Knowledge Management and Contingent Employment

Name (please print)

JOB TITLE: ........................................................................................................................................

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher(s).

3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) now or in the future.

4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

Signed: ........................................................................................................................................

Name: ........................................................................................................................................

Date: ........................................................................................................................................
## Appendix 2 - List of interviewees

### ABC bank - List of contractors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name Of Contractor</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sam Pemberton</td>
<td>FOREX contractor – London</td>
<td>30 May 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion Day</td>
<td>FOREX contractor – London</td>
<td>6 June 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya Sheldon</td>
<td>FOREX contractor – Hong Kong</td>
<td>14 June 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janelle Smith</td>
<td>FOREX contractor – Hong Kong</td>
<td>14 June 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliet Donovan</td>
<td>FOREX contractor – Hong Kong</td>
<td>16 June 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise Gillard</td>
<td>FOREX contractor – Tokyo</td>
<td>7 July 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy Yang</td>
<td>FOREX contractor - Tokyo</td>
<td>11 July 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ABC bank - List of Managers/Team leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name Of manager</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael Grey</td>
<td>Manager – FOREX</td>
<td>22 May 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Davidson</td>
<td>Manager - FOREX</td>
<td>26 May 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Heath</td>
<td>Team Leader – New York</td>
<td>30 May 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith Lombard</td>
<td>Team Leader – New York</td>
<td>2 June 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon Joseph</td>
<td>Team Leader- London</td>
<td>6 June 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl Ray</td>
<td>Team Leader - London</td>
<td>15 June 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia Roberts</td>
<td>Team Leader – Hong Kong</td>
<td>19 June 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin O’Donnell</td>
<td>Team Leader – Hong Kong</td>
<td>28 June 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelo Viccaratti</td>
<td>Team Leader - Tokyo</td>
<td>7 July 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Ozinsure - List of Contractors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name Of Contractor</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John David</td>
<td>IT contractor/Team lead</td>
<td>17 July 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Kingston</td>
<td>IT contractor</td>
<td>17 July 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Murphy</td>
<td>IT contractor/Team lead</td>
<td>24 July 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-Ann Keller</td>
<td>IT contractor</td>
<td>2 August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Swift</td>
<td>IT contractor</td>
<td>2 August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek Anderson</td>
<td>IT contractor</td>
<td>9 August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Li</td>
<td>IT contractor</td>
<td>9 August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo Sing</td>
<td>IT contractor</td>
<td>17 August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Koch</td>
<td>IT contractor</td>
<td>17 August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Thompson</td>
<td>IT contractor</td>
<td>28 August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damien Daro</td>
<td>IT contractor</td>
<td>6 September 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogi Adams</td>
<td>IT contractor</td>
<td>12 September 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ozinsure - List of Managers/project leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name Of Managers</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chris Robinson</td>
<td>Chief Architect</td>
<td>20 July 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Myers</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>24 July 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat Walker</td>
<td>IT manager</td>
<td>7 August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Swift</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>16 August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan Chang</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>16 August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian Bianchi</td>
<td>Team lead</td>
<td>28 August 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Costa</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>6 September 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shania Taylor</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>12 September 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 - Interview questions

Interview questions for contractors

1. How long have you been contracting?

2. How long with the present company?

3. Can you please outline for me your background? Your area of expertise?

4. Can you describe for me your role in your current assignment?

5. What made you decide to be a contractor? (Can you recall the events that led you to move from permanent employment into contracting)

6. How did you get your first contracting job? How do you generally secure contracts?

7. What do you see as the role of placement agencies within your industry and for you as a contractor?

8. In what ways do you go about selecting contracting roles? What criteria do you use?

9. How do you prepare yourself for a new contract?

10. Can you recount / run through a typical first day at a new contract?

11. In what ways do you think contracting differs from having a permanent job?

12. What are some of the challenges that you face in being a contractor?

13. What would you identify are the advantages in being a contractor?

14. What do you think organisations look for when they hire contractors such as yourself?

15. What do you see as the primary role of a contractor in your industry?

16. How often do you meet members of your team socially?

17. How often do you get approached for advice and help from members of your team?
18. In what way do you think the managers’/team leaders’ influence your relationship with other members of your team?

19. If you need some expert advice at work, how would you go about getting it?

20. What training have you received from the client organisation?

21. In what ways do you keep yourself updated with the changes in your profession? What are the sources through which you develop and maintain your expertise?

22. What do you think are the most important attributes for a contractor such as yourself to be successful?

23. Are you a member of a professional association? If yes, what advantages do you see in it? If not, would you ever consider joining one?

24. Can you describe for me the KM strategy of the client firm that you are working in?

25. What advice would you give someone who is considering becoming a contractor?
Interview questions – Managers/team leaders

1. How long have you been working with your current company?

2. How long have you been in your current role?

3. Could you explain to me the structure of your department? What is its main function?

4. Could you please outline for me your role within the organisation?

5. How many people do you have working in your division/team altogether?

6. How many contractors are employed in the division/team?

7. What is the main reason for hiring contractors within your department?

8. How are these contractors hired? If through agencies, do you have formal contracts with specific agencies?

9. What is the reason for hiring contractors within your department?

10. What roles are they hired for? What positions do they hold?

11. What is the normal tenure/duration that contractors are hired for?

12. What happens once the contractor finishes his/her contract? Are they offered permanent roles with the company?

13. What, in your opinion motivates the contractor in your division/team?

14. What are some of the issues that demotivate them or affect their performance?

15. What are some of the challenges in having both contractors and permanent employees in your department/team?

16. In your opinion, how do contractors differ from permanent employees?

17. When I use the term knowledge, what does it imply to you?

18. Could you describe to me the KM strategy of the organisation?

19. Is this the same strategy for your department? If not, how is it different?
20. Can you describe your department’s induction process for new employees?

21. Do contractors also follow this process? If not, how does their induction process differ?

22. How do members of your team share knowledge with each other? Is there a preferred way for knowledge exchanges amongst members of your team?

23. Do you think contractors contribute to the knowledge base of your department?

24. Do you find them willing to participate in knowledge exchanges in the firm?

25. If not, what do you think are the reasons for them to be unwilling to participate in such knowledge exchanges?

26. What are the challenges in managing contractors within your division/team? How do you think that contractors can be better managed/utilised within the division/team?