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The Patchwork of Knowledge Management

A qualitative study on how Knowledge Management is understood in the
professional context of Swedish business law firms

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Abstract

This paper investigates how the Knowledge Management (KM) phenomenon is understood in the field of business law firms in Sweden, by focusing on KM professionals and practitioners across hierarchical levels. The study uses a qualitative method and examines how four business law firms as well as one KM consulting firm perceive the management phenomena of KM within their highly institutionalized field. Field material has been collected by conducting 22 interviews with respondents at the five different firms. This paper uses the theoretical framework of institutional theory and institutional logics to analyze the data, and the main findings show that there is one emerging KM logic within the field of business law firms in Sweden. In addition, the study identifies a number of tensions regarding how KM is understood in relation to professionalism and KM practices. Thus, this paper provides new insights in the following three areas; the ambiguity of practices KM accounts for in business law firms, the role of professions in assimilating an emerging management concept such as KM, and the importance of networks and collectivism in imitating processes across institutional levels. The paper may inspire to a continued discussion on KM and its patchwork within professional service firms.

Key Words

Knowledge Management, Professional Service Firms, Business Law Firms, KM Professionals, Institutional Logics, Emerging Logics

Introduction

Knowledge Management (KM) is a concept developed in the 1990's and is focused on how knowledge is managed and retained in organizations (Koenig, 2012; St. Clair, 2017). There are many definitions, conjectures and approaches to KM (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Schultze & Stabell, 2004), and in attempting to define it one must account for the context and what it means in different organizations (St. Clair, 2017). In the past fifteen years, researchers have become increasingly interested in KM and have studied the phenomenon with different methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives. The academic field of KM has been evolving due to the remarkable increase in articles, books, conferences and job titles, focusing on the central issue of accumulating intellectual capital through KM (Serenko, Bontis, Booker, Sadeddin & Hardie, 2010; Serenko & Bontis, 2013).

Drucker (1959; 1969; 1999), a pioneer within KM, recognized the emerging knowledge intensive organizations and their knowledge workers half a century ago, when the society shifted from a focus on production to a knowledge society focusing on services. KM has emerged due to the growing pressure on organizations to increase their efficiency because of economic, technological and societal changes (Grover & Davenport, 2001; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Wiig, 2004). KM is believed to play an important role in professional service firms and knowledge-intensive firms such as consulting firms, accounting firms and business law firms (Schwartz, 2006). There is a need to manage human capital, and organizations need to improve knowledge development activities in order to maintain a firm's competitiveness (Nonaka, 1991). Indeed, Davenport and Prusak (1998) found that knowledge can provide a sustainable advantage as knowledge assets increase with use. Organizations that do not manage their knowledge are seen to be lagging behind the knowledge-creating companies (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Davenport & Prusak, 1998).

In addition to the mainstream KM theories presented above, several researchers have investigated KM in relation to knowledge intensive professional service firms within specific fields, e.g engineering (Diedrich, 2004), construction (Styhre, 2009), healthcare (Nicolini, Powell, Conville & Martinez-Solano, 2008) and management consulting (Werr, 2012). Additionally, several researchers have studied the strategic evolution of law firms. For instance, Winroth (1999) presented an ethnographic study on the modernization of the law firm through engagement in management efforts, conducted in one large law firm in Sweden. Furthermore, how knowledge is managed and shared within the law firm industry has received considerable attention in several national contexts. For instance, Gottschalk and Karlsen (2009) conducted a quantitative research on how law firms in Norway work strategically with their knowledge to achieve profitable growth and cope with market changes. In addition, Jonsson (2013; 2015) performed qualitative studies at one of the leading business law firms in Sweden, focusing on how and why knowledge is shared in practice among professionals.

Friedmann (2015) emphasized the relevance of law firms working with KM by arguing that "in a market where clients demand value and efficiency, KM is an essential approach to reducing cost while maintaining quality. KM captures and reuses lawyers' collective wisdom". As the law firm's collective knowledge was recognized as strategically

important in an increasingly competitive market (Brandberg & Knutson, 2006), several of the business law firms in Sweden introduced KM functions as part of their organizations in the beginning of 2000's, which makes KM a relatively new phenomenon in the conservative field of law firms (Hellberg & Knutson, 2003a).

Despite the increased attention to KM, academic research in this area has several limitations (Serenko et al., 2010). One is that research has tended to be normative in nature with literature reviews as the main source of references, rather than having a descriptive approach of how the KM phenomenon is manifested within a field (Serenko & Bontis, 2013). Despite that the importance of the role of KM practitioners has been highlighted, few researchers have studied how the KM phenomenon is understood in practice within specific contexts (Serenko et al., 2010; Serenko & Dumay, 2015). Apart from studies by Jonsson (2013; 2015) that provided insights regarding knowledge sharing, limited qualitative KM research within business law firms in Sweden has been conducted. Furthermore, little research has focused on KM as a phenomenon using institutional theory as a framework. Thus, the authors of this paper argue that the KM discipline has paid insufficient attention to the understandings of practitioners in their professional context with an institutional perspective.

The aim of this paper is to study the KM phenomenon in the field of business law firms in Sweden across institutional levels, thus accounting for KM professionals and practitioners. Investigating the emerging concept of KM and its new titles within the professional legal context becomes a compelling research area as this field is considerably traditional and conservative, i.e. highly institutionalized (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scott 2008). In order to recognize different levels within the field and the interplay between different sources of influence, an institutional logics approach is used in this study. The main purpose of this paper is to answer the following research question: *How is Knowledge Management understood in the professional context of Swedish business law firms?*

The paper is structured as follows: first, previous research on knowledge and KM is outlined with the different perspectives on the studied phenomenon in relation to professional service firms. Secondly, the theoretical framework describes relevant concepts from institutional theory, with a main focus on institutional logics. Thirdly, a description of the methodological approach used to conduct the study and analyze the results is provided. The authors then present and analyze the findings which are arranged in themes and tensions, followed by a discussion in relation the theoretical framework. The paper concludes with main contributions and further implications of the study.

Previous research on KM in Professional Service Firms

Professional service firms (PSFs) are knowledge intensive firms (Starbuck, 1992; Alvesson, 1993; Von Nordenflycht, 2010), which are foremost involved in applying their expert knowledge in order to deliver customized solutions and advice to clients' problems (Empson, 2001; Greenwood, Suddaby & McDougald, 2006). Thus, these firms value specialist knowledge as their main resource since their business idea revolves around knowledge; a concept that has been identified and structured in several ways. For instance, the explanation

and difference made between tacit and explicit knowledge has been discussed by Nonaka (1991, 1994). Tacit knowledge is defined as silent and hard to articulate, and explicit knowledge is simpler to codify and transfer (Nonaka, 1991, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Moreover, there are two main discourses in how knowledge is classified within the management literature; *knowledge as an asset and knowledge as a process* (Empson, 2001).

Viewing knowledge as a resource assumes that knowledge can be extracted, quantified and managed efficiently. This is illustrated by the studies of the knowledge-creating company (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) and the firm as a body of knowledge (Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In addition, organizations can understand knowledge as intellectual capital (Stewart, 1997) that can be used as competitive advantage. In KM research, this view is manifested through the ideas that knowledge can be transferred and managed within organizations.

On the contrary, viewing knowledge as a process advocates a social constructivist perspective where knowledge is believed to be bound to a context (Alvesson, 1995; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001). Rather than believing that knowledge can be extracted, it can be understood as an ongoing process of interaction between individuals that affects the creation and legitimation of knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 2000). Tsoukas (1996), Nicolini, Gherardi and Yanow (2003) as well as Diedrich (2004), criticize the resource-based view due to its deterministic approach, simplification and conceptualization of knowledge as an object. These practice-based researchers accentuate that what is considered to be valid knowledge is negotiated and decided within a context (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001; Nicolini et al., 2003; Kalling & Styhre, 2003; Diedrich, 2004; Gherardi, 2009). Additionally, Styhre (2003) argues that the mainstream knowledge management theorists tend to overlook the complexity of knowledge when studying how it can be managed, which consequently results in attempts to reduce it to be set of skills and capacities.

Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) argue that KM research provides a broad-brushed division between the "technology aspects, and those emphasizing the 'people side' of knowledge management" (pp.996). IT is generally given a central role in KM initiatives, and if PSFs view knowledge as a resource, it is assumed that it can be explicated, structured and organized by using IT-based tools in managing their knowledge (Diedrich, 2004). However, as Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) argue, this is a simplified view on KM since the IT can only facilitate the work of people, thus being an instrument for working more efficiently.

When studying KM within PSFs, professionalism is considered as an important concept (Styhre, 2011). There are many theories and definitions used in studies of professions and professionalism (Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977; Friedson, 1986; Abbott, 1988). For instance, Styhre (2011) has investigated professionalism as a form of systematic and institutionalized knowledge sharing, how members of professional communities are constantly exchanging data, information and know-how in their everyday work. Furthermore, the question of higher education is strongly related to the concept of professionalism (Larson, 1977; Empson, 2001). In addition, Styhre (2011) argues that it is useful to conceive professions as processes that are in the constant process of modification.

In addition to the concept of professionalism, there is a power dimension in knowledge (Foucault, 1980) as well as in professions (Johnson, 1972). As captured by the Latin aphorism *Scientia Potentia Est* i.e. knowledge is power, these two concepts are intertwined and enable each other's existence (Foucault, 1980). Furthermore, Bourdieu (1991) contributes to the discourse by arguing that the interplay of power and knowledge is clearly manifested in the creation and self-reproduction of professionals and experts through symbolic capital.

This paper will have an interactive approach on knowledge, viewing it as a process, due to its coherence with a descriptive and interpretative methodology. Furthermore, it examines KM in a field consisting of PSFs viewing knowledge as a social and contextual process accounting for the field dynamics of professionalism and power. In the following section, the theoretical perspective used to analyze the KM phenomenon will be presented.

Theoretical framework - Institutional Logics

Institutional theory studies organizational similarities, industry conformity and spread of ideas within organizational contexts (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin & Suddaby, 2008). This paper uses an institutional approach with a focus on *institutional logics* (see e.g. Friedland & Alford, 1991; Reay & Hinings, 2005; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) since it provides a bridge between a macro and micro perspective, i.e. between individual behavior and socially constructed institutional structures (Jackall, 1988; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999; 2008). This theoretical framework is enabling an interrelational analysis between individuals, organizations and institutions, which accounts for the different perspectives in a changing professional environment. In addition, this perspective helps understand how interests, power, and politics in organizations are being shaped and influenced by institutional logics prevailing in a specific field (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999; Seo & Creed, 2002).

The concept of institutional logics was presented in 1991 through the seminal work of Friedland and Alford as a critical reaction to neoinstitutional theory based on the previously performed research by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983). The field of institutional logics developed into various paths guided by institutional analysis and established itself as a meta-theory (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012). Thornton et al. (2012) define the concept as follows "institutional logics represent frames of reference that condition actors' choices for sense-making, vocabulary they use to motivate action, and their sense of self and identity" (pp. 2).

Several researchers accentuate that many of the organizational fields, defined by Scott (1995) as "a community of organizations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with the actors outside the field" (pp. 56), may contain multiple institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999; Schneiberg, 2002; Seo & Creed, 2002). Thornton and Ocasio (2008) argue that these multiple sources of rationality and heterogeneity, i.e. logics, can at times be contradictory, conflicting or competing. For instance, Lounsbury (2007) examined how the spread of a new practice is shaped by competing logics that

generate variations in organizational practice and behavior. This view accounts for how multiple forms of rationality underlie change in organizational fields (Lounsbury, 2007). Multiple institutional logics explain the coexistence of organizational similarities and differences (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

Organizations that follow different logics, which can be contradictory, are described by Battilana and Dorado (2010) as hybrid organizations. These organizations encounter logics from competing institutional domains of influence that reconstruct their practices and identities (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; McPherson & Sauder, 2013). Furthermore, this leads to new hybrid forms of logics that selectively incorporate parts drawn from different logics, guided by their quest for legitimacy (Pache & Santos, 2012).

The researchers within the academic field of institutional logics are divided regarding the existence of one dominant logic. Some state that one logic prevails within a field (Dobbin, 1994; Schneiberg, 2002; Reay & Hinings, 2005; Battilana, 2006), while others (Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006; Denis, Langley, & Rouleau, 2007; Kraatz & Block, 2008) argue that a dominating logic does not exist due to the multiple contexts that organizations interact with.

The predominating institutional logics are both enabling and constraining the agency of individuals and organizations (Giddens, 1984), thus the institutional logics perspective provides a link between institutions and action (Lounsbury & Boxenbaum, 2015) and legitimizes action (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). This is demonstrated by one of the main assumptions of institutional logics, the embedded agency (Seo & Creed, 2002; Battilana, 2006; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006), which explains that "interests, identities, values, and assumptions of individuals and organizations are embedded within the prevailing institutional logics" (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008, pp.103).

Thornton et al. (2012) argue that emergence of an institutional logic is manifested through symbols and vocabularies of practice, defined by Ocasio and Joseph (2005, cited in Thornton et al., 2012) "as systems of labeled categories used by members of a social collective to make sense of and construct organizing practices." (pp.159). If a logic, which can also be defined as a framework, is not established in practice it cannot be characterized as logic (Thornton et al., 2012). Additionally, narratives contribute to the emergence of new logics since they link the symbols with material elements in order to provide meaning to specific physical or social phenomena (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001).

The acknowledged role of professionals as institutionalized actors, and the seeming power and stability of institutionalized structures in professional contexts (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Scott 2008), make the traditional legal field a compelling research area as an example of a highly institutionalized field. The research in institutional logics has previously recognized the existence of logics of various institutional orders, e.g. market, corporate, state and professional logics, beyond the one dominant logic of rationality presented by early institutional researchers (Thornton et al., 2012). Several field level studies have previously identified a traditional professional logic and a competitive market logic, see for example Lounsbury (2007) on the field of finance, Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) on the field of accounting and Thornton (2004) on the field of higher education publishing. In addition, researchers have recognized an ongoing trend in professional service firms that move away

from the traditional professional logic towards an alternative, more business oriented, managerial logic (Cooper, Hinings, Greenwood, & Brown, 1996; Pinnington & Morris, 2003). Furthermore, professionals are increasingly engaging in management efforts as a consequence of growth and differentiation (Scott, 2008). Thus, PSFs are employing greater range of business service professionals, which influences the internal structures and roles within the firm (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006).

In addition to institutional logics, several traditional institutional concepts, recognized as the precursor of the institutional logics perspective (Thornton et al., 2012), are highlighted in this paper in order to analyze how the KM phenomena is understood within the field of business law firms. For instance, *legitimacy* has been described as a central concept in organizational institutionalism (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Meyer and Rowan (1977) presented some early institutional usages of this complex phenomena connecting it to challenges in performance and values within institutions. Suchman (1995) broadly defined the concept as follows: "legitimacy is a generalized perception of assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (pp. 574). According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), the industry that the organization operates in has a substantial impact on their behavior due to their quest for legitimacy from key stakeholders. Meyer and Scott (1983) argued that public authorities and formal professions are two large groups that have the collective authority over legitimation of what is acceptable. According to Suchman (1995), simply conforming to environments can be the best way to gain legitimacy. However, he also argued that legitimacy can at times be achieved through strategic manipulation to reach organizational goals rather than through environmental conformity. Furthermore, Deephouse and Suchman (2008) emphasized that interorganizational relationships function as legitimacy-enhancing through the decisions by other organizations.

Another concept within institutional theory is *isomorphism*. The principal idea of the concept is based on organizations endeavor to shape their structure accordingly to rationalized myths in society, which are institutionalized and perceived solutions of difficulties and challenges that emerge in the organizational life (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Hence, organizations are believed to become increasingly similar. Erlingsdottír and Lindberg (2005) provide a complementary perspective on isomorphism from a critical point of view and contribute to the discourse by introducing homogenizing and heterogenizing processes in organizational behavior. The idea of *isopraxis* is also presented by Erlingsdottír and Lindberg (2005), as the process of creating homogeneous practices. However, in this process of imitation organizations can translate ideas with same name into different concepts and practices. This process of reproduction into heterogeneous practices is defined as *isonymism* (Erlingsdottír & Lindberg, 2005).

Institutional isomorphism becomes a constraint when organizations strive to fulfill societal expectations while also searching for efficiency solutions and conformity with their environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008). If this process of gaining societal mandate is performed accordingly, the organization gains legitimacy in a successful manner. However, if these external pressures become

incongruent with the internal efficiency goals, organizations may decouple the daily activities from the formal structure presented to the outside the stakeholders and society as a whole (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Meyer and Rowan (1977) suggest that companies cope with institutional pressures through *decoupling* since these suggested practices and structures might not be efficient or internally consistent with other ideas. Decoupling enables organizations to simultaneously achieve legitimacy while keeping their focus on the core business, survival (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and efficiency (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008). Connecting this concept to the institutional logics perspective, Thornton et al. (2012) argue that individuals and organization “loosely couple or decouple who they are from how they act” (pp. 58) in order to handle the tensions of conflicting logics from different institutional orders.

In summary, the present paper investigates the KM phenomenon on a field level with an institutional logics perspective together with the traditional concepts of legitimacy, isomorphism and decoupling. The study analyzes the sources of influence on the KM phenomenon through multiple institutional logics, which explains organizational similarities beyond the theory of isomorphism, and accounts for differences across several institutional levels. Furthermore, this study examines KM as a plausible emerging logic within the highly institutionalized field of business law firms. Additionally, the research paper presupposes the existence of one professional logic and one market/corporate driven logic.

Methodology

In order to answer the research question regarding how a socially constructed phenomena, KM, is understood within the field of one type of PSFs, a qualitative research method through a field level study was chosen. This is in accordance with arguments by Silverman (2013), who argues that the everyday behaviour and activities are best studied through a qualitative approach, since it allows researchers to investigate the phenomena in its context. In addition, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) argue that groups of organizations and their contexts – whether termed field, industry, or network – are believed to constitute each other in an ongoing process. This fits the authors’ ambition to bring a descriptive and interpretative approach on how KM is understood within the professional context of Swedish business law firms. According to Zilber (2014), conducting field level studies is a messy practice, and as a researcher, one should try to conceptualize, strategically specify, capture and analyze the inter-organizational field that is studied. When conducting a qualitative study, different data collection and analysis methods could be used (Silverman, 2013), which could facilitate a broad and deep understanding of the studied phenomenon.

Collection of Data

In order to provide insights and to fulfill the purpose of this study, both secondary and primary data was collected, since the authors wanted to gain a broad understanding on how KM was described within the field. The data collection was divided into different phases. In the first phase of the study, secondary data was collected by searching for information related to KM and law firms. The researchers of this paper searched for information and academic

articles in databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar using keywords, e.g. “KM”, “Knowledge” or “Legal Knowledge Management”. Additionally, complementary data was gathered from the webpages of the firms participating in the study, reports published on previous cases conducted in these firms and other documents related to their KM practices. In addition, information on how KM is described in trade magazines and other field related articles in media was gathered, by searching for the same keywords on different websites such as the digital journal of the Swedish Bar Association “Advokaten”.

In the second phase, primary data was collected. Information on how KM was described in the different organizations through their formal and external communication was gathered, by searching for KM on the websites of different Swedish law firms. This in turn directed the authors to contact persons whom were willing to participate in the study. At a first stage, employees with titles related to KM were contacted, and at later stage, other respondents were contacted with the help of a snowball effect (Silverman, 2013). The selected participants in the study are therefore employees who work with KM within four of the leading Swedish business law firms, as well as two consultants working with KM in a legal KM consulting firm (see Table 1). In order to get a broader understanding of the phenomena and how it relates to the legal profession, some respondents do not have explicit titles related to KM, however they get in contact with KM via their work in different judicial areas of the law firms. They were important for the understanding of the professional context and structures of law firms, as the researchers of this paper wanted to explore how different employees understand KM within their field and how KM is performed in practice. Meeting with different types of respondents helped the authors understand how the studied phenomenon of KM was understood from different hierarchical levels (Silverman, 2013).

The chosen organizations are four leading business law firms and one consulting firm, located more specifically in Stockholm and Gothenburg in Sweden. The business law firms are two medium-sized and two large firms, having between 100-550 employees in each firm. The legal KM consulting firm is one of the few KM consulting firms in Sweden, it is relatively small consisting of two consultants and has several legal experts connected to the firm. The results in this study are not to be seen as general or true for the industry (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). However, the organizations are representative of the field as they are four of the leading firms, and are located in important Swedish regions. The choice of organizations is therefore based on accessibility, limited to business law firms working actively and explicitly with KM, which is the case for larger firms rather than small firms as of today. The choice of having several organizational settings provided the authors with deeper understandings around how the business law firms understand the concept of KM within the field, further allowing the researchers of this paper to perform a descriptive study. In addition, by studying various hierarchical levels within several organizations within the same field, the authors were able to explore the phenomenon of KM both vertically and horizontally within the field of Swedish business law firms.

The primary data consisted of semi-structured interviews. By interviewing respondents the researchers of this paper were given the chance to get to know the interests of the respondents, as well as their thoughts and experiences (Kvale, 2006). In total, 22

interviews were conducted during this study, with 3-7 interviews in each business law firm. 15 of the interviews were held face-to-face in Stockholm or Gothenburg, and 7 interviews were conducted by telephone and e-mail due to time constraints of the respondents. The interviews were in-depth interviews lasting generally between 30 – 75 minutes, which was considered enough in order to explore the respondents' understanding of KM. The interviews were open-ended allowing the respondents to talk freely about their work (Silverman, 2013). The interviews were structured in four themes 1) Description and understanding of KM within the organization 2) Practical activities and responsibilities related to KM 3) Development process of KM within the organization 4) Perceptions on the legal professions in relation to KM. All interviews were conducted in Swedish so that the respondents could talk freely using their native language, and translated into English at a later stage. There could be differences between these two different languages in the meaning of some words, hence, important interview statements could have been misunderstood (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to overcome this limitation, the authors interpreted the material in Swedish and kept the interview statements in their original form until the very end of the study. Furthermore, a majority of the interviews were recorded and transcribed if approved by the respondent, since “audiotapes provide detailed recorded talk which fieldnotes alone cannot provide” (Silverman, 2013 pp. 26), and the authors took notes during each interview to not forget about issues that need to be further explained (Czarniawska, 2014). Three of the interviews were not recorded due to personal and professional reasons indicated by the respondents.

Silverman (2013) argues that doing qualitative research might be messy and complex due to the object of study, the day-to-day lives, which tend to be somewhat chaotic. Thus, the authors were aware of the risks large amounts of aggregated interview data could bring. First, one limitation is that when conducting a field level study, researchers can never capture a field in its entirety (Zilber, 2014), the interviews and the added secondary data only cover a part of the field due to the scope of the study. Another limitation of this study is that the chosen organizations for this paper are explicitly working with KM, according to their external communication, which might have contributed to more formal interview responses and a corporate vocabulary on the phenomena of KM. In order to overcome this limitation, the respondents as well as the organizations were anonymized so that the respondents could talk freely about their work with KM. The company reports as well as other secondary data from the websites will also be anonymized in the study and in the reference list. Moreover, the names of the organizations are anonymized so that the readers of this study should not be affected by perceptions connected to company brands. In addition, as an ethical aspect, the names, gender and age of the respondents are anonymized. What is presented in Table 1 are the participating organizations and the title of each respondent, as it is relevant for this study to display the professional titles related to KM within the field of business law firms.

Table 1. Participating organizations and respondents

Respondents	Description and Relevance	Organization	Employees
Head of Training and Knowledge Management KM Manager KM and Training Assistant KM Assistant Professional Development Lawyer (PDL) Associate Associate	Swedish Business Law Firm with a Knowledge Department consisting of eight employees	ALFA	> 400
Knowledge Manager Knowledge Assistant Librarian Associate Associate Associate	Swedish Business Law Firm with two employees working full time with KM	BRAVO	> 400
Managing Partner/ Former Knowledge Manager KM Manager Associate	Swedish Business Law Firm with two employees working full time with KM	CHARLIE	> 200
Head of Knowledge Management Associate Associate Associate	Swedish Business Law Firm with one employee working full time with KM	DELTA	> 100
Knowledge and Strategy Consultant/ Former Knowledge Manager Knowledge and Strategy Consultant/ Former Knowledge Manager	Legal Consultancy Firm consisting of two KM Consultants and several legal experts connected to the firm	ECHO	< 20
Total number of interviews: 22			

In addition to the titles presented in the table, several terms were used when referring to the respondents. The term ‘legal professionals’ was used in the text to account for all employees within the business law firm that perform client work, while the label ‘KM professionals’ was assigned those who have a title related to KM. Those who use and practice KM were referred to as ‘KM practitioners’. When referring to the legal profession per se and to individuals with a law degree independently of title and experience, the term ‘lawyer’ was used. However, the employees that have been working at the entry level, up to a few years, within the business law firms were given the title ‘associate’ in this study.

Analysis of collected data

After the data collection, the next step was to analyze the gathered data. As Martin and Turner (1986) argue, grounded theory is a useful method and approach to analyze qualitative data. Grounded theory incorporates organizational complexities and contexts (Martin & Turner, 1986), and was therefore considered as a well suited approach to the purpose of this study to

describe a socially constructed phenomena. Furthermore, this approach was useful in order to make a continuous analysis of the field material (Martin & Turner, 1986).

The interviews conducted in this study were either transcribed or annotated, and then the material was coded. All of the interview material was coded openly so that the authors would avoid the risk of missing out on important information, as well as having biases to what would be considered relevant to the study in connection to the chosen theoretical framework. Some examples of codes were “IT”, “educational training” and “network”. After the initial coding, the large amount of detailed codes were categorized into different themes that were seen as relevant to the studied phenomenon (Martin & Turner 1986). The themes and broader concept groups consisted of combinations of the initial codes (Czarniawska, 2014), so that the authors could find patterns among these themes. By continuously comparing the material, patterns were discovered and a number of categories were identified. The core themes used to structure the field material were: 1) The Ambiguity of Knowledge Management 2) To be or not to be a lawyer 3) Becoming different or similar through Knowledge Management. These three themes contained several tensions that emerged from the respondent’s understandings and descriptions of the studied phenomenon. This further allowed the researchers of this paper to use the three themes as a foundation for the second part of the coding process, which was to categorize the material into broader concept groups closer to the chosen theoretical framework of institutional logics.

The authors used a technique to capture the logics by analyzing the qualitative data from an inductive approach called *Pattern Inducing: Interpretivist Analysis* (Reay & Jones, 2015). By using this approach, the researchers of this paper identified logics from interviews and personal experiences and induced patterns associated with the logics, by investigating both vocabulary and practices (Friedland and Alford, 1991). Hence, this paper investigates KM by analyzing the phenomenon at a field level by interviewing individuals in order to understand their perceptions of KM, their roles within the business law firms and the interplay and complexity between the organizations within the field.

The Swedish Business Law Industry and Knowledge Management

In order to get a brief overview of the setting in which this study has been conducted, a short description of the Swedish business law industry and its present state is presented in this section. According to the Swedish Bar Association (2017) the industry consisted of 5000 professional lawyers and almost 2000 associates who were practicing law as of the end of year 2015. Around 60 % of the lawyers work mainly with business law, and the many business law firms in Sweden practice various judicial areas related to business (The Swedish Bar Association, 2017). Since the competitive law industry is knowledge intensive, it is believed that knowledge should be managed as efficiently as possible (Nauc ler, 2002).

The law industry in general has undergone many technological and structural changes in the past decades, and there are now increased demands from clients for better use of processes and tools when it comes to legal services from law firms. New players and competitors have emerged in the marketplace since law firms often are slow in change processes, and the new players focus on digitalization and technology. Furthermore, there is a

shift in the balance of power from law firms to clients since the digitalization creates higher demands of efficient solutions from lawyers, as well as a greater pressure on prices. Clients are aware of the new processes and tools, therefore, law firms have lost some control over the standardized legal documents that were their most valuable knowledge in the past, but now are taken for granted and are easily available for the clients. (Björk & Hallgarn, 2012)

As a consequence of the market driven challenges within the field of business law firms, i.e. increasing competition and awareness of clients, the concepts of management and leadership were introduced to the business law firms as a way to cope with these changes (Winroth, 1999; Brandberg & Knutson, 2010). The delivery of services is expected to be faster since clients requirements for efficiency have increased, i.e. they request to get the best but most cost effective advice (Björk & Hallgarn, 2012; Kvarntorp & Knutson, 2016). Moreover, sales and communication have become necessary within business law firms as a consequence of the increasing competition (Kvarntorp & Knutson, 2016). Thus, the law firms are engaging more in offensive marketing and branding strategies to distinguish themselves from their competition (Kvarntorp & Knutson, 2016).

As a result of the changes within the industry, business law firms began to show greater interest in digitalization, specialization and development of the so called support functions, i.e. roles aimed to liberate the lawyers at the firm from administrative work and enabling them to focus on the client work (Brandberg & Knutson, 2006; 2007a; 2010). Brandberg and Knutson (2007a) argue that these new roles emerging within the law firms are challenging the old hierarchical structures and forcing the law firms to open up by employing other professionals such as marketing managers, IT managers, HR managers and KM lawyers. However, due to the strong tradition within the legal field, the specialists working with the support functions, i.e. not working with clients directly, are facing the difficulties in gaining acceptance (Brandberg & Knutson, 2007a). A challenge arises when non legal professionals aim to be part of the traditional structure within business law firms since the respect and status one gets within a law firm is primarily based on the success of legal work, i.e. being successful with clients (Brandberg & Knutson, 2007a).

The topic of KM has been discussed in the journal of the Swedish Bar Association over the past fifteen years, and it has been both praised and criticized within the legal field. In the early 2000's, legal professionals discussed whether KM should focus on IT-solutions or the individual knowledge process (Runefelt, 2002). For instance, KM was initially criticized and faced with skepticism since it was interpreted as an insult for professional lawyers that understood knowledge as something more than solely an IT system. However, Nauc ler (2002) considered the integration between human processes and IT systems as a necessity to cope with the increasing external requirements business law firms are faced with. By 2005, a dozen of the large Swedish business law firms had their own KM lawyers (Hellberg & Knutson, 2003a), including all of the four business law firms participating in this study.

Hellberg and Knutson (2003b) identified business law firms in London as the main source of inspiration for the ideas within the legal field in Sweden, including the interest in KM. In addition to the influence from London, it is also believed that KM efforts have emerged from the physical libraries within the firms, since the knowledge that the law firms

try to manage today was previously available in the libraries (Hellberg & Knutson, 2003b). Furthermore, Hellberg and Knutson (2003a) argued that there was a great variation in titles for the new KM profession, with titles such as Knowledge Manager, Know-how officer and KM lawyer, despite that some firms already had employees working with firms knowledge without the formal KM titles. For instance, in one of the leading firms, it started already in the mid 1990's, while the other firms that participated in the study have been working with KM since the beginning of the 2000's. Hellberg and Knutson (2003c) argued that in order to work with KM one must possess a law degree, several years of working experience at law firms, knowledge of the firms and clients needs, sense for structuring and cataloging, great skills in knowledge management, interest in IT as well as interest of management and development.

Hellberg and Knutson (2003d) discussed that having clear and realistic goals and making the employees enthusiastic is beneficial when introducing KM efforts. Furthermore, it was considered necessary to have the support by the partners at the firm and a clear mandate to require the firm's lawyers to engage in the KM efforts, e.g. by contributing to the knowledge banks with new information (Hellberg & Knutson, 2003a; Brandberg & Knutson, 2007b). However, if these aspects are lacking and not enough resources are invested in KM, the risk of failing increases (Hellberg & Knutson, 2003d). Furthermore, Brandberg and Knutson (2007b) recognized that a challenge with KM is to make it a natural part of the daily work. Another issue with KM is the time aspect since KM related work is rarely paid, it is not prioritized. Thus, it has been argued that treating KM equal to client work in terms of compensation could be one solution to the problem (Brandberg & Knutson, 2007b).

Persson (2017) argued that there is an ongoing discussion whether some of the legal work currently performed by lawyers will be replaced by Artificial Intelligence and other technological solutions in the future. Technological development is, according to Persson (2017), embraced by the legal professionals since it helps them process data systematically, which increases the internal efficiency. However, these changes within the field of business law firms inevitably result in implications on the firms structures, professional work and internal organization of activities, including KM practices.

Analysis

In this section, the field material will be presented through three themes; 1) The Ambiguity of Knowledge Management, 2) To be or not to be a lawyer, 3) Becoming different or similar through Knowledge Management. In addition, each theme consists of two tensions that will be analyzed. These tensions were identified based on the respondents' interview statements and behaviors containing different understandings and examples of challenges related to KM within the business law firms. By the end of each theme, a short discussion in connection to the theoretical framework will be presented.

The Ambiguity of Knowledge Management

Knowledge was identified by the participating business law firms as their most valuable asset. However, there is yet today an ambiguity and lack of clarity on what KM is, what it should

consist of and what type of knowledge is being managed within the law firms. This ambiguity is outlined in the following two tensions that emerged from the field material: 1) *KM as a tool for strategic positioning vs. KM as IT systems, databases and templates*, and 2) *Explicit and collective knowledge vs. Tacit and individual knowledge*. The tensions will be analyzed in the following sections.

The Professional Development Lawyer (PDL) at Alfa described the work with KM as a patchwork, referring to the many different practices and activities summarized as KM. The KM efforts are often divided into two large areas, educational training and IT. Libraries and binders were recognized as the cradle of KM that, in pace with technical evolution, developed into more digitalized solutions. Hence, IT gained greater importance in KM through emergence of the intranet and tools for document management e.g. databases, document systems and template banks. In addition, the social aspect of KM was highlighted, which includes various knowledge sharing activities, e.g. networks and groups within and between the law firms, meetings, conferences, phone calls and email contact. Furthermore, the field material emphasized concepts such as business development, strategy, branding and external environmental monitoring to be increasingly important parts of KM due to the competitive market of business law firms and increasing client pressures. In general, respondents at higher hierarchical levels within the firms tended to lift KM to be a combination of IT, educational training and a process of business development, where the underlying rationality came from a business point of view.

You can call KM different things, you could for example call it quality work. What are you as a KM Manager anyway? Are you a business developer, IT-developer or should the responsibility really be on HR? I personally believe it's about business development. -
Managing Partner, Charlie

As the quote proposes, it is not completely clear where KM belongs. For several respondents in managerial positions, KM was considered as a driver of competitive advantage that should be a natural part incorporated in the daily work of partners, lawyers and associates. Furthermore, the strategic management of the firms' collective knowledge is believed to guarantee a certain quality and professionalism in the delivered services by the business law firms. This goes in line with the ideas described by the consultants at the KM consulting firm, Echo, who explained that "our business idea is to get law firms to lift their KM-perspective, to think new, to develop their business". In order to achieve this, one consultant at Echo argued that KM must be understood and practiced beyond IT and digital solutions and be part of the strategic work and business development.

The discussion about whether KM is more than templates or not reoccurred in a majority of the interviews when attempting to define and concretize what KM means in practice. The Head of Training and Knowledge Management at Alfa emphasized that it is important to understand KM beyond working solely with IT, despite that KM in practice is related to templates.

Many think that KM equals templates, but it's a lot more than that, but to get people started it's important to get people to understand what this is about. It's about knowledge spreading and recycling of knowledge and all that, but sometimes it gets very practical, and we work with templates. - Head of Training and Knowledge Management, Alfa

Moreover, all of the business law firms that participated in this study claimed that their KM activities are heavily influenced by the fact that working with law is related to the production of documents and text. All of the interviewed associates recognized KM in terms of databases and templates as helpful for their legal work as they need guidelines and structures to perform their work correctly, especially in the beginning of their careers. Furthermore, they described their daily work as organized and structured, therefore, it is important that as much as possible is standardized with a coherent layout. Thus, a common idea identified in the answers received from all four business law firms is that "straightforward" or "pure" KM is about IT and templates that facilitates the daily work of lawyers. By arguing that KM is useful for their document heavy work in terms of structure, KM becomes hands-on explicit knowledge. This was described by the Knowledge Manager at Bravo:

We once had a former manager here who was really eager to say that 'KM is not about templates, KM is not about templates' but the problem is that KM is very much about templates. Because a lot of the essence of what you learn and what kind of experiences and knowledge you have will end up in some kind of written document. - Knowledge Manager, Bravo

As stated in the quote and shared by a majority of the respondents, KM is believed to help making knowledge explicit since the tacit knowledge that the lawyers possess should be available in templates throughout the firm. Several managers emphasized that the core of KM is to facilitate the daily work of associates and "to not reinvent the wheel" repeatedly, which helps them use and reuse relevant information efficiently. However, the nature of the legal work restricts the KM efforts in some judicial working areas due to their complexity. The external pressure from increasingly aware clients within the law industry forces business law firms to have a KM function that standardizes their legal work. Therefore, as several respondents highlighted, IT practices as part of the KM efforts, become a necessity and a "hygiene factor" due to the importance of documents being correctly formulated. The investment in KM within law firms therefore becomes essential for their business survival, as explained by the Knowledge Manager at Bravo:

You realize that this (KM) is taken for granted now. This should just be there. We cannot work with knowledge and be consultants if we don't have a function that works with this systematically. - Knowledge Manager, Bravo

As the quote suggests, the law firms are assumed to work with their knowledge in a way that benefits their clients and delivers high quality services to competitive prices. Thus, the value of KM efforts for the KM practitioners lies foremost in the time and cost efficiency related to

their daily work. The associates claimed that business law firms are able to maintain high fees for their services due to the increased efficiency achieved through digitalized solutions. Furthermore, they described time efficiency as the key benefit of KM since legal professionals generally work under high time pressure. The Head of Knowledge Management at Delta outlines this in the following quote:

You save time so that you can use the time to work with more complicated law which gives more money and is more fun. In the long run, we will not be able to charge the client for administrative and routine work. - Head of Knowledge Management, Delta

As indicated in the quote, the business law firms are faced with increasingly aware clients who are not willing to pay for time consuming administrative tasks. Therefore, the firms are forced to work with their knowledge strategically through KM efforts that advocate efficiency. However, several KM managers also identified weaknesses with KM within the legal field due to the prioritization of client work.

The weakness with KM work is that it becomes a 'nice-to-have' because you have to do what you have to do first, and then there's no time to also administer lessons and to take care of template updates. This is a challenge. - Knowledge Manager, Bravo

As described by the Knowledge Manager at Bravo, the challenge with KM in law firms is to incorporate it in the daily work, instead of only using it as a 'nice-to-have'. This indicates that KM should not be an antithesis to client work but rather a necessity for the increased performance of the entire law firm with long term benefits.

The respondents described that the prime idea of KM is to manage the collective knowledge of the firm in an effective way, it presumes a willingness and conditions to share knowledge. However, several respondents argued that the traditional structures and values within the law firms are restricting the proper functioning of KM. For instance, several respondents emphasized that the tacit knowledge regarding legal expertise and client matters is perceived as more valuable than the explicit knowledge, i.e. the administrative work and IT-related tasks such as updating databases and templates. The field material shows that KM is struggling within business law firms as the professionals have a long tradition and culture of individualism where individual expertise of lawyers is what is being valued both internally and externally. However, the work with KM is about converting this expertise into documents that should be available throughout the firm, thus contributing to the collective spirit and shared knowledge. One respondent compared these challenges with the process of establishment of other organizational functions, such as HR:

KM is what HR was a few years ago before it became completely established. - KM Manager, Charlie

The KM Manager at Charlie discussed that KM is not yet constituted as an acknowledged and independent area within the field of business law firms. Since the field material shows a

variety of activities related to KM, the management phenomenon faces the challenge of being ambiguous in what it should constitute as a support function. Thus, as problematized by several of the KM managers, KM risks becoming an ubiquitous thing without clear purposes and goals.

Discussion of the theme: Legitimacy, Decoupling and Simplification of Knowledge

As the field material indicates, the concept of legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008) in relation to KM is manifested both internally and externally. For instance, by connecting KM efforts with internal efficiency in terms of time and cost, the KM managers legitimize their existence within the business law firms. In addition, the firms' practice KM as they need to legitimize their work with knowledge towards external stakeholders and clients.

As Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue, companies cope with institutional pressures, e.g. increasingly competitive market and client awareness, through decoupling since suggested practices and structures might not be efficient or internally consistent with other ideas. The understandings of the purpose of KM efforts within the legal field varied where the associates' view on KM was considerably more simplified than the understanding provided by the KM professionals in leading positions. Despite the ambition to understand KM as a tool for business development, in practice KM efforts become somewhat decoupled due to the nature of the legal work i.e. production of documents.

Knowledge within business law firms is perceived as something that can be extracted and written down in documents, which reveals a view on knowledge as a resource. This object-like view on knowledge is a simplified way of understanding KM (Tsoukas, 1996; Nicolini et al.; 2003; Diedrich, 2004). Furthermore, this perception is mirrored in the ambiguity of KM practices ultimately decreasing KM to IT solutions that accumulate legal knowledge of professional lawyers into databases and templates. However, this simplified view of knowledge could be interpreted as a consequence of the document driven legal work.

In summary, based on the tensions that emerged from the field material, there is an ambiguity of how to work with KM and what type of knowledge is being managed. Thus, KM is struggling to become legit and accepted as an established area within the field of business law firms.

To be or not to be a lawyer

One shared idea between all of the participating firms is the importance of the legal profession in order to work with KM in a business law firm. Since business law firms are knowledge intensive organizations, the lawyers are well educated and value their profession and expert knowledge. In this section, an analysis of the field material around the tensions of being a professional lawyer within the field of business law firms will be presented. The two identified tensions are: 1) *Lawyer doing client work vs. Lawyer working with KM*, and 2) *KM professional with a law degree vs. KM professional without a law degree*.

The field material reveals that the legal profession is predominantly individually oriented due to the historical development of the profession where each lawyer had their own

ways of managing information and knowledge. Historically, information and knowledge was aggregated in binders or personal computers. Despite that the technological progress and digitalization facilitated the sharing of information and knowledge across the firm, the attitude of lawyers remains somewhat self-centered. Several lawyers emphasized a dilemma they face as their preference is to work on their own, while KM is about having a collective mindset. The KM Manager at Charlie captured this by describing the importance of knowledge sharing:

It is about creating a culture where you think about knowledge and how to share it.
It is about emphasizing a knowledge promoting culture at the firm. - KM Manager,
Charlie

However, trying to work with KM to create a knowledge sharing culture was discussed to be challenging at the business law firms. This might be due to the strong professional identity, as well as the attitudes of the legal professionals towards KM. Since client work is considered as the single most important thing at the firm, it is the carrier of value both in terms of profit and prestige. This further indicates that the client work within the lawyer profession dominates, putting aside all additional or administrative tasks. Thus, frictions arise when aiming to include KM into the daily work of professional lawyers. The Head of Knowledge Management described the implementation of a new IT-system at Delta, as part of a KM effort, as challenging due to the reluctance from senior lawyers:

When we implemented it in this world, it was kind of new. Many senior partners don't work that way at all, instead they work very traditionally. -
Head of Knowledge Management, Delta

As indicated by the quote, there are different attitudes towards KM at the hierarchical levels within business law firms. In addition, the field material shows that the formal holding of the lawyer profession was considered important for acquiring status at the business law firms. However, having educational background in law was not considered as sufficient unless combined with client work. The strong professional identity in relation to the formal titles within the business law firms laid foundation for the tension between being a lawyer doing client related work and being a lawyer working with KM. This tension is recognized in the practical work of lawyers, as discussed by one of the consultants:

Client work always comes first. KM is not something you do in the first place, you don't work with a template if you have client work to do. - Knowledge and Strategy Consultant, Echo

As the quote shows, KM is not considered a priority. Furthermore, solely being a lawyer is not perceived as prestigious enough if the practical work is connected to the so called support functions, which are administrative roles within the firm including KM professionals. Despite that KM is understood as something of great importance, its value cannot be clearly

accounted for in terms of financial profit the same way that client work can. Bonuses and internal time wage reports are used in some of the firms as motivators in an attempt to bring KM efforts closer to client work in terms of importance and priority. In addition, engagement from the partners within the business law firms was identified to be of great importance when initiating KM related projects. By successfully engaging partners, the KM practices could gain higher status in terms of being perceived as something necessary for the firm where the collective legal knowledge is used as competitive advantage.

You want someone who works higher up in the firm to be engaged, so it is really important to have a partner, managing partner or CEO who believes in this. - Head of Knowledge Management, Delta

As explained by the Head of Knowledge Manager at Delta and emphasized by several KM professionals, KM initiatives gained higher status at the firm by having a committed partner or CEO. This led to a discussion regarding the role of the support functions within the business law firms in relation to the professional identity. A majority of the associates perceived the KM Managers as having more administrative roles, and were seen as having a supporting function for their client work. This is further confirmed by the hierarchical structure within business law firms that divides the employees into partners, lawyers and support functions. The latter include functions that are not directly connected to legal work with clients, such as departments of HR, IT and KM. Some of the respondents describe a situation where working with KM is seen as a “slaskpost” (=a position within the firm that is not completely needed or perceived as necessary) within the business law firm.

It easily becomes a kind of a “slaskpost”, that you get to do all the administrative work at the firm. - Knowledge and Strategy Consultant, Echo

As indicated by the quote, there is an ambiguity regarding KM and what responsibilities the KM professionals have within the firm. This uncertainty results in an abundance of administrative tasks that are not necessarily related to KM.

A majority of the KM professionals who were interviewed for the study had educational background in law or had studied law courses during their career. This led to a discussion around the tension and necessity of a law education in order to work with KM. In order to work as a KM professional at a business law firm, a majority of the respondents considered it to be crucial to understand the core business and the politics within the law firm. Several respondents emphasized the essence of understanding the legal framework and way of working, as well as the importance of recognizing the need of the lawyers in order to provide them with the necessary tools. The Head of Training and Knowledge Management at Alfa described the close connection between legal understanding and the knowledge that they try to manage as follows:

My role is to offer the handicraft for documented advice and legal understanding. That requires broad and deep legal knowledge. Those who work with KM in law firms come from the inside and have a broad understanding of the core business in order to work with knowledge - Head of Training and Knowledge Management, Alfa

This attitude was critically discussed during several of the interviews and some argued that the legal framework is something that can be taught even if one does not have legal background. Furthermore, some respondents emphasized that the legal educational background is functioning rather as an identity confirmation and an overall conformity with the law firm context. The KM professionals with other educational backgrounds, e.g. specializing in library and/or information sciences, often felt a need to take law courses in order to gain greater understanding on the methodology of the legal practice. One of the consultants from Echo argued that one of the positive aspects with not working with KM within a business law firm but rather as an outside consultant, is in fact that you do not have to consider the focus on status and hierarchy in your daily work. However, the respondent claimed that it is still important to be a lawyer even as a consultant, referring to the legitimacy you get from other lawyers within the field.

It's important to be a lawyer in order to get sympathy, acceptance, understanding, to understand the business and the hierarchy in the law firm, to use the right terms and to understand the informal roles. - Knowledge and Strategy Consultant, Echo

As indicated by the quote, there is a connection between having a law degree and having an understanding of how these firms function. Some of the respondents describe the business law firm culture as quite rough and oriented towards constant success putting great amount of pressure on those working directly with clients. They explained that one should be aware of the power dynamics and know their place within the firm. Thus, working with KM was explained by some respondents as quite difficult due to the "lawyers know best what to do"-attitude they are facing since lawyers do not want to be told what needs to be done in relation to IT, templates or other documentation.

The politics and the culture is just like this, some things you don't get into, you win some fights, you know where you belong, and what fights to take, with whom, when and how. - Head of Knowledge Management, Delta

This was further described by the Knowledge Manager at Bravo, who claimed that being a lawyer is considered important for their work with KM in the organization, since lawyers measure status.

I think it's very difficult to work with KM in a law firm and get something useful done if you don't have a lawyer in the team, since you are dependent on people's goodwill. I think lawyers have a weakness, which is that they don't respect anyone who is not a

lawyer as much as someone who is. Completely groundless really, it's absurd. -
Knowledge Manager, Bravo

This indicates that lawyers approve their professional context on the basis of educational background. However, several respondents questioned this attitude by arguing that the formal title of being a lawyer is an unjust measure of employees competence within the business law firm. This goes in line with the presence of a strong and traditional legal profession that guides values of status and prestige.

Discussion of the theme: Legitimacy, Power and Professionalism

In summary, the field material shows that the legal profession of being a lawyer is prioritized before acknowledging other roles and titles such as KM professionals. In addition, what gives legitimacy within the legal profession is to do client work. As several researchers have discussed (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983), professional groups can be the source of legitimacy and can be provided with power to designate who is considered to be a professional lawyer. By having a non legal title such as KM Manager, challenges in the professional identity might emerge.

The question of higher education is strongly related to the concept of professionalism (Larson, 1977; Empson, 2001). The KM professionals are not given the same status as lawyers, yet they often have or are expected to have a law education. As discussed by Foucault (1980), there is an interplay between power and knowledge, and this close connection is displayed through the confirmation and reproduction of professionalism (Bourdieu, 1991). Furthermore, the legal professional industry is perceived as dominant and strong, and what is considered as valid knowledge within the field is negotiated and decided within a context, i.e. in each business law firm (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001; Nicolini et al., 2003; Kalling & Styhre, 2003; Diedrich, 2004; Gherardi, 2009).

Becoming different or similar through Knowledge Management

In this section, an analysis of the tensions regarding the business law firms and their competitive environment will be presented. The two tensions that emerged from the field material are: 1) *Differentiating through KM vs. Becoming increasingly similar through KM* and 2) *KM used for internal efficiency vs. KM used for external pressures*.

A majority of the respondents with titles related to KM are part of a KM-network between the Swedish business law firms. In addition, the respondents who work as librarians or work with the libraries as part of their KM work are also part of their own library-network. Moreover, the interviewed associates also described how they meet in different networks and conferences within as well as between the law firms, depending on their judicial areas. Besides being part of the same networks, many of the firms use the same kind of databases, template-databases and IT-systems related to KM. For instance, the KM consulting firm Echo explained that they work with 17 out of the 20 largest business law firms in Sweden, including the four participating law firms in this study.

As shown in the field material, the business law firms face the challenge of conforming to the environment while simultaneously identifying competitive advantages that will make the firm different. By managing knowledge and making it accessible for sharing across the firm, all of the KM professionals argued that their aim is to increase efficiency internally. Furthermore, the respondents claimed that KM is believed to help distinguish the business law firms from each other by strategically working with their brand image, uniform layout and making processes more efficient through KM-tools.

We try to make people think and understand that if all documents have the same standard, the same layout and the same types of finishes and introductions, we're strengthening our brand, we show quality outwards, the client knows what to expect. - Head of Knowledge Management , Delta

However, in this quest for uniqueness they move closer one another due to the similar, and occasionally the same, sources of ideas regarding their KM work that comes from outside the firm; from the KM-network, consulting firms and international conferences. The KM-network between the Swedish business law firms is open for KM professionals in Swedish business law firms working with KM, and they meet regularly, a few times per year. All respondents who are part of the KM-network describe it as a place to exchange experiences, challenges and solutions to problems that emerge within KM related work. The Head of Knowledge Management at Delta described the importance of the network as follows:

In our roles, you're kind of lonely. Maybe you have an assistant but you are often alone. Therefore this network is extremely rewarding, you can discuss common issues since they are often in the same situation. - Head of Knowledge Management, Delta

This quote indicates the positive attitude of the network and its relational value, which was confirmed by a majority of the KM professionals in managerial positions. The Knowledge Manager at Bravo expressed it with these words:

We have a KM-network where we meet regularly. There, I believe, we have our real colleagues because we have the same challenges and problems. It's not like we share our company secrets but people are generous about what they do, it's not like we can copy-paste someone else's work. You always get some advice and you don't feel so alone either. - Knowledge Manager, Bravo

This statement shows that even though the KM professionals meet often and are positive about the KM-network and its advantages of sharing their expertise, some of the respondents argue that they do not share everything because they still want to differentiate themselves. Even though the KM-network was described as something that you can participate in voluntarily, one respondent also added that it would feel like misconduct to not participate in the KM-conferences held in for example Stockholm, indicating that the KM-network is of high importance for their identity as KM professionals.

The field material indicates that established networks such as the KM-network increases awareness of the importance of KM within the field. In addition, it provides KM professionals with an opportunity to stay tuned with the moves of their competitors, imitate them or just get inspired by their actions. Several of the respondents described that since the interest for KM is somewhat limited within the firm beyond the few KM professionals, it may be considered a natural decision to look for inspiration outside the firm and to perceive the KM managers from the network as the true colleagues. Furthermore, the legal profession might constrain the knowledge sharing internally due to the interrelation between knowledge and status, which causes the KM professionals to engage in networks outside their workplace. This can also be related to the fact that some KM managers are alone in their domain within the business law firm and are in need of input and ideas from the outside. In practice, KM becomes a matter of relationship building and networking both internally and externally, as emphasized by majority of the KM professionals.

Another example of how the business law firms are becoming increasingly similar is that all participating firms claimed that their work with KM has been inspired by business law firms based in London. The field material shows that these firms in London act as trendsetters, and that the Swedish business law firms are heavily influenced by how KM is performed in other legal settings. When the respondents were asked specifically why they have certain titles and roles related to their KM work, many of them discussed external actors and forces that possibly have influenced their work with KM in their professional contexts. These do not only include business law firms in London, but also events and conferences held in London, Amsterdam and in different cities in the United States.

London is a very big trendsetter. What happens there comes here five or six years later. I have a feeling that when one started to develop some specific roles there, we were quite fast in trying to do that here as well. We look at what is happening in London, what are they doing there, and what can we bring here and transform it so that we can do something similar? - Knowledge Manager, Bravo

As this quote shows, they are inspired by London and their KM work, however, several respondents also added that they try to adapt and adjust the inspiration to their local professional contexts. For instance, the Professional Development Lawyer (PDL) at Alfa described how his/her title is an example of local adaptation since his/her job would be called Professional Support Lawyer (PSL) in London. This is confirmed by several articles in the journal of the Swedish Bar Association, claiming that business law firms in London are at the forefront when it comes to KM. However, the KM setup in British business law firms differs substantially from the way of working within law firms in Sweden.

The second identified tension is related to the reasons why business law firms engage in KM practices - are they working with KM because of internal needs or because of the fact that other law firms have a KM function? Client expectations make the business law firms to both share and reuse their knowledge, and at the same time, respondents claim that they use KM to increase internal efficiency. All of the associates emphasized the benefits with KM in

relation to both internal and external reasons for working with KM. One associate at Bravo explained this tension as follows:

You want to work as efficiently as possible because otherwise, you cannot charge [the client] for doing something from scratch. In order for me to write an employment contract, even though it's actually quite simple, if I'm supposed to do it from the beginning and think, it takes a very long time and they [clients] will not be ready to pay for it. So therefore it feels like it's completely necessary to have material ready so that you only have to work manually with what things that are specific for the case. - Associate, Bravo

This discussion shows that the associates have to consider both internal and external pressures in their daily work, making it more time and cost efficient. In order to have the templates and documents ready, the associates are required to work with KM on a regular basis. However, due to the time constraint and prioritization of clients, KM becomes a tool for meeting external pressures rather than focusing on updating internal databases and adding material.

Discussion of the theme: Professional Networks, Legitimacy and Isomorphism

Professional networks do not necessarily exist as a community help forum but they can rather be a must for professionals to function properly within their domain of competence (Styhre, 2011). As argued by Styhre (2011), "professional work is of necessity collective work" (pp. 15), indicating that the KM professionals who are constantly exchanging narratives within the KM-network are constantly confirming their own collective profession. This suggests that knowledge is a social process (Alvesson, 1995; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001) and that knowledge sharing in the participating business law firms occurs through various social meetings where experience is shared between both KM professionals and KM practitioners.

As discussed by Suchman (1995) as well as Deephouse and Suchman (2008) firms are conforming to the environment to gain legitimacy, thus it could be argued that the business law firms work with KM for the legitimacy purposes. By using the same consulting firm, exchanging ideas through the KM-network, and getting inspiration from the same conferences abroad, the business law firms are becoming increasingly isomorphic. Institutional isomorphism is driven by organizations endeavors to shape their structure accordingly to perceived solutions of challenges that emerge in their organizational field (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008). Not only are the business law firms similar in their structures, they are using homogenous KM practices which could be explained with the concept of isopraxis (Erlingsdóttir & Lindberg, 2005). However, as the firms try to adapt KM to distinguish themselves, they are rather using the process of translating ideas with the same name (KM) into different practices, so called isonymism (Erlingsdóttir & Lindberg, 2005), further leading to an ambiguity of what KM should contain.

Discussion - An Emerging KM Logic

In this section, the analyzed field material will be discussed with an institutional logics perspective. Three institutional logics in the professional field of Swedish business law firms

are recognized, based on the field material and the theoretical framework on institutional logics (see Thornton et al., 2012): the *professional logic*, the *business logic* and the *KM logic*. In accordance to existing literature, the current study acknowledges the existence of the traditional professional logic and the market logic governed by management practices (Cooper et al., 1996; Pinnington & Morris, 2003) within the field of business law firms. In addition to these two existing logics, the authors of the present study identified one emerging institutional logic; the KM logic. In contrast to what Jonsson (2013) has in her study of one business law firm called a KM logic, this study takes an institutional logic perspective and points at the practical struggles involved in the emergence of KM as an institutional logic in the major business law firms in Sweden. The three institutional logics and the relations between them constitute the main findings from this study and will be presented and elaborated on in this discussion.

The *professional logic* accounts for both the weight of the legal profession and what the legal work means in practice. This logic inevitably becomes involved with the flows of knowledge within the firm both in terms of mastering the profession of being a lawyer and legal knowledge directly connected and fundamental to the client matters. Moreover, the field of business law firms is a highly institutionalized field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scott 2008) with a strong profession and clear hierarchical titles related to education. Thus, the professional logic influences the power dimension within the firm (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999; Seo & Creed, 2002) since knowledge and power are believed to be intertwined (Foucault, 1980). In addition to the importance of having educational background (Larson, 1977; Empson, 2001), i.e. having a law degree, client related work is considered as the most valuable practice within the legal profession. Thus, the professional logic was recognized as the dominant one in this study due to its constant presence in discussions around status and prestige across different hierarchical levels in the participating business law firms. Since knowledge and professionalism could be seen as a collective process (Styhre, 2011), the professional logic is manifested through knowledge exchange in practice, which predominantly occurs in groups, networks and various types of meetings within and between the business law firms. In order for professionals to function properly within their domain of competence professional networks are considered as highly important (Styhre, 2011).

The increasing use of management practices as a strategic quest for competitive advantage has previously been described as the market logic (see Lounsbury, 2007). However, in this study, this logic is referred to as the *business logic*, due to the increasing pressure on the business law firms to have a mindset that fosters strategic business solutions within the firm. In addition, this logic is related to how knowledge within the firm is efficiently utilized and how it can further contribute to the business development of the firm. Jonsson (2013) recognized the business logic as the dominant logic within the field of business law firms. However, based on the findings of this field study, the researchers of this paper beg to differ. Despite that the business logic was perceived as highly important, studying the different organizational levels, the logic was mainly represented at higher hierarchical levels within the law firms, while the professional logic was represented at all levels.

The existence of the professional logic and the business logic confirm the presence of multiple logics within the field that co-exist and can at times become conflicting or competing (Lounsbury, 2007; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008), which is displayed through the ambition of the business law firms to include a business development rationality in a highly traditional professional field that values stability. The present study recognizes the professional logic as the dominant one, however, the business logic challenges the traditional professional logic with new market driven ideas that the firms are faced with. The authors of this paper identified a third logic from the field material that emerges as a combination between these two; the *KM logic*, which accounts for both of the two established logics. However, it is struggling to become accepted within the highly institutionalized field of business law firms.

Patterns in the vocabulary and practices used by the respondents, recognized from the field material, lead to the identification of the third and emerging logic which focuses on the the practical work with knowledge and how information is stored and shared. The researchers of this paper identified KM as an emerging logic as it is combining symbols and practices from the field (Thornton et al., 2012). The field material shows that KM started out as a practice, and is constantly reconfirmed in narratives within and between different networks in the field of business law firms. Some of the symbols identified on a field level were; having a law degree, formal titles, templates representing the legal work, and support functions with new administrative roles within the business law firms. Furthermore, the recurring narratives identified from the individual interviews were about KM practices inspired by business law firms from London, the importance of the KM-network and the role of consultants. The vocabulary related to KM and what KM means in practice for KM professionals often consisted of words such as IT, templates and databases. Moreover, KM professionals constantly share the same ideas and narratives within and between the networks, emerging into homogeneous KM practices, which can be explained with the concept of isopraxis (Erlingsdottir & Lindberg, 2005).

The KM logic can be understood as a combination of the existing logics as it combines aspects from both the professional logic and the business logic in order to gain legitimacy within the field of business law firms. As an emerging logic, the KM logic enters the field with relatively low legitimacy and must therefore incorporate elements from the already established logics, taking on a hybrid form (Pache & Santos, 2013; McPherson & Sauder, 2013). Since it is struggling to become institutionalized, the KM logic must continuously adjust to the prevailing logics in order to gain legitimacy and become accepted. Thus, it is arguable that the KM logic takes on a hybrid form as it combines conflicting elements from different domains of influence within the field.

If the external pressures are the drivers of KM efforts, the KM logic becomes closely interrelated with the business logic since working with KM becomes a strategic choice in order to survive within the field, i.e. KM is understood in terms of business development and strategic management as a tool for gaining competitive advantage (Kvarntorp & Knutson, 2016). In order for the law firms to have a business mindset, they need to improve the management of their number one asset: legal knowledge, thus the KM logic serves the purpose of positioning KM as an embedded part of the business logic. Furthermore, the KM

logic could also be seen as part of the professional logic, meaning that as the law firms work with expert knowledge a KM function is a necessity demanding the firms to appoint employees that systematically manage the firm's collective legal knowledge. Since the KM logic grasps elements from both of the existing logics, it manifests legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008) both externally and internally. For instance, KM represents the business logic by legitimizing the strategic work with knowledge towards external stakeholders and clients. Furthermore, by connecting KM efforts with internal efficiency in terms of time and cost, serving the professional logic, KM as a phenomenon legitimizes its existence within the business law firms. However, there is an interrelational tension between the professional logic and the KM logic, since the latter aims to increase internal efficiency, ultimately diminishing certain work tasks from legal professionals. Despite the strong influence of the dominating professional logic, the KM professionals recognized this logic as somewhat outdated, indicating that the law firms must follow the market evolution by assimilating the business practices into their daily work.

The KM logic is mainly represented and used by the KM practitioners within the business law firms. These employees are all using the same vocabulary around KM practices; that it means IT, templates and databases, and describe KM in a similar manner by emphasizing that KM is seen as a support function and a position within the firm that is not completely needed or perceived as necessary. This view of KM could be related to power (Foucault, 1980), as the KM professionals are perceived as having the prime function of liberating the legal professionals of administrative work (Brandberg & Knutson, 2006; 2007; 2010). However, the KM Managers and other legal professionals at higher hierarchical levels use other words to describe KM aiming to lift the phenomenon to be the driver of "business development", "marketing and sales" and "strategic management of firm's collective knowledge". This indicates a patchwork of different practices associated to KM within the firms, leading to ambivalence of how KM is to be incorporated in the legal work. Due to these parallel understandings of KM within firms that the lawyers are following, i.e. combining different logics, the firms engage in decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008) that enables multiple logics to coexist.

By combining the professional logic and the business logic, the KM logic is struggling to become legitimized within the business law firms. For instance, the KM logic serves as a foundation throughout the whole client case process since it contains a vault of expertise and valuable information that has been aggregated within the firm over the last decade. Thus, KM professionals and practitioners justify their existence and put themselves as the basis of client work by contributing to internal efficiency, which is advocated in the business logic. In addition, they apply the practical aspects of the KM through IT-tools, databases and knowledge banks that standardize the client work, and follow the nature of legal work, which serves the part of the professional logic integrated in the KM logic. Furthermore, the KM logic struggles internally within the business law firms since the senior lawyers are following the professional logic that emphasizes the importance of status and prestige. However, the associates in this study understood KM as an advantage since it simplified their daily work and provided them with knowledge about the legal profession.

The KM logic also constitutes the fact that the business law firms are trying to manage tacit knowledge within the organizations, making it explicit and available to everyone (Björk & Hallgarn, 2012), and are thereby having a simplified view of knowledge. However, since the findings from the field material accentuate the presence of documents and templates in legal work, KM becomes a necessity for managing knowledge efficiently and works as a guarantee in terms of quality, which goes in line with arguments by Friedmann (2015). As described by the respondents, KM is seen a “hygiene factor”, a tool to avoid “reinventing the wheel” and a “must-have” in order to draw benefits from the expertise within the firm. This idea can be understood as a quest for legitimacy and conformity to the field environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008) due to the increasing market, societal and technological pressures on firms to increase their efficiency (Wiig, 2004; Grover & Davenport, 2001; Alavi & Leidner, 2001).

The interrelation between the three logics is an ongoing process that creates some struggles for the emerging logic in its institutionalization within the field of business law firms. The existing logics are not static, thus the presented logics have been identified in their current state. Through this interplay, the relation is constantly constructed and reconstructed within the field. As previously mentioned, based on the main findings, this paper argues that the professional logic dominates, the business logic challenges the field and a KM logic emerges as a combination of the two existing logics. However, this current state and interrelationship might change in the future within the field due to continuing institutional changes; being societal, market or technical changes (Björk & Hallgarn, 2012; Kvarntorp & Knutson, 2016). Due to the increasing presence of a business mindset and practices within professional service firms as a consequence of a competitive market (Cooper et al., 1996; Pinnington & Morris, 2003), the business logic and the professional logic will continue to engage in an interplay. However, since the logics are continuously interrelated, the relationship between the two existing logics is influenced and compromised by the third and emerging KM logic within the field.

The striving KM logic lacks clarity and coherence at the current stage leading to an ambiguity of what it should contain. As discussed in the analysis, just as HR struggled to become an accepted practice a decade ago, KM is now attempting to become part of the acknowledged practices within the field of business law firms. As the KM logic is part of an already highly institutionalized field with two coexisting and competing logics, in order for the KM logic to prevail, the respondents discussed a need for a cultural change within the traditional law industry. In order for the KM logic to become institutionalized, it could be argued that the underlying rationality of the dominating professional logic and its cultural values and norms need to adjust to new ideas of the management phenomenon.

There are different sources of influence that affect the institutional logics within the field of business law firms. For instance, if all lawyers have the same educational background and move from one business law firm to another, which was often the case in the this study, their interests, values and assumptions become similar, and everything they do related to their profession emphasizes the professional logic and is constantly confirmed through their practices. In addition, the importance of client work over other administrative work could be

seen as an embedded value within the professional logic. One of the main ideas of institutional logics is the embedded agency, which explains that norms and cultural values are embedded within the existing institutional logics (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) and provides a link between institutions and action (Lounsbury & Boxenbaum, 2015). The embedded agency in this case could be seen as the more the business law firms work with KM, the more it influences the legal profession and its values, and the KM logic could eventually become acknowledged.

Since formal professions are identified as groups that have the collective authority over legitimation of what is acceptable (Meyer and Scott, 1983), the KM network will have an impact on how KM is understood and practiced within the field. Furthermore, the business law firms are becoming increasingly similar, which was previously explained through the concepts of isomorphism (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008), isopraxis and isonymism (Erlingsdóttir & Lindberg, 2005). This suggests that if the business law firms continue to practice KM, the KM logic may become acknowledged and institutionalized within the field. However, the field material indicates that the professional logic could continue to dominate if the KM logic is primarily used as a “nice-to-have” without a clear intention and role in the daily work of legal professionals.

Conclusions and Implications

This paper examines how KM is understood within the professional context of business law firms in Sweden by analyzing qualitative field material from five organizations; four business law firms and one consulting firm specializing in legal KM, with an institutional logics perspective. The study contributes to a broader understanding on KM and its role in professional service firms within highly institutionalized fields. The results of the study reveal that there is an emerging KM logic within the field of Swedish business law firms, struggling to become accepted as the professional logic is dominating. In addition, the paper identifies a challenger of the professional logic, a coexisting market driven business logic, which was mainly represented at higher hierarchical levels within the studied field.

There are several implications of the present study and its results. One central implication of the study is that there is no clear definition of KM within business law firms in Sweden, it is a so called patchwork, which further has consequences for how KM is perceived and understood within this field. Furthermore, the paper exemplifies how the management phenomenon of KM is embedded within the contexts of professional service firms. This paper presents new insights in the following three areas: the ambiguity of practices KM accounts for in business law firms, the role of professions in assimilating an emerging management concept such as KM, and the importance of networks and collectivism in imitating processes across institutional levels. Finally, the paper highlights some tensions and challenges related to KM in business law firms due to the strong, traditional legal profession. Hence, the paper fulfills the purpose to study the KM phenomenon in the field of business law firms in Sweden across institutional levels by accounting for understandings of KM professionals and practitioners.

Another implication of this study is that in order for the emerging KM logic to establish itself within the field of business law firms, it must be accounted for across different institutional levels through practices and vocabularies connected to KM, becoming an explicit part of the organizational culture. Since the KM logic has elements of both of the existing logics, it could either become embedded to a greater extent in one of these or become institutionalized and recognized as a separate third logic. This study suggests that the KM logic is taking on a hybrid form as it is combining the two existing logics within the field.

One limitation of this study is that the KM logic was studied in its current state and only a part of its struggle to become institutionalized, as the authors did not study the business law firms during a longer period of time. Moreover, in identifying an emerging logic, it was not possible to account for the field in its entirety and thus cover all aspects. For future research, the researchers of this paper therefore suggest to study the emerging KM logic within the field over a longer period of time and study the phenomenon in all of its parts. The authors of this paper are looking forward to see how this study could contribute to a broader understanding and clarity around the struggles and ambiguities surrounding KM.

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