‘Welcome Aboard’
Theoretical and Empirical Advancements in Understanding Dynamics of Organisational Socialisation in Start-Ups and the Role of Knowledge Communication

PhD dissertation

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“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way […]”

(Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 1859/1993, p. 3)

**TAK**


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*Mia Thyregod Rasmussen*

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1. Introduction

We have all been there: Going through the unsettling process of settling in at a new workplace. Louis (1980) notes that it is probably inevitable that newcomers will experience unmet expectations and surprise when they enter unfamiliar organisational settings (p. 228). However, newcomers in start-ups face the double challenge of not only settling in at a new workplace, but doing so in an emerging environment. This is likely to have consequences for the newcomers in becoming knowledgeable about their new workplace and job. Kowtha (2011) observes that: “Given that socialisation is a learning process, an important factor in socialisation is job-related knowledge.” (p. 747). But how do newcomers become knowledgeable about their new job and new organisational context, i.e. ‘learn the ropes’, in organisations that are still under construction, and what are the challenges?

This dissertation explores how newcomers in start-ups experience their organisational entry, and what managers connect with getting newcomers successfully on board. The study is cross-disciplinary, as it rests on two pillars, namely organisational socialisation (OS) and organisational knowledge communication (OKC). By highlighting and integrating aspects of OS and OKC, and further combining this with a discursive approach, the study identifies patterns in how newcomers and their managers talk about knowledge in the context of OS in start-ups.

1.1. Motivating the Focus

The dissertation has both theoretical and practical groundings. The theoretical groundings include the interrelated aspects of: start-ups as a setting, the treatment of knowledge in OS and in relation to this OS outcomes, and the specific approach to OS that I subscribe to. The practical groundings relate to challenges of recruitment in start-ups in general, and challenges connected to the setting of ICT start-ups in particular. I elaborate on these in the following.

With regard to theory, OS in start-ups is not well-understood (e.g. Cardon and Stevens, 2004; Field and Coetzer, 2008), as there has been a lack of focus on what happens when the term ‘new’¹ applies not only to the employee, but also to the employing organisation. Ashford and Nurmmohamed (2012) comment on this aspect of OS literature and ask: “[…] the prominent theorizing on the organizational side, the now oft-mentioned Van Maanen and Schein (1979), has a decidedly “large organization” feel to it. […] What does organizational socialization look like in small start-ups?” (p. 19). In other words, even in new organisations newcomers go through the process of getting to know the workplace.

¹ See section 6.2.2. for my definition of a ‘start-up’ for the purposes of this research.
and their job, but we know comparatively little about what the process is like in this context, or about what it is like to be a newcomer in a start-up. Ashforth, Harrison, and Sluss (2014) note the general importance of extending the study of OS to new contexts:

“[…] socialization scholars have oversampled newcomers to full-time, white-collar occupations in large Western organizations, typically offering traditional work arrangements (Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007) – thereby raising questions about the relevance of our models to a wide variety of other work permutations. Thus, we encourage researchers to focus on more diverse settings in order to explore the otherwise hidden contingencies and boundary conditions of our models.” (p. 31).

Adjustment to a new workplace through OS as a learning process is related to knowledge (e.g. Kowtha, 2011, above). However, as indicated in some OS literature (Cardon & Stevens, 2004; Field & Coetzer, 2008), there are likely to be specific challenges to socialisation in start-ups, e.g. due to uncertainty connected to the start-up context (Alvarez & Molloy, 2006) and lack of structure (Klaas & Klimchak, 2006). Such challenges could affect newcomers in their attempts to become knowledgeable about their new workplace and tasks, which is central in OS. Therefore, in investigating OS in start-ups, it is important to understand these challenges, their implications for newcomers’ knowledge construction, and what newcomers need to know to get off to a good start (the assumption being that if they do not get off to a good start, there is a greater risk of them quitting).

However, even though knowledge is central in OS, it remains a ‘black box’. Although the word ‘knowledge’ is mentioned in numerous articles (e.g. Klein & Weaver, 2000; Morrison, 2002; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992) in the OS literature, and in specific definitions of OS (e.g. Wanberg, 2012), and despite it often being treated as an outcome of learning, few authors define what they mean by ‘knowledge’ or conceptualise it, and there often seems to be an implicit assumption or definition of knowledge which is close to that of information (e.g. in V. D. Miller & Jablin, 1991; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Furthermore, as I will show, it is often related to a functionalistic orientation and a transmission view of communication. However, if we agree that “OS involves newcomers learning the required knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours and culture of the workplace and adjusting to their new work and organisational context in order to function as fully effective and integrated members of the organisation.” (Field & Coetzer, 2011, p. 81), then knowledge is central in OS, including in start-ups, and we need to have a more sensitive approach to it.
This is then the cue for the entrance of the OKC field. In this dissertation, I rely on a perspective of knowledge which is critical of the functionalist object view of knowledge. As already noted, knowledge is to some extent a ‘black box’ and is also to some extent taken for granted in OS, but it is important considering disciplinary interests. I am critical of the way knowledge has customarily been treated in OS, because it has complexities that are often overlooked, even though it should, for example, be important in OS to distinguish between information and knowledge, since telling people something does not necessarily mean they can act on it. Thus, I aim to nuance the approach to knowledge in OS.

Furthermore, a lot of research is concerned with the outcomes of OS (e.g. T. N. Bauer & Green, 1998; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003), and which tactics are helpful in ensuring distal outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance. Klein, Fan, and Preacher (2006) observe that OS research “[…] has, however, tended to focus on those outcomes without sufficient attention to the processes underlying the development of those outcomes (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Fisher, 1986; Saks & Ashforth, 1997).” (p. 97). I take a step back, in investigating constructions of the socialisation process itself and the role of knowledge communication in this. I relate this to proximal outcomes of OS, since these are considered immediate aspects of adjustment (Ashforth, 2012), and I show how these dimensions of settling in are related to knowledge, and how dynamics connected to the start-up context create challenges for knowledge construction.

With regard to the approach to studying OS, much previous OS research has focused on the tactics which either the organisation or newcomers use, and which outcomes these lead to. In this way, parts of the OS literature are relatively mechanistic and normative. Some authors have called for a ‘person-by-situation’ approach (e.g. Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012), and along these lines, there have been calls for interactionist studies. Notably, Griffin, Colella, and Goparaju (2000) state that:

“[…] researchers have examined the theoretical underpinnings of socialization – both in content and process, and empirical studies have moved this work forward, but have examined them either primarily from the individual’s or the organization’s perspective. The interactionist perspective would seek to integrate these two areas by examining how newcomer’s attempts at self-socialization work in tandem with the organization’s attempts at socialization to influence socialization outcomes.” (p. 454).

However, few have heeded these calls (Kowtha, 2009, p. 1). In this dissertation, I follow the interactionist approach, and link this with OKC, where knowledge and communication go together in

3
a specific way, combining a relational and contextual view of knowledge with a transactional view of communication.

There are gaps in OS research that are not just ‘gaps’ in the sense of a lack of research, but the results of underlying assumptions in central OS literature which means that it is often functionalist and does not consider small organisations and start-ups. Thus, these assumptions have resulted in an empirical focus which neglects the role of context and its impact on the process of OS. This has had consequences for theory, as indicated in the above quote by Ashforth et al. (2014). Here, I study socialisation in start-ups, based on an interactionist perspective and with a focus on knowledge. In other words, I both problematis some assumptions (related to normativity in the OS literature) and add a specific knowledge perspective.

As regards the practical groundings, in general socialisation is considered important in helping newcomers be able to function and perform well in an organisation (e.g. Chao, 1997; Van Maanen, 1976). This is equally important for start-ups, if not more so. The recruitment process and potential for mis-hiring is costly for all companies, which means that successful socialisation is especially important for start-ups, since high employee turnover would necessitate using a lot of their scarce resources on recruiting. It might not be a problem for renowned companies with the required finances to attract people with valued skills. But new organisations which have yet to become known often find it more difficult to attract skilled employees (Williamson, Cable, & Aldrich, 2002). When newcomers do enter these organisations, it is often of vital importance that they can quickly be integrated into the company. Quite often, the owners’ own money is at risk, and getting newcomers off to a good start not only benefits both newcomer and company, but is also crucial to the company’s chances of surviving.

I focus specifically on information and communication technology (ICT) start-ups, since the IT sector is considered a knowledge-intensive industry par excellence (cf. Alvesson, 2001, p. 863-864). Knowledge-intensive companies are described as: “[…] firms where most work is said to be of an intellectual nature and where well-educated, qualified employees form the major part of the work force.” (Alvesson, 2001, p. 863). However, IT is also an industry with unique labour force challenges, due to a demand-supply gap. In Denmark, the demand for IT specialists has far outgrown

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2 For example, the large demand for specialists led KMD, a Danish company specialising in software solutions for the public and private sectors, to promise employees 10,000 DKK for suggesting a potential new employee who was eventually hired (Juel, 2017).
the supply (see e.g. Hvilshøj, 2016, p. 26). Thus, the recruiting and resource challenges mentioned above can be even more critical when there is a shortage of people with the necessary skills and the ‘war for talent’ is tough. In an economy where these professionals can easily get a job in another company, getting newcomers on board well is even more important.

Considering these theoretical and practical aspects, it is paramount that we understand OS in the context of ICT start-ups better. Thus, in this dissertation, I deal with the problem of understanding dynamics related to OS in ICT start-ups, especially focusing on knowledge-related challenges. And since OS is centrally related to knowledge, but knowledge is poorly understood in the OS literature, I develop a framework for integrating OKC and OS, to offer a perspective for better understanding knowledge and knowledge communication in OS in general, which I then draw on to understand challenges related to OS in ICT start-ups. Even if unmet expectations and surprise (Louis, 1980) cannot be prevented, we can learn more about the challenges that newcomers in start-ups face, and what they need to be able to deal with these.

1.2. Research Questions

Based on the above, my agenda is to investigate and compare how managers and newcomers in ICT start-ups talk about issues related to OS when accounting for their experiences of newcomer entry, with a specific focus on knowledge. The purpose of pursuing the problem and agenda is to contribute with a better understanding of the role of knowledge communication in OS and how it affects perceptions of the entry processes. The work was guided by two overall research questions and two sub-questions. The research questions and sub-questions are a crystallisation of the aspects mentioned in the first sections, and the research agenda and purpose. They are oriented towards problems of how we understand knowledge in OS (since socialisation is related to knowledge), and then focus on socialisation in start-ups and the role of knowledge in encounter experiences in start-ups.

The first research question is theoretical:

**RQ1:** How can the field of organisational knowledge communication be integrated in organisational socialisation to help us better understand and work with organisational socialisation as a process where knowledge communication takes place?

The second research question and the related sub-questions are empirical and explorative. The overall question is focused on how entry in start-ups is constructed generally:

**RQ2:** How are accounts of organisational entry in Danish ICT start-ups constructed?
The two sub-questions, aimed at newcomers and managers respectively, focus on what role knowledge is given in the accounts:

1) Newcomers sub-question: How does communication of task-specific and organisational knowledge during organisational entry in Danish ICT start-ups affect newcomers’ perception of the processes?

2) Managers sub-question: What do the ICT start-up managers consider the role of organisational knowledge communication to be in the context of organisational entry processes, and which ways of communicating are relied on and considered important for knowledge communication with newcomers in ICT start-ups?

Thus, the sub-questions focus on the role of knowledge, how the role of knowledge is made sense of, and what ‘place’ knowledge has in managers’ and newcomers’ accounts (how it emerges/is constructed), e.g. what is described in positive or negative ways?

The newcomer sub-question focuses on both task and organisational knowledge (e.g. routines/procedures, social knowledge), which is in line with definitions of OS as a process with multiple components. Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) definition of OS includes obtaining both abilities/skills and social knowledge, and Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012) note that OS is typically defined as being about knowledge and skill acquisition (p. 9-10).

The reasoning behind the terms ‘accounts’ and ‘constructed’ is that, if we want to know what socialisation in start-ups and knowledge in relation to that ‘look like’, we have to know how the relevant parties construct it. This implies a focus on discourse in relation to socialisation in start-ups. Since I employ an interactionist approach, I relate newcomers’ and managers’ accounts to each other, i.e. accounts of experiences of and opinions about knowledge communication and OS processes. This also means that, in the accounts, it is talk related to knowledge which is interesting, i.e. ‘not the concept but the use of it’, how they talk about it. The focus on constructions in discourse also gives agency to the informants. And I can then focus on what they say and how, and what they orient to.

I refer to the two sets of informants in my study as ‘newcomers’ and ‘managers’. I use the label ‘newcomers’ rather than ‘new employees’ since the newcomers are not necessarily employees in a traditional sense, but can also be interns or student developers. Thus ‘newcomers’ is a more inclusive term. Newcomers here can refer to interns, student developers, and part- and full-time employees. In
the case of ‘managers’, I interview owner-managers (entrepreneurs) and managers in the start-ups who have at least some personnel responsibility.

Two boundary conditions should be mentioned here. First, I have concentrated on the encounter stage of socialisation in start-ups. Even though OS literature often focuses on newcomer entry, and to some extent treats socialisation as something finite, it is a continuous process. It is not something that people experience only once and only for a few months, but something they go through every time they get a job, change jobs, or transition within an organisation. If changes occur in an organisation, which is perhaps especially likely in start-ups, socialisation can be a recurring/ongoing process, e.g. as new newcomers enter or the start-up is taken over. However, drawing on Rollag (2004; 2007), even though OS can recur or even be ongoing, it is still possible to consider someone as a relative newcomer versus not a relative newcomer. In the interviews, I asked managers how long new employees were considered newcomers and at what point this changed, and asked newcomers whether they felt they had settled or were still settling in. Furthermore, the encounter stage is considered one of the stages where most socialisation occurs (Field & Coetzer, 2011).

Second, I have focused on newcomers, managers, and the immediate context of the start-ups (and to some extent individual differences). Some of the shared aspects across start-ups might be partly due to a kind of institutionalised (ICT) start-up culture, i.e. a culture at field/industry level which is reproduced in the individual start-ups. This might be influential, but is only part of the research to the extent that it is mentioned by the informants, or if it is an aspect of the broader context which is relevant in interpreting what the informants say.

Given the focus on start-ups, this study has some affinity with entrepreneurship. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I do not go into the entrepreneurship discipline as such, but include relevant parts of the literature which link human resource management (HRM) and entrepreneurship (I return to this in chapter 3), since the ‘object’ of the study is not entrepreneurship as such, but socialisation in start-ups.

1.3. Contributions Preamble
This research project involves theoretical, empirical and practical contributions, which I briefly outline in the following. I start with the empirical, since these are related to the theoretical and practical.
Saks and Gruman (2012) criticise the lack of focus on actual practices in OS studies: “We conclude that as a whole, the socialization literature remains fragmented, undeveloped, and incomplete, as it has failed to adequately identify and study the socialization practices used by organizations today.” (p. 27). In this study, I focus on OS in Danish start-ups, and approach their practices as situated in a context. Thus, the context and its implications for practices are intrinsic parts of the study, as understanding dynamics of OS in the start-up context is central.

Furthermore, my study includes both newcomers and socialisation agents (managers) as informants. I not only look at tactics from a managerial perspective, but also at newcomer practices, i.e. how are these constructed from an emic perspective, and how do the perspectives relate to each other. As noted previously, there have been calls to study both parties in OS literature, inasmuch as socialisation is co-constructed.

This paves the way for the part of my theoretical contribution which concerns nuancing theorising in relation to OS in start-ups, since I relate my empirical findings to previous OS literature, especially as regards traditional socialisation tactics. The other part of my theoretical contribution stems from integrating aspects of OS and OKC, leading to insights into OS in start-ups and the proximal outcomes of OS and into knowledge and communication in OS in general.

Finally, the practical contributions take the form of empirically and theoretically grounded suggestions and recommendations for start-ups hiring and integrating newcomers in the emerging organisations.

1.4. Structure of the Dissertation and Reflections on the Research and Writing Process

In the previous sections, I have described the reasoning behind and motivation for the research, including my research questions. The following chapters are structured as follows: In chapter 2, I introduce social constructivism as my philosophical position, touch on other aspects of the research design, and discuss my abductive and reflexive approach. The literature and theoretical work is concentrated in chapters 3, 4 and 5. In chapter 3, I review OS literature, starting with central aspects of the discipline, and then focusing on literature related to OS in a start-up and ICT context, the treatment of learning and knowledge in OS, and outcomes of OS. Literature related to OKC is reviewed in chapter 4, including a presentation of what the field is about, and the disciplinary trajectories it brings together and how. In chapter 5, I draw on the two previous chapters to develop my theoretical framework, where I integrate OKC and OS. In this chapter, I answer RQ1. In the
subsequent chapters, I then proceed with the empirical aspects. In chapter 6, I cover my methodological choices, including the reliance on a qualitative research strategy and a case study design. In chapter 7, I elaborate on the methods used for constructing empirical material, namely interviews, and then describe the analytical strategy that I developed, which includes coding, thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires. The analytic work is presented in chapters 8 to 14. The analysis is split into different chapters, each focusing on specific aspects and building on each other to answer RQ2 and the sub-questions. The analysis is introduced in chapter 8. In chapter 9, I present examples of individual analyses of a newcomer and manager interview respectively, and also include an example of a case start-up sub-conclusion. In chapter 10, I focus on thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires across the manager interviews, while in chapter 11 I do the same across the newcomer interviews. Chapter 12 draws on the two preceding chapters to analyse thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires across managers and newcomers. In chapter 13, I then change the angle slightly and focus on the case start-ups across and in relation to context. In chapter 14, I round off the analysis and sum up the analytic work as a whole. In chapter 15, based on my previous theoretical and empirical work, I discuss implications, including a consideration of socialisation under ICT start-up conditions and the OS outcomes in start-ups, and I present my theoretical and practical contributions, emphasising that these were enabled by my empirical contributions and the research design. The dissertation ends with a conclusion in chapter 16.

The present dissertation is the result of three years’ work. In the dissertation, where one chapter follows another, the finished product is presented in a linear fashion. However, this does not reflect the process which led to it. I discuss abduction and reflexivity more thoroughly in chapter 2, but include a few remarks on the research and writing process here. The research and writing processes were intertwined, in the sense that I did not first carry out the study and then write about it, but have written throughout. Moreover, I did not only read in the beginning, but have read continually. I started with gaining an overall overview of the relevant literature, which has then increasingly become more fine-masked as I constructed the empirical material and analysed it. In this way, the relevance and focus of literature and analysis in relation to the research questions developed and became clearer along the way. Thus, especially the final steps of literature and theory work and analysis were less sequential and more concurrent.
2. Philosophy of Science and Research Design

In this chapter, I first present my philosophical position. I then end the chapter with touching on the relationship between this position and other elements of the research design, as the different elements are interrelated.

2.1. Philosophy of Science: A Social Constructivist Position

In research, scholars are guided by or subscribe to certain worldviews as a background for their reasoning. These philosophical worldviews are referred to as philosophies of science. Philosophy of science is the discipline concerned with the different ways of approaching the study of ‘reality’ in the sciences and the different ways that we can know about this ‘reality’. This involves understanding ontology and epistemology as two central (and related) aspects. Ontology is about “[…] the nature of what the researcher seeks to know (i.e., the “knowable” or “reality”).” (Kuada, 2012, p. 58), and epistemology covers “[…] the nature of knowledge and the means of knowing (i.e., “how we know what we know” or what we conceive as a truth).” (Kuada, 2012, p. 59).

The research presented here was couched in my philosophical stance towards social constructivism. Since the contributions I make in this dissertation hinge on my philosophical position, I therefore address it at some length. In the following sections, I describe the paradigm of social constructivism as it applies to and informs the present research, arguing for my philosophical stance and covering central aspects of the paradigm’s ontology and epistemology, and present thoughts on the implications of subscribing to this position. In later chapters, I elaborate on the specifics of my methodological approach and use of different methods, and also cover the relationship between my philosophical position and the theory and literature I draw on.

Social constructivism itself contains a range of ideas. Hansen and Sehested (2003) state that there is not one social constructivism, referring to it in the plural as social constructivisms (p. 8). Thus, in the following sections, I specify what kind of social constructivist I am by discussing the specific social constructivist ideas I draw on.

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3 Here, I distinguish between ontology in philosophy of science (the characteristics of ‘reality’), and meta-ontology in the realm of the discipline of philosophy per se (what does it mean to exist?). The latter is outside the scope of this dissertation.
2.1.1. Social Constructivism and ‘Difference’ from Social Constructionism

For several reasons, both ‘social constructivism’ and ‘social constructionism’ are used in the literature, and there is not total agreement about differences or overlaps in meaning, when to use which mode of spelling, and whether the difference in spelling is at all important. Gergen (1985, p. 266) uses the prefix *social* and the spelling *constructionism* to make a distinction between other traditions using the term *constructivism* and his own philosophical views of *social constructivism/constructionism*. Burr (2001, p. 2), following Gergen (1985), also labels it *social constructionism*. Burr and Gergen do not differentiate between social constructivism and social constructionism as such (cf. Young & Collin, 2004, p. 378), but refer to it as *constructionism* to avoid using the spelling *constructivism* altogether.

There are also more practical reasons for the confusion relating to spelling. In Danish, there is a tendency to primarily use the term ‘Socialkonstruktivisme’ rather than ‘Socialkonstruktionisme’, where ‘Socialkonstruktivisme’ covers both social constructivism and social constructionism. In English, different authors variously refer to either –tionism or –tivism, and it is not always clear whether they are making a distinction, view them as related, or just prefer one way of spelling.

Young and Collin (2004) note that “[…] social constructivism […] shares several features of social constructionism.” (p. 378). In their text, a distinction between social constructionism and social constructivism is grounded in a slight difference in research objects, which is related to the broad distinction between constructivism (without ‘social’ as a prefix) as giving primacy to the individual mind, and constructionism as giving primacy to broader social constructions (cf. Young & Collin, 2004). “[…] social constructivists […] recognize that influences on individual construction are derived from and preceded by social relationships.” (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 376). Thus, the adoption of the spelling –tivism indicates that social constructivism is a social constructionism that involves more interest in and consideration for the individual in relation to the social construction, rather than a focus on social constructions per se (where ‘defaced’ people construct something and are affected by it). In other words, social constructivism gives a face to the agents doing/taking part in, affecting and being affected by social construction.

Some do not distinguish between social constructivism and social constructionism at all. In my view they are rather alike, inasmuch as there is more that unites than separates them when comparing them to other philosophies of science. The exception is in their unit of analysis and approach to the relationship between the individual and the social, where social constructivism looks more at the individual as part of social constructions (with a certain view of what an individual is) and social
constructionism has as its unit of analysis social construction per se (cf. Young & Collin, 2004, p. 376) (see also section 2.1.3. on the individual and the social). As such, the difference (if any) between social constructionism and social constructivism is primarily a question of epistemological interests, since to a large degree they do share the underlying ideas about ‘reality’ as social construction and the importance of language in both creating and studying social constructions (see section 2.2.1.).

I refer to the position followed here as social constructivism. This spelling is more in line with my focus (based on Young and Collin’s distinction above), since the ‘tivism’ spelling highlights the agency (in a social context) of those who produce, rather than only focusing on that which is produced, i.e. (in what can be the focus as object of analysis) there is more balance between the individual and the social. It should be noted that what is meant by ‘individual’ is somewhat of a reframing from other philosophical positions, inasmuch as the individual is an individual because of a certain historical, social and relational context. Put differently, the actors who play a part in socially constructing do so from a certain position in the world (more on this in section 2.1.3.). Thus, I also use the spelling to signal my focus in terms of object of analysis, i.e. that I am among those who consider ‘reality’ to be a social construction who focus a bit more on agentic individuals in a socially constructed ‘reality’ (that they are in a socially constructed ‘reality’, and that they take part in constructing it with others).

Thus, I do not focus on OS as a coherent construction (as in social constructionism, where the focus is on the product, that which is socially constructed), but investigate the patterns that emerge in and across the discourse of the different informants. For social constructivists, there are individuals as actors in a world that is socially constructed, social constructions affect the individual, and the individual plays a part in affecting the social constructions. In other words, rather than focusing solely on that which is constructed, social constructivism includes an eye for the people in the process of construction, i.e. those who construct (together, in a social context), and their agency (and how they construct), thus acknowledging the agents (individuals relating to and affected by the social) who are part of producing together (see Young & Collin, 2004, p. 376).

In this way, social constructivism and social constructionism can be seen as complementary (and social constructionism as something holistic). Their respective focus on different aspects of what is socially constructed, how and by whom, are both important and should not be separated but linked. Having shown why I prefer the spelling social constructivism here, in the following sections I outline social constructivist assumptions. Where relevant, I draw on Burr and Gergen’s thoughts to the extent
that they are applicable to a social constructivist approach to the unit of analysis and the relationship between the individual and the social.

2.1.2. Social Constructivist Assumptions about ‘Reality’

Social constructivists regard ‘reality’ as socially constructed. ‘Reality’ does not contain inherent qualities that we can ‘access’ without being influenced by our social context and relations. I write of ‘reality’ in quotation marks to highlight that social constructivists view ‘reality’ as socially constructed, which means that multiple ‘realities’ can co-exist. This differs from the realist view that there is one true reality. Keaton and Bodie (2011) describe the social construction of ‘objects’ in the following way:

“The social process of defining the object (i.e., its construction) enables it to exist in a social context, to have meaning. Given this SC position, the confusion often surrounds just exactly what is being socially constructed: It isn’t the physical composition of an object (i.e., its material arrangement) that is brought into existence, but its social composition, the ideas which define that object within a social context. In other words, communication changes how objects are perceived and the range of potential meanings they can embody.” (p. 192).

In other words, that which is socially constructed is the meaning, something’s ontological being as something specific. That there is a physical presence is not a construction, but what it is and the meaning we attach to it is. Its being real as something specific is a social construction. Gergen (2015) notes that “To be sure, there is something, but when you try to describe what that something is, you will inevitably rely on some tradition of sense making.” (p. 5, emphasis in original). Thus, there might be ‘something’ but that something, the meaning attached to it, is constructed, e.g. in the way we talk about it, and it gets a presence in our world of meaning through our way of talking it into being (see also section 2.2.1. on social constructivism and discourse).

Keaton and Bodie (2011) note that: “Meaning and our perceptions of ‘reality’ are socially constructed; our ideas about the real, in turn, influence our behaviour, including how we communicate with others. Through this process we define objects, enabling them to exist in a social context.” (p. 195). This idea of ‘ideas about the real’ affecting behaviour shows that social constructions are consequential. However, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966), in everyday life, we take for granted that ‘reality’ is a construction. Burr (2001) notes that: “Berger and Luckmann’s account shows how the world can be socially constructed by the social practices of people, but at the same time be experienced by them as if the nature of their world is pre-given and fixed.” (p. 10). It then
becomes part of the social constructivist project to investigate taken-for-granted social realities and knowledge about these (cf. Burr, 2001, p. 3). That is, social constructivism in a sense ‘deconstructs’ to understand how something is constructed, and how the people who construct it go about it. And social constructivism acknowledges that individuals are agentic in relation to social constructions (e.g. playing a part in maintaining them or changing them). People make social constructions.

Social constructivism relies on an antirealist ontology (Burr, 1995, in Young & Collin, 2004, p. 377), and an antipositivist epistemology (Kuada, 2012, p. 73), i.e. ‘reality’ is not something ‘out there’ that researchers create knowledge about as tabula rasa observers. Within the framework of different broad paradigmatic orientations that Kuada (2012) presents, social constructivism is in the realm of interpretive interactionalism (and subjectivism) (p. 80). For interpretive interactionalists: “The argument here is that environments are enacted through interactions with other actors within the environment and a sense-making process through which individuals assign and read meanings into the environments that they co-create with others.” (Kuada, 2012, p. 80). As regards the interactionist perspective, Kuada (2012) notes that: “The best-known proponents of the interactionist perspective in social science are scholars who subscribe to a social constructivist perspective on understanding social worlds.” (Kuada, 2012, p. 78). And as regards the interpretive: “[…] an interpretive paradigm requires investigators to perceive their actors as engaged in continuous interpretation, meaning creation and sense-making of events and their contexts.” (Kuada, 2012, p. 77). As such, interpretivism in relation to interactionism in a social constructivist sense implies that individuals are situated in a social context (relations, culture, history) that they make sense about, and the social context itself is both what they make sense about and something that influences the sense they make (as they are situated in it). In the next section, I expand on the relationship between the individual and the social for social constructivists.

2.1.3. The Individual and the Social
As indicated above, social constructivists have a specific understanding of ‘an individual’ and the relationship between individuals and the social (also as other individuals). The social world is not separate from the individuals in it, and neither are individuals separate from the social world around them, as Cunliffe (2008) observes: “[…] social reality is not separate from us, but […] social realities and ourselves are intimately interwoven as each shapes and is shaped by the other in everyday interactions.” (p. 124). This idea about the intimate relationship between the social and the individual is expressed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) as: “[…] man […] and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer.” (p. 78). Thus, there are both individuals and
social worlds, but they should not (and cannot) be totally distinguished from each other because they are necessarily interwoven. Stacey (2001) criticises the dualism that is sometimes presented between the individual and the social and giving primacy to either the one or the other. In one way, social constructivism represents a dualist (i.e. both/and) perspective which acknowledges both (and the connection), as opposed to dualism or ‘binary’ (either/or)\(^4\) perspectives.

Social constructivism holds that we understand the world through attaching meaning to it, and the concepts and categories we use for this, and that are the outcome of this, are socially affected, e.g. by our relationships and the communities that we are a part of. Gergen (2015) notes that social constructivism is “[…] holding that we understand the world through mental categories, but we acquire those categories through social relationships.” (p. 30). In other words, individuals have mental categories, but they acquire these mental categories in and through relations. This implies a view of the individual that cannot be removed or separated from the social (even cognitively). Thus, in social constructivism, it is difficult to say individual without remembering the social, and vice versa (not saying a without saying b). Gergen (2015) notes that:

“[…] what we take to be knowledge does not begin with the lone individual observing and recording the world for what it is. Rather, as we confront the world, our descriptions and explanations emerge from our existence in relationships. It is out of relationships that we foster our vocabularies, assumptions, and theories about the nature of the world (including ourselves), and the way we go about studying or carrying out research.” (p. 13).

In one sense, what makes an individual is partly how her/his social relationships and social experiences differ from those of other people: “[…] when we say we live in a world, it means that we live in a series of situations where interaction is going on between an individual and objects and/or other persons.” (J. Kim, 2016, p. 71).

The way I approach ‘reality’ is that there are individuals, and we can treat them as objects of analysis, remembering that they are implicated in complex webs of social relations, and we have to take these into account. Thus, treating people as objects in this context means that they are subjects in webs of social relations. I am not saying that individuals have no agency in creating themselves, but that that agency is facilitated by the resources made available to them in relation to their web of social relations. In my view, therefore, individuals are (subjects) in social settings that they affect and are

\(^4\) Schultze and Stabell (2004) characterise dualism as ‘either/or’ and dualist as ‘both/and’.
affected by (and constructions are in relation to and affected by that social setting). Thus, in my analytical focus, this relationship between the individual and the social is important. Considering construction as a process of production (instead of focusing only on the outcome of production) highlights the role of agents in the course of taking part in the world that they are socially constructing (e.g., as they negotiate, maintain or change aspects of it). As the participants go about this, not all constructions are created equal, or taken up as equally relevant, and they can change.

Thus, as regards the relationship between the individual and the social, social constructivism can be viewed as a position between radical constructivism (e.g., von Glasersfeld, 1990) and social constructionism. Radical constructivism is focused on the individual and gives primacy to what an individual cognitively constructs. Social constructionism focuses on that which is constructed and how it affects people, thus giving primacy to the social, and how it imposes on people. Social constructivism acknowledges that the socially constructed not only imposes on, but is also affected by, the individual, i.e., social constructivism acknowledges individuals as agentic.

The overall focus here is not on the social construction as such (social constructionism), but on the individuals as actors in a world that is socially constructed, i.e., the social construction affects the individual, and the individual plays a part in affecting the social construction (social constructivism). This is a philosophical stance where agency is given to individuals and the social in tandem, inasmuch as they coexist and facilitate each other.

2.1.4. Social Constructivist Assumptions about Knowledge

In this section, I focus on the questions of what and how in relation to knowledge for social constructivists, i.e., the epistemological questions of what and how knowledge is possible (considering our ontological stance, how is knowledge possible about a socially constructed world). This also entails considering the role of the researcher.

According to Stake (1995): “Most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered.” (p. 99). For a social constructivist, this construction of knowledge takes place through interpretation affected by social environment, i.e., it is interpretation and construction in a setting (time and place). The knowledge is constructed in, and in relation to, some context. Locke and Golden-Biddle (1997) describe this in the following way:

“A socially constructed view of science suggests that knowledge cannot be known separately from the knower, because the content of knowledge is influenced by social practices and
interactions, and because the determination of what ideas count as knowledge is a meaning-making activity “enacted” in particular communities.” (p. 1025).

Thus, there are ‘knowers’, and these knowers are bound in relationships and social situations, and their knowledge is affected by these. This applies to both constructing knowledge in research and the specific context here, where knowledge in OS is of particular interest (the theoretical framework in chapter 5 builds on theoretical perspectives in line with the above view of knowledge).

This view is also why organisational knowledge does not exist on its own, but is dependent on people. Alvesson (2001) states that: “As a socially constructed phenomenon, knowledge does not exist on its own, but is dependent on social recognition; without being perceived and recognized by others, for all practical matters, knowledge does not appear as such […]” (p. 872). Taken together, the two quotations from Locke and Golden-Biddle (1997) and Alvesson (2001) indicate that there are individual but socially situated knowers, and these together construct what counts as knowledge in a community. This collective aspect is also evident in Stake (1995): “Although the reality we seek is of our own making, it is a collective making. We seek the well-tuned reality, one bearing up under scrutiny and challenge.” (p. 102). Thus, the ‘reality’ that we perceive is a social construction, and our knowledge of that construction is also socially constructed.

Thus, we say that knowledge is socially constructed since it is (to some extent) socially conditioned, constituted in, and internalised in relation to a social context. Burr (2001) notes that: “It is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated.” (p. 4). Coupled with the section on the relationship between the individual and the social, this explains why multiple ‘realities’ exist when ‘reality’ is understood as a social construction. In our daily lives, we have different webs of relations, and thus we have different networks that we construct ‘reality’ with and in relation to. This also means that we do not know the same things or know them in the same way (some relationships we share, others are different), because we are part of different sets of social webs (as also noted in Rasmussen, 2016, p. 12). This sometimes leads to different perspectives for making sense of the world, since we relate to different communities for deciding what counts as (relevant) knowledge.

Thus, people make sense of ‘reality’ through interpretation in a social, historical and cultural context. As social constructivism is an interpretivist paradigm (Kuada, 2012), this means that we make sense of the socially constructed ‘reality’ through interpretation, and in turn, our interpretations are also affected by the social realities that we are part of. That is, we construct knowledge about socially
constructed ‘reality’ through interpretation, which itself takes place situated socially (within a socially constructed ‘reality’).

2.1.4.1. Acknowledging the Role of the Researcher

Social constructivists acknowledge the role and impact of the researcher as regards different aspects of conducting research, e.g. both gathering (or constructing) empirical material and analysing it. The researcher is already in the world, not observing it from the ‘outside’: “Since the turn of the 20th century at least, we have known that there is no point of observation for describing the world that lies outside the world.” (Lehmann, Qvortrup, & Walther, 2007, p. 9). Thus, I am myself part of a socially constructed ‘reality’ which influences how and what I am researching. For social constructivists, therefore, knowledge construction cannot be reduced to the outcome of a spectator objectively observing. For instance, narratives in interviews are produced because of an intervention, they are not lying around. The interview setting itself is constructive, a setting for making meaning about experienced and constructed social ‘reality’. In this way, an interview and interview talk is co-produced between the researcher and the informants (see, for example, Schultze & Avital, 2011, p. 4-5).

The interpretivist and interactionalist assumptions informing social constructivism mean recognising that a researcher interacts with the research “object” (that is itself a construction), and that her socially influenced interpretations affect how she approaches the field, e.g. that OS is constructed as an academic discipline in the first place is something that has occurred through negotiations. The discipline did not just exist for someone to pick up and start to conduct research on (see also Kastberg, 2011a, on the construction of disciplines).

One implication of a social constructivist approach to knowledge is the importance of not taking the object of analysis for granted as something stable. Mik-Meyer and Järvinen (2005) note that, in a constructivist/poststructuralist tradition, the object of analysis is understood as fluid and unstable (p. 9). When researching something as a construction and being constructed, therefore, it is important to acknowledge the object of analysis as ambiguous or multifaceted, i.e. constructions can change (inasmuch as the meaning we attribute to something can change, thereby changing e.g. how important we find it), and also as shaped or affected by the (intervention of a) researcher (Mik-Meyer & Järvinen, 2005, p. 9). This relativism does not mean that research is futile, but that in understanding ‘reality’ as socially constructed we must acknowledge the condition that research is always a perspective on the world, and this recognition is important in qualifying what we think we know and
how. Social constructivism acknowledges that interpretations of the researched are influenced by the social ‘reality’ that the researcher herself is a part of. As such, an interpretation (and understanding) of the empirical material is not independent of context. Rather, social constructivism acknowledges how the context (of both the researcher and the ‘field’) is inevitably part of the researched constructed ‘reality’.

Epistemology concerns “[...] the conditions that make knowledge and knowing possible.” (Savolainen, 2009, Related literature section, para. 2). In a social constructivist perspective, these conditions relate to how the researcher is part of a social world and that interpretation is part of making sense of the world, and this is done while being in the world, not observing it from a place ‘outside’. Furthermore, the central aspect of meaning implies that it would not make sense to separate what one is investigating from its context, since that would be separating it from that which is part of giving it its meaning, and in relation to which it is given meaning. With phenomena involving humans and emotion, for example, you cannot just neutrally observe behaviour and extrapolate from that, but need to make sense of (interpret) the behaviour in and in relation to a context, since the participants act within this as a frame for meaning. This also means that there is a kind of double construction via interpretation going on. The informants construct accounts about their experiences (based on their interpretations of the/in a social setting), and I as the researcher then analyse (and interpret) these constructions.

2.1.4.2. Knowledge at Three Levels
Knowledge is a central construct in this dissertation and present at three levels: the epistemological, the theoretical and the everyday, practical level. Epistemologists are concerned with the question of “how knowledge is possible” (cf. Qvortrup, 2004a, p. 82), which I have discussed above. As regards knowledge at a theoretical level, in my research project, the epistemological ideas about relations combined with a specific definition of ‘individual’ tie in with theoretical definitions of knowledge that also recognise its complexity (see chapter 4).

Since what counts as knowledge is a social construction, knowledge can look different on an everyday, practical level and in philosophical works on the topic, i.e. from different perspectives. One might think that the definition of knowledge is somewhat taken for granted on an everyday level, where a more practical concern might be: “how is knowledge put to use?”. In everyday concerns, therefore, it is not what knowledge is that matters, but how it is made useful/made use of. My empirical material will be used to discuss how knowledge is approached by managers and newcomers
within the context of OS in start-ups, i.e. the empirical material is an example of everyday accounts of knowledge that I can then discuss in relation to theoretical and epistemological ways of thinking about knowledge. Qvortrup (2004a) notes that the difference between an epistemological and a theoretical (or what we here might call a disciplinary) focus on knowledge is that the former emphasises how knowledge is possible, while the latter focuses on how knowledge is used and ‘takes place’ (p. 82). An example of the latter in the context of my research would be how newcomers ‘use’ knowledge and how knowledge takes place for them in relation to being new in the organisations.

In terms of the theoretical field I draw on as a new way to inform the study of OS, OKC as a field and the strands of organisation studies, knowledge management (KM) and communication theory that it brings together is also in line with a social constructivist position, for instance in the way communication is understood (cf. section 4.2.3.), and also understanding knowledge as something situated and relational (section 4.2.2.), which is related to the view in social constructivism.

2.2. Relationship with Other Aspects of the Research Design

In addition to my social constructivist philosophical position, my research design includes an abductive and reflexive approach, a qualitative methodology and case study design, the methods drawn on for constructing and analysing empirical material, and my theoretical framework. Importantly, these aspects are not altogether separate elements, but are interrelated, and the research design and research should be understood as dynamic and reflexive.

Having outlined my philosophical position above, in the following sections I first note how this position relates to the research questions, how this is related to a focus on discourse, and why discourse is interesting for a social constructivist (I go into specific discourse methodical aspects in chapter 7). I then discuss my abductive approach and reflexivity, highlighting the interplay between theory and empirical material. Throughout, I touch on methodological, methodical and theoretical aspects which are elaborated further in separate chapters. These sections are important to understanding how the research contributes to our knowledge in a social constructivist sense.

2.2.1. Research Questions, Social Constructivism and Discourse

On an overall level, the social constructivist position has consequences regarding which questions are asked in the first place, i.e. which questions are considered relevant, and how these questions are asked. In terms of my research agenda, the philosophical stance is evident through the research interest in how OS is (socially) constructed, and how the informants talk about knowledge in this
regard. In other words what is investigated is how newcomers construct and try to make sense of a construction (the start-up) within the social ‘reality’ of the workplace they are becoming part of and contributing to, and how managers construct their accounts about welcoming newcomers.

The connection between my philosophical position and the focus on how informants talk about the topics in question goes through social constructivism’s interest in and focus on language use, which emphasises social constructions as accomplished through discourse (e.g. Burr, 1995, p. 5; Gergen, 2015, p. 72). I elaborate on discourse and my analytic method in the methods chapter (7). Here, I focus on language and discourse in relation to the social constructivist interest in language, and the implications for my research.

Discourse is both constructed and constructive (cf. Potter, 1996, p. 97-98; Potter, 2004/2009, p. 610), i.e. it is constructed as we speak, and it constructs “versions of the world” (Potter, 1996, p. 97). The constructive nature of discourse can be seen from the notion of performativity: “[…] we bring states of affairs into being as a result of what we say and what we do.” (Paltridge, 2006, p. 12). In other words, discourse constructs and changes ‘reality’. This means that, as an epistemological consequence, in order to answer my research questions, I must pay attention to how the topics of socialisation and knowledge are talked into being in the interviews, in what ways, and what forms the accounts take, i.e. how do the newcomers and managers construct socialisation and knowledge in their accounts. Since the phenomena are constructed as they speak, the language use is then constructive in terms of how they then orient to those topics. It is then interesting whether there are any shared aspects (i.e. whether their versions overlap or not), to what extent, how and why. Put differently, because of its constructed and constructive qualities, which means that discourse is the communicative realisation of something, it is relevant to employ a discursive approach to study how the informants discursively realise OS and knowledge, e.g. which dynamics they make real.

The distinct view of language in social constructivism is also where this paradigm differs from other perspectives, especially the more positivist and objectivist paradigms. For social constructivists, language is not a ‘neutral’ vessel or a ‘clean’ channel. This is opposed to realist positions, which hold that behind any language there is an independent reality which determines, and is mirrored by, language. Andersen (2013) notes that a social constructivist ontology is the starting point for discourse theory (p. 27). Specifically: “[…] you construct reality, at the same time as you function in it and observe it as people.” (p. 27, my translation). Thus, the ontology of language here is not a 1:1 relationship between a life world and language as objectively reporting on this, but rather language
as constructed and constructive in time and space. Understanding discourse as both constructed and constructive shows that there is no linear relationship between language and a reality ‘out there’, but that there is an ongoing (re)construction.

Ontologically, social constructivism means a different approach to how (what we experience as) ‘reality’ comes about, and this has the epistemological consequence of a different approach to what and how we can know about this ‘reality’. Language does not reflect an objective reality or inner states as fixed ontological realities (a realist approach). Social constructivism acknowledges and relies on the constructed and constructive nature of language and language use (i.e. you cannot just ‘tap’ into others’ experiences via language as a neutral medium). In turn, these constructed and constructive elements themselves become central as phenomena of interest, i.e. language is not interesting as just a tool for expressing and accessing inner feelings and life worlds, it is interesting in itself because of its constructed and constructive (and thus consequential) nature.

2.2.2. Research Approach and Reflexivity

In this section, I discuss my abductive approach and reflexivity as a specific ‘logic’ or guiding approach to my inquiry. This approach is related to my social constructivist position, in that it pertains to the type of knowledge sought and how it is produced, considering what I have previously written about the ontological and epistemological dimensions of social constructivism.

As should be evident from the following paragraphs, I see abduction and reflexivity as being related. I see this as a way of showing how, even though research is often not linear, it still has some kind of forward (or rather onward) momentum. Despite continuous fluctuation back and forth (e.g. between theory and empirical material), and a continuous (re)production, the starting point is never quite the same, but always builds on previous reflections. In other words, you do not suddenly jump from a level of thought in one part of the process to an entirely different level of abstraction in another; rather, understanding is developed along the way. The ongoing reflexive process means that one is moving (continuously developing understanding), but it also means that the researcher must recognise this gradual movement by continuously being reflexive about the work.

This not only acknowledges the presence of the researcher, but also the attempt to understand the informants and reflections about how the object of analysis, as it is increasingly better understood, has consequences for the theoretical implications. Social constructivism does not consider the researcher as a neutral tool who produces tabula rasa observations about an objectively existing reality, but acknowledges her as active and present, that she is herself socially situated, and that,
through pursuing “[…] understanding and meaning insight into the social reality” (Højberg, 2013, p. 318, my translation), the perspective of the informants is not just observed, but something which is in itself consequential. As mentioned previously, the importance of context as something which the research object is embedded in, and cannot be separated from, means recognising that one is studying a phenomenon that does not just exist in and of itself.

2.2.2.1. Abduction and the Interplay of Empirical Material and Theory

In terms of the guiding logic, the approach here can best be described as abductive, or consisting of abductive steps, rather than inductive or deductive. Whereas an inductive approach is considered to be related to theory development, and a deductive approach to theory testing (cf. e.g. Bryman, 2012, p. 24-26), Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) note that abduction describes how: “During the process, the empirical area of application is successively developed, and the theory (the proposed overarching pattern) is also adjusted and refined.” (p. 5).

Thus, I describe the approach here as primarily abductive because of the continuously developing relationship between the empirical material and literature/theory. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) note that:

“Abduction starts from an empirical basis, just like induction, but does not reject theoretical preconceptions and is in that respect closer to deduction. The analysis of empirical fact(s) may very well be combined with, or preceded by, studies of previous theory in the literature, not as a mechanical application on single cases, but as a source of inspiration for the discovery of patterns that bring understanding.” (p. 5).

Abduction can be combined with a social constructivist position, inasmuch as social constructivists would agree with the fluctuation between existing theory, empirical material and implications for theory/new understandings. Indeed, Brænder, Kølvraa, and Laustsen (2014) state that “[…] analyses within a social constructivist paradigm in particular – often will make use of inductive (or rather abductive) strategies for analysis (that is developing the theoretical framework for the answering of the problem in interplay with the specific empirical analyses) […]” (p. 253, my translation). Thus, for a social constructivist, the ‘interplay’ of theory and empirical material is important.

Blaikie (2010, p. 72) notes that abduction is used to achieve the research purpose of understanding, and Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) also note that: “In its focus on underlying patterns, abduction also differs advantageously from the two other, shallower models of explanation [induction and
deduction]. The difference is, in other words, that it includes understanding as well.” (p. 5, emphasis in original). As regards the ‘underlying patterns’ mentioned here, it is important to note that in my research, because of my social constructivist position, these are understood as constructed.

In my research, although I have a theoretical framework, the purpose as such is not to test theory. Rather, it is to investigate what new knowledge can come from combining the empirical and literature/theory. This involves exploring how the fields of OS and OKC might be integrated (theoretical framework), exploring the empirical material, and considering these in relation to each other. By doing this, the researcher can achieve the kind of understanding which Blaikie (2010) and Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) emphasise as an important result of an abductive process. It also means that the research is explorative not just in relation to empirical aspects, but in relation to multiple relationships, such as the one between empirical material and theory/literature (e.g. what can OS theory learn/can it be nuanced based on the empirical material and OKC literature? What is the relationship between the theoretical framework and the empirical material?) and the relationship between different literatures. In this way, the abductive also means that emic (seen from within, the informants’ perspective) and etic (viewed from the outside, the researcher’s/literature/theoretical perspective) meet throughout the research process.

As such, although I had some ideas about the phenomenon (as a social constructivist, I recognise the role of the researcher), I was open to what informants said, and could always read more literature, or consider the literature already found, in light of this. Thus, in my project, it is especially some of the work with the literature review, theoretical framework and construction of empirical material that takes place at the same time, and thus influence each other. This is related to Riessman’s (1993) notion of analytic induction: “A focus for analysis often emerges, or becomes clearer, as I see what respondents say.” (p. 579). For instance, although I knew about the notion of ‘outcomes’ in OS, my initial contact with informants made it clearer that it was relevant and meaningful to specifically include this in the theoretical framework (the outcomes from an OKC perspective), since it made a relevant discussion of (nuancing our understanding of) outcomes in the context of OS in start-ups and from the perspective of OKC possible. Thus, the OS literature on outcomes is coupled with and discussed in relation to the OKC perspective, which in turn is discussed in relation to the empirical material (which suggested and confirmed that outcomes would be an analytically relevant aspect of OS to include in pursuing the agenda and purpose of my research).
Another example is that I (re)read Field and Coetzer (2008) in the period where I was also coding interviews. During that time, I noted different thoughts and reflected on tendencies that I saw emerging across my interviews. In Field and Coetzer (2008) there were different points I thought I might be able to relate to some of those tendencies. Therefore, in my notes for the more specific analysis of the empirical material (after coding), I jotted down quotations from Field and Coetzer (2008) next to the notes about tendencies (emerging patterns) in the empirical material. In other words, when I encountered literature that I thought might meaningfully be related to some of the tendencies, I would note it down so that I could use it when I was writing the different chapters, but also so that, as I was going through the analysis, I could reflect upon whether it applied to (all of) the different interviews, how and why.

A third and final example is that I would sometimes follow something in an interview or ask for more elaboration about a specific point, because something the informant said might remind me of something I had read, so I would follow up on it because it might be relevant.

The relationship between abduction and reflexivity is then also important here. My research has an element of abduction, because the different elements of my research, because of reflexivity, are in constant check and conversation with each other. The acknowledgement of the role that reflexivity plays means that I do not claim to be an inductivist (or deductivist) as I move through literature and theory work, and empirical material and analysing. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) mention that: “Abduction is probably the method used in real practice in many case-study-based research processes (Sköldberg, 1991).” (p. 4, emphasis in original). I elaborate on my case study design and specific use of methods in chapters 6 and 7.

2.2.2.2. Reflexivity
Arguably, all research designs and research should be reflexive. Here, however, reflexivity is not just something general, but is centrally related to abduction as a logic, since this approach to knowledge production requires rigorous reflexivity. I thus wish to show that reflexivity is an integral part of the make-up of my research and my approach to research.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009; 2018) have presented a framework for ‘reflexive methodology’, and while I do not draw on the whole framework here, since it is a methodological framework in its own right, I do use a central point they make about reflexivity between multiple aspects of research. This is that, reflexivity here, besides reflexivity in general, not only means working reflectively with individual aspects of research (i.e. the planning, conduct and writing up of research should be
characterised by reflexivity), but also that these aspects are not, and should not be, detached from one another. These aspects are interconnected, and reflexivity helps to elucidate the implications of this interconnectedness. So reflexivity pertains not only to different aspects of research in isolation, but also to cutting across the different aspects, since they are (recognised as) intricately related. In this way, reflexivity is recognised as part and parcel of knowledge production and is central to an abductive approach to generating understanding and producing knowledge. It means acknowledging the reflexive and dynamic character of research. For instance, even though something is presented sequentially, in practice the work might not be as sequential, and elements of it can have relationships that extend both backwards and forwards in terms of how they are related to each other.

As regards more specific aspects of conducting my research, I elaborated on the relationship between empirical material and theory in the section on abduction above. But there is also a relationship between the theories that I draw on and social constructivism. I touched on this in relation to OKC in section 2.1.4.2., and I return to it in relation to both OKC and how I approach OS in the literature and theory chapters (chapters 3-5). Here, theories should be understood as perspectives on the world, and I rely on theories which are in line with my social constructivist position.

I regard reflexivity and transparence as facilitating one another. Of course, reflexivity is not just about stating that you are reflexive, it is very much a question of showing that reflexivity in action. I return explicitly to reflexivity and transparence in section 7.3. on the quality of my empirical investigation.

2.2.3. Moving on with the Philosophical Position in Mind
In this chapter, I have outlined my philosophical position, and explained how it relates to a number of other research design aspects. This lays the ground for the literature and theoretical work in chapters 3-5, and the methodological and methodical choices in chapters 6 and 7. Throughout these chapters, at relevant points I return to how my choices regarding theoretical, methodological and methodical aspects relate to the philosophical position outlined here.
3. Literature Review: Organisational Socialisation


The purpose of this chapter is to outline research in OS in general, introducing central concepts and perspectives, and then to review the literature that is relevant for the topic and analytical focus here, namely OS in ICT start-ups. Blaikie (2010) notes that “The aim of the literature review is to indicate what the state of knowledge is with respect to each research question, or group of questions.” (p. 56). Thus, the research questions serve as the guiding logic for what is included in this review of the OS literature, and the review is structured in such a way to make the ‘state of knowledge’ clear. First, therefore, I present a brief overview of the OS literature in general, starting with a section on terminology (3.1.), and then outline different dimensions of and traditions in OS research (3.2.). This then forms a general background for the following sections, where I focus on the literature specifically related to the present research: Section 3.3. focuses on context, including OS in start-ups and small companies, OS in groups, and OS in software development; section 3.4. deals with learning and knowledge in the OS literature; and in section 3.5., I touch on the outcomes of OS. The review covers both theoretical and empirical studies. The final section (3.6.) sets out my position vis-à-vis the specific definitions of and approach to OS that I subscribe to, which I relate to OS in a start-up context. Thus, I first outline OS in general, then deal with specific aspects relevant to the topics here, and then end the chapter with bringing these together. In the subsequent review of OKC (chapter 4), I present the OKC perspective and the aspects of it that I draw on. In chapter 5, I then present my theoretical framework focusing on how I link the two fields of OS and OKC.

The literature review takes the form of a qualitative review, also referred to as a ‘traditional narrative literature review’ (Rozas & Klein, 2010, p. 389-390, p. 394-395). Since my research is explorative, I have chosen a literature review approach which is in line with this, rather than doing a systematic review with the purpose of generating hypotheses. In this way, I cover the central topics, while also allowing the review to develop as focus points for the project were developing. Thus, it has been a process of generating an overview and specifying focus points in a broad literature.
A long-standing criticism of the OS literature is that it is fragmented (Batistič & Kaše, 2015; Saks & Gruman, 2012, p. 42), so fragmented in fact that some (e.g. Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006) state that there is a relative lack of OS theory (p. 493), while others (e.g. Batistič & Kaše, 2015) state that OS literature is more theoretical than empirical. Based on others’ criticism, Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006, p. 498) argue that there is a lack of a coherent theory. Batistič and Kaše (2015) also point to this kind of fragmentation. Saks and Gruman (2012) mention that there is a lack of focus on practices in praxis (p. 27). Thus, there is not only fragmentation in terms of theory versus empirical studies, but also fragmentation within them.

3.1. Clearing up the Terminology and Comments on Neighbouring Fields

The long history of research in OS, together with the range of other disciplines which contribute to it, its relationship to neighbouring fields, and the fragmentation mentioned above, has resulted in a wealth of terms, notions and concepts that one must make sense of and be able to distinguish between when working in this area. In the following subsections, I review definitions of OS and touch on its relationship with, and differences from, other related fields.

3.1.1. Occupational Socialisation and Organisational Socialisation

The literature on socialisation in a work-related context has taken two directions. The first deals with organisational socialisation (OS), whereas the other focuses on vocational/occupational (also termed professional) socialisation. Although my research draws on the former, it is nonetheless useful to understand what lies behind the two different prefaces to socialisation studies.

T. N. Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, and Tucker (2007) regard the difference between the two directions (OS and occupational socialisation) as concerning the type of adjustment in question: “Organizational and occupational socialization are different types of adjustment. For example, learning to be a nurse is different from learning to work at a new hospital as a nurse.” (p. 711). Thus, OS is the study of adjusting and transitioning into a specific workplace, while occupational socialisation is about learning and adjusting to a specific type of job (an ‘occupation’).

Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012) describe the relationship between OS and occupational (professional) socialisation as a discussion of when ‘organisational’ socialisation begins (p. 9), i.e. whether it begins when someone has anticipations in relation to a specific organisation, or whether, in a sense, it already begins during childhood (cf. Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012, p. 9). Following Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012), if OS is in relation to a specific organisation, then occupational
socialisation comes before OS, i.e. learning to work (in a profession) e.g. through education comes before learning to carry out that profession in a specific organisation. Since a profession is acted out in an organisational context, the two overlap and can also clash.

3.1.2. Defining Organisational Socialisation
The literature is awash with definitions and characterisations of OS. In this section, I discuss the central definitions. In section 3.6., I then identify the definitions of OS I employ in relation to studying OS in a start-up context.

Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner (1994) observe that definitions of OS have progressed from the general to the more detailed (p. 730). Field and Coetzer (2011) echo this in commenting on the development of definitions over time:

“Defining OS has progressed from a general description of ‘learning the ropes’ (Schein, 1968; Van Maanen, 1978), to being defined as a learning process through which newcomers make the transition from organisational ‘outsider’ to effective participating and contributing ‘insider’, while adjusting to their roles in the context of their new workplace environment (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo & Tucker, 2007; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Feldman, 1976; Feldman, 1981).” (p. 82).

Schein (1968) notes that, broadly speaking, socialisation is “[…] the process by which a new member learns and adapts to the value system, the norms, and the required behavior patterns of an organization, society, or group.” (p. 1). He defines OS more specifically in the following way: “Organizational socialization is the process of “learning the ropes,” the process of being indoctrinated and trained, the process of being taught what is important in an organization or some subunit thereof.” (p. 2). Schein is generally known for his work on culture, and this is also evident in his work on socialisation, which has influenced much of subsequent OS research. Bacharach (1989), mentioning Schein, notes that some organisational theorists view culture as “an integrative normative device” (p. 499), and that “[…] their implicit functional orientation (placing emphasis on sustaining the organization as a whole) may make them vulnerable to criticism that they serve the interests of management.” (p. 499). The functionalist control ideology, i.e. newcomers needing to be ‘indoctrinated’, underlying Schein’s early OS definition could partly explain the focus on ‘what the organisation does’ in the first wave of OS research (section 3.2.2.).
Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) seminal definition of OS as “[…] the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role.” (p. 211), focuses on OS as the process by which newcomers learn about their organisational role, and, according to Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012, p. 9), is also the most cited. In an earlier definition by Van Maanen (1976), he uses the term ‘member’ instead of role (p. 67), i.e. socialisation is defined as becoming a member, rather than learning a role.

Chao’s (1997) and Taormina’s (1997) definitions are examples of more comprehensive and specific definitions. Chao (1997) offers the following definition:

“Organizational socialization is often identified as the fundamental process by which an individual learns how to adjust to the performance demands of the job and the culture of the organization (Chao, 1988). This process encompasses the learning of organizational goals and values, job-specific duties and expected behaviors, and the social skills needed to establish positive and productive relationships with other organizational members.” (p. 130).

Taormina (1997) describes his definition as a “comprehensive definition”, because it includes both socio-psychological and content aspects:

“Organizational socialization is the process by which a person secures relevant job skills, acquires a functional level of organizational understanding, attains supportive social interactions with coworkers, and generally accepts the established ways of a particular organization.” (p. 29, emphasis in original).

In contrast, Cooper-Thomas and Anderson’s (2006) definition is broad but much less specified: “Organizational socialization (OS) is the process through which a new organizational employee adapts from outsider to integrated and effective insider.” (p. 492).

Despite variations across definitions, e.g. from very early definitions primarily about learning culture, norms and behaviour to newer ones involving both social knowledge/relationships and tasks/job skills, Field and Coetzer (2011) note that OS research still focuses on two main aspects:

“Although definitions of OS have developed over time, current conceptualisations and research (e.g., Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Saks & Ashforth, 1997) continues to focus on the two key ‘traditional’ aspects of OS. These aspects are: (1) that it is a learning process; and (2) it concerns newcomer adjustment to their environments (e.g., Feldman, 1976; Jones, 1983; Jones, 1986; Louis, 1980; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).” (p. 82).
3.1.3. Organisational Socialisation, Assimilation and Individualisation
Porter, Lawler, and Hackman (1975) write that ‘Individualisation’ is “[…] the reciprocal process that goes on simultaneously in employee-organization adaptation […]” (p. 170), and note that adjustment can go both ways:

“[…] at the same time that an organization is attempting to put its distinctive stamp on the individual, he in turn is striving to influence the organization so that it can better satisfy his own needs and his own ideas about how it can best be operated.” (p. 170).

They mention that there are three types of individualisation reactions: rebellion, creative individualism and conformity (Schein 1968, in Porter et al., 1975, p. 171-172). Porter et al. (1975) also note that there is a “[…] dependence-independence conflict that all subordinates must face and resolve.” (p. 185).

Jablin (1987) writes about organisational assimilation and states that it has two parts: organisational socialisation and employee individualisation (p. 693). During the 1990’s, a debate over terminology took place, and Communication Monographs was one of the outlets where works related to this debate were published. The debate largely centred on and emanated from the distinction between socialisation, individualisation and assimilation. While some use OS as the overall label for the discipline focusing on the phenomena of organisations’ attempts to socialise newcomers and newcomers’ efforts at individualisation (remember that Porter et al. (1975) describe these as each other’s reciprocal processes), others, based on Jablin, use the notion of assimilation to cover both of these processes:

“[…] assimilation views individuals as active message senders and receivers throughout the stages. Assimilation involves the interaction of socialization and individualization. Socialization refers to organizations’ attempts to mold individuals to meet their needs while individualization comprises individuals’ attempts to mold organizations to meet personal needs (Jablin, 1982; 1987).” (Kramer & Miller, 1999, p. 360, emphasis in original).

However, according to Jablin (1987), individualisation does not take place until the metamorphosis stage (p. 694) (see 3.2.1.1. on stage models), which contradicts Porter et al.’s (1975) description of socialisation and individualisation as simultaneous processes. In my view, new employees are (at least potentially) also active in the encounter phase, e.g. as they themselves might seek out information, i.e. they do not just passively wait to be formally or informally socialised by the organisation.
This discussion seems to be related to a difference in the literature on proactive behaviour (which I return to in 3.2.2.2.) and the idea of individualisation. To some extent, the literature on proactive behaviour emerged in relation to understanding newcomers as active because they are motivated to reduce uncertainty. In other words, although it assumes that newcomers will engage in proactive behaviours to reduce uncertainty and to e.g. regain a sense of control (e.g. Ashford & Black, 1996), it also seems to assume that the primary concern is still that of the newcomer adjusting to the organisation. Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012) note that:

“One prominent goal difference reflects a bias in the literature to date. That is, we often presume that newcomers engage in proactive behaviors during the entry process to reduce uncertainty and fit in. However, they may do so for other motives […]” (p. 18).

On the other hand, ‘individualisation’ implies more upfront proactivity, in that newcomers might, for example, try to change a role, rather than just try to find information to help them reduce uncertainty about role requirements. Thus, individualisation is more about proactivity in relation to own needs and opinions, whereas the initial focus on newcomer proactivity seemed to be more a focus on newcomer response.

3.1.4. Onboarding and Organisational Socialisation
It is relevant to discuss the relationship between onboarding and OS, since the term ‘onboarding’ is beginning to be used interchangeably with ‘Organisational Socialisation’. T. N. Bauer and Erdogan (2011), for example, equate the two, while Lacaze and Bauer (2014) use the notion ‘newcomer onboarding’. However, Wanberg (2012) notes that “The emerging view is that the terms onboarding and socialization should be differentiated and that care should be taken that the two terms are not used interchangeably […]” (p. 3, emphasis in original), and she refers to Klein and Polin (2012), who are proponents of this view as they argue that the two terms should be distinguished (p. 268).

Use of the term ‘Organisational Socialisation’ and OS as a field goes back a long way back, e.g. Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012) note that the term first surfaced in the title of a 1963 journal article (p. 13). The use of the term ‘onboarding’ is more recent, and seems to be making its way into academia from practitioner literature. Wanberg (2012) notes that: “The term onboarding has been particularly popular in practice-oriented outlets and organizations […]” (p. 3, emphasis in original).

OS is an academic field with a number of theories and perspectives (e.g. a focus on organisation, newcomers, or both, see section 3.2.2.), whereas onboarding is neither an academic field nor a theory
(but is related to OS), but is more a practice and comes from the practitioner ‘realm’ (i.e. it is originally, and still mostly, a practitioner term). It signals that there is somebody who needs to/is going to be ‘onboarded’, and thus focuses on what the organisation does. Klein and Polin (2012) differentiate OS and onboarding and state that: “We use the term onboarding to refer to all formal and informal practices, programs, and policies enacted or engaged in by an organization or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment.” (p. 268, emphasis in original).

Following this definition, onboarding does not address the newcomer as an active participant as such, and to the extent that it does, it is about what the organisation wants the newcomer to do, or about readiness and increasing the individual’s abilities. In this sense, some aspects of ‘onboarding’ are closer to the literature on orientation and training (e.g. Wanous, 1992). Even if it is about ‘onboarding’ newcomers, the newcomer’s agency is blurred to some extent. Klein and Polin (2012) note that: “[…] proactive behaviour on the part of newcomers is outside of the practices, programs, and policies that constitute onboarding (Klein & Heuser, 2008). Onboarding, as we have defined it, concerns what the organization and its agents do, not the actions of newcomers.” (p. 268).

The aspects that the two terms cover can be different, e.g. onboarding seems to refer to a more controlled process (cf. Benzinger, 2016), viewed from the perspective of the organisation. Furthermore, onboarding is more temporally limited than socialisation. Although I focus on newcomer socialisation, in general OS is considered to (re)occur throughout an individual’s career, e.g. with promotion, or as changes take place in the organisation. From the organisation’s perspective, onboarding is more temporally limited to a newcomer’s first entry into the organisation.

### 3.2. Approaches to Organisational Socialisation

Overall, two (interrelated) approaches to characterising the OS literature exist. On the one hand, part of the literature distinguishes between, and focuses on, content and/or process dimensions of OS (section 3.2.1.). On the other, it is characterised by different focus points (the organisation and organisational tactics, the newcomer and newcomer proactivity, or an interactionist perspective) (section 3.2.2.). These approaches are outlined in the following sections.

#### 3.2.1. Dimensions of Organisational Socialisation

According to Chao et al. (1994), there are two dimensions of research within the OS literature. The first involves the different elements of the process of becoming an organisational member (p. 730),
while the second focuses on the content dimension – “[…] what is actually learned during socialization.” (p. 730).

3.2.1.1. Process Dimension
Chao (1997) notes that “Early research was process-oriented, identifying different phases of socialization.” (p. 131). This early interest in the process of OS can especially be traced back to Porter et al.’s (1975), Van Maanen’s (1976) and Feldman’s (1976; 1981) writings on stages of OS. Each of their stage models has three stages. The first stage is labelled pre-arrival or anticipatory socialisation, the second encounter or accommodation, while the third stage is labelled change and acquisition, metamorphosis or role management. Jablin (1987) added ‘exit’ as a fourth stage. Ashforth (2012), based on a number of others, also mentions four stages (p. 175): Anticipation, encounter, adjustment and stabilisation. Wanous, Reichers, and Malik (1984; Wanous, 1992) combined some of the stage models in an integrative review.

Different authors vary in their number of stages, how they label them, and how they define the boundaries between them. The following draws on Feldman (1976, 1981), since his work is some of the most comprehensive on this topic. Feldman (1976) presents and tests a model of individual socialisation based on interview and questionnaire data. His model identifies three stages (he alternates between calling them phases and stages): Anticipatory, accommodation and role management. The first stage, anticipatory socialisation, “[…] encompasses all the learning that occurs before the recruit enters the organization […]” (p. 434). The next stage, accommodation, “[…] is that period in which the individual sees what the organization is actually like and attempts to become a participating member of it.” (p. 435). Finally, in the third stage, role management, “[…] recruits already have come to some tentative resolution of problems in their own work groups, and now need to mediate the conflicts between their work in their own group and other groups which may place demands on them.” (p. 435). In 1981, Feldman relabelled the stages ‘Anticipatory socialisation’, ‘Encounter’, and ‘Change and acquisition’.

For each stage, Feldman specifies activities that newcomers engage in, e.g. he mentions four activities in the accommodation (encounter) stage: “[…] learning new tasks, establishing new interpersonal relationships with coworkers, clarifying their roles in the organization, and evaluating their progress in the organization.” (1976, p. 435). He also specifies personal and organisational contingencies that control movement through the stages. The process variables identified for anticipatory socialisation are realism and congruence; for accommodation they are initiation to the task, role definition,
congruence of evaluation, and initiation to the group; and for role management they are resolution of outside-life conflicts and resolution of conflicting demands at work. In relation to the process dimension, there has been a lot of focus on different outcomes of OS, including outcomes of different stages and their relation to more distal outcomes. OS outcomes are covered in section 3.5.

Different critiques have been levelled at the stage models (e.g. Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012; Ashforth, 2012). They have been argued to have several limitations, e.g. they construe newcomers as passive and going through a strictly linear process (cf. Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012, p. 13). However, Van Maanen pointed out as far back as 1973 that his stages (labelled choice, introduction, encounter and metamorphosis) are only analytically distinct (p. 409), i.e. in practice they might not be so distinct. Feldman (1981) noted that “It is assumed that the onset of encounter precedes the onset of the change and acquisition stage, but there is some continuity and overlap between stages.” (p. 310). Ashforth (2012) indicates that, in some cases, a phase might even be skipped (p. 175).

According to Schein (in Louis, 1980, p. 235), newcomers can cross three types of borders: Functional, hierarchical and inclusionary. In relation to the stage models, a person might be in different phases as regards the three borders. In this way, it becomes a process with different elements that might be important at different times.

### 3.2.1.2. Content Dimension

The content dimension of OS concerns what newcomers (need to) learn in order to adjust: “Socialization content refers to the substance of what an individual learns (or should learn) in order to become a proficient and comfortable member of the organization.” (Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007, p. 449). Although there are a number of different content typologies, for this review I take a point of departure in Chao et al. (1994):

> “Among the socialization typologies and scales, the Chao et al. (1994) typology and accompanying scale have been the most favorably received in the literature (Bauer et al., 2007) and characterized as being one of the most comprehensive measures of socialization to date (Saks & Ashforth, 1997).” (Klein & Heuser, 2008, p. 299).

Chao et al. (1994; Chao, 1997) identify ‘six dimensions for socialisation learning’: Performance proficiency, Language, People, Politics, Organisational goals and values, and History. Saks and Ashforth (1997) observe that there might also be other dimensions:
“For example, work group socialization is an important part of organizational socialization (Anderson & Thomas, 1996) not represented in the Chao et al. (1994) taxonomy. [...] In addition, the Chao et al. (1994) taxonomy does not include a dimension of role learning (i.e., newcomers’ knowledge of the requirements, boundaries, responsibilities, and expectations of their role(s) within an organization).” (p. 265).

This agrees with Louis (1980), who notes that the content dimension of socialisation has two focal points: Role related and culture/norm related (Louis, 1980, p. 231).

Klein and Heuser (2008) expand Chao et al.’s (1994) typology from six to 12 dimensions of socialisation content: Language, History, Task proficiency, Working relationships, Social relationships, Structure, Politics, Goals and strategy, Culture and values, Rules and policies, Navigation, and Inducements (p. 301). They also add two components:

“[…] to reflect the fact that (a) each of those content dimensions needs to be learned relative to different organizational levels (e.g., job, work group, unit, organization) and (b) socialization occurs over several months and that there are temporal considerations relating to the different socialization content dimensions.” (p. 282).

I return to these components in section 3.4. on learning and knowledge in OS.

3.2.2. Three Waves of Organisational Socialisation Research
Different periods of OS research have focused on different actors (Batistič & Kaše, 2015): the organisation, newcomers, or both. Initially, scholarly interest focused on the organisational perspective, i.e. what organisations did and what outcomes they hoped to achieve. This was followed by a period of increased interest in, and specific focus on, the (individual) newcomers. Finally, criticism of the lack of integration between the two perspectives encouraged calls for interactionist studies, which recognise that socialisation is something that both organisations and newcomers actively engage in, and that they influence each other, i.e. the two parties interact (Griffin et al., 2000).

Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012) characterise this development as three ‘waves’ (p. 10) in OS research, with the focus on the organisation as the first wave, the focus on (individual) newcomers as the second, and the interactionist focus (which they label the ‘integrated perspective’) as the third. Within each wave, there can then be a more explicit focus on content or process dimensions (e.g. stages of OS), or other factors. In the sections below, I briefly review each of the three waves.
3.2.2.1. The Organisation-Focused Wave
According to Saks and Ashforth (1997), “The traditional approach to organizational socialization portrays newcomers as passive or reactive recipients of socialization programs and practices (i.e., what organizations do to newcomers and on how newcomers respond; Morrison, 1993a).” (p. 246). This is exemplified in Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) seminal OS text, where their definition of OS focuses on the newcomer, but the text is mostly concerned with the tactics that organisations use to ‘integrate’ the individual and which role orientations these lead to.

Six dimensions of tactics that an organisation can use for socialising newcomers have been in focus. Originally presented in Van Maanen (1978), these were elaborated in Van Maanen and Schein (1979):

Collective vs. individual (being socialised as part of a group vs. individually), formal vs. informal (having formal practices separating the newcomer from existing employees vs. socialisation as informal), sequential vs. random (having specific sequences vs. supplying information randomly), fixed vs. variable (having a fixed time for different socialisation activities vs. variable time), serial vs. disjunctive (using existing role inhabitants to socialise a newcomer vs. not using role models), and investiture vs. divestiture (encouraging and focusing on the individual’s identity, abilities and skills vs. encouraging the newcomer to unlearn and embrace e.g. new values). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) state that certain constellations of these tactics might lead to different role responses from the newcomers, namely custodial, content innovative, or role innovative responses.

G. R. Jones (1986) groups the tactics into two overall clusters: Individualised socialisation tactics and institutionalised socialisation tactics (p. 266), where the former constitute individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive and divestiture ends of the six dimensions, and the latter constitute the opposite, namely collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial and investiture tactics (p. 266) (later, divestiture and investiture in the two clusters are reversed). He also groups the tactics by the area they focus on (p. 263). Thus, the collective-individual and formal-informal dimensions are concerned with context, the sequential-random and fixed-variable dimensions are linked to content, and the last two dimensions, serial-disjunctive and investiture-divestiture, are linked to social aspects. Like Van Maanen and Schein, G. R. Jones (1986) also relates the two clusters of tactics to specific role responses, but he changes the order of some of the dimensions (fixed-variable and investiture-divestiture) (p. 264), suggesting a different relationship between two of the tactics and the resulting role response than Van Maanen and Schein (1979).
In a review article, Saks and Ashforth (1997) note that “Research on socialization tactics has provided strong support for Jones’ (1986) findings that institutionalized socialization tactics are negatively related to role ambiguity, role conflict, and intentions to quit and positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and a custodial role orientation.” (p. 255).

3.2.2.2. The Newcomer-Focused Wave
The organization-focused wave was followed in the 1980s by a period of increased interest in newcomers and individual differences (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006, p. 495). Even though focus on newcomers as individuals (including psychological differences) became prevalent here, others had already recognised that individuals play a role in socialisation, as can be seen from Porter et al.’s (1975) notion of individualisation (see section 3.1.3.).

Regarding this shift in focus, Lacaze and Bauer (2014) note that:

“Research on organizational socialization has progressively evolved from a vision of organizations imposing their values to their members to a vision of proactive employees striving to reduce uncertainty by seeking out information. It has been a long time since Schein (1968) defined socialization as an “indoctrination” process.” (p. 59).

These authors indicate that the greater focus on newcomers’ individual characteristics (e.g. propensity to engage in proactive behaviour) resulted from changes in labour market and job definitions.

As regards the newcomer-focused wave, as opposed to ‘people processing’ above, this has been described as:

“An alternative approach [that] presented socialization as a process in which newcomers were given an active role […] The overarching theory for this approach presented socialization as a sense-making process. It describes the cognitive processes newcomers rely on to cope with surprises.” (Lacaze & Bauer, 2014, p. 61).

Louis (1980) is the main reference in OS regarding this focus on cognitive processes and making sense of surprises and uncertainty. Scholars discussing sensemaking often refer to Weick’s (1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) theory of sensemaking and the related concept of sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). However, Weick’s work on sensemaking is a theoretical framework in its own right which I will not discuss further here, since I focus on the notion in the specific sense it has been used in the OS literature, where ‘sensemaking’ is (mostly) treated as a cognitive phenomenon, often related to uncertainty reduction.
As indicated above, sensemaking in OS is linked to Louis’ (1980) article. Chao (1997), based on Louis (1980), notes that: “Interpretations of work experiences often involve sense-making processes, which constitute a key aspect of socialization (Louis, 1980).” (p. 137). Louis (1980) reviewed the previous literature on turnover and socialisation as distinct perspectives on organisational entry in order to develop a perspective that could bridge the gaps in the two literatures. This resulted in a perspective that “[...] proposes that an appreciation of what newcomers typically experience during the transition period and how they cope with their experiences is fundamental to designing entry practices that facilitate newcomers’ adaptation in the new setting.” (p. 226). Louis’ new perspective is theoretically developed. It is not based on data, nor does she comment on how a researcher might investigate newcomer experiences. She notes the following implication for designing practices:

“It is proposed that appreciation of changes, contrasts, and surprises characteristic of newcomers’ entry experiences is essential in designing organizational structures that facilitate newcomer transitions. In essence, they constitute a part of the experiential landscape of individuals during the encounter stage of organizational socialization.” (p. 239).

As regards the focus on newcomers and newcomers’ proactive behaviour, Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006) observe that: “Concurrent with the shift in perspective to look at newcomer individual differences and their influence, research in the last 20 years has acknowledged the role of the newcomer as an active agent in the socialization process [...]” (p. 496). In this respect, newcomer proactive behaviour “[...] refers to individual-driven or informal means of “self-socializing” (Ashford and Black, 1996).” (Lacaze & Bauer, 2014, p. 61). It has been connected to outcomes such as learning, social integration and role clarity (p. 61).

In recent research, newcomer proactive behaviour is no longer only about uncertainty reduction, but is also “[...] anticipatory or future oriented, self-initiated, and about taking control to make things happen (Parker & Collins, 2010).” (Cooper-Thomas & Burke, 2012, p. 57). In summing up the work of Griffin et al. (2000), Cooper-Thomas and Burke (2012) note that: “Effectively, Griffin et al. (2000) argue that some proactive behaviors can replace the lack of structure from individualized organizational socialization tactics.” (p. 64). In other words, less structure can call for more individual proactivity. If an organisation employs less structured tactics, newcomers need to be (will be) more proactive.

The most studied proactive socialisation behaviours are: Information-seeking, feedback-seeking, general socialising, networking, relationship-building, boss-relationship building and job-change
negotiation (Saks, Gruman, & Cooper-Thomas, 2011, p. 37). Of these, newcomer information-seeking is the most studied area of proactive socialisation behaviours (Benzinger, 2016, p. 747; Saks et al., 2011, p. 37). Information-seeking is defined as: “[…] a key behavior for new employees that may help them adjust. New employees ask questions about different aspects of their jobs, company procedures, and priorities and take an active role in making sense of their environment.” (T. N. Bauer & Erdogan, 2011, p. 53).

V. D. Miller and Jablin (1991) mention seven newcomer information-seeking tactics: overt questions, indirect questions, third parties, testing limits, disguising conversations, observing and surveillance. The tactics can be combined (p. 115-116). They draw on and add to Ashford and Cummings (1983), who mention more overall tactics of either monitoring or inquiry.

Comer (1991) shows that newcomers acquire both technical and social information from their peers. Morrison (1993), mentioning Ashford and Cummings (1983), Comer (1991) and V. D. Miller and Jablin (1991), extends this, and presents five specific areas that newcomers are likely to seek information about: technical information, referent information (role demands, role expectations), normative information (expected behaviours, expected attitudes), performance feedback and social feedback (p. 559). Ashford and Black (1996) note that:

“For information seeking, the open-ended pretest data suggested that a central focus of newcomers’ information seeking was the larger firm context (e.g., the firm’s strategy and trends affecting it) and the internal context more directly relevant to the newcomers’ jobs (e.g., firm politics, policies and procedures, and organizational structure).” (p. 206).

As regards the tactics used, according to Mignerey, Rubin, and Gorden (1995): “The active, explicit channel is, in particular, more important than passive or implicit information-seeking strategies in seeking out social and technical knowledge (Comer, 1991).” (p. 79). Barge and Schlueter (2004), mentioning information-seeking vis-à-vis relationships, note that: “The socialization literature regarding information seeking (Miller & Jablin, 1991) as well as more general discussions of group and organizational communication (Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Poole, 1999) distinguishes between task and personal dimensions of relationships.” (p. 237).

Saks et al. (2011) criticise the literature on newcomer information-seeking for being too occupied with information-seeking tactics and paying too little attention to the outcomes of the use of such tactics. In Cooper-Thomas and Anderson’s (2006) literature review, they comment that “Newcomer
information seeking consistently predicts positive socialization outcomes (Miller and Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993a, b).” (p. 508). However, the outcomes they refer to here are proximal and distal outcomes of socialisation (see section 3.5), i.e. outcomes of (parts of) the process per se, but what Saks et al. (2011) refer to is lack of research on the more immediate outcomes of specific information-seeking tactics (e.g. are the different tactics successful?).

3.2.2.3. The Interactionist Wave
Lacaze and Bauer (2014) describe interactionism as a “[…] Reconciliation of the organizational and individual approaches […]” (p. 62). The roots of this perspective can be traced back to articles using the term interaction with inspiration from symbolic interactionism (e.g. G. R. Jones, 1983; Reichers, 1987). When I use the term interactionist, I refer to acknowledging socialisation as an interactionally achieved accomplishment, i.e. it is not just about either ‘the organisation’ or ‘the newcomer’.

Perhaps this wave is better described as a splash or a ripple, since it does not seem to be a full-blown wave to the same extent as previous waves (which it integrates). While there have been calls for interactionist studies (cf. Ashforth and Saks, 1997), few have been carried out. In 2000, as mentioned in my introduction, Griffin et al. remarked that:

“[…] researchers have examined the theoretical underpinnings of socialization – both in content and process, and empirical studies have moved this work forward, but have examined them either primarily from the individual’s or the organization’s perspective. The interactionist perspective would seek to integrate these two areas by examining how newcomer’s attempts at self-socialization work in tandem with the organization’s attempts at socialization to influence socialization outcomes.” (p. 454).

Several years later, in 2009, Kowtha noted: “However, there are very few studies of this interactionist model, and there is a need for further research on the subject […]” (p. 1). Batistič and Kaše (2015) label it the ‘person-by-situation’ approach, calling it a mix, and state that there are a lot of studies on this – but the studies they refer to deal with the interplay of organisational tactics and newcomer differences, not necessarily a broader interactionist socialisation-individualisation kind of interplay.

The few studies which are based on an interactionist perspective are typically quantitative. For example, Zou, Tian, and Liu (2015) mention the “[…] dearth of socialization literature from an interactionist perspective […]” (p. 172), and T. N. Bauer and Green (1998) collected data from both newcomers, co-workers and managers, but both studies are quantitative.
The lack of interactionist studies is interesting, considering that, as long ago as 1975, Porter et al. mentioned both socialisation and individualisation in relation to organisational entry as a mutual adjustment between multiple parties, and that there are at least two agents in this adjustment process, who influence each other. I.e., they mentioned it early, but it took time before the interactionist perspective became more called for (and there are still calls for it). Thus, there has been labels for focusing on either the organisational or the newcomer perspective, whereas the interactionist calls for integrating them. This also involves greater complexity. Field and Coetzer (2011) write:

“Newcomer adjustment is a process of interaction between both newcomers and organisational insiders (i.e., socialisation agents) influences and it is difficult to predict newcomer adjustment without exploring the nature of socialisation from both an individual and organisational insider perspective (‘interactionist’ perspective) (Griffin, Colella & Goparaju, 2000; Jones, 1983; Reichers, 1987). The ‘interactionist’ perspective has not received a great deal of empirical attention and there is a need for further research that examines the socialisation process in small firms from a newcomer perspective as well. This is especially so, given that newcomers play an active role in their own socialisation and individual differences influence their ability to learn and adjust (Carr et al., 2006; Jones, 1983; Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 2000).” (p. 91-92).

According to Ashforth (2012), in interactionist research: “The focus here is on how learning and adjustment are facilitated/inhibited by the socialization processes enacted by the organization (i.e., socialization tactics) and by the newcomer (i.e., proactivity).” (p. 170, emphasis in original).

The interactionist perspective includes considerations about newcomers’ interaction with different socialisation agents. Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006) mention insiders as learning sources (p. 502), highlight the importance of insiders (as resources, providing resources) for helping newcomers adjust (p. 495), and note that: “It is important that organizations provide newcomers with opportunities to work and socialize with colleagues in order to gain the benefits of friendship and resource networks (Jones, 1986).” (p. 507). Here, there has been a move from viewing socialisation agents solely as providers of information to now also focusing on the relationships (e.g. Korte, 2010).

3.2.2.4. From Indoctrination to Individualisation and Interactionism
As seen above, there have been various approaches to OS throughout its history, ranging from acculturation and indoctrinating newcomers (see Schein, 1968) and ‘staff induction’ to acknowledging newcomer agency and understanding the process as an interactional achievement, i.e.
from socialising employees (or ‘recruits’) to socialisation as something that happens in an organisation as an interaction between different actors.

This implies different conceptualisations of ‘the newcomer’, which result in different orientations, ranging from the newcomer as passive recipient (indoctrination) to active agent (interactionist perspective, individualisation), and to some degree taking into account the situation of the newcomer (e.g. the difference between graduate and experienced newcomers).

Rollag (2007) observes that the term ‘newcomer’ is commonly associated with a temporal characteristic (p. 65). He presents a more relative position on the issue of time vis-à-vis newcomers, in investigating the newcomer label in relation to the perspective of the newcomers themselves (2004) and of their colleagues (2007). In the latter study, he hypothesised that “[…] co-worker perceptions of an individual’s ‘newness’ in the organization are a function of (1) the individual’s relative position in the firm’s tenure distribution and (2) the frequency of interaction between the rater [colleague] and the individual.” (2007, p. 63). As such, ‘newcomerness’ is not a function of clock time, but is relative.

3.3. Organisational Socialisation in the Context of Start-Ups and ICT

In the following subsections, I focus on OS in start-ups and small companies (section 3.3.1.), OS in small groups and teams (section 3.3.2.), and OS studies in software engineering (section 3.3.3.). Various authors (e.g. Batistič & Kaše, 2015; Saks & Gruman, 2012) have pointed to the lack of empirical studies in the OS literature. This might explain the prevalence of normativity in OS literature, which overlooks or underestimates the impact of some contextual aspects and the dynamics between them, i.e. far from being in focus, they are often downplayed as ‘merely’ contextual elements. Ashforth, Saks, and Lee (1998) note that “Research on how the context of work affects HRM practices in general, and socialization practices in particular, is relatively scarce.” (p. 897).

However, contextual aspects should not be overlooked, and both formal and informal aspects should be considered. For instance, Porter et al. (1975) note the impact of the immediate job environment in their chapter on adjustment (p. 178-181). In their 1997 review of OS literature, under the subheading ‘Reinstating context’, Saks and Ashforth comment: “As the process through which individuals learn to function effectively within a given organizational milieu, socialization is necessarily embedded within a specific context. The identity, structure, strategy, culture, and size of an organization shape socialization options.” (p. 269). Wang, Kammeyer-Mueller, Liu, and Li (2015) note that “[…] the manner in which the general social environment influences newcomer adjustment remains under-
investigated.” (p. 4). These authors aim at presenting “[...] a formal taxonomy of the organizational context relevant to newcomer socialization.” (p. 3). They focus on the two dimensions content and process, and relate them to formal organisational practices, aspects of climate, and socialisation agents as contextual aspects. They note that what newcomers learn (content) and how they learn (process) are distinct but related aspects of newcomer socialisation (p. 3), and that these are underexplored areas (p. 4). They go on to make 10 propositions that link different contextual aspects to socialisation content and socialisation process (p. 12-18).

As regards new and small ventures, in general (before going into detail with the literature below), authors have long noted that new ventures have a ‘liability of newness’ (Stinchcombe, 1965) compared with older or more mature companies, and that there is also a distinct ‘liability of smallness’ (e.g. Aldrich & Auster, 1986). These notions are also drawn on in the literature at the intersection of HRM and entrepreneurship, as I will show below.

3.3.1. Organisational Socialisation and HRM in Start-Ups and Small Organisations
As regards ‘indicating the state of knowledge’ (Blaikie, 2010) about OS in start-ups, few OS studies have focused on small organisations and new ventures. According to Field and Coetzer (2008):

“The small body of research into the HRM practice of OS has been conducted in large organisations (e.g. Ashforth, et al., 2007; Cable & Parsons, 2001; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2002; Hart, Miller & Johnson, 2003). Consequently, there is an acute shortage of research in small firms and many questions remain unanswered as to how small firms socialize their employees and ensure they make effective role transitions (Cardon & Stevens, 2004).” (p. 529).

This is despite the same authors’ contention that: “The significance of OS in small firms is just as, even if not more important and challenging in achieving desired outcomes, as in large firms (Cardon & Stevens, 2004; Rollag & Cardon, 2003).” (Field & Coetzer, 2008, p. 529).

However, a number of aspects relevant to newcomer entry in start-ups are mentioned in the literature which links entrepreneurship and HRM research. Thus, in this section, I include both the scant literature on OS in start-ups and small organisations and the literature on entrepreneurship and HRM, since they are both relevant to the present context. I thus focus on what has been written so far as regards the conditions of OS in start-ups, and on those contextual aspects that are likely to be of
relevance to the present research. I therefore include the literature on OS in small organisations to the extent that aspects in this literature are relevant to OS in start-ups as small organisations.

Field and Coetzer (2008) conducted a literature review focusing on the relationship between the OS process and individual as well as organisational outcomes. They found that one of the knowledge gaps in the OS literature concerns “[…] the differences in OS approaches between small and large firms.” (p. 524), and conclude that there is a lack of research comparing OS in small and large organisations and also that there is a lack of interactionist research. Especially relevant for the context at hand, they note that:

“In practice different approaches to OS are associated with the type of organisational context, which includes organisation size and structure (Ashforth, et al., 1998; Saks, et al., 1998). Organisational size, in particular, is a key contextual variable in the adoption of OS practices (Johns, 1993), with research indicating that OS processes between small and large firms differ (Cardon & Stevens, 2004).” (p. 529).

In discussing the differences between OS in small and large firms, they refer to some of the socialisation tactics mentioned previously and highlight that: 1) OS in small firms is typically informal, whereas OS in large organisations is more formal, 2) large organisations often have to use an institutionalised approach to OS due to the number of employees, whereas small firms should use an individualised approach, 3) some institutionalised tactics can only be implemented in larger organisations, e.g. collective tactics, and 4) socialisation is more inclusive, extensive and happens faster in smaller organisations (cf. Field & Coetzter, 2008, p. 529).

In this discussion, they refer to a study by Rollag and Cardon (2003), who employed qualitative methods to compare the experiences of newcomers in start-ups with those of newcomers in large organisations, focusing on socialisation tactics to investigate how much socialisation is ‘enough’. In an earlier journal study of newcomers’ first week in high-tech start-ups, Rollag (2002) found six informal activities that were especially salient in the diary entries, namely “introductions, first assignment discussions, reading documentation, establishing and becoming acquainted with office technology, asking questions, and lunch.” (Results and Implications section, para. 1). Despite some similarities between these two works and mine, they differ in that: I focus specifically on ICT start-ups in a Danish context, my research is explorative with a focus on these start-ups, I do not gather empirical material from other types of companies for comparison, and I include a specific focus on the role of knowledge and relate this to the dynamics of OS in start-ups.
Rollag (2004; 2007) explores the concept of relative tenure with a starting point in start-ups. Although he could have explored this concept in larger or more mature companies, he argues that the ‘relative’ is important in terms of companies where growth is faster or where employee turnover is greater. Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006) also state that: “The evidence to date suggests that OS occurs more rapidly in fast-paced environments such as IT, and where there is a higher rate of new joiners […]” (p. 509), and note that:

“...It is also plausible that organizations that have a large proportion of relative newcomers as employees are more adept at socializing newcomers because of the knowledge and experiences of the relative newcomers about OS in that organization (Rollag, 2004). This enables relative newcomers to fill in the gaps left by official OS programs, and also to work to improve these sanctioned information resources.” (p. 509).

In other words, the newcomers in the start-ups might help other incoming newcomers to fill the gap that they themselves missed.

Field and Coetzer (2011) comment on additional aspects that seem to speed up inclusion:

“In small firms, the small number of employees, and the prevalence of informal processes, facilitates quicker and more extensive inclusion and assimilation of newcomers into their new work environments (Cardon & Stevens, 2004). In addition, embedding newcomers in their new environment can be facilitated in small firms where employees tend to work closer together (Marlow, 2000) and are also more likely to operate as a team (Heneman, Tansky & Camp, 2000).” (p. 84).

They go on to highlight speedy inclusion as beneficial, considering various constraints:

“[...] given the human, material and financial resource constraints faced by small firms when compared to larger firms, the positive effects of the speedy and effective adjustment of newcomers on the critical OS outcomes of turnover and performance are of particular significance (McAdam, 2000; McAdam, 2002).” (Field & Coetzer, 2011, p. 90).

Field and Coetzer’s (2011) study of OS in small manufacturing firms in New Zealand focused on the pre-encounter and encounter stage (one of the gaps they identified in the 2008 review above) from the perspective of socialisation agents (they interview socialisation agents). They observe that in small firms, socialisation agents are central to both recruitment and socialisation, since: “These social sources of recruitment are also likely to take the initiative and play an important role in socialising
newcomers before they join the organization (Coetzer, 2006).” (p. 89-90), and that this “[…] reflect[s] the typically informal nature of small firm HRM, the resource constraints in these firms (Stevens, 2007) and the need for small firms to minimize risks and costs associated with onboarding newcomers from unfamiliar sources (Kotey & Slade, 2005).” (p. 90).

Bourlier Bargues has conducted and published a number of studies on OS in small firms in France, several of which build on her doctoral dissertation (Bargues-Bourlier, 2009) on OS in small organisations, where she argues for enriching the study of OS through a better understanding of OS practices in the context of small firms. She notes that: “While the integration of newcomers is a key issue for small businesses, socialization practices they implement remain poorly understood.” (Bargues, 2013, p. 63). The 2013 article presents a longitudinal multiple case study, where she follows new employees in six cases, representing three different ‘configurations’ of small companies, labelled ‘Traditionelle-indépendante’, ‘Managériale’ and ‘Entrepreneuriale’, and shows that there is a relationship between (the use of certain) OS practices and the different configurations. Thus, as regards context, there is not just a difference between small and large firms, but also between different types of small firms.

In earlier work, she hypothesised that, since institutionalised socialisation tactics, more than individualised tactics, have been shown to be connected to the positive outcomes of job satisfaction, engagement and less intention of turnover, small companies of the ‘entrepreneurial’ configuration, which focuses on innovation, might be challenged in reaching these outcomes because they are more likely to use socialisation tactics that cannot be characterised as belonging to the institutionalised tactics cluster (Bargues-Bourlier, 2006).

Bargues and Bouchard (2013) investigated the links between socialisation practices and entrepreneurial (innovative) orientation in four different cases with varying degrees of being entrepreneurial or conservative. They found that small firms of an entrepreneurial orientation structure newcomers’ positions less, focus less on communicating rules, and are more likely to listen to newcomers’ innovative ideas and adopt these (p. 102).

Bargues and Valiorgue (2019) conducted a case study in entrepreneurial small firms (ESFs) in France. They note that: “This focus on socialization processes in the context of ESFs allows us to answer the call for more contextually sensitive research and qualitative methodological settings (Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012).” (p. 44). In addition, they:
“[...] propose to answer the call of organizational socialization scholars who propose to develop new research settings and empirical investigations to shed light on the mundane activities of socialization and their dynamics (Ashforth, Harrison & Sluss, 2014; Klein, Polin & Leigh Sutton, 2015; Solinger, et al., 2013).” (p. 31).

These authors draw on the perspective of institutional work, and show that newcomers and insiders engage in different socialisation activities, and that, as regards roles, these activities can lead to either maintenance of existing roles or new role creation. They present role creation as a distal outcome (p. 44), whereas Ashforth (2012) describes role crafting as a proximal outcome, and they characterise socialisation as an ambidextrous process (p. 43). Bargues (2013) draws on the notion of ‘effet de grossissement’ (‘enlargement’ or ‘magnification’ effect) (p. 65), which covers how, in small companies, the individual employee has more relative weight than in larger companies.

Moving to the literature on HRM and entrepreneurship, the 2000s saw the emergence of calls for more research on HRM in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and HRM in entrepreneurial organisations (e.g. Tansky & Heneman, 2003), and for the fields of entrepreneurship and HRM studies to approach each other (e.g. R. A. Baron, 2003). In their study of HRM practices in Irish high-tech start-ups, Keating and Olivares (2007) noted that “[...] human resource management (HRM) research within an entrepreneurial context is an emerging area of academic research.” (p. 171; see also J. A. Katz, Aldrich, Welbourne, & Williams, 2000). Barrett and Mayson (2008b) observed that:

“[...] the home discipline for many entrepreneurship scholars is likely to be strategy or strategic management and this explains why many scholars may prefer to focus on the ‘harder’ economic and strategy factors that contribute to firm success and failure rather than the so-called ‘softer’ people and relationship issues.” (p. 3).

As well as journal articles (some in special issues), edited books on the HRM-entrepreneurship interface emerged in the 2000s, including: Managing People in Entrepreneurial Organizations (edited by J. A. Katz & Welbourne, 2002), Human Resource Strategies for the High Growth Entrepreneurial Firm (edited by Tansky and Heneman, 2006b), and International Handbook of Entrepreneurship and HRM (edited by Barrett and Mayson, 2008a). In the following, I highlight central aspects from relevant chapters in these books and journal articles, especially as they point to contextual aspects that are important when researching OS in start-ups and small businesses. Thus, given the extent of the HRM field, I focus on those parts of the entrepreneurship-HRM literature which are relevant for socialisation and which stress the importance of context, i.e. there are
differences between large/mature and small/new organisations. This literature emphasises that there is still a lot about HRM in start-ups that we do not know, including the extent to which large-organisation theorising applies to start-ups (Barrett & Mayson, 2008b, p. 4).

Context, in relation to contrasts between large firms and small, new firms, is highlighted:

“[…] context matters. The papers presented throughout the book suggest that size, instability, uncertainty, and growth orientation are all key distinctive contextual elements associated with the entrepreneurial organization. Accordingly, the assumption here is that findings from research conducted within the context of larger, more stable organizations may not necessarily be relevant for entrepreneurial organizations.” (Klaas & Klimchak, 2006, p. 246).

In other words, new ventures can have various challenges that may not be relevant in larger and more mature organisations. For instance:

“Human resources are critical for new organizations in ways often unappreciated by researchers who study only established organizations. Founders have trouble establishing a fixed division of labor in young organizations because they are still learning the routines and competencies they need.” (J. A. Katz, Aldrich, Welbourne, & Williams, 2000, in Cardon & Tolchinsky, 2006, p. 70).

I start this section of the review with Cardon and Steven’s 2004 article “Managing Human Resources in Small Organizations: What Do We Know?”, in which the authors review research on HRM in new ventures and suggest several topics that warrant further attention. The article is a review of 83 articles, later narrowed down to 37 articles plus book chapters. Less than half of the articles they found were based on empirical data (p. 299). They touch briefly on OS (p. 310) when they mention training, noting that “Recent work suggests, however, that socialization processes in small organizations differ from those in large ones.” (p. 310). They review research on both new ventures and small businesses (age and size), i.e. two dimensions that are both relevant, and also discuss the importance of distinguishing between new ventures and small organisations, since the latter can be mature in a way that new ventures are not.

“In entrepreneurial firms, the liabilities of both smallness and newness are likely to manifest themselves in how the firm addresses human resource issues. In small firms, where resources are likely to be scarce, there may be a very small number of formal HR departments or
professionals, increased difficulty in recruiting and retaining employees due to lack of financial resources, and an increased reluctance to engage in costly or restrictive practices. In young firms, where experience is likely to be lacking, we may expect to see a reduced reliance on formalized training, difficulty recruiting due to lack of legitimacy, and more informal and potentially haphazard employee management systems.” (p. 297).

Thus, the dimensions of age and size are important, and: “In both cases, the distinct liabilities presented in size and age make the study of human resources in entrepreneurial firms different than the study of them in large and established firms [...]” (Cardon & Stevens, 2004, p. 297-298).

According to the authors, HR in these companies can be characterised as “muddle through practices” (p. 302). As a workforce aspect, they also mention that these companies are likely to have interns as contingent labour (p. 304). They also mention the challenge that managers with personnel responsibilities are not HR professionals (p. 302), i.e. owner-managers dealing with HR issues they are not trained for, or have experience with, which is also echoed by other authors (e.g. Martin, Janjuha-Jivrai, Carey, & Reddy, 2008, p. 208). Welbourne and Katz (2002) note that:

“There is HRM going on in firms too small to have an HRM department, or even an HRM officer. But when the HRM department is not there, who does HRM? Like all other unassigned activities in the firm, it falls to the leadership team, the founder, the CEO, and the rest of the senior management team.” (p. xi, emphasis in original).

In other words: “When any organization is born, the founder does the relationship management, and the organization and the founder may be nearly isomorphic.” (Welbourne & Katz, 2002, p. xii). Dal Zotto and Gustafsson (2008) link entrepreneurs’ challenges regarding HRM competencies to liability of newness, and mention the following paradox:

“We assume that, due to the liability of newness (Stinchcombe, 1965) novice entrepreneurs lack HRM competences. As the firm grows, the size of the entrepreneurial team and the dynamic of its composition increase (Chandler et al., 2005). This makes the need for HRM competence all the more pronounced.” (p. 89-90).

Challenges related to the traditional functional HR practice of recruiting are highlighted:

“Recruitment seems to be one of the most challenging HRM tasks for smaller firms due to their lack of financial and material resources (Hannan and Freeman, 1984). In emerging firms the problem is a lack of experience. Given that HRM often becomes the responsibility
of the general manager rather than a trained HRM professional (Longenecker et al., 1994), then attracting and selecting competent personnel can become problematic for emerging firms (Arthur, 1995).” (Dal Zotto & Gustafsson, 2008, p. 92).

As regards hiring practices, Field and Coetzer (2011) found that: “(1) informal recruitment of staff through owner/managers’ and employees’ social networks facilitated newcomer learning and adjustment; (2) selection methods were employed that enabled socialisation agents to predict newcomer learning and adjustment [...]” (Field & Coetzer, 2011, p. 80). Dal Zotto and Gustafsson (2008), in commenting on the practice of hiring through networks, note that:

“Extant literature indicates that core employees of entrepreneurial firms are often acquired through networks. Leung et al. (2006) provide an important insight into the hiring practices of entrepreneurial firms by highlighting how firms shift their network pools during different stages of emergence and growth. During the start-up phase the core team members are recruited from both social and business networks, whereas in the growth phase, recruitment is carried out almost solely from business networks.” (p. 92).

David and Watts (2008) focus on the first employment decision, reporting on case studies of small business owners and their individual approaches. They note that “In these cases, employment is conceptualized as a learning experience for the owner.” (p. 326). An often repeated aspect of HRM in small firms, and what differentiates HRM between small and large firms is the informality of HRM practices in the former. This also has consequences for employment practices:

“Indeed, the term ‘informal’ is repeatedly used in literature referring to employment practices and relationships with small firms (see Barrett and Mayson, chapter 6, this handbook; Kotey and Sheridan, 2004; Marlow and Patton, 2001; Ram, 1999 for example). This informality may manifest itself in the form of emergent rather than deterministic employment practices.” (David & Watts, 2008, p. 328).

This notion of emergent practices is not just connected to hiring, but to HR in small firms in general:

“The nature of human resource management in small firms is understood to be characterized by ad hoc and idiosyncratic practices. The liability of smallness (Heneman and Berkley, 1999) and resource poverty (Welsh and White, 1981) presents unique challenges to managing human resources in small firms.” (Barrett & Mayson, 2008c, p. 111).
Alvarez and Molloy (2006) note that: “[…] unlike established firms, entrepreneurial firms operate under conditions of uncertainty.” (Alvarez & Molloy, 2006, p. 1, emphasis in original). As indicated previously, OS has traditionally had a focus on, and theoretical background in, uncertainty reduction theory (Saks & Gruman, 2018). The quotes here suggest that the start-up context is inherently uncertain. This has consequences for OS in start-ups. Klaas and Klimchak (2006) note that:

“Emphasis might also be given to the lack of structure in terms of job expectations and in terms [of, sic] formal processes within the firm. Another key component might relate to uncertainty that small firms face and the effect this has on the ability of managers to provide structure or make commitments (Cardon, 2003).” (p. 248-249).

Following Mayson and Barrett (2006), a lack of financial resources presents another challenge, in particular when there are also limits to managers’ time and expertise in HRM. Specifically, these authors point to the fact that the needs of small companies are idiosyncratic, and both internal implementation of HRM practices and seeking external specialist advice are costly, not only as regards money but also time-wise (p. 227).

A number of authors mention that the challenges faced by new firms makes them value certain characteristics of newcomers:

“More specifically, entrepreneurs find the most important factors to their business’s success to be (1) developing high-potential employees that can perform multiple roles under various stages of growth, and (2) matching of people to the organization’s culture (Heneman et al., 2000).” (Cardon & Tolchinsky, 2006, p. 71).

Related to the first point above, Tansky and Heneman (2006a), commenting on a chapter by Cardy and Miller (2006), note that: “[…] workers need a breadth of capabilities to perform effectively in the small and/or growing firm. In fact, the dynamic, unstructured environment requires personal characteristics such as interpersonal skills and values.” (p. xvi).

As regards the second point above, several studies touch on aspects of culture and fit (e.g. Barrett & Mayson, 2008c, p. 124; Cardon & Tolchinsky, 2006, p. 77), both in terms of ensuring fit and that newcomers can also influence the culture of the organisation. Tansky and Heneman (2006a) state that: “Evidence also suggests that small firms are more concerned with person-organization fit rather than person-job fit.” (p. xv). Field and Coetzer (2011) say that: “According to Coetzet (2006) and Coetzet & Perry (2008), employee practices in small firms aimed at recruiting and selecting
newcomers who are able to ‘fit in’ make valuable contributions toward pre-employment socialisation and reduces the amount of learning and adjustment required post-employment.” (p. 90). Cardon and Tolchinsky (2006) note the cultural impact of newcomers: “New organizational members can have a significant impact on the culture and dynamics of a firm (March, 1991), and given that SMEs can be quite small, the potential for one new worker to impact others is greater than it is for larger organizations.” (p. 89).

With regard to challenges and practices, in the works reviewed above, several topics and potential issues central to OS and HRM in start-ups emerge: resources (money, material, human), experience of entrepreneurs as personnel/HR managers, recruiting through networks, fit and culture, informality, lack of structure, and uncertainty. In addition to these dimensions, there can be variations between start-ups as regards management orientations, and these orientations influence personnel practices. In a report on the Stanford Project on Emerging Companies (SPEC), J. N. Baron and Hannan (2002) showed that founders emphasised different orientations to various aspects of managing the emerging organisation and its people, which they crystallised into five ‘blueprints’.

Considering this complexity, it makes sense for Field and Coetzer (2011) to argue that “[…] small firms should adopt a contingency approach toward the types of processes required to facilitate newcomer adjustment.” (p. 91). For academics studying the phenomenon, Welbourne and Katz (2002) note that “[…] the study of HRM and entrepreneurship must go beyond the traditional domain of HRM because people management in smaller, entrepreneurial firms is not dependent on an HR department.” (p. xi). According to Cassell and Nadin (2008), this contextual complexity and the differences between large companies and small, new ones also have implications for how the issues at stake can best be studied:

“The adoption of HRM practices is rarely strategic and they are often informal, bearing little resemblance to the ideas about best practice characterizing the HRM literature (Cardon and Stevens, 2004; Reid et al., 2002). This renders traditional positivist approaches to the study of HRM of limited value unless they are also complemented by in-depth contextualized accounts enabling us to understand the highly nuanced approach to HRM of entrepreneurs and small business owners.” (p. 74).

In chapters 6 and 7, I present my methodological and methodical choices in detail, arguing that these are suitable considering the complexity outlined here and showing how they allow for a high degree of context sensitivity.
3.3.2. Socialisation in Work Groups and Teams

OS in small, new organisations may, to some extent, resemble group socialisation. In other words, the close connection between functions and daily interactions in start-ups is perhaps more reminiscent of work in small groups than of the way an organisation is typically conceptualised in the OS literature, i.e. as larger entities with departments and multiple work groups. Given this understanding of ‘organisation’ in the OS literature, the concern with work groups is often about the work group as the more immediate and most ‘localised’ setting for newcomers’ integration. Furthermore, there can also be a relationship between the organisation and the group, or between the group and other groups in the organisation, where newcomers need to learn how to balance the different demands of working in a group in a larger organisation (e.g. Feldman, 1976; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). In a start-up context, the organisation and work group might be one and the same (the work group is the organisation, and the organisation is the work group), or there might at least be considerable overlap. Saks and Ashforth’s (1997) review of the OS literature includes a review of group socialisation. In relation to the understanding of work groups in larger organisations, they found that:

“One final promising area of research concerns the socialization of an entirely new group that is formed to complete a particular project […] In this case, the group itself is a new entity within the organization, and it can be expected to experience some form of organizational socialization.” (p. 267).

In a start-up context, if one group of people constitutes the organisation, and this group of people is coming together (and is joined by others), it would not be subject to OS from a larger context (organisation), but might on the other hand do socialisation together, which is reminiscent of certain aspects of group development. Wanous et al. (1984) point to the lack of integration between the OS and group development literatures, and to their temporal and conceptual overlaps. They mention group redevelopment, i.e. that a group changes when a newcomer joins it (e.g. because it changes the composition of the group) (p. 670). The start-up context seems to involve a number of overlaps between OS and group development processes, because socialisation processes take place while there is also a state of group development.

Wanous (1992) discusses overlaps between different types of development: organisational, socialisation, groups (p. 196-200), and notes that: “The types of groups entered can vary dramatically. Sometimes newcomers enter well-established groups, but at other times the groups entered may have
short histories and only weakly developed norms. Sometimes newcomers themselves enter as a group.” (p. 196). He then goes on to mention that:

“There are a great many opportunities for organizational socialization to take place, and it takes place in groups that more (or less) need to develop on their own. That is, sometimes the groups entered are almost as “undeveloped” as the newcomers are “unsocialized”. It may be true that the “classical” situation of organizational socialization that comes most readily to mind is that where the “lone” newcomer joins an existing and well-established group. Certainly in this situation a maximum of pressure will be brought to bear on the individual. However, socialization takes place in a number of other contexts. The dynamics of socialization can become difficult to separate from those of group development […]” (p. 196-197).

3.3.3. OS Studies in Software Engineering and Development/IT

There are few studies of OS within the context of software engineering and IT work, and most of them use the term ‘onboarding’. An exception is King, Xia, Quick, and Sethi (2005) who conducted a study focusing on institutionalised OS tactics in relation to role adjustment and attachment of IT professionals as knowledge workers. Yates (2014) studied onboarding in software engineering for her doctoral thesis. She focuses on new developers who join projects, and need to understand codebases, and how developers work together to achieve this. She distinguishes between novices and newcomers (as to whether they have development experience/skills) (p. xix).

In another doctoral thesis entitled Strategizing and Evaluating the Onboarding of Software Developers in Large-Scale Globally Distributed Legacy Projects, Britto (2017) studied the onboarding of software developers in relation to legacy projects in large companies. He observes that:

“While there is a vast literature about onboarding in a diverse type of professions […], there are only a few dedicated studies in software engineering research and, to the best of our knowledge, there is no holistic study that investigates how the onboarding of software developers is strategized.” (Britto, 2017, p. 156).

Nifadkar and Bauer (2016) employ a sample of newcomer software engineers to study the implications of relationship conflict on newcomers’ information-seeking. However, they do not address context/occupation other than briefly mentioning why it is a relevant setting for studying conflict, and briefly mentioning it in relation to practical implications and potential limitations.
The few studies of OS and onboarding in software engineering are interesting considering that Cardon and Tolchinsky (2006) mention computer analysis and system design as professions where ‘professional norm control’ can be expected (p. 88-89). E.g. it would be an interesting context for investigating the relationship between occupational socialisation and OS.

3.4. Learning and Knowledge from an Organisational Socialisation Perspective

In this section, I address how learning and knowledge have been approached in the OS literature. Since OKC is a central part of my research agenda, it is necessary to review what has been written about knowledge in the OS literature. Generally speaking, the topics of learning, knowledge and information are difficult to separate because they are interrelated, although there are also differences. In chapter 4, I address learning and knowledge from an OKC perspective, and in chapter 5 I address how this perspective is integrated with OS for the purposes of my research. Since knowledge is intimately related to learning, I also review relevant OS literature related to learning here.

“Learning the ropes” (Schein, 1968, p. 2) is a central notion in the socialisation literature. Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006) state that “Since the 1960s, there has been considerable consensus that learning is the core of organizational socialization […]” (p. 497). For instance, Chao (1997) describes OS as a learning process (p. 130) and this learning is considered to be both implicit and explicit (Chao, 1997) and takes place across different levels (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006, p. 497). Thus, studies of OS touch on both learning content and various aspects of the learning process (although a focus on content seems to have taken precedence over process). I covered learning content dimensions in section 3.2.1.2., in relation to process and content as two different dimensions of OS research, and focus on other (but necessarily related) aspects here.

Ashforth, Sluss, and Saks (2007) studied “[…] how socialization processes (socialization tactics and proactive behavior) jointly affect socialization content (i.e., what newcomers learn) and adjustment.” (p. 447). They conducted a longitudinal survey of a sample of graduates, and comment that their results “[…] provide evidence that how newcomers are socialized (process) has an impact on adjustment over and above what newcomers learn (content).” (p. 459, emphasis in original), i.e. in relation to distal outcomes of adjustment (such as job satisfaction and intention to quit), form and process carry importance beyond learning content. They also note that “[…] proactive behavior was more strongly related to learning than were the socialization tactics.” (p. 459).
Chao (1997), in focusing on “The relationship between informal organizational socialization and unstructured training, and its effect on learning and career development […]” (p. 130), observes that:

“Unstructured training and development include many forms of on-the-job training, as well as a wealth of information that is absorbed by observation and interaction with others that may or may not be sanctioned by the organization. Together, these unstructured training and development experiences represent a powerful process by which an individual learns about the job, work unit, and organization. This learning process is generally termed organizational socialization. Although some socialization tactics are formalized programs in the organization, the impact of informal tactics is generally viewed as more powerful than formal tactics (Feldman, 1989), and they represent a primary means by which most employees learn about their jobs.” (p. 130, emphasis in original).

Cardon and Stevens (2004), mentioned previously, refer to Chao (1997) in their review of HRM research in small and new firms, commenting that in these organisations formal training might be substituted by instructions of an informal character, unstructured training and OS practices (p. 310).

Chao mentions two modes of learning: implicit and explicit (1997, p. 135), where the latter means that “[…] learning is a conscious process based on attention to selected stimuli in the individual’s environment.” (p. 135). Implicit learning, on the other hand “[…] posits that learning can occur nonconsciously […] Knowledge gained from implicit learning is generally unavailable to conscious awareness and is known as tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1969; Reber, 1993).” (p. 136, emphasis in original). She notes that:

“Implicit learning and tacit knowledge are important to organizational socialization because they recognize that individuals may not be aware of the entire socialization learning process. Furthermore, tacit knowledge can influence an individual’s reactions to socialization attempts and, subsequently, leave the individual unable to articulate or justify these actions.” (p. 136).

Later in this section, I show that this constitutes important challenges for quantitative studies of learning and that the difficulty of taking this into account in quantitative scales leads to a number of limitations.

Klein and Heuser (2008) present comprehensive work on learning in relation to OS. They argue for “[…] viewing socialization fundamentally as a process of learning about a new or changed role and
the environment surrounding that role.” (p. 279). I focused on the learning-content dimension of their work in section 3.2.1.2., so here I focus on the processual and overall learning aspects. As mentioned above, Klein and Heuser add two components to their 12-dimension content typology, namely level and temporality. As regards level, they note that:

“[…] those content areas need to be mastered relative to multiple levels within the organization […] Specifically, the learning that characterizes the socialization process needs to take place relative to the job, the immediate work group, sub-units within the organization (e.g., departments, locations, divisions), as well as to the organization as a whole.” (p. 309).

Of relevance in relation to start-ups, they state that: “[…] in a small firm, we would expect to see less distinction between levels (and some levels may not exist) than in a large firm.” (p. 312).

As regards temporal aspects, “[…] socialization occurs over several months and there are temporal considerations relating to the different socialization content dimensions.” (p. 279). They go on to note that, “[…] in terms of our current focus on the optimal learning of socialization content, no research to our knowledge has examined the optimal timing for learning the different socialization content dimensions” (p. 313). They mention that stage models might to some extent be useful in relation to indicating content focus points throughout the OS process.

Wang et al. (2015) focus on the interface between context, learning (content) and process in OS. They make two overall contributions to understanding newcomer adjustment as they develop and use a taxonomy of contextual factors as part of understanding adjustment content and distinguish learning content from newcomers’ process of adjusting (p. 4-5). They note that:

“[…] categories of socialization content serve as the raw material that newcomers acquire to understand their new jobs. However, socialization content only determines what newcomers should learn. As for how much information and knowledge newcomers actually obtain, a more significant role is played by socialization process.” (p. 10, emphasis in original).

While the above quotes focus on learning content and process, another aspect of learning in the OS literature highlights the importance of socialisation agents as learning sources. However, according to Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006), “As the OS literature has come of age, learning has been acknowledged as the crux of OS […] However, research on learning sources has not kept pace.” (p. 502).

As regards human learning sources, Delobbe, Cooper-Thomas, and De Hoe (2016) state:
“From both interactionist and learning perspectives, the nature and quality of informal interactions between newcomers and insiders, especially supervisors and peers, have been viewed for a long time as major determinants of newcomers’ adjustment (Jokisaari, 2013; Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Rubenstein, & Song, 2013; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Reichers, 1987).” (p. 848).

Korte (2007) criticises previous OS theory for mostly focusing on passive learning. Drawing on cognitive learning and social exchange, he argues that OS is more complex, and that a broader conceptualisation is needed. He highlights informal learning: “In line with the literature on informal learning in organizations, this paper suggests that much of the learning of the social norms of the workgroup and organization by newcomers takes place informally.” (Problem Statement section, para. 2). He also stresses the importance of the social context, and suggests that: “[...] the primary influence on learning is the individual interactions and relationships with members of one’s immediate workgroup. It is the quality of these interactions and relationships that can strengthen or thwart the successful entry into an organization.” (Problem Statement section, para. 2).

Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006) caution that the focus on newcomer learning in itself is not enough: “[...] learning is a means to an end. The learning in itself does not change the individual from newcomer to insider; rather it is what is achieved with that learning that defines this transformation.” (p. 498-499). This links with the knowledge aspect, where Klein and Heuser (2008) argue that: “The most immediate outcomes of the socialization process are changes in knowledge (Fisher, 1986). The most appropriate criteria are therefore indicators of the learning that occurs during the socialization process (Chao et al., 1994).” (p. 296-297).

Klein and Weaver (2000) observe that, in quantitative studies, in terms of the learning content dimension scales typically used, often following those developed by Chao et al. (1994), “[...] some assess the relatively straightforward learning of factual or procedural knowledge while others address the more complex integration of knowledge.” (p. 64). They stress that this is a challenge because it means that the scales address different types of learning, but it is not known to which extent they to this in a “reliable, valid manner” (p. 64).

Ostroff and Kozlowski’s (1992) article is central as regards how ‘knowledge’ is treated in the OS literature. I focus primarily on this article, as a large amount of subsequent research references this (e.g. Klein & Weaver, 2000; Wang et al., 2015), and because it is one of the articles that comes closest to dealing with learning, information and knowledge together. It is an example of how learning has
been studied in the context of OS, and they use the learning aspect in focusing on newcomers gaining knowledge of various domains through information acquisition:

“This study investigated newcomers’ information acquisition about organizational contextual domains from different sources, the relationship between information acquisition and knowledge of domains, relationships between information acquisition from sources, knowledge of domains and socialization outcomes, and shifts in these processes over time.” (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992, p. 849).

The study is based on two waves of questionnaires, enquiring about information acquisition, domain knowledge (they specify four domains: job-related tasks, work roles, group processes, and organisational attributes), and attitudinal outcomes. Their results show both a relationship between newcomers’ information acquisition from different sources and their beliefs about their knowledge of the four domains and between information acquisition and a range of attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction and turnover intention. However, there is not a 1:1 relationship between information acquisition and newcomers’ perceptions/beliefs about their knowledge:

“These findings support the notion that the utility (for gaining knowledge) of the information acquired is not equivalent to the amount of information acquired. Interpersonal sources may provide information about the organizational context, but observation of others and trial and experimentation appear to contribute more to the perceptions of knowledge gained about these features.” (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992, p. 863).

They also find that: “[… sources of information are differentially important for knowledge or mastery as well as for attitudinal outcomes.” (p. 867). As regards the different content domains, they conclude that: “Results from this study indicate that acquiring information about and mastery of these issues [organisational] is less important than a focus on task, role or group issues during early job experiences [...]” (p. 869).

The above quotes about the differential importance of sources of information can be related to Wang et al. (2015), who seem to suggest that different information sources can be complementary, in that the “[...] socialization process directly results in newcomers’ acquisition of knowledge about their new work environment. Newcomers can increase their levels of organizational knowledge (i.e., amount of learning) by seeking different types of information.” (p. 16-17). They also note that: “Since newcomer socialization is a process during which newcomers interact with the new environment, the
quality of socialization outcomes largely depends on the quality of these interactions.” (p. 18). As regards interactions with socialisation agents, Delobbe et al. (2016) note that: “[…] relationships with insiders are proven as a key conduit for newcomers to acquire role-related and organizational knowledge (Jokisaari, 2013; Morrison, 2002).” (p. 851).

In terms of the limitations of and challenges in Ostroff and Kozlowski’s (1992) study, a common criticism of relying on self-report questionnaires in this way is problematising whether people know what they do not know, i.e., to which extent can people assess what they have learned about something if they do not know how much there is left to learn? The authors themselves acknowledge relying on self-reports as a limitation (p. 870). However, they do qualify this limitation in their text, by mentioning that they assess newcomers’ ‘knowledge beliefs’ (p. 863), i.e. assess newcomers’ perceptions about their knowledge.

Also, with regard to assessing learning and knowledge through surveys, Chao (1997) notes that:

“[…] the lessons learned during socialization encompass a wide variety of topics, including how to perform one’s duties, who to seek help from, and what to believe. Interpretations of work experiences often involve sense-making processes, which constitute a key aspect of socialization (Louis, 1980). Thus, much of the knowledge gained from socialization experiences may occur at nonconscious levels of information processing.” (p. 137).

The implication of this is related to the above criticism about assessing knowledge in cases where people might not know what they do not know, but in another way: the quote suggests that it might be difficult to measure all learning through survey research, because if the knowledge is created on a nonconscious level, newcomers might not indicate this as learning in a survey measure.

Another criticism of the study is that, even though Ostroff and Kozlowski (1992) seem to differentiate between information and knowledge in the beginning of their article (p. 853), they offer no definitions of learning, information or knowledge. Although one of their sections is entitled ‘Acquiring information versus gaining knowledge’ (p. 853), and they differentiate between learning, information and knowledge, it is not clear how they do so, since they do not address the distinction they make, and later in their article they seem to be confounding, and sometimes even equating, information and knowledge. At any rate, not specifically defining the differences makes it difficult to determine whether you have ‘measured’ one or the other, which may then be why they seem to collapse them.
Cardon (2001) and Myers (2011) employ somewhat more specific definitions and nuanced understandings of knowledge. In studying the impact of anticipated tenure (related to contingent workers) on different aspects of accommodation, Cardon (2001) draws on the notion of knowledge integration, meaning that newcomers integrate prior general knowledge with firm specific knowledge, resulting in new knowledge, and she notes that this is understood as learning. She emphasises that this knowledge integration is facilitated by social relationships (p. 14-15).

Myers (2011) emphasises that knowledge has a “tacit, procedural, and organizational” nature (p. 289). She mentions organisational knowledge socialisation (p. 295), and focuses on how newcomers come to understand organisational knowledge, defined as “[…] context-specific information that enables members to interpret, make decisions, and act (Droege & Hoobler, 2003).” (p. 285). She observes that: “Previous research has examined how organizational knowledge is distributed (Choo, 1998; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), but research has not related these findings to the socialization of newcomers.” (p. 286). According to Myers, it is challenging to distribute organisational knowledge to newcomers, since “[…] acquiring functional organizational knowledge requires familiarity with the context – something newcomers lack.” (p. 286). In other words, newcomers are unlikely to get the full benefit of early orientation programs: “Until recruits develop minimal contextual understanding, they cannot effectively absorb and internalize much of the information that is shared during formal training, which, ironically, often occurs during the first few days of membership.” (p. 286). She stresses the importance of informal workgroup interaction (as opposed to early formal orientation) for newcomers to acquire organisational knowledge (p. 293), since workgroup interaction is a “[…] means of exposing new members to contextualised understandings and normative behaviors […]” (p. 289). Thus, Myers (2011) emphasises the importance of contextual immersion for understanding organisational knowledge, which is necessarily tied to a specific context:

“The extensive literature on organizational knowledge and the intricacies surrounding its distribution offer several theoretical and practical insights into the difficulties of newcomer socialization. First, due to the need to understand the relevant context, it is apparent that new members require exposure to the role, work, and culture of the organization before they are capable of making sense of and utilizing organizational knowledge.” (p. 297).

Finally, conceptualising socialisation as a phenomenon of mutual adjustment, there is also another perspective in relation to learning, namely that it is not just newcomers who have to learn, the organisation also needs to learn about the newcomer (Keisling & Laning, 2016, p. 382). For instance,
colleagues might be better able to help a newcomer if they know more about her/his background. Keisling and Laning (2016) also mention that there is “[...] research that suggests another purpose of onboarding is for the organization to learn and broadly share knowledge about the new employee’s signature strengths.” (p. 382). This might be especially relevant in new ventures, where a candidate is often hired because she/he possesses specific skills, i.e. hired not just to replace another person, but to help the start-up move forward.

As shown above, in relation to learning and knowledge aspects of OS there has been a focus on learning content domains, information acquisition, which information and information sources are relevant for different learning content domains, and thus learning and knowledge about those domains, and how this is linked to specific (often distal) OS outcomes. However, knowledge as such has not been very specifically defined, and the link between information, learning and knowledge also seems to be more inferred than elaborated. The OKC field presented in chapter 4 offers important contributions to OS in this regard. In other words, there is a shortcoming in the OS literature which OKC can help to solve, which would strengthen the understanding of knowledge in the OS field. In the theoretical framework (chapter 5), I show that, through OKC, OS can be approached as a knowledge communication process and OS proximal outcomes understood as related to knowledge.

3.5. Outcomes of Organisational Socialisation

As noted in chapter 2, in the early phases of my work I was familiar with ‘outcomes’ as a general aspect of OS. However, the more I immersed myself in my empirical and theoretical work, the more meaningful they became as a way to understand aspects of the newcomers’ accounts about entry and knowledge in that regard, in relation to my research questions and the purpose of the research. In this section, therefore, I present an introduction to ‘outcomes’ in the OS literature. In chapter 5, I then show how these can theoretically relate to the integration of OS and OKC outlined in that chapter. In the discussion (chapter 15), I bring together my empirical findings and theoretical framework, and as part of this I discuss dynamics and knowledge challenges related to the outcomes in a start-up context.

Outcomes of the OS process are classified at two levels: proximal and distal. Bargues and Valiorgue (2019) note that:

“Scholars have identified “proximal” socialization outcomes that indicate how well a newcomer is adjusting to his or her new role (Bauer, et al., 2007; Saks, et al., 2007). They have also identified “distal” outcomes that indicate the ultimate consequences and effects of
organizational socialization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2012), such as organizational commitment and job performance (Bauer, et al., 2007; Jones, 1986; Saks, et al., 2007).” (p. 44).

I focus on proximal outcomes for two reasons: the ‘socialisation time’ in focus for my study means that immediate adjustment outcomes are more relevant than ultimate longer-term consequences, and furthermore I argue that, by focusing more on proximal outcomes, we might become better able to facilitate processes that lead to more successful distal outcomes. In the literature, it is indicated that there has been too much focus on distal outcomes and too little on the proximal outcomes which precede them (e.g. Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) review different typologies and present four proximal outcomes: task mastery, role clarity, group integration, and political knowledge (p. 781). According to the authors, “These proximal socialization outcomes are direct representations of the quality of a newcomers’ [sic] adjustment, indicating both the acquisition of requisite knowledge and skill for the organizational role as well as the development of social relationships that will help to bind the newcomer to the organization and its goals.” (p. 781). In other words, proximal outcomes are traditionally treated as measures of adjustment and knowledge acquisition related to different aspects, and this has typically been measured through the use of quantitative scales, as shown in the review by T. N. Bauer and Erdogan (2012).

For the purposes here, I focus on role clarity, task mastery and social integration, since these are considered the three primary proximal outcomes (Ashforth, 2012, p. 180). As regards role clarity, Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) note that:

“[…] to function in the organizational environment, newcomers must learn about their job’s purpose and relationship to other jobs (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Louis, 1980). Role clarity reflects having sufficient information about the responsibilities and objectives of one’s job in the broader organization and having knowledge of behaviors considered appropriate for achieving these goals (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Ambiguous situations with unclear role expectations may make it difficult for individuals to assess where to direct their efforts, resulting in confusion and dissatisfaction (Miller & Jablin, 1991).” (p. 781, emphasis in original).

In OS, the opposite of role clarity is referred to as role ambiguity, which Saks and Ashforth (1997) describe as a ‘stressor’ for newcomers (p. 261).
Task mastery, which Lacaze and Bauer (2014) refer to as self-efficacy, includes newcomers

“[…] acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills they need to complete expected task behaviours (e.g. Chao et al., 1994; Fisher, 1986; Reichers, 1987; Taormina, 1994). As operationalized in our present study, task mastery reflects this learning as a self-appraisal of one’s ability to successfully fulfill job responsibilities.” (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003, p. 781).

The third proximal outcome is often labelled either ‘work group integration’ or ‘social integration’ (e.g. Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Lacaze and Bauer (2014) refer to it as ‘social acceptance’. However, common to these different labels is a focus on newcomers’ relationships with peers. Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) define work group integration as an outcome that:

“[…] relates to perceived approval from coworkers and inclusion in their activities, which can be a source of social support and assistance. Newcomers may also use social acceptance as an indication that they fit into their new work roles, meaning they have established a situational identity (Moreland & Levine, 2001; Reichers, 1987).” (p. 782).

One example of empirical work which includes OS outcomes is Delobbe et al. (2016), who draw on a psychological contract perspective and study how newcomers’ perception of their obligations “[…] at the start of employment shapes the subsequent socialization process.” (p. 845). As part of their focus on the role of perceived obligations, they show how it indirectly affects three socialisation outcomes: 1) role clarity, 2) group integration, and 3) organizational values understanding, through training utility and social dynamics (leader-member exchange and team-member exchange) (p. 845, p. 858). The outcomes they cover are described as follows:

“The role dimension refers to the clarity of activities and responsibilities, performance expectations, and appropriate behaviors related to one’s position in the broader organization. Social integration relates to the employee’s inclusion in coworkers’ activities and the level of acceptance and assistance from the work group. The third dimension encompasses understanding the goals and values of the organization as a whole.” (p. 850).

Their study was carried out in a military context, the newcomers being new army recruits. They hypothesise that “[…] newcomers with a higher sense of their personal obligations at entry will perceive orientation training as more useful and develop better relationships with their supervisors and peers, which in turn will facilitate their work adjustment.” (p. 845). In relation to newcomer
proactive behaviour, they offer two explanations for how newcomers’ sense of obligations affect socialisation: 1) newcomers may engage more in proactive behaviours, thus getting more out of training and building relationships, if they have higher perceived obligations, 2) the newcomers can trigger social exchange processes through delivering contributions (see Delobbe et al., 2016, p. 861).

3.6. Positioning: Approach to and Definition of Organisational Socialisation in the Study

This review has identified different focus points in OS research, and shown the discipline is to some extent fragmented. In the following, based on sections 3.1. and 3.2., I outline the approach to and definitions of OS that I employ. My choice is influenced by context sensitivity, i.e. I have chosen a definition of and approach to OS relevant to the start-up context and the research questions. I thus also refer to section 3.3. In the theoretical framework (chapter 5), I couple this OS positioning with the OKC field which I review in chapter 4, and draw on sections 3.4. and 3.5.

In the present study, I couple an interactionist approach with context sensitivity. I follow the interactionist approach to OS (Griffin et al., 2000), which stresses that socialisation is something newcomers and socialisation agents (in my case primarily the managers/owners) accomplish together, and that both parties should therefore be considered. In my view, this perspective is more relevant to, and in line with, the start-up setting. It is also more meaningful given my view of communication and knowledge, which I elaborate in chapter 4 and the theoretical framework.

This is also related to approaching OS as a social constructivist. Since I follow a social constructivist position, both ontologically and epistemologically, it is not just knowledge of social ‘reality’ that is socially constructed, social ‘reality’ is in itself socially constructed (cf. Rasborg, 2013, p. 406). In brief, the interactionist approach in OS calls for socialisation studies to consider newcomers and the actions of socialisation agents in tandem, rather than focusing on either organisational tactics or newcomers’ (re)actions. Previously, I described how social constructivists view the relationship between the individual and the social. This also relates to the relationship between social constructivism and the interactionist approach in OS. I view the process of settling in as something that newcomers and managers (and other socialisation agents, but here I focus on those two as especially salient in the start-up context) negotiate and achieve in collaboration, i.e. it is constructed in and of a social environment, and not just something that one party does to the other. Thus, OS is simultaneously both a social and an individual phenomenon. Approaching OS as co-constructed between multiple agents is consistent with the perspective that the meaning of ‘reality’ is socially constructed between parties.
This means that, even though I focus primarily on newcomers, I also include the managers’ perspectives. Including different perspectives is also related to my transactional approach to communication (see section 4.2.3.), where people create meaning together. This makes it important to understand the different perspectives. Here, this is done through accounts (which are not regarded as context-independent) and investigating patterns in and across them, as the accounts construct and reproduce specific versions of the social realities of OS in start-ups.

As regards context, the apparent lack of context sensitivity in OS (as shown in the review) seems to stem from an assumption that OS will look very similar across types of companies, not only in terms of size, but also age and industry. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) try to present a general theory, and thus these contextual nuances are not featured in the original works on OS. Cooper-Thomas, Anderson, and Cash (2011), in referring to Van Maanen and Schein (1979), state this fact about the attempted generality. But even if Van Maanen and Schein (1979) did mention that elements of their theory would not apply to small organisations, most of the later research has focused on the tactics in larger companies, and few have then addressed them in small and new companies, although, as shown in section 3.3., the scant literature on OS in start-ups, and the emerging literature on HRM and entrepreneurship mention a range of aspects that are likely to impact OS in start-ups.

So far, I have mentioned context in terms of type of industry and type of company (age, size). Other contextual aspects include type of newcomers, type of job, and also national context. As regards national context, within the HRM area, Mayrhofer, Sparrow, and Brewster (2012) note that European HRM is tied to context because of specific contingencies and characteristics, also conceptually, which differ from universalist assumptions in e.g. North American HRM approaches (p. 528). It is also possible to identify these ‘universalist assumptions’ in the OS literature. Mayrhofer et al. (2012) argue for contextualised studies on a macro level (national aspects) in relation to HR research in general. I argue for contextualised studies on a more meso/micro level within the area of OS specifically. In other words, instead of neglecting context, it is necessary to investigate whether particular contextual aspects affect OS, or at least to take into account that this is something that might make a difference.

Since I study OS in the context of start-ups, drawing on the perspective of OKC, and with an interactionist understanding, I follow Cooper-Thomas and Anderson’s (2006) definition of OS as: “[…] the process through which a new organizational employee adapts from outsider to integrated and effective insider.” (p. 492). I agree with this definition, because a large number of other definitions, going back to Van Maanen and Schein (1979), focus on how newcomers learn a role. But
in start-ups, titles can be arbitrary and roles not formally or informally given. Thus, Cooper-Thomas and Anderson’s (2006) definition is more suited to socialisation in start-ups, since it does not focus on how individuals learn a pre-specified role, but puts more emphasis on the process of adapting from outsider to insider. I thus prefer this definition, since it is broader and focuses more generally on becoming part of the organisation. Of course, becoming part of an organisation often happens in terms of a role, but in start-ups, as mentioned, roles are sometimes less defined and more emergent.

Given that Cooper-Thomas and Anderson’s (2006) definition is very broad and general, I couple it with elements from Taormina’s (1997) definition of OS as: “[…] the process by which a person secures relevant job skills, acquires a functional level of organizational understanding, attains supportive social interactions with coworkers, and generally accepts the established ways of a particular organization.” (p. 29, emphasis in original). Thus, OS is about the process of going from organisational outsider to organisational insider, and this entails elements such as acquiring relevant skills, understanding, and social integration. As regards Taormina’s definition, the final part about ‘accepting the established ways’ can be debated in relation to start-ups, since the degree of ‘established ways’ can differ and newcomers can play a role in defining them.

As mentioned, in my view OS is more than just a process about what organisations ‘do’ to their newcomers, but something that is co-constructed (interactionist perspective). Even though Cooper-Thomas and Anderson’s (2006) definition focuses on individuals as ‘new organisational employees’, I view process here as being integrative, i.e. something where multiple parties play a role, and I understand process not as something that is necessarily very planned, but more as an occurrence of a series of (minor or major) events. In the literature, OS often seems to be perceived as a planned process, but this is not always the case in practice (at least not in the detail that some of the literature would suggest, and also not in many of the start-up companies I know of). OS practices may be planned, or they might be ad hoc and emerging.

In addition, in terms of approach, I view newcomers as not just motivated to reduce uncertainty, i.e. I agree with Ashford and Nurmohamed’s (2012, p. 18) and Cooper-Thomas and Burke’s (2012, p. 57) comments that proactive behaviour is about more than uncertainty reduction. For instance, newcomers might also be motivated to excel and prove themselves (which can be related to uncertainty, but not exclusively). I am more inclined to say that people constantly (consciously or unconsciously) try to make sense, e.g. because they are motivated to contribute.
Although related to both the previous and subsequent phases, I focus primarily on the encounter phase of socialisation, which I define as the phase where a newcomer (officially) makes her/his entrance in an organisation, starts doing work, and e.g. meets other employees. I return to the encounter phase in the methods chapter (7), where I discuss the temporal aspects for the interviews I conducted.

I present my theoretical framework in chapter 5, and show how the combination of OS approaches and definitions outlined here can be compatible with that framework. My research should not be seen as an attempt to fragment the OS field even more, but rather as picking up some of the aspects that are underexplored and linking them (i.e. OS in small, new organisations and knowledge in relation to OS), in a relevant synthesis. In the next chapter, I focus on OKC, before integrating OS and OKC in chapter 5.
4. Literature Review: Organisational Knowledge Communication

Organisational Knowledge Communication (OKC) is an emerging disciplinariness, which is based on the tendency to link various aspects of organisational communication and knowledge management (KM) (cf. Kastberg, 2014). It is a specialised field based on a unique integration of aspects from other disciplines, namely organisation studies, knowledge management (KM) and communication theory (Kastberg, 2014, p. 83), and is as the crossroads of certain perspectives within these. Thus, OKC is the study of communication of and about knowledge in organisations.

As with the OS literature review in the previous chapter, the present review also takes the form of a qualitative, narrative review. In relation to the research at hand, the purpose is to present OKC as an overall field, and then focus on the elements of the OKC trajectories I will be using, and how I use them. OKC is both a niche field and an encompassing one, inasmuch as it draws on and integrates several comprehensive disciplines. Thus, in this chapter, I review the related literature and outline the specific positions taken, in line with the overall OKC field. In chapter 5, I show how a synthesis of the OKC perspective with OS can be possible, and how they are synthesised in the context of my research.

4.1. Organisational Knowledge Communication as a Field

OKC is described as a ‘triple helix’ which draws on three academic strands, integrating them to create its very own DNA (Kastberg, 2014):

“In their synthesis the three trajectories form a disciplinary triple helix, a triple helix which, in turn, gives rise to Organizational Knowledge Communication as a novel, 3rd order disciplinarity. Whereas each discipline is a strand in its own right in the helix, these strands, nevertheless, also allow for disciplinary integration, albeit punctually and dynamically. And it is exactly in such trilateral punctual and dynamic integrations that Organizational Knowledge Communication becomes visible, becomes a disciplinarity.” (Kastberg, 2014, p. 83).

Thus, as Kastberg (2014) argues, it is the way that aspects from the three disciplinary trajectories (organisation studies, knowledge management and communication theory) are integrated which makes OKC a field in its own right, a discipline which builds on others to form a unique new discipline.
Tompkins (1987) wrote that “Communication is a polysemic word, a concept of multiple meanings.” (p. 71). The prospect of reviewing the interfaces between organisation, knowledge and communication is further complicated by the fact that it is not only ‘communication’ that is polysemic - ‘knowledge’ is also a much debated concept, and organisation is defined in multiple ways. However, OKC’s special DNA comes from its drawing on specific aspects of the different trajectories and integrating them. I describe this in more detail in the following sections.

4.2. The Disciplinary Trajectories

In this section, I review the contributions from the three trajectories of organisation studies, knowledge management and communication theory which OKC draws on. As noted above, OKC is a distinct disciplinarity because of the way it integrates certain aspects from each of these trajectories. In the following, I outline relevant aspects of each trajectory in relation to OKC, and in later sections relate these to each other and sum up OKC as a field.

4.2.1. Organisation: Trajectory and Context

In this section, I show how ‘organisation’ is approached in OKC. Given the size of the three trajectories, and since I return to aspects related to ‘organisation’ elsewhere (e.g. in chapter 5), here, for reasons of space, I only briefly describe conceptualisations of organisation and position OKC in relation to these.

Earlier works focused on knowledge communication (without the O for organisational) in a variety of contexts, especially specialised knowledge, and related to the broader society (see, for example, Kastberg, 2010). The movement from KC to OKC implies a specification of context; in OKC, the ‘O’ signals the context for knowledge communication, the approach to which is informed by including organisation studies as a disciplinary trajectory, which then becomes a dimension of the overall OKC disciplinarity. Here, I focus on the phenomenon ‘organisation’ in relation to the organisation studies trajectory, and in chapter 5 I return to organisation as a context in relation to OS and start-ups as my empirical setting.

As regards the organisation studies trajectory, organisations are now conceptualised as more organic, moving on from more mechanical conceptualisations. Kastberg (2014) notes that:

“There is a tendency to acknowledge a development over time; a development of going from a perception of the organization (as well as its practices and processes) as being structurally
relative [sic] simple, relatively mechanistic and relatively closed to an understanding of the organization as a highly complex, a highly dynamic and an open entity.” (p. 87).

One proponent of viewing organisations as complex and dynamic is Stacey (2000; 2001) who, in describing ‘complex responsive processes’ as a way of understanding knowledge in organisations, highlights relational aspects and mentions that organisations are ‘interactive processes’ (2000, p. 36). I return to Stacey’s views on knowledge in the next subsection (4.2.2.). In elaborating on organisations, Stacey (2001) writes: “I am suggesting, then, that human organizations are processes of complex responsive relating between bodies in human and non-human contexts. These are processes of communicative interaction in the medium of symbols, patterned as organizing themes.” (p. 188). This is markedly different from the more mechanic and static definitions, and gives communication a central position in relation to ‘organising’.

OKC draws on the general discussion in organisation studies about how to approach the study of organisations (cf. Kastberg, 2014). Thus, the conceptualisation of ‘organisation’ in OKC follows newer developments in the definitions of organisations, where ‘organisations’ are increasingly understood as complex, dynamic and open. In other words, organisations are not seen as simple mechanic and objectively existing structures, but as contingent and complex systems with permeable boundaries (i.e. they do not exist in isolation from their surroundings), where communication between people is central.

4.2.2. Knowledge
Knowledge management (KM) is another of the disciplinary strands underlying OKC (Kastberg, 2014). In this section, I outline the relationship between KM and OKC (subsection 4.2.2.1.), but I also move beyond the discussion of knowledge from a KM perspective to draw on other relevant works (subsection 4.2.2.2.), e.g. those that discuss knowledge and knowing from more philosophical starting points, since I also regard this as part of the OKC disciplinarity in the way that it integrates the three trajectories of organisation studies, knowledge management and communication theory. In subsection 4.2.2.3. I then discuss learning and information in relation to knowledge in OKC. In other words, I first frame knowledge per se, and then touch on learning and information in relation to this. The aim of these sections is to present different views and nuances of knowledge and knowing, i.e. to position the knowledge aspect of OKC. This also forms part of the basis for chapter 5, where I show how I link OKC and OS, and why this is a relevant contribution.
4.2.2.1. Knowledge Management and Moving beyond It

Kastberg (2014) notes that: “[…] although it is not much more than three decades old, KM has nevertheless matured remarkably fast as a discipline.” (p. 88-89). Based on Guretzky (2010), he presents three generations of trends in KM: KM 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 (Kastberg, 2014, p. 89). KM 1.0 focuses on “Making implicit knowledge explicit”, KM 2.0 highlights the role of communication, while the final generation (in this typology) is about empowerment of knowledge workers (p. 89).

Greve (2015) slightly alters and presents additional theories related to the three generations (p. 38-39). She sums up the first generation as “Knowledge is a dichotomy” (p. 39), the second generation she labels “Knowledge is a hierarchy” (p. 41), and the third “Knowledge is empowerment” (p. 44).

Kastberg (2014) argues that the different tendencies show that:

“In terms of evolutionary development the legacy of the early cognitivist idea, i.e., that knowledge is an entity which we can make explicit, easily isolate, somehow package and then send to whomever is in need of that particular parcel of knowledge, seems to be vanishing.” (p. 89).

Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) also challenge the conceptualisation of knowledge as something that can be managed, describing the coupling of ‘knowledge’ and ‘management’ not only as an odd couple, but as an oxymoron (p. 996): “[…] knowledge is an ambiguous, unspecific and dynamic phenomenon, intrinsically related to meaning, understanding and process, and therefore difficult to manage. There is thus a contradiction between knowledge and management.” (p. 995).

These authors criticise the functional orientations to knowledge that overlook its socially constructed character:

“A common take on knowledge seems to be to accept or side-step the inherent problems of defining the concept, but go on and use it anyway. Authors emphasize the social nature of knowledge creation but they regularly stop short of acknowledging the socially constructed nature of knowledge itself. Instead a highly functionalistic understanding of knowledge prevails. The logic seems to be as follows: ‘we don’t know what knowledge is but it seems to solve problems in a functional way, so let’s use it anyway’.” (p. 999).

In their review of the KM literature, Schultze and Stabell (2004) develop a framework with four different discourses in KM research (see p. 556) based on two dimensions: duality-dualism and dissensus-consensus. The ‘dualism-duality’ dimension is their epistemological dimension (p. 553),
while they view the ‘dissensus-consensus’ dimension as a social-order dimension (p. 554-555). They state that their objective is “[…] to explore the contradictory, double-edged nature of knowledge by developing a theory-informed framework that highlights different assumptions about knowledge and its management.” (p. 550). The four discourses in the framework are: “[…] the neo-functionalist, the constructivist, the critical and the dialogic.” (p. 551). One way of distinguishing between them is how they approach tacit knowledge, i.e. knowledge as implicit and un-codified as opposed to explicit knowledge, since an original focus of KM was how tacit knowledge could be operationalised. This distinction between the two has therefore been central in KM. Thus:

“In the neo-functionalist discourse it [tacit knowledge] is viewed as a unique asset that promises a firm competitive advantage whereas in the constructivist discourse it provides the necessary formative context that supports coordination and the use of the communication of explicit knowledge. In the critical discourse, tacit knowledge is regarded as a source of power and a coveted prize that adversarial parties – such as management and workers – seek to own, while in the dialogic discourse tacit knowledge is the most insidious forms of disciplinary power that is inevitably part of knowledge.” (Schultze and Stabell, 2004, p. 561, my emphasis).

Schultze and Stabell (2004) argue that “[…] all four discourses need to be appreciated, understood and represented in knowledge management research for this area of inquiry to deal with the rich and problematic nature of managing knowledge in practice.” (p. 549), and that “[…] the metaphors of knowledge proposed in our framework support the development of situated understandings of knowledge.” (p. 567).

In relation to this framework, OKC as a communicative approach would lie mainly in the ‘Constructivist Discourse’ camp (while perhaps also partly being aligned with aspects of the ‘Dialogic Discourse’ and some aspects of the others), where:

“In other words, knowledge as mind is not a reference to the cognitivist metaphor of organizational brain (Morgan, 1986), but rather reflects the duality worldview in that it challenges the notion that knowledge can be managed as an object separate from human action (Cohen, 1998). If knowledge is brought to bear in mindful action, then ‘the locus of the agent’s knowing is not in his head but in practice, that is to say, his understanding is implicit in the activity in which he engages’ (Tsoukas, 1996, p. 16).” (Schultze & Stabell, 2004, p. 558).
The authors sum up the constructivist KM discourse in the following way: “To summarize, the constructivist discourse is concerned with practices of knowing and learning and the coordination of action in organizations.” (Schultze & Stabell, 2004, p. 563).

Schultze and Stabell (2004) also note that:

“The constructivists’ dialectic perspective on tacit knowledge is much more in line with Polanyi’s (1966) original work, which was on tacit knowing, i.e., the notion that ‘we can know more than we can tell’ (p. 4). The discourse does not separate knowing (i.e., action) from knowledge (Pentland, 1995).” (p. 563).

This is not only in line with Polanyi (1966/1967), but also with Ryle’s (1949) notions of ‘know how’ and ‘know that’ and the relationship between them, which Polanyi also employed. I return to this in section 4.2.2.3., where I discuss the relationship between information and knowledge.

‘Knowledge’ has been treated extensively in research from a number of perspectives (see, for example, McIver, Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, and Ramachandran (2012), on knowledge in organisational literature). McIver et al. (2012) comment that there are two schools of thought on knowledge in organisations: the commodity school and the community school (p. 87). The commodity school, which has a possession perspective, “[…] have focused on understanding “knowledge” as an artifact […]” (McIver et al., 2012, p. 87, emphasis in original), whereas the community perspective focuses on knowing and approaches knowledge as a “dynamic phenomenon” (McIver et al., 2012, p. 87-88). In this regard, OKC leans towards the latter.

Thus, even though KM is one of the disciplinary strands underlying OKC, the knowledge perspective developed in OKC and the view of knowledge presented in the OKC literature has developed significantly from original KM definitions of knowledge, because here KM meets specific aspects of organisation studies and communication theory. However, the KM literature has itself developed (Guretzky in Kastberg, 2014), and here OKC draws on more recent KM research.

The knowledge ‘hype’ in relation to organisations has also been criticised. For instance, Alvesson and Spicer (2012) question whether organisations are always smart and knowledge-intensive. Thus, this is a critical contribution in the knowledge-oriented literature on organisations (see also Alvesson, 2001). Specifically, it is a critique of the understanding of knowledge in the resource-based view of organisations, where KM and knowledge communication are approached from a functionalist resource perspective. OKC is not interested in a functionalist focus on knowledge exploitation, but
rather focused on advancing a more complex understanding of knowledge and knowledge use and communication in everyday organisational practice. In this sense, OKC has a distinct ‘axiology’ (K. Miller, 2005, p. 30-31). This is also linked to the specific developments in the three trajectories that it draws on, and especially to how these are integrated, which I elaborate in the sections in this chapter.

4.2.2.2. Characterisations of Knowledge

Discussions about knowledge have different starting points, depending on whether they are on an epistemological, theoretical or everyday-practice level. Epistemologists are concerned with the question of ‘what is knowledge?’ (cf. Qvortrup, 2004b). Theoretically, according to Qvortrup (2004b), the question is “how is knowledge possible?” or “how is knowledge brought about?” (p. 12). Finally, it might be presumed that the definition of knowledge is somewhat taken for granted on an everyday-practice level, where it is more a question of “how is knowledge put to use?” As such, the everyday concern is not what knowledge is, but how it can be useful or made use of. Thus, my aim here is also, after having reviewed select literature, to outline a view of knowledge in OKC that can be applied on a theoretical level, but which is also meaningful in a more practical sense in relation to how my informants approach the concepts of knowledge and knowing, while also being consistent with my epistemological standpoint. As regards the knowledge aspect, what is relevant in an OKC context is not (necessarily) a grand philosophical debate about what knowledge is (once and for all), but more a situated investigation of what knowledge is in a certain context, and how it is part of the makeup of that context.

The knowledge literature is rich in discussions on different types, levels and taxonomies of knowledge, especially literature discussing other scholars’ classifications. In this section, I outline a number of central classifications and taxonomies of knowledge, including: Polanyi’s (1966/1967) notion of tacit knowledge and the related notion of explicit knowledge, Qvortrup’s (2004a; 2006) four orders of knowledge, Blackler’s (1995) review of five types of knowledge, and Tsoukas and Vladimirou’s (2004) writing on personal and organisational knowledge and the relationship between them. In the next section, I touch on the knowledge/information debate, using Davenport and Prusak’s (2000) hierarchy as a starting point, and Ryle’s (1949) notions of knowing that and knowing how.

As the above shows, a range of typifications, taxonomies and typologies of, or relating to, knowledge have been proposed over the years. These can be classified into different overall clusters, e.g. where one cluster of typologies focuses on the form of knowledge (e.g. the tacit/explicit discussion), and another on content (what knowledge is about). As such, a ‘type of knowledge’ can signify both form
and domain. Moreover, these clusters need not be mutually exclusive, since, for example, it is possible to talk about the form of content knowledge.

In relation to this, based on Cook and Brown (1999) and Schultze and Stabell (2004, p. 553), two epistemologies of knowledge can be said to exist, without being mutually exclusive, in the same way that a focus on knowledge in a content perspective does not exclude also considering the form of knowledge (the two might also be intricately related). These two epistemologies are an epistemology of practice and an epistemology of possession. The former is concerned with the question ‘when is knowledge?’: “[…] opening the inquiry to the emergent nature of the phenomenon in situated practice.” (Schultze and Stabell, 2004, p. 553), while the latter is concerned with the question ‘what is knowledge?’.

In an organisational perspective, the vast majority of literature on knowledge and knowing mention at some point the notions of tacit and explicit knowledge. The notion of tacit knowledge is attributed to Polanyi (1966/1967). Tacit, or implicit, knowledge has been described as “[…] knowledge that is unarticulated and tied to the senses, movement skills, physical experiences, intuition, or implicit rules of thumb.” (Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009, p. 635). This is contrasted with explicit knowledge, which is: “[…] uttered, formulated in sentences, and captured in drawings and writing […]” (Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009, p. 636).

The above distinction is often mentioned in relation to Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) SECI model, the central idea of which is how to turn tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through the conversion processes of Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination and Internalisation. There is some disagreement about treating knowledge as either tacit or explicit, however (e.g. Duguid, 2005; see also the discussion below on information versus knowledge). Nonaka and von Krogh (2009) later amended this, saying that tacit and explicit knowledge should be seen as end-points on a continuum, with different expressions of knowledge leaning more towards one side of the spectrum than the other (p. 636-637). Polanyi (1966/1967) noted that there is always a tacit dimension. Brown and Duguid (2001) note that Polanyi “[…] is not, then, arguing for two types of knowledge, merely for two dimensions – two interdependent dimensions, it turns out […]” (p. 204). I agree with this line of thinking, also found in Duguid (2005) and Ryle (1949), where the tacit/explicit distinction is conscientious, since they are related to each other, i.e. the theoretical/formal (explicit) is linked to the practical/experiential (tacit).
Another characterisation is in Qvortrup (2004a), who, in his book *The Knowing Society*, bases his notion of four orders of knowledge on a systems theoretical approach and Bateson’s orders of learning (Qvortrup, 2004a, p. 31, p. 83). He also refers to Ryle’s (1949) classical notions of ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’ (Qvortrup, 2004a, p. 83). He explains that “[…] knowledge is knowledge about something as well as about itself.” (Qvortrup, 2004a, p. 18, my translation). In the following, I briefly go through the four orders of knowledge.

Factual knowledge is an example of *knowledge about something*: “Factual knowledge is knowledge of objects and phenomena. It is first order knowledge.” (Qvortrup, 2006, p. 10).

Competence is an example of *knowledge about knowledge*: “Competence is knowledge about factual knowledge, e.g. knowledge about how to solve problems by using one’s factual knowledge. This is thus second order knowledge: Knowledge of knowledge.” (p. 10).

Third order knowledge, creative knowledge, which is referred to as *systemic knowledge* in *The Knowing Society* (Qvortrup, 2004a, p. 85), is described as:

“[…] knowledge about knowledge about knowledge, i.e. knowledge about the hidden assumptions and/or explicated theories on which problem solving is practised. It is called “creative” because the possession of this type of knowledge makes it possible to change or modify one’s basic and often implicit assumptions and thus to do or “know” something differently.” (Qvortrup, 2006, p. 10-11).

Fourth order knowledge, which is meta-systemic (Qvortrup, 2004a), is:

“[…] knowledge concerning the evolutionary background for our system of knowledge forms. This fourth order knowledge cannot be changed or modified by the individual knowing person, but we know that it exists as the cultural knowledge background, i.e. as that which constitutes the absolute borderline to that which cannot be known. We know that we don’t know what we don’t know.” (Qvortrup, 2006, p. 11).

Qvortrup (2006) further states that “[…] knowledge […] is always a matter of confirmation of observations through repeated self-observations and through communication of others’ observations.” (p. 23). Knowledge consists of condensed and confirmed observations (p. 10).

Blackler (1995), based on a synthesis of earlier works, makes a distinction between five different types of knowledge which he calls: embodied knowledge (knowledge how/knowledge of
acquaintance), embedded knowledge, embrained knowledge (knowledge that/knowledge about), encultured knowledge, and encoded knowledge (p. 1023-1025).

He distinguishes between knowledge as a possession (to have knowledge) and knowing as an activity (doing knowing/knowledge): “Rather than regarding knowledge as something that people have, it is suggested that knowing is better regarded as something that they do.” (p. 1023, emphasis in original).

In other words, knowledge is knowing because it is an active process. He then goes on to suggest a focus on “how knowing is accomplished” (p. 1039), arguing that the focus should be on the systems through which knowing is achieved rather than on different types of knowledge (p. 1040). However, he also sees knowledge as something that is mediated and in itself transferrable (e.g. p. 1023). In section 4.3., I integrate the sections addressing the contributions of the different OKC trajectories to discuss why knowledge transfer is not possible from the perspective of OKC.

My research is concerned with how newcomers address the role and effect of organisational knowledge communication in their organisational entry, and in this sense knowledge has both an individual and an organisational perspective. The organisation provides the setting within and about which newcomers are presumed to try to become knowledgeable. In this respect, Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2004) provide an excellent discussion of the links between individual and organisation knowledge. They define personal knowledge as: “[…] the individual capability to draw distinctions, within a domain of action, based on an appreciation of context or theory, or both.” (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2004, p. 373). Organisational knowledge is then defined as:

“[…] the capability members of an organization have developed to draw distinctions in the process of carrying out their work, in particular concrete contexts, by enacting sets of generalizations (propositional statements) whose application depends on historically evolved collective understandings and experiences.” (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2004, p. 373, emphasis in original).

In an organisational context, the two are intimately related:

“ […] in so far as organizational knowledge is put into action, it is irreducibly personal. Since practitioners necessarily act in the real (i.e., complex) world, they inevitably rely on their judgment for aligning representations and cultural meanings with “the facts of experience” (Polanyi, 1962, p. 31).” (Tsoukas, 2011, p. xv, emphasis in original).
Thus, even though Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2004) focus on organisational knowledge, they also address how it is related to individuals, since organisational knowledge, in its application, is closely connected to personal knowledge. “Acknowledging that all knowledge contains a personal element or, to put it differently, ‘[recognizing] personal participation as the universal principle of knowing’ (Polanyi, 1974: 44), implies that knowing always is, to a greater or lesser extent, a skillful accomplishment, an art.” (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2004, p. 372, use of brackets in original).

These authors draw on Polanyi and Wittgenstein (p. 365) to show that knowledge is both personal and collective. Inspired by Polanyi, they note that personal knowledge is knowledge through indwelling, shifting the focus from thinking about personal knowledge as something an individual has and gives to others, to how it is constructed in specific environments (p. 365).

Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2004) stress the capacity to draw distinctions as an important element of their definitions of personal and organisational knowledge – the two definitions share this element. Drawing distinctions is situated, as Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2004) state that: “Individuals draw distinctions within a collective domain of action, namely within a language-mediated domain of sustained interactions.” (p. 368). This links up with Stacey’s (2000) complexity perspective, where he sees knowledge as emerging in relations between individuals (p. 23). Knowledge is thus situated in relations/is relational, and as such knowledge is related to something/these relations (the generalised other): “[…] knowledge emerges and evolves in a history of social interaction, rather than being developed by an autonomous individual […]” (Stacey & Griffin, 2005, p. 10, emphasis in original). This agrees with my social constructivist position, i.e. it is not feasible to separate man (and his knowledge) from his social context. He is knowledgeable in terms of and in relation to his social relations. Since we are suspended in different webs of social relations and situations, our personal knowledge (our ‘version’) is unique because of the uniqueness of the set of social relations and the situations in which we use our capacity to ‘draw distinctions’. Even if we take it for granted, this capacity to draw distinctions is practiced in (relation to) a social environment.

Stacey’s (2001) work on knowledge from the standpoint of complexity theory and complex responsive processes of relating is a radical contribution to rethinking knowledge in organisations. Stacey (2001), like others, criticises much of the early literature on knowledge, but he goes a step further in also criticising the critics for not being radical enough, as they still seem to be influenced by the same underlying idea as the works they criticise, namely that there is a dialectic between the individual and the social as two distinct levels (p. 38). Stacey (2001) disagrees with this, saying that
we must see the social and the individual as integrated parts. The situatedness inherent in this also means that knowledge is contextual. This in turn relates to how he distinguishes between knowledge and representations of knowledge. As such, Stacey (2001) argues for a view of knowledge which is built on a different teleology (e.g. p. 5).

4.2.2.3. Knowledge, Knowing, Learning and Information

Having presented knowledge aspects in relation to OKC, in this section I now discuss the terminology of concepts that are often used in relation to knowledge. The literature on knowledge in organisations is characterised by a number of perspectives, and to make sense of these in this review, it is useful to understand the distinction between knowledge and knowing. In her study of the practices of enacting knowing in distributed organising, Orlikowski (2002) states that knowing is “[…] a verb connoting action, doing practice […]” (p. 251), whereas knowledge is “[…] a noun connoting things, elements, facts, processes, dispositions […]” (p. 251). This relates to McIver et al.’s (2012) community and commodity schools mentioned earlier, and Blackler’s (1995) distinction between knowledge as possession and knowing as an activity.

As regards the relationship between knowledge and the notion of learning, literature on learning is vast, but here I focus specifically on learning as it would be approached within OKC. Learning and knowledge are intricately related. Indeed, in OKC there is a terminological challenge to discussing the notion of learning in relation to knowledge, because they are connected and it is difficult to speak of one in isolation from the other. The capacity to draw distinctions develops on the basis of learning, i.e. when an individual has learned something she/he is able to draw distinctions (distinctions should be understood in a both simple and abstract way). This also means that knowledge is not a static entity. Rather, it develops continuously (is processual), because through ongoing learning, people continuously develop their ability to ‘draw distinctions’. This can also be related to Qvortrup’s (see above) different levels of abstraction concerning knowledge, i.e. learning to draw distinctions at different levels of abstraction. In the sense that the outcome of learning is the capacity to draw distinctions, the outcome of learning is knowledge.

Furthermore, following the above points from Stacey (2001), learning (from an OKC perspective) is situated in (relational) spaces and is ongoing through time. Since learning is tied to social context, knowledge is too. As regards the interactional (relational) dynamics related to both knowledge and learning, and the connection between knowledge and learning, Stacey (2001) notes that:
“[…] knowledge is meaning and it can only emerge in the communicative interaction between people. It emerges as meaning in the ongoing relating between people in the living present. This is an evolutionary concept of knowledge as meaning continuously reproduced and potentially transformed in action. Knowledge is, therefore, the thematic patterns organizing the experience of being together. The process of learning is much the same and there does not seem to be much point in trying to distinguish one from the other.” (p. 189).

In OKC, while knowledge and learning are understood as intricately related and often difficult to distinguish between, there is a marked difference between information and knowledge, part of which is related to learning.

The past few decades have seen much criticism of earlier works on knowledge, which have tended to treat it simplistically as an object that can be transferred. Here, I will focus on the more critical perspectives (often associated with the community perspective mentioned earlier), especially concerning the difference between information and knowledge.

Davenport and Prusak (2000), described by Kastberg (2014) and Greve (2015) as second-generation KM literature, present a typology of the hierarchy from data through information to knowledge, and potentially (eventually) wisdom. Their way of distinguishing and presenting this hierarchy can be criticised because they still seem to talk of knowledge in somewhat functionalistic terms (knowledge ‘management’ and knowledge ‘transfer’, i.e. knowledge as a ‘thing’ which is manageable and should be controlled), despite defining knowledge as:

“[…] a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organizations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organizational routines, processes, practices, and norms.” (p. 5).

Although the hierarchy argument has been criticised by some authors (e.g. Duguid, 2005, p. 115), the heuristic value of the hierarchy typologies is that they draw attention to the necessity of distinguishing between information and knowledge, because they are not the same. Knowledge is more applied and reflexive, and has an inherent experiential, relational and active aspect that is not part of information. In fact, Davenport and Prusak (2000) should be given credit for actually venturing a definition of knowledge at all, considering the surprisingly few KM texts which do (cf. Alvesson & Kärreman,
2001). This might also be part of the explanation of why a lot of KM is about or leads to the transfer of information. This and the fact that knowledge per se is not transferable in a 1:1 way (see section 4.3.).

A number of articles touch on the conceptual confusion between information and knowledge (e.g. Blair, 2002; Savolainen, 2009). An important way to distinguish between information and knowledge is in the work they facilitate. Here, it is necessary to go back to Ryle’s (1949) notions of knowing that and knowing how, and Polanyi’s (1966/1967) concept of tacit knowing. As mentioned previously, Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) SECI model shows how one mode of knowledge is converted into another, but it has been much criticised in recent years. For example, according to Duguid (2005, p. 116), Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) have misread Ryle’s original work (1949).

Duguid (2005) relates Ryle’s (1949) notions of knowing that and knowing how to Polanyi’s (1966/1967) notion of tacit knowing, and the notion of explicit knowledge, in the sense that knowing that cannot be put into action without knowing how. Information could be thought of as knowing that (i.e. you are told a piece of information), which we then relate to other pieces of information that we already have, but you need knowing how in terms of context/tacit dimensions to use that information:

“Ryle, like Polanyi, argues that the two aspects of knowing are complementary, knowing how helping to make knowing that actionable. They are not, however, substitutable: Accumulation of know that does not lead to knowing how. Know that, we acquire in the form of explicit, codified information. By contrast, “we learn how;” Ryle argues, “by practice” (1949, p. 41).” (Duguid, 2005, p. 111, emphasis in original).

Thus, knowing that does not automatically imply that one knows how to act on it. This is important, since it is this nuance of difference between information and knowledge that is sometimes missing in the OS literature, in particular in the literature on newcomer information-seeking (I return to nuancing newcomer information-seeking in section 5.1.2.1.).

For something to be knowledge in the full sense of the word (something that enables you to act meaningfully in the world, i.e. knowledge that enables action), therefore, it needs to include both of Ryle’s (1949, p. 28) notions of know that and know how (knowing that, knowing how). Otherwise, to use the example of building a wall, two things can happen: you know that you have to build a wall of a certain size, but you do not know how to, or, you know how to build a wall, but cannot get started because you do not know that about how big it is supposed to be, which is a prerequisite for laying
its foundation. Thus, both aspects are necessary for building the wall, because it is not enough to know only one of the two dimensions, you need both to be able to do something. Brown and Duguid (2001), based on the writings of Polanyi and Ryle, note that knowledge is ‘two-dimensional’ (p. 204):

“Acquiring know that does not lead to being able to use it […] Know that may be both explicit and free flowing, but from Ryle’s perspective it is neither actionable nor useful on its own. To make know that useful requires appropriate know how, something thus very similar to Polanyi’s tacit dimension.” (p. 204, emphasis in original).

In the context of coding in software development (which is part of the work the newcomers in my case start-ups do), the example would be the important relationship between knowing how to code (e.g. in a specific coding language) in general and knowing what to code (i.e. what you are building). Here (as in the example above) they are related/interconnected, because how something should be coded depends (partly) on what you are supposed to build (the goal, what the software is supposed to do). For instance, in software development some technologies are preferred over others for given tasks, because they are more suitable in relation to the end goal. This is e.g. the case in relation to choosing between various database structures. Thus, know that and know how, as with the relationship between tacit and explicit knowledge, are not altogether different ‘knowledges’, but interrelated aspects of knowledge.

While data and information are necessary, they are not in themselves sufficient for knowledge per se. For them to be transformed into knowledge, something has to be done with information in the process of learning. This also relates to the critique of the SECI model and ideas of knowledge transfer; knowledge (because it is both a process and an outcome) is not transferable. What is knowledge for one person and is communicated to another is at best information (although she/he might acknowledge that it is knowledge for the first person) until that person has done something with it. In other words, we can communicate pieces of information, but just because we are told something it does not mean that we ‘know’ it, even if we relate that something to someone else. We can talk about knowledge, but this does not mean that what others get from the conversation is knowledge per se (which would be equal to a linear model of communication, which I will touch on below). And because pieces of information are bound to a social context, where they are used as part of learning and become part of knowledge, knowledge has social elements. I.e. because of the social aspects, how and in relation to what something is known is in one sense part of that which is known.
The recognition of these social aspects is important. Stacey (2001) notes that the idea that knowledge from A is passed on as information to B (that she/he can then mentally process or not) is cognitivist (p. 194-195). In his work on knowledge, he emphasises situatedness, communication in local situations and processes of relating. The ‘cognitivist’ transfer idea is therefore challenged because it is ‘decontextualised’, i.e. it does not acknowledge relational and situational aspects which have been established as important for understanding knowledge.

4.2.3. Communication

The approach to communication in OKC is informed by the communication theory trajectory and, due to the ‘organisational’ aspect, is especially related to the discipline of organisational communication (which in itself is a combination of organisation studies and communication theory). In OKC, following the trend in organisational communication, communication is approached with a transaction view as opposed to a transmission view (Kastberg, 2014, p. 87-88), i.e. communication involves multiple agents orienting to each other, not just one person transmitting a message to a receiver.

Communication theory (and more broadly communication studies) has come a long way since its infancy as it, according to Kastberg (2014) “[…] has undergone a considerable development.” (p. 87). This includes different conceptions, models and definitions of communication, but old definitions are not always abandoned in favour of new ones. Rather, different disciplines have different ways of understanding communication, and sometimes even scholars within the same discipline seem to favour different definitions (which is in a sense not totally in line with T. S. Kuhn’s (1962/2012) paradigm writings, i.e. not all have left ‘old’ paradigms for new ones). This was addressed by Craig (1999) in his landmark article “Communication Theory as a Field”, in which he outlines seven different traditions (p. 132), arguing that, while communication theory is not a coherent field, if we think of it at a more abstract meta level, it might be possible to construe it as a field with internal variation (p. 119).

There are three communication models, or rather clusters of models, that are central in communication theory: the linear, the interactional and the transactional (West & Turner, 2004). Since OKC employs the transactional model, I focus mostly on that here, but I also briefly outline the linear and interactional models, as this makes it easier to show how the transactional model is different.
The *linear* model of communication is also known as the transmission model, since it portrays communication as the sending of messages from a sender to a receiver. Traditionally, Shannon and Weaver (1949) are credited for the linear model. Here, communication is an event where A (the sender) transmits a message to B (the receiver). Thus, the linear model is a model of information ‘transfer’.

The linear model has been subject to some criticism over the years (Windahl, Signitzer, & Olson, 2009, p. 94). For instance, Kastberg (2015) notes that:

“[…] within the horizon of this ideology, it goes without saying that the receivers retain what is transmitted. From the point of view of more recent communication theory it is, however, well known that even if all viewers or listeners are offered the same kind of information, in the same way, this does not imply that they retain the same information, or if they retain at all.” (Organic food communication as transmission section, para. 1).

In the *interactional* model a feedback loop is added such that B gives feedback to A, and communication is two-way. In contrast to the linear model, where the sending of information from A to B alone is ‘communication’, in the interactional model, a communicative event takes place when A sends a message and B then gives feedback to A. The interactional model not only differs from the linear in that ‘communication’ involves more inter-action between A and B, but also in that it involves consideration for the sender and receiver’s context and background, referred to as their ‘field of experience’ or ‘frame of reference’ (Schramm, 1971; West & Turner, 2004), i.e. there is more consideration for both A and B as actors and not just ‘black box’ entities.

As regards critique of the interactional model, K. Miller (2005) notes that:

“An interactional view is clearly a move forward because it acknowledges that communication is not strictly a one-way process with direct and linear effects. However, this model is still relatively simplistic in its isolation of a source and receiver and its consideration of limited influence between them.” (p. 6).

Finally, the *transactional* model is different, inasmuch as it shows communication as a process rather than as a singular event, i.e. communication is no longer a singular event involving the transfer of a message from a sender to a receiver, but is an ongoing process with participants (rather than ‘senders’

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5 Note that the interactional model in communication theory is not the same as the interactionist perspective in OS.
or ‘receivers’ of messages) who interact and create meaning together. Thus, in the transactional model, communication is no longer modelled as information transfer in a linear fashion from A to B (or with the addition that B gives feedback), but is construed as an ongoing process of meaning negotiation between participants.

Kincaid’s (1979; Kincaid & Schramm, 1975; Rogers & Kincaid, 1981) convergence model of communication is an example of a transactional process model: “The convergence model of communication […] treats communication as a process in which information is shared among members of a system in order to reach a more mutual understanding regarding some topic.” (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981, p. 281-282).

Even though Rogers and Kincaid (1981) note that the goal of the interaction is “to reach more mutual understanding” about something (p. 281-282), this does not mean that a communicative process always results in mutual understanding. The opposite of convergence (i.e. moving towards each other and mutual understanding) is divergence (i.e. moving away from each other). Thus, while the model has mutual understanding as the ideal, it is not deterministic, since it does not suggest that this is always the result, i.e. convergence towards mutual understanding does not necessarily happen, the process can work the other way (cf. Windahl et al., 2009, p. 98). For instance, ideally we would like to understand each other, but in practice this might depend on our motivation for communicating.

The way that mutual understanding is conceptualised here, it is also to some extent a more ‘democratic’ communication model than the linear model. The linear model suggests the transfer of a message from a sender to a receiver, where the sender ‘owns’ the message. The transactional model, on the other hand, acknowledges that there are multiple participants in communication, and thus ‘understanding’ as an end goal is not necessarily defined by just the one participant. Rather, mutual understanding is achieved through participants interacting. Moreover, this model takes into account contextual aspects, since it includes the participants’ field of experience and the wider environment: “The interaction and communication take place in a social reality, that is, an environment where certain social factors may be decisive.” (Windahl et al., 2009, p. 98).

Overall, the communication models can be divided into linear models on the one hand, and circular and spiral models on the other. Rogers (1986, in Windahl et al., 2009, p. 94) notes that the linear models describe singular communicative acts, whereas the newer circular and spiral models are more comprehensive process models. Windahl et al. (2009) note a development in conceptualisations of communication from “[…] the transmission/mechanistic linear type of definition toward the
mutuality/shared perceptions type.” (p. 12). This latter type is what was referred to above as the transactional perspective. Windahl et al. (2009) also note how the analytical focus shifts from the linear transmission models to the processual transaction models: “In most communication models, the single individual is the unit of analysis; in the network model, the dyad, i.e. two elements – individuals, groups, etc. – linked together by communication […] are studied.” (p. 99).

This shift from viewing communication as message transmission from a sender to a receiver (and focusing on the one or the other), to regarding communication as a transactional accomplishment, and thus necessarily focusing on the participants in relation to each other, is congruent with the interactionist perspective in OS, where socialisation is viewed as something that newcomers and other organisational actors accomplish together. I return to other possible aspects of integration between OKC and OS in chapter 5.

4.3. Knowledge Communication and why Knowledge Transfer is not possible in OKC

In this section, I draw together the above presentations of knowledge and communication in organisations in relation to OKC to show why and how knowledge transfer is not possible in OKC, but knowledge communication is.

The idea of ‘knowledge transfer’ is debated in OKC (Christensen, 2018). Newell (2005) criticises the knowledge transfer idea, noting that it is “[…] short-circuiting the learning cycle […]” (p. 275). In other words, if knowledge could easily be transferred between people, the notion of learning would be obsolete, because in principle you could then transfer all knowledge in the world to all people in the world. Her critique originates in the situatedness of knowledge (three specific characteristics as she sees it) (p. 282), but ultimately she seems to be arguing that knowledge transfer is still possible as long as different contexts and characteristics of knowledge are taken into account. But she also mentions that sometimes it is necessary to undertake ‘exploration’ to understand and use other peoples’ knowledge (cf. Newell, 2005 p. 288). Thus, there is still a learning element, since people have to learn before they can draw distinctions, i.e. they cannot just put others’ knowledge to use without going through a learning process themselves.

In the same vein, one might ask whether ‘knowledge communication’ is also a paradox. For this discussion, we need to consider the different communication models mentioned above (section 4.2.3.). T. Kuhn and Porter (2011) note that: “Communication scholars hold that meaning – as that around which communication revolves – is too precarious, too tied to context, and too embedded
within layers of discourse to make transfer a possibility.” (p. 27). This seems to rule out the transmission view, which describes communication as the transfer of a message from a sender to a receiver. If, on the other hand, communication is understood as transaction, the focus on message transfer from sender to receiver shifts to a focus on the transactional process between participants (as they converge towards mutual understanding). Here, it is no longer about a transfer from A to B, but about participants who together make an effort to try to understand each other (ideally). In this way, one participant is not simply adopting another’s meaning or knowledge, rather participants are trying to ‘get nearer’ each other’s understanding.

From an OKC point of view, therefore, the idea of knowledge transfer is problematic, because it does not fit well with either the view of communication or the view of knowledge in that framework. If communication is understood not as ‘transfer’, but as transaction rather than transmission, then transferring knowledge through communication does not make sense. And, when knowledge is understood as constructed, relational, and based on learning in a social context, this also means that pure transfer (transferring knowledge as a decontextualised message) is problematic.

In this way, we can still talk about (organisational) knowledge communication, because we talk about knowledge, we just do not transfer it in a Shannon and Weaver sense of communication as transfer. From the point of view of a convergence model of communication, the mutual understanding participants converge on through communication as a process has to do with knowledge, since communication is mutual/social and knowledge also has social (relational) elements.

In this sense, from a transactional view of communication, one could also argue that ‘knowledge communication’ is a more appropriate term than ‘knowledge sharing’ (depending on how ‘sharing’ is defined). For example, you can say that you communicate your knowledge in order to share it, but what your conversation partner gets from the conversation is not knowledge - at the most it is input for learning and thus knowledge building. ‘Knowledge communication’ acknowledges that people can talk about knowledge (e.g. one person telling another about his knowledge, without this becoming (personal) knowledge for the other person) without knowledge per se being transferred (although some of the building blocks might be taken up).

As an example, through communication I might try to explain to someone how to do something, and through interaction, we might converge on a mutual understanding about how to do this. You may talk about your knowledge (if you are conscious of it), but this will not be directly transferred to your conversation partner as knowledge per se, only as information, i.e. mere utterings do not enable the
conversation partner to ‘draw a distinction’. But, as the communication process proceeds, she/he can communicate their own understanding, and in that continuous cycle, possibly develop the capacity to draw a distinction. And it is in this continuous cycle that (maybe) mutual understanding is to be found.

What is OKC then? Is it not paradoxical to speak of knowledge communication if others are unable to draw distinctions based on my relating knowledge to them? If we accept Tsoukas and Vladimirou’s (2004) point about knowledge as the capacity to draw relevant distinctions within some context that allows one to act, then knowledge communication is still a central activity and a means for people to learn about the context in question, and with it how to draw distinctions. When communication is understood as transaction, the communicative process involves the activities of both participants, and not just the transfer from one to another, and this action aspect is central. This is also why ‘transfer’ of knowledge is not possible: the ‘transfer’ notion lacks the active part of the conversation partner, where she/he integrates and makes sense, and reflects - what does this mean for me? And it is in the sense of communication as ongoing meaning-making between participants, in a context, that we can talk of knowledge communication. In other words, knowledge communication understood not as knowledge transfer, but as a process with active participants.

In relation to the point above about utterings, I can (to some extent) talk about what I know (or on the basis of what I know) (e.g. try to explain aspects of how I ‘make distinctions’, and on what basis), but for others these utterings remain information until they have done something with them (maybe they become aware of something, but until they do something, it lacks a contextual/experience element, action). Put another way, uttering something can be a necessary but is not a sufficient condition, the conversation partner must also do something. This relates to one of the central differences between the transmission and transaction views of communication (who is doing the communicating, where does the analytical focus need to be). In other words, although some knowledge aspects can be uttered, they cannot be used by others in that sense, not without some kind of effort on their part, and furthermore the process takes place in a context.

Thus, in OKC, knowledge communication is not about knowledge transfer, which would imply reliance on a linear model of communication and a simplistic view of knowledge, i.e. knowledge cannot be communicated in the ‘transfer’ sense. Rather, knowledge communication in OKC refers to the communication of and about knowledge in organisational contexts, i.e. knowledge is implicitly or explicitly part of the communication, but OKC recognises the complexities of communication of and about knowledge, based on its underlying communication model and view of knowledge.
As an example, in his case study of knowledge communication in relation to a humanities graduate in an IT company, Christensen (2018) defines ‘knowledge communication as knowledge interaction’ (p. 3-4): “Therefore, knowledge is, being communication in the original sense, “togetherness” […] in the current paper, knowledge communication is knowledge interaction.” (p. 3-4).

4.4. Summing up

In the sections above, I have reviewed OKC in relation to this dissertation, covering OKC as an overall field, together with the developments in organisation studies, knowledge management and communication theory that the field draws on and the aspects from these that it uniquely integrates.

As shown, OKC presents a complex and nuanced approach to knowledge communication in organisations, which are themselves complex entities. Knowledge is seen as in constant relation to something, as situated, and not a static transferable object. Communication is understood as transactional and processual. Thus, even though OKC draws on three trajectories that are vast themselves, it integrates the perspectives to present a unique angle on organisational knowledge communication. Furthermore, OKC entails both communication related to organisational knowledge and communication about knowledge in organisations (communication in organisations that facilitates knowledge development, people becoming knowledgeable).

However, OKC does not constitute a narrow view, since it is not one theory, but a collection of works which have an affinity with the above. OKC is thus also a multifaceted compound which specifically addresses the challenge of understanding the interfaces between organisation, knowledge and communication. In this sense, the project of OKC is in line with Tsoukas and Vladimirou’s (2004) statement that: “If theoretical confusion is in evidence the answer cannot be ‘drop theory’ but ‘more and better theory’.” (p. 365).

Thus, by challenging assumptions, building on theories, relating typologies to each other and creating stronger concepts, OKC allows for a synthesis between the disciplinary trajectories. This in turn enables an approach that can be used to study the multifaceted phenomenon of knowledge communication in organisations, since it allows different nuances to emerge. The strength of this perspective, e.g. in relation to knowledge, is related to the kind of academic endeavour that Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2004) describe here:

“Our understanding of organizational knowledge (or any other topic of interest) will not advance if we resign ourselves to merely recycling commonsensical notions of knowledge
for, if we are to do so, we would risk being prisoners of our own unchallenged assumptions, incapable of advancing our learning. On the contrary, what we need is ever more sophisticated theoretical explorations of our topic of interest, aiming at gaining a deeper insight into it.” (p. 364).

In OKC, this is also an argument for not choosing one typology, but rather linking different aspects of different works to each other in order to create a unique but also comprehensive angle for studying the multifaceted phenomena at hand. In terms of integrating different typologies and works on knowledge, a relevant integration in OKC would be combining Qvortrup’s (2004a; 2006) typology of different levels of knowledge, Tsoukas and Vladimirou’s (2004) writing on organisational and personal knowledge and their relationship, and Stacey’s (2000; 2001) arguments about the individual becoming and being knowledgeable through relationships (all three are mentioned in section 4.2.2.2.). Combining these into an overall knowledge framework is a possibility, and a very appropriate one, since they each make distinct contributions to different aspects of knowledge that can be related to the others6, and integrating them thus addresses different nuances of knowledge.

Specifically, Stacey (2001) addresses the relationship between the individual and the social, and knowledge as situated. Tsouskas and Vladimirou (2004) can then be drawn on to understand how, even though knowledge is produced in and tied to interactions (Stacey’s view), all organisational knowledge is ‘personalised’ when individuals draw on it in a context; since they apply it to a specific situation, the knowledge then has a personal element (although it is also still contextually and relationally bound). Finally, drawing on Qvortrup (2004a; 2006) adds the nuance that ‘knowledge is both knowledge about something and about itself” (Qvortrup, 2004a, p. 18), which is useful for considering different levels of abstraction of knowledge (e.g. in relation to viewing OS outcomes as multidimensional).

In this project, the above are combined and build on each other, my perspective being that a person can be knowing but that this is always in relation to some context and in a socially constructed environment. As such, the knowledge that individuals draw on (Tsoukas and Vladimirou’s notion of personal knowledge) is tied to and affected by the social relations they are part of (Stacey), and this knowledge can have different levels of abstraction (Qvortrup). For my work, this means recognising

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6 Even though Qvortrup (2004a) draws on systems theory, and Stacey (2001) on complexity theory, a meaningful integration is still possible, inasmuch as Qvortrup (2004a) also views knowledge as complex, but uses systems theory (as a starting point) to ‘distill’ the four orders of knowledge.
that knowledge is relational and contextual, in the sense that it is in relation to something and someone.

Above, I have shown how KM literature has been criticised for creating too much of a divide between tacit and explicit dimensions of knowledge, and for not considering the relational, situational and contextual aspects (or, if they are considered, trivialising or playing them down to some extent).

Offering a definition of knowledge is difficult when faced with so many different views of the phenomenon. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I view knowledge not so much as a thing or object than as a process or co-constructed outcome, i.e. as something rather complex, and it is in light of this understanding that it is problematic when our approach to knowledge and the way we speak of it is too simplistic. There are important differences between, for example, data, information and knowledge (for more on this ‘hierarchy’ see Davenport & Prusak, 2000, p. 1-2), since they signify different levels and terms of engagement that allow us to do different things. Thus, equating information and knowledge means that we simplify one and enhance the other.

I take a critical stance on the differences between information and knowledge, arguing that it is important to understand these differences. Information can be an input for knowledge, but obtaining information does not automatically mean that one is then knowledgeable/knowing. Going back to McIver et al.’s (2012) two schools, I lean towards the ‘knowing’ perspective, due to its emphasis on actions and relations. The interactionist approach to OS links nicely with a relational/contextual view of knowledge, since it emphasises the agency of both newcomers and other parties in the socialisation process, and thus also ties in with the transaction view of communication. Drawing on a knowledge perspective which views knowledge as a relational phenomenon, OS becomes more a relational process relying on a transaction view of communication rather than transmission view. For instance, Rollag, Parise, and Cross (2005) discuss two different approaches to OS and orienting newcomers, what they label the ‘informational’ and the ‘relational’ approach (p. 36), the difference being whether the focus is on supplying information or helping newcomers build networks. Even though they speak of building relations to ‘tap information’ from others, which again is not the same as knowledge (since knowledge cannot just be tapped), the focus on relations is interesting, and goes some way toward the approach that I am arguing for here.

People are knowing within a context of relations, and their knowledge is related to the different social contexts they are part of. Knowledge is not simply transferred, but built up through interaction (and reflection and sensemaking of these interactions). Our knowing is always in some way a result of
someone having been part of an interaction with others or with their artefacts. Even if we take this for granted in our daily lives, we cannot say that our knowledge is independent of our social reality.

Thus, from a social constructivist stance, knowledge is relational in two ways: it is created together with other people and situated in the context of relationships, and (related to the above) it is relational/social in the sense that it needs to be socially accepted (i.e. what counts as knowledge is what the community accepts as knowledge). As mentioned in chapter 2, therefore, knowledge is socially conditioned (in being e.g. conditioned by relations). In the same chapter, I also noted that, in organisations, one consequence of a social constructivist view of knowledge is that, “As a socially constructed phenomenon, knowledge does not exist on its own, but is dependent on social recognition; without being perceived and recognized by others, for all practical matters, knowledge does not appear as such […]” (Alvesson, 2001, p. 872). This social construction of what counts as knowledge applies to both theory and practice.

In addition to being relational and contextual (broadly and historically), knowledge is also situated (both in a here-and-now and in an historical sense). The situated (the specific here-and-now relations and situation) in itself has a broader context. A situation might to some extent (at least in the here-and-now) be bounded (e.g. spatially or temporally), but it is also part of a context which is a universe of (previous) situations. Moreover, knowledge is situated in a double sense. It is situated both in relation to that which you have and do it (i.e. knowing in action, having knowledge in doing it) and (linked to the relational and contextual aspects) in relation to the situation where it was first developed (learned) and done.
5. Theoretical Framework: Integrating OKC and OS

In this chapter, I synthesise the theoretical pillars mentioned in chapters 3 and 4, and present the theoretical framework for the dissertation, outlining how OKC and aspects of OS can be integrated. OS in start-ups forms the field and analytic object for this study. OS is a discipline and a theoretical area in its own right, as shown in the review in chapter 3. I add and draw on OKC as a theoretical perspective, as I argue that a coupling can be made between OKC and OS, where OKC can make a meaningful contribution to OS. Specifically, I approach OS as a process where OKC takes place. This chapter then, including the way it builds on the two previous chapters, answers the theoretically focused RQ1. In the analysis and discussion chapters, I then reflect on the empirical material and theoretical framework in relation to each other, in line with the abductive process outlined in section 2.2.2.

OS has been described as a communication (Barge & Schlueter, 2004, p. 253; Bullis, 1993, p. 10) and learning process (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006), with the central result of gaining knowledge: “The most immediate outcomes of the socialization process are changes in knowledge (Fisher, 1986). The most appropriate criteria are therefore indicators of the learning that occurs during the socialization process (Chao et al., 1994).” (Klein & Heuser, 2008, p. 296-297).

Considering that knowledge and communication are central in the OS process, OKC is a meaningful perspective to draw on, because a central aspect of OKC is how it couples and integrates (specific aspects of) communication and knowledge with respect to organisational phenomena. In other words, OS is a process where, although knowledge and communication are important, as shown in the OS literature review and elaborated further in the following, OS literature has some shortcomings as regards theorising and working with knowledge and communication. Integrating aspects from OKC can contribute to OS by facilitating more nuanced understandings of concepts and aspects that the OS literature itself highlights as central to its disciplinary interests. I.e. OKC can help us understand knowledge and communication aspects in OS, as integrating aspects of OKC as presented in chapter 4 with OS gives a theoretical toolbox for better understanding knowledge communication in OS. Below, I describe how I couple OS and OKC, and show how OKC can contribute to and complement current perspectives in OS. After the analysis, I then discuss theoretical perspectives and findings from the empirical investigation in relation to each other, including how the coupling of OKC and OS provides a frame for understanding OS in start-ups through integrating OKC aspects into OS.
5.1. Interfaces between OKC and OS

In the following, I outline where and how I link OS and OKC, as I go through specific integration points between OS and the constellation of organisation, knowledge and communication in OKC. I also address the OS outcomes in relation to an OKC perspective. In the introduction to this chapter, I noted that OS has been described as a learning and communication process, and that this description of the phenomenon of OS also makes a case for using OKC as a theoretical perspective, which is then a theoretical contribution.

In the various sections of the theoretical framework, I show how my work is an attempt at synthesising aspects of OKC and OS. This synthesis should not be understood as a move towards total convergence, but rather to create project-relevant links between the two streams of literature. As mentioned above, I find it meaningful to approach OS with insights from OKC because of what it allows us to see that we could not see before. Thus, my frame of reference for understanding OS involves theories that focus on a certain view of individuals, the social, the relational, what knowledge is and what communication is. This is a meaningful contribution to the interactionist (person-by-situation) perspective in OS, because the communicative and relational aspects of interactionism can be better appreciated through theories where these aspects are key. Thus it is not just a case of how, from the viewpoint of OKC, OKC can contribute to OS, but also about the value of OKC from the point of view of OS. In relation to the disciplinary interests of OS, therefore, OKC can contribute with perspectives that can be integrated with and help strengthen or add to elements of OS as regards explainability value and understanding. For instance, since ‘changes in knowledge’ (cf. Fisher, in Klein & Heuser, above) is a central aspect of OS, but knowledge is still to some degree a ‘black box’ in OS, then it makes sense to include a literature (OKC) that explicitly tries to grapple with issues related to knowledge communication in organisations (and which does so in a way that is coherent with an interactionist approach).

In the next sections, I outline how OKC can nuance OS approaches to communication and knowledge. Section 5.1.1. focuses on communication, and in section 5.1.2. I focus on knowledge (in adherence with the view on communication). I also address the OS proximal outcomes in relation to OKC (section 5.1.3.). In section 5.1.4. I address ‘organisation’ in OS and OKC, and focus on this in relation to the start-up context. Finally, section 5.2. discusses the synthesis between OS and OKC, based on the different sections as a whole.
In this way, I show the touchpoints and interfaces between the fields and the theories they draw on, and how they can be meaningfully integrated. I address both the O, K and C aspects of OKC as a field in relation to OS. Throughout, I note how aspects of OS and OKC can fit together and have a conversation. Where there are differences in underlying assumptions (e.g. because the two fields approach phenomena from different angles), I highlight how the perspective of OKC can contribute to OS (e.g. how communication is conceptualised).

There is a certain level of plasticity involved in this, since I do not attempt a full integration between two fields that are themselves vast and contain multiple perspectives, but rather focus on certain aspects, e.g. on how and where they can cohere, and in what terms there can be a meaningful integration, considering the purposes of the present research. In other words, I focus on an integration that allows me to work with OS and OKC in relation to each other and which is also relevant to the empirical setting. This involves thinking about where the two fields can converge, i.e. where they have some overlaps in interests or topics which makes it meaningful for them to communicate, to a greater or lesser extent, and then finding a meaningful way to integrate them.

In chapters 3 and 4, I mentioned the various roots of OS and OKC, e.g. that they are both informed by the discipline of organisation studies. They have some of their roots in common, however at a general level. They are informed differently or draw differently on the roots, which is why, in relation to the parts that they can be seen to have in common overall, they address these from different angles and have different focus areas. In the following, based on the definitions that I work with, I will outline how, in the context of this project, the two areas are thought to relate.

A central point of possible integration between OS and OKC is through the interactionist perspective in OS. As mentioned in the review of the OS literature (chapter 3), this regards OS as an organisational phenomenon with multiple actors, and as something the actors achieve together. This fits well with the dynamics in OKC, related to how OKC conceptualises communication, knowledge and organisation. I return to this potential interface between OS and OKC throughout the following sections.

5.1.1. Communication Studies of OS and the OKC Perspective

Before proceeding, a word of caution regarding terminology is needed. In this section, I refer to the interactionist perspective in OS, which argues for considering multiple parties in a socialisation process in relation to each other (as discussed in chapter 3), and the three communication models mentioned in chapter 4, namely the linear, interactional and transactional. It should be noted that the
interactionist perspective in OS is not the same as the interactional model in Communication Theory. Here, I argue for drawing on a transactional understanding of communication, and that this is relevant in relation to the interactionist perspective in OS.

It is not unusual for a communication scholar to take an interest in OS. For instance, Bullis (1993) highlights OS as a field of interest for communication scholars, and Ashforth, Sluss, and Harrison (2007) note that:

“[...] communication scholars have conducted a great deal of research on organizational socialization (see the reviews by Jablin, 1984, 1987, 2001). These scholars examine communicative practices and their effects on newcomers and other organizational members as they negotiate their relationships (McPhee & Zaug, 2000).” (p. 21).

Jablin (1987) mentions five communication outcomes related to ‘assimilation’ (his term for the combined process of organisations’ socialisation efforts and newcomers’ attempts at individualisation, cf. section 3.1.3.):

“In addition to the numerous noncommunication outcomes posited to result from the assimilation process (e.g., Feldman, 1981), a number of communication outcomes can be postulated, including newcomers’ (1) feelings of organizational communication satisfaction, (2) perceptions of organizational communication climate, (3) degree of understanding and sharing in the communication culture of the organization, (4) participation in emergent organizational communication networks, and (5) levels of organizational communication competence (Jablin, 1982, 1985b).” (p. 713).

Myers and Oetzel (2003) use interviews and questionnaires to develop and validate an index of organisational assimilation (p. 438). A number of the questions in their data collection relate to communication and communicative processes. They state that their findings “[...] contribute to understanding communicative processes and outcomes that foster premature turnover.” (p. 450), and that: “Appreciating communicative processes associated with assimilation may be beneficial toward encouraging newcomer integration. When organizations become aware of types of communication involved in assimilation, they can take action to encourage those processes.” (p. 451). They developed an index consisting of six dimensions: familiarity with others, acculturation, recognition, involvement, job competency, and adaptation and role negotiation (p. 443-445).
In those OS studies where communication is mentioned, especially in the early studies, there is often a quantitative focus on communication, and when communication is a more specific object of analysis in OS (e.g. Z. P. Hart, 2000), quantitative methods are often used to study this (e.g. to assess both quality and frequency of communication). Reichers (1987), for example, argues for the importance of the frequency of interactions (p. 285) in the encounter stage. Rollag (2007) also seems to focus on the quantity of interactions (their frequency) rather than the quality, and indeed outcome, of interactions. This view ignores both the quality and outcome of interactions. As mentioned previously, Saks et al. (2011) criticise the literature on newcomer information-seeking for focusing too much on information-seeking tactics per se, and too little on the results of the use of different tactics.

Even though some OS literature (e.g. G. R. Jones, 1983; Reichers, 1987) seems (to some extent) to draw on a symbolic interactionist approach, in a lot of the literature there is an implicit or explicit assumption or line of argumentation about newcomers feeling anxiety and being driven by a motivation for reducing uncertainty. This is then related to a transmission (linear or at best interactional) view of communication, focusing on either organisations giving information or newcomers processing or seeking it. This is paradoxical, since a symbolic interactionist approach would more logically see communication as transaction, i.e. not just an exchange of symbols, but meaning-making in interaction through symbols, i.e. interacting on the basis of (re)producing, maintaining and changing symbolic meanings.

In relation to the communication models mentioned in section 4.2.3., there is thus a tendency for earlier OS studies to rely on a transmission view of communication (as in the linear or interactional model). Poole (2011) notes:

“There are at least two different conceptions of communication that apply both to organizations and more generally. The first views communication as the exchange of information, and the second, as a process of the creation and sustaining of meaning. [...] The view of communication as information exchange has its formal roots in Shannon’s (1948, as cited in Ritchie, 1991) mathematical theory of communication, which couples naturally with a commonsense view of communication. Information is defined as that which reduces uncertainty.” (p. 249-250, emphasis in original).

He mentions newcomer information-seeking (where some of the tactics, e.g. asking questions, necessarily include communication behaviour) as relying on a transmission view of communication,
since V.D. Miller and Jablin’s (1991) study which lead to their typology of information-seeking tactics is described by Poole (2011) as “[…] lodged in the information-processing tradition […]” (p. 257).

Moreover, even though Jablin (1987; 2001) describes assimilation as “[…] composed of two dynamic interrelated processes […]” (2001, p. 755), i.e. socialisation and individualisation, Kramer and Miller (1999) rely on notions related to the transmission view of communication, when they note that: “[…] assimilation views individuals as active message senders and receivers […]” (p. 360, emphasis in original).

Another example of communication work in OS is Manata, Miller, DeAngelis, and Paik (2016), who call for more multilevel studies and more focused and specific studies of communication in OS. Manata et al. (2016) note that: “[…] despite scholars’ insistence that communication is a central process by which newcomer socialization occurs, explicit assessments of how and what information is exchanged between newcomers and incumbents are often avoided (Kramer & Miller, 2014).” (p. 308, emphasis in original).

In relation to Poole’s (2011) distinction above, this work also seems to align with the tradition of communication as information exchange/information processing, i.e. communication as the giving and receiving of information. This focus is further exemplified in their critique of previous research on newcomer socialisation as tending to: “[…] overlook critical communicative aspects (i.e., who-says-what-to-whom-and-how).” (p. 307). However, towards the end of their chapter, they also note:

“[…] modeling and application of our central communicative mantra (P3): who, what, when, and how. Such modeling will presumably allow scholars to move beyond basic information sharing to conceptualizing communication as a back-and-forth process that emerges over time in a complex manner.” (p. 330, emphasis in original).

To go from conceptualising communication in OS as information-sharing to conceptualising it as an ongoing process suggests a move from a transmission to a transaction view of communication. It also suggests considering different aspects of communication, i.e. not just focusing on content, but also on the process. OKC, as previously mentioned, relies on a transactional understanding of communication. In relation to this, the convergence model considers participants’ ‘field of experience’ (which is not part of the linear model). This is more in line with the second conception of communication mentioned by Poole (2011):
“A second perspective on communication emphasizes meanings and the role of communication in generating and sustaining them. Meaning cannot be reduced to information, because it depends on associations among symbols grounded in the surrounding culture and the communicators’ experience, and shaped by the immediate interaction and context (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001).” (p. 250-251, emphasis in original).

In section 4.2.3. on communication in OKC, I noted that there is a congruence or fit between transactional models of communication and the interactionist perspective in OS. The transactional models consider communication as an accomplishment between participants (rather than the transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver), while the interactionist perspective in OS views socialisation as an accomplishment between actors (and not just something one party, e.g. the organisation, does to another, e.g. the newcomer). Poole (2011) also hints at this connection between an interactionist perspective in OS and the need for a transactional view of communication (although he does not use the word ‘interactionism’ but the notion of ‘interaction process’):

“Socialization is often thought of as a one-way process in which the organization shapes the employee. It is more accurate, however, to think of it as an interaction process involving both the employee and organization. Although the employee learns about and adjusts to the organization, the organization and its existing employees accommodate to the new employee.” (p. 256).

In other words, using OKC as a perspective in OS studies means emphasising transaction and interactionism, rather than transmission and OS as a one-way influence of one party on another. Communication is thus not just about transferring information, but making meaning and converging (or diverging) on mutual understanding, where meaning-making is not isolated to the inside of someone’s head, but is something actors (participants) do together through interaction in context. In this research, communication is something that newcomers and other organisational members do together (e.g. in sequences such as asking questions, getting answers, following up). In this way, they are also creating knowledge together and by participating.

In the context of OS, communication can serve a multitude of purposes, both from an organisational and a newcomer perspective. However, the view of communication that I adhere to should not be viewed as functionalistic, but, in line with my discursive approach, as constitutionalist, in that communicating is not just done to achieve a purpose, the act of communicating in itself constructs and constitutes.
5.1.2. OKC Knowledge Perspective and OS
As mentioned in the OS literature review, most research on learning and knowledge in OS has focused on the content dimension, i.e. the different topics that newcomers need to learn and become knowledgeable about, and the instrumentality of various information sources in achieving this. Ashford and Black (1996) note that: “Van Maanen (1977) described entry into an organization as a job transition that “thrust(s) one from a state of certainty to uncertainty; from knowing to not knowing; from the familiar to the unfamiliar” (p. 16).” (p. 200).

In synthesising OS and OKC, what does it mean to view knowledge in relation to OS from an OKC perspective? Perhaps the lack of specific definitions of knowledge in OS has to do with the fact that it is often easier to describe what knowledge is not. Given the complexity of knowledge, I also feel uneasy about having to give a precise definition of it, however, in chapter 4, I presented OKC, and described how a kind of framework could be developed based on various researchers and authors touching on (different aspects of) knowledge, and here I elaborate on how it can be related to OS.

Thus, in this dissertation, while knowledge in OS is viewed as knowledge about something, it is not a (stable) object, but rather something dynamic, contextual, relational and situated. In OKC, there is a view to considering not only content but also processual aspects of knowledge. In this sense, there is still a focus on content (what knowledge is about), but the OKC perspective involves a more critical view of the form of knowledge than usually problematised in OS. For instance, even though newcomers learn about different topics, the OKC perspective is open to a relationship between these topics, rather than just describing them as distinct from each other. Another, related, example is that socialisation learning dimensions (e.g. those suggested by Chao et al., 1994) might be linked to Qvortrup’s (2004a; 2006) orders of knowledge as having multiple levels of abstraction. Earlier socialisation literature has mentioned multiple levels, e.g. some content dimensions varying in importance at the group, department and organisational level (e.g. Klein & Heuser, 2008, p. 309-310). Qvortrup’s (2004a; 2006) orders suggest a different kind of multi-level, where there might be different abstractions within knowledge related to one type of content domain.

To some extent, Myers’ (2011) work touches on this relationship between form and content of knowledge, in that she highlights the importance of the social context of informal work-group interaction for acquiring organisational knowledge (in a broad sense), as opposed to early orientation training. In the latter, a newcomer has too little understanding of the new work context to be able to make sense of and take up the organisational knowledge offered through such orientation. She
emphasises that the actual interaction with organisational incumbents is important for acquiring the contextual understanding needed to make sense of organisational knowledge.

In relation to the above, Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006, p. 502) emphasise the importance of insiders as learning sources. From an OKC perspective, with its view of knowledge and transactional understanding of communication, this notion of ‘learning source’ should again not be understood as an incumbent (sender) transmitting ready-packaged learning to a newcomer (receiver). This conceptualisation is the problem with the traditional KM literature, since it seems to rely on a definition of knowledge as being independent of human beings and operationalised as an object that somehow has a life of its own (cf. Kastberg, 2014). In other words, it neglects the context-dependency of knowledge.

Rather, insiders as a ‘learning source’ should be taken as an indication of the significance of social relations. A number of OS studies have highlighted the importance of social acceptance and integration (e.g. Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). From an OKC perspective, it is not just that these incumbents have knowledge and are gatekeepers of organisational knowledge, but that the newcomer, in becoming part of the organisation, becomes part of a kind of knowledge ecology through becoming integrated and taking part in the work. Thus, it is not the ‘intrinsic’/inherently personal knowledge (disregarding relations and webs of relations as part of knowledge), but also relations as such as learning sources (i.e. both facilitating learning and guidance). As Bradt (2012) notes: “The point is that it’s not about the quantity of interactions. It’s about the quality of the relationships.” (p. 320, emphasis in original).

This is in line with Stacey’s (2001) focus on interactions: “This perspective suggests that the conversational life of people in an organization is of primary importance.” (p. 189). Therefore, in line with Stacey (2000; 2001), if organisational knowledge is related to relationships and interactions in the organisation, a newcomer must become part of organisational relationships to take part in the organisational knowledge, since the knowledge is not ‘in’ the organisation as such, but in the relations within the organisation, as an organisation is an interactional process (Stacey, 2000, p. 36). This is also why, according to Stacey (2000), knowledge as such cannot be stored:

“Knowledge, in this sense, cannot be stored, and attempts to store it in artifacts of some kind will capture only its more trivial aspects. The knowledge assets of an organization then lie in the pattern of relationships between its members and are destroyed when those relational patterns are destroyed.” (Stacey, 2000, p. 37).
If, therefore, knowledge and learning are related to relationships and ongoing interactions, the newcomer must become part of organisational relationships to take part in the organisational knowledge interactions. As regards knowledge and learning in relation to the relationship between ‘the individual’ and ‘the social’, Brown and Duguid (2001) note that:

“Such a claim does not deny the integrity of the individual. It accepts, however, that what individuals learn always and inevitably reflects the social context in which they learn it and in which they put it into practice. When learning a job is at issue, this context usually includes the firm as a whole, immediate colleagues, and the relevant discipline or profession (as well as idiosyncratic external forces bearing on each individual).” (p. 201).

Social knowledge might be considered one of the topics a newcomer has to learn about. However, social knowledge also has a distinct place in OS, being mentioned specifically in Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) definition. According to Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012):

“The most cited definition of socialization describes it as the “process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). Their definition generalizes from an earlier definition that specified more clearly the social knowledge to be acquired as “the value system, the norms, and the required behavior patterns of an organization or group” (Schein, 1968, p. 2).” (p. 9).

Thus, the above paragraphs exemplify the value of understanding knowledge as contextual, relational and situated. Thinking of organisations as organic also means that knowledge is dynamic. Knowledge is also dynamic because of the relationship between the individual and the organisation. This was discussed in chapter 4 through reference to Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2004) and Tsoukas (2011), and is especially relevant in relation to organisational entry. Tsoukas (2011) noted that organisational knowledge becomes personal when an individual uses it in practice, i.e. knowledge is not only dynamic in the sense that it is not stable, but also in the ongoing process of how it is used.

This is also connected with the relationship between explicit and implicit. As Brown and Duguid (2001) note: “Though knowledge undoubtedly can be usefully articulated and explicated, in use the explicit nonetheless always possesses this other, implicit dimension.” (p. 204).

This is reminiscent of Tsoukas’ (2011) description of the relationship between personal and organisational knowledge, where the individual, when solving a task, relates organisational ‘facts’ to previous experience, and the relationship between the tacit and explicit, and knowing that and
knowing how, as dealt with in chapter 4. In addition, Louis (1980) notes that “knowing about” can be viewed as cognitive, and “acquainted with” as experiential (p. 238).

In this way, OKC makes an important contribution to OS, because it can be used as a framework for understanding knowledge as situated in a relationship between the individual and the organisation. In the OKC perspective presented here, based on Stacey (2001) (and in accordance with social constructivism), we need to emphasise the interface between individual (as described in section 2.1.3.), organisation, context and relations, rather than focusing narrowly on the individual or the organisational level. The view of knowledge as context-bound, situated, relational and dynamic is thus an important bridge to build between OS and OKC, since it allows for a more nuanced and complex view of knowledge in OS, e.g. concerning the relationship between personal and organisational knowledge, and how newcomers (in practice and in an environment) transform and realise their learning into task-related and social behaviour.

Orlikowski (2006) argues that knowledge can be viewed as culturally and materially ‘scaffolded’:

“In using the metaphor, I want to focus on the ‘scaffolding of knowledgeability’ – that is, it is useful to understanding knowing in practice as scaffolded – both culturally (e.g., through codes, language, norms) and materially (e.g., through physical objects, biological structures, spatial contexts, and technological artifacts).” (p. 462).

The aspect of cultural scaffolding can be said to relate to what I have previously written about the situational and relational/interactional ‘boundedness’ of knowledge. The notion of material scaffolding of/for knowledge is very useful, not only in the context of OS, but especially in the context of OS in IT. The idea is that knowledge-building (e.g. as newcomers try to adjust to, learn about and make sense of their new environment in order to act in it) can be aided and scaffolded by different materialities. Here, for example, it is IT systems, platforms and technologies in the ICT start-ups which can act as material (digital) scaffolds (but also employee handbooks, among other things). Importantly: “These scaffolds don’t exist outside of knowledgeable human practice; they are ‘performed by human agency, and as such, are situated within particular times and locales.” (Orlikowski, 2006, p. 462).

Stacey (2001) observes that it is important to distinguish between tools and knowledge as such, although these are related: “In their communicative interaction with each other people use the tools
of technology, artifacts and systems, all being some form of extension of their bodies. But these are only tools, not knowledge itself.” (p. 189).

In other words, the tools which scaffold knowledge are not knowledge per se, but they are important facilitators of knowledge work, inasmuch as they are relied on and support knowledge workers in interacting with each other in relation to e.g. their tasks. Thus, they support knowledge because they are used in the members’ communicative interactions. This means that considering materiality in relation to scaffolding knowledge is in line with the previously presented perspectives. Furthermore, social constructivists can also appreciate materiality (e.g. Leonardi, 2015, p. 239), remembering that the meaning related to the ‘material’ is considered to be socially constructed. In this sense, it is relevant to consider which (communicative) affordances different materialities are considered to have, e.g. as different materials (such as employee handbooks) are used to structure and act as guides in newcomer entry.

Finally, the above and the shown consequences for conceptualising and understanding knowledge in the context of OS can be meaningfully integrated with the interactionist OS perspective, since it highlights OS as an accomplishment between newcomers and the organisation (and its incumbents).

5.1.2.1. Nuancing Newcomer Information-Seeking
In OS, as shown, aspects of knowledge and information are already mentioned. However, my argument is that we need to be more nuanced in how we approach those topics, their interdependencies and differences, and that OKC is helpful in this.

In sections 4.2.2.3., 4.2.3. and 4.3. I described how, from an OKC perspective with its transactional view of communication and complex view of knowledge, information acquisition alone does not result in knowledge acquisition. In the OS literature, this relates to Saks et al.’s (2011) critique of the newcomer information-seeking literature, based on the fact that it does not consider whether information-seeking behaviour results in (the intended) outcomes. In other words, information-seeking behaviour alone does not necessarily lead to the outcome of obtaining information. For instance, you might seek information about some topic, but not get it.

The literature on newcomer information-seeking has traditionally focused on the tactics that newcomers use. However, given the two aspects above, it needs to put more focus on the outcomes of these behaviours, and on a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between information and knowledge. The literature on newcomer information-seeking seems to make a leap of faith from
information-seeking to knowledge and not really address the process in between, and in my view has some unfinished business with respect to the relationship between information and knowledge. Going back to chapter 4, information-seeking could be part of learning, especially when received information is tested and put to use, and it is not knowledge until the learner has done something with it. For example, a newcomer might be working with a task, encounter a problem, and then engage in information-seeking. Information is then obtained in relation to learning how to solve the task, and can be tested in relation to it, and in this way become part of a learning process.

In addition to a more critical view of the relationship between information and knowledge, drawing on OKC to nuance aspects of newcomer information-seeking would also entail more focus on the context, situation and interactions, and treat information-seeking as a process rather than isolated events, due to the transactional view of communication. Again, OKC is a useful perspective in relation to an interactionist approach to OS. Among other things, this relates to Saks et al.’s (2011) critique, as, from an interactionist viewpoint, looking solely at newcomer behaviours, and not their interactions with others and the results, does not tell the whole story about whether information-seeking is successful or not.

In addition to process aspects and the relationship between information and knowledge, another aspect of nuancing newcomer information-seeking concerns the motivation for information-seeking behaviours. The general assumption in the literature seems to be that newcomers are motivated to seek information in order to reduce uncertainty (and, for example, regain a sense of control, as noted in Ashford and Black [1996]). However, focusing on adjustment (e.g. Wang et al. 2015), the motivation does not (only) have to stem from wanting to reduce uncertainty as such, but from a desire to e.g. fit in or simply obtain information to quickly create value.

On a final note, although I have focused here on newcomer information-seeking in relation to OKC, OKC may also be a useful approach for nuancing our understanding of and approach to other newcomer proactive behaviours, such as feedback-seeking.

5.1.3. OKC and Proximal Outcomes of OS
In sections 2.2.2. and 3.5. I noted that, during the course of my work, a focus on proximal outcomes as related to knowledge and challenges connected to OS in start-ups emerged as relevant, considering the explorative interests indicated in my research questions, regarding integrating OS and OKC, and constructions of OS in start-ups and the role of knowledge communication in that regard. In section 3.5., I introduced the proximal outcomes as they have been treated in the OS literature. Here, I focus
on the proximal outcomes in relation to my efforts to integrate aspects of OS and OKC, i.e., considering previous points in this chapter, theoretically connecting OS outcomes and the OKC perspective. In the discussion (chapter 15), I take up proximal outcomes again, as I relate the points developed here to my empirical work and findings, to discuss accounts of the OS process in start-ups in relation to consequences for the proximal outcomes.

According to Saks and Ashforth (1997), there is a weakness in OS research in relation to outcomes:

“Another weakness has been the continued reliance on traditional socialization outcomes, including stressors (role ambiguity and role conflict), affective responses and job attitudes (job satisfaction and organizational commitment), and behavioral intentions (intentions to quit). More theoretically relevant outcomes must be assessed, including learning, knowledge, skill acquisition, social integration, and person-organization fit (Chao et al., 1994; Chatman, 1981; Major et al., 1995; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992).” (p. 261).

Knowledge and skill acquisition (as indicated above) are more theoretically relevant (than distal outcomes), since they are more in line with the focus of OS definitions (see Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012, p. 9-10). The theoretical framework of this dissertation facilitates an understanding of proximal OS outcomes as related to knowledge. T. N. Bauer and Erdogan (2012) note that:

“Proximal outcomes are those that indicate how well a newcomer is adjusting to his or her new position within the new organization […] Proximal indicators (also called adjustment indicators or accommodation) are often captured by understanding how accepted the newcomer feels by organizational insiders such as coworkers and supervisors, how much role clarity they have, and how high their performance self-efficacy is (Bauer et al., 2007).” (p. 100, emphasis in original).

This is related to knowledge, in that: “The most immediate outcomes of the socialization process are changes in knowledge (Fisher, 1986). The most appropriate criteria are therefore indicators of the learning that occurs during the socialization process (Chao et al., 1994).” (Klein and Heuser, 2008, p. 296-297). T. N. Bauer and Erdogan (2012) also state that: “Successful socialization must facilitate appropriate job related knowledge if newcomers are to be successful in their jobs.” (p. 103-104).

Thus, learning, knowledge and adjustment go together, since the adjustment expressed in proximal outcomes is related to learning and knowledge. I focus on the proximal outcomes of role clarity, task mastery and social integration. These are all related to adjustment through learning (e.g. learning
about different content areas, mentioned previously) and coming to understand, and can, in this way, be described as related to newcomers becoming knowledgeable. Considering the definition of OS I subscribe to (section 3.6.), i.e. a process where a newcomer goes from outsider to effective insider (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006) by acquiring job skills, organisational understanding and social integration (Taormina, 1997), the outcomes can be considered as knowledge outcomes.

Social integration is a bit special, however, since it is not enough to learn social conventions to be accepted; other factors also influence whether a newcomer is socially accepted by her/his new colleagues. Again, this highlights the explainability value of the interactionist perspective, where the investigation of outcomes should not be restricted to the individual newcomer, but needs to be seen in relation to the organisation and socialisation agents.

A number of works have touched on the importance in general of social integration for adjustment, but also related to the other proximal outcomes. In a general sense, Ashford and Black (1996) note that: “Reflecting needs for flexibility and freedom of movement, Bauer and Green (1994) and Reichers (1987) showed how newcomers’ attempts to get involved in task and social relationships during entry facilitated adaptation.” (p. 199). As regards the relationship between social integration and role clarity, the same authors state that: “Bauer and Green’s (1994) finding that professional involvement (attending social events and seminars) tend to reduce role ambiguity substantiates that information is exchanged during these relational episodes.” (p. 203). Finally, Ashford and Black (1996) note the instrumentality of social relationships for role clarity and task mastery:

“Proactive behaviors such as stopping by other people’s offices or work areas to talk, initiating social opportunities, and participating in formal social activities can give newcomers a situational identity and help them acquire appropriate skills and role behaviors and gain a sense of organizational policies and procedures (Morrison, 1993b; Reichers, 1987). These behaviors also build friendship networks and social support (Nelson & Quick, 1991). Indeed, network researchers have noted the instrumental and expressive benefits of networks (cf. Ibrarra, 1993; Tichy, 1981).” (p. 201).

Given a theoretical framework where knowledge is understood as situated, contextual, relational and dynamic, the outcomes should not be understood solely as cognitive, since the knowledge related to what has been learned and facilitating the adjustment is bound to a certain (constructed) organisational and social reality. For instance, the conditions for role clarity exist in a specific context, and this can change. This means that role clarity as an outcome becomes itself dynamic. Rather than
being a one-off level of adjustment, this is something that can continue to develop, e.g. as the organisation develops. The same applies to task mastery. I.e., the outcomes are contextual.

Qvortrup’s (2004a) four orders of knowledge adds the nuance that an outcome is not just one-dimensional. Rather, it is multi-level, in the sense that there are different levels of abstraction, e.g. related to role clarity. Adding a further level of complexity, this can be considered in relation to Klein and Heuser’s (2008) work on learning dimensions vis-à-vis different levels in the organisation (e.g. group, overall organisation). Drawing on Tsoukas (2011) and Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2004), when a newcomer uses ‘organisational knowledge’ to solve a task, it becomes personal knowledge or has a personal element. In this way, the outcomes can be seen as related to internalisation.

Jablin (2001) mentions role clarity as a ‘communication-related variable’ (p. 763), noting that “[…] few studies have explicitly focused on unpacking the communication attributes and the specific kinds of messages associated with the enactment of the strategies and tactics.” (p. 763). Here, it should be kept in mind that there are different implications in relation to which communication model is thought of in connection to this, e.g. understanding ‘role clarity’ as transferred versus, following the model of communication used in OKC, understanding it as negotiated and co-constructed, converged on.

And, also in line with OKC, a more processual approach to the outcomes is taken. The OS literature contains a number of works where authors focus on and discuss aspects such as ‘what was the outcome of the process?’ and ‘how can we optimise the process to ensure positive outcomes?’, and where, for example, links between proximal and distal outcomes are studied quantitatively (e.g. Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg [2003]). However, there are few who discuss and qualitatively investigate what the newcomers thought of the process itself.

Here, I agree with those who problematise one of Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) assumptions. Tuttle (2002) mentions Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) different assumptions and notes that:

“Although these assumptions help Van Maanen and Schein (1979) in their theory development, […] others would take issue with the idea that the process of adjustment experienced by individuals is not an important factor in the success or failure of the socialization process (Jones, 1983; Louis, 1980).” (p. 75).

Others also agree that the process is important. For example, Ashforth, Sluss, and Saks (2007) showed that: “[…] how newcomers are socialized has substantive and symbolic value over and above what they actually learn.” (p. 447, emphasis in original). This is not to say that the content is not important,
but it does mean that the process surrounding the content (and the process itself) is also important and worth investigating.

Thus, if OS is to be properly understood as a process of adjustment (and not only as a process of uncertainty reduction), it is not enough to focus on the outcomes as an end goal, we also need to investigate the process and how it is related to the outcomes. In this dissertation, this is done from a specific knowledge perspective, and thus an interest in how both newcomers and managers talk about the process, the outcomes, the relationship between them, and the outcomes as (related to) knowledge. In this way, I am not so much studying OS success in terms of whether certain outcomes are achieved (or not) as studying the impact of knowledge communication on the evaluation of the OS process (which is what leads to the outcomes).

5.1.4. The Start-Up Context and Organisation in OKC and OS

Theoretically, my contributions to OS primarily come from nuancing the understanding of knowledge and communication in OS, therefore I have given primacy to treating these above. However, the empirical setting, in relation to the analysis and discussion, also has consequences for my theoretical contributions. Therefore, I include a brief note (admittedly) on the approach to ‘organisation’ in OKC and OS and the start-up context here.

Both OKC and OS focus on phenomena in and of organisations, i.e. ‘organisation’ is the locus and location of both OKC and OS, since both address phenomena that take place in ‘organisations’ and are considered to be important for them. However, ‘organisation’ is conceptualised differently in the two areas. In OS, the focus is often on large organisations (such as in industry), and in general parts of the OS literature seems not to be fully up to date with the developments in definitions of organisation mentioned in chapter 4, i.e. there is sometimes still a mechanic, one-way and static orientation (e.g. a focus on newcomers having to learn the established culture of an incumbent, and presumably stable, organisation). In this sense, the organisational context is different here, as the focus is on start-ups. In OKC, on the other hand, ‘organisation’ (as noted in section 4.2.1.) is considered to be something dynamic and interactionally achieved.

The acknowledgement that organisations are complex and dynamic is fitting considering the start-up context. The newer definitions of organisation that OKC draws on (as noted in chapter 4) are in a way more inclusive, and thus more useful in considering emerging ventures, in that the organic and dynamic aspects of these definitions can better account for the development process in start-ups. In other words, considering the start-up context here, a more holistic and organic definition of
organisation is needed than that which a lot of earlier OS research is based on. In particular, the organisation-focused wave in OS research is more aligned with classical definitions of organisation. However, the perspective in the interactionist wave is better suited to approaching organisations as dynamic and complex, in that it recognises socialisation as something that parties achieve together.

5.2. Summing up and Answering Research Question 1

In the above, I have mentioned a range of interfaces where OS and OKC can meet, and points where OKC can meaningfully nuance or add to the study of OS. In this final section, I sum up how the two fields (based on the above points of possible integration) are synthesised, in terms of how they are bridged. This therefore answers RQ1: How can the field of organisational knowledge communication be integrated in organisational socialisation to help us better understand and work with organisational socialisation as a process where knowledge communication takes place?

Glancing through the sections, it is evident that the interactionist perspective in OS is important for the possibility of linking an OKC orientation with OS. As regards the organisational aspect, it links with OKC in the sense that it acknowledges organisations and organisational phenomena as dynamic and co-constructed, since socialisation is achieved by existing members and newcomers together.

In terms of the communication assumptions in OKC, i.e. viewing communication as an ongoing, transactional process with participants, this is also in line with an interactionist perspective, and contributes to OS by nuancing how communication is conceptualised in this discipline. In other words, it shifts the focus from single instances of information-giving and -receiving to a process with mutually engaged participants (ideally) converging on mutual understanding. Earlier OS studies, on the other hand, are more aligned with traditional KM and linear (and to some extent interactional) views of communication.

OKC conceptualises knowledge as contextual, relational, situated and dynamic. Here, in the relationship between the social (organisational) and the individual (as (becoming) part of the organisation), there is a link between the perspectives of social constructivism, OKC and interactionism in OS. Again, considering the integration of aspects from Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2004; Tsoukas, 2011), Stacey (2001) and Qvortrup (2004a), knowledge, when put to use, has personal aspects (e.g. organisational knowledge is used in relation to individual experience), but it is also contextual and relational, and there are different levels of knowledge.
Even though different criticisms lurk in the OS literature, e.g. that studies of newcomer information-seeking lack a proper results focus (Saks et al., 2011), these criticisms are presented in different articles and are rarely integrated, i.e. different points of critique can be found, but the criticisms are to some extent sporadic, fragmented and not integrated (across topics). OKC, on the other hand, which is steeped in different traditions, offers a holistic way of addressing the criticisms, offering its own nuances and contributing to OS moving forward.

For my research, therefore, OKC presents a meaningful perspective in relation to understanding OS phenomena, since ICT start-ups are described as knowledge-intensive, socialisation is described as a learning process resulting in changes in knowledge (e.g. Klein & Heuser, 2008), and, as a process of adjustment proximal outcomes are related to knowledge. Socialisation is knowledge-intensive for both the organisation (and incumbents) and newcomers, and in the meeting between them. For example, for newcomers, OS might be a process with steep learning curves and different domains of knowledge related (and interrelated) to the organisation they need to learn about. And this learning is partly facilitated by communicative processes. And, as regards the context of ICT start-ups, there are likely to be (as shown in the OS literature review) specific challenges in relation to OS, which can be related to, and have consequences for, knowledge.

Thus, I study OS processes through the perspective of knowledge that emphasises practices, communication and context, rather than knowledge as something that is just there and needs to be distributed, and this is achieved through focusing on how newcomers and managers talk about and construct aspects of knowledge and socialisation in the topical context of each other.

In the following chapters, I present the methodology and methods that I have relied on for my empirical work, and then present my analysis. In the subsequent discussion, I bring together my empirical and theoretical work.
6. Methodology: Qualitative Research Strategy and Case Study Design

In this chapter, I present and discuss the methodology used in the research. Grix (2002) characterises methodology in the following way:

“Methodology is concerned with the logic of scientific inquiry; in particular with investigating the potentialities and limitations of particular techniques or procedures. The term pertains to the science and study of methods and the assumptions about the ways in which knowledge is produced.” (p. 179).

Thus, methodology covers a range of aspects. Here, I use a qualitative research strategy and a case study design. In the following, I present my choices in relation to these, discuss their advantages and limitations, and show how the methodological elements are related to my epistemological standpoint.

6.1. Qualitative Methodology

I draw on a range of qualitative techniques for constructing and analysing empirical material, as my research agenda is pursued through methods centered on understanding through interpretation and meaning, rather than numerical values. For construction of empirical material, I primarily rely on semi-structured and narrative semi-structured interviews. For analysis, I rely on discourse analysis, initially using a thematic approach to get an overview of the material. I return to the methodical specifics in chapter 7.

As regards the connection between the qualitative research strategy and the theoretical and empirical interests of the study, a qualitative approach is useful in research on OKC. Christensen (2018) notes that: “An attempt to develop a theoretical and methodological framework to study knowledge communication has been made by Kastberg (2016), who calls for a flexible and situational methodology rather than a fixed one.” (p. 6). A qualitative strategy is thus seen as relevant here, because it is a more open approach for generating knowledge and understanding. Rather than using pre-specified categories (or variables), it allows new meanings to appear and be investigated. In other words, rather than e.g. relying on existing scales to test (through numbers) whether a theory applies in a certain setting, a qualitative approach makes it possible to ‘discover’ previously un-encountered meanings, i.e. the choice of a qualitative methodology suggests a different knowledge (epistemological) interest altogether.

I thus use qualitative methods because of the explorative nature of my research, where the richer understanding that qualitative methods can provide is necessary, since there are important aspects
that questionnaires cannot ‘capture’, but where the qualitative methods I employ are better suited to investigating managers’ and newcomers’ constructions, and this approach facilitates sensitivity in not just asking what a priori seems relevant, but having an eye for what emerges and is constructed as relevant for the informants.

As I draw on a qualitative methodology, and, in relation to this, narrative interviewing techniques and discourse analysis, I will also make a methodological contribution. Furthermore, this methodology also plays a role in being able to make the empirical and theoretical contributions, due to the kind of insights and understanding it facilitates. Empirical studies of OS are mainly based on quantitative methods, where (longitudinal) survey designs in particular have had a central place, and although qualitative research in OS is gaining, it is still not as common. Examples of qualitative OS articles include: Korte (2009 and 2010, using the same dataset), Bargues (2013), and Korte, Brunhaver, and Sheppard (2015). There is, therefore, room for more qualitative studies. Following Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012) “[…] qualitative methods can portray the diverse range of emotions and feelings that newcomers have by examining the narratives that newcomers provide.” (p. 18).

6.2. Case Study Design

In the following, I present my case study design. Christensen (2018) notes about case studies that:

“First, conducting a case study allows an answering of “how” questions (Yin 2014) […] Second, the study of organizational practices and the phenomenon of knowledge, knowing and knowledgeability are highly complex, and case studies make it possible to grasp complexity (Yin 2014).” (p. 6).

Thus, considering both the topics and form of my research questions and the explorative nature of my enquiry, a case study design is suitable.

The following outline of my case study design focuses on what type of case study my design can be characterised as, how I identified and selected specific start-ups to serve as case organisations for the research, aspects of being in contact with the start-ups, and the question of case studies and generalisation. I conducted a small pilot study, which I briefly mention throughout the sections and elaborate on in the methods chapter (7). In the methods chapter, I also elaborate on the selection of newcomers and managers as embedded cases in the overall case start-ups. In this chapter, therefore, I focus on the overall aspects of my case study design and the case start-ups as the context for the newcomers and managers as embedded cases.
6.2.1. Type of Case Study
Following Stake (1995) and Maaløe (2002), I characterise my study as an instrumental, explorative, embedded multi-design case study. I regard it as an embedded multi-design because the study includes multiple overall cases (the various start-ups), where the embedded cases are the managers and newcomers in these start-ups. The explorative part is related to my overall research purpose and the abductive approach discussed previously.

Stake (1995) mentions instrumental case studies as research where the case is instrumental to learning (p. 3). In instrumental case studies “[…] the case serves to help us understand phenomena or relationships within it […]” (Stake, 1995, p. 77). In the present dissertation, a case approach is instrumental for the purpose of investigating and learning about OKC and socialisation in ICT start-ups. Case studies are also relevant for research where appreciating the context of phenomena is considered important (cf. Hartley, 2004, p. 323).

The embedded multi-design case study is a type of multiple case study, where there are cases (units or people) embedded in cases at a different level (cf. Maaløe, 2002, p. 69. His types are based on Yin, 1984/1994). In my research, the newcomers and managers as individual informants are embedded cases in the case start-ups, i.e. where the start-ups are a specific organisational context (that the actors can also influence) for the newcomers or managers as embedded cases. Here, one informant (a manager or newcomer) represents one embedded case. To ensure the anonymity of my case start-ups and informants as embedded cases, the start-ups are referred to as Case 2, Case 3, Case 4, Case 5 and Case 6. When referring to an informant, I note which case start-up the informant is affiliated with, and whether the informant is a manager (M) or newcomer (NC). For example, ‘C2/NC1’ refers to the first newcomer I interviewed in case start-up 2.

Table 1 illustrates the connection between different case start-ups (contexts) and managers and newcomers as informants embedded in these (I return to this as part of a matrix structure in chapter 8 when I introduce the analysis chapters). The design recognises and makes affordances for research considering the multiplicity of aspects in the relationship between case start-ups, informants (i.e. managers and newcomers as cases embedded in the start-up context), and their relationships across.

This design makes it possible to answer the empirical research question and sub-questions, since it includes managers and newcomers across start-ups while also taking context into account, i.e. retaining context sensitivity as regards differences between the start-ups and various informants.
6.2.2. Selection of Case Start-Ups

In this section, I focus on the identification and selection of the case start-ups. As mentioned in the introduction and OS literature review, although the ‘newness’ of a start-up is expected to add a layer of complexity and dynamics to OS, there has been little empirical research on this. The (expected) complexity/dynamics is what makes start-ups interesting in relation to the phenomenon of OS, and ICT start-ups in particular since ICT is a knowledge-intensive industry.

My selection of case start-ups is an example of a purposeful sampling strategy, or, rather, a selection strategy. I have employed a sampling strategy where the sampling is directly related to the purpose of the study (cf. Neergaard, 2007, p. 11), i.e. I have sampled cases that are relevant to my study. Neergaard (2007) writes about this type of sampling more as purposeful selection (p. 11).

I prefer the term selection over sampling, as I have specifically identified and selected start-ups based on a set of relevance criteria (Maaløe, 2002, p. 123) based on my research questions, i.e. I did not create a population of start-ups to choose from, rather I sought out the specific case start-ups. Flyvbjerg (2006) mentions two overall types of selection (p. 230), random selection and information-oriented selection. The former is related to sampling and generalising to a population, whereas the latter has more to do with information-rich cases, the purpose being: “To maximize the utility of information from small samples and single cases. Cases are selected on the basis of expectations about their information content.” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). This is related to Stake’s (1995) point about selection criteria, where he notes that: “The first criterion should be to maximize what we can learn.” (p. 4). Thus, here I have used an information-oriented selection strategy.

My relevance criteria were defined from the term ‘ICT start-ups’. Thus, I first had to define what might be characterised as a company in the ICT industry, then define a start-up, and finally define what then characterises an ICT start-up. In addition, the start-ups needed to be hiring and I chose to focus on a specific geographical area.

In the Cambridge Business English Dictionary, ICT is defined as “information and communication technology: the use of computers and other electronic equipment and systems to collect, store, use,
and send data electronically”. I thus define ICT start-ups as working with aspects encompassed by this definition. In terms of the selection of start-ups, the sampling can be said to be ‘within industry’, since all the case start-ups are within ICT. However, ICT is itself a broad category (e.g. including both hardware and software). I focus on software companies. Thus, the case start-ups are both ‘within industry’ and within certain parts of that industry.

A ‘start-up’ can be defined in different ways. I draw on Lievegoed’s (1997b) description of business development as a stepwise process (through different phases of development) (p. 79) to define a start-up as a business that is in the pioneering phase, i.e. the ‘pioneers’ are still the important figures running the company (Lievegoed, 1997a, p. 92). I see this as a more meaningful way to distinguish between a start-up and a mature business, since it is more relative than distinguishing companies on the basis of age. Mønsted (2003), for example, mentions a period of up to one to two years for start-up companies (p. 17), but I am more aligned with the development approach, since a company does not suddenly become different just because it is two years old.

Based on this, ICT start-ups (i.e. start-ups in the ICT industry) are defined as new ventures whose value proposition and core product/service is centrally related to information and communication technology, and where founders and managers play a vital role for the strategic direction and work.

I chose to limit my selection of case start-ups to ICT start-ups in and around the city of Aarhus, Denmark. This geographical proximity means that the case start-ups are all located near Aarhus’ relevant educational institutions, other ICT companies (SMEs, large companies), and various communities focused on and incubators for start-ups (some of which are connected to the university). Thus, the start-ups are close to, and to some extent part of, the same geographical start-up ‘ecosystem’. The conditions for ICT start-ups in and around Aarhus is also part of the reason that I chose to focus on this area, since it was likely to make access to start-ups and potential informants easier.

There are six case start-ups in total. One served as a pilot case to try out the general research idea and approach, and the empirical material from the remaining five case start-ups constitutes the subject of analysis (I return to the pilot case and the empirical material in the methods chapter). The number of case start-ups was the result of a number of factors. The ‘theoretical’ expectation/assumption about information-rich/relevant problematics was coupled with a more practical aspect of access to material: the start-ups needed to have recently hired or have plans to hire (I followed some who eventually did not hire, while others did).
I chose to include more than one case start-up because of my exploratory agenda, and, in order to make comparisons within and across case start-ups, I wanted to interview at least one manager and two newcomers in each start-up, in order to have enough quality material to be able to answer my research questions. In other words, I needed material to be able to meaningfully make the comparisons indicated in my research agenda and to answer my research questions. This means that I needed enough quality material both intra and inter case start-ups. When speaking of sampling and purposive selection, a related term is saturation, which is typically understood as the point at which further material or analysis does not yield new information (Saunders et al., 2018). As regards a qualitative understanding of saturation, Teddlie and Yu (2007) also describe this as saturation of information, i.e. saturation is reached when e.g. adding more cases does not provide additional information. In relation to the discourse analysis method I use, Phillips and Hardy (2002) note that “[…] the notion of saturation in discourse analysis is “elastic.” The end-point comes not because the researcher stops finding anything new, but because the researcher judges that the data are sufficient to make and justify an interesting argument (Wood & Kroger, 2000).” (p. 74). That is, here, saturation is the point at which the need for information to be able to answer the research questions is saturated. Since I have carried out all the interview and analytic work myself, the decision about when this level had been reached was not made either before or after analysis, but in the process in-between. As regards material for discourse analyses, Wood and Kroger (2000) note that, in terms of the required number and quality of interviews, this:

“[…] can usually be estimated fairly well based on the length and content of the interviews, on previous work, on experience and logic, and, if necessary, on one or two pilot interviews. One might need relatively more discourse for a coarse-grained analysis (e.g., of interpretive [sic] repertoires) than for a fine-grained analysis (e.g., of turn taking) […]” (p. 80).

I did conduct pilot interviews, which I return to in section 7.1.5. in the methods chapter. As indicated by Phillips and Hardy (2002) above, Wood and Kroger (2000) also highlight the relationship between material and making compelling arguments:

“The researcher must judge whether there are sufficient data to make an (interesting) argument and to warrant or justify that argument, for example, to provide the exceptions that can be used to assess claims. That is, the question about number comes down to having a sufficient number of arguments of sufficient quality and having sufficient data for those arguments to be well grounded. We would emphasize that discourse analysts have no need
to apologize for small numbers of participants or texts – bigger is not necessarily better.” (p. 81).

The five case start-ups and embedded cases allow me to answer my research questions while also being manageable, considering the detailed analysis I subject the material to (see the methods chapter). I included Case 4 for exploratory reasons and information richness, and as a means for ‘warranting or justifying’ as indicated above (I elaborate on this later in this section).

When I had identified a potential case start-up based on my criteria, I contacted them to ask whether they would agree to serve as one of my case organisations. For each of the five start-ups that serve as case organisations, I also had an introductory talk with (one of) the owner(s)/central manager(s). Not all the start-ups I contacted ended up being a case organisation. Some declined to participate for various reasons, e.g. pressure of time, size/kind of start-up (e.g. if it was intended as a one- or two-man business), or because they were not hiring. And some of those who agreed to participate did not hire in the period in which I was following them, so I selected other companies which were. Before contacting a potential case start-up, I would check to see if there were any job postings online, although this did not always mean that they actually ended up hiring someone. Also, even though a start-up seemed to be relevant, it is not always easy to know in advance, because it can be difficult to find much information about them.

Whether the final case start-ups are different from those who declined to participate (i.e. those who might have been hiring) is difficult to say. However, this does not change the fact that the chosen start-ups are relevant for studying the phenomenon in focus here. Furthermore, the informants do not disagree with the start-ups being labelled as start-ups (when I had contact with them and in interviews). However, Case 4 is a different kind of start-up than the other case organisations, which the informants in that start-up also mentioned (I return to this later).

Case 1, which I used for my pilot study, was identified through my personal network. Four case start-ups (Case 2, 4, 5 and 6) were identified through a website where IT start-ups can post job openings (thehub.dk) and virk.dk, where it is possible to search for specific companies in specific regions in Denmark through industry codes (e.g. ‘computer programming’). On thehub.dk I could follow start-ups in the Mid-Jutland area who were hiring. On both websites, but especially on virk.dk since it is linked with the CVR database (the Danish central company register), it is also possible to see when the company was first founded/registered as such. Case 2 and 6 were first identified on thehub.dk, Case 4 and 5 were first identified on virk.dk (where I looked for companies in Aarhus registered
under ‘computer programming’ and similar industry codes). Finally, Case 3 is an example of snowball sampling (R. Atkinson & Flint, 2001): the manager in Case 4 mentioned the manager in Case 3 and offered to be a reference, so that the Case 3 manager knew he could expect an e-mail from me, and so that I could say that I had heard about them via someone he knew.

The final set of case start-ups is marked by both differences and similarities, i.e. in some aspects they are homogeneous, while in others they are heterogeneous. I could have picked other case start-ups, but there would just have been other differences and similarities. For instance, although the companies were not all founded in the same month of the same year, they are all at the recruiting stage. In Rollag’s (2004) study of relative tenure in relation to OS, he also uses start-ups of various ages, where their common denominator is geographical, all being situated in Silicon Valley.

Another example of variation between the start-ups is in the level of experience of managers and newcomers, e.g. the managers differ as regards age and experience with ‘personnel management’/HRM: while the partners in Case 2 have recently graduated, the owner-founder-manager of Case 5 has a lot of experience in hiring from a previous job. On a continuum of experience with hiring/HRM, the managers range from none/very little (in case start-up 2 and 6) through some to a lot (in case start-up 3, 4 and 5).

Table 2 gives an overview of the characteristics of the case start-ups. While their product or service is somehow related to ICT, they differ in their core competencies (developing/different services), and although each start-up is unique they all share some of the same overall challenges. So even though they have something in common (sector and related challenges, e.g. recruiting and being a start-up), they also differ from each other (e.g. in services/products). It is therefore interesting to investigate whether patterns emerge in spite of individual uniqueness (and how/whether these are related to the sector and/or being a start-up). Instead of using a rigid definition of a start-up, I believe that these similarities and differences are more in line with the variation that exists in the start-up landscape. It also allows me to make a stronger analytical argument, inasmuch as I can investigate patterns across, while also considering some differences between, the start-ups.

My pilot case was a web bureau (focusing on developing web shops), and the five case start-ups focus on developing software, or their products/services include a software development aspect (e.g. in relation to web-based solutions or smartphone applications). In Case 3 and 4, I had the opportunity to interview the very first newcomers. Especially as regards Case 4, I had contact with them from a
very early stage in the life of the organisation. In Case 2, 5 and 6, they had some interns, part-timers or freelancers before the informants that I interviewed.

Table 2: Characteristics of Start-Up Case Companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case start-up #</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Year founded (recorded)</th>
<th>Approximate size of start-up (at time of interviewing)</th>
<th>Finances/ funding (initially)</th>
<th>Ownership structure (initially)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case 2</td>
<td>B2B software development</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>7-8 persons (December 2016 - February 2017)</td>
<td>Bootstrap</td>
<td>Multiple founders as owner-managers (partners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 3</td>
<td>B2B software development</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>4-5 persons (June 2017 - September 2017)</td>
<td>Bootstrap</td>
<td>Multiple founders as owner-managers (partners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 4</td>
<td>B2B software development</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>10-16 persons (March 2017 - August 2017)</td>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Shared corporate ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hired manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 5</td>
<td>B2B software development with consumer aspect (leisure)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>9-10 persons (April 2017 - June 2017)</td>
<td>Bootstrap</td>
<td>One founder, owner-manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 6</td>
<td>B2B software development with consumer aspect (shopping)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>8-9 persons (March 2017 - August 2017)</td>
<td>Bootstrap</td>
<td>Multiple founders as owner-managers (partners)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows, Case 4 differs from the other case start-ups in that it was started in a different way. Here, the interviewed manager was hired, and did not contribute to the initial funding. The other case start-ups are bootstrap, initially funded through the owner-managers’/partners’ money. Case 4 is still a start-up, however, just not in the way we often depict a start-up, i.e. founded by one or more entrepreneurs with their own money. Notwithstanding, although the manager (that I interviewed) is a ‘CTO’ (and not CEO or owner/partner), he has the personnel responsibility in the start-up and has
a big impact on the company because he was there from its formal first day, and is the daily manager, i.e. his visions and ideas are influential from the start. As such it can therefore be considered to be in the pioneering phase mentioned above. I consider Case 4 a start-up (in its own right), because it is not just a subsidiary or a spinoff. On a social media platform, they describe themselves as a start-up (funded by two existing companies), i.e. not a subsidiary or spinoff of another company. It is a new venture with ownership shared between two companies, which is to develop and sell a unique new product. And even though some aspects are different from the other start-ups, it is still a new venture, and thus a relevant site for exploring OS in a new ICT company.

I decided to include Case 4 as a case start-up because, when I first met with a representative, it struck me that it was to some extent different from the others, and, in relation to my exploratory endeavour, also especially information rich. For instance, part of the information richness is related to an ambitious and explicit goal for growth in number of employees. This is both a more explicit and ambitious goal than in the other start-ups. Compared with Case 2 and 6, it is more likely to have some degree of experience with hiring/recruiting/HR, because the manager has previous experience with personnel management (as do the managers in Case 3 and 5). It is also different in that the central person behind initial idea development who is there is not in charge of employees, whereas in the other start-ups the managers with personnel responsibility own their entrepreneurial ideas.

The inclusion of Case 4 presents two related benefits. Firstly, the fact that it is (slightly) different from the others allows me a more nuanced analysis and discussion, i.e. potentially discussing alternative understandings. Secondly, it means that some of the same patterns might be identified across all case start-ups. In other words, considering that this start-up has some differences in its preconditions, it makes it interesting to investigate whether newcomers’ have similar experiences across the case start-ups. For example, do some of the same issues occur, despite the fact that managers are likely to have varying degrees of experience in having employees and being managers? Do the newcomers relate different experiences, or are there patterns across the start-ups, despite contextual differences?

6.2.3. Continuous Contact with Case Start-Ups

After completing the interviews, I still had some contact with the case start-ups. For example, I sent a short e-mail update around Christmas 2017, and in May 2018 I met some of them (Case 2, Case 4, Case 5, and Case 6) for follow-up meetings, where I wrote additional field notes and reflections. Through these follow-up e-mails and meetings, I was able to follow (some of the developments in)
the start-ups and discuss preliminary findings with them, and also to give input back to the start-ups and inform them about the progress of my work.

Thus, even though the research is not longitudinal, since I have only formally interviewed each informant once, I have still been able to follow some of the developments in the organisations. I have also followed them through their websites and the social media Facebook and LinkedIn. Through this, I have increased my understanding of the case start-ups and their context.

6.2.4. The Question of Case Studies and Generalisation

As case studies have been criticised for not being generalisable due to their highly contextual nature (cf. Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, p. 27; Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 220, p. 224), I end this chapter with arguing that the context sensitivity afforded by case study designs is relevant not only for the present research, but also as regards how we relate phenomena studied in context to like phenomena in other contexts. Flyvbjerg (2006) refutes that ‘context’ is a problem, since “[…] in the study of human affairs, there appears to exist only context-dependent knowledge […]” (p. 221). Case studies are thus suitable for studies of human affairs, as they acknowledge and indeed rely on context.

Flyvbjerg (2006) also mentions the generalisation issue in relation to the purpose of case studies, in the sense that the objective can be either to prove something or to learn something (p. 224). My research agenda and purpose (and the wording of the RQs) is linked to learning and understanding, which thus influences how I design and approach my case study.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) note that, whether generalising from qualitative case studies is considered problematic or not:

“[…] depends on the epistemological point of view. It also depends on what is meant by generalization. […] In a perspective that accepts non-observables in the form of patterns and tendencies, common to and underlying several surface phenomena, successive expansions of the empirical area of application within a certain domain are both possible and desirable, even in qualitative studies.” (p. 27, emphasis in original).

Thus, some scholars hold that findings from case studies can to some extent be ‘generalised’, or rather extended. Daymon and Holloway (2011) note that case studies offer the possibility for rich description, which can lead to extendability, and “Therefore, although your findings may not be universal to all other cases, some conclusions may resonate with readers in such a way that they can apply your findings to other situations with which they are familiar.” (p. 124).
In a qualitative case study approach, the generalising can take the form of analytical generalisation (Maaløe, 2002, p. 22), which is different from the quantitative understanding of generalisation as using a representative sample and statistically testing to generalise to a population. In relation to the previous points about context, it is the deep contextual understanding that provides the basis for theorising and analytically generalising to other similar contexts/other organisations with similar conditions. In other words, part of the analytical generalisation (and contributions) is related to context (situation/circumstances). Newell (2005) notes that: “The limits to generalizability of research involving a small set of cases are well documented. However, the value of the methodology lies in its ability to provide rich insights and to provide directions for future inquiries.” (p. 278). Thus the strength of analytical generalisation in relation to case studies comes from acknowledging conditions, and the implications of the findings related to the conditions, e.g. in relation to nuancing existing theory. Daymon and Holloway (2011, p. 126) mention qualitative generalising to a theory as something that can also include nuancing. Even though case studies can be explorative and not deliberately testing theory, a case study might provide the basis for theorising anyway, since the findings could have implications for new theory development or nuancing existing theory. Stake (1995) mentions ‘petite generalizations’ and using these as input for nuancing and modifying (pre-existing) ‘grand generalizations’ (p. 7).

As discussed in section 6.2.2., I rely on selection of cases for informational purposes. My choice of a case study and how it is designed is related to learning, understanding, explorative and informational purposes. Thus, in my qualitative case study, I investigate how the informants talk about and thus construct the conditions for socialisation and knowledge communication in start-ups. In relation to this, the strength of a case study approach is its acknowledgement of context and the potential information richness of cases. Given the similarities and differences across the start-ups, this context sensitivity potentially adds an extra layer of richness to understanding central aspects of OS and knowledge communication in start-ups, e.g. related to certain contextual differences.
7. Methods

By methods is meant the specific ‘techniques’ used to acquire knowledge (Grix, 2002, p. 180). Having presented my philosophical standpoint, theoretical framework and methodology in previous chapters, I now discuss this final aspect of the research design in detail. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to present the methods used for constructing and analysing the empirical material, i.e. why the specific methods were employed, how the techniques were operationalised, and how the methods for constructing and analysing the empirical material (and the various steps throughout) are linked. Figure 1 shows an outline of the empirical elements and process. The methods used to construct the empirical material consist of semi-structured and narrative semi-structured interviews, while the analysis methods for the individual interviews and across interviews consist of creating an overview of thematic clusters and discourse analysis focusing on interpretative repertoires.

Figure 1: Empirical Elements and Process

I started with an overall idea of which methods to use to answer my research questions. As regards the specific use of the methods, my approach has been empirically driven, i.e. I started with an overall set of planned phases (constructing and analysing), but in order to ensure the suitability of the method, I did not pre-specify the full set of procedures (in a linear fashion). For example, I knew that a type of discourse analysis would be relevant for answering my research questions, but I did not specifically design how to go about it before I had carried out some of the interviews, and in that way the analytic strategy also had an emergent aspect. I see this as in accordance with a reflexive approach (as described in chapter 2) in an explorative study. I thus had an overall idea of my approach and the coupling of the different elements (in relation to the research agenda and research questions), but I designed the specific procedural aspects of each step (taking into consideration the previous and the next step) as I went along. In the following, I discuss the various aspects of constructing and analysing the empirical material. The chapter closes with a section on quality criteria and considerations.
7.1. Constructing the Empirical Material

The following presents my considerations about the empirical material. First, I describe how the informants in the five case start-ups were selected. I then elaborate on background and primary material, the relationship between a social constructivist position and doing interviews, my interview protocol and ethical formalities related to working with empirical material, and then briefly describe my efforts to ‘pilot’ my approach. Finally, I discuss the manager and newcomer interviews and the interview styles employed in more detail, ending with a section on transcribing the interviews.

7.1.1. Selection of Informants as Embedded Cases in Case Start-Ups

In chapter 6, I described how I found and selected the case start-ups for my study. In the following, I outline my considerations regarding the selection of newcomers and managers as embedded cases in the start-ups. I start with the managers, and then move on to the newcomers, where I especially focus on timing in relation to selecting informants and conducting the interviews.

In order to answer sub-question 2, I chose to interview managers with personnel responsibilities, because this means that they act as decision makers on employee-related matters and as representatives of the company in this regard. Since some of the start-ups had more than one manager or partner, I interviewed the person who the start-ups themselves identified as the manager(s) with (day-to-day) personnel responsibility. In Case 2, 3, 4 and 5 this is one person, whereas in Case 6 there are five partners, three of whom have some kind of personnel responsibility.

As regards newcomers, all were newly employed when I first contacted the start-ups, or were hired during the following months. Given that OS is largely understood as a process (e.g. Saks & Ashforth, 1997), it is relevant to consider the timing of the newcomer interviews. I interviewed new employees with a tenure of approximately two to four months in the start-ups.

There are various opinions in the OS literature about when, and for how long, a new employee is considered a newcomer. According to Louis (1980), learning the ropes and coping with differences between expectations and reality when entering a new organisation lasts 6-10 months (p. 231). However, there are difficulties in determining precisely when to collect the empirical material (e.g. Ashford & Black, 1996; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). For instance, Saks and Ashforth (1997) say that:

“While it is well known that the socialization process unfolds over time, socialization theory does not specify the intervals for particular changes (Chao et al., 1994) and it is not yet clear.
at what point data should be gathered to best assess socialization processes and outcomes.” (p. 257).

Notwithstanding, there is some consensus that it is a good idea to start early when investigating socialisation (e.g. Field & Coetzer, 2011; Saks & Ashforth, 1997, p. 258). In relation to the context of ICT start-ups, Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006) state that: “The evidence to date suggests that OS occurs more rapidly in fast-paced environments such as IT, and where there is a higher rate of new joiners […]” (p. 509). They cite Chen and Klimoski (2003), who noted that, in the IT teams they studied, it took newcomers two to three months to become full members (p. 596).

Another consideration is that the amount of time newcomers need to settle in and learn about different areas can vary (Myers & Oetzel, 2003, p. 440), and whether there are optimal points in time for learning about certain content (Klein & Heuser, 2008). Ashforth (2012) mentions a range of aspects that affect settling-in time and make decisions about when the researcher should engage challenging:

“[…] the rate of learning and adjustment are strongly influenced by temporally oriented individual differences, the difficulty of transitioning from one’s former role to one’s current role, and various features of the work context. […] the rate is also strongly influenced by socialization processes enacted by the organization (socialization tactics) and newcomers (proactivity).” (p. 161).

It is not just that OS unfolds over time, however, since contextual aspects are also likely to have an impact. In other words, it makes sense for the literature to be vague about ‘settling-in time’ and the implications for collecting empirical material, because it is likely to vary (and be contingent) between different individuals and different contexts. Thus some authors, e.g. Ashford and Nurmoahmed (2012), call for a person-by-situation approach (p. 10). Rollag (2007), in a study of Silicon Valley start-ups, acknowledges the contingent nature of the label ‘newness’ (p. 63). He investigated colleagues’ perceptions of ‘newness’ as a function of two elements, the first being relative tenure (“[…] an individual’s relative position in his or her firm’s tenure distribution […]” [Rollag, 2004, p. 853]), and the second being how often a colleague has interacted with the new employee (p. 63).

Based on these challenges, and on the recommendations that OS should be investigated early, I chose to set a criterion that the newcomers had to have been in the start-up for at least two months before I interviewed them, and for no longer than about four months, because I also had to interview them when they would still be able to recall different situations they had experienced. In other words, they
had to have been through at least parts of the experience of being a newcomer, while also being able to remember and give an account of it (although the account is of course retrospective sensemaking and constructed in the here-and-now). Thus, my time criterion was pragmatically derived, but it also takes account of recommendations in the literature to investigate OS early since the first few months are vital (e.g. Field & Coetzer, 2011, p. 81), and the process can happen faster in some contexts. This approach to the time aspect of the interviews is reminiscent of Ashford and Black’s (1996) approach:

“We chose our data collection times on the basis of past research practice and common sense. […] we knew that we had to let enough time pass to give newcomers the opportunity and the need to engage in some of the entry activities.” (p. 204).

Thus, the newcomers are interviewed during the same time interval (two to four months), which means that they have been through some of the process, while the time span should also ensure that they still have some memory of the details. This also gave a little flexibility in relation to scheduling the interviews, so that the informants would actually have time to do the interview (i.e. it takes into account that the start-ups are often very busy, and that part-timers are not in the office every day. I return to part-timers below). As mentioned above, ‘settling-in time’ is relative and might vary, e.g. Ashforth (2012) notes: “[…] individuals likely proceed through the stages at different rates.” (p. 175). The chosen time period means that by definition they are at least in the encounter stage, but perhaps some of them might already feel they have settled in (and reached adjustment/metamorphosis). As previously noted, Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012) call for a person-by-situation approach (p. 10), which indicates a sensitivity to different people and situations, e.g. a newcomer might have adjusted to some things, while other things still feel very new. The point here is simply that, with regard to stage models of OS, the interviews take place after formal entry, so the interviewed newcomers have in common that they have entered and are therefore at least in the encounter phase. Towards the end of each newcomer interview, I asked whether they felt they had got used to the organisation and job, as a kind of indicator of what they thought about their progress in settling in.

The newcomers interviewed in the start-ups are not only full-time employees, but also part-timers and interns. In the ICT sector, the gap between demand and supply of candidates with the required IT skills means that a lot of companies try to ‘catch people early’ (e.g. while they are still students), or that they need to consider other alternatives to full time-graduated or experienced employees in order to fill their vacant positions, e.g. interns or student developers, some of whom will later go on to full-
time employment. However, these are just as much newcomers as the full time-employees, and also go through the OS process (e.g. Pennaforte, Drysdale, & Pretti, 2016).

I have used the same time criterion (approximately two to four months) for all newcomers. In a field note from the C6/M1 interview, I noted that: “Overall I thought about how part time employees have had less ‘confrontation’ hours when I interview them, but on the other hand perhaps they have had more time to think and reflect, how I use the same time frame for all newcomers I interview”. I also ask the newcomers about their feelings of being settled in. Also, as an important part of exploratively studying OS in start-ups, this is part of a dynamic of socialisation in start-ups, i.e. it is part of the study that start-ups (and other ICT companies) sometimes hire newcomers who are interns or part-timers, and the fact that they do not come into the office every day means that they might miss out on important information (some of the managers in Case 6 mention challenges related to this). This, and how it affects them, is therefore a relevant aspect for part-time newcomers: their process might be more fragmented and slow, but on the other hand they might also have more time between working days to reflect on things. Finally, there is still the practical aspect of interviewing the newcomers while they still remember details of their process. I therefore chose to use the same time interval of approximately two to four months (from start to interview).

Lastly, it should also be mentioned that some of the start-ups are characterised by a longer or shorter period between when one newcomer and the next starts. During this period, the start-up is likely to develop, and sometimes managers learn and/or change practices related to welcoming newcomers from one newcomer to the next. Even though I carried out the interviews over several months, the case organisations are still start-ups, and the fact that they might develop or change their practices is precisely a dynamic of OS in start-ups.

When I first started my study, my thought was to focus on newcomers in ICT start-ups in general, but in my first case start-ups the newcomers were primarily developers or people who otherwise had specific IT-related jobs, so I decided to focus on newcomers with a specific background and tasks (i.e. developers and data scientists). Thus, my newcomer informants are people with some kind of background and/or tasks in IT/development (e.g. backend/frontend developers, ICT engineers, computer scientists, information technologists). Although it might have been interesting to include newcomers with a different background (e.g. some start-ups had marketing people), since managers often had an IT background and were not used to dealing with people with a different background, I chose to focus on certain types of employees, i.e. people in ICT start-ups with a more specific range
of tasks and backgrounds, in order to make a more specific contribution. Furthermore, developers was the most prevalent kind of newcomers, and these are the ones who are perhaps the most difficult for start-ups to find because the demand is bigger than the supply.

In some of the start-ups, during the period where I followed them for primary empirical material (interviews), there were some newcomers that I did not interview. In Case 4 I interviewed everyone hired as employees during the first months except one (hired during the first two months) who did not answer my e-mail request (all the interviewed newcomers were Danes, and the person I did not interview had a different nationality). In Case 5, I interviewed two student developers (who would later become interns). They started at the same time as another student developer (with the same educational profile), who also did not answer my request for an interview.

Appendix 3 gives an overview of the interviews conducted. In the following sections, I describe the interview setup and interview guides in more detail. Both the questions and indeed the reason I interview managers and newcomers alike are inspired by the interactionist approach to OS. This allows me to relate what the managers say to what the newcomers say (and vice versa), and, for example, compare constructions of organisational tactics with statements about newcomer proactivity.

7.1.2. Empirical Material: Interviews and Background/Contextual Information

In addition to the interviews, I also had different background and contextual materials. These both helped me prepare the interviews and carry out the analysis. In my view, noting all material that contributes to my thinking and analysis and recognising that background and contextual information is also important (e.g. to understanding, developing questions), is part of a reflexive, transparent approach. Table 3 presents an overview of my interviews as the primary empirical material, and lists the different background and contextual material and information I have drawn on.

I visited the websites and social media pages of the case start-ups (to the extent that they had any) before conducting the interviews. This was not only to acquire background knowledge of the case start-ups in advance, but also to prepare more informed questions and be better able to follow up in the interview situation. Being acquainted with the websites (and social media pages) as sources of information would allow me to know both more about the company and about the resources available to new employees (for instance, the website of the company where I carried out pilot interviews is in Danish, but many of the company’s employees are not Danish, and some have only limited knowledge
of the Danish language, i.e. although they employ people from other countries, these cannot learn about the company from its website).

Table 3: Empirical Material and Encounters with 'the Field'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary material</th>
<th>Supporting background/contextual material and information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews:</td>
<td>Websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured with managers: 7</td>
<td>Social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative semi-structured with newcomers: 16</td>
<td>Job postings online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start-up #</td>
<td>‘Site visits’ such as introductory meetings both in connection with (before and after) interviews (all on-site) and feedback sessions. Includes informal discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>I wrote notes for and about the interviews and site visits, and also noted various other reflections. Thus, there are field notes on the interviews (noted immediately before, during and after), and also specific case start-up notes and broader analytical notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcomers</td>
<td>Documents (given to new employees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(+ 3 pilot interviews: 1 manager, 2 newcomers)</td>
<td>Case 2 employee handbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Case 4 employee handbook and IT guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E-mails (information and updates)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to the interviews, I also asked managers whether there were any materials (information, employee handbooks, blogs, intranet access) that they handed out to new employees or encouraged them to consult. Depending on the answers, this could then be worked into the interview guides in the form of different questions (e.g. why/why not, what is the purpose). The purpose of asking this was to answer sub-question 2 about managers’ thoughts on the role of OKC and knowledge communication with newcomers. It would also be useful for me to know about this before the newcomer interviews, since it might enable me to ask better follow-up questions. As an example of this kind of material, two of the five start-ups had employee handbooks, which I was allowed to see in both cases.
As regards the sequencing of the interviews, in each start-up I first interviewed the manager(s) and then the newcomers. I prepared the manager interviews based on both specific questions (section 7.1.6.) and the background material and contextual information indicated in the table, while the newcomer interviews were based on both specific questions (section 7.1.7.) and the background material and contextual information, plus what I learned from having interviewed their manager. Thus, I designed the sequencing of the interviews to allow me to be well-prepared for the newcomer interviews, and with it gain more insights from them. In this way, I was able to use the background material and contextual information to ask questions that were adapted to a specific start-up (e.g. questions about the employee handbooks) and sometimes to specific informants in that start-up (e.g. considering such situational factors as whether they were the first newcomer).

I could have carried out observations and then interviews, but we cannot observe what people think; however, we can investigate how managers and newcomers discursively construct and account for their opinions and experiences. In this dissertation, my epistemological interest is constructions of OS in start-ups and knowledge communication in relation to this.

7.1.3. Social Constructivism and Interviews
Grix (2002) argues that research should be question-led, i.e. one should use the best way of getting to know about an issue, rather than letting it be defined by methods. In the present research, interviews are the best way of investigating individuals' sensemaking and constructions and whether there are any patterns across informants and the start-ups. But carrying out interviews as a social constructivist means something specific: it entails acknowledging the role of the researcher, the role of language, and the interplay between the researcher and the informants, since, for a social constructivist, interviews do not mean accessing the reality but a way of gaining insight into a social ‘reality’.

I view social constructions as being accomplished by individuals in collaboration (people as social entities). Thus, when investigating socialisation as a phenomenon that both managers and new employees are actively involved in constructing, I believe that interviews are meaningful when recognising that managers and new employees as actors are both part of the social entity that constructs socialisation, i.e. I interview different agents who are considered to accomplish OS together. And being a social constructivist means that I must both acknowledge my own role in the interviews (i.e. someone who intervenes in the daily lives of the participants) and that the phenomena I investigate, namely socialisation and knowledge, are themselves social constructions.

In his study of knowledge communication and dispersed work teams, Petersen (2016) notes that:
“The interviews constructed in the dialogue between researcher and participant will […] not be taken as representations of the “‘true’ inner states of language users”, which Wetherell (2001, p.19) criticises, but are considered as representing participants’ sensemaking of the organisational context and the knowledge communication practices the participant engages in.” (p. 132-133).

The same type of interest is part of my study, i.e. investigating how newcomers and managers discursively construct their experiences, and whether there are any patterns. What ‘reality’ are they constructing in relation to OS and knowledge in start-ups? For example, when the newcomers tell about their experiences, they use language to construct their narrative. Through talk, people create versions of ‘reality’, and I then investigate how they do this and which versions they create (i.e. how they talk about and construct their experiences, how they talk about OS, and which role they give to knowledge). Narratives are examples of accounts where a version is produced as real. Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000, p. 71) observe that narrative analysis is not about uncovering an objective world, but it must be remembered that the narrative is offered as a fact, a version which is produced and oriented to as real in, and in relation to, a social context, and that this then has consequences.

Thus, it is meaningful to interview individuals as parties to a process of social construction, and relate the interviews to each other. In the interviews, informants can reflect on their experiences, and their accounts can be seen as sensemaking. This makes it interesting to investigate how they account and construct these accounts and whether there are any patterns in them, i.e. it is not a question of accessing their immediate experiences, but analysing how they make sense of them and construct them in, and in relation to, a socially constructed setting. The phenomenon takes place in a social setting, and how we experience it and subsequently tell about it are also affected by social settings that are constructed. Using language constructs a phenomenon rather than neutrally reporting on it, and thus the language we use is consequential.

7.1.4. Interview Protocol and Ethical Formalities
I developed an overall interview protocol (appendix 4) for both the manager and newcomer interviews to remind me to make field notes before, during, and after an interview, and what I should try to pay attention to and make notes about. Corbally and O’Neill (2014), in relation to the biographical narrative interpretive method, write that: “Following the interview, the interviewer records brief contextual and situational data in a private debriefing exercise. This proves useful in refreshing the memory regarding the context of the interview before analysis.” (p. 36). Thus, I noted cues that could
help me reflect on the process immediately after it had taken place, but the notes also helped me reflect sometime after the process and served to remind me of the specifics of the interview situation and context before I began the analysis.

For all case start-ups (including the pilot) and informants, it was agreed that both the company and the interviewees would be anonymised. As noted (section 6.2.1.), the start-ups are referred to by number. Managers are referred to as M, and newcomers as NC, e.g. C2/NC2 refers to the second newcomer I interviewed in Case 2. At the start of the interviews, I told participants that their name and the names of any colleagues they mentioned would be anonymised, and that I would do the transcribing myself. There is verbal informed consent from the informants (which I have recorded) that I can use the material for my dissertation.

As regards ethical aspects relating to introducing the research to the participants, I stressed that there were no right or wrong answers, and that I was simply interested in their experiences with and opinions and thoughts about the process of settling in a new workplace (which is ‘new’), and that they were the ‘experts’ on their own experiences. Especially in the introductory meetings with the managers, where I sought to be allowed to interview their newcomers, I emphasised that my aim was not to test or evaluate the start-ups compared to theory, but that the research had the more exploratory aim of gaining an understanding of the ‘field’ (e.g. through an appreciation of their challenges), and with it what researchers and practitioners can learn and what the implications of this might be (e.g. nuancing theory or new theorising).

I mentioned at the beginning of the interviews that the study was about the entry of newcomers in start-ups and communication of knowledge in relation to that. In order to avoid social desirability bias, where informants strive to give answers they think the researcher wants to hear (cf. Bryman, 2012, p. 227-228, p. 271), I mentioned OS and OKC in very broad terms and that I had an open approach. I chose this approach to balance ‘setting the scene’ with not expressly elaborating my theoretical perspectives, since this might have made some wary of talking about e.g. ‘knowledge’, while I sought to let them talk freely about it. Thus, the informants were introduced to the topic as an overall frame for our conversation, but not the specific research questions or theoretical framework.

7.1.5. Pilot Interviews
I conducted pilot interviews with a manager and two newcomers in a small bureau specialising in web shops. I describe them as pilot interviews, since I did not conduct a fully-fledged pilot study, but used the interviews to test the concept and format of the questions I was developing for the newcomer.
and manager interviews. In other words, the pilot interviews were used to test whether both the interview approach in relation to the research agenda made sense and whether the more specific questions made sense. Thus, it was a way of ‘testing the format’ at multiple (interrelated) levels.

Some months after the first pilot interviews, I had the opportunity to interview another newcomer in the company. This led to further considerations in relation to generating relevant questions, and also allowed me to begin to think about aspects related to the analysis across multiple newcomers.

Based on the pilot interviews, I added extra questions to both the overall manager and newcomer interview guides (based on something that appeared relevant, or questions that seemed to be missing) and added follow-up questions to existing questions (I elaborate on this in the specific interview sections later). Y. Kim (2010) notes modifying questions as one of the advantages of piloting, i.e. here, pre-testing interview guides. Furthermore, the pilot interviews led to further considerations about how to introduce the interviews to the managers and newcomers and how to frame the topic in the setting of the interview.

7.1.6. Semi-Structured Interviews with Managers

I employed a semi-structured interview approach for the manager interviews (Kuada, 2012, p. 112-113). Semi-structured interviews involve having a list of questions, but also allow for the possibility of asking further questions, and changing the order of the questions, as the interview situation develops. In structured interviews, on the other hand, there are only predefined questions and a specific structure, and in unstructured interviews, there are only overall topics and neither structure nor predefined questions. The interview guides are included in appendix 5.

The manager interviews serve a dual purpose: They help answer RQ2 and sub-question 2, and they also give me contextual information that helps me ask better and more informed (follow-up) questions in the newcomer interviews.

The interview guides consisted of three sections: 1) an introduction, 2) the question section, and 3) a round-off section. Section 1 set the scene for the interview, including formal aspects and introduction to the topic. I also made it clear that I was interested in their perspective (since they are the persons ‘living’ with the phenomenon in practice), to underline (as I did in the introductory meetings) that I was not out to test them, but was asking because I was interested in their perspective. For most of the managers, this introduction served as a brush-up or reminder, since I had already had some contact with them (in an introductory meeting or via e-mail) in connection with gaining access. I also wrote
in a field note after the C6/M1 interview that, after the introductory meetings, some of the managers had time to reflect on some topics before I interviewed them, e.g. this is the case for M1 in Case 6.

Section 2 is the primary ‘content’ section of the interview. The questions here were structured after overall topics related to the overall subjects and derived to answer the research questions, i.e. they concerned socialisation, knowledge, and the potential link between the two. I tried to structure the questions related to overall topics that moved along in a logical way. However, as it is a semi-structured interview, we could also jump back and forth, and e.g. go back to earlier answers, and I asked follow-up questions, and also sometimes questions that were not noted in the interview guide.

The questions were developed in relation to my research questions and the two overall topics of OS and OKC, e.g. I asked managers about their thoughts regarding when a newcomer becomes an insider. In relation to knowledge, I e.g. asked what the managers themselves thought was necessary to know about the start-up in order to get off to a good start. As previously mentioned, the questions are also guided by the interactionist approach, i.e. understanding OS as something that is achieved by multiple parties in interaction. For instance, in relation to newcomers’ role in the start-ups as new companies, I asked the managers what they expected of newcomers and what they thought it would take for a newcomer to succeed.

In addition to the questions derived from the overall research questions, some questions were inspired by literature and theory (which is also relevant to the later discussion on theory in light of my empirical material). For instance, as regards sub-question 2, about managers’ thoughts on OS and OKC and the resources they draw on, I thought about Ashforth, Sluss, and Saks’ (2007) finding that the ‘how’ of OS has importance beyond content, and thus had different questions about what they would do when a newcomer enters the start-up and about how and where newcomers could find information and learn about different aspects. This is also related to how the managers attempt to ‘give sense’ or help the newcomers make sense of something.

As mentioned above, I also included questions that were directly related to the specific start-up or informant. For instance, in Case 4, I asked the manager about the employee handbook. I also asked some of the managers whom I knew had previous experience of personnel management what their thoughts were in relation to using that experience in the new start-up. In addition, after the pilot interviews, I added some follow-up questions and nuanced the wording of others.
I had two final questions, about whether there was something they felt I should have asked, and
whether there was something they wanted to add or felt they had not had the chance to say. Maaløe
(2002) mentions that “[…] the interview is not over until one has made sure of it and e.g. asked the
informant: “Is there anything where you are wondering why I have not asked about it”?” (p. 218, my
translation). One advantage of these questions is that the managers could go back to a topic they
thought was important and elaborate on it. In a field note from the C3/M1 interview I have written:
“I noted that the last question (one of the two designed to round off) had a good effect in eliciting a
reflection from the interviewee”. Thus, these questions not only had the effect of opening up the
session a little, but it was also a way for me to go back to something the manager had said. This also
relates to what Maaløe (2002) says about the interviewer ‘asking to test what we think we understood’
(p. 51, my translation).

Finally, as regards section 3, this was designed to thank the informant and round off. Here, most of
the managers would then ask me questions and/or otherwise engage in after-talk.

As I moved from one informant and case start-up to the next, I reflected on the interviews and
sometimes added questions or altered questions in the interview guide. For example, in reflecting on
the interviews, the first two manager interviews (the pilot manager interview and the interview with
the manager in Case 2) were not that long (about 21-23 minutes) considering the type of interview in
question. However, all the questions were related to my research questions, and interviews should not
be long just for the sake of it. Other manager interviews were substantially longer. This difference
could be due to a number of factors, e.g. the managers’ interest in the topic, how much they had
thought about it (also in relation to previous experience and how many newcomers they were hiring),
their different situations (e.g. who they are hiring, how), the fact that I might have established a better
rapport with some of them, and also that I added more questions and/or developed better ones.

7.1.7. Narrative Semi-Structured Interviews with Newcomers
I arranged the newcomer interviews either via their managers or (in most cases) directly with the
newcomers themselves. Before the interviews, newcomers were told in general terms that it was about
their experiences of starting and settling in a new workplace. I also mentioned that they should think
of the interviews more as an open conversation where I was interested in what they had to say.

For the newcomer interviews, I employed techniques used in narrative interviewing (e.g. C. Anderson
& Kirkpatrick, 2016, p. 632; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997), in relation to an overall semi-structured
approach. In the following, I show how this means asking open questions that may elicit narratives
and thinking about the relationship and structure between these and follow up-questions, within a semi-structured interview frame. I refer to this way of interviewing as ‘narrative semi-structured interviews’ due to the point of departure, i.e. starting with trying to elicit narratives, coupled with further questions, rather than the other way around, and because it signifies a technique used within a specific frame for interviews. The interviews include both questions to elicit narratives and follow-up questions, and go back and forth between primarily narrative sequences and sequences that follow up and ask for further telling. The follow-up questions drew on some of the same inspiration as the manager interviews, with the addition of asking about aspects that came up in the manager interviews. However, the starting point is an invitation to the newcomers to tell their story. According to Mishler (1986) “[…] telling stories is a significant way for individuals to give meaning to and express their understandings of their experiences.” (p. 75). Thus, I used techniques related to narrative interviewing, because giving newcomers the chance to tell gives them an opportunity to create and give meaning to their experiences, and to reflect on these experiences and engage in (retrospective) sensemaking. In line with the explorative orientation, there is room for thoughts to unfold, since it is not a ‘debriefing’ or reporting of their experiences, but an account constructed in the here-and-now.

The use of narrative techniques is aligned with my social constructivist position. Johnstone (2004) notes that: “Like all talk and all action, narrative is socially and epistemologically constructive: through telling, we make ourselves and our experiential worlds.” (p. 644-645). P. Atkinson and Delamont (2006) point out that narratives are accounts and not an objective (and independent) ‘truth’ about experience (p. 166), and state that “[…] we do not believe that any account simply mirrors some antecedent reality, but helps to create that very reality itself […]” (p. 168). This is in agreement with the view of language in this research, namely that language does not passively represent an objective reality but constructs reality.

Furthermore, telling stories takes place in social contexts. A number of authors point to narrative interviews as a co-construction, e.g. J. Kim (2016, p. 169), and both M. Bauer (1996) and Boje (2001) highlight the advantage of an approach that allows the immanent and exmanent, and etic and emic (i.e. the positions of the informants and the researcher), to meet. Boje (2001) argues that, rather than a duality, the relationship between the emic and the etic should be seen as a circularity (p. 127), since the two appropriate each other. This stance is in line with the reflexive approach employed in my research, in that it acknowledges the implications of interpretive interactionalist research (as mentioned in chapter 2).
As mentioned, the overall interview protocol was also used for the newcomer interviews. The specific interview guides for the narrative semi-structured interviews are included in appendix 5. The interview guides had three sections: 1) an introduction, 2) a question section with open questions to elicit narrative and more specific questions (the questions alternated between narrative questions and more specific questions), and 3) an ending. At the start of the interviews, I made sure to say that I was interested in their experiences of being a newcomer, and that there were no “wrong” answers.

J. Kim (2016) recommends that narrative interviews should consist of a *narration phase* and a *conversation phase* (p. 167). The conversation phase follows the narration phase (J. Kim, 2016, p. 169), but the narration phase can begin again since there is not necessarily a linear relationship between the phases (J. Kim, 2016, p. 169). There might be a circular movement between the phases, i.e. a narrative interview will often consist of multiple narration and question sequences. Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) also mention that, in one way, narrative interviews can become semi-structured, but they have a different starting point and combine questions and invitations with different functions (eliciting stories, probing, following up, asking more specific questions about the things informants mention/their experience of different aspects). Since I followed this phase approach (i.e. giving space to uninterrupted narration followed by elaborative questions), the following sections have been structured accordingly. In section 7.1.7.1. I comment on eliciting narratives (the narration phase), and in section 7.1.7.2. I describe how I followed up with questions for elaboration or further topics (the conversation phase). In practice, however, the phases were intertwined.

Section 3 of the interview guide was about rounding off, thanking the informant, and often ended with after-talk, e.g. where the newcomers would ask me questions.

7.1.7.1. ‘Eliciting’ Narratives
I put ‘eliciting’ in inverted commas, to indicate that narratives are not pre-packaged accounts that one can dig up by asking an open question, i.e. they are not stories that objectively exist. The word ‘elicit’ might make it seem as if they can be drawn out of the narrator, that through encouragement, a ready-made story will be told in a neat and chronological way. Rather, it is a construction that the interviewer and narrator achieve together, and, in line with my view of language, the stories are not a simple representation, since discourse is constructed and constructing.

Hollway and Jefferson (1997) present four interview principles from the German biographic-interpretative method tradition: 1) questions should be open-ended, 2) they should aim at eliciting stories (i.e. invite interviewees to tell about their experiences), 3) *why* questions should be avoided,
and 4) when following up, questions should draw on the interviewee’s ordering and phrasing (p. 60).
Staunæs and Søndergaard (2005) also argue that, when doing narrative interviewing, it is important
to ask how and what rather than why questions (p. 65-66).

According to Riessman (2008): “The goal in narrative interviewing is to generate detailed accounts
rather than brief answers or general statements.” (p. 23). Thus, while it is important to ask open-ended
questions, it is also important to encourage an informant to tell about specific experiences and give
examples, since this can lead to more detailed accounts. The process starts with an open narrative-
eliciting question, which is a question that invites the informant to tell about her/his experience with
something, an open question that asks the informant to describe how a specific situation was
experienced. The point at which the narrator ends her/his story (e.g. by returning to the present) is
called coda (cf. e.g. Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). This marks the end of the story, and gives the
interviewer a chance to ask elaborating or clarifying questions. Whenever the newcomers reached
coda, therefore, I asked them more specific questions to get them to elaborate or continue telling the
story/narrative.

I had two overall invitations for the newcomers to tell about their experiences, and I had structured
further questions in relation to the different overall topics, and to help open up their narration. The
first invitation was an opening question, where I invited them (broadly) to tell about their experiences
with entering and starting in the start-up. C. Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016) mention the importance
of open questions in narrative interviewing (p. 632). The researcher should not interrupt during this
opening narrative-eliciting question. The second question asked them to tell about a situation where
they had a question, needed information or had a problem, and how they solved it. Thus, newcomers
were asked to describe their experience of entering the new organisation, and what they did the first
time(s) they encountered a problem (a question, an uncertainty, a discrepancy between expectation
and reality or actual practice) which they needed help to solve due to lack of knowledge. These
questions were my narrative starting points.

For some of the informants, the broad opening question did not immediately result in lengthy telling,
or they gave a more general answer, but others took up the invitation and engaged in long, detailed
sequences of telling. Sometimes (especially if the informant did not readily open up), I would ask the
newcomers to describe a specific event, e.g. what their first day(s) was like. Thus, despite different
suggestions and guidelines about narrative interviewing, it can still be challenging to do in practice.
Even though some say that storytelling is part of being human, it does not mean that people want to
tell their stories to a researcher, even if the researcher tries to elicit narratives. So, in relation to this, I tried to make the informants feel comfortable (e.g. by stressing that there were no right or wrong answers). Thus, there has to be some kind of introduction and, to some extent, a setting of the stage, but then the stage has to be given to the newcomer. I tried to do this by emphasising that their experiences were the starting point, and then asking them to tell me about them. I told them that they should think of the interview more as a conversation. It can be difficult to move beyond the ‘question-answer’ format, since the label ‘interview’ has certain implications, i.e. participants have preconceptions about what it means to be ‘interviewed’, so in order to get around this I said that they should not consider it a ‘normal’ interview. Highlighting their experiences as the starting point might also help address social desirability bias.

Initially, I asked two short introductory questions about the interviewees’ background and tenure in the organisation, just to set the stage/for the record. However, I quickly moved these to after the opening question, because the newcomers would sometimes mention this themselves, and the interviews worked better when the first question was an invitation to tell. Since the narratives constitute the starting point, the follow-up questions were structured in relation to these.

7.1.7.2. Further Elaborations and Questions
In the interview guides I had also noted questions for follow-up and elaboration related to the overall topics. These served as invitations to continue their telling (and sometimes narratives also occurred in the more regular question-answer sequences, or occurred more as I developed a better rapport with the informant), and as guiding and helping questions in relation to the more conversational phases of the interviews. I ended the sessions with the same two questions as for the managers, i.e. asking them whether there was anything they wanted to add or wondered that I had not asked them. I also used the flexibility of the semi-structured approach to ask further questions. As I conducted the interviews, I included emerging tendencies in later interviews (e.g. by asking questions related to them if relevant considering what the newcomer I was interviewing said). I used the learning from the pilot interviews to make some questions more open and changed the wording of others.

The questions noted for follow-up, elaboration, and further attempts to ‘elicit’ narratives were based on various sources of inspiration. First, the questions relate to RQ2 and sub-question 1. This led to interview questions related to OS, OKC, and how they might be related. For instance, a follow-up to the second narrative question (about questions and resolving them) was whether there was something (that they had learned along the way) that it would have been nice to know earlier. As with the
managers, the interactionist approach to OS also inspired questions (e.g. related to organisational tactics and newcomer proactivity).

As in the manager interviews, I also included questions derived from, or inspired by, theory and literature. For instance, I included questions on information-seeking tactics, e.g. the seven tactics presented by V. D. Miller and Jablin (1991) (overt questions, indirect questions, third parties, testing limits, disguising conversations, observing and surveillance). Furthermore, and related to the critique of the literature on information-seeking (cf. Saks et al., 2011), I included questions about the results of the newcomers’ information-seeking attempts (i.e. did they get the information they asked for, was it enough?). Thus, I included questions not only about what they did themselves, but also about the result of their efforts, since this can be related to how they discursively link what affects their perception of the entry process to aspects of OKC. For the newcomers, I also took into account Ashforth, Sluss, and Saks’ (2007) comments that ‘how’ OS is done can be important beyond content, e.g. by asking them how they had been introduced to different things in the start-up (instead of just what they had been introduced to), and how they would prefer to get or find different kinds of information.

I also included specific questions related to the different start-ups and newcomers, and here I also relied on what the managers had said in their interviews. For instance, I asked questions about the employee handbook in the start-ups that had one. Towards the end of the interview, before the two round-off questions, I asked the newcomers whether/to what extent they felt they had settled in or were settling in. According to the stage models, a newcomer is settled in when she/he has reached the metamorphosis stage. My research deals with experiences in the encounter stage, but it is interesting to know whether they think they are still in this stage, or whether they feel they have settled in and/or the extent to which they have settled in.

Maaløe (2002) argues that a researcher should put her interpretations on the line by questioning them, and that this is done by asking the interviewees (p. 51). This agrees with Riessman’s (1993) view of the advantage of narrative interviewing: “Those who collect personal narratives […] can ask informants what they mean by what they say. Language used in an interview can be scrutinized – “unpacked,” not treated as self-evident, transparent, unambiguous – during the interview itself as well as later, in the analysis of interview transcripts.” (p. 32). In other words, the researcher needs to pay attention and reflect on the interpretations she is forming already during the interview itself. One way of doing this is to ask the newcomers with their concepts and what they mean when they use them.
For instance, in the interview with C2/NC1, he kept using the expression ‘feeling stuck’, so I asked him to elaborate on this. This also relates to M. Bauer’s (1996) notions of exmanent and immanent mentioned previously.

Thus, in their accounts, the newcomers give meaning to and create meaning about their experiences. I then analyse which interpretative repertoires they draw on in relation to which meanings they construct, and how, by investigating which resources they use in discursively producing meaning. I investigate which themes unfold in the narratives, and how the new employees talk about them (discourse). It is also interesting to see what is included and not included in their accounts, what they emphasise, and what is taken for granted.

7.1.8. Argument for Using Two Different Techniques in Semi-Structured Interviews
Since the purpose of interviewing managers and newcomers is to answer both RQ2 and the sub-questions directed at each group of informants, I opted to use the same overall approach to constructing empirical material (semi-structured interviews), but with slight variations in the use of techniques. The manager interviews follow the form more traditionally, whereas I rely on narrative interview techniques for the newcomer interviews. This allows for comparability across the groups while also being suitable considering the focus of the two sub-questions.

The managers were asked about practice and their view of the process, while the newcomers were invited to tell about their experiences with the process (a more open approach). Thus, the ‘classical’ semi-structured form was chosen for the manager interviews, because, in relation to the sub-question focusing on managers, I wanted to ask them specific questions about what they do (or do not do), why, and about thoughts and opinions on getting newcomers on board. In the newcomer interviews, in relation to the sub-question focusing on them, I wanted to investigate what they would say about their experiences, and how they gave meaning to them. I thus opted for a style that takes their experiences as a starting point, since this might help spotlight important topics and finer details of the experience of settling-in. Thus, I use the narrative as an interview technique because it can be helpful in this endeavour, since it is more geared towards ‘eliciting’ accounts of experiences than the general semi-structured approach. In the narrative approach, the interview is designed to allow newcomers to tell about their experiences from their own perspective, considering what is relevant for them, and thus opening up a topic. This is appropriate considering the research question it was meant to help answer (i.e. what and how the newcomers tell about their experiences).
I also wanted to compare the manager and newcomer accounts. The approach chosen here enables me to investigate how the informants give meaning to the phenomenon and compare managers’ ‘accounts of reasoning’ to newcomers’ ‘accounts of experience/creating meaning’, i.e. what the managers say about their thoughts on the process, and what the newcomers say about their experience of it. As noted, I regard the use of interviews as being in accordance with my social constructivist stance, in that it means addressing the actors who are part of socially constructing and are affected by social constructions.

I regard the interviews not as two different types (as mentioned previously, narrative interviews often come to have a semi-structured form), but as the same type (semi-structured) with a variation in interview techniques, chosen because of the variation in the types of questions and answers/accounts they facilitate that is relevant to answering my sub-questions.

The two sets of interviews are related to each other due to the interactionist approach taken. In the section on analysis (7.2.), I argue for how my analysis allows for a comparison of managers’ and newcomers’ talk, and answering the respective research questions, which are also related because of the interactionist perspective (i.e. the interactionist approach makes the comparative aspect important). Common to the interviews, and the premise on which I compare newcomer and manager accounts, is that they share the same overall focus, namely OS and knowledge, i.e. the starting point for my comparison of the manager and newcomer accounts is that the interviews deal with the same topic, the interviewees just represent two different parties in the OS process, and the interview questions and approach need to reflect this. Thus, the parties can orient differently to the topic frame, but, because of the comparative aspect, this then becomes a part of the analysis. I then also employ an analytical strategy which gives a basis on which the interviews can be related across, and which thus helps me answer my empirical research question and sub-questions.

Drawing on both of these techniques (and the following analysis) allows me to answer my empirical research question and sub-questions, since the interviews result in individual accounts of OS that I can relate both to each other (e.g. among newcomers) and across newcomers and managers (recognising nuances and context). There is some topic-related similarity in the interview guides, since, even though they are related to different sub-questions, they relate to the same overall research question. The fact that I use the same approach to coding and analysing the interviews (elaborated in section 7.2.), and that the interviews are all qualitative interviews, also means that there is a basis for cross-comparison.
7.1.9. A Note on the Language used for the Interviews

All interviews were conducted in Danish, except the two newcomer pilot interviews and the two newcomer interviews in Case 6, which were in English, since these informants were better at English than Danish. I interviewed informants in the language they had the best command of and were most comfortable with, while at the same time being a language that I had command of. This gives people better opportunities for expressing themselves (cf. Søderberg, 2006, p. 43). This is also related to discourse, in that Potter, Wetherell, Gill, and Edwards (1990) note that, in constructing discourse, we rely on the linguistic resources that are available to us (p. 207). Therefore it makes sense to interview people in the language where they have the most comprehensive vocabulary. Again, this is not about understanding language as a window (cf. Arnoldi, 2005, p. 255), but recognising that the linguistic resources available to us influence the discursive constructions we can make. In the analysis chapters, I indicate when I have translated a quote from Danish into English. When translating quotes, I tried to balance staying close to the informants’ language and choice of words with communicating meaning. The analysis was carried out on the Danish version of transcriptions.

7.1.10. Transcription of Interview Recordings

Before coding and analysis per se could start, the interviews had to be transcribed. Potter and Wetherell (1987) state “The question of exactly how detailed the transcription should be is a thorny one.” (p. 166), but concede that, “[…] for many sorts of research questions, the fine details of timing and intonation are not crucial […]” (p. 166), and conclude that “[…] it is important to think very carefully about what information is required from the transcript, and at what level the analysis will proceed.” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 166). Thus, with regard to my research questions, I opted for a transcription that leaves out timing and intonation (cf. above), since these were not part of the ensuing analysis, and chose an approach that focuses on word content7 (cf. Hammersley, 2010, e.g. p. 556) because this was suited to the kind of analysis that my research agenda requires. In other words, the transcription approach was based on both the unit of analysis and the analytic strategy used. A legend for transcription conventions was noted on each transcript.

The transcription process had three phases: First, I listened to the sound file (played at slower-than-normal speed) and wrote as much as possible. Then I played the sound file again (at the same speed) in order to edit and make corrections and additions. Finally, I listened to the sound file played at normal speed, checking the transcription and making any final corrections. The hand-written field

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7 An interview situation is, of course, multi-modal, but here I focus on the managers’ and newcomers’ spoken discourse.
notes from the interviews are written into the transcription documents. The transcriptions are included in appendix 6.

Since analysis and initial ‘ideas’ about patterns in the material already emerge while doing the interviews, and continue in the transcription and coding phases, as well as in the actual analysis, I made a point of transcribing the interviews myself. Braun and Clarke (2006) observe that:

“The process of transcription, while it may seem time-consuming, frustrating, and at times boring, can be an excellent way to start familiarizing yourself with the data (Riessman, 1993). Further, some researchers even argue it should be seen as ‘a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology’ (Bird, 2005: 227), and recognized as an interpretative act, where meanings are created, rather than simply a mechanical act of putting spoken sounds on paper (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).” (p. 87-88, emphasis in original).

During this process, I wrote notes continuously, e.g. whenever things that were said struck me as similar or different. A central technique in relation to interpretative repertoires is being sensitive to variation, both ‘within and across accounts’ (McKenzie, 2005, p. 3). I discuss this in more detail in section 7.2., on analysis, but here it should be noted that this work with the interviews helped me become better acquainted with the content, and made me think about patterns, similarities and differences.

7.2. Analysing the Empirical Material

In the following, I focus on how I analysed the empirical material. The analytical process involved a number of steps, in order to analyse the material from managers and newcomers individually and especially across informants, designed to answer research question 2 and the sub-questions. Thus, what I present here is my analytical strategy (Esmark, Laustsen, & Andersen, 2005, p. 8), which can be characterised as a method bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 25), in that I weave together techniques and procedures and let them build on each other. Esmark et al. (2005) mention that: “To speak of analytical strategies is basically an attempt to discuss methodological and methodical questions under social constructivist premises.” (p. 8, emphasis in original, my translation). Such an attempt requires reflexivity and transparence, especially since the analytical strategy has a purpose (to help answer the research questions), but because of the nature of empirical material in a qualitative enquiry, the more specific tactics related to the overall analytical strategy can
be emerging, as the empirical material is constructed, to ensure the relevance of the analytic method considering the actual material.

In short, my way of operationalising discourse analysis focusing on interpretative repertoires is through an analytic strategy drawing on coding and a thematic overview, and then investigating repertoires as patterns for individual informants and across informants. Thus, the steps build on each other, and end with a focus on interpretative repertoires. Interpretative repertoires “[...] can be seen as the building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena.” (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 172). I elaborate on the specific interpretative repertoire part of the analysis in section 7.2.2. First, however, I describe the preceding analytical steps, which were designed with the end point of interpretative repertoires in mind. Since working with interpretative repertoires means investigating building blocks in accounts and identifying discursive patterns, a sensitivity to nuances is important, and throughout section 7.2.1. I show how I gained an overview of the material while at the same time ensuring sensitivity to nuances. Figure 2 shows the different elements in my analysis.

Figure 2: Elements and Steps in the Analytical Process

The analysis was carried out on two levels: 1) Focusing on the individual informants as embedded cases, and 2) across informants as embedded cases and across case start-ups. Thus, first each case (embedded informants and start-ups) was analysed individually, and then when all the interviews from the different case start-ups had been analysed individually, cross-case analyses were carried out (cf. Neergaard, 2007, p. 14). In order to get started on the analysis I needed an overview of the material, which meant coding and analysing all the individual interviews and then summing up for the individual case start-ups. I subsequently used this as the starting point for the cross-analyses. Thus, the first steps helped me get an overview, while in the following steps I could then focus on patterns across informants.
After having In Vivo annotated an interview (cycle 1), I did step 1 of cycle 2, i.e. I did not annotate all the interviews first before going on to cycle 2, I carried out both cycle 1 and step 1 of cycle 2 for one interview before doing the same for the next, and so on. I did this to initially try to stay a little more with the individual interview, in annotating and category-labelling, i.e. even though some labels go across interviews, I tried to be sensitive to what the label looked like in the individual interview, while also making notes when something seemed to go across interviews. When I had done that for all the interviews, I worked with refining themes (step 2 of cycle 2) individually and went on to the individual interpretative repertoire analysis. I then summed up the individual interviews within each case start-up in a sub-conclusion. I was now able to start the cross-analysis, where I refined themes across managers, newcomers, managers and newcomers, and start-ups, and proceeded to the cross-analysis (M, NC, M&NC, case start-ups) of interpretative repertoires, based on the individual analyses. Within and between steps I continuously wrote notes for the analysis.

Because of the complexity of the material (owing to its qualitative nature and its coming from different informants and contexts), I wanted to develop an analytical strategy which could help me handle this complexity while also retaining context sensitivity. Therefore, I developed this method bricolage and matrix way of analysing the material, because this is best suited to answering my research questions, since it is sensitive to tendencies across informants and start-ups, while enabling different individual and contextual nuances to be taken into consideration. In the following sections, I describe the elements of the analysis in detail.

7.2.1. Coding and Thematic Work
In the following, I first address how coding was an intrinsic part of the analytical work (section 7.2.1.1.). This is followed by section 7.2.1.2., where I explain in detail how the coding was carried out for the purposes of this research. In section 7.2.1.3. I comment on using NVivo and Word in doing the coding. Finally, in section 7.2.1.4. I address how the coding and thematic work served as a springboard to the part of the analysis which focused on interpretative repertoires.

7.2.1.1. Coding as Part of Analytical Work
Coding is not just a mechanical process but an analytic aspect, due to the interpretive work involved in refining and categorising, and because of the analytic thinking and reflection that it stimulates, especially in a ‘data-driven’ study, i.e. the analysis is driven by the empirical material and is context sensitive. After reflecting on interviews and transcribing, it is the next step in the analytic work. Thus, coding is not just a step prior to analysis, but one that provides input to and serves as part of the
analysis. As with transcription, it helps the researcher get close to the empirical material. I wrote notes along the way, e.g. if I found that people were talking about the same topic in an interesting way, and that this was something that should be followed up afterwards. Thus, coding not only helped me get an overview of what the informants talked about (the range of topics and themes), but also helped in following up on how they talked about it. Potter and Wetherell (1995, p. 87) also mention coding in relation to discourse analysis, and looking for themes as a way of ordering the material. Here, the approach to coding and dealing with themes as thematic clusters is my way of operationalising coding and a thematic overview as systematic steps to enable me to carry out a discourse analysis of interpretative repertoires.

7.2.1.2. Coding of Interviews in Multiple Steps
My coding consisted of two overall cycles. In cycle 1, I In Vivo annotated the individual interviews based on content (section 7.2.1.2.1.). Cycle 2 (section 7.2.1.2.2.) consisted of two steps, since I first developed category labels based on clustering the annotations from cycle 1, and then refined thematic clusters across the category labels (which are themselves clusters of topics in the annotations). Thus, the coding gave an overview at different levels of abstraction, since it ordered the content in clusters and patterns, first by delineating small segments of text in In Vivo annotations, and then, at higher levels, clustering the annotations in category labels and refining themes across these.

A brief note on language is in order here. The annotation language followed the language of the interview, because I coded based on the language used by the informant, but category labels and names of thematic clusters are translated into English. Example codes also follow the language used in the interview.

7.2.1.2.1. Coding Cycle 1
Coding cycle 1 was carried out by means of In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013), which “[…] as a code refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record […]” (p. 91). The choice of In Vivo coding was influenced by the final focus on interpretative repertoires, since In Vivo coding is well suited for “[…] studies that prioritize and honor the participant’s voice.” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). In Vivo coding is also known as ‘emic coding’ (cf. Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). Thus, I chose In Vivo coding as the first step, because it is an open and sensitive approach which is relevant due to the research agenda and exploratory nature of my research, and it is useful and appropriate as it helps ‘capture’ the content of the interview and complexity throughout, and is in general a way of delineating segments of the interview. Using a too descriptive coding approach from
the onset would have risked blurring the nuances and variations that are an important part of identifying interpretative repertoires. I needed a way of coding that would give me an overview while at the same time allowing me to ‘catch variations’ rather than disregard them.

Conducting, transcribing and coding the interviews myself, going through every interview line by line, and trying to condense the content with the informants’ own words gave me a good ‘feel’ for the empirical material, and also helped me in the cross analysis, since it made it easier for me to remember and compare who said what.

As regards annotations, I started from the top of every interview and annotated lines or sentences all the way through to the end, using the ‘annotations’ function in NVivo (see section 7.2.1.3.). I also label my In Vivo coding ‘annotating’, since the codes do not only consist of a single word or short phrase, but sometimes whole sentences or summaries of sentences if their content is logically connected. Sometimes it takes more than a word or short phrase to code this, since they might contain variations and different topics (that later relate to more than one category label or theme). Thus, sometimes I included more than one line of transcript if they were logically and closely connected, but I was also alert to multiple topics being addressed in the same sections. This also means that, in the category label listing, some lines are listed under more than one label because they address multiple topics at the same time.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) note that: “[…] as coding has the pragmatic rather than analytic goal of collecting together instances for examination it should be done as inclusively as possible.” (p. 167, emphasis in original). I therefore coded all lines of the informants’ talk so as not to pre-emptively ‘judge’ whether something was relevant or not, since something that initially might not seem important might later be linked to something else, or, when comparing the interviews across informants, might be related to what another informant said. I also coded talk about the interview itself (meta talk) when it was related to the interviewees’ expectations of the interview.

Starting with open codes meant that I coded with informants’ own words, rather than those I would have used (e.g. in the pilot C1/M1 interview, where the interviewee talks about “what we are and what we stand for”. If I had used my own concepts here, I would have coded this as ‘identity’/’values’, but I stuck to his terms). This is because, given that it is a discourse analysis, I am interested in their language use, and to analyse which interpretative repertoires the informants draw on, I need to ‘follow’ their word use (even though I might have a different ‘concept’ for something).
Saldaña (2013) notes that a danger of In Vivo coding is that, if relying too much on the approach by itself “[…] it can limit your ability to transcend to more conceptual and theoretical levels of analysis and insight.” (p. 95), and he mentions reflection connected to ‘analytic memo writing’ and second-cycle coding as ways of moving beyond this initial coding (p. 93). In my approach here, I wrote notes if interesting tendencies emerged or words/phrases/expressions recurred that I should return to later. Furthermore, I did not only use In Vivo coding, it was followed by second-cycle coding (see the next section), and the analysis continued with investigating interpretative repertoires.

7.2.1.2.2. Coding Cycle 2: Category Labels and Thematic Clusters
Coding cycle 2 consisted of two steps. In step 1 the In Vivo codes were grouped under category labels. In step 2, these category labels were further refined to thematic clusters. Here, I focus on the individual interviews. I cover analysing thematic clusters across informants under section 7.2.2.4.1. Thus, in the two steps in coding cycle 2, I first clustered the In Vivo annotations into categories (of content), and then went from categories to thematic clusters (i.e. patterns across different categories).

7.2.1.2.2.1. Cycle 2, Step 1: Category Labels
Coding cycle 2, step 1, took the form of pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013, p. 210). Saldaña (2013) notes that: “Pattern Coding develops the “meta-code” – the category label that identifies similarly coded data. Pattern Codes not only organize the corpus but attempt to attribute meaning to that organization.” (p. 209). In my pattern coding, I grouped what the informants said under category labels (Saldaña, 2013), i.e. I gathered what they said about a topic (what they were accounting on, and a little about how, e.g. whether they described something as good or bad). I then further explored how they talked about something in the specific interpretative repertoire analysis.

In this step, I worked through the coded transcriptions from the top to develop clusters of lines that address the same overall topic. I did not ‘code’ directly into labels (i.e. directly ‘attach’ labels), but started with the In Vivo coding. The material is vast, and doing it this way means that I went through each interview several times (transcribing, In Vivo coding, category labels, themes, interpretative repertoires). The In Vivo coding means that I had ‘delineated’ chunks with line numbers, which made it easier to find a segment again in the next stages of coding.

When two or more codes were related, I noted the line numbers under the same category and gave the category a name. Here, I was inspired by Locke, Feldman, and Golden-Biddle’s (2016) notion of live coding (versus inert coding), which enables categories to be emerging, rather than fixed, i.e. the category labels unfold as the coding progresses, and are not established a priori as ‘codes’. If a code
did not relate to the category labels I already had, it was listed as a new category. Sometimes, with a later code, or if a category seemed to emerge that would include earlier codes, I went back and included these in the new category too. For example, this might happen if something was only briefly mentioned initially, but was then later returned to and elaborated on. The same segment can be noted under different categories, e.g. because of overlap when the informant weaves together different aspects. I then return to this when I work with the thematic clusters, since lines that are listed under multiple categories suggest that some topics are (being treated as) related.

For each interview, this work resulted in a table (as exemplified in Table 4). The first column lists category labels, the second lists the line numbers of codes that relate to the category and from which it was developed, and the third gives an example of a code (In Vivo) that has been grouped under the category. This gives an overview over all lines throughout an interview that have to do with different specific aspects, and e.g. also shows that there can be topics that the informants come back to. It groups segments revolving around the same topics. As regards the names of the labels, I tried to keep close to the language use of the informant, while considering that they need to be descriptive and related to all the lines listed for the topic, i.e. describe what these segments are about or have in common. Some of the category labels are short phrases, and some have small explanations that more specifically indicate what the category is about. The listing of line numbers for a category label covers all the instances where an informant talks about or makes reference to the specific topic category.

Table 4: Generic Category Labels and Line Numbers Table - Informant N

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category label</th>
<th>Line numbers</th>
<th>Code example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>“…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the table illustrates an example of clustering, i.e. clusters of sentences/segments (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994). And this clustering is comprehensive because: “At this stage in the research we are in the business of producing a body of instances, not trying to set limits to that body. Thus all borderline cases, and instances which seem initially only vaguely related, should be included.” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 167). In order to be ‘inclusive’, while at the same time retain sensitivity to nuances, it was better to have too many rather than too few category labels, so if I was in doubt I would create a new label, which I could refine later if necessary (e.g. in connection with step 2 in cycle 2).

Since an interview is co-constructed between the participants, some of the category labels reflect the topics in the questions I asked. However, they should be seen as resulting from a meeting of the emic
and the etic, in that an informant might be talking about a topic I asked about, but can introduce other topics in relation to this, thus giving meaning to the topic in a certain way. In other words, even if a category label generally reflects something I asked, I can still investigate informants’ account in relation to it (and later, it is also easier to distinguish between the topics we talked about and the themes in their accounts). For instance, a common category label across informants might be something like ‘asking questions’, since I asked about this, but some informants introduced the topic themselves. In particular, when I asked newcomers how they tackled having questions, most of them said that they would just ask someone. Thus, an ‘asking questions’ label clusters lines involving talk about asking questions, i.e. it gives a collection of lines that I can go into detail with and also compare across informants. Moreover, the nuances appear again when I refine thematic clusters in the next step (section 7.2.1.2.2.2.).

Some category labels across the informants look similar and/or were given similar names. This is partly related to the fact that they were asked about the same overall topics. However, in this phase I was trying to keep a little more to the individual interview, i.e. even though I recognised some labels as present across informants, I tried to be sensitive to what the label looked like in the individual interviews, while also making notes about links to other interviews. Thus, I tried to balance between the individual nuances (and context) and looking across informants. In order to keep in mind contextual aspects, and as more general aspects of interest in relation to the analysis occurred, I continuously made notes. This helped me in later stages of the analysis.

Thus, the category labels group topics the informant is talking about and what they are about. In the next step of cycle 2, I then refined thematic clusters in the interview by looking at the content of the categories and the nuances and potential overlaps between them. Pattern coding develops category labels (Saldaña, 2013, p. 209), these can then be refined to ‘themes’ (Owen, 1984, p. 275).

7.2.1.2.2.2. Cycle 2, Step 2: Thematic Clusters in Individual Interviews

The next step of cycle 2 was to refine thematic clusters in the individual interviews. I use the notion ‘thematic cluster’ to denote clusters of content that is thematically related and recurs in specific ways (e.g. not just talking about ‘lunch’ as a category/topic, but talking about it in a specific way). Where a more specific or ‘pure’ thematic analysis might have worked with themes and sub-themes, i.e. focusing on how these are organised and relate to each other, I focused more broadly on thematic clusters, since my endpoint was not a thematic analysis per se, but a discourse analysis, and thematic clusters helped me identify and analyse interpretative repertoires. I.e. I worked with themes in a way.
that was attuned to the work being part of a discourse analysis. Thus, an important part of the coding was the reflection that it occasioned. I used the overview and notes from the reflective considerations in the more specific discourse analytic part of the analysis. To describe this work, I draw on literature related to ‘themes’ and ‘thematic analysis’, but I use it in connection with what I label thematic clusters, which is a more suitable term in relation to the discourse analysis here. Thus, when I refer to ‘theme’ in relation to my own work, it should be understood as a thematic cluster.

I was wary of ‘slicing’ the content too much, since the informants weave together aspects in their accounts, and how they do this is important from the perspective of interpretative repertoires. This means not only focusing on which themes exist, but also how they unfold and relate to other themes.

Because of my focus on interpretative repertoires, instead of coding into themes and sub-themes, I took a more holistic approach, so that I refined thematic clusters, and an aspect of analysing interpretative repertoires is then having an eye for how the themes unfold. Thus, some of the clusters are broad, while others are narrower. This ‘clustering’ is also related to how the informants connect things in their accounts, which is again related to identifying interpretative repertoires as something they draw on in connecting aspects of their experiences and discursively creating meaning about them. It also covers how a thematic cluster can have some internal variation. Thus, because I worked with themes in relation to discourse analysis, I needed to do this in a way which would give me an overview while at the same time not being too reductionist and ‘blind’ to context, since the nuances are important.

In this step, the category labels were developed into more overall themes. Some category labels might need to be split up (and parts of labels merged), others will be merged as themes, and some themes will go across aspects of different category labels. Thus it is not just a question of collating category labels, but going through the material again, since a thematic cluster is not just the sum of two category labels, but involves thematically related aspects across category labels. In other words, this step consists in refining: Going from categories to more overall thematic clusters for each individual interview. This step served as the closure of the coding and thematic part, before I moved more specifically into analysing interpretative repertoires. Overall, the coding ‘tree’ logic looks like this:
To take one example, in the interview with a manager in Case 2, I identified a thematic cluster that I labelled ‘Starting by building an overview’. This thematic cluster consists primarily of content from two of the category labels listed for that interview, namely ‘Starting out …’ and ‘Building up …’ respectively. These categories were formed by clustering In Vivo annotations that were topically related to each other. For instance, the category label ‘Starting out …’ covers annotations where the manager describes their process with newcomers, such as giving them a set of exercises to start with.

The many authors who talk about ‘themes’ also means that there are multiple approaches to coding and thematic analysis (e.g. Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Leavy & Ross, 2006; Owen, 1984). This makes it important to be clear about terminology. The overall approach was inspired by others (e.g. Leavy and Ross (2006), who suggest a three-part thematic analysis). I used In Vivo coding for the first cycle, and pattern coding as step 1 in the second cycle, which resulted in category labels. I then called the result of the final refining ‘thematic clusters’. Thus, as regards the hierarchy between categories and thematic clusters, here thematic clusters come after categories in the process of working with the material. The advantage of the approach employed here is that it makes it possible to spot emergent or unfolding themes and variations within them, i.e. rather than just picking themes out, they have a context and unfold throughout the interview. I.e. as an interview progresses, there can be variations in a thematic cluster.

In addressing what a ‘theme’ is, Owen (1984) employs three criteria: recurrence, repetition and forcefulness (p. 275). In his study of relational discourse, in terms of the recurrence criterion, “Recurrence was observed when at least two parts of a report had the same thread of meaning, even though different wording indicated such a meaning.” (Owen, 1984, p. 275). The next criterion, repetition, follows the same principle, but here it is not about sentences which overlap in meaning, but “[...] repetition of key words, phrases, or sentences.” (p. 275). Thus, Owen (1984) states that:
“Criterion two is an extension of criterion one in that it is an explicit repeated use of the same wording, while criterion one involves an implicit recurrence of meaning using different discourse.” (p. 275). The third criterion, forcefulness, has a special application in Owen’s (1984) work, since part of his material consisted of diaries, where e.g. underlined text would be considered as forcefulness. However, the criterion applies to written and spoken discourse alike (Owen, 1984, p. 275). In spoken discourse (as my material is), forcefulness “[…] refers to vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses which serve to stress and subordinate some utterances from other locutions in the oral reports […]” (Owen, 1984, p. 275). The argument for forcefulness is that the form of discourse (Owen, 1984, p. 276) also plays a role and can be used to identify a theme. My transcription does not contain all of the features that define forcefulness. I primarily draw on the first two criteria in refining the themes and deciding when something is a theme. However, I sometimes also used the forcefulness criterion as a supportive criterion, in terms of understanding it as emphasis. For instance, something might recur several times during an interview because it is something the informant wants to stress, and that indicates a kind of forcefulness. Another pointer would be the immediately surrounding ‘text’ of an uttering and its relationship with that text.

I draw especially on Owen’s (1984) notion of ‘recurrence’ at the meaning level as a criterion for what defines a theme (thematising). This means that themes ‘emerge’ from something that ‘cuts across’ an account (and across accounts), e.g. aspects, perspectives, or an orientation towards something. In this way, the themes show or indicate a form of ‘salience’ at the meaning level. Since recurrence is a criterion at the meaning level, identifying something that ‘cuts across’ necessitates interpretation (identifying something as having something in common in the categories/in the interview). To sum up, Owen’s (1984) criteria of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness focus on meaning, words/phrases, and emphasis respectively.

As mentioned above, the kind of thematic work I did requires interpretation. Braun and Clarke (2006) discuss the notion of themes as ‘emerging’, distinguishing between semantic and latent themes, i.e. patterns in semantic content (description) versus interpretation already at the theme level (latent level) (p. 13). Since I drew on the ‘recurrence’ criterion, which necessitates interpretation, the themes that I work with can also be said to be latent, since I did not just work with repeated content. Thus, the themes were not just ‘lying there’, and, to the extent that they ‘emerged’, they were identified as themes based on the three criteria mentioned above. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that:
“Analysis within this latter tradition [latent thematic analysis] tends to come from a constructionist paradigm (eg, Burr, 1995), and in this form, thematic analysis overlaps with some forms of ‘DA’ [...], where broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings are theorized as underpinning what is actually articulated in the data.” (p. 84-85).

Thus, this approach is well suited as part of identifying interpretative repertoires. The researcher interprets, and the themes can be interpretive in the sense that a theme can be related to a certain interpretation/a likeness in an informant’s way of expressing (an interpretation of) something.

The balance throughout the process was to keep the sensitivity to the complexity in the empirical material while also reducing it to something that could be worked with analytically. I did this by moving from an inclusive step, category labels, to a more focused step, thematic clusters that were relevant to my research questions. The first steps (cycle 1 and cycle 2, step 1) were inclusive, and ensured that I ‘catched’ the nuances in the material overall, before moving on to a more focused analysis of the themes that were relevant to my research questions. Wetherell and Potter (1988) also state that, at some point, they “[...] selected out from the interviews all passages of talk relating to our topic [...]” (p. 177).

Elements of different themes can touch on each other. This does not imply a problem with delimiting the themes, but is a strength of the narrative approach, acknowledging that different themes can be touched on in relation to different contexts, and through this may become related to other themes. Especially in the newcomer interviews, there is perhaps a closer relationship between some of the themes due to the narrative technique, which results in threads of meaning across themes, as the newcomers weave together different aspects in accounting for their experiences. In the category tables, a number of lines are listed for more categories, and the relationship between them then sometimes became part of the reason that both categories were related to one thematic cluster.

Different themes might also be identified as aspects of experiences that clash with each other, and that are therefore not a coherent whole (e.g. a theme could have implications across different categories, sometimes in different ways). However, although themes may seem fragmented to start with, examining how they unfold makes it easier to see how they are related to each other (I show in my analysis that some of the different themes touch on each other, since they can be constructed using the same interpretative repertoire).
This complexity meant that a thematic cluster was difficult to describe with a single word, since the nuanced clusters required a more detailed description. Thus, I refined thematic clusters, and could then carry out a more fine-grained analysis of how these were constructed (taking into account nuances and context), and identify repertoires in the account. In order to carry out the work in this step, I developed a procedure involving five steps:

1. First, I would draw up a table (like the one in Table 5). If I already had notes for the refining process (e.g. made while I was creating categories), I would go through these and note something as a theme if it lived up to the theme criteria.

Table 5: Thematic Clusters - Informant N

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category labels</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td>N1, N2</td>
<td>…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td>N1 (i.e. a label can be part of more than one theme) Nn</td>
<td>…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. I then went through the content of lines listed under more than one category label (in the tables these are noted in bold). For instance, for C4/NC8 there were category labels on mess/chaos and on frustration, where some lines overlapped between the categories. Based on these categories, a theme was refined about experiencing mess/chaos and frustration while entering the start-up. Thus, some meaning (recurrence) or words (repetition) might be related to different categories and therefore link different aspects thematically.

3. Next, I looked more specifically at the content and parts of each category label to see whether some of them had content that was thematically related (i.e. whether there was recurrence and/or repetition thematically). Often, social aspects were mentioned in relation to a number of different topics (e.g. formal and informal social aspects).

4. Then I went through the transcription to look for recurrence, repetition and forcefulness. This also served as a kind of check of steps 1-3. If a specific word was interesting, I could search for it using the search function in NVivo (‘Query’ → ‘Text search’) and investigate trends in relation to an idea about a theme (both in individual interviews and across interviews), since repeated words might indicate a recurrence of meaning (or a topic thread with varied meaning).

5. Finally, I gave the clusters labels, and added a description to more clearly show what they were about and to indicate important nuances. I tried to describe the emic themes in a way
that reflected the informants’ word use (since the themes are a result of their language use). In the tables, I also noted which category labels had content related to the theme.

Throughout this process, I was sensitive to ‘resistance’, by being familiar with the material and checking thematic clusters to ensure that they respect the material. As regards the thematic clusters listed, in relation to the criteria for identifying themes, whether something is listed as a thematic cluster or not does not (only) have to do with ‘how much’ it is in the talk, but how central it is. The themes are qualitatively derived. Whether something is identified as central or not is then based on Owen’s (1984) criteria, and also Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) notions of consistency and variability, which indicate that something is ‘happening’ in the text. In addition, when identifying themes, I could also use my various notes and field notes as guides.

7.2.1.3. NVivo and Word as Supporting Software

I used the ‘annotations’ function of NVivo (version 11 and later 12) for the In Vivo coding (first cycle coding). I started by coding a few of the interviews in Word (using the ‘comments’ function), but opted to use NVivo because it would make it easier for me to search across different annotated interviews, as it is possible to search across ‘sources’ (the imported and annotated PDF or Word files), instead of having to search Word documents one at a time. Thus, NVivo has some benefits when reaching the analyses across informants, because it makes it easier to search across transcriptions. However, I used Word when developing category labels and refining themes, because it gave me a better overview of the developing category labels (as I could easier work with the names and content of these). Moreover, it was easier to scroll through the many category labels in a Word document than to have to go through the ‘coding stripes’ in NVivo. There is also a memo function in NVivo that I could have used to write and search across notes, but I chose to write my notes in the unfolding analysis documents instead. In this way, I could easier structure the notes according to where they would be relevant, and gather notes on different interviews in the same sections if they were related.

The material is more important than necessarily using a state of the art programme. Thus, I needed to find a way to work with the material that would allow me to do the necessary work in a meaningful way, so I used the tools which allowed me to develop the kind of overview I needed and that gave better accessibility for me while I was doing the work. It is also easier to show the work included as appendices as PDF files based on Word documents, rather than having to export or make screenshots from NVivo. Thus, this makes it more transparent, both for myself and others.
7.2.1.4. Coding as an Analysis-Facilitating Component and a Springboard

The coding cycles and steps were the same for the manager and newcomer interviews. The coding helped me gain an overview of the thematic clusters in relation to the research topic. The next part of the analysis went into more detail about how the themes and accounts in general were constructed, i.e. the interpretative repertoires the informants drew on. There was thus a close relationship between the thematic and discourse analysis parts, since the thematic clusters did not stand on their own, but served as a starting point for investigating the informants’ discourse in more detail. Thus, I used the patterns in the categories and themes in the next part of the analysis, where I investigated interpretative repertoires and the patterns and variations they might contain. In other words, I investigated how the themes were constructed by going back to those places in the interviews where they were mentioned and focusing on the ‘building blocks’, i.e. the interpretative repertoires (cf. Wetherell & Potter, 1988) informants drew on when discursively creating them.

The techniques used throughout the analytical process should not be seen in isolation. The process was designed so that the elements could build on each other, and therefore all steps were important. In other words, the coding, refining of themes, and identification of interpretative repertoires were intricately related, in that one step facilitated the next. I also wrote notes throughout and used these in the analysis. However, during the course of this process, it rose to higher levels of abstraction and became more and more analytical going from In Vivo codes to category labels that were primarily descriptive, and then to themes that were somewhat descriptive but also more ‘analytical’, both because they relate to connections between the categories and because they are sometimes connected to each other. Finally, based on this, I then focused on identifying interpretative repertoires, i.e. how the informants talk about something, analysing how they construct it, and determining which resources they use to construct meaning.

Other works on discourse analysis often describe going through the transcripts multiple times, i.e. reading and rereading, and collecting excerpts/instances of something interesting (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In my study, this was operationalised through coding, going through the annotations and creating category labels and then themes, and, together with the notes written throughout the process, using this as an overview to start the interpretative repertoire analysis.

As mentioned, my coding choices were determined by what I needed the coding to do in relation to my discourse analysis. I thus chose In Vivo coding because the first cycle was inclusive in order to avoid overlooking or not considering aspects which might be related to patterns in important ways.
Since it is a discourse analysis, it is also important that the coding, category labelling and thematic work respects my informants’ language use.

In the subsequent thematic and discourse work, I was then able to focus on what was relevant in relation to my research questions, knowing that the inclusive starting point meant that, even if some aspects were less salient, they were still part of my overview. In other words, the initial open coding of the material enabled me to see whether themes that on the surface seemed to be unrelated might nevertheless be related to the research questions. This is important because, as noted above, this means a sensitivity to also identifying ‘the smaller things’ that mean a lot, but which we might otherwise overlook in OS research. A more holistic approach makes it more clear that things are connected and in what way. The chosen approach allowed me to keep nuances, but in such a way that I could work with the complex material instead of separating too much out and blurring nuances that might turn out to be important.

Thus, there was a systematicity which was also flexible, allowing the method to do the work I needed it to do. The coding and thematic work is not just that, but also includes sorting, classifying and giving an overview. Having addressed the themes, this then functioned as a springboard to the interpretative repertoire analysis, considering patterns and variations. As such, there is a relationship between coding as ‘what’ and interpretative repertoires as ‘how’. The thematic coding resulted in a structure from which I could go back in the ‘depths’ and also consider context. I then examined the resources used to construct the themes when analysing the interpretative repertoires the informants drew on to relate their entry experiences. In short, the coding allowed for gathering snippets of these unfolding themes, and in the subsequent discursive analysis I could then analyse which interpretative repertoires the informants drew on when producing the accounts, in relation to the various themes.

7.2.2. Discourse Analysis

For my analysis, I employed a discourse analytic approach focusing on interpretative repertoires. This helped answer my research questions, in that it provided a frame for investigating which versions of OS and knowledge were constructed and how, and how managers’ and newcomers’ versions relate to each other. In the following sections, I outline the overall discursive framework and thoughts behind the ‘tool’ - interpretative repertoires - used to answer these questions.

This approach builds on ontological, epistemological, methodological, and theoretical assumptions. Overall, discourse analysis (in the version employed here) agrees with a social constructivist position, inasmuch as it is: “[…] ‘a research orientation based on a post-modernist commitment to the socially
constructive nature of reality’ (Macnaghten, 1993: 54), and therefore consistent with the social constructionist paradigm […]” (Taylor & Ussher, 2001, p. 296).

Discourse as an analytic approach means subscribing to a certain logic which has consequences for knowledge production. According to Wood and Kroger (2000):

“Discourse analysis involves ways of thinking about discourse (theoretical and metatheoretical elements) and ways of treating discourse as data (methodological elements). Discourse analysis is thus not simply an alternative to conventional methodologies; it is an alternative to the perspectives in which those methodologies are embedded. Discourse analysis entails more than a shift in methodology from a general, abstracted, quantitative to a particularized, detailed, qualitative approach. It involves a number of assumptions that are important in their own right and also as a foundation for doing discourse analytic research.” (p. 3).

In section 2.2.1., I touched on the relationship between discourse and social constructivism. In the following, I describe in more detail how I approach discourse in relation to the purposes for which I use it. I start with a section ‘On discourse’ to briefly introduce central aspects of discourse work (theory, analysis) in general. I then outline the specific approach to discourse work I employ here, and that provides the frame for my discourse analysis.

7.2.2.1. On Discourse

Discourse studies consist of a family of studies (from different disciplines and fields) that employ a discursive approach to studying various phenomena. Potter and Wetherell (1987) observe that what ‘discourse’ is depends on who you ask and which discipline they come from. They see discourse and discourse analysis, and the relationship between them, as follows:

“We will use ‘discourse’ in its most open sense […] to cover all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds. So when we talk of ‘discourse analysis’ we mean analysis of any of these forms of discourse.” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 7).

As regards discourse analysis, Potter et al. (1990) state that: “Put simply, discourse analysis studies how people use discourse and how discourse uses people.” (p. 213). Sarangi (2017) notes that, although there is a vast range of discursive approaches, they: “[…] share some family resemblance with one another, given their ontological and epistemological foundations in a broad sense, despite their differential orientation to what counts as data, categorisation, unit of analysis, evidence, claim,
etc.” (p. 8). Thus, there is a kind of discourse (meta) theory that these discursive approaches relate to. In these sections, I mention aspects of this to describe the foundations of the discursive approach I draw on, and I then show how I operationalised this approach for the purposes of my research.

R. H. Jones (2012) mentions that discourse analysis relies on four assumptions about language:

“1 Language is ambiguous. […] 2 Language is always ‘in the world’. That is, what language means is always a matter of where and when it is used and what it is used to do. 3 The way we use language is inseparable from who we are and the different social groups to which we belong. […] 4 Language is never used all by itself.” (p. 2, emphasis in original).

The second point is related to language use being situated. R. H. Jones (2012) mentions four ways in which language is situated: “First, language is situated within the material world, and where we encounter it […] Second, language is situated within relationships […] Third, language is situated in history […] Finally, language is situated in relation to other language […]” (p. 3).

R. H. Jones (2012) defines discourse analysis as “[…] the study of the ways sentences and utterances are put together to make texts and interactions and how those texts and interactions fit into our social world.” (p. 2).

Burr (1995) states that “[…] surrounding any one object, event, person, etc., there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the object in question, a different way of representing it to the world.” (p. 32). This is related to the term ‘account’. In the context of discourse studies: “The term account most broadly refers to a person’s version of events in the world, of the self, of others, and so on.” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 213, emphasis in original).

An important premise of the discursive approach used here is that discourse is understood as both constructed and constructive (cf. Potter, 2004/2009, p. 610). Thus, ‘accounts’ are constructed but also constructive. In chapter 2, I mentioned the relationship between the discursive approach to language and social constructivism. Talk is action (e.g. Burr, 1995) in that it constructs and is constructed, produces and reproduces. Following Burr (1995) and Potter (2004/2009), when we give an account of something, we also construct that which we are orienting to, i.e. we construct an account which itself has constructive implications. This dual aspect of the nature of discourse means that discourse analysis is about investigating more than just the content of text, it also leads to the recognition that

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8 R. H. Jones (2012) is a student textbook, which provides a good overview.
the content is not just a product but also productive, and thus consequential. This underscores the relevance of investigating discourse related to knowledge and OS.

7.2.2.2. Discursive Psychology and Interpretative Repertoires
I draw on some of the thoughts on discourse stemming from discursive psychology, especially those related to ‘interpretative repertoires’. In this section, I present some overall aspects of discursive psychology. These serve as a backdrop for considerations related to ‘interpretative repertoires’, which I then focus on in the next section. I discuss more specific analytical tactics in subsequent sections.

As with other discursive approaches, discursive psychology is not a single streamlined application of discourse analysis, but is itself a position with a number of strands (cf. Edley, 2001, p. 189). Furthermore, the term ‘psychology’ should not be understood as limiting it to a discursive approach in psychology alone. Wood and Kroger (2000) note that discursive psychology: “[…] not only draws upon multiple disciplines but also works to transcend a number of traditional disciplinary boundaries.” (p. 196).

Discursive psychology, at least some strands of it, has a strong link to social constructivism (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 102). Here, therefore, I follow the specific strands that are in line with my philosophical position, and that are suitable for answering my research questions.

In their discursive psychology version of discourse analysis, Wetherell and Potter (1988) stress function, construction and variation (p. 169). The functional aspect is related to a different approach to language in psychology: “The term function, then, emphasizes the action and outcome orientated nature of descriptive discourse against views of language as an abstract, essentially referential system which have been prevalent in psychological theory and practice […]” (Potter et al., 1990, p. 207).

Function and construction are intricately related, and deal with the previously mentioned nature of discourse as being simultaneously constructed and constructive. Potter et al. (1990) note that:

“The metaphor of construction illuminates three facets of this discourse analytic approach. First, discourse is manufactured out of pre-existing linguistic resources. […] secondly, such an assembly will involve choice or selection from possibilities. […] what is picked out in talk depends on the orientation and interests of the speaker. Thirdly, and more generally, the constructivist metaphor reminds us that much of the time we deal with the world in terms of discursive constructions or versions.” (p. 207-208).
Construction is not necessarily purposeful: “It may be that the person providing the account is not consciously constructing, but a construction emerges as they merely try to make sense of a phenomenon […]” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 34). This means that: “All language, even language which passes as simple description, is constructive and consequential for the discourse analyst.” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 34). In other words, even though a construction is not conscious, it is still consequential, and discourse analysts analyse discourse as having a function, as doing something.

With regard to variation, Potter et al. (1990) note that: “The third central concept, variation, follows from the first two. […] the sorts of variation between descriptive accounts of the same phenomenon can be striking in analytic practice (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).” (p. 208). I return to variation throughout the following, since it is central in analysing interpretative repertoires.

These three central concepts underscore that discourse is action. Edley (2001) notes: “In drawing upon the arguments of people like Wittgenstein and Austin, discursive psychologists point out that language is itself a form of practice.” (p. 192, emphasis in original).

7.2.2.2.1. On Interpretative Repertoires

The notion of interpretative repertoires was first introduced by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), who used it to describe “different ways of talking” (Edley, 2001, p. 197). It was later picked up by Potter and Wetherell (1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). In Wetherell and Potter’s (1988) variation of discourse analysis, the analytic unit is interpretative repertoires (p. 169), which is also mentioned as an analytical tool (p. 172). A number of characterisations of interpretative repertoires can be found in their work, e.g. “The interpretative repertoire is basically a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events.” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 138), and “By interpretative repertoire we mean broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions, common-places (Billig, 1988d) and figures of speech often clustered around metaphors or vivid images and often using distinct grammatical constructions and styles.” (Potter et al., 1990, p. 212).

Some have criticised ‘repertoire’ for having behavioural undertones, but Potter et al. (1990) emphasise that ‘interpretative’ as a prefix indicates that such a connotation is erroneous (p. 213). Furthermore, interpretative repertoires should not be understood as connected to structuralist thinking, since the approach is linked to an anti-realist position: “[…] the discourse approach shifts the focus from a search for underlying entities - attitudes - which generate talk and behaviour to a detailed examination of how evaluative expressions are produced in discourse.” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 55). In other words, interpretative repertoires are not about identifying ‘real and objective’
underlying patterns. I have mentioned function, construction and variation as central concerns in discursive psychology, and that this approach acknowledges language use as both situated (e.g. in social contexts) and involving an aspect of choice, e.g. choosing between linguistic resources to do something in a specific context. Thus, although we can draw on different resources when we talk, we might use certain words due to considerations of function and social acceptance.

Thus, in line with previous sections on the relationship between language and social constructivism, discourse is not about being representative of pre-established internal ideas of e.g. knowledge. Notwithstanding, different ways of talking about knowledge may have advantages and disadvantages. That is to say, talking about knowledge as an individual object rather than a relational/contextual process and/or outcome has different implications, including what it communicates to newcomers. For example, in terms of what the informants consider as ‘knowledge’, it might be constructed as something that can be objectively documented and made ‘tangible’/explicit in writing (a characterisation that can have functional consequences). It is therefore relevant to consider interpretative repertoires in my investigation of how newcomers and managers construct and talk about OS, and evaluate this in relation to knowledge.

Throughout this and previous sections, I have mentioned both discourse and interpretative repertoires. Edley (2001) notes that: “Perhaps the first thing to say is that the two concepts are, indeed, closely linked.” (p. 202), and “If there is a major difference between the two concepts then it is predominantly a matter of disciplinary ‘ring-fencing’.” (p. 202). Specifically:

“[…] the concept of interpretative repertoires is used by those who want to place more emphasis upon human agency within the flexible deployment of language. Compared to discourses, interpretative repertoires are seen as less monolithic. Indeed, they are viewed as much smaller and more fragmented, offering speakers a whole range of different rhetorical opportunities.” (p. 202, emphasis in original).

This is reminiscent of the distinction that Gee (2005) (see also Alvesson & Kärreman [2000] on levels of D/discourse) makes between spelling Discourse with a big D (big D Discourses) and a small d (small d discourses), which is used as a way of distinguishing between grand societal discourses (macro) and more local discourses (micro and meso). Gee (2005) also describes small d discourse as language-in-use (p. 7). In this respect, interpretative repertoires lean towards small d discourses (discourse at the micro and meso level), especially since they are very much tied to (local) context: “The important point here is that the way the object is constructed is dependent on the discursive
practice within which the repertoire is invoked.” (Potter et al., 1990, p. 212), i.e. an interpretative repertoire is invoked in relation to some larger context. In this way, interpretative repertoires can be understood as a locally constructed version of something, in relation to some situation.

Wood and Kroger (2000) also agree with this idea of discourse as something broader than repertoires: “We use the term discourse to cover all spoken and written forms of language use (talk and text) as social practice.” (p. 19, emphasis in original), and: “Interpretive [sic] repertoires are general discursive resources that can be used by speakers and writers to construct versions of events, actions, persons, internal processes, and so on and to perform a variety of other actions […]” (p. 43).

Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) identified two repertoires within scientific discourse as a broad frame (p. 39). In my research, the informants use interpretative repertoires in their accounts when faced by my interview frame, which, although being open, is also shaped by the discursive realms of OS and OKC.

**7.2.2.2. Going from Thematic Clusters to Interpretative Repertoires**

In this section, I focus on the relationship between the thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires, and how I moved from the former to the latter analytically. As mentioned, the approach to themes was developed in relation to being able to analyse interpretative repertoires, and I used a way of coding that allowed variability and nuances in themes to be identified. For example, careful reading of lines noted under a category label, listed in relation to a theme, made it possible to show nuances in overall themes and acknowledge that the themes unfold. This is the case in some of the interviews where an aspect is mentioned multiple times, but in various ways.

The thematic clusters show patterns in the content of an account. I used this as a starting point for analysing interpretative repertoires, which are patterns in how the informants talk about something, i.e. the resources they draw on to construct meaning about something. Thus, I first generated an overview of content patterns, and then analysed how the informants talk about the themes and topics in relation to my research questions, in terms of interpretative repertoires. The interpretative repertoire analysis therefore took its point of departure in the thematic clusters, while also relating to the overall account. Hence, the thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires are not ‘decoupled’ from each other. For instance, having the opportunity to influence versus feeling uncertain is a theme in some of the interviews (and also a repertoire across informants); I then investigated how this is constructed, and the different manifestations that are variations over the same theme. Thus, part of the purpose of identifying themes was also ‘selection’, i.e. finding the themes which the informants oriented to as meaningful, and which were relevant to my research questions, and then analysing how they talk
about these, first individually, and then across informants. In going from the individual coding and
refined themes to interpretative repertoires, I also consulted my notes and field notes.

In the analysis here, there are overlaps between themes and interpretative repertoires, inasmuch as
both are patterns. However, they are not the same kind of pattern, and there are different ways of
identifying them (cf. my comments on Owen’s (1984) theme criteria and Potter and Wetherell’s
(1987) approach to identifying interpretative repertoires. I also elaborate on identifying interpretative
repertoires in the individual interviews in section 7.2.2.3.). Nonetheless, a theme might be intricately
related to a repertoire if it is more than a content pattern and has the qualities of an organising idea.
In this sense, themes and interpretative repertoires are connected. A ‘building block’ (i.e. a repertoire)
as an organising idea will somehow show itself content-wise (i.e. in what informants speak about),
but what makes it a repertoire is that it is a ‘building block’, i.e. a specific pattern in the way they talk
about something. In this way, it also makes sense that, for an individual repertoire, I can find traces
of the same idea (e.g. as a theme) in other interviews.

In going from thematic clusters to interpretative repertoires, I investigated whether there were any
central building blocks that transcended the account, e.g. an overall way in which an informant gave
meaning to her/his experiences. Sometimes this was close to one thematic cluster, sometimes it
transcended different clusters or categories. By identifying themes, I created a structure which I could
use to ‘dive in’ and also consider the context. Sometimes, the themes were related because they were
linked to the same interpretative repertoire. In the C2/NC1 interview, I identified a theme labelled
‘Evaluation and approach’. These aspects were linked through ‘learning’ as a central component. I
identified what this ‘learning’ component was constructed of and that ‘learning’ (and specific
meanings related to it) was a central building block, and thus a repertoire, drawn on to construct
meaning in that interview.

In both the analysis of the individual interviews, and the subsequent across analysis (section 7.2.2.4.),
the themes are considered as something that informants construct and orient to as meaningful.
However, they should not be understood as a ‘straitjacket’, but rather as a guide and starting point for
considering nuances, comparing, and investigating the meaning the informants construct in relation
to the overall topics of my research, and as a starting point for exploring which repertoires they draw
on in constructing meaning about this. The analysis thus takes place both within and across themes,
and in relation to the accounts in general, since the thematic clusters show which emic themes emerge,
and the discourse analysis then explores how managers and newcomers talk about socialisation and
knowledge. Using thematic clusters to gain an overview in connection to interpretative repertoire analysis is my way of designing and operationalising a discourse analytic strategy for the purposes here. Thus, this work involves an intricate relationship between the thematic and the discursive.

7.2.2.3. Analysing Interpretative Repertoires in Individual Interviews

In the previous sections, I have discussed the parts of my analytical strategy which provide the background for the part of the analysis I now go into. In this section and subsections, I focus on identifying interpretative repertoires in the individual interviews. I then cover themes and interpretative repertoires across informants in section 7.2.2.4.

Edley (2001) notes that it is difficult to answer the questions of how to identify and delineate interpretative repertoires:

“Identifying interpretative repertoires turns out to be a ‘craft skill’ rather than being something that one can master from first principles. It is an ability that develops with practice. […] However, as a general rule, the trick to spotting interpretative repertoires is familiarity with one’s data.” (p. 198).

As regards familiarity, I conducted the interviews, transcribed them, and read each transcription several times in connection with the coding, refining themes and interpretative repertoire analysis. This enabled me to gain an overall impression of the topics in each interview, and then to plunge more deeply into tendencies in the material, both individually and across informants.

Wetherell and Potter (1988) describe discourse analysis as a methodology (p. 168). But in their 1987 book and 1988 text there are also examples and description related specifically to method, especially as regards interpretative repertoires. Below, I outline the specific discourse analytic procedures (building on the steps addressed previously) that I used to identify and analyse interpretative repertoires in the individual interviews. Overall, I focus on what is identifiable as a building block in an individual’s account, based on themes, how they talk about them, and the account in general, i.e. which interpretative repertoires they use in their accounts. In one sense, interpretative repertoires are an analytical strategy, inasmuch as they are characterised as both an analytic unit and an analytical tool, but they still need analytical tactics for identifying and analysing them. I describe overall aspects of identifying and analysing repertoires in the individual interviews here, and discuss the specific process for the manager and newcomer interviews in more detail in section 7.2.2.3.1.
One way of identifying interpretative repertoires is to investigate the variations in a piece of “text”. For example, Wetherell and Potter (1988) state that “There is regularity in the variation” (p. 172), and “Speakers give shifting, inconsistent and varied pictures of their social worlds.” (p. 171). Identifying these variations is therefore a way of becoming attuned to the various interpretative repertoires a person may draw on: “That is, the idea of a repertoire spotlights flexibility of use in practice […]” (Potter et al., 1990, p. 212). However, lack of variation is also analytically interesting:

“[…] one of the striking things about studying the talk of fifty or so interviewees on a particular topic is the restricted and indeed stereotypic set of terms and tropes which occur again and again. Our use of the idea of a limited range is not meant to place a priori boundaries but to highlight this conspicuous lack of variation.” (Potter et al., 1990, p. 213).

Going back to Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) definition of interpretative repertoires as “[…] basically a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events.” (p. 138), this suggests that a focus on patterns is relevant to identifying and analysing these building blocks. Wetherell and Potter (1988) also mention a focus on patterns of repertoire use (p. 177-178). Thus, in the individual interviews, I look for patterns in how the account is constructed.

One example of looking for patterns in relation to interpretative repertoires is Marshall and Raabe (1993), who were also inspired by Potter and Wetherell (1987) in their analysis of patterns in discussions of privatisation and nationalisation. They describe this as follows:

“The identification of recurrent patterns in the linguistic constructions, referred to here as repertoires, was tackled by reading and rereading the transcripts and taking out instances where there appeared to be terms, phrases or metaphors linked to the concepts of privatization or nationalization either in terms of (i) similarity in structure or content; or (ii) differences or variability in what was being said.” (p. 38).

As regards searching for patterns, Potter and Wetherell (1987) themselves note that: “This pattern will be in the form of both variability: differences in either the content or form of accounts, and consistency: the identification of features shared by accounts.” (p. 168, emphasis in original). Thus, I look for both variability and consistency in the accounts. In this way, looking for contrasts (as a kind of variability), both those contrasts that the informants present themselves and more latent contrasts or paradoxes in the material, is an analytical tactic. I investigate variability (differences) and consistency (shared) both for individual informants and across informants (section 7.2.2.4.). Hence,
in terms of looking for patterns, this is about “[…] identifying significant patterns of consistency and variation.” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 169). Potter (2004/2009) highlights variation as an ‘analytic lever’, and elaborates on the kind of variation that one can look for:

“All kinds of variations are potentially relevant – differences in descriptions of objects and events, stylistic shifts, the choice of different words, and so on. […] The researcher will benefit from attending to variations: in the discourse of single individuals (on one occasion or different occasions); between different individuals; and between what is said and what might have been said.” (p. 616).

In this research, I looked for patterns and variations throughout the analysis (during the interviews, transcribing, coding, discourse analysis) and wrote down thoughts on interesting aspects and emerging tendencies both within each interview and across interviews.

As mentioned, I also went through the material numerous times. Thus, my analytical strategy consisted both of read and reread, in relation to the (systematic) steps mentioned previously, and then a specific focus on the interpretative repertoires, where consistency and variability were potentially important. I saw that contrasting could be a useful tool as early as the pilot newcomer 1 interview, during which the informant would establish something as a fact by subsequently presenting something else as his subjective meaning, e.g. ‘it is like this, but I think this’ (therefore the first is ‘factually’ what it is like). This can also be related to what McKenzie (2005) says about two orientations of discourse, i.e. an epistemological orientation and an action orientation (p. 2). As mentioned, contrasts could also be more latent, indicating a kind of discursive schizophrenia, e.g. as there were nuances in themes or aspects of the accounts that contradicted each other during the course of the interview. It is therefore an advantage that the coding allowed for broad themes with internal nuances. If the informants returned to a theme on multiple occasions, I could see whether they addressed different elements of the same theme or addressed the theme in different ways.

In relation to the previous steps, I could go through the lines noted under categories related to different themes to look for similarities and variation, i.e., how did the theme arise (by going back to the places that are related to it, where it is talked about), which building blocks are used to create it, and does this involve an interpretative repertoire. In other words, the coding, category labels and thematic clusters are the ‘what’, i.e. what do they talk about, and the interpretative repertoires are the ‘how’, i.e. how do they talk about it. For example, something might not just be a characterisation, but also a certain kind of (positive or negative) evaluation. I also considered other interesting parts of the
informants’ accounts (as discursive manifestations). I.e. in the interpretative repertoire work in relation to themes and the accounts in general, I was interested in how they oriented towards and constructed certain aspects in relation to my epistemic interests.

Overall, the thoughts mentioned here involved being sensitive to ‘building blocks’, repositories, variation and consistency/inconsistency, remembering that accounts are ‘versions’ (cf. e.g. Potter, 1996, p. 97), and considering repertoires as patterns and investigating what they were built of and how, e.g. how do the informants ‘conceptualise’ something in the specific context, and how is their ‘concept’ constructed in their account.

Based on the definitions of, and work on, interpretative repertoires mentioned above, an interpretative repertoire in the individual interviews is a building block that an informant draws on to construct her/his account, i.e. across the interview, something that is central to how they construct their account, e.g. a central ‘idea’ that seems to organise or inform at least part of their account. In other words, interpretative repertoires are repositories (lexicons, registers) that can be drawn on to construct accounts. I then investigated how the informants did this by looking at what they relied on to interpret, give meaning to, and build their accounts. Something their account is characterised by or that seems to structure it. It is important to note that a repository is not just about ‘words’, but also about style, e.g. a specific way of contrasting something.

Identifying which interpretative repertoires were being drawn on was also an interpretation. An interpretation of the account constructed in the interview situation, and in relation to the interviewer’s and informant’s context/background. Edley (2001) notes that “[…] when people talk, they do so using a lexicon or repertoire of terms which has been provided for them by history.” (p. 190). However, they also choose the words in a specific context (as mentioned previously in relation to the situatedness of language use). Thus, in a social situation, informants are likely to draw on the repertoires they think are meaningful as regards the (socially constructed) immediate and more overall context. Widdicombe (1993) acknowledges the context, but says that informants also use their ‘own’ words (a repertoire available to them):

“It seems unlikely that the resources I observed were generated solely by my presence; it is more useful to regard them as culturally available resources which speakers drew upon in my presence. Therefore, the research situation can be regarded as a context in which resources and practices are elicited or used, rather than created […] Moreover, there seems
no good reason to suppose that the resources observed are solely a product of the interview situation.” (p. 108).

In other words, informants do not just answer questions using resources offered to them by the researcher, but draw on repertoires available to them which they find meaningful. For instance, they might position something as relevant, or make something relevant, by mentioning this and not something else. With regard to positioning, Toth (2014) notes that “Interpretative repertoires may signal certain positions that the participant adopts and makes relevant […]” (p. 169). In the newcomer interviews, this can be related to the narrative interview technique, in that ‘relevance fixation’ is an aspect of story-telling (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 60).

As mentioned previously, language is consequential for discourse analysts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 34). But Wetherell and Potter (1988) also make a distinction between motivations and consequences: “[…] we would want to make a strong distinction between the psychological motivations for using these discursive forms and their social psychological consequences. Well-intentioned talk can have reactionary consequences […]” (p. 181-182, emphasis in original). What is important to note here is that, no matter the reasoning or motivation for using certain words, or whether it is consciously thought about at all, the words we use have a constructive function. Wood and Kroger (2000) mention about orientation and participants’ meaning that:

“Orientation is also broader than the concept of participants’ meaning in the sense that it involves not only how the participants see things, but also that they see things in a way that has implications for what follows in the interactions. That is, it is not only that participants notice something but that they do something with or about that noticing.” (p. 113).

Finally, in a more meta-reflection on identifying interpretative repertoires in interviews, some scholars have noted that discourse theory can be more nuanced in relation to interviews (e.g. Cruickshank, 2012). Potter and Wetherell themselves use interview material in some of their studies, e.g. in their work on discourses on racism (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). I have previously discussed the relationship between a social constructivist position and using interviews (section 7.1.3.), and in earlier sections on the interview design I also addressed the interviews and interview talk as socially constructed, as all talk is constructed and constructive. In section 7.3., I present considerations about how the interviews went and the rapport between researcher and informants.
7.2.2.3.1. Repertoire Analysis of Individual Manager and Newcomer Interviews
I started on identifying interpretative repertoires in the individual interviews by rereading the interview transcript and then going through the refined thematic clusters, all the while checking for relevant field notes. Because of the way I have coded, I was able to check whether the same lines were coded under different category labels and/or themes, and whether something in the way an informant talked transcended the account. I would consider how they talked, in relation to the topics in the sub-question focused on managers (concerning their thoughts on the role of organisational knowledge communication in organisational entry, and what ways are considered important for knowledge communication with newcomers) or newcomers (concerning their thoughts on task-specific and organisational knowledge, and how it is related to their experience of the entry process), and about the overall empirical research question, i.e. how they talked about entry experiences, being a newcomer, knowledge, communicating knowledge, socialisation and new employees. I also considered whether there were other relevant or interesting interpretative repertoires that might be of importance to how an account was constructed, and checked the category labels table, because even though not all labels were related to a thematic cluster, they might still be of interest discursively.

In identifying tendencies in their way of talking and giving accounts (sometimes going across thematic clusters), e.g. ‘ideas’ they draw on or use to form/build/construct their account, I thought about whether it was a repertoire according to the description in the previous section. I labelled the repertoires according to which words the informants used, a meaning, an ‘idea’ or a metaphor.

7.2.2.3.2. Case Start-Up Sub-Conclusions
After analysing each individual interview in a case start-up, I wrote a sub-conclusion for the start-up. I listed all identified themes and checked to see whether there were any similarities across them. For instance, in Case 6, all three interviewed managers had a cluster relating to freedom/opportunities and challenges/insecurities. I also listed the individual repertoires to see whether there were any similarities (e.g. as with an ‘acceptance’ repertoire in Case 4), and considered whether and how these were related to themes, i.e. considering overall shared elements in both themes and interpretative repertoires among the accounts of informants in one start-up. Thus, across a start-up, informants might share aspects of the same theme, and something that is a theme for one individual can be close to something that is a repertoire for another (i.e. where it is a more significant part of how their whole account is constructed). By working with these sub-conclusions, I reached a nuanced abstraction, i.e. a more overall picture for the whole case start-up, albeit still with nuances.
7.2.2.4. Analysis across Embedded Cases and Case Start-Ups

Building on all of the previous work with the empirical material, I then began to work with patterns across informants. First with patterns across embedded cases, i.e. across the manager interviews, across the newcomer interviews, and across the manager and newcomer interviews, and, finally across the overall case start-ups. Based on the individual analysis and the sub-conclusions for each case start-up, I investigated (also considering characteristics and context) whether anything was shared (in relation to knowledge and OS) across some (or all) of the informants (at different levels), and also, if they seemed to be talking about the same things, whether there were any analytically important nuances. In the following, I discuss some general aspects of the across analysis, and then focus on the specific parts of it (across managers, across newcomers, etc.) in the subsections.

I label working with the material in this way a ‘matrix discourse analysis’, since I investigated discourses within and across different ‘groups’ and compared them. It enabled me to work with the material at a more abstract level, i.e. in terms of patterns across informants, while at the same time respecting the individual informant and considering contextual nuances. In going from the coding of individual interviews to interpretative repertoires across informants, I used the continuously developed overviews to reach the next stages. The individual interviews can be characterised as the ‘micro’ level and the analyses of themes and interpretative repertoires across informants as the ‘meso’ level, which I then drew on at a more macro, or overall level, to discuss and make analytical generalisations.

Variability has already been mentioned as an analytic lever in identifying interpretative repertoires. This is not just the case for individual interviews, but in particular across interviews, inasmuch as:

“Variability […] is a signal that different ways of constructing events, processes or groups are being deployed to achieve different effects. Patterns of variation and consistency in the form and content of accounts help the analyst to map out the pattern of interpretative repertoires that the participants are drawing on.” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 102).

McKenzie (2005) concurs that “Focusing on variations in the ways discourse is constructed, both within and across accounts […]” (p. 3) is part of analysing interpretative repertoires. This agrees with the comparative aspect of my dissertation, in that “Regularity within the accounts of a single individual is therefore less interesting than the regularity that exists in the elements used by different speakers to describe the same person, event, or thing.” (McKenzie, 2005, p. 2). This is therefore an analytical approach that is suited to my agenda. Wood and Kroger (2000) also note that: “This strategy
(adapted from Potter & Wetherell, 1987) reflects the discourse-analytic principle of variability. As analysis proceeds, the analyst often comes across accounts or versions that seem either similar to previous accounts or different and potentially inconsistent or contradictory.” (p. 111).

In my research, therefore, as I went through the material, there were points where informants agreed and other points where there was disagreement or paradoxes (or ‘outliers’, as exceptions that confirmed a tendency). In a field note from the C3/NC2 interview, I noted that “I can compare what in some cases they say works well with what they in other cases said not worked so well. There are differences among the cases, but also tendencies”. Thus, as I compared themes and repertoires across informants, I could e.g. pay attention to what was accounted for or constructed as good versus bad in their experiences.

The various across analyses were based on the same method of comparing themes (and categories) across the informants (e.g. across the managers), and then focusing on ways of talking that they seemed to share, i.e. patterns in what and how they talked about something (whether there were patterns across informants in how they constructed their accounts). In this part of the process, I focused specifically on the themes and repertoires that were most relevant to my research questions.

Again, themes are topics, something the informants talk about and orient to as important, while interpretative repertoires are more coherent organising building blocks, traces of which can be found across interviews, perhaps in slightly different ways but oriented towards the same idea. In each part of the analysis across, I started with refined themes across, and then focused on interpretative repertoires across (also drawing on the individual analyses). As mentioned previously, the themes were not a ‘straitjacket’, but a guide and starting point.

The analysis ends with a ‘summing up’ chapter, where I include both the themes and interpretative repertoires. The topic addressed here is overall settling-in experiences and knowledge (e.g. the perception and construction of OS when considering knowledge). This topic is addressed with a number of themes in the accounts, some of which are related to more overall interpretative repertoires. In the across analyses, I relate the themes across informants to shared repertoires, also based on individual repertoires that, in comparing themes across, seem to be shared. This gives me some overall clusters to work with, and I also include the refined themes that do not seem to be directly related to a repertoire, but which are interesting in relation to my research questions.
7.2.2.4.1. Identifying and Refining Themes Across

For each part of the analysis across (i.e. across managers, across newcomers, across managers and newcomers, and across case start-ups), I started by refining themes across. Here, I explain the rationale of going from individual to across themes (and how it is related to identifying interpretative repertoires) in general, and in the subsections I then outline more specifically how this was done for the different ‘groups’ and how it is connected to identifying interpretative repertoires (for that group). The way I worked with the individual interviews (In Vivo coding, category labels, refining themes) helped me with the work across, since it was easier to see whether they were talking about the same themes, i.e. whether they were talking about the same topic and how/nuances.

In refining themes across, I again employed Owen’s (1984) theme criteria of recurrence and repetition (but not so much ‘forcefulness’, since I was not working with the individual transcriptions to the same extent here, except that it was also interesting if, across, the informants somehow emphasised the same things). The specific steps for the managers across and the newcomers across were the same (outlined in section 7.2.2.4.2.), but for the managers and newcomers across and then case start-ups across I used the themes across tables developed here, so the process started at a different level. Thus, in the individual interviews I used five steps for working with themes, a process which was then modified for doing some of the same work, but this time across interviews. Again, there was a focus on meaning rather than on quantitative occurrences. So in the individual work I ‘unearthed’ nuances, and across, e.g. a certain repetition could then be relevant in relation to my research questions.

I also produced tables for the work on themes across informants (see Table 6). These consisted of columns noting a theme name, a description and where the theme was found, where I noted the pseudonym for the informant, and whether it was listed as a theme or category label for that informant.

Table 6: Exemplification of Table for Themes Across

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Where found (pseudonym + whether theme in itself or category label)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Theme for: Category label for:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>N N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By doing this, I went through all the themes in the interviews, and then show when a theme is present across e.g. different newcomers, arriving at higher-order themes across. In proceeding from this to repertoires across, I then focused on how they talked in relation to the themes that were present across, i.e. was there recurrence and repetition of meaning/words across informants, and was there variability or consistency in their way of talking about something? In one sense, therefore, I was asking, ‘If this
is the theme, how do they talk about it? What are the patterns and/or variations?’. This might also be related in general to the accounts, i.e. something around the themes which was also relevant, e.g. as they account more broadly. Again, as with previous steps, this allowed me to first reduce complexity, and then take it up again in considering what were repertoires across.

In working with themes across, there could be themes that were already identified as themes in individual interviews (this was for instance the case with a ‘social theme’ that was salient in many individual interviews), but also some that (in relation to recurrence and repetition) only became themes when looking across. This was for instance the case with a theme about prioritising tasks. Both C6/NC1 and NC2 mentioned this, but it was clearer as a theme across, because of recurrence/repetition that was not in the individual interviews, but could be identified across. I.e., it was across that it could be identified as a pattern. Thus, recurrence and repetition as criteria made sense both at the individual and across level, and it let me identify both individual themes that ‘went across’ and aspects that became a pattern across (but which were not a theme in individual interviews).

Some of the themes across are very close to the overall repertoires identified. E.g. as something that was identified as a thematic cluster in one interview could be found in different ways in other interviews, and there might then be a pattern in how they talked about this. For instance, as I read and reread the transcripts, I sometimes noticed that it was the same words informants were repeating, or the same meaning. These patterns also became evident through investigating the themes, because in comparing these, I was also comparing their ‘building blocks’. Since the themes were discursively created in informants’ accounts, I could then investigate how, and whether, certain building blocks were used across the interviews (in investigating what the themes were built of and looked like across). This meant that I could draw on the interpretative repertoire analysis of the individual interviews and elaborate on these across, as well as identify tendencies that showed themselves across, and then go back to the individual interviews for nuances. Thus, in the across analysis, there could be connections/patterns between the themes and the interpretative repertoires. One repertoire might transcend different themes, while at the same time nuances in or between themes might be related to different interpretative repertoires being at work (at the same time).

7.2.2.4.2. Themes and Interpretative Repertoires across Managers, Newcomers
In the first parts of the across analysis, I focused first on managers and then on newcomers across. In order to identify themes and interpretative repertoires across each group, I carried out the same steps.
for both, one group at a time, starting with the managers. In working with the themes and interpretative repertoires across managers, and then across newcomers, I first compared the category labels and themes noted for each informant in the group (managers or newcomers). I noted themes across in a table (as exemplified in 7.2.2.4.1.), including a name, description, and which managers or newcomers shared the theme (and whether for these it was present as a theme in itself or as a category). I did this by collecting the two tables (the one with category labels and the one with thematic clusters) for all the managers and all the newcomers in a document, and then examining these across, starting with themes, then category labels (e.g. taking a theme listed for C2/M1 and then going through the tables for the other managers to look for similarities).

Afterwards, in working with the themes across and identifying interpretative repertoires across, I had three steps. In the first, I investigated whether an individual repertoire was similar to other individual repertoires, or whether traces of it could be found in the themes or category labels for the other managers or newcomers. This related both to links between individual repertoires and themes across, and links (in ways of talking) between the themes across. Thus, in investigating similarities and differences, comparing and contrasting, I compared the individual interpretative repertoires, and compared these with themes across, and then grouped similar individual interpretative repertoires with related themes across.

In the next step, I considered themes across that were not discussed previously, and thought about whether these were related or (in relation to the next step) might anyway be part of a repertoire across.

Finally, based on the above, I noted what seemed to be an interpretative repertoire across the managers or newcomers (which could include repertoires that were not repertoires in individual interviews but were salient across). In other words, based on what I had previously identified, could I identify anything which constituted a building block or organising idea across the managers or newcomers. For example, across newcomers, because of similar variations and paradoxes or elements being contrasted, a repertoire related to ‘balance’ was identified.

The parameters on which to compare were both emic (the themes and repertoires) and related to my research questions. Specifically, at the end of the managers across analysis, I related the manager themes and repertoires across to sub-question 2 and the overall empirical research question. At the end of the newcomers across analysis, I then related the newcomer themes and repertoires across to sub-question 1 and the overall empirical research question.
7.2.2.4.3. Themes and Interpretative Repertoires across Managers and Newcomers
Having identified themes and repertoires across managers and across newcomers, I then compared across the two ‘groups’ of actors. I started by comparing the two tables created previously with themes for managers across and newcomers across. I developed a new table, noting theme name, description, and which managers and newcomers mentioned (aspects of) it (and whether it was present as a theme in itself or as a category label for these). First, I compared the themes listed for one group with those listed for the other. I did not consider all individual category labels across, but if something was listed as a theme either across newcomers or across managers, but not both, I checked the category label tables for the other group, to see whether the theme could be identified for this group to some extent.

I then drew on this in identifying repertoires across by comparing the repertoires identified across newcomers with those for managers. Based on the themes, I could also include repertoires that, although not a repertoire across managers or newcomers separately, were salient across the two groups together. In doing this, I would also consider the sub-conclusions from the individual case start-ups, where I had already related the managers and newcomers in the individual case start-ups. This also helped in relation to context sensitivity.

Thus, in this part of the analysis, it was interesting to see how managers and newcomers talked about the same topics (socialisation and knowledge), and how their ways of talking were similar or different. This is also why I did not stop at a thematic analysis, but used a thematic aspect in my discursive approach, because when they were talking about something that was basically the same topic, I could then compare how they did this (how the newcomers accounted for something and how managers accounted for it, which repertoires they were drawing on), i.e. by regarding interpretative repertoires as a kind of discursive themes, I was then investigating themes in the way they talked about entry, socialisation and knowledge related to this (how they used language to construct and account for it).

I was aware of the risk of a priori establishing a dichotomy between managers and newcomers (who are, in some sense, also co-workers), but I was investigating how they talk about the phenomena of knowledge and OS. In talking about these topics, they might draw on different repertoires. But, I also acknowledge that one person can speak from different positions (both newcomers and managers), and that maybe they draw on the same repertoires.

7.2.2.4.4. Thematic Clusters and Interpretative Repertoires across Case Start-Ups
Finally, as regards themes and repertoires across the case start-ups, I first drew up tables for the individual case start-ups in order to get an overview of each that I could then relate to the other case
start-ups, and which I needed in order to write about the themes and repertoires across case start-ups. I used much the same approach for these tables as for those across managers and across newcomers. I related the themes identified for the different informants in a start-up to each other and to the category labels. However, I did not go to the level where I was relating the category labels of informants to each other. This step is more about comparing across the case start-ups at an overall theme and interpretative repertoire level, taking into consideration contextual/situational aspects of the start-ups. Thus, it was at a theme level that I checked whether a theme (or traces of it) for one informant could also be identified as a theme for other informants in the same start-up, i.e. whether themes identified at an individual level could also be said to be a theme across the start-up. Here, I also went back to the sub-conclusions for each start-up that I wrote when I had analysed all the interviews with informants in a case start-up (i.e. based on the analysis of individual themes and interpretative repertoires).

I then used the tables with themes across an individual case start-up to refine themes across all the start-ups, noting theme name, description, and the start-ups where it was found. For this step, I also used the other parts of the analysis and the sub-conclusions previously written for each case start-up. I drew on these in relation to contextual and situational nuances, as the purpose of this step was to compare across the start-ups with consideration for variations in contextual and situational characteristics. This helped me answer my research questions in a nuanced way by considering contextual aspects in more detail. Thus, even though some themes and repertoires can be recognised across managers and newcomers, in this step I could nuance contextual differences that might be important in relation to understanding OS and OKC in start-ups, and be related to what the themes look like and how the repertoires were drawn on in a case start-up. In other words, considering also the characteristics of the case start-ups (what they share and where they differ), what do they then have in common as regards themes and interpretative repertoires relating to OS and OKC?

7.3. Methods Summary and Reflections on the Quality of the Research
In this chapter, I have presented my methods for constructing and analysing the empirical material. I started with a model (Figure 1, reproduced here as Figure 4) giving an overview of the different elements and steps of the process. I then outlined the various elements, including how I have gone about them, how they relate to each other, and how they help me answer my research questions. Before presenting the analysis and findings in the coming chapters, I end this chapter with reflections on quality aspects related to my use of methods and the research.
As regards considerations about the quality of my research, here I would especially like to stress the notion of transparency: “[…] i.e., making the path to conclusions clear to readers […]” (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006, in Brodsky, Buckingham, Scheibler, & Mannarini, 2016, p. 18). I regard this criterion as being related to reflexivity and to my social constructivist position (both addressed in chapter 2). That is, I see it as a criterion that is important to show reflexivity in relation to my view of the world, because viewing social reality as a social construction, I have to be transparent about my choices, and as a social constructivist I should acknowledge the interactionism associated with this kind of research. Being reflexive might therefore also help me be transparent, and vice versa.

Transparency is not the only criterion that is applicable; indeed, transparency is intimately related to other criteria by virtue of the level of detail needed to ensure it. On the one hand, a high level of detail can help the researcher become transparent, but, on the other hand, in order to ensure transparency a high level of detail is required. My point is that it is not just the traditional quantitatively originated criteria of reliability and validity that make for credible research. Criteria derived specifically for qualitative and constructivist research (e.g. Lincoln & Guba’s [1985] trustworthiness criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as an early example) add something extra, since the credibility of qualitative research does not just concern findings, but also how the research is presented. This differs from reliability and validity, with their traditional focus on ‘stability of findings’ and ‘truthfulness of findings’ (Altheide & Johnson, 1994, in Silverman, 2014, p. 83) respectively. Thus, credible qualitative research necessitates reflexivity on both findings and on how the research is presented, and credibility is not just shown by applying a number of criteria.

Transparency is connected to what some authors call an ‘audit trail’ (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this dissertation, it is again related to reflexivity. Thus, there are three ‘criteria’ that I regard as relevant in the overall context of this research, namely striving for transparency, reflexivity and an audit trail, relating not just to the analysis, but the project work and writing up in general.
As mentioned, I have written notes throughout the process. I have used these to remind myself of things to remember for the analysis, describing methods and various other reflections (including for this section). For the empirical work, I continuously organised the notes under headings in analysis documents. In terms of a work (audit) trail, I can use draft and note documents to follow developments in the documents and analysis. I had a note/analysis document containing reflections on the interviews (primarily content) written during interviewing, transcribing and coding, and when I went to the next steps (e.g. refining themes individually, etc.) a new document based on the old was created to continue working in (so I still had the original document with notes).

In the following, I focus on considerations regarding constructing and analysing the empirical material, and in this way further address aspects related to transparency, reflexivity and audit trails.

7.3.1. Considerations on Constructing Empirical Material
As regards interviews, Söderberg (2006) emphasises remembering “[…] to draw special attention to, and reflect on, the quality of the social inter-action between narrator and audience.” (p. 401). This relates to how, in interview research (especially considering the techniques employed here), even though the overall interview guide is the same, the interviews can have a different character, e.g. relating to the local situation and rapport. For a social constructivist, an interview is co-constructed, and not a case of the researcher controlling everything. You might have a general outline of what to ask, but you cannot control every aspect of the process of generating empirical material. One example in the present research that is not necessarily consequential, but something that should be mentioned, is gender, since all but one of the informants are male, and I am a female researcher.

One of the things I had considered beforehand, and that cropped up in conversations about my research, was the stereotype that software developers are not the most talkative or social of people and may even be shy. Although I did experience a general willingness to participate, I can see from my field notes that a few of the interviews were more difficult. For example, newcomer 1 in Case 2 was more willing to talk about his experiences than newcomer 1 in Case 1 (pilot). I also noted that this pilot interview sometimes felt more like a traditional semi-structured interview (even though it was supposed to be a narrative interview), in that it was difficult to get the informant to say anything about specific episodes or about general topics in more specific language. For instance, the informant (who was interviewed in English) often used the general/depersonified ‘you’, rather than ‘I’ or ‘me’.

Although I am used to semi-structured interviewing, narrative interviews require a somewhat different technique. Despite various recommendations on narrative interviewing in the literature, it
was important for me to try it, so part of the reason for conducting pilot interviews was to get used to the technique. For instance, I was aware of allowing longer pauses, and encouraging informants nonverbally to say more (e.g. nodding). I also thought about sitting in a way which showed that I was listening.

Another aspect concerning the quality of the interviews is that there was room for the informants to reflect, and also to be empowered. This is evident in the instances where they disagree or only partly agree (e.g. by saying 'yes, but …'), or reframe questions to issues they present as more important or relevant. In section 7.2.2.3., I noted that Widdicombe (1993) mentions that informants draw on available repertoires, i.e. they do not just rely on linguistic resources offered by the interviewer, but also on pre-existing resources that they find meaningful. In my research, for example, some of the informants do not use ‘my’ words, or they contest how a word is used. For instance, the words ‘process’ and ‘procedure’ sometimes meant something more specific for the informants. This is also evident when people answer or say something using other terms than the ones I use. As regards terms related to OS and onboarding, in the theoretical chapters, I used the term OS, but in the interviews (and then in the analysis) both the informants and I often used the term onboarding, because, as indicated in the OS literature review, this is more of a practitioner term for the entry process, although in the literature the difference is also about more than academic versus practitioner terms.

As regards informants’ reflections, in a field note from the C6/M1 interview, I wrote: “He mentioned that he had been thinking after our initial meeting, that it had got him thinking”. This is similar to a field note from the C6/NC2 interview: “During the first days he had been introduced to the vision, M1 had mentioned in the interview that I did with him that maybe that was something they could be better at (so maybe the fact that I interviewed him, which he said in advance had got him to think, is part of the reason that they then involved it in the way they did)”. I also have an e-mail where M1 mentions that they had set time aside for the introduction. I also noted about C6/M2 that: “He seemed to be thinking about some topics for the first time, i.e. he had not thought about it before, until I asked him about it”. Thus, this relates both to the interview as a chance for the informant to reflect and to the fact that a researcher asking questions constitutes an intervention in their everyday life.

My notes also show that C2/M1 presents a number of reflections, i.e. in the interview, he engages in a reflection and thought process, and is not just passive. For example, he mentions several times that welcoming newcomers has been a learning process for the partners, in that they have had to get used
to actually having employees and having more people around (lines 166-172) and that they produced an employee handbook, which was a learning process for them (lines 264-270).

In a way, there might also be an aspect of impression management, both for managers and newcomers. For example, in one of the individual analyses, I noted that the informant seemed to present some things in a certain way as if to address an expectation that he thought I had, e.g. when talking about a vision, he said that they had not worked a lot with that yet, but that he knew they should.

7.3.2. Considerations on Analysing the Empirical Material
The analytical approach was designed with the research purpose and research questions in mind, and is connected to the other parts of the research design. The analytical approach itself has some implications, also related to the social constructivist perspective. The approach was designed to help me answer both the empirical research question (RQ2) and the two sub-questions, and thus had to take into account both within and across group aspects. I.e., regarding the comparative aspects, the analytical approach developed should facilitate this (e.g. having implications for how the coding was done). As noted, the comparative aspects are also related to the interactionist perspective on OS. A benefit of the multiple steps of the analysis is that it also forces me to reflect continuously. Maaløe (2002) notes that “To understand necessitates willingness to continuously test one’s hitherto formed understanding.” (p. 50, my translation), and this is an intrinsic part of my analysis, e.g. in always considering whether a topic is constructed in the same way by different informants.

Two important aspects related to developing the analytical strategy concern 1) designing an approach that is suited to answering the research questions, while 2) also considering the material, i.e. an approach that fits the material. Even though you know that you are doing interviews, some specific analytical tactics are easier to see as meaningful (or not) when the interviews are done (because until then, you do not know what the material will look like).

Importantly, in analysing it should be remembered that interviews are a setting for construction: “[…] the research interview should be examined analytically as a performative act, through which identities are enacted, actions are justified and recounted events are retrospectively constructed.” (Atkinson & Coffey, 2002, in P. Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. 167). Also related to my social constructivist position and view of language, when using interviews for constructing empirical material, one should remember that: “When it comes to personal narratives, spoken performances, oral testimony and autoethnographies, we should not simply collect them as if they were untrammelled, unmediated representations of social realities.” (P. Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. 170). Furthermore, the role of
the researcher, not just in co-constructing the material, but also in analysing it, should be acknowledged, i.e. the role of the researcher in identifying themes and doing discourse analysis should be recognised (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Taylor & Ussher, 2001):

“‘Discursive themes’ do not just lay about waiting to be discovered, they do not simply emerge, but must be actively sought out. The process, in terms of data collection and analysis, is unavoidably informed by the researchers’ disclosures, comments and choice of questions and by their preconceptions and their personal, theoretical and political orientations.” (Taylor & Ussher, 2001, p. 310).

For example, the informants may take into account cues from the researcher, and adopt or discard certain frames. In coding, I needed to make choices about what I labelled e.g. categories, and consider whether the words were their words or mine. In coding cycle 2 step 1, for example, I tried to ensure that names of category labels were close to informants’ word use, but also used my own words to help create overview. The labels should describe what informants were talking about, while also making their own words clear in this. The category labels provide an overview of topics that emerged in the accounts, as well as group together segments of talk related to the specific topics that I asked about.

Specifically regarding discourse analysis, Potter and Wetherell (1987) mention four “[…] analytic techniques which can be used to validate […]” (p. 169): coherence, participants’ orientation, new problems and fruitfulness. Many of these also relate to how the analysis is presented. Even though they do not specifically refer to it as an audit trail, Wetherell and Potter (1988) state that:

“Studies of this kind [discourse analytic] include a representative set of extracts along with detailed interpretations which link the analytic points to specific features of extracts in such a way that the reader is able to assess the success of interpretations and, if necessary, offer alternatives. The overall goal is to openly present the entire reasoning process from data to conclusions.” (p. 183).

Thus, in the analytical chapters in the following, quotes and references to places in the interview transcripts (by line numbers) are used not only to show and exemplify themes and interpretative repertoires, but also to support interpretations and ensure transparency.
8. Introduction to Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents the structure and relationship between the chapters (9-14) dealing with the analysis and findings of the empirical work. In qualitative studies, it can be difficult (and not altogether meaningful) to clearly divide the analysis section from the findings section, in part because of the level of complexity and nuances present. In the following chapters, I flesh out the analytical work, ending each chapter with summing up, noting the interpretative repertoires in that chapter, and identifying important thematic clusters (i.e. something that is not a ‘lexicon’ or pattern in how they speak, but where the pattern lies in it being something they speak about).

I have previously labelled my analysis a ‘matrix’ discourse analysis. This is because I carry out different analyses, and then contrast and compare them by means of a cross-analysis in order to answer both the two sub-questions and my overall empirical research question (RQ2). The progression from chapter to chapter corresponds to the overall sequence of my analytical work, which was itself designed with the end-goal of the cross-analyses in mind, relating to answering sub-question 1, sub-question 2 and research question 2.

The multiple parts of the analysis are in line with my interactionist orientation, since I consider both managers and newcomers, first individually, in relation to the sub-questions focused on the two sets of agents, and then together, in order to answer the overall empirical research question 2.

The chapters are structured and interconnected as follows: Chapter 9 presents an individual analysis of a manager and newcomer interview respectively as exemplars. The analyses of individual interviews provide the basis for the cross-analyses in the following chapters. In chapter 9, I also give an example of a case start-up sub-conclusion. Chapters 10-13 are all cross-analyses. The work can be thought of as one overall analysis with a set of sub-analyses, which together answer the overall empirical RQ2, and along the way answer the two empirical sub-questions. In chapter 10, I discuss the manager interviews as a whole, and then comment on the findings related to sub-question 2. In chapter 11, I focus on the newcomers, and end that chapter with reference to sub-question 1. I then combine the manager and newcomer perspectives in chapter 12, answering RQ2. In chapter 13, I change the angle slightly, focusing on the case start-ups and the contextual differences between them, including how they relate to the repertoires in the previous analyses. This adds contextual nuancing to answering RQ2, and also relates to the sub-questions. Finally, in chapter 14, I sum up the full analysis.
The flowchart in Figure 5 visualises the progression through the analysis chapters, indicating the focus of the individual chapters, how they contribute to answering the overall empirical RQ2 and the two sub-questions, and showing how they build on each other. As such, the analysis consists of multiple analyses which individually contribute to answering sub-question 1 and 2 respectively, and build on each other to answer RQ2.

Figure 5: Focus of Analysis Chapters and Chapter Progression

- **Chapter 9**
  - Exemplification of individual manager and newcomer analyses. The individual analyses lay the groundwork for the across analyses in the following chapters
  - Exemplification of sub-conclusion for individual analyses related to one case start-up

- **Chapter 10**
  - Managers focus
    - Cross-analysis of thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires
    - Answers sub-question 2 and contributes to answering RQ2

- **Chapter 11**
  - Newcomers focus
    - Cross-analysis of thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires
    - Answers sub-question 1 and contributes to answering RQ2

- **Chapter 12**
  - Newcomers and managers focus
    - Cross-analysis of thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires
    - Answers RQ2

- **Chapter 13**
  - Focus on contextual differences between case start-ups in relation to themes and interpretative repertoires
    - Contributes contextual nuancing to answering RQ2 and sub-question 1 and 2

- **Chapter 14**
  - Sum-up of the different analyses and overall summary of the analyses chapters
9. Analyses of Individual Interviews and Case Start-Up Sub-Conclusions:
Exemplifications

In this chapter, I use the analyses of the interview with the manager in Case 2 and newcomer 1 in the same start-up to exemplify the analyses of the individual interviews. The remaining analyses of individual informant interviews can be found in appendix 7. This work provides the foundation for, and is part of, all of the following analyses. Due to limitations of space, I only present one individual manager analysis (section 9.1.) and one individual newcomer analysis (section 9.2.) as examples. As noted in methods section 7.2.2.3.2., I wrote a sub-conclusion for each case start-up when I had worked with all the individual interviews relating to it. In section 9.3., I present the sub-conclusion for Case 2. The sub-conclusions for the other start-ups (Case 3, 4, 5 and 6) can also be found in appendix 7. The chapter ends with a section (9.4.) marking the transition from individual to cross-case analyses.

I illustrate the work with the individual interviews with examples from Case 2, since the thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires in these emerged as very distinct and explicit, as I analysed the interviews. I thus use these as examples because of their clarity. The analytical procedure for the individual interviews was described in the methods chapter. For each of the examples, I first present the thematic cluster tables developed, and then go on to describe these in more detail, together with the interpretative repertoires. I end by summing up important aspects of the interview in relation to my research questions, specifically rounding-off the analysis in relation to my empirical research question (RQ2) and the sub-questions, addressing managers and newcomers respectively.

9.1. Exemplification of Individual Manager Analysis: Case 2 Manager

Table 7: Thematic Clusters for C2/M1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category labels (primary)</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starting by building an overview</td>
<td>‘Starting out …’</td>
<td>The benefits of letting newcomers understand the system by giving them the opportunity to build their understanding ‘from the bottom’, and letting them get through/go through everything. This allows them to get an overview and quickly move to specific tasks. If they have any questions, the interns can also discuss with each other and get (build) a deeper understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Building up …’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(‘Working together (interns)’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Together (Together and ‘togetherness’)  
‘Starting out …’ 
‘Working together (interns)’  
(‘Unity/feeling of being in it together …’)

This theme encompasses various references to ‘doing something together’: the managers doing things together, the newcomers doing things together, and everybody in the organisation doing things together, professionally and socially, although the two are related. This also involves notions of helping each other and bonding, and is reminiscent of creating a collective, a ‘we’/‘us’, a shared feeling of being part of the organisation.

Two overall thematic clusters were identified in the C2/M1 interview, which are labelled ‘Starting by building an overview’ and ‘Together’. In the following, I discuss these and identify a ‘building’ repertoire, since there is a recurrence of meaning shaped by the informant’s drawing on and repeating specific terms (his ‘building blocks’) (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 172), related to ‘building’.

The thematic cluster ‘Starting by building an overview’ is formed by terms such as ‘building’ and phrases with similar meaning. The table with category labels (see appendix 7) shows that the lines noted under the ‘Building up …’ label are also listed under ‘Starting out …’, which suggests that the informant speaks in a way that connects the two. The informant’s use of the word ‘build’ is interesting, because it is an integral part of software lingo/jargon, software being something you ‘build’. As noted in the theme description, the informant talks about the benefits of letting the newcomers understand the system they will be working on by giving them the opportunity to build their understanding ‘from the bottom’, and letting them go through everything, which enables them to acquire an overview, and move more quickly into specific tasks (as opposed to just being ‘thrown’ into coding for a system they are not familiar with). And when they have questions, the interns can discuss things with each other and get (build) a deeper understanding. This is exemplified in the following:

“[…] then they should solve some kind of task [me: Yes] because then they got an um then they got an idea about all the technologies they should use, roughly, and they got through all

---

9 I also considered a ‘Manager’ thematic cluster, but decided against this as a theme in itself, since the aspects that would be involved primarily occur when the informant is accounting for aspects related to the other two thematic clusters.  
10 I presented my coding tree logic in methods section 7.2.1.2.2.2., where I used the ‘Starting by building an overview’ cluster here to exemplify the logic.
things because then they could begin to be productive quite fast [me: Yes] after that [me: Okay] so they weren’t just thrown into a giant system, uh then they could build it up from the bottom” (C2/M1, lines 105-114, my translation).

“And our uh that which they should work with was a finished system, uh that we had done, and it can be a little tough if one is newly educated, always it can be a little tough to be thrown into ‘yes well write some code that can fit in here’, so they were allowed to build all of it up from the bottom and then got an overview over it” (C2/M1, lines 118-121, my translation).

The approach in the company is related to the managers’ own background and experiences (and the informant also uses this to explain why there is a difference between welcoming programmer interns and marketing interns):

“[…] it is very very easy for us to get programmers onboard, uh it is immensely difficult to find programmers [me: Mmh] but but it is easy to get them onboard in the company because we know fairly well we know we can quite quickly find out what they can do, and we know exactly what they should do.” (C2/M1, lines 52-56, my translation).

“[…] while with the programmers we have often sent them some guides and some . uh courses online that they can just quickly read through and they can take a look at ‘what are the technologies that I am going to work with’, and we know quite specifically what that is” (C2/M1, lines 63-65, my translation).

In other words, they know how to help the programmer interns (lines 370-371) because they share the same background, and because they know which technologies they are going to use, it is also easier to communicate and explain this to them.

The thematic cluster ‘Together’ is formed by phrases similar to ‘doing something together’ and sentences with similar meaning. The manager’s account of how they welcome newcomers and his opinions about it are permeated by phrases like ‘helping each other’, ‘being close/tight-knit’, to ‘bond’, to ‘connect’, and ‘fit together’. As noted in the theme description, this theme encompasses various references to ‘doing something together’, i.e. managers doing things together, newcomers doing things together, and everybody in the organisation doing things together, both professionally and socially (the notions of helping each other with tasks and bonding), although the two are related. This is reminiscent of creating a collective, a ‘we’/’us’, a shared feeling of being part of the
organisation, a unity, and is also related to how the informant characterises the company as a small company (lines 137 and 230) and describes ‘bonding’ over lunch. This is exemplified in the following quotes:

“Yes well we are not that many so we need to fit together a little all of us, um. so and because we are not that many there are not a lot of different types of people. Uh and there we have been lucky so far we have fit together quite well so we have had a quite good cohesion from day one.” (C2/M1, lines 137-140, my translation).

“[…] it is also a lot about that you fit together” (C2/M1, line 195, my translation).

About them eating lunch together: “[…] that uh, we have enjoyed that a lot. It is a very very easy way to bond a little [me: Mmh], uh so we do that every day” (C2/M1, lines 234-237, my translation).

“Well technologically there are some things that are uh difficult. That that [me: Mmh] [Indistinct]. But with the start task that they had and that they work very closely together the interns we have then had then they have had it all at once and then it hasn’t really. There is not really that much they need to know about the organisation [me: No] because it is very small, so that you’ll quite quickly figure out” (C2/M1, lines 224-230, my translation).

The two thematic clusters (‘Starting by building an overview’ and ‘Together’) are topically connected, since the set of terms the informant draws on for each are linked. Thus, there are shared aspects across the themes, an indication of which can be found in the thematic cluster table, where the category label ‘Starting out …’ is part of the build of both clusters.

This sharedness is exemplified by the way in which the manager talks about ‘starting’, ‘building’, and the newcomers doing this together. The informant stresses that the newcomers help each other during their settling in, and that they can actually learn more in this way. For instance, based on what the manager said about the newcomers working together, I asked him about wanting the newcomers to discuss among themselves, and he said that:

“[…] one gets a lot from that [me: Yes]. Um and that we also just know, that then they can ping it off a little on each other, try to figure out what ‘how was it, how do you understand this’, and that we think they get a lot from” (C2/M1, lines 286-289, my translation).
“Sometimes not just get the answer either, if it is something. uh I wouldn’t say banal but if it is something about a technology, then it can often be, if one has we have been through it we can say ‘well you do this and this and this’ [low – me: mh]. If they sit and talk about ‘aah well one could do this and this’ then one will get a little deeper into ‘why is it they do like that’ [low – me: mh], and then they get to the solution themselves and that is always good” (C2/M1, lines 294-299, my translation).

In the following quotes, the manager emphasises that it is important that the newcomers can participate as knowledgeable in their own right, and in part that this is expected of them:

“Mmm that you should not be afraid of uh speaking up. That is we work a lot with that if you know something then, or if you have an opinion, you can see ‘that is going to go wrong in two weeks, if we do it like this’, then you should say it, and then you should we . and you are also allowed to say that something is a bad idea uh to everyone [me: So] just of course in a decent way […] (C2/M1, lines 199-204, my translation).

“You should take initiative [me: Mmh] um, you should show. ‘I can do this’, umm, and that we have luckily had some that have been really good at, uh all of them [me: Mmh] um yes you just need to show that you want it, that you would like to, and you should also show that you want to be a part of the company. And uh for lunch [me: Yes] sit and talk a little, that is like it. So if we can if we can connect a bit together in the company then everything is going to work out” (C2/M1, lines 181-190, my translation).

In the final lines of the second quote, the manager mentions that it is important to show that you want to be there, and that this is shown not only through engaging in terms of professional topics, but also in a general sense of ‘connecting’ with colleagues.

Thus, the entry process is described as a collaborative effort in multiple ways as regards getting the newcomers onboard and getting them to contribute (by helping each other and making suggestions). This takes us back to the comment about the word ‘building’ in relation to software jargon. This is an important part of the informant’s account of welcoming newcomers, and in this respect it can be said that the manager draws on a ‘building repertoire’. According to Wetherell and Potter (1988):

“Any particular repertoire is constituted out of a restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion. Commonly these terms are derived from one or more key
metaphors and the presence of a repertoire will often be signalled by certain tropes or figures of speech.” (p. 172).

Thus, when the manager talks of ‘building’ in a metaphorical sense, he is drawing on the specific repertoire that the metaphor is related to. The newcomers ‘build’ an overview and understanding (and knowing), and they do this by working on a task, and discussing/talking to each other about it, i.e. they do not just do it alone, but together. However, his use of the word ‘build’ is at a task/skills level (not in relation to the organisation as such), about building an understanding of tasks and technologies. In the case of relations between the people, the informant speaks of ‘bonding’ and ‘connecting’. However, the two are linked through an orientation towards doing something together/working together, both when it comes to tasks and social aspects.

To sum up, when this manager talks about welcoming newcomers, there is a technology and task focus (how they go about introducing newcomers to these aspects): the manager draws on notions of and related to ‘building’ (overview and understanding), but also highlights social aspects (RQ2). As regards the part of the manager sub-question which focuses on the role of OKC, for this manager, OKC can be seen as related to ‘building’ an understanding so that the newcomers can participate fully and quickly, and they partly do this by talking to others (interns). As regards the part of the sub-question that focuses on ways of doing knowledge communication with newcomers, the informant highlights face-to-face communication (especially with other newcomers), that the task the newcomers are given is a medium through which they can learn and understand the system, that they are sent guidelines, and that they have an employee handbook for specific pieces of (introductory/basic) information.

9.2. Exemplification of Individual Newcomer Analysis: Case 2 Newcomer 1

Table 8: Thematic Clusters for C2/NC1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category labels</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship and tone</td>
<td>‘Tone/ambience …’</td>
<td>Aspects of the ambience at work: Lunch as relaxing, overlap with elements of the Tone label, ambience and relationships at work, feelings about being at work, feelings about getting help and helping others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(‘Thoughts about being able to/asking for help, helping others …’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Lunch/relaxing’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Evaluation and approach - starting, balance (getting the balance right) | ‘Starting (process, exercises, tasks) …’  
|‘Evaluation of process (encounter, starting …)’  
|‘Approach to getting started …’  
| (‘Being ‘stuck’’)  
| (‘Flow’)
| Linking evaluation and approach:  
| Evaluation is positive because entry was in sync with his approach, mentioning learning and positive evaluations in the same sentence multiple times, how he likes to learn and his evaluation of the opportunities for learning during entry.  
| The idea of ‘balance’. Getting the necessary information/learning the necessary things, moving on when ready while at the same time not just sticking with one thing because you are comfortable with it. Development, but balanced (pace).  

Two overall thematic clusters were identified in the C2/NC1 interview (related to the research questions): ‘Relationship and tone’ and ‘Evaluation and approach’.

The thematic cluster ‘Relationship and tone’ covers the newcomer’s comments about lunch as relaxing (lines 103-109), how it overlaps with elements of the ‘Tone’ category label, the ambience and relationships at work (which give a sense of collegiality; see the example from lines 347-350 below), and feelings about being at work.

As an example of ‘familiarity’/good ambience in the workplace, in line 75 the informant mentions ‘knowing the boys in advance’, ‘the boys’ referring to the managers/partners/owners of the company, i.e. his bosses.

Later in the interview, when I asked how he felt about being more settled, he mentioned the informal tone, and colleagues working together and feeling good about each other:

“Well that is nice, it is some of that which makes for that we have an informal tone that we uh can joke around a little for five minutes and then that is that then we work a little again, it makes it that you do not just come in and then it is totally quiet and everybody is just sitting in front of their computer, it creates this collegial teamwork and that you feel good about each other uh” (C2/NC1, lines 347-350, my translation).

Also related to this theme are feelings about getting help and helping others. As regards the ‘tone’ in the start-up and colleagues helping each other, the newcomer says that it has been easy to ask for help.
(lines 76-80), and that it has been good for the newcomers to be together and that they were prepared to help each other (e.g. lines 157-164).

As regards the ‘Evaluation and approach’ thematic cluster, the newcomer’s account is a very positive evaluation, e.g. the start was ‘well planned’ (line 68) and ‘it was a very good way to settle in’ (lines 230-231). These two aspects (evaluation and approach) seem to be linked as a consequence of the evaluation being positive, because it is in sync with the informant’s approach/preferences (the lines listed under the category label ‘evaluation’ are (primarily) positive). The newcomer mentions (aspects related to) learning and positive evaluations (of the process) in the same sentence multiple times, how he likes to learn, and his opportunities for learning during entry. Often, when giving an evaluation, he backs it up with a sentence about his own approach, or he starts talking about his own approach, and then says that his evaluation is positive because the practice was in line with his preferences.

Also related to this thematic cluster is the idea of ‘balance’: getting the necessary information and learning the necessary things, moving on when ready, while at the same time not just sticking with one thing because you are comfortable with it. It is a continuous, but balanced, development (pace). These aspects are exemplified in the following. First, regarding the initial starting task, learning, and reducing the feeling of pressure of time:

“uh so it was just what should I say a pure learning process and it was nice to have the pressure taken off which is that you have some deadline and there is a client who needs it and all of those things that are now coming along the way, it was a really good way to start […]” (C2/NC1, lines 45-48, my translation).

On being told where to find answers and finding answers himself: “Yes it has been really good because when you learn to find the answer to your question yourself then you also know more about how you should do it next time and then you can avoid asking, and you would rather do that, you want to be able to solve your own tasks and then in that way instead of just learning every single task then you learn to learn something new” (C2/NC1, lines 289-293, my translation).

On wanting to understand: “[…] but this thing about having someone that you can pull over and then say ‘this is’, one thing is that I have found the solution but I would like to understand why it is like that, then you have had the chance to get an explanation so you haven’t just had to settle with thinking ‘well it is like that then it is like that’ you could also get the
explanation for why it is like that in reality, that is good for someone like me because I would like I do not just want to be able to do the things because I know they are supposed to be like that I also want to try to understand why it works” (C2/NC1, lines 440-446, my translation).

As mentioned above, the notion of ‘balance’ is also part of the ‘Evaluation and approach’ cluster, and it permeates the informant’s account in relation to learning, motivation and settling in. Specifically, the balance between learning all you need and feeling comfortable about moving on while at the same time not just sticking with what is comfortable, but keeping on challenging yourself:

“So it has been a balance between it needing to be long enough for one to have gotten the hang of what the introduction needed to give but also not too long so you just thought that now you were making thought-up examples […]” (C2/NC1, lines 361-363, my translation).

“[…] uhm and a good thing also to challenge oneself has also been that they have also been very aware of, uh the owners of the company, that we wouldn’t just do a small thing because now we were comfortable with that, then they have given a kind push to make sure that you also got to do something else so you also came all the way around” (C2/NC1, lines 413-416, my translation).

The informant links the above aspects about the starting tasks, balance and learning with building self-confidence, i.e. having the skills and the feeling of being able to do something:

“[…] it was a good way to start out that you did not sit for too long with one task so you felt there was a flow in it, uh and you also get this self-confidence that ‘I can take on a task and solve it’ [me: Mh] ‘and then take on a new task’ so it was a good way to create some self-confidence I think” (C2/NC1, lines 374-378, my translation).

It can be seen from the above that there is a ‘learning repertoire’ in the informant’s account. During the interview, I noticed that the informant often talked about learning, motivation and self-confidence, so towards the end I asked him to elaborate (lines 404-407). The informant describes his experiences with organisational entry as a learning process, with a repertoire of building understanding and getting an overview, aspects of balance, building self-confidence (related to the occupation/tasks), and motivation. This is achieved through the start task/exercise, but especially through also doing actual work on projects and wanting to properly understand the background for something (this is also related to the aspect about the newcomers helping each other).
The newcomer presents a double aspect of learning as part of OS, since it is both about being able to solve a particular task (and feeling confident) and understanding at a deeper level why it should be solved that way (understanding why things are as they are, connections). This is reminiscent of Ryle’s (1949) conception of knowledge as not just ‘know that’ but also ‘know how’, i.e. not just being able to do something, but understanding why it should be solved that way. In this context, it might mean that you will be better equipped to solve potential problems. For instance, the informant mentions becoming more ‘complete’ as a programmer (so here there is also an aspect of occupational socialisation/training), and in his account this is part of how he constructs the idea of what makes a good programmer (or, at least, the idea that he wants to present in the interview). In the quote below, the newcomer again mentions the tasks and exercises that were meant to help the newcomers learn, and that the managers made sure that they would not just learn one part and then stick to that, but instead become more ‘complete’:

“[…] still really well planned in that we had some tasks that were meant for learning to begin with and were not just thrown into a small part because they were very good at making sure that we came all the way around that we became more complete as developers instead of just being introduced to this and then […]” (C2/NC1, lines 68-71, my translation).

To sum up, when this newcomer describes his experience of organisational entry, he is mainly drawing on a repertoire which links learning with aspects such as balance and self-confidence (and motivation). The account is primarily positive, since the newcomer stresses that he has not felt any pressure of time, that questions have been welcomed, and that there has been a good environment for learning (e.g. through discussing with peers such as the other programmer intern). The focus on learning is primarily related to tasks. As regards ‘learning the ropes in the organisation’, we talked about the employee handbook, and he comments that the organisation is flat, with not a lot of hierarchy to make sense of (lines 170-171). The tone and ambience in the organisation also constitutes a thematic cluster, and is highlighted by the newcomer as something that shapes their daily interactions in a positive way, and which has made it easy to ask questions.

9.3. Exemplification of Case Start-Up Sub-Conclusion: Case 2

In Case 2, two overall thematic clusters were identified for each of the informants. For the manager these were labelled ‘Starting by building an overview’ and ‘Together’. For newcomer 1, the themes
were labelled ‘Relationship and tone’ and ‘Evaluation and approach’. For newcomer 2\textsuperscript{11}, the themes were labelled ‘Working together/talking’ and ‘Atmosphere’. Two main aspects are common to the three informants from this case start-up:

- An orientation towards learning (a repertoire of learning) as something that is built up, entails deep understanding, and is helped by having people to discuss with (rather than just reading). This also entails respect for each other’s competencies/skills (both between managers and newcomers, and among newcomers), e.g. the newcomers are invited (as knowledgeable) (but also expected) to be engaged, and can help each other because they appreciate each other’s skills. The ‘building’ characterisation in the manager interview and the ‘learning’ repertoire of NC1 are similar in highlighting the importance of, and preference for, not just wanting superficial answers but a deep understanding, and they also both mention ‘getting through/covering everything’.

- An orientation towards social aspects, inasmuch as the informants note the importance of a good atmosphere, collegial bonding and fitting together socially in the company. Previous acquaintance is also a central topic here: newcomer 2 said that he knew most of the ‘insiders’ in advance, and the manager mentioned that settling in (at least socially) would not be a problem for newcomer 2 because they already knew him. The fact that a lot of the people know each other is mentioned as creating a relaxed and good working environment, and newcomer 2 said that it was easy to settle in because there is a good working environment and it is easy to talk to the others.

9.4. Transition: From Individual Analyses to Cross-Case Analyses

In methods section 7.2.2.4., I described how I proceeded from identifying thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires in the individual interviews and sub-conclusions for the case start-ups to the following analytical steps, which build on both this and each other. Thus, I go from working with the embedded cases (managers and newcomers) at an individual level to working across both the embedded cases (across managers, across newcomers, and across managers and newcomers), and the case start-ups. This work is presented in the following chapters.

\textsuperscript{11} See appendix 7.
10. Thematic Clusters and Interpretative Repertoire across Managers

I described the methods for working with thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires across managers in section 7.2.2.4.2. of the methods chapter. A schematic overview of the thematic clusters across managers can be seen in the table in appendix 9a.

A number of links appear when comparing themes across managers and repertoires for individual managers, since several of the individual repertoires also seem to crop up in other manager interviews as themes or category labels. I start by investigating the individual repertoires identified as being related to themes across managers (sections 10.1. – 10.4.). For instance, in section 10.1., I focus on the repertoires of the three managers in Case 6 that are related to challenges, resources and ‘self-driven’ employees, and how these relate to themes across the managers regarding resources, actively involved employees and opportunities to influence. I identified a discursive connection between ‘influencing’ and ‘uncertainty and challenges for newcomers’, which I comment on as a repertoire across managers in section 10.2. In section 10.5., I then investigate the themes which have not yet been covered, but which are also salient across managers. Finally, in section 10.6., I sum up the repertoire and central themes across the managers.

10.1. Self-Driven/Independent Newcomers, Resource Constraints and Influencing

There is a tendency in the manager accounts to discursively link the importance of newcomers’ ability to be self-driven and work independently with aspects of resource constraints. This is especially clear in Case 6. For C6/M3 it is a repertoire (‘Need for self-driven employees because of lack of resources’), C6/M2 has two repertoires labelled ‘What have we done and what would we like to do’ and ‘Resource constraints and onboarding practices’, and C6/M1 draws on a repertoire labelled ‘Challenges and difficulties’. Specifically, the managers in Case 6 mention the need for newcomers and employees who are self-driven and able to work independently, because they do not have the resources to e.g. constantly supervise them. For instance, C6/M3 says:

“[… ] and we would like to that is we try to recruit for people who have a high degree of independence because when we are not bigger than we are then there is not that is there are not resources to sit and hover around you all the time […]” (lines 172-175, my translation).

C6/M1 mentions that they employ people who can do something the managers cannot, and that newcomers will therefore be involved in ‘problem-crunching’ (lines 262-271), i.e. they have to contribute and learn that problem-solving is a part of their everyday work.
The theme of ‘Small organisation and resources’ is also present in category labels for C2/M1, C3/M1 and C5/M1. On a more general level, this has to do with resource constraints in terms of time, money and people, and the challenges this involves. In relation to this, the managers often compare themselves with larger companies (i.e. larger companies can do more because they have more money). In fact, there seems to be a general tendency for managers to compare themselves with other (often larger) companies, or other start-ups, when recounting something in relation to being a start-up and taking in newcomers. This has the effect of discursively constructing the unique context of each of the start-ups.

However, managers also point out that size and newness, i.e. that the start-ups are small and new, has an upside. This appears in the theme on ‘Opportunity to influence’, where the Case 6 managers mention that newcomers have opportunities to influence the work and choose their approach. For instance, C6/M3 noted that:

“[…] we have had some that uh, when we previously sought sought job adverts that exactly thought it was great to enter a new place because they then had, their starting point was that it was new so they might have more freedom to influence their work procedures and which tools they used and like, so that they could maybe more design their everyday, uh and that I think must be a a strength […] (lines 154-158, my translation).

However, this theme links with the theme on ‘Actively involved (self-driven) newcomers/employees’, since newcomers are frequently expected to contribute. Thus, while the opportunity of influencing is talked of as something positive which also attracts employees, the newness and lack of resources of the start-ups also means that newcomers need to have initiative and are expected to contribute and take ownership. Thus, the newcomers are to be socialised to take ownership (and are expected to do this), and should (sometimes from the outset) show initiative. But the managers also mention that the opportunities to influence are likely to attract people who are motivated by this, and that in this sense there is also an aspect of self-selection (that the newcomers self-select into the specific environment). However, the level at which the newcomers can influence differs: in some start-ups it is more on a task level, while in others they also play a part in relation to goals and other more overall aspects.

Thus, the three themes across managers labelled ‘Small organisation and resources’, ‘Actively involved (self-driven) newcomers/employees’ and ‘Opportunity to influence’ are linked, inasmuch as opportunities, resources (and resource challenges) and the need for self-driven employees are
discursively linked. The tendency to talk about ‘Small organisation and resources’ can be said to be a discursive reproduction of aspects of ‘liability of newness’ (Stinchcombe, 1965) and ‘liability of smallness’ (Aldrich & Auster, 1986) (see also Abatecola, Cafferata, & Poggesi, 2012), since the managers reproduce some of the ideas of the challenges that new and small companies face compared with other companies.

10.2. Influencing and Uncertainty/Challenges Repertoire, and the Social as Important

The theme on ‘Opportunity to influence’ mentioned above is often discursively linked with the theme across managers on ‘Uncertainty/insecurity/challenge connected with newness, for newcomers’. This latter theme has to do with managers mentioning things that might be challenging for the newcomers, and how (often attributed to the newness of the organisations) there is uncertainty that the newcomers need to handle.

When viewed across managers, these stand out as not just individual themes, but as a specific way of talking across the manager accounts, a ‘building block’ and a pattern, and is thus an interpretative repertoire. The pattern is built from a fluctuation/variation between freedom and opportunity to influence as upsides of entering a start-up on the one hand, and challenges such as uncertainty, insecurity and unclarity as downsides on the other, including a combination where freedom can itself be a challenge (as I will show in the C6/M1 quote below). Thus, when the managers mention opportunities and challenges, it stands out as more than ‘content’ of the accounts, as a specific pattern concerned with the benefits and challenges of entering a start-up, i.e. they are each other’s opposites, and the relationship between them is an organising idea.

The link is especially clear in Case 6, where manager 1 has a specific theme on ‘Freedom and insecurity’, and manager 2 and 3 have themes which center on the same (opportunities and challenges). Manager 1 mentioned that giving newcomers freedom also gives them insecurity:

“[…] so they come in and then it is . ‘we are probably roughly going in that direction over there that is your responsibility’, so there is much more what can you say, you would like to the company always sells it job adverts on freedom that is a giant challenge to give a new employee freedom that is not a plus for many people to come in and get freedom, it must also give an immense insecurity as an employee to come in and then . not have specifically defined what is it I am supposed to do” (C6/M1, lines 114-119, my translation).
C3/M1 mentions active involvement, but he does not talk of it as an opportunity or as a challenge, but rather as a condition. His start-up is very new, and they are taking on very experienced newcomers (who might not experience the challenges in the same way as an inexperienced person would) who will work with a specific aspect, but who will also take part in discussing the overall strategy and approach. In other words, active involvement is not an ‘opportunity’ here, but a condition, something they need to do from the very start. On the other hand, he stresses the importance of fit and alignment (see section 10.3.).

The manager in Case 4 draws on a repertoire of ‘Creating safe zones in a challenging environment’, pointing out the importance of secure formal working conditions (such as pay and pension) and that social relationships also create a sense of security. Thus, the themes on ‘Social, social ‘fit’’ and ‘Uncertainty/insecurity/challenge connected with newness, for newcomers’ are also linked, because the social is talked of as a way of dealing with uncertainty and of creating something secure in the face of a challenging environment. For example, throughout the interview, the manager says that the newness and openness of the tasks is likely to be challenging for newcomers, especially those who do not have a lot of previous experience. Thus, these challenges are talked of as a condition in the start-up (as with C3/M1, there is an orientation towards aspects of the newness being a condition).

In general, security/comfort is recurrent across the manager interviews (e.g. in Case 3 and 4), and people aspects are highlighted as something which can give this sense of security, e.g. having experienced and skilled people in the company, as mentioned by C5/M1 (a solid base and experienced people, lines 931-935). C4/M1 also highlights social aspects, such as having good social foundations and knowing each other. Both C2/M1 and C4/M1 highlight cooperation and communication among the newcomers (and between them and others). For instance, C4/M1 says that, when newcomers talk together, it can create an acceptance of not understanding something, because they no longer feel alone in not understanding it (lines 698-705).

The above is one aspect of the ‘Social, social ‘fit’’ theme across managers. This theme has to do with knowing each other, doing things together (socially), bonding, and creating a sense of ‘togetherness’ and team spirit. As such, it has a lot to do with the social working environment, since managers also say that it is important that the newcomers fit in socially (e.g. C2/M1 says that it is important that the people in the company ‘fit together’, and C3/M1 also mentions ‘fit’), and that knowing people in advance makes this easier. As regards the social working environment, there is an orientation towards ‘teams’, building/ensuring a team feeling and group dynamics (especially C4/M1 (‘you are a team’))
and C5/M1 (‘working together on site’, ‘team spirit’)). The social here is sometimes related to professional aspects (i.e. working well together), but it also has a more ‘purely’ social aspect of bonding with one’s colleagues. Overall, the social is oriented to as significant, e.g. C5/M1 mentions that:

“I do not at all think that is I do not at all think that you should belittle how much the social means it means incredibly much I think, really it is also whether people feel alright when they are in a place or not that is of course important […]” (lines 806-808, my translation).

10.3. Alignment

Alignment was identified as an interpretative repertoire and a theme in the C3/M1 interview. Across the managers, traces of ‘alignment’ can also be found in the C5/M1, C6/M2 and C6/M3 interviews. Here, by ‘alignment’ is meant that, in the job interviews (i.e. during recruitment), managers try to ensure that they and the newcomers are ‘aligned’ on various topics. For example, C3/M1 highlights the importance of the recruitment process in ensuring that newcomers are ready:

“So I think that much of that about getting people into a company uh the most important point in time as regards making sure that they are mentally ready and that you like get off to the right start that lies before they start [me: Yes] that is it lies in the recruitment process and what you talk about there […]” (lines 282-285, my translation).

Later, he specifically mentions ‘alignment’ (he speaks in Danish but uses the word ‘alignment’, i.e. it is not translated by me in the following quote) as part of the early encounters:

“[…] I just think that a lot lies in that process with you having recruited people in and like well . there there lies a lot of alignment in that part of [me: Yes] it uh which means that when they then start then I think you like, then you think then the the worst part is over [me: Yes] in that way right, that is then you are going to work it out” (lines 757-761, my translation).

The various topics mentioned in relation to alignment are primarily concerned with ensuring a vision and approach ‘fit’ (e.g. understanding the situation of a start-up) and communicating expectations: managers say that they try to ‘make things clear’ and make the newcomers ‘aware of’ certain aspects in the job interview, e.g. that the newcomer is expected to be able to work independently and be self-driven. As mentioned in section 10.1., these expectations can also be viewed as opportunities by the newcomers, who might deliberately select the start-up environment precisely because they are motivated by them.
10.4. Systems, Platforms, and Notions of ‘Building’

‘Building’ was identified as an interpretative repertoire for C2/M1, since he orients to how the newcomers need to ‘build an understanding’ of the systems they are going to work on. This has some similarity to aspects of C5/M1’s repertoire about ‘IT people as craftsmen and IT work as building houses’, where he mentions that, although the IT people have learned a craft, they still need to understand the specific pattern of what they are going to be working on, because ‘building the house’ (doing IT work) can be done in a number of different ways. For instance, he notes that:

“[…] but evidently there is of course there should of course be a lot of uh what it is called supervision of it [me: Yes] right so that you get the correct things built and uh and there it is maybe also more complicated than building a house because software development you can build in thousands of different ways in reality right” (lines 91-96, my translation).

In this way, both C2/M1 and C5/M1 state that newcomers need to understand the pattern or structure of the IT products they will be working on.

Across the managers, the above is connected with the theme on ‘Tools/systems/platforms, documenting in systems as knowledge bases/repositories’. This theme has two aspects related to newcomers becoming familiar with the systems in the start-up they enter. On the one hand, there is the specific system (software) to be built (i.e. the product(s) the start-up sells to its customers), where they need to understand the pattern and what it is they are building, in order to do the work efficiently. On the other hand, IT work also involves a number of ‘support systems’, e.g. to track revisions that are made throughout development. These technologies are used to handle different aspects of the development work (project management, version control, time monitoring, etc.). Furthermore, most of the companies have intranets, or platforms with the same features as intranets, where they keep e.g. employee handbooks and various guidelines, etc.

Thus, a central part of the onboarding process is to get newcomers ‘on’ the systems. For instance, C5/M1 says that, to get the newcomers started, because newcomers are craftsmen who have already learned the craft and are familiar with the tools, you show them where the tools are (and give them access to them) and then they are ready to start, with some guidance (regarding the pattern of the specific project and where to start).

Across the various interviews, the managers had a tendency to mention different systems, platforms and documents when I asked questions related to knowledge, i.e. they discursively connect
knowledge with logs, documentation and systems. For instance, C5/M1 said that they use Confluence (a kind of collaboration software with wiki functions) for documentation, and that:

“[…] we put everything we can into that when we have time and such like then we try to put it in in that way you build up a knowledge base, and then it is also easier when you get new people in because then you can say ‘just go in and take a look in there then it says how you configure Outlook’ or or you know ‘how you work with Android development with that thing we do’ or what it is […]” (lines 208-212, my translation).

In relation to the above, that newcomers need to build an understanding of both the specific system they are working on and the support systems and (digitally stored) material, the tendency to link knowledge and platforms has two aspects. On the one hand, the tools used to carry out the development work store specific task-related information (e.g. who has made a certain change to the software code). On the other hand, e.g. the intranets are used to store information which has something to do with the overall organisation, or the framework for doing the development projects, i.e. context-related information.

As such, the different systems and platforms can be said to be knowledge scaffolds (Orlikowski, 2006). In particular, the support systems scaffold the knowledge-building newcomers are involved in when they learn about and start working on their specific tasks. Newcomers need to know how to use the support systems, and at the same time these systems store information that they need to do their job. The newcomers also need to understand the software systems developed by the start-ups for their clients. Thus, the newcomers need the systems to be able to carry out different aspects of knowledge work. And the managers explain that knowledge is embedded in the systems. For instance, C6/M3 says that the technology used to track different versions of code (version control) also includes information about who has made changes or was the last person to work on it, so that you know which person to ask about it (lines 449-458).

As regards information stored in support systems and intranets, C6/M3 states that ‘this is of the quality which it has been made to have’ (lines 392-393), while C6/M2 says that there are a lot of things they have not documented, but at some point they need to scale up (because of more employees), and that when they do the newcomers should not need to ask the development managers all the time (lines 125-127, 400-406). He also mentions that they have been thinking about building a ‘knowledge base’ which the newcomers can use (lines 127-129).
Thus, the managers orient to systems and technologies as knowledge repositories. In the way they talk about knowledge and information in relation to the various platforms, there is sometimes an invocation of a kind of to-from or ‘have and have not’ (cf. Kastberg, 2011b) perspective, i.e. newcomers need information, and if shown where it is stored, they can get started. However, this is nuanced by the fact that access to the systems can be said to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for onboarding the newcomers and getting them started on their tasks, because, as noted, the managers also say that: 1) the newcomers need guidance about the patterns (how they should ‘build the house’), where to start, and contextual information; and 2) not all information is stored in the systems (which the newcomers need to get the full picture). As far as task-onboarding is concerned, therefore, the managers themselves acknowledge that, although the systems are important, they are not enough in themselves.

10.5. Other Themes: Experience and Emerging Onboarding Procedures

Two themes across the managers have yet to be touched on: 1) ‘Experienced and/vs. inexperienced newcomers/employees’, and 2) ‘Onboarding procedures as emerging’.

The theme about experienced and inexperienced newcomers has to do with the benefits of having experience for the newcomers (e.g. that they are better able to deal with uncertainty), that having experienced newcomers is of benefit to the organisation, and that experienced and inexperienced newcomers are likely to ask different questions. For instance, C5/M1 says that he onboards very ‘green’ (i.e. new and inexperienced) people, who ask very practical questions, and that if he was onboarding experienced people, they would be more likely to ask questions about strategy, because they are more career-minded. C2/M1 and C4/M1 add that it can be beneficial for newcomers to talk to other newcomers, because they might figure things out together (and in that way learn), and it can help them feel that they are not alone in e.g. being insecure about something.

The theme about emerging onboarding procedures has to do with the fact that, in some of the start-ups, the onboarding procedures are not specified, are still emerging, are trial-and-error, and what the managers will do or would like to do in the future. This is related to both resource constraints and growth. For instance, C6/M2 cites resource constraints as an explanation for what they have done and a challenge for what they would like to do, and he also says that, if they are going to grow, they need to scale up some of their onboarding practices or change them to be better suited to taking on more people. C6/M3 states that they change their onboarding ‘procedure’ on a continuous basis, and that
the hiring of C6/NC1 is only their third formal recruitment, so that it is still new for them (lines 87-88). Indeed, he notes that welcoming newcomers has been a learning process:

“[…] we have actually had interns in multiple rounds so it has been uh it has been a little like a trial and error, and then it has been when we have like discovered that it has not gone very well you have then afterwards thought maybe we should uh think some more about it, so we have actually uh that is it has been asking friends and acquaintances and other start-ups we have had up here that have like done it before us and say ‘hey what were your experiences and what did you then do better?’” (lines 47-51, my translation).

10.6. Summing up: Managers across Start-Ups

In the above analysis of the links between individual manager interpretative repertoires and themes across managers one pattern stands out as an interpretative repertoire across managers, namely the discursive connection between the themes of ‘Opportunity to influence’ and ‘Uncertainty/insecurity/challenge connected with newness, for newcomers’, which has primarily been covered in section 10.2. In addition, themes across managers are oriented towards self-driven/independent newcomers, small organisations and resource constraints, social aspects, alignment, systems and platforms in relation to getting newcomers started, experienced vs. inexperienced newcomers, and emerging and developing onboarding procedures.

With regard to the sub-question concerning managers, the themes about systems and platforms as knowledge repositories, and the theme about alignment, are important. The systems and platforms have an important double presence, inasmuch as newcomers need to learn about the systems and platforms and how they are used in the organisation in order to do their tasks, while at the same time the platforms also contain information which the newcomers need to work on their tasks. However, managers recognise that, for newcomers to get started with their tasks, the systems are necessary but not sufficient, because they need time to build an understanding of the software systems they will be working on (C2/M1), and guidance about which patterns they should follow when they develop the software (C5/M1). When it comes to more overall organisational information and ‘fit’, the managers (especially C3/M1 and C6/M3) emphasise that the job interviews are instrumental in ensuring that they and the newcomers are aligned about the approaches needed for working in a start-up, among other things.
11. Thematic Clusters and Interpretative Repertoires across Newcomers

Following the analyses of the interviews across managers, I then continued with an analysis of the interviews across newcomers (as described in methods section 7.2.2.4.2.). A schematic overview of the thematic clusters across newcomers is shown in the table in appendix 9b.

A comparison of thematic clusters across newcomers and repertoires for individual newcomers shows a number of similarities, e.g. several of the orientations or resources from the individual repertoires are similar to other individual repertoires, or can be found as part of other newcomer interviews as themes or categories. I start by investigating the individual repertoires identified as being related to themes across newcomers (section 11.1.-11.7), and draw attention to identified repertoires across newcomers. I then investigate the theme ‘Future’, which has not been dealt with yet, but which is also salient across newcomers (section 11.8). In section 11.9., I sum up the analysis across newcomers, including repertoires and central themes.

11.1. A ‘Social’ Repertoire from the Newcomer Perspective

All the newcomers mention social aspects. Most introduce the topic themselves, but even in those cases where I asked about it, they still accounted for it as being important. All stress the importance of the tone/ambience in the workplace. C2/NC2 draws on a repertoire about ‘Working environment’ and C4/NC1 on ‘Creating social foundations’. Across the newcomers, the theme ‘Social work environment’ has to do with aspects such as relationships, interacting, chemistry, and fit. As part of this, some of the newcomers also mention the benefits of previous acquaintance, some of them having known either their new manager(s) and/or new colleagues beforehand.

The newcomers talk about getting to know their new colleagues, and building or creating social frameworks in the start-ups. Both C3/NC2 and C4/NC5 use the expression ‘clicking’ with their new colleagues. The newcomers often mention after-work activities (e.g. bowling or going out to dinner) or eating lunch together. They also mention the feeling of sharing something and having something in common. The newcomers realise that they are creating norms and culture together (e.g. C4/NC6, lines 97-101), and that they need to be aware of exactly what it is they are creating, both for their own sake and for the people who will enter later.

In a way, the social is talked of as a kind of ‘security’, but also as something that can be related to uncertainty. For instance, C4/NC2 says that he had a sense of security from already knowing some of his new colleagues (e.g. because he knew they were talented and nice people), but that he
experienced some uncertainty regarding the others, i.e. how things would work out with them (lines 875-879).

On closer inspection, there are two interrelated ways of talking about these social dynamics. On the one hand, the social is talked about in relation to tasks and in general being able to work together in the organisation, i.e. it is easier to interact with and give feedback to a colleague if you know her/him (C4/NC1 and C4/NC8). Furthermore, it is easier to ask questions when you know your colleagues better:

“[…] I think it’s a problem if you kind of just if you have a question and you keep it in you don’t ask for some sort of reason maybe you don’t know the people or you just, but whenever I get a get a question I just shoot it and I and I ask so I get the information right away, but I can imagine it being a problem in a newer environment in environment when I’m not so familiar with the people around me” (C6/NC2, lines 613-617).

C5/NC1 and C6/NC1 mention ‘opening’ or ‘start’ conversations, i.e. it was good to be able to start talking to new colleagues in a natural way. For instance, C5/NC1 was able to talk about a shared educational background and use the actual development work related to his specific task as a way to get the conversation going, i.e. this was an ‘entry point’. Thus, this is a way for newcomers to become integrated with their new colleagues. At the organisation/task social level, there is also a more overall organisational aspect of social knowledge, where you need (and want) to understand the culture and social dynamics of the company to be able to take part. Thus, the professional social level partly links with another theme across newcomers on ‘working together’, both as regards aspects of ‘integration’ and integration between groups and helping each other. For instance, C4/NC4 mentions making sure to talk to people at lunch who he does not sit next to (at his desk), because it makes it easier to approach them later with work-related questions (lines 710-713).

On the other hand, there is also a more ‘pure’ social tendency in the newcomers’ accounts, in that they say that, in general, it is nice to know your colleagues and be able to talk about something other than work. In other words, social knowledge seems to be not only related to the organisation (norms and culture), but also more specifically to finding out what their new colleagues are like ‘as persons’ (C4/NC1, lines 608-610). C4/NC1 mentions the size and newness of the organisation in relation to ‘bonding’:
“[…] because as we are not more [people] and when it is all new then it is also just important, I think [that] we all agree on, like bonding a little with each other right and figuring out who are the different, um so we have also spent a lot of time on that […] but you also have to like and like yeah set a little time aside to get to know each other right uh […]” (lines 205-211, my translation).

Thus, although work group integration and social integration both involve an aspect of professional integration and general social/collegial integration, the two are interrelated parts of social integration (there is a link between professional and social integration). Thus, across the newcomers, there is a social repertoire made up of two related patterns: the social is more than a theme, because it presents itself as an organising idea about doing things together in the company (‘existing together’ and doing ‘organisation’ together), i.e. you should know each other, both for professional purposes and for general well-being. C4/NC1, for example, mentions both the importance of ‘bonding’ (in a general social/collegial sense) and how she can give feedback more effectively when she knows the colleague better (a social aspect related to tasks).

11.2. Learning and Understanding

NC1 in Case 2 draws on a repertoire of learning, and NC7 in Case 4 draws on a repertoire of accepting that there are things he needs to learn, but that he will deal with it ‘as it comes’. Across the newcomers, there are a number of thematic clusters which have to do with learning and understanding in relation to new tasks and the workplace. These themes are also interrelated.

The theme ‘Learning and knowledge-sharing’ is about learning how to do something, about the organisation and its domain, about the product, and about one’s tasks and the tools needed to solve them (thus, this theme is also related to the theme about ‘Tasks’, which is discussed in the section below). ‘Learning’ is often a part of the newcomers’ accounts about being newcomers and settling in, i.e. they are learning, and thus become knowledgeable. E.g. C2/NC1, C4/NC7 and C5/NC1 mention learning as a part of the process. This theme also concerns the way in which newcomers learn from each other and their colleagues. For instance, in Case 4 several newcomers say both that they are all new and that they are new in relation to the domain. Across the case start-ups, a number of the newcomers also touch on how they build confidence through learning (especially C2/NC1).

Across the newcomers, when asked how they find information or what they do if they are unsure of something, they often say that they just ask a question, and that there is a good supportive environment
in the start-ups for this. However, some of the newcomers also mention that they do not want to disturb their colleagues in their ‘flow’ or their ‘zone’, and do not like asking too many questions (C2/NC1, C5/NC2, C6/NC2).

The theme ‘Getting overview, understanding, holistic, context’ is about getting a more holistic understanding of the start-up, and of the background and reasoning for the decisions made. Several newcomers also mention overview as related to having an understanding of what their colleagues are working on, and that they all to some degree need to understand the others’ work, since they all contribute to the same product (thus, there is a link to the ‘Working together’ theme). For example, in Case 4 there are two profiles, software developers and data scientists, and the newcomers say that one profile needs to understand what the other does, since they work on the same product. Standup meetings (a particular way of doing briefings which is often used in an IT context) are mentioned as one way of getting this overview of what various colleagues are working on. It is also a way of helping each other, since employees get a sense of what problems their colleagues have.

Across the newcomer interviews, the expression that something (e.g. an introduction to something) ‘gave a lot’ recurs often. For instance, C4/NC2 says that:

“[…] there has been some common activities also what is it called uh we had a visit at a […] producer [me: yes mh] that also gave a lot it is really cool to meet the customers directly […]” (lines 142-145, my translation, my emphasis).

However, as also reflected in the above quote, it is not always clear what exactly it ‘gave’ or what this ‘gave’ means or refers to, e.g. whether it is an overview, understanding, or a certain feeling (or several of these at the same time).

C5/NC1 says that, in order to learn about the organisation, he asks elaborating/clarifying questions when there is a good or natural opportunity to do so (e.g. when the conversation touches on a topic he has a question about), or if there is a conversation which he feels is relevant for his work. Here, questions seem to link the contextual with task aspects. For example, when a project is mentioned, he inquires whether it is something they will be starting on soon, or, when a client is named, he tries to find out whether it is an existing or a potential new client.

Wanting to understand background aspects involves asking such questions as ‘why do we do this?’ and ‘why do we do it this way?’ (e.g. the newcomers in Case 2 and Case 6). This can be seen as ‘know why’, which the newcomers relate to ‘know how’, i.e. they have a better chance of knowing
how to do something if they also understand why it should be done in a certain way. For instance, NC1 in Case 2 says that, whenever he has a problem, he does not just want a quick fix, but needs to understand why and how something works in a certain way, i.e. he does not just want to fix something, but wants to understand why a certain solution is the correct one. In relation to the above paragraphs about learning, he also mentions that it is ‘learning to learn’ (lines 292-293) rather than just being told what the solution is. In another example, NC1 in Case 5 says that, although he can see whether a given solution works or not, he still does not have enough experience to evaluate whether it is the best way of solving the problem at hand.

Newcomer 2 in Case 5 mentions that they have a design folder, which has helped him better understand the thinking behind the product and what he should aim for when developing it. He also says that he asks questions about how existing elements have been made. As mentioned above, the newcomers in Case 6 also mention wanting and needing to understand the thinking and reasoning behind the product they are working on.

The two themes above (‘Learning’ and ‘Overview’) are also related to the theme ‘Finding out who to ask’, i.e. finding out who to ask about certain topics (e.g. who has responsibility for what, and who is doing what) and who knows what (e.g. C6/NC2). This, in turn, is related to the theme ‘Externals, freelancers’, i.e. understanding the role of freelancers and people who contribute to the work of the start-up, but who are not physically present, and what it is like to communicate with them and ask them questions. Newcomer 1 in Case 5 talks about interacting with external consultants, and that this was made easier because they had visited the office, i.e. there are challenges related to interacting with people you have not met in person. Newcomer 2 in the same case start-up talks about ‘who is who and who is what’, i.e. who the externals/freelancers are and what their role is, because once he understands their responsibilities he will know who to approach with his questions. Newcomer 1 in Case 3 mentions something similar, i.e. what it would be like to suddenly meet someone new at the office and, when asking who the person is, finding out that it is one of the owners. In other words, it is nice to have an image of ‘who is who’ at an early stage, and preferably through face-to-face meetings.

In general, when it comes to this ‘Overview’, there are elements of sensemaking about the context. This includes making sense of ‘who are the others?’ (e.g. what is their role/function), which is also related to making sense of ‘what is my role in the organising?’ and ‘where do I fit in?’. 
The first two themes mentioned above are also related to the themes ‘Handbooks’ and ‘Documents, systems, platforms and insights’. ‘Handbooks’ covers the fact that employee handbooks are oriented to as having a legitimacy function, since some of the newcomers state that it is good to be able to refer to something that is written down. They also mention being able to look up different topics, and that the handbooks are best suited for basic information, details and rules. They contrast this with its relevance to the stage of maturity and size of the start-ups, and that, as regards some of the information, talking about it is more relevant, i.e. they contrast written information with experiencing something in practice.

For those case start-ups which had an employee handbook (Case 2 and Case 4\textsuperscript{12}), the newcomers say that the topics/information covered was as expected. Newcomer 1 in Case 2 says that an employee handbook can be a good thing, especially when it deals with practical information (but they might also have potential drawbacks). The employee handbooks and similar written material are contrasted with other ‘sources’ or ways of learning, e.g. by the newcomers in Case 2. Although they say that handbooks are good for (basic) information and for ensuring legitimacy (i.e. having a place where rules are written down), newcomer 2 asserts that communicating (face-to-face) is better for actual learning (e.g. tasks), and stresses that he prefers face-to-face communication, even though he acknowledges that, for the organisation, it might be more ‘costly’.

Some of the newcomers in Case 4 state that they have not read, or only skimmed, the employee handbook. In relation to some of the literature about OS and uncertainty, this is interesting, because it means that newcomers do not necessarily use all the available means to reduce or handle uncertainty (or perhaps, from a ‘Uses and gratifications’ perspective [e.g. E. Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973], there is an expectation that the value of the information in the handbook is not equal to the time and effort needed to read it).

A number of the newcomers talk about organisational values in relation to the handbooks in terms of getting answers to such questions as ‘who/how are we?’ in practice, i.e. it makes no sense to just read ‘this is what we are’, they want to experience how the values are lived out/enacted. For instance, newcomer 5 in Case 4 touches on the relationship between espoused and enacted values when he says that writing about values in a handbook is an attempt to formally communicate them, which is less efficient than if it was something they actually did and communicated (lines 795-800). C2/NC2

\textsuperscript{12} In those versions of the handbooks that I have had access to, they both indicate that the handbook is not ‘final’, one being described as work in progress, while the other notes that it is updated on a continuous basis.
mentions an example about interacting with clients in a professional way and that he cannot learn this from an employee handbook, but that he can learn it through discussing his e-mails to clients with the managers. Thus, the newcomers mention that values need to be lived, and that they need to see how they are lived, rather than just reading about them. On a final note, the newcomers themselves are also part of creating and living the values of the organisation.

The theme ‘Documents, systems, platforms and insights’ concerns how the newcomers are introduced to information in the various systems and platforms and that they need to/should understand it in order to use it for their tasks. For instance, NC2 in Case 5 says that, in order to figure out which tasks to work on, he needed to learn how to read the organisation’s project management platform. Some of the newcomers talk about being introduced to the systems and platforms, and about the role of these systems and platforms in introducing them to the organisation and their work tasks, and sometimes it is also contrasted with face-to-face interactions. For instance, C6/NC2 says:

“[…] if I’m curious about something I just ask to to people that I knew were doing some design before, some of the developers were doing that, so I just ask ‘what’s the idea behind this or behind this’ and then it’s it’s much easier that they can explain because sometimes documentation can be a bit confusing and time-consuming as well, so just instead I instead of thirty minutes crawling through the old stuff I just use five and ask them” (lines 331-335).

The relationship between the themes mentioned in this section warrants a note about the relationship between organisational context and work tasks. Sometimes, development work is talked about as technical and, in one sense, decontextualised. For instance, C4/NC6 says that, below the surface, it is all 0’s and 1’s, so it does not really matter which product you are working on (lines 352-354). This is related to the theme about ‘Characteristics of IT, IT work’, which I return to in section 11.6. This contrasts especially with what the newcomers in Case 6 say about wanting and needing to understand reasoning and background in order to develop the product and solve problems, i.e. they need to understand the context to know how to solve their tasks. In this sense, task knowledge becomes embedded in a kind of contextual ‘meta’ knowledge. It might also be thought that, if the tasks are very standardised (and thus less in focus), the newcomers would be more interested in context as something important. However, e.g. newcomer 4-6 in Case 4 say that IT work is also a creative development process.
11.3. Getting the Balance Right Repertoire: Being Introduced and Starting

Both newcomer 1 and 2 in Case 5 draw on ‘Balance’ repertoires, and balance is also a central aspect of the thematic cluster in C2/NC1’s account, labelled ‘Evaluation and approach’. Although there are small differences in the C5/NC1 and 2 ‘Balance’ repertoires, there are also similarities (as shown in the sub-conclusion for Case 5). The ‘Balance’ repertoire across newcomers is related to the theme across newcomers about ‘Getting the balance right’, which in turn is about the length of the introduction vs. starting on actual work tasks. In other words, across the ‘Balance’ repertoire, and related to ‘Getting the balance right’, what has to be balanced involves learning, feeling confident and comfortable, and avoiding information overload. The relationship between being introduced and starting also ties in with themes across the newcomers on ‘Personal approach and preferences’ and ‘Tasks’. Finally, it is also related to the theme ‘Mild/gradual/gliding start’.

The theme about learning mentioned in the section above can be related to the ‘Tasks’ theme, which has to do with the newcomers describing their tasks in relation to getting started. In relation to the topic in this section, the focus is on how newcomers (especially the interns and student developers in Case 2 and 5) talk about their introductory exercises and initial (starting) tasks. This is related to the theme about ‘Personal approach and preferences’, as exemplified through C2/NC1. As mentioned in the individual analysis for C2/NC1, his evaluation seems to be positive, because there is agreement between his personal preferences and the process which he has been through. NC1 in Case 5 also mentions having a specific task as a place to start, an entry point, and being allowed to do this first task and learning at his own pace.

This can be related to knowledge scaffolding, in that it is a way of learning about tasks in the context of a specific company, e.g. for C2/NC1, the exercises were meant as an introduction to the structure of the system he would later be working on. In this way, the exercises and initial tasks become an entry point and a scaffold on which to build their learning and understanding. This is especially the case in Case 2 and 5, because the newcomers here need to learn about the system structure in order to navigate through it in their work. In Case 3 and 4, the newcomers take part in deciding on and building the system architecture13, whereas in Case 2, 5 (to some extent) and 6 (for C6/NC1) a system architecture to support development of the software products already exists, which the newcomers then contribute to.

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13 The repertoire for C3/NC1 is also labelled ‘Balance’, but this has more to do with the balance between taking part in making decisions and needing to understand the background for decisions already made.
The coding of one of the pilot interviews (C1/NC1) and the interview with newcomer 1 in Case 2 uncovered an emerging tendency that opportunities for learning (e.g. exercises, having ample time to learn about the systems) are related to positive evaluations of the entry and starting process. For example C2/NC1 was given some introductory exercise tasks which were close to practice, but without deadlines and with no ‘costs’ if he made a mistake. However, as both C2/NC1 and the newcomers in Case 5 mention, this needs to be balanced against working on actual tasks, because you also want to get started and move forward. C2/NC1 mentions the balance between having ample time to learn and feel confident in a task, while also getting a helpful push from the managers so that you learn more and are challenged. NC1 in Case 5 states that you cannot be introduced to everything, but at some point just need to get thrown into things. NC2 in Case 5 and NC2 in Case 6 mention information overload. C5/NC2 asserts that an introduction should not be: first, information overload (which means that you will forget the information) and then you are ready to get started, but that information should come or be available on an ongoing basis when it is relevant for the task at hand:

“[…] I was happy with being hurled into the task and then when there was something my buddy would come by and say ‘you should do this and this and this and then this and this happens’ [me: Yes] and like that is get it all in get it in when you needed it the the relevant when you needed it instead of getting it all in at one go, uh because if you get it all in in one go well then it just as quickly goes away again […]” (lines 590-596, my translation).

C6/NC2 says that questions will come once you get started, and that an information-heavy introduction will not change this. On the contrary, it may just lead to more questions, since the information overload means that a lot of the information gets forgotten. Thus, for these newcomers (C5/NC1 and 2, C6/NC2), the introduction should cover the basics, and then they should be allowed to get started and get the information as they go along.

The above can be related to knowledge scaffolding in the sense that, instead of communicating all the information up front (which leads to information overload), there is a certain value in telling newcomers who to ask about the specifics. Thus, when specific questions arise, they will know who to go to. Information is not knowledge (at least from a theoretical viewpoint), but there is a value in knowing where to find information that is then context-related and that you use to understand something (e.g. C4/NC8, C2/NC1). In other words, the newcomers need to know where and who the resources are, and then these need to actually be available to them.
As mentioned above, the balance repertoire is related to the theme about ‘Mild/gradual/gliding start’. C3/NC2 is the most extreme example of this theme. He draws on a repertoire of ‘Unproblematic entry’, and says that he experienced his new job more as a smooth transition than a radical change. This is related to the theme in the next section (11.4.) about experience, as it might have something to do with the fact that he has experience and already ‘fits’ in, since in his new place they work in a way that he has been used to from other places. Other newcomers also mention having experienced the process as natural (C4/NC3) and good (e.g. C2/NC1). The description of something as ‘nice and calm’ recurs across the newcomers as something positive (e.g. C4/NC1), and several also describe the process as smooth-flowing (e.g. C4/NC3).

Thus, to sum up, especially across C2/NC1 and the two Case 5 newcomers, there is a balance repertoire concerning the good things about a calm/nice and easy start, where there is also something specific in terms of tasks. Traces of this repertoire can also be found in other newcomer accounts (e.g. C6/NC2), in terms of different aspects of the balance between being introduced and starting on tasks.

11.4. Previous Experience versus no Experience: Differences in Newcomer Characteristics

NC2 in Case 4 draws on an ‘Experience’ repertoire, and NC5 in the same start-up draws on a repertoire of ‘Experience and preferences’. These are related to themes across the newcomers on ‘Experience and vs. not experienced’ and ‘Personal approach and preferences’. ‘Experience’ (vs. inexperience) is a recurrent topic across the newcomer interviews, and the theme about ‘Experience and vs. not experienced’ has to do with the relationship between experienced newcomers and ‘new’ (i.e. inexperienced) newcomers and that between experienced existing employees and newcomers. Thus, there is both an aspect of previous work experience (vs. no previous work experience) in general, and an aspect of experience in the company vs. newcomers. Throughout the interviews, the newcomers talk about their colleagues, the value of buddies, shared (or not shared) backgrounds, and the difference between school and work/internship experience. Finally, there is also the aspect of having a lot of previous experience, but at the same time being new in an organisation.

In relation to the theme above, the interns and student developers (i.e. the ‘inexperienced’) talk positively about exercises, and that they need to become familiar with the system structure, how the code is built, and how it is positive to have a specific task to focus on in the beginning while still learning. For those who describe themselves as experienced, some of them (especially in Case 4) still mention that they are new to the area they will be developing software for. Thus, there seems to be a tendency for the inexperienced to focus a lot on learning task-specific elements (e.g. C2/NC1 focuses...
mostly on learning in relation to tasks, and very little in relation to the organisation), while the more experienced newcomers focus more on domain and contextual elements (although here too, they still need some introduction to and time to research and familiarise themselves with the domain in relation to their tasks). Thus, when the two different groups (inexperienced and experienced) talk about learning and challenges, the inexperienced tend to talk more about systems and software, while the experienced focus more on becoming comfortable with the context and working efficiently together. As a case in point, when I asked NC5 in Case 4 how he had been introduced to his specific tasks, he said that there had been no introduction (lines 386-391), but that he was interested in finding out what the clients want and ensuring that they develop a product which clients want to buy.

As regards interns, although the immediate focus might be on getting them up to speed, initially they might need more information about the organisation and practices just in order to tackle their tasks, i.e. make sense of the task in relation to the broader organisational context.

There also seems to be differences between the questions asked and information sought by the various groups of newcomers, where the more experienced newcomers across the start-ups talk more about strategy, planning, and future/business outlook. This is perhaps because they are already familiar with the different technologies, and that they therefore have more energy and time to interest themselves in the organisational context.

The relationship between experience and inexperience is especially clear in Case 4, where some newcomers have just finished their PhDs while others have 10-15 years of experience in the IT industry. Moreover (as mentioned in the sub-conclusion for Case 4), there is an interesting tendency for experienced newcomers to refer to the inexperienced newcomers as ‘new’ (the ‘new’ ones). C4/NC6, an experienced newcomer, does this even though he started a month later and in this sense is actually newer (in the organisation) than the inexperienced newcomers.

Notwithstanding, across the Case 4 newcomers, they sometimes talk of ‘experience’ in a way which constructs it as something that is taken for granted as being directly relevant. Often, they use the term ‘experience’ in a general way, and it is not clear precisely what they mean about or connect with ‘experience’. For instance, NC5 in Case 4 asserts that he is probably the most experienced in the company (lines 400-401), but not in relation to what (or whether he has simply worked in the IT industry the longest). In other words, often it is not clear whether what they refer to as ‘experience’ means specific experience of roles and tasks or, more generally, how long they have been in the start-up/the IT industry/the labour market. Thus, it is not always clear how much of the experience they
talk about is general or tied to specific contexts (which might or might not be relevant in the new context).

This theme is linked to ‘Personal approach and preferences’, since some of the newcomers who describe themselves as experienced also say that they have formed opinions about how things ought to be, and what works well and not so well. According to Field and Coetzer (2011) “[…] newcomers with previous work experience compare their new work environment with their previous work settings (Louis, 1980; Jones, 1983). Previous work experience enables them to learn quicker and they are more adept at adjusting to their new environment (Cable & Parsons, 2001).” (p. 92). Across the interviews, there is certainly a tendency for the experienced newcomers to compare their new workplace with earlier workplaces. Since they have something to compare with, this might also be why it seems to be recurrent in their sensemaking (for instance, in the section above, I mentioned that C3/NC2 talks of his entry as a smooth transition, and that it might be related to the fact that work practices in the new workplace are similar to those in the previous one). However, as regards adjusting to a new environment, some of the classic literature on ‘breaking in’ notes that ‘unlearning’ what has been learned at a previous workplace (e.g. culture) is an important element. In the typology of socialisation tactics, the extreme version of this is ‘divestiture’: “[…] organizations explicitly intend such tactics to mold newcomers into forms that the organizations wish.” (G. R. Jones, 1986, p. 265; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In other words, managers might be more aware that experienced newcomers come from a different culture. In the present context, experienced newcomers in start-ups might ‘adjust’ to their new environment by bringing practices from their old workplace (as suggested by C4/NC1). But this could make adjusting more difficult, since previous work experience might mean a preference for specific practices (from previous employment). However, a lot of the newcomers also stress that practices need to be meaningful (i.e. something which worked in one previous workplace might not work in the new context).

11.5. Acceptance Repertoire and Thoughts about Entering a Start-Up

In Case 4, a number of the newcomers draw on repertoires which touch on accepting the start-up situation (to some extent). For C4/NC3 this is labelled ‘Naturalness and acceptance’ and for C4/NC4 it is labelled ‘Consequences of and acceptance of ‘newness’”. In working with the sub-conclusion for Case 4, I noted that similarities in ‘acceptance’ could also be found in the interviews with C4/NC5 and C4/NC6. Newcomer 1 in the same start-up draws on a repertoire of ‘Balancing newness and working professionally’. Across the newcomers, this is related to the themes ‘The start-ups, size,
newness, resources/capacity’ and ‘Having given thought to entering a start-up’, and also to ‘Start-up vs. large/other organisation(s)’ and ‘Personal approach and preferences’. Finally, it also links with the themes about ‘Structure and starting’ and ‘Insecurity, uncertainty, challenges and frustrations’ (the latter two are discussed in section 11.7.)

The theme on ‘Having given thought to entering a start-up’ is about acknowledging the start-up situation and accepting it (to some degree). In other words, some of the newcomers acknowledge that the organisation they have entered is new, and that this has various consequences (and consequences for what they can expect). For example, C4/NC3 draws on phrases along the lines of ‘accepting/coming to terms with’ (e.g. lines 430-431) and mentions that one just needs to be patient (e.g. lines 438-439). The ‘newness’ aspect links it to the theme about ‘The start-ups, size, newness, resources/capacity’, as does the aspect of resources.

This is also linked to the theme about ‘Start-up vs. large/other organisation(s)’. Although the newcomers with no previous industry experience mention that they have nothing to compare with (e.g. C4/NC3), there is a general tendency for newcomers to compare with other workplaces when talking about their entry to the start-up, and how they do things there. Thus, the experienced newcomers may form expectations based on what they have been used to at previous workplaces, and the start-ups might therefore need to address these expectations up front.

The theme about ‘Personal approach and preferences’ is also relevant in relation to the topic in this section, since several newcomers say that they prefer working in smaller companies, and were attracted to the start-ups because of their size and newness, i.e. it is exciting to work in a new company, and also easier to have a say, because there is e.g. less bureaucracy. Some of the newcomers in Case 4 mention that the newness means they have to deal with (practical) tasks that would otherwise not have been part of their job, but that they do not mind (all that much) because they accept it as part of working in a new organisation.

Throughout this section, I have mentioned acceptance as being ‘to some extent’, i.e. there also seems to be a limit to what can be accepted and for how long. For instance, C4/NC6 says that, even though they are a start-up, they cannot keep being a ‘muddled place’ (lines 674-676), and C4/NC1 also says that it is okay that things come (get more settled) along the way, as long as the ‘starting arrangement’ does not end up lasting too long (lines 907-916). This is related to the themes about ‘Structure and starting’ and ‘Insecurity, uncertainty, challenges and frustrations’, which I return to in section 11.7. Overall, the newcomers (to some degree) expect the start-up situation, and are ready to accept it, but
there are also limits to what and for how long it can be accepted, since it can be a challenging environment to work in.

11.6. Impacting the Workplace: ‘Influence’ Repertoire

Newcomer 1 in Case 6 draws on two related repertoires of ‘Professionalising and improving the organisation and its product’ and ‘Active involvement and voicing opinions’. Newcomer 2 in the same start-up draws on a repertoire of ‘Responsibility and ownership’. Newcomer 6 in Case 4 draws on a repertoire of ‘Active engagement and making an impact’. Across newcomers, this is related to the theme about ‘Talking, having a say, involvement’, and also has links to the themes about ‘The start-ups, size, newness, resources/capacity’, ‘Personal approach and preferences’ (which is linked to ‘Working together’ and ‘Characteristics of IT, IT work’), and ‘Hierarchy, roles and titles’.

The theme ‘Talking, having a say, involvement’ is about influencing, contributing to, and taking part in ‘building’ the organisation and its products. Thus, when the newcomers talk about impacting, it involves both the product (e.g. making suggestions for improvement, as for C6/NC1) and the organisation and its practices, i.e. the more general context in which they work (e.g. Case 4, where the newcomers convinced the manager that a certain meeting took place too often and at an inconvenient time).

As noted above, a number of the newcomers mention being attracted to working in a start-up because the size and newness means they have more say and influence. They also mention that they prefer to work in smaller companies, e.g. because there is less bureaucracy. Thus, the themes about ‘The start-ups, size, newness, resources/capacity’ and ‘Personal approach and preferences’ are linked here. In other words, the newcomers can influence their workplace because the start-ups are small and new, and it is also something they want to do (e.g. C6/NC1). This combination, and the opportunities it gives, is one reason for being interested in the job in the first place (i.e. an expectation of good opportunities to influence). For instance, in relation to applying for an internship, C5/NC1 compares being an intern in a large financial institution and not having a lot of influence with his expectations of a position in the start-up:

“[…] and then here I think you could actually get to be part of what was pulling really the core system, and I thought that sounded cool so therefore I applied here […]” (lines 38-39, my translation).
Some of the newcomers in Case 4 also mention that, in the job interview, the start-up was ‘sold’ or presented as a place where it was possible to have influence.

‘Influencing’ also has an interface with occupational socialisation, in that there are links between the themes on ‘Personal approach and preferences’, ‘Working together’ and ‘Characteristics of IT, IT work’. For instance, some of the newcomers in Case 4 say that, because of their experience, they have formed preferences for how things should be done (e.g. regarding the relationship between research-and-development and product management), or have preconceptions about what it means to do development work properly. This is, for example, the case for C4/NC8. When they contribute to the start-up, this is also based on what they have learned in the past, and what they have previously experienced as being good or bad practices in the IT industry.

Another example is C5/NC2, who is a student developer and says that the work practices in the school and in the start-up are similar, they fit. This is an example of occupational socialisation, i.e. development work should be done in a specific way. However, in lines 487-490 (and 507-510), he also mentions that they learned about documenting at school, and he contrasts this with how it is done in the start-up, and that he now understands better why they are told at school that documenting is important.

The way in which newcomers influence the start-ups involves an aspect of individualisation when it is needed/required. For instance, NC1 and 2 in Case 4 say that there is a lot of openness, including about goals. In general, especially in Case 4, the newcomers state that they play a part in building and defining the company, since there is a lot of openness and they need to make suggestions and figure out together how to do things. The newcomers might rely on previously developed preferences for doing things, and these preferences can be influenced by occupational socialisation. Thus, individualisation, occupational socialisation and OS are linked. For instance, NC1 in Case 2 relates that he wants to learn to be a proper coder/developer, which seems to be not only what he learns at school, but in particular also what he learns ‘in practice’. At his start-up, he then also goes through a process of OS, where he learns to be a coder/developer in a specific organisation, i.e. how to solve tasks in a specific context.

This relationship between preferences, individualisation and occupational socialisation is especially clear for C6/NC2. He is the first to be hired for a certain role in the start-up, and his repertoire is one of ‘Responsibility and ownership’, e.g. he talks about shaping the role and its boundaries, and in this way defining what his colleagues can expect from someone with this title, and also how he will be
onboarding future newcomers in the same function. Thus, he has strong views about what it should mean to have such a role and about its relationship to other ‘functions’ in the start-up. This is reminiscent of occupational identity (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009), which might also be partly at play when the experienced newcomers in Case 4 talk about ‘the proper way of doing development work/working together’. Thus, this links with the theme on ‘Hierarchy, roles and titles’. Furthermore, some of the newcomers mention that there is a flat hierarchy in the organisation and that this leaves room for participating.

Furthermore, in the case of individualisation, there is some variation regarding strategies and what is ‘individualised’, e.g. whether a newcomer influences (how to do) her/his tasks and/or influences the organisation on a more general level. For instance, what I wrote in the previous section concerning C6/NC2 is very focused mainly on role and tasks. An example of something more general is that the newcomers in Case 4 had a say on when a certain meeting (that takes place regularly) should be held.

To round this section off, newcomer 1 in Case 3 draws on a ‘Balance’ repertoire about participating in decision-making while at the same time needing to understand the context and the decisions which have already been made, i.e. helping to make decisions at the same time as needing to make sense of the context in which they are made. In this section, the focus has been on the ‘influencing’ part. In the next section, I focus on the challenges the newcomers face in relation to entering a start-up, some of which have to do with contributing to something where there is a lot of ‘openness’.

11.7. Chaos and Mess, Insecurity, Challenges and Frustrations

Across the newcomers, there is much talk about challenges and frustrations in relation to entering a start-up. This has led to the themes ‘Insecurity, uncertainty, challenges and frustrations’ and ‘Structure and starting’. These themes are linked to other themes involving what the challenges are related to and/or why they occur: ‘The start-ups, size, newness, resources/capacity’, ‘Tasks’, ‘Hierarchy, roles and titles’ and ‘Learning for managers’. The clearest example of the topic of challenges and frustrations is newcomer 8 in Case 4, who draws on a repertoire of ‘Chaos and unusualness’.

The theme about ‘Insecurity, uncertainty, challenges and frustrations’ has to do with such things as lack of clarity, expectation versus reality, things that need improving and bad decisions, negative surprises, tensions, hectic growth, and figuring out task priorities. As such, these insecurities, challenges and frustrations are related to both the newcomers’ tasks and more overall organisational
elements (e.g. direction, context). Across the newcomers (e.g. C2/NC1, C5/NC2, C6/NC1, C6/NC2), there is a focus on wanting to do the job and create value, and if information is hard to get or is not clear, or if expectations are not clear (e.g. C4/NC8), this can lead to frustration.

This is related to the theme about ‘Structure and starting’, inasmuch as the newcomers say that they need some kind of framework (e.g. procedures and plans) and direction/goal, i.e. a start-up is easier to enter if it has something like a framework or guidelines to hold onto, because otherwise it can be difficult to understand where and how to contribute, and where to start. In this sense, a lack of some kind of structure leads to uncertainty, and can be frustrating.

The relation between this theme and challenges/frustration is very clear in Case 4, where the newcomers mention how they have played a part in finding out what to do and how, and setting goals. This is where challenges and frustrations become linked to the ‘Tasks’ theme, since some of the newcomers (again, especially in Case 4) state that they have needed to do a lot to define their tasks, figure out where to start, and how best to solve the tasks. Another task-related aspect across some of the newcomers (C5/NC2, C6/NC1 and 2) has to do with prioritising tasks. For instance, C5/NC2 says that their initial project management tool has not made it easy to figure out the priorities for the different tasks (lines 265-287).

‘The start-ups, size, newness, resources/capacity’ cluster is linked to challenges and frustrations, since some of these stem from size, newness or resources. For example, C4/NC5 relates that it has been difficult to figure out how much money they have (lines 674-679). ‘Learning for managers’ is also related here, newcomers saying that the managers are also going through a learning process and finding themselves in new situations. For instance, C6/NC1 mentions a meeting with the managers where he voiced some of his frustrations, where he was told that it was also new for them and that he was their ‘guinea pig’.

‘Hierarchy, roles and titles’ is also related to uncertainty and challenges. For instance, C6/NC2 says that the different responsibilities of other people in the organisation were not clear and that one person could have multiple roles. He therefore had to try to make sense of their roles to know who to ask about different questions:

“[…] there are so few people and so many things we need to cover quite often one person is responsible for multiple things [me: Yes], so I just when I had a question about something I just ask someone ‘hey do you know who should I ask about this and this and this?’ and then
I just went, so kinda more the uh the inner kind of functions of each each person [me: Yeah], uh I tried to figure out the [me: Yeah] that out because that wasn’t so clear when I got here […]” (lines 472-481).

There is a tension between, on the one hand, newcomers saying that titles are somewhat ridiculous in a start-up (C3/NC2) and that it might be better to avoid assigning titles in the beginning in order to let roles develop more freely (C4/NC2), and, on the other, the fact that a lack of titles and roles can mean that newcomers are unclear about precisely what other people in the organisation do, or who to go to with specific questions.

However, the role aspect does not just have to do with figuring out what other people do, but also what one’s own role is. NC8 in Case 4 in particular mentions unclear role expectations, and that, after a month in the start-up, he had called a meeting with the manager and asked whether he was doing what he was supposed to be doing. C4/NC8 also mentions that he felt uncomfortable about carrying out some aspects of what he perceived to be his role. He says that, although he had some experience when he came, he is still new in the company and was not able to build the respect and rapport with his colleagues that he would like before carrying out that part of his role where he had to tell people to do things differently. As previously mentioned, C4/NC8 draws on a repertoire of ‘Chaos and unusualness’, and some of the frustration he mentions has to do with role (un)clarity, and also task mastery (i.e. it can be difficult to know whether you have mastered your tasks if you are unclear about role expectations). Whereas NC1-3 and NC4-6 started more or less at the same time (in two groups a month apart), NC8 started alone some time later. Thus, some of the messiness and frustration he experienced might have something to do with that (starting alone and a bit later, and starting as an experienced newcomer). When asked whether he would have liked the start-up to ‘prime’ more for the chaos than they did, he replied that he would have liked to know that the data science part of his job (which he thought would take up most of his time) was smaller than the more basic process and technology side, but he also said that if he had known this, then he might not have accepted the job in the first place (lines 950-982).

As a final note, NC8 in Case 4 observes that, although he describes his experience of entering the start-up as chaotic, there is also a sense of ‘safety’ or ‘security’ in the working conditions, e.g. in terms of pay and pension. Furthermore, in the section on social aspects, I mentioned how good social conditions and relationships are talked about as something that gives a sense of safety in the face of
an otherwise challenging work environment. C3/NC1 also says that the fact that the founders have a good understanding of their respective areas is reassuring.

11.8. Another Thematic Cluster: Future
The future theme arises from the newcomers talking about their own future, the future of the organisation, or both (e.g. their future in the organisation). For instance, a number of the newcomers mention development and growth (in terms of number of employees) of the organisation, and that, if and when it grows, there are things they need to have or (emerging) routines they need to scale up, in order to accommodate more people. Thus, the newcomers not only note ‘what it is like right now’ but also ‘what will it be like later/when we grow?’. For instance, C4/NC4 says that he will be very interested to see which profiles enter later, and ‘where’ they will be placed in the organisation (lines 832-834).

A ‘pay it forward’ sentiment recurs across the newcomers, in that, even though (or perhaps because) they are newcomers themselves, they show concern for future newcomers. For instance, C6/NC2 relates that he will be onboarding future newcomers in the same role, and is aware that he is shaping colleagues’ expectations of people in that role. C4/NC2 mentions helping inexperienced newcomers (e.g. by ensuring there is some kind of framework). C4/NC6 says that, although they are a start-up, they cannot keep being a ‘rodebiks’ (a ‘muddled place’) but have to set a course and then find out whether this is good or bad (lines 674-680). He also relates this to future newcomers feeling that there is more order (i.e. it is not all ad hoc).

The theme is partly linked to the theme about ‘Insecurity, uncertainty, challenges and frustrations’, inasmuch as this involves concerns and thoughts about the future. For instance, according to C3/NC1, when you start in a new venture you do not really know whether they are on to something (lines 378-384), i.e. you run a risk because you do not know whether the start-up’s offering is going to be a success.

11.9. Summing up: Newcomers across Start-Ups
In the sections above, I have analysed the links between individual newcomer interpretative repertoires and themes across the newcomers. The following are identified as interpretative repertoires across the newcomers:

- The importance of the social. This repertoire has two nuances that are interrelated aspects of integration, namely professional social integration and collegial social integration.
- **Balance.** This is about ‘Getting the balance right’ in the relationship between introductions and starting, and how having a specific task to start with is a good thing.

- **Acceptance.** This repertoire involves having (to some degree) expected and accepting that they are entering a start-up, and that it implies a number of conditions.

- **Influencing.** The newcomers talk positively about opportunities to influence the workplace, both in relation to specific tasks and more general organisational elements. It is something which attracts them to start-ups and small companies in the first place, and something they want to do.

In addition to these repertoires, there are also a number of themes across the newcomers that are not clear enough as organising ideas to be interpretative repertoires. For example, I have not included ‘challenges’ as a repertoire in the above. NC8 in Case 4 draws on a repertoire of ‘Unusualness and chaos’ to construct his account of his experiences, but across the newcomers, the aspect of challenges is not a single organised or organising idea, but more a range of elements and conditions that the newcomers orient to as being challenging or frustrating. Thus, across the newcomers, it is still more a theme and topic, than a specific repository. Other themes have to do with learning and understanding, previous experience versus no experience, and future aspects.

As regards the newcomer-focused sub-question, the balance repertoire and the themes related to learning and understanding are especially relevant here. The themes on learning and understanding are about the different things the newcomers need to learn (both task and organisational/contextual elements) and their opportunities for learning, and how they talk about getting an overview of the organisation, e.g. what their various colleagues are working on, and how it helps them understand the broader picture. Learning and understanding is related to the ‘Balance’ repertoire, since the newcomers talk positively of ‘balanced’ entries, which involves both an introduction to task and overall organisational aspects (but not information overload) and a specific task to get them started. This is thus opposed to the ‘Structure and starting’ theme, where newcomers say that it can be challenging and frustrating to start without a framework or guidelines or something specific to hold on to, since it can result in a lack of clarity and lead to insecurity, e.g. about what one is expected to do. Returning to ‘Balance’, the newcomers also talk positively about there needing to be a balance between the length of the introduction and actually starting on tasks, both because they will have questions anyway once they get started and because they are motivated to get started with their tasks and create value.
12. Thematic Clusters and Interpretative Repertoires across Managers and Newcomers

This chapter, which draws on chapters 10 and 11, discusses the thematic clusters across managers and newcomers and identifies interpretative repertoires across the two groups of informants. The procedure for this step was described in section 7.2.2.4.3. in the methods chapter. The table in appendix 9c shows a schematic overview of the thematic clusters across managers and newcomers.

I first discuss the thematic clusters across managers and newcomers that are related to repertoires, presenting four interpretative repertoires across managers and newcomers (sections 12.1. – 12.4.). Then, as previously, I investigate other themes across managers and newcomers not yet covered, but which are also discernible (section 12.5). In section 12.6., I sum up the interpretative repertoires and central themes across managers and newcomers.

12.1. Influencing and Freedom versus Challenges and Insecurity Pattern

‘Opportunities and challenges’ was identified as an interpretative repertoire across managers, while ‘Influencing’ was identified as a repertoire across newcomers. These link to the themes ‘Influencing and contributing’ and ‘Uncertainty/insecurity/challenges for newcomers’ across managers and newcomers. These further relate to other cross themes, especially ‘Learning for managers’, ‘Size, newness and resources’, ‘Start-up vs. other/large organisation(s)’, ‘Titles and roles’ and ‘Emerging onboarding procedures’.

The themes regarding opportunities for contributing and challenges are linked, since both managers and newcomers agree that it can be challenging to start in a start-up, among other things because there are fewer resources available, although, on the other hand, this also makes it easier to contribute and influence, e.g. because there is less bureaucracy. ‘Room to influence’ is also mentioned as something that can be a challenge in itself, e.g. because while newcomers are expected to take on ownership and responsibility (remember here that managers mention expectations related to engagement, taking responsibility, and the ability to work independently) the frameworks for doing so might not exist. This results in an intricate balance, where too much ‘freedom’ might be a cause for ‘uncertainty’.

Despite the various nuances across the interviews, this is a repertoire inasmuch as the occurrences all seem to be constructed in relation to the same paradox or tension. Thus, the relationship between opportunities and challenges is a specific building block that managers and newcomers draw on in accounting for their opinions and experiences. It is a pattern in their accounts, and it unites the two
aspects in a single repertoire. Although it can be labelled using different word-constellations, generally speaking, the one side has to do with opportunities/impacting/influencing/contributing/freedom (to choose tools, approach, etc.) while the other has to do with insecurity/uncertainty/challenges/frustration (e.g. because of chaos, muddle, lack of framework, decisions which have not been made). In other words, there is some variation, but the variations are built on the same ‘template’. They are positions converging on the same building blocks, suggesting a repertoire.

Significantly, the repertoire is not ‘there is something good, there is something bad’ as such, but the way opportunities and challenges go hand in hand in a specific way and also influence each other. For the managers, I identified an interpretative repertoire in the way their themes ‘Opportunities to influence’ and ‘Uncertainty/insecurity/challenge connected with newness, for newcomers’ were explicitly connected discursively. For the newcomers, I identified a repertoire concerning ‘Influencing’ (the opportunity for influencing as something positive). Although for newcomers this is a repertoire in itself, I also identified a broad theme covering ‘Insecurity, uncertainty, challenges and frustrations’ (in relation to such aspects as tasks, direction and context) and a related (but more specific) theme about ‘Structure and starting’. The managers also mention different challenges, but tend specifically to construct freedom as something that is not only, or not always, a good thing. For the newcomers, I also identified an ‘Acceptance’ repertoire. This covers the fact that newcomers (to some extent) accept the negative aspects of the start-ups being new organisations, both because they had expected them and because this is partly what gives them opportunities to influence, i.e. they accept some things because they also have benefits. This repertoire, coupled with the ‘Influencing’ repertoire and aspects of the ‘Insecurity, uncertainty, challenges and frustration’ theme (and the related theme of ‘Structure and starting’), is similar to the building blocks that form the manager repertoire. For instance, C3/NC1 says:

“[…] but it is evident there are more uncertainties but there is of course also, in some way, more to get to say [me: low – ‘yes’], there is then on the other hand also more responsibility […]” (lines 333-335, my translation).

Thus, I identify ‘(Opportunity to) influence and challenges’ as a repertoire across managers and newcomers, because it is a specific pattern built over the same building blocks (especially as regards connecting freedom and insecurity), where the aspects are constructed as going hand in hand and being each other’s conditions.
Across newcomers and managers, therefore, the repertoire is ‘(Opportunity to) influence and challenges’, with the variations previously mentioned, since they both go hand in hand. In other words, it is not necessarily all challenges, but specifically freedom/influencing and the relation to different insecurities, uncertainties and challenges experienced when (wanting to) using that freedom and opportunities to influence, e.g. when the newcomers talk about unclear expectations. The repertoire can be found across the informants in the specific constellation where the aspects are constructed as relating to or influencing each other: both managers and newcomers mention influencing, managers mention insecurity in relation to freedom, and newcomers mention accepting some things related to the start-ups being new (such as some degree of muddle and chaos) because the newness and openness is what gives them opportunities, but at the same time also involves challenges and insecurity. Overall, therefore, both managers and newcomers mention opportunities/benefits on the one hand, and challenges on the other. Thus, there is a specific pattern of variation/contrasting and constructing opportunities to influence/freedom and challenges, such as insecurity, as going hand in hand.

C6/M1 specifically states that jobs are sometimes ‘sold on freedom’ and that freedom is not positive for everyone, because it can be challenging (lines 116-121). In the same case start-up, NC1 says he has had the freedom to choose his tasks from a range of open tasks, but also that he has been unsure about how to prioritise them, and that it has been difficult to get input for how to prioritise them (e.g. he was told to just ‘pick one’14). NC2 in the same start-up also talks about prioritising tasks, saying that, although he has the freedom to do things his own way, he needs to know the deadlines, because he does not want to delay other people who might be waiting for him to complete his work. Again, there is a tension between being free to choose your own approach and insecurity. On the one hand, he has the freedom (broad frames/guidelines) and can experiment, but on the other he needs to know whether there are any important deadlines, because he delivers input to projects that others work on (lines 175-178, 181-187). For instance, he says that, for things to ‘run as smooth as possible’, he needs an overview of the work and the deadlines (lines 538-544), and that: “[…] you need to keep in timeframe yet you can experiment and do whatever you want so it is sometimes it can get overwhelming yeah” (C6/NC2, lines 186-187).

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14 It is possible here that the managers had already selected a number of tasks, and therefore prioritised them beforehand, but that this was neither visible nor communicated to the newcomer.
C4/NC1 mentions that dealing with all the ‘openness’ in the organisation requires confidence (feeling ‘safe’ with oneself). C4/NC8 focuses a lot on frustration, chaos and muddle in his account (he draws on a repertoire of ‘Chaos and unusualness’). C4/M1 mentions ensuring that practical aspects such as pay and pension are taken care of, since, along with good social relationships, this helps create a sense of security and safe conditions. In other words, ensuring a good social environment and that salary-related aspects are taken care of is one way of achieving a feeling of security and safe zones/a safe base (C4/M1). The manager in Case 5 also mentions security in relation to the social. And, linked to the ‘safe base’ that C4/M1 mentions, C5/M1 also notes that something feels more safe when it is more consolidated.

The newcomers are pleased about the opportunities to become involved and having freedom, but also mention the lack of e.g. guidelines or ‘boundaries’, and that the lack of a clear framework is challenging. A newcomer’s role is one example of something where lack of clarity can lead to insecurity and uncertainty. According to C4/NC8, expectations of what he was supposed to do had been very unclear. There are also other examples of how ‘openness’ or lack of clarity about roles can both give freedom and have challenging consequences. In a field note from the interview with C4/NC2, I have written that “The informant also mentioned roles and the lack of formal roles as something that might be confusing to some people, but also that it again made it more open, because people were not assigned specific roles that they would then ‘take on’”. In other words, roles are not always defined or given a specific title. Both managers and newcomers across start-ups mention that their environments are informal with flat hierarchies, and that they do not have titles. However, as can be seen from C4/NC8 regarding unclear expectations about his own role, and from C5/NC2 and C6/NC2 regarding the lack of clarity about other people’s roles, the newcomers still have a need to know where they fit in, ‘who is who’ and what the other people in the organisation do.

The newcomers orient to the direction which the (owner) managers outline (e.g. in Case 6 and 4), but they also mention that they would like to have a say in this and influence the direction the start-up takes. Given the challenges and frustrations described above, and coupled with the desire to have a say and contribute, the newcomers can be said to engage in some degree of self-socialisation, in that they seek information (newcomer information-seeking) about aspects which they believe to be important, and where they feel they lack information. For instance, C6/NC1 gives a number of examples where he has asked about the start-up’s policies on various things. When the newcomers are asked whether there is anything they would have liked to know sooner, they often mention things
which have been difficult, or things related to getting an overall understanding, and with it being able to feel settled.

Thus, there seems to be a link between frustration and self-socialisation, i.e. frustration due to lack of information can lead newcomers to engage in proactive/reactive behaviours. In this sense, some degree of challenge, insecurity, uncertainty, and frustration might actually drive the newcomers to be active and ask questions. Here, they try to make sense of the start-ups, and it helps them make decisions. The newcomers emphasise that this is helped by the fact that it is easy for them to ask their colleagues questions, and in general they also mention that they have many collective conversations, which are thus important facilitators. It also seems to be important in relation to alleviating some of the frustrations, i.e. although something can be frustrating, at least it is easy to talk to colleagues and ask questions. In relation to ‘Acceptance’ discussed in a later section, there seems to be a fine balance here, where ‘openness’ due to the start-up situation can be accepted and even somewhat motivating, but if the newcomers find it hard to get answers, and the start-up situation continues unchanged, it can become demotivating.

In the above, I have shown that there is a tension (and paradox) between the freedom/opportunity to influence on the one hand, and insecurity on the other. This tendency is most clearly expressed by C6/M1, when he says that ‘freedom is not for everyone’ because it also means being able to handle insecurity and uncertainty. The newcomers express and construct uncertainty in different ways, e.g. in relation to why some things are described as frustrating or challenging (i.e. because it made them feel uncertain or insecure). In addition, throughout the interviews there are a number of specific aspects which are constructed/mentioned as something that creates insecurity and uncertainty. There are also some exceptions regarding uncertainty, especially C3/NC2, and C4/M1 mentions that some of the experienced newcomers might be better able to cope. While not acknowledging uncertainty does not reduce the complexity, the newcomers (with help from insiders) can find strategies to cope and work with it.

In a broader perspective, the tension between insecurity and freedom might also exist in other contexts, as a general challenge. In a sense, the relationship between opportunities and challenges might be a truism or cliché. However, even if this is the case, it is interesting that it shows up here, and in the above I have investigated how it is constructed in this context, i.e. in relation to my domain of organisational enquiry. I have also noted what it might mean (and what the consequences are) that this way of talking is present in the start-up context, i.e. saying that, on the one hand, something is
good, and then, on the other, that something is bad, might be a very typical conversational pattern. Here, this pattern has the specific form of freedom and opportunities to influence as the upside of entering a start-up, while the downside comprises the various specific challenges connected with entering a start-up, especially those intricately related to ‘freedom’, e.g. general insecurity, and uncertainty in relation to what is expected.

12.2. The Social across Managers and Newcomers
‘Social as important’ was identified as a repertoire across newcomers and contains two interrelated nuances: the professional social and the collegial social. This repertoire links with the theme across managers and newcomers labelled ‘Social environment, relationships and fit’, which is about knowing each other, relationships, and a social framework. This theme is further partly related to the across theme ‘Norms and culture’.

Newcomers’ tendency to talk about both the professional social (the ‘social functional’ nuance) and the collegial social (the ‘social for social’ nuance) can also be found among managers. For instance, C5/M1 mentions both team spirit and dynamics, and also that the social (in general) should not be underestimated.

As regards professional social aspects, both managers and newcomers say that employees need to work together (e.g. C6/M1), and they talk about teams (e.g. C4/M1 and C3/NC2) and about ‘fitting in’ (e.g. C6/M3). The professional social is related to more effective communication and better ways of giving feedback.

As regards collegial social aspects, the word ‘bond/bonding’ is used by both managers and newcomers (C2/M1, C4/NC1). The collegial social might be considered an extension of, or contribution to, the notion of ‘workplace/social integration’, inasmuch as work group integration is more than just professional integration in a team, but also has a more general, personal aspect. Taormina (2009) mentions the different needs of newcomers, and that one of these is the need for affiliation. Here, affiliation is not just in terms of professional aspects of the work group, but also a general social affiliation and integration. The collegial social concerns feeling good about being able to talk about other things than work, knowing who your colleagues are as people, and that knowing your colleagues and having good social relations also gives a sense of security.

Thus, the two aspects have to do with the fact that it is good to know your colleagues in general, and also that this also facilitates better interactions. The two nuances are related, in the sense that the
social is important for integration, and thus linked to other elements of OS. In particular, newcomers talk about the work environment in relation to their possibilities for asking questions and how relaxed they feel about asking their new managers and colleagues questions. Thus, the social environment and integration have consequences for newcomer information-seeking, in relation to what ‘tactics’ the newcomers are likely to use. The managers state that newcomers can just ask the person next to them, their buddies, team members, or the managers themselves. However, newcomers say that they sometimes prefer to go to people they know (i.e. who are previous acquaintances), or those with whom they feel they have a good rapport. This suggests that an open environment and accessibility is not necessarily enough, but that aspects of social integration also affect how, when and who the newcomers talk to and ask questions to. In other words, whether it is easy to ask, and get answers to, questions or not depends both on the atmosphere in the work environment (openness, culture), and on how well you know people, because it has implications for how relaxed you feel and thus who you ask (both as regards tasks and more overall organisational/contextual aspects).

Thus, the social repertoire highlights the importance of social aspects and integration, and links the professional (technical/work-related) and the social. Social knowledge does not just have to do with values and culture (which, for example, the newcomers in Case 4 know they are creating together), but also with knowing one’s colleagues on a more personal level.

12.3. Balance

‘Balance’ was identified as a repertoire across newcomers, and is related to the themes across managers and newcomers on ‘Balance, introduction and starting on tasks’ and ‘Newcomers starting with specific task/exercise’.

As regards the newcomers, I noted that ‘Balance’ had to do with the balance between the length of the introduction and starting on (specific) tasks, together with related aspects (e.g. information overload). C4/NC1 also mentioned that it was good to have had data from the beginning, because it gave them something specific to start on (in the face of lack of organisational clarity), and some of the managers mentioned the advantages of having very specific tasks for newcomers to start with, both as part of introducing them and as having something specific as an entry point (e.g. C5/M1 and C2/M1).

Thus, both newcomers and managers emphasise the advantages of newcomers having specific tasks to start with. In Case 2, they highlight the exercises the interns were given, together with the fact that
they can build knowledge about the system structure they will be using (knowledge as related to experience). In Case 5, the introduction to tasks (i.e. what they should work on) seems to have been adequate (C5/NC1 observes that you cannot be introduced to everything, but that at some point need to be thrown into the task), whereas the introduction to general organisational aspects could have been better, i.e. where newcomers seem to lack part of the framework/context. The Case 6 managers also acknowledge that they could have been better at introducing, for example, the start-up’s vision, and C6/M3 says that newcomers want to understand the big picture (of the production process), and where they fit in.

There seems to be a paradox here, since, when talking to me (where it would be difficult not to mention it), the managers talk quite a lot about their organisations, but when it comes to the organisation and the newcomers, C5/M1 for one primarily focuses on getting the newcomers started on solving their tasks. In this case, it is primarily interns, which might partly explain this, but the newcomers talk about the organisational context, within which they have to solve their tasks, and they seem to have needed a little more upfront introduction to this. For instance, both C5/NC1 and 2 mention talking to and knowing who the external collaborators are (freelancers and external consultants), since they sometimes need to direct questions to them.

Thus, across both managers and newcomers, there seems to be a balance not only between the length of introduction and starting on (specific) tasks, but also between task-related introduction and more overall introduction to aspects of the organisational context.

12.4. Acceptance, Alignment and Small/New Organisations

‘Acceptance’ was identified as a repertoire across newcomers (primarily those in Case 4, I return to this in chapter 13, where I consider the findings in relation to case start-up differences), and is related to the themes across both managers and newcomers on ‘Alignment and consideration for entering a start-up’, ‘Size, newness and resources’ and ‘Start-up vs. other/large organisation(s)’.

As mentioned previously, by the acceptance repertoire for newcomers is meant that (to a certain extent) they expect, and are prepared to accept, the start-up situation and its consequences. This has some links to the theme across managers on alignment, since part of this theme relates to managers mentioning that the newcomers need to understand a number of aspects related to the situation (e.g. constraints of time, money and personnel resources).
The above is related to the themes on ‘Size, newness and resources’ and ‘Start-up vs. other/large organisation(s)’, since both newcomers and managers use ‘small organisation/new organisation’ arguments, i.e. they both have a tendency to focus on aspects of a ‘small organisation’, such as size, newness and resources (often in comparison with other companies) as a way of arguing for something. Although aspects of this tendency can be seen in individual interviews, it is clearly a tendency across the informants.

This type of argumentation (almost a narrative, i.e. telling their story as the story of a small organisation and its challenges and benefits) is often used to open or end various manager and newcomer accounts, e.g. in relation to reasoning or acceptance. In the early stages of my project, I noted that the danger of this argumentation is that even though some informants address both pros and cons of smallness and newness, it might lull managers (and newcomers) into thinking that it is easy to settle in and talk to colleagues because the organisation is small, which is not necessarily the case (or at least not entirely), i.e. it is a ‘small organisation fallacy’. This is a proposition which most of the managers make at least once, but it might not always be the case, and it could result in the entry process being trivialised, i.e. taking for granted that a lot of things are easier just because the organisation is small. However, throughout the analysis, this was counterbalanced by the perspective of challenges and frustrations, across both newcomers and managers, e.g. managers discursively reproduced aspects that can be connected to the liability of newness and smallness. But again, these considerations were also combined with opportunities, i.e. due to size and newness. Thus, the size and newness aspect is related to both benefits and challenges.

The ‘small organisation’ argumentation is thus linked to the ‘(Opportunity to) influence and challenges’ repertoire. On the one hand, the problems/difficulties/challenges of the (lack of) structure and the strain/pressure on resources and organisational insiders are linked to size and newness. On the other hand, size and newness are also said to make things easier. For instance, in a field note from the parting talk with C6/NC2 I have written that “We talked about the differences between large and mature companies and small start-ups, he said that he thought there was more room to grow professionally in a small start-up, where in a big company you might become glued to one way of doing things for ten years.”. Thus, this is a benefit of size and newness related to freedom/opportunities compared to other (more ‘settled’) companies. In section 10.1., I mentioned that the managers reproduce ‘liability of newness’ and ‘liability of smallness’. However, they also focus on what I label ‘opportunities/benefits of newness’. This goes across managers and newcomers, because, as shown above, both groups mention both challenges and benefits in relation to size and
newness. Going back to the ‘Acceptance’ repertoire, this repertoire connects opportunities and challenges, since the newcomers mention that they are ready to accept certain things because the newness makes it exciting and gives some benefits in terms of opportunities. In other words, the fact that the two things influence each other (as noted for the ‘(Opportunities to) influence and challenges’ repertoire) makes them more inclined to accept the negative (to a certain degree).

12.5. Other Themes

In the following, I focus on the thematic clusters across managers and newcomers not specifically touched on above, namely ‘Experienced and/vs. inexperienced’, ‘Platforms and insights’, ‘Employee handbooks’, ‘Getting an overview, understanding’ and ‘Standups’, and ‘Working together, way of working’ (which is also linked to ‘Norms and culture’).

12.5.1. Experience and Inexperience

Experience versus inexperience has been treated as a theme across both managers and newcomers. Both newcomers and managers emphasise that experienced newcomers are likely to cope better with insecurities related to the current condition of the start-ups, e.g. ‘fluffy’ or not having very specific job descriptions (e.g. C4/M1).

Interestingly, the inexperienced newcomers in Case 4 (who all have PhDs) mention that they have been used to dealing with uncertainty in their dissertations. For instance, NC3 says that uncertainty and finding a way is something that he has been used to, and describes the entry experience in the start-up as a natural process. Thus, these ‘new’ newcomers might be able to handle uncertainty because of their educational/PhD background where they have been used to it, because it can also to some extent be exciting, and because it is something that is talked about in the start-up. In addition, they mention that they do not have a lot of previous industry experience to compare with, and therefore do not have a lot of specific expectations.

On the other hand, maybe the experienced newcomers have tackled uncertain working conditions or broad task descriptions before, and know that they should not expect too much and approach things with an open mind. Nonetheless, when they compare their current workplace with previous workplaces, their earlier experiences with insecurities or complex tasks seem to have been in the context of more specific procedures and processes, so that at least there was a general framework to hold onto, whereas now (Case 4), not only are the tasks not specifically defined, but there is no established way of dealing with them. In other words, although the experienced newcomers can use
some of their previous experience to handle the start-up complexity, they might also need to ‘rethink’ or ‘unlearn’ processes which were appropriate at earlier workplaces in order to adapt to their new situation. In a field note for newcomer 5 in Case 4 about the significance/role of knowledge, I have written that “some of the more experienced newcomers seem to be more used to not knowing everything beforehand as being part of the process, but it can still be frustrating if things are too unclear. [Newcomers express a need for] Broad outline/settings with room to navigate (but after all something that is a little specific).”.

It is also possible that the Case 4 manager was more concerned about the inexperienced newcomers and a little less about ‘insecurity’ as regards the experienced newcomers, precisely because they are experienced and should be used to handling it (for instance, he mentions that NC2 can better have a desk which is not directly next to someone else’s (and thus makes ‘ping-pong’ a bit more difficult), because he is experienced (lines 686-691)). In the learning literature, there is a notion of ‘transfer’ which means transferring what one has learned in one setting to something which can be used in different settings (e.g. Markauskaite & Goodyear, 2016). Here, it can be thought of as transferring knowledge/experience (experience as knowledge, knowledge as experience) from one domain (workplace) to another. For the experienced newcomers, it means not just how to do something, but how to cope, and not just being experienced in dealing with ‘fluffy’ tasks, but dealing with an unclear situation.

Finally, it can also have something to do with what kind of tasks the newcomers are given when they start. In a field note for C4/NC2, I have written that “The informant mentioned something that made me think about the importance/difference that the specific type of job makes. I.e., in this organisation the participant mentioned that one group of employees might have experienced more frustration than another group in relation to the specificity of their tasks when they started.”. The group referred to here are the experienced software engineers, as opposed to the data scientists, some of whom were inexperienced newcomers (novices).

As regards the type of questions asked, the experienced newcomers seem to ask about more general aspects, such as plans and direction (e.g. C4/NC2, C4/NC6). The manager in Case 5 says that his newcomers ask very practical questions because they are ‘green’ (inexperienced), whereas he would

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15 Tsang and Zahra (2008) note that “Within an organization, individual unlearning involves stopping the enactment of certain routines by individual members. This often occurs when new members join the organization with their pre-existing sets of skills, knowledge and world views.” (p. 1444).
expect experienced newcomers to ask more questions about, for example, strategy. Across newcomers and managers, there seems to be a greater focus on tasks for inexperienced newcomers than for experienced newcomers. This, however, is also linked to the case start-up contexts, since most of the inexperienced newcomers start in companies where they will build on something which already exists, while most of the experienced newcomers start in companies where they are involved in building foundations (Case 3, Case 4).

‘Experience’ is talked of as a kind of knowledge which the newcomers can draw on, and in this sense, the distinction between experienced and inexperienced newcomers is similar to the notion of ‘haves and have nots’ (Kastberg, 2011b). According to Kastberg (2011b), this way of talking makes us focus (in this case) on the inexperienced as people who have knowledge gaps to be filled rather than on the dynamics which can allow them to create knowledge. In general, ‘experience’ is constructed as something highly positive and valuable, but in one sense, it becomes a kind of container word which might sometimes be blinding, inasmuch as constructing someone as ‘experienced’ seems to have consequences for how they are introduced. For instance, C4/NC8 mentions that he feels that there were parts of the introduction/information that he might not have received, because he was ‘experienced’.

Finally, experience and inexperience also involves the relationship between managers and the people they hire. For instance, C6/M1 says that they hire people who can do something the managers cannot, or who are better at it, and C5/M1 admits that he is aware of what he is good and not good at, and that it is important to find people who are good at the things he cannot do (lines 104-109). However, something that is interesting across the managers is what they do not say, namely how they/the start-up can learn from the newcomers they hire because these can do something they cannot (although C2/M1 and C6/M1 do touch on this). Thus, when the newcomers start, at least in some of the start-ups there seems to be more focus on getting them up and running than on learning from them, and, although they can contribute, it will probably be limited to specific tasks. There seems to be an imbalance here: You hire someone because they have specific skills that you lack, but then you only focus on what they need to learn, and not what your organisation can learn from them (the exception being C2/M1, lines 199-212).

12.5.2. ‘Platforms and insights’
Both managers and newcomers mention systems and digitally stored materials. Some of the managers highlight the benefits of different IT tools in relation to welcoming newcomers, e.g. databases and
platforms as knowledge repositories (primarily for task related information), and say that they use different systems to structure their work. For instance, C5/M1 talks about technologies that can be used to document, and through this build a ‘knowledge base’ that you can refer newcomers to (lines 208-212). The newcomers mention getting used to the various systems and platforms, and using the information stored there to do their work. As such, the ‘Platforms and insights’ theme across informants involves an introduction to platforms and that they are a place for storing information, i.e. it has to do with how they are used, and where things (pieces of information) are.

In a way, the systems are both tools that the newcomers need to do their work and something which helps introduce them to it. For instance, the digital project management platforms are tools that the newcomers need to be able to understand how to read and how to mark what they are working on, and at the same time, they provide an overview of the ongoing projects and tasks. This was something I specifically asked about (e.g. whether they knew how to use the tools, and whether they were used to accessing information), since, in an IT context, it is relevant to investigate how they talk about these systems in relation to the entry of newcomers. And there seems to be an integration between learning how to do the work and learning about the systems needed to structure and carry it out. I previously mentioned Orlikowski’s (2006) notion of knowledge-scaffolding and materiality, and that these platforms are a kind of (digital) materiality that scaffold newcomers’ knowledge creation. For instance, in the case of documentation, they might discuss how to document something after a decision has been made (the important thing being that they talked about something which was then written down, i.e. the knowledge lies in the interaction, and the documenting is then an artefact of that). Or, as regards logged information or the employee handbook (where these exist), newcomers might read something and then ask questions related to this. In this way, there is an involvement with the material.

From a theoretical point of view, these systems and tools can be conceptualised as scaffolds in the same sense as Orlikowski (2006), i.e. for newcomers they can function as scaffolds in their knowledge creation. As such, they are information repositories which can serve to help newcomers learn and create the knowledge they need to solve their tasks. The information in the system is contextualised. The information can help newcomers understand the workplace, and as the newcomers build an understanding of the context, they are more likely to be able to understand and put the information to use, as the context provides a frame for how to understand the information. This relates to Myers’ (2011) comment on the challenge of giving a lot of information before newcomers understand context.
Although I identified a theme across managers on digital tools (such as databases) as knowledge repositories, this is subject to some qualification. While the technologies have informational benefits, some of the tools, how they are used, and the information in them also need to be contextualised in order to be fully useful for the newcomers. C5/M1 says that, even though newcomers are given access to tools to get started, they still need guidance, and stresses the role of the newcomers’ buddies. These social interactions can help contextualise information and make it more useful. C6/M3 emphasises that, even though they had documentation in systems, it only had the quality they had given it.

In the ICT start-ups, the IT systems and tools can be said to be both part of the content and process of OS. The systems are an integral part of practice, i.e. they are needed to do the work, while at the same time being something the newcomers need to learn about. As scaffolds, technology can play a part in augmenting the OS process. It gives affordances (e.g. for scaffolding knowledge-creation), while also being both a tool and object of work.

12.5.3. ‘Employee handbooks’

Across managers and newcomers, employee handbooks are talked of as serving a legitimacy purpose and as repositories for basic information about the organisation. The legitimacy aspect has to do with the fact that what is written in the handbooks becomes, in effect, formal rules. When I collected empirical material, both case start-ups 2 and 4 had employee handbooks. The manager in Case 4 said that only ‘the bare necessities’ were written in the handbook, e.g. alcohol policy and the procedure for calling in sick. The newcomers seem to echo the sentiment that it should cover the basics, i.e. employee handbooks are best suited for basic information (and that it can be useful to have a specific place for these basic details), especially in relation to the size and maturity of the organisation, and because a lot of introductory information is still better given face-to-face.

The newcomers mention that, for some things, it is good to have something written to refer to, e.g. if employees violate a rule, they can be told they are violating an explicit rule. Sometimes the employee handbooks are talked of as having a pseudo-role as information, and as serving a more important role as an ‘authority’ on rules that employees can refer to. In other words, ‘these are the rules that we agree on’, and having written them down legitimises them (because they become formalised) and makes them easy to refer to. It is important to note, however, that espoused and enacted procedures need not be the same. For instance, C4/NC5 mentions that, although their employee handbook describes the rules for working from home, and the procedures for agreeing this with one’s work group, in practice they go about this in a different way.
C6/M1 talks about a brand book/employee book, to communicate their vision and what they do, and help newcomers understand their journey. He mentions this in relation to his feeling that they have not been very good at communicating their vision to newcomers, but that it could be very motivational. However, for C5/NC1 and C4/NC5, communicating vision in the handbook cannot stand alone. C5/NC1 mentions a previous workplace where the description of values in the handbook came off as ‘preachy’, while C4/NC5 says that it is one thing to attempt to communicate values formally, but another to actually live them.

In general, as regards information material, the newcomers (e.g. C2/NC2) agree that, while written material can be useful, things (such as values) need to be experienced and done in interaction with others in order to see what they say and do, and in that way better understand relationships and the new organisational context.

12.5.4. ‘Getting an overview, understanding’ and ‘Standups’

The themes across informants ‘Getting an overview, understanding’ and ‘Standups’ are related, since newcomers mention standup meetings as a way of getting a better overview, by hearing what their new colleagues are working on, and managers say that standups give them an overview of what their employees are working on, and whether they need help with anything.

The ‘Getting an overview, understanding’ theme has to do with newcomers getting a holistic understanding of their new workplace and an integrated understanding of the organisation and their tasks. As such, it has to do with learning about the task/job/functional aspects, as well as the more (social) organisational aspects, and how these are linked.

I have previously mentioned ‘the big picture’ a number of times, and that it has to do with e.g. understanding both the entire production procedure for a project and the users who will use the product. The managers seem to stress ‘what do we do’, and the newcomers seem to puzzle about additional questions such as ‘who is who?’ (C5/NC2) and ‘who are we?’ (C3/NC1). Furthermore, in addition to the managers talking about the products, the newcomers say that they want and need to understand not just why something is as it is, but also why things are done in a certain way. This relates to the difference between ‘why/how do we do this?’ and ‘why do we do it that way?’, which is similar to the difference between effectiveness and efficiency as ‘doing the right thing’ versus ‘doing the thing right’. In other words, for the newcomers it is not just about the rationale for and market potential of the product, but why the product is being created in a certain way. Thus, it has to do with understanding at a deeper level.
As regards what the newcomers ask, and how they ask, the questions seem to fall into specific categories. One category includes practical task-related questions, such as setting up computers and printing. Another category includes questions related to immediate plans and plans for the future. As regards the tactics for newcomers’ information-seeking, C5/M1 mentions that experienced newcomers are more likely to ask questions directly related to e.g. vision and strategy, e.g. the experienced newcomers in Case 4 focus on these aspects (e.g. the business plan). There is therefore a tendency for experienced newcomers to seek more insight into and ask more questions about strategy and future plans. On the other hand, as regards organisational aspects, C5/NC1 seems to use a more opportunistic tactic. While not totally passive, since he is asking questions, it is opportunistic in the sense that he asks questions when a relevant opportunity arises, such as when his colleagues are talking about a topic that he has questions about.

Finally, as regards going from being an outsider to being an insider, C3/M1 says that newcomers become insiders faster in start-ups because there is less in relation to which they are new. On the other hand, C4/M1 acknowledges that it can be challenging to have less organisational knowledge and experience in the organisation to draw on. As he says, the start-up is so new that they simply do not have a great deal of organisational knowledge and learning, so you cannot just tell newcomers to ask someone who has been there a long time, because nobody has (lines 131-133, 474-486).

12.5.5. ‘Working together, way of working’
Across managers and newcomers, the ‘Working together, way of working’ theme has to do with a number of related aspects. One is that the newcomers orient to a ‘togetherness’ when they e.g. mention that they work on different tasks but on the same product. In relation to this, managers and newcomers also talk about (finding out) how to organise the work in such a way that they can work on their own tasks while also working together. The managers also mention group dynamics and team spirit in relation to working together and how they work.

In general, both managers and newcomers mention various aspects related to creating something together and ‘doing’ organising, e.g. as they have opinions about and preferences for how the organisations’ task operations should be run. With regard to this ‘organisation-building’ and the start-ups as ‘emerging’ ventures (which makes it a different setting for socialisation than usually studied), I have asked questions related to structures, routines and procedures, among other things. For example, if I mentioned that there might not be a lot of routines, the answer would sometimes be ‘yes, but’, because they (or managers) had already devised routines, were in the process of developing
them (together), or had simply imported them from earlier workplaces. This is also the case for norms, where (related to the across theme of ‘Norms and culture’) C4/NC1 says that norms ‘come from somewhere’, and that the experienced newcomers could draw on norms from other workplaces. Thus, perhaps counterintuitively, some routines can quickly be developed in a start-up, especially in cases where they are ‘imported’. However, a number of the newcomers stress that they do not want to have procedures ‘just for the sake of having them’, but need to question their practices and develop procedures that make sense. One example is meetings, i.e. how often they should have them, and whether it makes sense. For instance, in Case 4 the newcomers relate that they persuaded the manager to move a specific meeting, and that they now have a routine with specific meetings during the week.

As such, through the way that managers and newcomers talk about how they are developing the organisations, the process can be characterised as a kind of ‘creolisation’\(^\text{16}\), since they create, import and mix practices in a specific context (as part of socialisation and individualisation). I return to this notion of creolisation in relation to socialisation in start-ups in the discussion (chapter 15).

12.6. Summing up: across Managers and Newcomers

In the sections above, I have discussed themes across managers and newcomers in relation to previously identified interpretative repertoires across managers and newcomers, respectively. This has resulted in the identification of the following repertoires across managers and newcomers:

- Across managers and newcomers, there is a relationship between ‘(Opportunities to) influence’ and ‘Challenges’ giving rise to a repertoire labelled ‘(Opportunity to) influence and challenges’. This can be identified as a specific variation across the informants since they talk about the benefits and challenges connected with entering and working in a start-up, and how these affect each other (especially as regards the relationship between freedom and insecurity).

- The ‘Balance’ repertoire across managers and newcomers focuses on the benefits of having specific tasks that the newcomers can use to get started (and how soon they get started on them), and on the balance between the introduction to tasks and the introduction to more overall organisational aspects. It is thus partly linked to the repertoire above, since having something specific to hold on to can help newcomers cope with challenging and unclear environments, because they do not have to deal with both uncertainty of tasks and uncertainty in the overall context to the same extent.

\(^{16}\) I would like to thank my colleague at the Department of Management who suggested this term.
- ‘Acceptance’ was identified as a repertoire for the newcomers, and this is related to the ‘Alignment’ theme on the manager side, since they mention some of the same things about what it means to enter a start-up, and in this respect they are both related to the theme about ‘Size, newness and resources’. In turn, ‘Acceptance and alignment’ is related to the repertoire on influencing and challenges, in that the newcomers appear to accept some aspects of the start-up situation because it also involves a number of benefits (primarily opportunities to influence). However, in relation to the challenge aspect, there is also a limit to how much the newcomers will accept, at least if they feel that the challenges are not being handled.

- Finally, across managers and newcomers there is a ‘Social’ repertoire with two nuances, namely a ‘professional social’ aspect and a more purely social aspect of ‘collegial bonding’. The two are related, however, and appear in the overall ‘Social’ repertoire.

A number of themes were also addressed across managers and newcomers. These do not constitute repertoires (because they are more a pattern of something that is talked about than a ‘building block’ as such, i.e. it is something they talk about, but stylistically there is no overarching pattern to make it a repertoire across informants), but nevertheless stick out as cross themes. These are: ‘Experience and inexperience’, ‘Platforms and insights’, ‘Employee handbooks’, ‘Getting an overview, understanding’ and ‘Working together, way of working’.

Overall, there are specific professional business/task aspects, and also more relational/social aspects. Throughout the interviews, these social and business aspects are often linked discursively, i.e. they are often mentioned in relation to each other. For example, the business and task aspects are embedded in an organisational context where relationships and social aspects can influence how they do business and carry out their tasks.
13. Thematic Clusters and Interpretative Repertoires across Case Start-Ups

From a focus on the embedded cases, i.e. managers and newcomers in the case start-ups, as mentioned in methods section 7.2.2.4.4., I then turned to a comparison across the case start-ups. Here, I refined themes across the start-ups, and consider themes and repertoires in relation to contextual differences across the case start-ups and their informants. This is related to my efforts to ensure sensitivity to nuances, and is in line with a person-by-situation approach, as mentioned in Ashford and Nurmohamed (2012).

Table 9 shows themes across the case start-ups, based on a comparison of the themes in the individual start-ups (appendix 9d-h). The table lists themes on an overall level (since it is based on themes across case companies), down to themes shared across only two start-ups.

Table 9: Themes across Case Start-Ups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Where found (case start-up #)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social aspects</td>
<td>The importance of social aspects</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and building, understanding</td>
<td>Aspects about and related to learning, getting an overview, and coming to understand</td>
<td>2, 4, 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting and newcomers’ role, contributing</td>
<td>Newcomers taking part (building the organisation, designing the work) (that there is a need for it, Case 6)</td>
<td>3, 4, (5), 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newness, size, start-up</td>
<td>The start-ups as small and new, consequences of being a start-up</td>
<td>3, 4, 5 (+ 6 on resource challenges related to newness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty, (lack of) structure and starting</td>
<td>Uncertainty, challenges for the newcomers when entering</td>
<td>(3), 4, 6 (in 6 combined with opportunities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience/inexperience</td>
<td>Experience (and benefits) and inexperience (of newcomers)</td>
<td>4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working together</td>
<td>Helping each other, doing things together, group dynamics</td>
<td>2, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles</td>
<td>Aspects of or related to roles</td>
<td>4, (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering, natural process, mild</td>
<td>Entering is experienced as a natural process/transition</td>
<td>(3), 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing things when needed, introductions, overload</td>
<td>Balancing length of introductions, newcomers wanting to get started on tasks</td>
<td>(5), (6)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A number in parentheses () indicates that the theme is only noted for one person in that start-up.
Four themes are prevalent across the start-ups. The first is social aspects, which is a theme in all the individual start-ups, e.g. in Case 3 the focus is on chemistry and fit, in Case 4 it is on creating social foundations and unity, and in Case 2 the manager mentions ‘bonding’. The other three themes are ‘Learning and building, understanding’, ‘Starting and newcomers’ role’ and ‘Newness, size, start-up’. As regards ‘Learning and building, understanding’, which is about learning, getting an overview, and coming to understand, traces of this are found in Case 2, 4, 5 and 6. As regards ‘Starting and newcomers’ role’, which is about newcomers taking part in building the organisation and designing the work, and in general having an important role, this is found in Cases 3, 4, (5) and 6. The part about newcomers’ role as contributors is related to the previously identified repertoire on ‘Influencing’ and the related repertoire on the connection between influencing and insecurity. ‘Challenges’ is found in themes across the individual informants in Case 4 and 6. A trace of the overall repertoire on influencing and challenges is also found for NC1 in Case 3, where he mentions the balance between contributing while at the same time needing to understand and make sense of decisions that have already been made. As mentioned above, the connection between opportunities to influence/freedom and challenges/insecurity is also related to size/newness and resources, which is also found as a theme (‘Newness, size, start-up’) across a number of the start-ups (3, 4, 5 and 6).

With regard to the informants’ repertoires in the individual case start-ups (see Table 10), in Case 2 these are centred on learning/building understanding and the working environment. In Case 3, it is balance, alignment and unproblematic entry. In Case 4, the repertoires centre on (acceptance of) newness, challenges, engagement, experience, and creating safe zones and social foundations. In Case 5, it is IT as craft work and balance. Finally, in Case 6, the repertoires centre on challenges, resources, the need for self-driven newcomers, active involvement and ownership.

An overlap in repertoires within an individual case start-up, i.e. informants drawing on similar repertoires, could be due to a dominant discourse in the start-up, e.g. in relation to recruiting and entry. It could also be related to the specific context in the start-up, and that e.g. newcomers draw on the same linguistic resources to talk about it (which again might be related to a dominant discourse in the organisation). Again, one of the aims of the project is to investigate how OS, and in this respect knowledge communication, is constructed in start-ups.
Table 10: Individual Repertoires by Case Start-Up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case 2</th>
<th>Case 3</th>
<th>Case 4</th>
<th>Case 5</th>
<th>Case 6</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NC1: ‘Experience’</td>
<td>M3: ‘Need for self-driven employees because of lack of resources’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NC2: ‘Experience and preferences’</td>
<td>NC1: ‘Professionalising and improving the organisation and its product’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NC3: ‘Naturalness and acceptance’</td>
<td>‘Active involvement and voicing opinions’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NC4: ‘Consequences of and acceptance of ‘newness’’</td>
<td>NC2: ‘Responsibility and ownership’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NC5: ‘Experience and preferences’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NC6: ‘Active engagement and making an impact’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NC7: ‘Accepting need to learn, dealing with it ‘as it comes’’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NC8: ‘Chaos and unusualness’</td>
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</table>

Coupling the repertoires with both the cross themes in the individual start-ups and the sub-conclusions, in Case 2, building/learning and the working environment are central aspects of the accounts across informants. In Case 3, alignment (of expectations), the impact of the social, and
thinking of it as a project start stand out, along with balancing newness and taking part, and the entry being a transition. In Case 4, the accounts centre on newness and the uncertainty/frustration of a challenging (and special) environment, but also acceptance, contributing, experience and learning, working together and social aspects. Social aspects are also prevalent in the accounts in Case 5, along with IT people as skilled craftsmen and support from buddies, learning and balance related to introduction, and doing actual work. The informants also mention newness and externals.freelancers. Finally, the accounts in Case 6 centre on newcomers taking ownership and responsibility, and the need for them to be self-driven. They also highlight challenges (especially related to resources), managers learning, and the relationship between freedom and insecurity. Both managers and newcomers mention understanding ‘the bigger picture’ in relation to wanting newcomers to understand history and background, and newcomers wanting to understand processes and where they fit in (and needing access to different materials in order to carry out their tasks). Once again, social aspects are also highlighted.

In the following sections, I build on the opening of this chapter (regarding themes across the start-ups, and the brief summing up of the individual start-ups) to consider contextual differences across the start-ups. There could, for example, be a contextual difference in the way that something is very salient in one case start-up but not in another (since informants focus on the context/situation, and there are variations in these between the start-ups). For instance, the newcomer ‘Acceptance’ repertoire is salient in Case 4, which could be related to the fact that this start-up has a number of very experienced newcomers and some unique conditions, e.g. the newcomers enter when the start-up is very new. However, there are clearly limits to this acceptance, and there is also a ‘challenges/frustration’ theme across the newcomers in this case start-up.

13.1. Contextual Differences

Across the start-ups, there are similarities and differences in terms of characteristics and the context surrounding newcomers’ entry. In this section, I consider the themes and repertoires identified previously in relation to relevant differences across the start-ups. The differences in characteristics, situation and context for newcomer entry across the start-ups include aspects such as:

- Whether the newcomer is (considered) experienced or not.
- Whether there are other employees in the start-up (besides the (owner) managers), how many, and whether they are experienced.
- How experienced the manager(s) is.
- The financial/funding situation and form of the start-up.
- The service/product (what does the start-up produce, how, and for whom), and the stage of development of that product/service (e.g. in relation to the age of the start-up).
- Tasks and role of the newcomer (which tasks will the newcomer be working with, and what is her/his role, and whether they are interns, part-timers or full-time/permanent).
- Previous acquaintance (between manager and newcomer, newcomer and/or new colleagues including other newcomers, or between manager and existing employees).

13.1.1. Context, the Social and Gradual Starts

Previous acquaintance (i.e. whether the newcomers know the manager or new colleagues in advance, or whether the managers and/or colleagues know each other in advance) is mentioned several times across the case start-ups, and it is often highlighted as something which gives a sense of security, both for managers who are hiring and newcomers who are settling in.

One contrast in relation to this aspect is that, although C2/NC2 and C6/NC2 both knew the founders/owner managers in advance, C2/NC2 had discussed the company and products with them before, whereas C6/NC2 (even though he was good friends with some of the managers) did not actually know that much about the company. He had heard them talk, but that was not the same as being part of it himself; so he knew some of the people, but not the organisation as such. Thus, even though previous acquaintance can make it easier to acquire social knowledge such as values and culture (e.g. both C2/M1 and C2/NC2 mentioned that previous acquaintance made it easy for him to settle in socially), it does not necessarily mean that the newcomer will know a lot about the specifics of the company. However, it might still make it easier to settle in, because it can be easier to ask questions about the organisation and one’s tasks (e.g. C6/NC2 says that it is harder to ask questions in an environment where you do not know the people).

In Case 3, the manager mentions (as part of alignment) ensuring a social, cultural and value fit as early as in the recruitment phase. This is also mentioned by the two newcomers. They make sure that they can ‘understand’ each other and that there is ‘chemistry’. Both manager (lines 765-770) and newcomers also mention meeting all the owners/partners in advance (that they take part in the recruiting process), and not just some of them (which is possible because of the size of the start-up). In this way, they seem to have moved some of the focus on ensuring ‘work group integration’ to a very early stage. In Case 3 in general, the anticipatory and entry stages of socialisation are somewhat merged, so that aspects (such as work group integration) which in most models might be placed under
entry stage socialisation are moved to a previous stage (anticipatory). Moreover, the start for C3/NC2 has been more gradual than is often presented in the literature, with less clear-cut points for starting and entering. NC2 notes that entry to the new workplace was not experienced as a radical change, which seems partly to do with the fact that it has been very gradual. This early focus on alignment, (ensuring) work group integration, and starting as a gradual transition is reminiscent of pre-boarding17.

In Case 4, a lot of newcomers start at the same time (unlike in most of the other start-ups), and in a field note from the C4/NC1 interview I have written: “It is difficult to socialise when there is not much in advance (e.g. routines, established ways) – so the socialisation perhaps becomes more something that happens in common (at least here where some started together, vs. my other cases where most have started one at a time).”

13.1.2. Context and Experience
Experience is related to whether the newcomer is (considered) experienced or not, whether there are other employees in the start-up (besides the (owner) managers), how many, and whether they are experienced, and how experienced the manager(s) is. In other words, throughout the interviews, experience is related to both the newcomers and their colleagues and managers.

Starting with the newcomers (and their colleagues), the tendency to contrast experienced with inexperienced newcomers suggests that all newcomers are not created, or constructed as, equal. For example, all the newcomers in Case 2 and 5 are inexperienced (newly educated or hired as interns/student developers). This might explain why ‘learning’ seems to be prevalent across the informants in these start-ups. In Case 3, by contrast, both newcomers are very experienced, while in Case 4 and 6 there is a mix. Some of the newcomers in Case 4 are newly educated, while others have many years of experience. In Case 6, one newcomer is newly educated and another has some previous experience. In Case 4, NC1 (who is ‘inexperienced’) in particular says that they can learn from each other, e.g. the newcomers have worked with different coding languages, and are thus ‘experienced’ in these different languages. Several newcomers in Case 4 also point out that they are all new to the domain they will be coding and developing software for, and in this sense it is something they all need to learn about. This is also highlighted as something that creates common ground. For instance,

17 Although ‘pre-boarding’ has received little attention in academic literature, it is becoming increasingly popular among HR practitioners and consultancies (e.g. Brienza, 2018; Fleck, 2007). In brief, it is the backward extension of onboarding, where pre-boarding covers the period between the hiring decision and the candidate formally entering the workplace.
NC1 and 2 state that being introduced to the domain together gives employees a sense of togetherness. In Case 2, the manager and NC1 mention having respect for each other’s knowledge and skills.

Thus, in relation to the interactionist approach to OS which considers the newcomer and the organisation in tandem, it is necessary to consider the ‘context’ of the newcomers, i.e. are they newly graduated or do they have many years of experience (and with what?)? As mentioned previously (section 11.4.), the experienced newcomers might also have preferences for how things should be done, which can be both a benefit and a challenge when settling in a new workplace, because they will invariably compare the new workplace to the old. Another aspect of experience is simply how often, or whether, you have entered a new workplace before.

One example of this is Case 3, which is a fairly new start-up, where the newcomers take part in decision-making. The two newcomers here are very experienced, and their manager does not draw on the ‘(Opportunity to) influence and challenges’ repertoire to the same extent as some of the other managers (at least not as regards the challenges aspect). However, C3/NC1 does draw on a ‘Balance’ repertoire about taking part in decision-making while at the same time needing to understand the decisions which have already been made.

As regards managers’ experience, in Case 2 and Case 6 the managers are young (in Case 6 some are still studying), and this is their first experience of being managers. Both C2/M1 and C6/M2 and 3 acknowledge that getting newcomers on board and having employees is also a learning process for them. By contrast, the managers in Case 3, 4 and 5 have previous management experience. Thus, some of the entrepreneurs are experienced, and some are not. There seems to be a tendency for the less experienced managers to focus more on the task aspect than on communicating ‘the big picture’ to their newcomers. This is the case for both Case 2 and Case 6. As indicated previously, this might also be due to the fact that they primarily employ inexperienced newcomers. For instance, C2/M1 says that it is the task aspects which are challenging in their workplace. However, manager 1 and 2 in Case 6 say that they would like to be better at communicating vision and culture, because it might help motivate their employees, and manager 1 in general says that he would like the newcomers to understand their journey. Manager 3 in the same start-up says that he has learned that they could be better at addressing some things up front, because the newcomers ask about them anyway, e.g. the whole production process for their product, and the newcomer’s place in all of this.

I have noted that the managers in Case 6, who have only little management experience, at least as regards employees, present a lot of considerations and reflections in the interviews. None of them
have a management education as such (although part of their educational backgrounds also include some ‘soft skills’ courses), but in one of our meetings manager 1 mentioned that, during his education, they had been visited by occupational/industrial psychologists, and this brought the conversation round to screenings and personality tests. On the whole, even though they might not have a lot of management experience, they have some interesting reflections on their experiences with newcomers and employees so far. This relates to the theme of ‘Learning for managers’.

13.1.3. Tasks and Roles
This involves the tasks and role of the newcomer (which tasks will the newcomer be working with, what is her/his role, and are they interns or full-time/permanent?). It is also related to the service/product (what does the start-up produce, how, and for whom?), and how ‘developed’ it is (the stage of development of the product/service in relation to the age of the start-up). The start-ups also differ in the extent of the organisation, product, projects and systems already in place or being developed.

In Case 2 (primarily NC1), 5 and 6 (NC1), the newcomers start with relatively pre-defined tasks, where they are building something specific (e.g. a specific function/page for an app), i.e. the newcomers work on products and systems where there are some pre-existing aspects. However, NC2 in Case 2 has participated in some meetings and decision-making, since he is alone in representing the hardware area, whereas the others in the organisation are primarily software developers.

The above contrasts with Case 3 and 4. In Case 3, newcomers participate in defining the framework and choosing tools. There already exists an older system which is used as an inspiration and which they want to improve, but the start-up is at the point where the newcomers take part in discussing which IT tools are appropriate for the ‘building’ they will be doing. In Case 4 there is no pre-existing product (only data), and here newcomers take part in defining the tasks (and even, to some extent, the goals).

Thus, there are differences in how specific and pre-defined the newcomers’ tasks are across the start-ups, and what their roles are, and this is sometimes also related to their degree of experience. In Case 2 (NC1) and 5, the newcomers do not take part in defining and developing ideas/projects to the same extent as those in Case 3 and 4. This has implications for what the newcomers need to know in order to master their tasks and fulfil their role responsibilities, i.e. what they need to become ‘knowledge-integrated’. In Case 2 (NC1), 5 and 6 (NC1), the newcomers need to understand how the pre-existing systems/products are built, and why they are built in that way, since part of their tasks is to continue
building on these. In Case 4, the newcomers face less defined tasks and goals, and thus play a greater part in building up the organisation. In consequence, they might experience more general uncertainty, and they also seem to have more long-term considerations. I return to role clarity in the discussion, where I focus on the OS outcomes in a start-up context (section 15.1.2.)

In brief, the newcomers’ tasks and roles, together with the situation of the start-up, have implications for what they need to know and how they can use any prior experience they might have.

13.1.4. Funding Situation and Form of the Start-Up
Whereas Case 2, 3, 5 and 6 are (at least initially) ‘bootstrap’ start-ups, Case 4 has funding. Moreover, Case 4 also has a professional board, whereas some of the other case start-ups have volunteer advisory boards (e.g. Case 5, Case 6). This gives the other start-ups different financial challenges compared to Case 4. For instance, the manager in Case 3 says that the partners have invested their own money, and C6/M1 mentions that the lack of financial resources means they cannot afford to hire the best (or experienced) people.

However, although some of the newcomers in Case 4 say that it is a ‘safe’ place because it has funding (e.g. there are less concerns about pay), this does not mean they have no concerns about money at all. For instance, NC5 mentions insecurity in relation to the board and how much autonomy the start-up actually has, and also that it is difficult to figure out how much money they actually have and how they can spend it. For instance, he mentions concerns related to how the board sometimes ‘hovers’ in the background (lines 431-432).

13.2. Summing up: Across Case Start-Ups and Differences in Characteristics
In brief, this chapter shows that it is necessary to consider both the characteristics of the newcomer, the organisation, and the situation in general (i.e. a person-by-situation approach), since there is not only an interaction between the organisation and the newcomer, but also between this and the surrounding environment, which is in line with the interactionist approach to OS.
### 14. Summary of the Analysis

This section sums up the major findings of the various chapters of the analysis across informants and case start-ups. Table 11 below presents a schematic overview of the analysis chapters.

Table 11: Overview of Findings in the Analysis Chapters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Thematic clusters</th>
<th>Interpretative repertoires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>Sub-question 2</td>
<td>Social, social fit; small organisation and resources; actively involved newcomers; Experienced and inexperienced newcomers; uncertainty/insecurity challenge for newcomers; opportunity to influence; tools/systems/platforms; emerging onboarding procedures; alignment through recruitment</td>
<td>Opportunities to influence and challenges for newcomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcomers</td>
<td>Sub-question 1</td>
<td>Social work environment; experience and not experienced; talking about things/having a say; working together; learning and knowledge sharing; getting overview; structure and starting; hierarchy and roles; size and newness; getting the balance right; insecurity and challenges; start-up vs. other organisations; handbooks; documents/platforms and insights; personal approach and preferences; tasks; future; mild/gradual start; finding out who to ask; having given thought to entering a start-up; characteristics of IT and IT work; learning for managers; externals and freelancers</td>
<td>The social as important Balance Acceptance Influencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers and newcomers</td>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td>Social environment, relationships and fit; experienced and inexperienced newcomers; influencing and contributing; uncertainty/insecurity/challenges for newcomers; learning for managers; size, newness and resources;</td>
<td>Social Balance Acceptance and alignment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
platforms and insights; start-up vs.
other/large organisations; standups;
getting an overview; titles and roles;
alignment and consideration for
entering a start-up; balance,
introduction; working together;
employee handbooks; newcomers
starting with specific task; norms and
culture; emerging onboarding
procedures

(Oppportunity to) influence
and challenges

Nuances related
to contextual
differences

Contextual aspects which informants orient to:
Experience of managers, newcomers and other employees, other
employees in the start-up, financial situation and form of the start-
up, service/product and stage of development, tasks and roles of
the newcomer, extent of previous acquaintance

First, after refining thematic clusters across managers, I then analysed the interviews across managers
and identified an interpretative repertoire, namely ‘Opportunities to influence and challenges for
newcomers’. In addition, a number of themes were salient across the managers, namely self-
driven/independent newcomers, small organisations and resource constraints, social aspects,
alignment, systems and platforms in relation to getting newcomers started, experienced versus
inexperienced newcomers, and emerging and developing onboarding procedures (with a future
orientation).

Next, I refined thematic clusters across the newcomers, and analysed these to identify interpretative
repertoires across the newcomer interviews. These included ‘The social as important’, ‘Balance’,
‘Acceptance’ and ‘Influencing’. Although ‘Challenges’ is a central theme across newcomers, it
covers a range of aspects and is not specific enough to be considered a coherent pattern (a repertoire)
in itself. Other salient themes across newcomers include learning and understanding, previous
experience versus no experience, and future aspects.

Following the analyses across managers and across newcomers, I then coupled them and analysed
thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires across the two sets of informants. ‘(Opportunity to)
influence and challenges’ was identified as a specific building block across the interviews, since the
informants talk about the benefits and drawbacks of entering a start-up, which are related. Other
repertoires across informants are ‘Balance’, ‘Social’ and ‘Acceptance and alignment’. The latter is
identified as a repertoire across informants, since the newcomer repertoire ‘Acceptance’ and the
manager theme on ‘Alignment’ were found to share a number of aspects (often related to consequences of newness and smallness). The ‘Social’ repertoire has two interrelated nuances, one ‘professional social’ and the other more focused on ‘collegial social’ aspects. ‘Balance’ has to do with balancing the length of the introduction with starting on specific tasks, and balancing introduction to tasks and more overall aspects. Across the repertoires, I also show how they are related to each other. Finally, a number of themes across managers and newcomers were addressed: ‘Experience and inexperience’, ‘Platforms and insights’, ‘Employee handbooks’, ‘Getting an overview, understanding’ and ‘Working together, way of working’.

In the chapter on contextual differences between the start-ups, I focused on contingency factors related to the newcomers, managers, the start-ups (and the employees) and their situation. The findings highlight the importance of context sensitivity for OS. According to Field and Coetzer (2008):

“Results of a recent meta-analysis on the relationship between socialisation tactics and newcomer adjustment undertaken by Saks, et al. (2006) indicate that organisations should take a “contingency approach” to socialisation practices. For example, organisations need not choose between an individualised or institutionalised approach, but if required can use a combination of both.” (p. 528).

This seems to be apt in the present context, since I have shown how different factors (newcomers as individuals and their experience, managers and their experience, colleagues, the start-ups, the situation) combine to create unique socialisation situations. Feldman (1976) has already introduced the notion of a contingency view of socialisation. However, where his article is from a hospital setting, and describes stages of socialisation and individual and organisational contingencies in relation to how newcomers move through these stages, my view of contingency is more holistic, in that it includes and highlights the situational context and its consequences for socialisation. For instance, the newcomers have varying degrees of experience, and this is a nuance that is not often included in the literature, because earlier research has tended to focus either on graduates entering an organisation (cf. Daskalaki, 2012, p. 97) or experienced people who change jobs or transition to a new role in their present organisation (e.g. Cooper-Thomas et al., 2011). However, as is the case for especially Case 4, but also Case 6, a start-up might hire both experienced and inexperienced candidates, and the start-up context is itself a unique situation for socialisation.
The four repertoires identified across managers and newcomers are all, to varying degrees, linked to the start-up context. The ‘(Opportunities to) influence vs. challenges’ repertoire is a repository for what is constructed as the benefits and drawbacks/challenges of entering a start-up. The ‘Acceptance and alignment’ repertoire directly touches on (to some extent) expecting and accepting the start-up situation, and being aligned, in the sense that the newcomers must understand what is needed when working in a start-up (e.g. in Case 6, newcomers need to be able to work independently and be self-driven). Parts of the ‘Balance’ repertoire are also linked to the context, because when faced with a challenging environment, having a specific task is an advantage for newcomers. Finally, as regards the ‘Social’ repertoire, in Case 4 in particular the newcomers mention that they are creating a social framework in the new organisation.

The findings above answer the overall RQ2: How are accounts of organisational entry in Danish ICT start-ups constructed? As regards the sub-questions on knowledge communication, task and organisational aspects, I have already touched on these in the ‘Summing up’ sections of the analysis of the manager and newcomer interviews. Overall, newcomers are settling into both a job and an organisation, and since the job takes place in an organisation the two are related, although there are also aspects which centre on either the job or the organisation. For instance, as regards task mastery, employees need to know about the organisational context in order to carry out their tasks in accordance with ‘expected task behaviours’ (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003, p. 781). In other words, being able to do a job is not just a question of occupational socialisation, because it is also related to a specific company context and practices. This is touched on by C5/M1, who says that IT work can be done in different ways, and that, in his start-up, the newcomers need to follow a specific pattern which he has started to lay down. Both C5/M1 and C4/M1 also touch on aspects such as team spirit and group dynamics, which form part of the context in which the tasks are carried out. Cutting across both the task and more overall organisational domain, related to knowledge, the newcomers mention talking to their new colleagues and managers, and in general highlight the benefits of an environment where their colleagues are close (both physically and socially) and where it is easy to ask questions. The managers highlight different systems and platforms, how they are used, and how the newcomers are introduced to them, and also note in various ways that these cannot stand alone, and mention face-to-face introductions, supervision, and buddies.
15. Discussion: Implications and Contributions

In the previous chapters, I have approached OS as a knowledge process, drawing on the field of OKC. I then analysed discursive practices related to OS in start-ups, specifically in relation to opinions about and experiences of organisational entry. In this chapter, I bring together my empirical findings and theoretical framework to discuss implications of the start-up context for OS, and present my contributions.

In section 15.1., I focus on the start-ups as the context for OS and related implications, discussing aspects specifically related to socialisation under ICT start-up conditions and tensions, together with proximal outcomes and knowledge challenges in this regard. As noted in earlier parts of the dissertation, the focus on proximal outcomes emerged as meaningful as I immersed myself in the theoretical and empirical work. In chapter 5, I focused on the proximal outcomes in relation to knowledge communication theoretically, and the empirical material shows knowledge-related implications for the proximal outcomes. Here, I thus focus on the proximal outcomes in relation to the knowledge challenges mentioned in the empirical material, and also draw on the theoretical framework, in order to understand and discuss the special challenges and dynamics related to OS in start-ups and how this has consequences for the outcomes. This understanding of how the start-up context has implications for the OS process and the proximal OS outcomes, facilitated by the coupling of OS and OKC and the empirical material, leads to insights not only for OS proximal outcomes in start-ups specifically, but also for the approach to proximal outcomes of OS generally.

In section 15.2., I draw on the previous chapters and section 15.1. to present my contributions. I especially focus on contributions to theory. Importantly, context sensitivity forms the background for many of these. I also include some recommendations for practice.

I round off the chapter (section 15.3.) with suggestions for future research, considering both ideas stemming from, and boundary conditions of, the present research.

15.1. Socialisation under ICT Start-Up Conditions: Tensions and Implications for Outcomes

Considering OS metaphors and clichés such as to ‘hit the ground running’ and ‘learn the ropes’, it seems apt to ask how, or even to which extent, newcomers do this in start-ups. How do you ‘hit the ground running’ and ‘learn the ropes’ in organisational contexts where everything is not up and running? In the previous chapters, I analysed how the managers and newcomers in the start-ups account for their opinions about and experiences of organisational entry. I found four overall
repertoires that the informants drew on, labelled: ‘Social’, ‘Balance’, ‘Acceptance and alignment’ and ‘(Opportunity to) influence and challenges’. I also touched on some contextual differences between the start-ups, and related these to identified themes and repertoires.

In the following subsections, I bring together my empirical work, the OS literature and my theoretical framework to discuss the implications of my empirical and theoretical work. Throughout, I relate to the overall interpretative repertoires and the significance of these in relation to my RQs. In this dissertation, the interface between OS, OKC, and the start-up context is central. In order to bring these together, and discuss what my work then shows and what it means for OS in start-ups, in section 15.1.1., I focus on how managers and newcomers talk about socialisation under ICT start-up conditions, including different tensions, i.e. how the identified repertoires and themes are related to the conditions and show tensions, and relate this to the literature on socialisation. After having focused on different tensions in ICT start-up OS, in section 15.1.2. I then focus on proximal OS outcomes and knowledge challenges in relation to current OS theory, the theoretical framework and the empirical findings. As mentioned above, in doing this I bring together dynamics and challenges of OS in start-ups with a view of the outcomes as related to knowledge.

15.1.1. Empirical Findings, Conditions, and the Literature

In this section, I consider how the identified repertoires are linked to the ICT start-up context. These repertoires all have aspects specifically related to the context, which suggests that there are indeed specific aspects central to OS in start-ups. In particular, the repertoires show tensions and challenges, but also opportunities, and I will use these in discussing the premises for socialisation in start-ups. While some of these challenges are also likely to be present in larger or more mature firms and in other industries, and some might say that the repertoires identified are fairly basic (general, human), other premises for, or ways of dealing with them might be needed in start-ups, so it is interesting to examine what the repertoires mean in the specific context and what the consequences are.

As mentioned, both newcomers and managers touch on contextual aspects of size, newness and resources (especially resource constraints) in their accounts. This is related to the repertoires in various ways. As regards the repertoire ‘(Opportunity to) influence and challenges’, the analysis showed that, on the one hand, size and newness are equated with ‘benefits of newness/smallness’. Both managers and newcomers mention that the size and newness make it easier for the newcomers to contribute and have a say, and also that it can be more agreeable to work in an organisation with
fewer people. On the other hand, the managers in particular reproduce the idea of ‘liability of newness/smallness’, especially as regards resource constraints.

Thus, newness and size aspects are talked of as giving rise to insecurities and challenges that are context specific. For instance, C4/M1 says that they do not have an organisational learning yet, which means that they have not yet developed a ‘conscience’ about their domain (lines 474-486). The lack of organisational learning and knowledge is sometimes presented as a challenge and a frustration. On the other hand, both managers and newcomers mention that it means that there is less that newcomers ‘need to get the hang of’, because there is less ‘baggage’ and history. Thus, newness is both good and bad: The upside is that there are less existing aspects the newcomers have to ‘figure out’, while the downside is that this also means that there is less (framework) to hold on to and help one settle in.

Thus, the start-up situation has consequences for knowledge communication and for socialisation, inasmuch as the possibilities for knowledge communication and what they communicate about impacts the socialisation (I return to this in the section on OS outcomes in a start-up context).

The above also seems to be related to a time/development factor, i.e. when does the start-up begin to hire, how many are hired and how quickly (after each other), and how ‘defined’ are the start-ups’ products/services at the point of entry? As mentioned in chapter 13, some newcomers (Case 3, Case 4) participate in very early stages of product work, and even in task and goal definition, whereas when (most) newcomers in Case 2, 5 and 6 start working on a product, it already has some pre-existing aspects and functions, i.e. they build/contribute to something that is already in progress.

Other researchers have touched on the difference between an individual and an institutionalised approach to OS as related to organisational size. According to Field and Coetzer (2008): “[…] an individualised approach to OS is more appropriate for small firms (Ashforth, et al., 1998; Saks, et al., 1998). In addition, certain institutionalised tactics, such as collective, are only feasible in organisations of a certain size (Saks, et al., 1998).” (p. 529). They also noted that “[…] an individualised approach represents less organisational involvement and structure in socialisation, which result in newcomers being more active participants in their own socialisation. This can result in increased uncertainty.” (Field & Coetzer, 2008, p. 527). Thus, (sometimes) an individualised approach is recommended for small organisations, and sometimes it is the only possible approach, e.g. in start-ups that hire only one person at a time at intervals, because it means that it is not possible to follow a collective tactic, which is part of the institutionalised approach, so the process will resemble the individualised approach more. I have previously mentioned the notion of ‘self-
socialisation’, and that there might be a greater need (both from the newcomers’ and organisations’
side) for newcomers in start-ups to engage in this. Overall, the above quotes from Field and Coetzer
(2008) present a conceptual argument/background for the empirical repertoire about opportunity to
influence/freedom and challenges/uncertainty I identified across the informants, i.e. that one
challenge is uncertainty, and that newcomers are active and have the opportunity to influence (e.g.
their roles and tasks), but that this might also make them feel uncertain and insecure.

Across the start-ups, some kind of and level of uncertainty for newcomers (and managers) seems to
be inevitable, since it is highlighted as related to the condition of being a start-up. And while the
literature on OS in general talks about how newcomers experience uncertainty and would like to
reduce it (e.g. Ashford & Black, 1996), part of the uncertainty here seems to be inherent to the context
they enter, and thus, there are some uncertain aspects that cannot be removed altogether. However,
given the newness of start-ups, this is constructed as acceptable, at least to some extent, and is
sometimes even expected, as in the ‘Acceptance’ repertoire. For instance, some of the managers and
newcomers talk about insecurity related to future aspects.

Furthermore, as regards the discursive pattern related to freedom and opportunities to influence on
the one hand, and insecurity and challenges on the other, this suggests a specific tension between the
upsides and downsides of entering a start-up, and how these affect each other. The opportunity to
influence is motivating, while disorder and chaos can be frustrating, and eventually demotivating. For
instance, the newcomers mention that unclear expectations and/or the lack of a guiding framework
are challenging. This can be experienced as the newcomers try to make use of their opportunity to
influence, or as they are expected to be self-driven, e.g. in finding and solving tasks. I.e. it can be
daunting to take part in defining and deciding when you still feel new. Sometimes, entry in the start-
ups to some extent resembles ‘trial by fire’ (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988), as the newcomers
are given brief introductions and then set straight to work on (more or less defined) tasks.

This also relates to the context aspect in the ‘Balance’ repertoire, as several newcomers highlight that
it was nice to have something specific to start with, because it gave them something to hold on to in
the face of a muddled or unsettled work environment. The ‘Balance’ repertoire can also be related to
the context by drawing on some differences between the start-ups. In Case 3 and 4, as opposed to 2,
5 and 6, there seems to be less instruction, and the newcomers are more involved in central dialogues
and discussions. Thus, in relation to these start-ups, the notion of ‘onboarding’ in its strict sense
cannot explain the whole picture, since newcomers are involved more from the beginning (and even
before their official start, as with C3/NC2\textsuperscript{18}). Thus, in these case start-ups, there is a very high degree of interactionist OS, since newcomers play a part in shaping their tasks, roles, and the organisation itself. In dealing with the ‘Balance’ repertoire for newcomers, I also noted that C3/NC1 draws on a ‘Balance’ repertoire which is different from the ‘Balance’ repertoire across newcomers. This difference is relevant here, as he talks about a balance which is not so much a balance between length of introduction, starting on tasks, and (avoiding) information overload, but instead, related to how he is involved in making decisions from the very start, talks about balancing (the requirement for) contributing from day one with needing to make sense of already made decisions. In other words, he does not have the time to familiarise himself with everything first, but has to contribute at the same time as he is learning about the background and reasoning.

The ‘Acceptance/alignment’ repertoire has a clear context boundedness as it is specifically linked to the start-up situation. It involves the managers talking about ensuring alignment, especially in terms of wanting and needing newcomers to understand the start-up situation and making them aware of its consequences, and the newcomers talking about (to some extent) expecting and accepting aspects related to the start-up situation. This is related to accepting aspects of the start-up situation, because that is also what facilitates some of the things that attracted the newcomers to working in a start-up in the first place. In the analysis, I mentioned self-selection and related it to the ‘Acceptance’ repertoire, i.e. that people explicitly chose to apply for and/or accept a position in a start-up because they were attracted to it because of e.g. its newness and size, and because they expected that it would be a more agile organisation where it would be easier to have a say and make an impact.

As regards acceptance, self-selection, and motivation, even though there are challenges, it is interesting to note the implications of the ‘Acceptance’ repertoire, i.e. some degree of acceptance of some aspects of the start-up situation because other aspects are motivating, and that a number of the newcomers mentioned why they had specifically sought out or accepted the start-up job, and thus to some degree had self-selected into the environment. But even if there is some aspect of self-selection, the newcomers cannot have the full knowledge of the organisation in advance, and thus they might experience some frustration, e.g. if something is more disorganised than expected.

As regards the social repertoire, several newcomers mentioned getting jobs in the start-ups via their network (for C4/NC8, I made a field note about network hiring). This is related to two aspects in the

\textsuperscript{18} The case of C3/NC2 is also special in that, when he was hired and they talked about salary and pension, he said he also wanted a share in the company (lines 126-132). Throughout the interview, he highlights getting involved and being active.
interviews. First of all, previous acquaintance is a factor in all the case start-ups, since one or more newcomers either knew the manager and/or other newcomers/new colleagues in advance. Some of them said that this made settling in easier and helped give them a sense of security, because they already knew who some of the other people were, and that they were good at their jobs. Secondly, the hiring decision itself seems to be related to this acquaintanceship sometimes, in that managers (and newcomers, in terms of the decision to accept the job), mention aspects such as fit (and chemistry) and alignment. Also related to the newness of the start-ups, in relation to the social repertoire, both newcomers and managers mention aspects such as ‘building a culture’ and norms related to e.g. eating lunch together as something that is related to (creating) a feeling of ‘togetherness’.

As noted, some of the challenges and insecurities that the managers and newcomers mention seem likely to be something that is not restricted to the start-up context (e.g. concerns about social integration), however they might be accentuated because of the newness of the organisations. For instance, while social integration might also be a concern for newcomers in established companies, here, especially in Case 4, the newcomers in general talk about creating and building the social framework because the organisation is very new.

In the analysis, I briefly mentioned that the socialisation and individualisation present in some of the start-ups can be described as a kind of creolisation, as not only managers but also newcomers influence the organisation-building in the new ventures. This is especially related to the ‘influence’ aspects of some of the identified repertoires, but to some extent depends on what the newcomer is hired for (tasks, role), their background and their position (e.g. whether they are interns or permanent full-time employees). This creolisation is more evident because the start-ups are newer organisations. For instance, in some of the start-ups there is more room for individualisation, and in some it is even expected, e.g. if one is hired to take up, and in that way make, a role that no one else in the organisation has the skill set for (e.g. C5/M1 and C6/M1 mention hiring people who have competencies they lack) or has had before. This is for instance the case with C6/NC2. However, he also mentions the challenge of taking up a function where he has opinions about how it should play out, while at the same time needing to understand the organisation and deadlines in order to contribute in a useful way. Here, future research might draw on the communities of practice literature (e.g. Wenger, 1998) and/or draw more on the literature on work group socialisation (e.g. N. Anderson & Thomas, 1996), at least for the start-ups where there is more negotiation of tasks and roles going on (typically the start-ups with more experienced newcomers, or where there is an overweight of experienced newcomers).
As shown in the OS literature review, it has already been suggested that different conditions and challenges related to socialisation exist in small companies and start-ups compared to larger and/or more mature companies. The review also showed that OS in start-ups and small organisations is under-researched. Part of the argument for the relevance of investigating OS in start-ups was the expectation, partly grounded in literature, that some things would be different for OS in start-ups and existing theory might not always apply. I summed up the range of aspects which other authors have noted might influence practices and constitute challenging aspects concerning OS and HRM in start-ups, notably: resources (money, material, human), experience of entrepreneurs as personnel/HR managers, recruiting through networks, fit and culture, informality, and uncertainty. Based on J. N. Baron and Hannan (2002), I also noted that management orientations can differ across start-ups, and that this can influence people practices in different ways. As shown above, all of the aspects mentioned in the literature can be found empirically as part of thematic clusters and repertoires from the analysis.

15.1.2. Proximal Outcomes in ICT Start-Up OS: Knowledge Challenges and Links

In this section, building on the analysis chapters, I focus on how the informants talk in relation to the three proximal outcomes of OS mentioned in the theoretical framework (see 5.1.3.), namely role clarity, task mastery, and social integration. Thus, I focus on the three outcomes in relation to how they are talked of in a start-up context. In the theoretical framework, I outlined how these outcomes can be seen to have knowledge aspects, as they are knowledge outcomes and/or have consequences for knowledge. Considering that the proximal outcomes have been described as ‘adjustment variables’ (cf. Ashforth, 2012, p. 180), and that Klein and Heuser (2008, p. 296-297) note that knowledge is the outcome of the OS process and learning is an indicator, there is a case for drawing on OKC, especially when studying OS in a context that, as shown in the literature review, is characterised by uncertainty and dynamics that are likely to affect newcomers entering start-ups.

The outcomes have often been related to uncertainty reduction. However, in a start-up context, there are likely to be a number of challenges to achieving these outcomes, as I will show below. For instance, achieving role clarity and task mastery can be difficult in cases where neither roles nor tasks are explicitly defined. In most of the start-ups, the newcomers, at least to some extent, participate in defining the tasks and making decisions, which has implications for role clarity and task mastery. In this way, the start-up situation has consequences for socialisation and knowledge communication related to it.
15.1.2.1. Role Clarity

In the OS literature, role clarity is about how:

“[…] to function in the organizational environment, newcomers must learn about their job’s purpose and relationship to other jobs (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Louis, 1980). Role clarity reflects having sufficient information about the responsibilities and objectives of one’s job in the broader organization and having knowledge of behaviors considered appropriate for achieving these goals (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964).” (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003, p. 781, emphasis in original).

As regards this outcome, the empirical material has a number of clashes with the theoretical recommendations. Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) note that “[…] roles […] describe well-defined and structural components of the workplace […]” (p. 782), which is contrary to what C4/NC2 says about how they do not as such talk about specific roles, because they want the roles to develop rather than be pre-specified and something that the newcomers take on. As such, this is an approach which ‘violates’ the definition of role clarity. Feldman (1976) notes that ‘role definition’ is a variable in the accommodation stage (p. 435), and that it concerns understanding which tasks are part of one’s role, and how to prioritise them and allocate time between them (p. 435). The question of how to prioritise tasks was raised by both newcomers in Case 6.

One example of uncertainty and lack of clarity about roles is NC8 in Case 4. He is an experienced newcomer, who said that he had asked his manager for a meeting, because the expectations for his role were unclear, and he was unsure whether he was doing what was expected of him. Part of his role is to help ensure that the start-up develops their software in a sound way, which means that he has to give feedback to his new colleagues, which sometimes has the consequence that they might need to redo part of their work. He says he felt uncomfortable about giving this kind of feedback before he had had the chance to develop rapport with his new colleagues and gain their respect for his professional abilities. Thus, this touches not only on role clarity, but also on social integration. Delobbe et al. (2016) showed that “[…] newcomers’ obligations at the start of employment contribute to the social exchange dynamic underlying organizational socialization.” (p. 845).

In terms of socialisation tactics, the distinction between ‘serial’ and ‘disjunctive’ “[…] refers to newcomers being socialised with the assistance of previous job incumbents as role models or the lack of/absence of role models.” (Field & Coetzer, 2008, p. 527). In a start-up, there is likely to often not be a role model, e.g. when there are no previous employees in a certain role. This is the case for
C6/NC2, who is the first product designer in the start-up. Thus, it would not be possible to use a ‘serial’ tactic. C6/NC2 says that it is challenging for the managers to onboard him because he has a different background, and he is aware that he is shaping a certain role and is going to be a role model when onboarding future newcomers in that role. Delobbe et al.’s (2016) study, mentioned previously, showed that “Newcomers with a higher sense of their personal obligations are more prone to update their knowledge, skills, and competencies and to adapt to their new work environment.” (p. 848). Here, this notion of perceived obligations can be related to the themes and individual repertoires on taking responsibility, e.g. as espoused by C6/NC2 and some of the experienced newcomers in Case 4.

The role clarity outcome is central here, as central aspects of what is considered part of role clarity are challenging in a start-up context. For instance, C4/NC8 needs to act as a role model (as he needs to tell people how something should be done, i.e. how a task should be performed), but at the same time he mentions that he has been frustrated about unclear expectations, i.e. he is himself a newcomer who experiences a lack of role clarity (which ultimately led him to call a meeting with the manager). Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) note that “Ambiguous situations with unclear role expectations may make it difficult for individuals to assess where to direct their efforts, resulting in confusion and dissatisfaction (Miller & Jablin, 1991).” (p. 781).

Thus, role clarity can be challenging to achieve in start-ups for a number of reasons, e.g. because a newcomer might be hired to occupy a role in the start-up which no one has held in the company before. Thus, a major implication of the start-up situation is that it can have great impact on the socialisation outcome of role clarity (which is highlighted as being of central importance in OS, e.g. as it is related to distal outcomes such as commitment and performance [T. N. Bauer & Erdogan, 2012, p. 101]). Thus, gaining role clarity can be difficult in a situation where the organisation is permeated by newness and the structure and perhaps even focus (of service, goods) is continually developing. This makes it difficult not only to get the full grasp of one’s own role, as it is also likely to develop, but also makes it challenging to relate one’s own role to colleagues’ roles and the ‘bigger picture’, when things are in flux in this way. As mentioned, perhaps no one has had the role before, or if a similar role did exist, maybe it has changed slightly. As for understanding others’ roles, C5/NC2 mentions a ‘who is who?’ issue which is about figuring out who the freelancers are and what they do. This clarity about others’ roles also relates to being able to figure out who to approach with different questions, as e.g. mentioned by C6/NC2.
This means that a central aspect of adjustment and something that newcomers need to make sense of is challenging, especially as role clarity is not only about ‘what is the role?’ but ‘what is the role in the specific context?’, i.e. the newcomers need to make sense of what the role is in the organisation, how a specific role is to be carried out in the specific context. This is especially part of the interviews with experienced newcomers who have had a specific role before, but where the circumstances in the start-up mean that the role cannot be enacted in the way they are used to (e.g. C4/NC8). C6/M3 also touches on how the newcomers want to understand where they (and their role) fit in in the bigger picture. In other words, understanding their role in isolation is not enough, they would like to understand how the work that they do is part of a bigger picture (e.g. lines 309-313), and understand the user perspective, i.e. what happens at the end of the ‘production line’ (lines 304-309).

Maybe one would expect to find even more individualisation strategies (from the newcomers) in start-ups (compared to other companies), because there is not necessarily a lot to socialise into, e.g. in the case of roles. However, this might depend on how strong a concept of the start-up the managers have, for instance whether they introduce newcomers to pre-conceived ideas about what they want in a role, or whether they develop the ideas and the roles with the newcomers. It also depends on newcomers’ motivation, experience, and the type of job they are hired to do. For instance, there are differences between NC1 and NC2 in Case 2, where the one is an intern/student developer and the other is a full-time hardware developer who plays a larger role in relation to decisions, since he is the only one with expertise in the hardware area. In Case 3, both newcomers (who are experienced) play a part in setting the direction and making decisions.

In a broader perspective, a number of managers and newcomers mention doing things that are not in their job description (or that they did not expect to be part of their job/tasks), and that you need to take responsibility for the workplace in general and tasks that are not specifically yours precisely because it is a start-up (e.g. C5/M1 lines 464-470, C4/NC8). For C4/NC8, this can be related to the ‘Acceptance’ repertoire (and how there are also limits to the acceptance), as he mentions that also having to solve some practical tasks is acceptable. On the other hand, in terms of specific professional tasks, he mentions that he is spending a lot of time on more basic aspects of these because he is the only one who knows how to do it, but that he expected to be spending a lot more time on the knowledge work, where he can use his specific skill-set.

This is connected to task mastery, which I will go into next, since, in one sense, C4/NC8 cannot live out his ‘occupational identity’ as a data scientist to the full, because he is spending a lot of time on
tasks that are not central to being a data scientist. Thus, for some of the experienced newcomers, this consequence of an organisation’s newness and how developed it is (i.e. needing to build basic aspects that you do not consider to be part of the role/work you were expecting to be doing) might lead to frustrations. As such, aspects of how a role should be enacted from the perspective of occupational socialisation might not fit entirely with the possibilities for performing it in a specific organisation, or how e.g. a manager expects the role to be performed, i.e. the OS aspect of role clarity where the role needs to integrate with the organisation in general.

In at least some of the start-ups, therefore, there seems to be a tendency of giving newcomers some tasks (or at least an indication) and letting roles develop, i.e. giving specific tasks and letting the role develop, or letting both develop. Several of the newcomers and managers mention the benefits of having specific tasks to start with, and maybe because of uncertain situations the managers try to help newcomers by giving them something specific, but newcomers still want to (try to) understand how they fit in (in the bigger picture), e.g. as they want to contribute. And, as noted above, Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) state that “Ambiguous situations with unclear role expectations may make it difficult for individuals to assess where to direct their efforts, resulting in confusion and dissatisfaction (Miller & Jablin, 1991).” (p. 781). In this sense, even though newcomers are given specific tasks, they still need role clarity to understand how to prioritise them, which is something that is mentioned as a frustration/insecurity by C6/NC1.

Thus, rounding off role clarity, I found that roles were not always clearly spoken of, e.g. as they were presented as something that should emerge rather than be fixed. This can have consequences for how to obtain clarity of one’s own role, and some of the newcomers also mentioned that it could be a challenge in relation to understanding others’ functions, and e.g. figuring out who to approach with specific questions. Role clarity is also related to understanding roles in relation to each other (e.g. C6/M3 mentioned ‘cog wheels’). Treating roles as emerging rather than fixed challenges role clarity as a finite outcome in start-ups, since both one’s own and others’ roles might develop, leading to new role constellations that need to be made sense of. This means that role clarity might be developing on an ongoing basis, as roles can also develop. In this sense we might speak of relative role clarity, or at least need to consider that, in assessing role clarity, we will often only get a snap-shot that can change over time.
15.1.2.2. Task Mastery
Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) write that task mastery concerns “[…] the technical competence required for task completion […]” (p. 781), and that “A major issue for newcomers, beginning the day they start work, includes acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills they need to complete expected task behaviours (e.g. Chao et al., 1994; Fisher, 1986; Reichers, 1987; Taormina, 1994).” (p. 781).

As an example of task mastery, C2/NC1 and the newcomers in Case 5, who are interns and student developers, mention working and becoming familiar with new technologies that they need to solve their tasks. Another example is that, in relation to the inexperienced newcomers in Case 4, some of their experienced colleagues mention that, although they know how to code, they have not been used to doing it in a way where the code or software can be reused, whereas in IT development this is necessary. In other words, in order to master their tasks in the new context, it is not enough to be able to code, they also need to understand how to do it in such a way that the code can be reused.

In some of the start-ups, there seems to be a tension where the managers focus a lot on the tasks, but where the ‘big picture’ is sometimes missing. This is exemplified by the newcomers in Case 5. The quote by Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) above indicated that task mastery includes “[…] acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills they need to complete expected task behaviours (e.g. Chao et al., 1994; Fisher, 1986; Reichers, 1987; Taormina, 1994).” (p. 781). In my empirical material, it is clear that ‘knowledge needed to complete expected task behaviours’ is about more than the task per se, and includes needing to know about the task in context. For instance, C6/NC1 mentions that he asked a lot of questions to understand e.g. reasons behind decisions, and that if he understands this reasoning in full, he will know how he should fix something. In other words, it is not enough just to know about the tasks and have certain skills e.g. related to coding. Getting a fuller picture of the organisation helps the newcomer settle in, and is also needed for task mastery in the full sense of the term. Thus, this is also related to what I have mentioned before about the difference between explaining ‘this is how we do something’ and helping newcomers understand ‘this is why we do it in that way’. And for some of the newcomers where there has been a lot of focus on tasks (e.g. C5/NC1 and 2, C6/NC1\textsuperscript{19}), the latter aspect about reasoning or the bigger picture, which is mentioned as important for understanding, seems to sometimes have been missing.

\textsuperscript{19} Newcomer 2 in Case 6 had a more extensive introduction to e.g. the vision and history of the start-up.
There is a tension here. Tasks are good, because it is good to have something specific to get started with in a situation where a lot of things are new, and where there might be a lot of things in the environment that are muddled or unsettled. At the same time, however, there can be a need for understanding the surrounding context to be able to solve one’s tasks in an expedient way. Myers (2011) noted that socialisation practice often contains a paradox, as newcomers are met with heavy (but sometimes short) periods of orientation, but are unlikely to get the full benefit of this, since they do not (at that point in time) have enough understanding of the new context. For example, C6/NC2 mentioned an information-heavy introduction at a previous workplace, where some of the information was straightforward to the people giving it, because they had been in the organisation for years, but not to him, because he had only just arrived and did not have experience in the organisation.

The above is also an aspect in Case 4. Even though the experienced NC6 mentions that “below the surface it is all 0’s and 1’s” (lines 350-354), i.e. that in a sense it does not matter what kind of product you are developing software for, there are still contextual aspects which influence how the newcomers can accomplish their tasks. For instance, C4/NC1 (a data scientist) mentions that she needs to know something about the domain in order to be able to identify outliers (lines 496-515) in the material she uses to create data models. Thus, isolated task training is not enough for task mastery, contextual aspects also matter. Another example of this is when C5/NC1 mentions that, although he can look up a solution to a problem online, he sometimes still needs to ask his more experienced colleagues, since they can better evaluate whether it is a good solution or not.

Having already touched on IT aspects, I will now discuss them in more detail, since they are central to task mastery in an ICT start-up. For example, in Case 6, M3 mentions that, for some aspects of app development, there are specific external guidelines (e.g. concerning developing apps for Android smartphones), so when working with that technology, there are some recommendations that are external to the start-up as such. The newcomers in Case 5 (especially C5/NC2) also mention using external material (such as online guides and videos) to find information on how to do something, e.g. related to app development. On a broader level, one could say that the newcomers draw on different available resources to scaffold their knowledge creation in relation to task mastery, as they also use e.g. external videos and online searches.

Thus, one aspect of task mastery concerns specific skills, as seen in the section above. However, as mentioned, that is not all there is to task mastery. In terms of ‘expected task behaviours’, this would include that newcomers become familiar with the ways of running the day-to-day work, e.g. project
management and how to track versions of code. C5/M1 describes IT people as craftsmen, i.e. they have learned a craft, but he also mentions that they need guidance, because IT development is complex and the ‘house’ (the software) can be built in many different ways. Thus, although the newcomers might have learned how to code and about project management tools, etc., they still need guidance on how to code for the particular project in the start-up. C5/M1 mentions how he started ‘building’ the software, and that this means there is a pattern the newcomers need to follow. Furthermore, there are processes and ways of working that are specific to the company, i.e. aspects along the lines of ‘how do we do something?’ (or ‘how would we like to do it?’). This could for instance be project management practices.

System architecture can be said to be talked about as a kind of knowledge scaffolding (Orlikowski, 2006). For instance, C2/NC1 and C2/M1 mention that the newcomers were given some exercises which were about learning the basic structure of the system they would be building on, so that, when they actually started working on it, they would have an understanding of the general structure, even though the system was full of content. In a way, the system becomes both text and context, since the newcomers need to understand the general architecture of the system itself, and at the same time the system architecture is the context for the development work that the developers do, so they need to learn how to read the context20.

Finally, for task mastery in an ICT start-up context, it is interesting to note that the managers and newcomers talk about IT jobs as jobs with tasks that are both specific and complex (field note from C5/M1 interview). In other words, the tasks are to some degree standardised, and at the same time some of the newcomers (e.g. C4/NC4) characterise IT development as creative development work. For instance, C5/M1 mentions ‘getting the workers started’ (the standardised part), but also that they need guidance (the more creative part) because IT development can be done in different ways, and some of the newcomers mention contextual aspects, i.e. a product can be more or less advanced. C4/NC4 notes that a lot of IT work is about working on already developed systems, and that it is ‘maintenance’ work where systems have interdependencies. This means that you cannot just change something as it might affect the whole system (lines 551-559), so you need a creative solution rather than a standardised one to solve that kind of problem.

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20 This can be said to be what differentiates IT developers from people who use IT on an everyday level; the developers need to understand the structure of a system in order to build on it, but an everyday user of e.g. an app does not need to understand how to code in order to use the app.
As regards task mastery, there are some differences across the newcomers. The experienced newcomer 2 in Case 3 did not express difficulties related to task mastery (rather the opposite), whereas the newcomers in Case 5, who were student developers, said that their tasks were very new. Task mastery is not only about skills, but requires knowledge/understanding, both ‘that’ and ‘how’. As regards the repertoire on influencing and challenges, in relation to task mastery, some of the newcomers have somewhat free hands in determining what to do and how, but on the other hand this is also connected to some feelings of discomfort, e.g. as expectations are not always clear.

15.1.2.3. Social/Work Group Integration

According to Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003), “Work group integration relates to perceived approval from coworkers and inclusion in their activities, which can be a source of social support and assistance.” (p. 782, emphasis in original).

A relevant tactic here is collective versus individual socialisation processes. Gómez (2009) describes this as the difference between being socialised as part of a group vs. ‘individual learning experiences’ (p. 182). Some of the newcomers in my research have started together with other newcomers, while others have started alone. In Case 2, NC1 started together with another intern, whereas NC2 started alone. In C3, both newcomers started alone. In Case 4, newcomers 1-3 started together, newcomers 4-6 started together a month after the first group, and NC7 and 8 started alone. Case 4 is the start-up where most newcomers have experienced collective socialisation. In Case 5, the two interviewed newcomers started together. In Case 6, both interviewed newcomers started alone. Even though, across the start-ups, some newcomers started alone, some of them knew manager(s) and/or (some) of their new colleagues beforehand, e.g. C6/NC2. This shows that, while there are differences across the start-ups, e.g. OS is necessarily more individualised in some start-ups because they only have one newcomer at a time, a company might need to socialise both collectively and individually, depending on how it hires, i.e. they do not necessarily do only the one or the other.

Saks and Ashforth (1997) note that: “Other processes that might underlie the impact of socialization tactics on newcomer adjustment include social support, reward mechanisms, and opportunities to develop relationships (Bauer & Green, 1994; Wanous & Colella, 1989).” (p. 262). As regards opportunities to develop relationships, in those start-ups where newcomers start alone, they can only build relationships with existing employees – or only with managers where there are no other employees. In other start-ups, the newcomers can also build relationships with other newcomers. Both C2/M1 and C4/M1 say that it is good for (inexperienced) newcomers to have each other to talk to. In
addition, as mentioned before, a lot of the newcomers are already acquainted with their new manager and/or (some of) their new colleagues. This means that they already have some previously established relationships. This is the case for a lot of the experienced newcomers in Case 4, but the two newcomers in Case 5 (who are student developers) also mention that they study together and thus know each other well and support each other. Thus, a lot of the newcomers have some pre-established relationships which can help them get support and assistance.

In the analysis, I identified a social repertoire across managers and newcomers with two nuances (‘professional social’ and ‘collegial bonding’). This suggests that social integration does not just have a functional aspect, but also a broader social aspect. Across the interviews, the newcomers also orient to the general work environment in terms of, for example, tone and ambience. This, coupled with the two nuances, also relates to the relationship between work group integration and more overall social integration in the organisation as such. For instance, in Case 4 there are two overall groups (data scientists and software developers), and newcomer 4 says that it is also important to talk to other people at lunch than those you usually talk to, in order to develop a relationship which makes it easier to ask questions later. As such, he is making sure to socialise across work groups. C6/NC2 also touches on how it is easier to ask questions (it is less uncomfortable) when you know the people you are talking to. The definition of work group integration quoted above says that inclusion can be a source of social support and assistance. The examples from C6/NC2 and C4/NC4 suggest that ‘inclusion’ also makes it easier to ask for support and assistance.

As mentioned in the OS literature review, Barge and Schlueter (2004) note that the information-seeking literature “[…] distinguishes between task and personal dimensions of relationships.” (p. 237). However, the findings here suggest that these two dimensions are also related (task and social). Korte et al. (2015) also noted that, for the newcomers in their study “Developing good working relationships was predicated on getting to know others personally.” (p. 197).

In general in Case 4, the social is talked of as ‘something we do together’, e.g. as they talk about creating a social framework (e.g. C4/NC1, C4/NC4). ‘Socialising’ in a start-up context is something the newcomers (and other employees) do together as a group through talking to each other. I.e. building and maintaining the social frame is a group effort (as the people socialise with each other).

The newcomers highlight that they talk to each other and their colleagues, and the fact that the newcomers are involved and play a part in defining the organisation and their tasks seems (in addition to the newcomers taking ownership, which might lead to stronger socialisation) to have the added
benefit of building relationships. Thus, the newcomers have the opportunity and are encouraged to contribute, and when they do that they talk to and discuss with their colleagues (which thus constitutes interactionist socialisation), and it means that, because of the context, the newcomers have good opportunities to build relationships with co-workers soon after they enter the start-ups. And for some newcomers in Case 4, ‘being in it together’ (the start-up situation) also seems to mean that they build stronger bonds. Several of the newcomers said that ‘we talk about things’, e.g. when making decisions (e.g. C2/NC2). This also signals the orientation towards ‘doing things together/being included’, and being included in the decision-making has the additional benefit that the employees know about the decisions being made.

In relation to the aforementioned definition of work group integration, inclusion in the activities of the work group can be described not only as social integration, but also as a condition for carrying out one’s tasks, i.e. for some tasks you likely need to be included in the activities and the group to understand what you are supposed to do and how.

In the literature, the notion of ‘social knowledge’ is related to such organisational aspects as culture, norms and values (Schein, 1968). However, the findings here suggest that the individual level (and its integration with the group level) should not be overlooked. Specifically, the ‘collegial social/bonding’ nuance of the social repertoire concerns getting to know one’s colleagues on a personal level and talking about things that are not necessarily related to work, while the ‘professional social’ nuance involves working together better and learning about organisational aspects through getting to know the people. Thus, to learn ‘social knowledge’, it is not enough to e.g. read or be told about values and culture, one needs to become acquainted with the people who practice it.

In the literature, uncertainty has often been equated with such newcomer concerns as ‘Can I solve my tasks?’ (task mastery) and ‘What kind of workplace is it?’. However, uncertainty as regards social aspects has not been stressed to the same extent. In the empirical material, social aspects involve not just culture and norms at an overall level (an example concern could be ‘Will I fit in?’), but also extends to colleagues at a more individual/personal level, such as ‘Who are they?’ (e.g. C4/NC2, C4/NC1 lines 205-211, 609-610).

Rollag et al. (2005) found that managers often take an informational approach to newcomer entry, and argue that they should pursue a relational approach instead, i.e. focus on who newcomers need to know rather than only on what they need to know (p. 41), although their relational approach still seems to have an assumption about who newcomers should know for informational purposes: “Rather
than focus exclusively on providing information, managers should also emphasize relationship development as a means of facilitating information transfer.” (p. 38). However, the social repertoire in my material suggests a more general social orientation, along the lines of ‘who are my colleagues?’.

Furthermore, since social cues obtained from interactions are a type of information situated in the interactions themselves, the relational approach should involve more than just tapping people rather than e.g. documents for information, but should also include the consideration that some of the important information in socialisation is tied to interactions. As such, a relational approach should not only be about exploiting relationship-building for the purposes of information transfer, but also understanding that social integration is about more than facilitating information transfer.

Wesson and Gogus (2005) studied the effects of two different orientation programs (an individual computer-based and a group social-based) on perceptions of learning OS content, drawing on Chao et al.’s (1994) six content areas. They note that “To some degree, all six content areas of socialization have some aspects that are socially driven and some aspects that are information driven. However, some of the content dimensions are inherently more socially oriented than information oriented.” (p. 1019). They hypothesised that the use of an individual computer-based approach would negatively affect the learning of content areas that are richer in social information:

“Assuming that the same information is covered in both types of orientation sessions, we would expect the use of a computer-based orientation program (as opposed to social-based orientation program) to have negative effects on the socialization dimensions that require more social interaction to be acquired […]” (p. 1020).

They found that “[…] the computer-based group had lower levels of socialization in the content areas of people, politics, and organizational goals and values […]” (p. 1024). Thus, reading information material does not by itself constitute learning in domains that are heavily reliant on social cues.

As Wesson and Gogus (2005) note: “[…] newcomers require much more than information about how to perform their job well to adjust to their new organization.” (p. 1019). Interestingly, both managers and newcomers orient to the importance of social aspects, and both mention that the (small) size of the organisation can be a benefit, e.g. as there are simply fewer new colleagues that one needs to make sense of. Furthermore, the start-up situation means that there is not resources and/or time for long orientations, instead most of the newcomers start with tasks quite early on. And because there are task interdependencies, or because the newcomers have to ask questions about their tasks, they
need to engage with others in the organisation soon after entry (although sometimes the only colleagues in the organisations are the manager(s) and perhaps other newcomers).

According to Wesson and Gogus (2005), all the content areas that newcomers need to learn about have both informational and social aspects. And sometimes the information goes through social aspects, i.e. the social does not just anchor or relay information, e.g. as social cues help with suggestions for how the information should be interpreted. For instance, Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006, p. 495) note the importance of insiders (and that they are more useful than programs). This is not just for support but also in providing information to newcomers. Based on the empirical material, contact with socialisation agents and more formal programs or materials can complement each other. This means that focus should not be on how to make either an informational or a relational approach work, but on how to make them work in tandem, so that they can build on each other. This implies thinking about how to facilitate newcomers’ contact with others, while also leveraging on the benefits of e.g. the information-storing potential of different tools.

The importance of opportunities for social interaction is in line with Stacey’s (2001) view of knowledge and relational processes, and the view of knowledge here as contextual, situational and relational. As noted above, social cues are important in a number of OS content learning areas. One example of this is in Case 5, where part of the newcomers’ learning is facilitated by on-the-job learning with a buddy, which is simultaneously a relational/face-to-face approach and material/IT-based. Here, the knowledge creation is thus scaffolded by both.

As regards social integration, in the analysis I found a ‘Social’ repertoire. Especially of interest here, considering the context, is how the newcomers also highlight general social integration in the start-up as something important, and orient towards what the social environment should be like, including that they also help form it. Considering that earlier OS literature has to a large degree rested on assumptions of organisations as stable entities where social knowledge amounts to learning a pre-existing culture and norms, in relation to the outcome of social integration it is interesting that the newcomers highlight creating the social environment and getting to know each other personally.

15.1.2.4. Towards a Holistic and Processual View of Proximal Outcomes
In the above, I focused on the proximal outcomes of and related challenges to knowledge in start-up OS. The proximal outcomes of OS are characterised as adjustment variables (Ashforth, 2012, p. 180). Based on my integration of OKC in OS in order to better understand it as a knowledge process, and based on the empirical material and findings, I propose that we move towards a more nuanced
understanding of proximal outcomes, especially as regards understanding them as interlinked. The discussion in the following is of course influenced by the empirical setting here, e.g. as I highlight how challenges and conditions related to the start-ups’ situation are presented in a way that relates to the outcomes. The discussion below is thus related to a nuancing of proximal outcomes considering both the knowledge perspective and the start-up context. However, I will argue that the general idea of approaching the outcomes in a more holistic and processual way is likely to be applicable to OS in other contexts as well. I follow up on the contributions of the following discussion in section 15.2.2.

The importance of social aspects, e.g. as emphasised in the ‘Social’ repertoire, is interesting considering that in some studies it is treated as secondary to other outcomes: “It is likely that social integration, as an outcome, matters more than we have explicated in the literature. Social integration of newcomers has been emphasized in the socialization literature less than job performance factors such as role clarity and task mastery.” (Wanberg & Choi, 2012, p. 341). The salience of social aspects (the ‘Social’ repertoire) across the manager and newcomer interviews suggests a need to highlight and put the ‘social’ back in OS theorising as a component that should not be taken for granted or is only worthy of implicit treatment. Klein and Polin (2012) note:

“Louis et al. (1983) observed that interactions with others were the most helpful socializing activities, and subsequent research has reinforced those findings. Welcome activities are thought to play an important role in facilitating the development of social as well as work relationships, and research supports the need to establish both types of relationships, as they each have been shown to be differentially critical in facilitating learning, assimilation, and socialization outcomes (e.g., Bravo, Peiro, Rodriguez, & Whirley, 2003; Moreland & Levine, 2001; Morrison, 2002b).” (p. 273).

The social aspects mentioned in the interviews, where, for example, uncertainty also has a social aspect, is interesting considering the literature on OS, where uncertainty reduction is focused more on role clarity (including expectations) and task mastery than social aspects (e.g. Mignerey et al., 1995). Yozgat and Güngörmez (2015) mention social integration in relation to uncertainty:

“Social integration which is also described as the newcomers’ developing a social sense of the organizational environment and to be liked and accepted by peers is considered as one of the most critical indicators of newcomers’ adjustment (Morrison, 1993; Bauer & Green; 1998). As a result of access to people and network, social integration gives a sense of control, makes the organizational environment predictable, and thereby allows newcomers have
social-capital resources whenever they need information and support (Ashford & Black, 1996).” (p. 465).

Saks and Ashforth (1997) also mention in-group (versus out-group) perceptions, which can be related to social integration in the sense that you have better access to instrumental and expressive social support (p. 253) if you are perceived as in-group, e.g. you have better access to asking questions. Following Stacey’s (2001) focus on interactions/relating in relation to knowledge, social integration is also interesting in terms of what the interactions are like, since this would affect knowledge construction.

Other studies also mention the importance of integration and social support. Major, Kozlowski, Chao, and Gardner (1995) “[…] found the negative effects of unmet expectations on socialization outcomes were ameliorated by favorable role development relationships with supervisors or co-workers. They inferred that “newcomers who have quality relations with their supervisors are better able to overcome reality shock and become adjusted to their new roles” (p. 429).” (in Saks & Ashforth, 1997, p. 255). This is interesting in relation to NC8 in Case 4, who called a meeting with his manager because he was unclear about his role expectations. Considering the context here, in the reviewed literature on OS and HRM in start-ups there was an indication that social aspects were consequential in start-ups, e.g. in relation to fewer people and faster integration.

It follows from the theoretical framework that OKC opens up for points of integration between the outcomes, i.e. there is a relationship between them due to the way that knowledge is situational, contextual, and influenced by social relationships. Based on Qvortrup’s (2004a) levels of knowledge, I also pointed out that there might be different abstraction levels of knowledge related to the outcomes.

As shown, the informants’ discourse constructs the outcomes as being related to each other, i.e. the empirical material also makes a case for considering the outcomes in a more integrated way. Thus, although the outcomes are sometimes treated or operationalised as relatively distinct in surveys (e.g. in the scales in Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg, 2003, p. 785), in practice they are interrelated. Some studies have indicated such an interrelatedness, albeit in a fragmented way. Feldman (1976) found that “Initiation to the group and initiation to the task are significantly correlated with each other […]” (p. 442). In his study this was not found to be related to role definition, but T. N. Bauer and Erdogan (2012) found relationships between social acceptance and role clarity, as well as between social acceptance and self-efficacy (their term for task mastery), and between role clarity and self-
efficacy. Thus, surveys have shown some relationships between the outcomes. Here, I draw on my qualitative empirical material as a basis for understanding how and why they are linked.

Overall, the three outcomes condition each other. They do this in a way that is not linear, but rather dynamic. For example, in order to develop role clarity, you might need to ask questions. If you are socially integrated, you are likely to feel more comfortable in asking questions and to get better or more elaborate answers. It is also likely that being socially integrated makes it easier to understand the relationships between colleagues’ roles, contributing to one’s own role clarity in relation to what others do (i.e. understanding where your job contributes in relation to others’). At the same time, the social support related to social integration is also likely to be important for developing task mastery, e.g. learning how to put different pieces of information to use (learning and becoming knowledgeable about practices) could also have a social dimension. If a task can be solved in different ways (i.e. task mastery as such is marked by equifinality), understanding what is acceptable behaviour in the organisation could be part of understanding whether you have mastered your task in relation to situated expectations. For instance, C4/NC8 says that, although some of the inexperienced newcomers can code (i.e. master the task of coding as such), they are not used to developing code in such a way that it is reusable, which is needed in the start-up. Thus, it might be easier to achieve being perceived as in-group if you master your tasks, because then you are accepted as belonging to a community.

Based on the interrelatedness of these aspects, I argue that, with regard to integration of newcomers, we also need to view the outcomes as (at least partially) integrated. And because the process is dynamic and unfolds over time, this is not just a matter of a one-way influence of one outcome on another, and the relationship between two outcomes is also likely to affect the third outcome.

In addition to the interrelatedness of role clarity, task mastery and social integration, the empirical material also suggests an important interrelatedness between the domains a newcomer needs to learn about. As mentioned, there are various typologies of learning content (e.g. Chao et al., 1994). These content domains relate to different aspects of what a newcomer needs to learn about. However, it is not only useful to consider how they relate to socialisation individually and collectively, but also how they relate to each other, e.g. there might be relationships between the dimensions of ‘people’ and ‘politics’. Previously, I mentioned that there was an indication that an introduction to ‘the bigger picture’ had been lacking for some newcomers, or that it had not been balanced enough with a task.

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21 The role of trust is highlighted as important in knowledge sharing and knowledge seeking (e.g. Zhang & Chen, 2018). When people are socially integrated, they are more likely to trust each other and more willingly engage in social support.
focus. The above suggests the importance of remembering the interrelationships between task focus and more overall organisational aspects as the context of those tasks.

And, although it is helpful to be aware of all the different dimensions a newcomer needs to learn about, perhaps for the individual organisation extra value could lie in considering whether sets of these domains are specific to that organisation compared to others, i.e. domains where the organisation is comparatively different, and how those domains fit with other domains.

Again, relating this to outcomes, learning in one domain might be instrumental for learning about another, i.e. having learned about ‘people’ might make it easier to understand ‘organisational values’. This is also connected to the interrelationships between the outcomes, i.e. there are different aspects but they are related and together form the complex of knowing needed to adjust. Being integrated can help one function as an insider, in that it gives better possibilities for understanding one’s role - also in relation to others in the organisation and their roles - and mastering tasks, which, in turn, might also help a newcomer be perceived as an in-group member.

Thus, there are overlaps in the adjustment related to the outcomes, which also come together to form an overall complex. In themselves, the three outcomes are necessary but not sufficient, i.e. one alone does not constitute socialisation, and it is difficult to envision fully reaching one outcome without the influence of the others. In this sense, we need to understand role clarity, task mastery and social integration as more than distinct and finite outcomes, and consider how they are processually related.

Understanding the outcomes more as holistic and processual aspects of integration than as finite and separate begs the question of to which extent it is appropriate to label them ‘outcomes’ at all. In the literature, outcomes as adjustment variables or indicators in a positivist sense have been approached as aspects that can be separated and where the extent to which each outcome has been reached can be measured. In other words, the label ‘outcomes’ means that they have been approached as (immediate) desirable end-states. However, considering the theoretical framework and empirical findings here, where the relationship is more holistic and processual, it does not make sense to focus on them as finite outcomes that can easily be measured separately. Rather, we should understand them as integrated and recursive aspects of integration. And if we focus on them as part of the socialisation process, rather than only immediate desirable outcomes of it, we can better approach them as being related to integration. Thus, if we understand that they are related and how, instead of focusing on measuring the extent to which an outcome has been reached, we can start thinking about them as
important integration aspects that facilitate each other, e.g. in the context of OS in start-ups, considering the points I have discussed in the preceding sections.

In relation to my research questions, the salience of the social should be mentioned, because it is related to consequences for socialisation and knowledge in that regard. The empirical findings on the social aspect are consistent with the importance of relational and participative aspects suggested in the theoretical framework, and e.g. highlighted by Stacey (2001). For instance, buddies and ‘on-the-job-training’ with peers are mentioned by managers and newcomers in a way that is related to knowledge consequences. In this way, social integration can be understood as scaffolding knowledge (and conditioning it), e.g. as regards support needed for task mastery and understanding what others do as related to one’s own role clarity. In turn, this is connected to the professional/functional nuance of the social repertoire, i.e. that social integration is related to task knowledge and performance.

15.2. Contributions

In the following sections, I present the contributions of my research to theory (15.2.1. – 15.2.3.). As mentioned in the introduction, several of these are facilitated by my empirical work, as my interactionist approach and focus on start-ups and context in general are in themselves empirical contributions to OS research which then form the basis for developing some of the theoretical contributions. Thus, this study addresses Ashforth et al.’s (2014) call for researchers to “[…] focus on more diverse settings in order to explore the otherwise hidden contingencies and boundary conditions of our models.” (p. 31). Having presented the theoretical contributions, I also include some recommendations for practice (15.2.4.).

I base the following considerations on the synthesis of OS and OKC, the analysis including the identified repertoires, and the above discussion. Furthermore, the contributions to theory and practice suggested follow from the findings and relating them to the connection of OS and OKC. The contributions nuance but also to some extent modify how we should understand or approach certain aspects of OS in relation to start-ups and in general.

Overall, the contributions reflect a suggestion, along the lines of OKC, to consider in tandem and combine the what (content) and how (tactics, behaviour, process) of OS, inasmuch as I argue that there are aspects of socialisation that we can better understand through moving away from the mechanic and normative approaches to a more organic way of viewing OS, which includes acknowledging its dynamics and contextual aspects.
The research design has given affordances for how I could contribute and the nature of my contributions. As regards philosophy of science, I addressed this at some length in chapter 2, as it relates not only to how I have designed my enquiry, but also to which theories and perspectives of OS, knowledge and communication I draw on and how. Notably, this position sets my dissertation apart from much other OS research, as I rely on a social constructivist position which is antirealist and antipositivist. This is part of what makes the present work different from the more functionalist and normative perspectives sometimes seen in OS research. Although OS research has a long and impressive history, there is still a potential for learning more, especially considering that we can draw on perspectives which allow us to ‘see’ in a different way.

With regard to methodology and methods, although I have mentioned other OS studies that are also qualitative, my contribution here comes from the execution and level of detail involved in how, and for what, I use the various methods. This is also connected with my theoretical perspective. Rather than working quantitatively with proxies for knowledge (where knowledge is a ‘black box’), I have employed a specific conceptual frame and research design that facilitates an explorative and nuanced understanding of OS in start-ups and knowledge in that regard. For instance, in interactionist OS research, the individual newcomer part is sometimes measured using psychological or behavioural indicators (e.g. desire for control and feedback [Nicholson, 1984]). In my research, I have carried out interviews to investigate what the informants discursively orient to, and coupled this with a case study approach and a matrix discourse analysis design, which has enabled me to make different comparisons across managers and newcomers and across case start-ups. Ashforth, Sluss, and Harrison (2007) point to research on discourse as a contribution from communication scholars to OS.

Together, these research design choices and how and which theoretical perspectives I draw on couch my dissertation. In terms of specific insights, this has helped me focus on aspects that the informants discursively weave together and construct as related, e.g. it has helped me understand specific knowledge challenges in relation to proximal outcomes, and how the proximal outcomes are related. Thus, it has facilitated a way to grasp and understand constructed relationships.

15.2.1. Knowledge in OS: Explainability Value of Connecting OS and OKC
In this section, I argue for the explainability value of connecting OS and OKC theoretically and in relation to the findings from the empirical material. Considering definitions of OS, knowledge is central to both the process and results of OS. This means that it is important to consider how knowledge is understood in OS (chapters 3-5). In this dissertation I then drew on this specifically in
relation to challenges to OS in start-ups, and how these are connected to knowledge. As I have argued for a more context-sensitive approach to OS, it is also relevant to include a perspective of knowledge and communication that gives affordances for this, and the OKC perspective is in itself context-sensitive, e.g. as it relies on a dynamic view of ‘organisation’.

In chapter 5, I argued, from a theoretical viewpoint, for the value of connecting OS and OKC, based on how OKC could add to and nuance how communication and knowledge are approached in OS. I.e., bringing OKC into OS provides a framework for understanding which I have used to try to unpack knowledge, which is still a black-box aspect in OS, despite being centrally related to the disciplinary interests. I synthesised aspects of OS and OKC, as part of drawing on OKC as a perspective to try to open the black box of knowledge in OS. Specifically, I argued that OKC can help us better understand communication as a transactional process, and knowledge as something highly complex. In the OS literature review, I included a section on how knowledge has been approached in OS literature, and in the theoretical framework I then drew on the OKC review to show what an approach to knowledge in OS, based on a knowledge communication perspective, would look like. This, together with my empirical investigations, has resulted in a number of insights concerning knowledge in OS and how, from a knowledge in OS perspective, OS should be thought of. The theoretical framework contributes to OS by presenting a way of drawing on OKC in OS which facilitates a more nuanced view of knowledge and communication in OS. For instance, I referred to different orders of knowledge and related this to different levels of socialisation-knowing.

Based on my critique of knowledge transfer, OS work on learning should concentrate even more on how to facilitate learning, i.e. although there has been a lot of focus on the content areas, there is still room for studies which move from ‘what do we want newcomers to know?’ to ‘how can we help newcomers learn?’. A central aspect here would be to focus on how to make newcomers part of the ‘conversational life’ of the organisation (cf. Stacey, 2000), especially considering that social integration is related to role clarity and task mastery.

As mentioned, other communication scholars have been interested in OS. This makes sense, as communication is integral to OS, e.g. many of V. D. Miller and Jablin’s (1991) newcomer information-seeking tactics require some kind of communication behaviour. Communication also plays an important part in relation to the proximal outcomes, e.g. talking to new colleagues as part of social integration, establishing role clarity, and getting feedback in relation to task mastery. In fact, OS would hardly be possible without communication, especially since it is a knowledge process, and
knowledge is conditioned by and used in a context and relationships. The significance of social integration and social knowledge highlights the importance of facilitating the social.

Finally, as regards theory, OKC is a highly complex field, and drawing on it in relation to an empirical investigation can also enrich the field itself, by not only thinking about how we can understand empirical material in the light of a theoretical field, but also how nuances in the empirical material can contribute to the theoretical field. Sometimes we can better understand our own theories and their affordances through good empirical illustrations. Here, for instance I have shown empirical examples of the relationship between ‘know that’ and ‘know how’.

In relation to the empirical material, as shown in the analysis and the previous discussion (and I also return to it in the coming sections) my contribution to OS through drawing on the theoretical framework presented focuses especially on understanding challenges related to knowledge in start-up OS. In this, I have especially focused on challenges in relation to knowledge connected to three proximal outcomes of OS in the context of start-ups. I identified aspects related to consequences of OS in start-ups (challenges, opportunities), both by way of the identified interpretative repertoires and by considering the informants’ discourse in relation to proximal outcomes.

As regards the empirical in relation to the explainability value of connecting OS and OKC, this for instance relates to the repertoires. E.g., the ‘Social’ repertoire is interesting considering the relational aspects of knowledge in OKC, which is then part of understanding and approaching OS as a knowledge process. E.g. I showed that social integration is linked to other outcomes. Another aspect regarding connecting the repertoires and the framework is related to the ‘Balance’ repertoire, e.g. as newcomers talk about the balance between introductions where they listen to information, and then actually getting started on specific tasks. This relates to the connection between ‘know that’ and ‘know how,’ which are not different ‘knowledges’ as such, but different interrelated aspects of knowledge. The integration between these two aspects is not only related to solving work tasks, but also relates to understanding the organisational context. The work in relation to outcomes led me to suggest nuancing our understanding of OS proximal outcomes, specifically in start-ups, but also in general. In the following sections, I comment on the nuancing of OS proximal outcomes in general, nuancing OS theory in relation to start-ups, and present recommendations for practice.

Thus, as regards the OS-OKC interface, in my theoretical framework, I have argued that relying on an interactionist approach to OS presents a point of integration between OS and OKC, where OKC’s position on organisation, knowledge and communication can then help unpack knowledge as a ‘black
box’ in OS. In the previous discussion (15.1.2.), I then showed how this perspective can help us understand knowledge challenges related to proximal outcomes of OS in the context of start-ups.

15.2.2. Nuancing OS Proximal Outcomes Generally
Based on previous sections on proximal outcomes, in addition to understanding dynamics and knowledge challenges related to the outcomes in a start-up context, a contribution to OS theory in general is the insight that we should be more aware of the links between the outcomes and the potential value of viewing them more as processual aspects of integration. The outcomes do not exist as finite aspects in isolation, since the way that adjustment takes place means that they to some extent facilitate each other. This insight of the outcomes as interlinked is facilitated by the theoretical framework and qualitative investigation of early parts of the OS process, and how the informants talk about it. In a questionnaire survey, an item related to role clarity could be ‘are there clear objectives for your role?’, which a newcomer might give a score of 2 (on a scale from 1-5, with 5 being the best), but this does not tell us anything about why the newcomer answers 2. The qualitative approach I have employed in this dissertation focuses on how informants describe entering a start-up, which can help us understand what makes adjusting in a start-up challenging, especially as regards challenges related to building the knowledge needed to adjust.

The interrelatedness between proximal outcomes might also have consequences for how we should approach the relationship between proximal and more distal outcomes. Earlier studies have created path models, showing links between certain proximal and distal outcomes. However, as my research suggests that researchers must be aware that the proximal outcomes are connected and condition each other, this means that future study designs should be sensitive towards this, including how it might affect the relationship between proximal and distal outcomes. Furthermore, although I have focused on role clarity, task mastery and social integration, there might be other adjustment factors, and more research is then needed to show whether and how these are related to the three considered here.

15.2.3. Nuancing OS Theory in the Context of Start-Ups
Dal Zotto and Gustafsson (2008) note that: “According to the HRM literature, all companies, however small, practice HRM even though this function can be implicit (Aldrich and Von Glinow, 1991).” (p. 92). Moreover, since OS is an adjustment process that takes place even if managers are not fully aware of it, a lack of attention to the process might influence newcomers’ experiences in a negative way. In this study, I have investigated the OS phenomenon in start-ups. Part of my contribution is thus to offer insights specifically about OS in start-ups. In this section, I focus on findings that nuance
OS theory in the context of start-ups. As noted elsewhere, the four main repertoires identified in the analysis show tensions, challenges and opportunities.

As regards the repertoires in relation to the outcomes, I have already discussed the ‘Social’ repertoire and the importance of social integration at some length. The repertoire on influencing and challenges is related both to challenges connected to role clarity in the start-ups and to task mastery, in the sense that freedom and autonomy can also be unsettling to newcomers. For example, if expectations are unclear, it can be difficult to evaluate whether you have mastered your tasks or not. The ‘Balance’ repertoire is also partly related to task mastery, in that newcomers mention the balance between introductions, starting on tasks, and questions emerging along the way. Due to the nature of the start-up context, I also noted that we might need to understand role clarity as relative rather than finite.

Overall, some of the challenges mentioned concern things in the start-ups being unsettled or undecided, and muddled or even chaotic. It has been suggested that less structure in newcomer entry is connected with more newcomer proactivity (e.g. Griffin et al., 2000). Furthermore, Ashforth et al. (1998, p. 902) suggested that individualised and less structured entries are related to innovativeness in organisations. However, the empirical material and the repertoires suggest that there can also be too much of a good thing. Especially the ‘(Opportunity to) influence and challenges’ repertoire, and to some extent also the ‘Balance’ repertoire, suggest that the insecurity and uncertainty can be frustrating and unsettling. I.e., people might be motivated to reduce the experienced uncertainty, so, on the one hand, it might make newcomers engage in proactive behaviour in order to get started, but, on the other hand, too much insecurity and uncertainty might also deter them from engaging in some behaviours, e.g. as it is uncomfortable to engage in behaviour with uncertain outcomes.

One aspect of OS that would benefit from being linked more to contextual constraints and opportunities is OS tactics. For instance, some of Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979) socialisation tactics are not likely to be possible in start-ups. Often, there is most empirical support for institutionalised tactics (versus individualised) being linked with preferred outcomes (e.g. G. R. Jones, 1986; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). However, there might be organisational environments, such as the start-up context, where it is difficult or perhaps not relevant for a company to rely (solely) on institutionalised tactics, e.g. because they do not have the necessary resources (as seen in section 3.3.1., in start-ups the HR function often falls to the owner-manager, and is characterised by informality). Thus, the ‘best practice’ suggestions regarding OS tactics may be more applicable to
larger and older companies, and a contingency view of organisational tactics is needed for OS in start-ups.

With regard to the oft-mentioned socialisation tactics, in the literature OS is often (implicitly or explicitly) presented as something that is conceived of as a planned process. But this is not always the case in start-ups, at least not to the extent that some of the literature would suggest, e.g. as regards the tactics of ordering socialisation sequentially versus socialisation as occurring randomly and the length of these ‘events’ as being fixed versus variable. Furthermore, both managers and newcomers mention limitations on various resources (such as money and managers’ time) as constraints.

Considering the tactic of collective versus individual socialisation, although the literature highlights the benefits of collective socialisation, if newcomers enter one at a time (as in Case 6), socialising newcomers together is not an option. However, this does not mean that the start-up cannot focus on the newcomers ‘socialising’ with other people in the organisation. Nonetheless, it should be noted that it is not always a choice to go with either a collective or individual socialisation tactic, sometimes it depends on the context, as socialisation not only takes place in established companies. In addition, as discussed previously, start-ups may be characterised by a kind of creolisation that is perhaps more reflective of collective socialisation in start-ups.

Yet another tactic is the serial versus disjunctive, i.e. using existing role incumbents to socialise versus not using them (or having the opportunity to do this at all). As with collective socialisation, serial socialisation is not always possible in new and/or small organisations if there has not previously been an incumbent in the function/role concerned, i.e. there is no one to pass the role on to the newcomer. As already mentioned, in start-ups the newcomers are sometimes hired to fill a position which no one has had before, which means that socialisation will necessarily be disjunctive, and can be related to challenges of role clarity. G. R. Jones (1986) noted in his overall constellation of the tactics as individualised or institutionalised that the use of individualised tactics is related to role innovation, which in the present context is often necessary. This also partly relates to the investiture/divestiture tactic (i.e. encouraging newcomers to abandon versus rely on a previous identity, culture and practices), in terms of considering how a newcomer can best use her/his skill set in a way that is aligned with the direction of the company, and which the newcomer will accept.

Given the (potential) lack of possibilities for using collective and serial tactics, socialisation in start-ups is likely to be more individual (one at a time) and disjunctive, or vary between the polar dimensions of Van Maanen and Schein (1979).
Finally, with regard to formal versus informal tactics, these can sometimes be difficult to separate in practice. For example, in the start-ups, where some aspects might not be planned, a lot of the socialisation events might be informal, or at least have important informal aspects, e.g. as the initial formal introduction is maybe half a day, and then other events take place more informally after that.

This discussion of OS tactics and context echoes Cooper-Thomas et al.’s (2011) observations in their study of newcomer strategies:

“The range of newcomer strategies that are outside of formal processes suggest that those designing HR induction, orientation and onboarding programs should consider how to enable newcomers to help themselves. […] The specific mix of support provided will depend on organizational factors (e.g. size, complexity) and newcomer factors (e.g. diversity, rate of newcomer hiring). We note that these considerations may be especially important for smaller organizations, which are less likely to have the resources to provide a formal structured process, and are also less likely to have custodial, replicable roles that benefit from a formal approach (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).” (p. 50).

Turning now to the repertoires, these emphasise the need for start-ups to help newcomers achieve a good balance between introduction to the organisation and starting on tasks, and between freedom and insecurity. In other words, start-ups should not leave newcomers to just socialise themselves, but, given the (often) fast-paced, uncertain environment and resource limitations, try to help the newcomers to help themselves. In this, social support as related to the ‘Social’ repertoire is paramount.

Thus, it might not be possible to use all tactics in start-ups, and there can be a mix of institutionalised and individualised tactics. Furthermore, tactics are only one aspect of socialisation, since individual motivations and (proactive) behaviour also have an impact. Both managers and newcomers also mention being pragmatic, considering what is the easiest and most feasible in a given situation, which is connected to the repertoire on acceptance and alignment.

In the analysis, I mentioned that there is both a ‘liability of newness’ and an ‘opportunity of newness’. Reproductions of aspects of liability of newness are found in the managers’ accounts, e.g. as they compare start-ups to larger companies, and note that their size and/or newness has implications for their practices. This was related to the manager theme on ‘Alignment’, which is about highlighting that newcomers need to understand the consequences of the start-up situation. However, on the other
hand, there are also opportunities of newness, which are related to the ‘Acceptance’ repertoire and the ‘influence’ part of the ‘(Opportunity to) influence and challenges’ repertoire, i.e. the newness and/or size of the start-ups also has positive and attractive features. To some extent, it is also recognised that the liabilities and the opportunities go together, e.g. as liabilities can also be opportunities, or be what facilitates that certain opportunities exist.

In discussing repertoires and context, I have argued that, based on my empirical material and findings: the social is about more than just work group integration for task aspects. ‘Balance’ is probably also relevant in other contexts, but here has the additional meaning that, in the start-up situation, it can also be helpful to have a specific task to hold onto. ‘Acceptance and alignment’ refer to (partly) accepting the start-up situation because it also has attractive possible advantages, while managers stress the importance of newcomers understanding what the start-up situation means for everyday practice. Finally, freedom and insecurity (and, more broadly, opportunities and challenges) refer to the opportunity to influence different aspects as an upside of entering start-ups, with the downside being the insecurity and other challenges that newcomers face.

To sum up, I have shown the importance of considering the context where OS takes place in general, and drawn attention to specific aspects of OS in start-ups that require attention in particular, based on both the repertoires and my findings compared with the traditional socialisation tactics. Some parts of the literature contain indications of a number of contextual contingencies (see in particular the context part of the OS review in section 3.3.1. regarding OS in start-ups), but in OS in general there is room for context to have a bigger place. A contextual approach would consider contingencies such as situations, size, age, industry, employee/newcomer aspects, organisational aspects, product/service, manager aspects and other employee aspects.

15.2.4. Recommendations for Practice

A number of implications for practice surface in this project. However, staying true to context-sensitivity and considerations for the constraints on resources such as money and managers’ time in start-ups, in the following I have endeavoured to present recommendations in a way that are not ivory-tower suggestions for best practice, but have rather tried to consider the feasibility of the proposed recommendations and suggestions in practice. Here, I primarily focus on practical recommendations for the start-ups and suggestions for start-up owners/managers welcoming newcomers.

First, as discussed at some length, the fact that the proximal outcomes are interlinked needs to be taken into consideration as it means that knowledge aspects related to task mastery, role clarity and
social integration are not separate but to some extent go together. For instance, C6/NC2 mentions that he needed to understand the direction and the product, as he was designing aspects for it, and his social integration (as he knew some of the managers in advance) made asking questions easier. In this regard, several newcomers emphasised the positive aspects of eating lunch together. Rollag (2002) also found that this was an important activity for the newcomers in his study.

Considering what the start-ups did that newcomers described in positive terms, and which would be relatively easy for other start-ups to implement (besides eating lunch together), was their use of standups and buddies. Standups helped give newcomers an overview of what others in the start-up were working on, and also gave them a formal platform to mention any task-related problems they had. Buddies were also highlighted as a good thing, because newcomers could go directly to them. In organisations where newcomers have both a social and a task-focused buddy, it can (given the interlinkedness of outcomes) be important to consider how these two aspects meet, so that the social is not disconnected from task aspects and vice versa. Another benefit of buddies is that the pay-it-forward sentiment suggests that the buddies in start-ups might remember what it was like for themselves to be ‘new’, and try to help newcomers with things they felt were missing when they were ‘new’. This also suggests that newcomers and buddies should be given time. The use of buddies might free some of the managers’ time, but the managers must then recognise that being a buddy then takes up some of the time of the person performing the buddy function. One recommendation for start-ups in connection with newcomer entry, therefore, is to use some of the means they already have, such as standups, and incumbents (previous newcomers) as buddies.

Furthermore, as regards technologies (and employee handbooks), these are useful but cannot always stand alone, e.g. as newcomers need guidance (C5/M1) and might need to get familiar with how the technologies are used in the start-up. Here, managers need to consider what kind of information it is suitable to store and communicate via these means, considering its complexity and the newcomers’ backgrounds.

Given the prevalence of newcomers and managers mentioning experience and inexperience, it is also important that managers take newcomers’ backgrounds into account, without taking for granted that experience alone will ease entry. Matching expectations might be one way for newcomers and managers to help each other ensure a good entry process. In this connection, and related to striking a balance in the fast-paced environment, it might be useful to have formal and informal follow-ups with relatively short intervals.
As regards uncertainties, this is something which must be recognised, including that some of them are not likely to disappear quickly, and that they are (partly) related to the start-up situation. Here, it is important to remember that good social integration can help alleviate this (e.g. as a coping mechanism), and that addressing uncertainty also includes ‘helping newcomers help themselves’ (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2011), especially when buddies or the manager are busy. In other words, although some aspects of insecurity and uncertainty can be difficult to solve straight away, the start-ups can try to ensure that they help newcomers tackle and work with it, e.g. by being aware of potential role uncertainties (related to both the newcomers’ own role and others’ roles), focusing on social aspects, balance, and the upsides of size/newness of the start-ups (also related to the ‘Acceptance’ repertoire). I.e. trying to leverage on the upsides and help newcomers handle the downsides. Also, the ‘Alignment’ theme suggests that managers are to some extent aware of wanting or needing newcomers to understand and be aware of consequences of the start-up situation. The implications for practice and challenges to socialisation in start-ups suggested in the literature can be found empirically. However, there are also benefits. This suggests that it would be fruitful to be aware of and address the challenges, while also harnessing the upsides. For this to take place, initial and continuous dialogue and matching of expectations could be a valuable tool.

The above recommendations, where I have tried to suggest specific things that start-ups can do, should be helpful to start-ups while also being feasible, given the various resource constraints. Start-ups owe it both to themselves and their newcomers to think about the welcoming and introduction, since it is in the interest of both parties.

15.3. Future Research

In this section, I make suggestions for future research in light of my findings and the boundary conditions of this dissertation.

In this study, I have focused on early socialisation (newcomers in start-ups). This involves two developmental aspects that could be highlighted in future research, possibly in tandem, namely future research could be longitudinal or involving prolonged fieldwork, following newcomers and/or start-ups over time. The benefit of this follow-research could be the opportunity to follow developments for both newcomers and start-ups over time. One possible avenue would be to focus on what happens, e.g. to socialisation practices, as the start-up grows, changes and/or matures. For instance, C6/M3 mentioned that if they were to take on more newcomers or several at a time, they would need to find a way to ‘scale up’ their welcoming resources. The ‘scaling up’ metaphor is one that I encountered a
number of times throughout the interviews. This is something that can be problematic even in the case of IT systems, so what happens when, when managers in ICT start-ups talk about scaling up, they are not just referring to their IT systems and the number of clients who use them, but to their organisations in general, including the number of employees? At least (but not only) from a discursive viewpoint, scaling up might be a problematic way of talking about growth in the number of employees. In other words, it would be interesting to follow how, and to what extent, the start-ups develop or professionalise HRM practices over time.

As regards newcomers, it could be interesting to follow e.g. role developments and retention. A number of the newcomers mentioned being attracted to the start-ups because of their size and a related expectation that it would be easier to have a say and that the organisations would also be more agile. However, some newcomers said they could accept aspects related to newness to some extent, for instance they also expected that things would be more settled at some point, because the start-up mess could not go on forever, both for their own and future newcomers’ sakes. Given these points, what happens when the organisation then grows and matures? (cf. the ‘growth paradox’ mentioned in Krackhardt [1995]). In a follow-up session, the manager in Case 4 raised concerns about what would happen to the motivation to work in a start-up when the start-up grows and develops. Following newcomers over a longer period of time could also be related to the current trend in HRM focusing on designing the ‘employee journey’. This again touches on the distinction between HRM practices as something that can be pre-planned and in practice being difficult to pre-plan, and where the individual also has a lot to say e.g. as a start-up develops.

On a methodological note, it has been pointed out that one challenge of longitudinal OS studies lies in setting intervals and understanding the changes that occur between them, since longitudinal surveys compare snapshots of particular points in time, but changes between these points can fluctuate (Saks & Ashforth, 1997, p. 257-259). Considering the complexity of OS in start-ups, in order to study developments, it might be more useful to carry out prolonged fieldwork, i.e. following developments by being on site for longer periods to study ‘what is going on’.

The developmental path suggested above also means that newcomers would at some point become insiders, i.e. socialisation agents who were once newcomers themselves. This is congruent with Rollag’s (2004; 2007) idea of relative tenure, and the suggestions that OS in fast-paced environments happens rapidly (e.g. Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). In some of the interviews, newcomers express a kind of ‘pay-it-forward’ sentiment, as they e.g. talk about how they would like future
newcomers to feel that something is more settled, or as they talk about an awareness of what kind of environment and role expectations they are creating. This is interesting, since it suggests that, although these newcomers have only been in the start-up for a few months, they are already taking ownership of it and its continued operations.

There could also be more focus on newcomers as socialisation agents themselves, i.e. how newcomers help each other by e.g. trying to help each other make sense of their new workplace. In the start-ups, sometimes the only ‘insiders’ are the managers, while there can be several newcomers at the same time. For instance, C2/NC1, C5/NC1 and a number of the newcomers in Case 4 all mention not being the only one who is new and that newcomers help each other. In terms of newcomer social support, the newcomers not only support each other by sharing the feeling of being a newcomer, but, as e.g. C2/NC1 notes, they also help each other with task-related knowledge.

In addition to following developments as a constructive route for future studies of OS in start-ups, another possible path concerns agents of the socialisation process in start-ups. Here, I have focused on managers and newcomers, because in the early stage of start-ups there are not always other insiders to investigate. In future studies, it would be interesting, and in line with the interactionist OS perspective, to include a wider range of socialisation agents, to the extent that there are e.g. other insiders than newcomers and managers, perhaps also including affiliates such as the freelancers and external consultants connected to some of the case start-ups in my study. A wider focus on different socialisation agents and how newcomers build social and professional relationships with these is also relevant considering the ‘Social’ repertoire found in the analysis.

Finally, as regards OS in general and the contribution of the OKC perspective, based on my theoretical framework and findings, I have argued for a holistic and processual approach to proximal outcomes. Future research could build on this, and study what this holistic approach means in relation to distal outcomes (since these are mediated by proximal outcomes [e.g. Kowtha, 2008, p. 69]), and whether a more holistic approach to these would also be in order.

This dissertation has focused on OS in start-ups and knowledge in that regard. Considering that the OS literature review showed that there is still a lot to be learned about HRM in general in start-ups, my research seconds this, adding that there is also still a lot to be learned about socialisation in particular in start-ups. As the present section shows, although this dissertation has gone some way in shedding light on the phenomenon of socialisation in start-ups, a lot remains to be explored, with the potential to inform both theory and practice.
16. Conclusion

The focus of this dissertation has been on the intersection between organisational socialisation (OS) in ICT start-ups and organisational knowledge communication (OKC). The agenda was to investigate how managers and newcomers in ICT start-ups talk about issues related to OS in their accounts of experiences with newcomer entry, with a specific focus on knowledge in this regard, and in relation to that point to how and where relevant links between OS and OKC could be made, in order to begin to unravel knowledge as a ‘black box’ in OS. The purpose of pursuing this was to gain a better understanding of the role of knowledge communication in OS in general, and in start-ups in particular, and of how it affects perceptions of the entry process. These efforts were guided by two research questions and two sub-questions. I argued that the value of such an exploration had both a theoretical and practical grounding.

The first research question (RQ1) was theoretical: *How can the field of organisational knowledge communication be integrated in organisational socialisation to help us better understand and work with organisational socialisation as a process where knowledge communication takes place?*

To help answer this question, I presented a theoretical framework in chapter 5, based on reviews of the OS literature and the OKC field. This framework argued for a possible synthesis between OS and OKC through specific points of integration, leading to a specific lens on knowledge communication in OS. In brief, I showed that OS can be understood as a knowledge process, I argued that the interactionist perspective in OS is a central anchor for integrating OKC in OS, and I then showed that, based on its understandings, definitions and assumptions in relation to organisation, knowledge and communication, OKC can nuance how we understand knowledge communication in OS, by helping us understand organisations and organisational phenomena as dynamic, appreciate knowledge as complex (being situated, contextual and relational), and model communication as transactional, as opposed to viewing organisations as stable entities where knowledge is transferred to newcomers as a bounded object through communication understood as transmission.

The second research question (RQ2) was empirical: *How are accounts of organisational entry in Danish ICT start-ups constructed?*

Two sub-questions, aimed at newcomers and managers respectively, focused on the role knowledge was given in the accounts. The newcomer sub-question asked: *How does communication of task-specific and organisational knowledge during organisational entry in Danish ICT start-ups affect newcomers’ perception of the processes?*
The manager sub-question asked: What do the ICT start-up managers consider the role of organisational knowledge communication to be in the context of organisational entry processes, and which ways of communicating are relied on and considered important for knowledge communication with newcomers in ICT start-ups?

In order to answer the empirical questions, I developed a research design couched in a social constructivist position, using an abductive, reflexive approach, and a qualitative, case study methodology, and conducted interviews with managers and newcomers. These were subsequently subjected to a multi-step analysis focusing on thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires in the discourse.

With regard to RQ2, I found four central repertoires in the accounts of organisational entry in start-ups across managers and newcomers: ‘Social’, ‘Balance’, ‘Acceptance and alignment’, and ‘(Opportunity to) influence and challenges’ (especially related to freedom versus insecurity). These are patterns of different aspects highlighted as central, tensions and challenges and opportunities that the informants talk about in distinct ways. The repertoires are patterns where, to a large extent, the informants talk in similar ways about the same topic. They go across contextual contingencies, but the contextual contingencies can also be found in relation to slight variations in the repertoires across case start-ups and informants.

As regards the newcomer sub-question, the various repertoires identified for newcomers (‘Balance’, ‘Influence’, ‘Acceptance’ and ‘Social’) construct different aspects of the entry experience as either good or bad. For instance, in relation to the ‘Balance’ repertoire, several newcomers stressed the value of being able to start quickly on a specific task as having something tangible to hold on to in a sometimes chaotic situation. On a broader organisational note, social aspects were highlighted, and I have discussed how this is in itself constructed as a central knowledge form. It is important for working together with colleagues and in that way in relation to task-related knowledge. Furthermore, the social is not something that can just be informed about; the newcomers express a need and want to interact with their colleagues, to get to know them better in general, and be able to better interact with them for task purposes. The newcomers point to opportunities for influencing both their tasks and more overall organisational aspects. This is related to acceptance, in that, because the newness and smallness of the start-ups present opportunities, there are other aspects connected to the start-up situation that are accepted (to some extent). The different challenges newcomers mentioned are also relevant to this sub-question, since several of these can be seen as knowledge challenges, especially
the challenges that have consequences for task mastery and role clarity. These are proximal outcomes which, including social integration, in turn are interrelated and influence each other.

Concerning the manager sub-question, the ‘Alignment’ thematic cluster in the managers’ accounts is related to the importance of newcomers understanding the organisation and the conditions for working in a start-up situation. The managers also emphasise getting the newcomers started on actual tasks by giving them access to the resources they need, and for them to e.g. have buddies or colleagues to go to with questions. In this sense, knowledge communication is related to both getting newcomers started with doing work, and, in a broader sense, ensuring alignment and understanding. Managers mention that knowledge is communicated in a range of ways and by various means, such as job interviews, introductions and briefings, direct contact between the manager and newcomer, buddy and newcomer, or other colleagues and the newcomer, and various ICT tools, such as the communication tool Slack, and systems and platforms such as databases and intranets where different pieces of information are stored. Some of the start-ups also have employee handbooks. Some of these means are already in place, while others are under construction or envisioned. The repertoire across managers on ‘Opportunities to influence and challenges for newcomers’ covers a pattern of talking about the upsides and downsides of entering a start-up in relation to each other, including that freedom can in itself be a challenge.

The discussion chapter combines the theoretical and the empirical, as I discussed implications and noted contributions. I first focused on tensions related to OS in start-ups based on the empirical material in relation to conditions for OS in start-ups, drawing on the identified repertoires and themes and the relationship between individualisation and socialisation, and related this to previous OS literature. Here, I also discussed aspects in the discourse about entering a start-up which could be related to the three OS outcomes of role clarity, task mastery and social integration, especially as regards knowledge challenges for newcomers. As regards role clarity and task mastery, the newcomers mention different challenges. However, they also mention being involved in and contributing to central decisions and other aspects of the start-ups, which means that some of the newcomers contribute to defining their own roles and tasks. In the case of social integration, the repertoire analyses showed a ‘Social’ repertoire across managers and newcomers, with two nuances. This suggests that the integration outcome should not only be linked to work-group integration (the professional social nuance), but that there is also a more general social component, in terms of knowing one’s colleagues on a more personal level. The social integration outcome is also linked to the other outcomes, in that integration makes it easier to ask for support and makes it more readily
available. Finally, many of the newcomers were already acquainted with their new colleagues, which makes some parts of social integration easier.

Based on the above, I also discussed the three proximal outcomes at a more general approach level, noting that they should be viewed as interrelated and that it would be useful to approach them in a holistic and processual way as aspects of integration rather than separate, immediate and finite results of the OS process.

Having discussed implications, I then presented the theoretical and practical contributions of my work. In relation to the theoretical lens, besides knowledge challenges connected to OS outcomes in start-ups and the interrelatedness of proximal outcomes, I pointed to the explainability value of integrating OKC in OS, both in relation to theory and in relation to the empirical material, since it provides a specific framework for approaching knowledge and knowledge communication in OS. My contribution to OS theory in relation to start-ups lies in the context-related insights gained from considering the repertoires and in highlighting how aspects of the start-up context affect the possibility for and use of traditional socialisation tactics dimensions. As regards contributions to practice, I presented specific recommendations that start-ups who are hiring can implement and drew attention to potential pitfalls that managers need to be aware of.

Finally, I suggested avenues for further research. Despite the long and rich history of OS research, there are still both existing areas that require further exploration and potential new focus points which can be taken up, especially at the intersection between OS in start-ups and SMEs and as regards nuanced approaches to knowledge in OS.

In this dissertation, I have argued that, considering the disciplinary interests of OS, knowledge and knowledge communication are central phenomena, and that integrating OKC in OS would be a relevant way of developing a lens to understand and approach this. On an empirical note, as shown in relation to the empirical research question and sub-questions, knowledge and the role of knowledge communication is central to the relationship between freedom and insecurity, and it is also an important part of understanding challenges related to the three proximal outcomes of OS in a start-up context and how these outcomes are interrelated. Thus, the theoretical and empirical work in this dissertation has paved the way for both theoretical and practical insights that help us understand and nuance knowledge and knowledge communication in OS, OS in the context of ICT start-ups, and related knowledge challenges.
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English Summary

The dissertation focuses on dynamics of organisational entry in Danish ICT (information and communication technology) start-ups, with a particular view to the intersection between organisational socialisation (OS) and organisational knowledge communication (OKC). There has been little focus on OS in start-ups, despite its importance for performance, and despite the challenges connected to human resource management (HRM), including OS, in small businesses and new ventures identified in the literature. Issues such as uncertainty and lack of structure are likely to present challenges to OS in start-ups and newcomers’ knowledge construction of their new workplace and job. However, although knowledge is central in OS, it remains a ‘black box’. I therefore developed a framework integrating OS and OKC, to help understand how the start-up context influences newcomers’ efforts to settle in and to begin to unravel knowledge as a ‘black box’ in OS in general. ICT start-ups present an interesting setting as knowledge-intensive companies in an industry where there is an imbalance between the demand for and supply of employees with the right skills.

Given the focus on dynamics related to OS in start-ups and their consequences for newcomers’ knowledge construction, the agenda was to identify how and where relevant links between OS and OKC could be made, and to investigate how managers and newcomers in ICT start-ups talk about issues related to OS in their accounts of experiences of newcomer entry, with a specific focus on knowledge. The purpose here was to contribute a better understanding of the role of knowledge communication in OS in general and in start-ups in particular, and how it affects perceptions of the entry process. I developed the following theoretical (RQ1) and empirical (RQ2) research questions and sub-questions to guide my exploration:

RQ1: How can the field of organisational knowledge communication be integrated in organisational socialisation to help us better understand and work with organisational socialisation as a process where knowledge communication takes place?

RQ2: How are accounts of organisational entry in Danish ICT start-ups constructed?

Sub-question 1 - Newcomers: How does communication of task-specific and organisational knowledge during organisational entry in Danish ICT start-ups affect newcomers’ perception of the processes?
Sub-question 2 - Managers: What do the ICT start-up managers consider the role of organisational knowledge communication to be in the context of organisational entry processes, and which ways of communicating are relied on and considered important for knowledge communication with newcomers in ICT start-ups?

In order to answer the theoretical RQ1, I first review the OS literature, especially extant research on socialisation and human resource management (HRM) in start-ups and SMEs, and then introduce OKC, which integrates aspects of organisation studies, knowledge management and communication theory. In my theoretical framework, I then present a synthesis of OS and OKC. I show how OS can be understood as a knowledge process, I argue that the interactionist perspective in OS is a central anchor for integrating OKC in OS, and I show that OKC can nuance the way we understand knowledge communication in OS, by helping us understand organisations and organisational phenomena as dynamic, appreciate knowledge as complex (being situated, contextual and relational), and model communication as transactional.

In order to answer the empirical research question (RQ2) and sub-questions, I develop a research design couched in a social constructivist position, employ an abductive, reflexive approach and a qualitative case study methodology, conduct interviews with managers and newcomers in five ICT start-ups, and subject the material to a multi-step analysis. A number of thematic clusters and interpretative repertoires are identified for individual informants, across managers, across newcomers, and across managers and newcomers. I also consider these in relation to contextual differences between the start-ups. Four repertoires are central in answering RQ2, labelled ‘Social’, ‘Balance’, ‘Acceptance and alignment’, and ‘(Opportunity to) influence and challenges’, the latter of which is especially related to a connection between freedom and insecurity. As regards sub-question 1, the repertoires identified for newcomers (‘Balance’, ‘Influence’, ‘Acceptance’ and ‘Social’) construct various aspects as good or bad in relation to their entry. For task knowledge, the ‘Balance’ repertoire is especially relevant, since the newcomers emphasise the value of quickly starting with specific tasks as something to hold on to in a situation that can be chaotic. This repertoire also pertains to the balance between task- and organisation-focused introduction. On a broader organisational note, some newcomers mention a lack of introduction to ‘the bigger picture’, and also highlight the social aspects of entry. As regards sub-question 2, the managers construct knowledge communication as related to both getting newcomers started on their tasks and, in a broader sense, ensuring alignment and understanding of the organisation and conditions connected to working in a start-up. Several ways of communicating are mentioned in this regard, including job interviews, introductions, direct contact
between the newcomer and different actors, and various ICT tools such as databases and intranets where different pieces of information are stored.

In the subsequent discussion, I focus on the implications of OS under start-up conditions, including important knowledge aspects and challenges related to the OS proximal outcomes of role clarity, task mastery and social integration, which emerged as empirically and theoretically relevant.

I then present my theoretical and practical contributions, noting the affordances of the research design and empirical contributions in bringing these forward. I point to the explainability value of integrating OKC in OS, in that it provides a specific framework for approaching knowledge and knowledge communication in OS. As regards OS in general, I indicate that the proximal outcomes are linked and comment on what this means for research. My contributions to OS theory in relation to start-ups lie in the context-related insights I gained from identifying and reflecting on the repertoires, understanding the challenges related to proximal outcomes, and highlighting how aspects of the start-up context affect the possibility for and use of different socialisation tactics. As regards contributions to practice, I present specific recommendations for start-ups welcoming new employees and suggest certain factors that managers need to be aware of. Finally, I present suggestions for further research.

Thus, by focusing on the intersection between OS and OKC in general, and OS in a start-up context and related knowledge challenges in particular, this theoretical and empirical work has paved the way for both theoretical and practical insights that help us understand and nuance knowledge and knowledge communication in OS, OS in the context of ICT start-ups, and the related knowledge challenges.
Dansk resumé

Afhandlingen fokuserer på dynamikker forbundet med nyansattes opstart i danske IKT-startups (informations- og kommunikationsteknologi), herunder med særligt fokus på forholdet mellem organisatorisk socialisering (OS) og organisatorisk videnskommunikation (OKC). OS i startups er underudforsket, på trods af dens vigtighed for deres resultater, og selvom litteraturen peger på en række udfordringer forbundet med human resource management (HRM), herunder OS, i små og nye virksomheder. Problemer såsom usikkerhed og manglende struktur kan skabe udfordringer for OS i startups og nyansattes muligheder for at skabe viden om deres nye arbejdsplads og job. Men selvom viden er centrat i OS, er det stadig en 'black box’. Jeg udviklede derfor en teoretisk ramme, der integrerer OS og OKC, for at hjælpe med at forstå, hvordan startupkonteksten påvirker nyansatte i deres bestræbelser på at falde til, og for at begynde at udfolde viden som en 'black box’ i OS generelt. IKT-startups repræsenterer et interessent miljø som vidensintensive virksomheder i en branche, hvor der er en ubalance mellem udbuddet af og efterspørgslen efter kandidater med de rette IT-kompetencer.

Som følge af fokusset på dynamikker relateret til OS i startups og deres konsekvenser for nyansattes videnskonstruktion var agendaen at udpege, hvor og hvordan der relevant kunne bygges bro mellem OS og OKC, og undersøge, hvordan ledere og nyansatte i IKT-startups italesætter problemer relateret til OS, når de beretter om deres oplevelser med opstart, med et specifikt fokus på viden. Formålet med dette var at bidrage med en bedre forståelse af videnskommunikations rolle i OS generelt og i startups specifikt, og hvordan det påvirker opfattelser af opstartsprocessen. Jeg udviklede følgende teoretiske (RQ1) og empiriske (RQ2) forskningsspørgsmål samt underspørgsmål for at guide min undersøgelse:

RQ1: Hvordan kan feltet organisatorisk videnskommunikation blive integreret med organisatorisk socialisering for at hjælpe os med bedre at forstå og arbejde med organisatorisk socialisering som en proces, hvor videnskommunikation finder sted?

RQ2: Hvordan bliver beretninger om organisatorisk opstart i danske IKT-startups konstrueret?

Underspørgsmål 1 – Nyansatte: Hvordan påvirker kommunikation af opgavespecifik og organisatorisk viden under organisatorisk opstart i danske IKT-startups nyansattes opfattelse af processen?
Undersøgsmål 2 – Ledere: Hvad betragter lederne i IKT-startups som værende organisatorisk videnskommunikations rolle i konteksten af organisatoriske opstartsprocesser, og hvilke måder at kommunikere på bliver brugt og betragtet som værende vigtige for videnskommunikation med nyansatte i IKT-startups?

For at svare på det teoretiske RQ1 gennemgår jeg først OS-litteraturen, især eksisterende forskning i socialisering og human resource management (HRM) i startups og SMV’er, og introducerer så OKC, som integrerer aspekter af organisationsstudier, videnledelse og kommunikationsteori. I min teoretiske ramme præsenterer jeg så en syntese af OS og OKC. Jeg viser, hvordan OS kan forstås som en vidensproces, jeg argumenterer for, at det interaktionistiske perspektiv på OS er et centralet bindeled for at integrere OKC i OS, og jeg viser, hvordan OKC kan nuancere, hvordan vi forstår videnskommunikation i OS, ved at hjælpe os med at forstå organisationer og organisatoriske fænomener som dynamiske, anerkende viden som kompleks (værende situeret, kontekstuel og relationel) og forestille kommunikation som transaktionelt.

de vilkår, som knytter sig til at arbejde i en startup. En række måder at kommunikere på bliver nævnt i forhold til dette, herunder jobsamtaler, introduktioner, direkte kontakt mellem den nyansatte og forskellige aktører og forskellige IKT-værktøjer såsom databaser og intranets, hvor forskellig information bliver lagret.

I den efterfølgende diskussion fokuserer jeg på implikationerne af OS under startupvilkår, inklusiv vigtige vidensaspekter og udfordringer relateret til tre umiddelbare resultater af OS, nemlig rolleklarhed, opgavebeherkselse og social integration, der fremstod som empirisk og teoretisk relevante.

Jeg præsenterer så mine teoretiske og praktiske bidrag og noterer, hvordan undersøgelsesdesignet og de empiriske bidrag understøttede frembringelsen af disse. Jeg fremhæver forklaringsværdien af at integrere OKC i OS, da det giver en specifik ramme til at tilgå viden og videnskommunikation i OS. Hvad angår OS generelt, så viser jeg, at de umiddelbare OS-resultater er forbundne, og kommenterer på, hvad dette betyder for forskning, hvor de indgår. Mine bidrag til OS-teori i forhold til startups ligger i de kontekstrelaterede indsigter, som fremkom ved at identificere og reflektere over repertoirerne, at forstå udfordringerne forbundet med de umiddelbare resultater og at fremhæve, hvordan aspekter forbundet med startupkonteksten påvirker muligheden for at bruge og selve brugen af forskellige socialiseringstaktikker. Hvad angår de praktiske bidrag, så præsenterer jeg specifikke anbefalinger til startups med nye ansatte og fremsætter visse faktorer, som lederne skal være opmærksomme på. Afslutningsvis præsenterer jeg forslag til yderligere forskning.

Ved at fokusere på forholdet mellem OS og OKC generelt, og OS i en startupkontekst og de relaterede vidensuudfordringer specifikt, har dette teoretiske og empiriske arbejde således bidraget til både teoretiske og praktiske indsigter, som hjælper os med at forstå og nuancere viden og videnskommunikation i OS, OS i konteksten af IKT-startups samt de relaterede vidensuudfordringer.

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List of Appendices

Appendices included at the end of the dissertation:

1. List of Abbreviations

Appendices available for the assessment committee on USB memory stick:

2a-b. Template E-Mail for Contacting Potential Case Start-Ups (in Danish and English)

3. List of Informants and Interviews

4. Interview Protocol

5a-u. Interview Guides for Manager and Newcomer Interviews, Including Pilot

6a-w. Transcriptions and Interview Field Notes

7. Analyses of Individual Interviews, Including Case Start-Up Sub-Conclusions
   (including tables of category labels and thematic clusters for individual informants)

8. Picture of Printed Tables with Thematic Clusters, Illustrating Across Work

9a-h. Tables with Thematic Clusters:
   - (a) across Managers
   - (b) across Newcomers
   - (c) across Managers and Newcomers
   - (d-h) in Individual Case Start-Ups
### Appendix 1. List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRM</td>
<td>Human resource management</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and communication technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>KM</td>
<td>Knowledge management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKC</td>
<td>Organisational knowledge communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>OS</td>
<td>Organisational socialisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Small and medium-sized enterprises</td>
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