

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS16/B02/15 <hr/> (please insert ref. above)

**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report
(for completed projects only)

<p><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within six months of the approved project completion date. 2. Completion report: within 12 months of the approved project completion date.
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Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

Situated knowledge in power relations: Its legitimization, sharing and appropriation

2. Investigator(s) And Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	LAW Kuok-kei / Assistant Professor	Lee Shau Kee School of Business and Administration, The Open University of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	KAMOCHE Ken / Professor	Nottingham University Business School, Nottingham University
Others		

3. Project Duration

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval (must be quoted)
Project Start Date	01/01/2016	N/A	N/A
Project Completion Date	31/12/2017	N/A	N/A
Duration (in month)	24 months	N/A	N/A
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31/12/2018	N/A	N/A

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. To determine how scaffold workers who operate in highly uncertain environments conceptualize their working knowledge, how they define it, and how this conception of knowledge is constituted in their everyday practices.
2. To determine the extent to which scaffold workers perceive their everyday practices as a social accomplishment, and whether and to what extent it is tied to their social identity.
3. To characterize the types of mechanisms management adopt for ensuring health and safety, and the extent to which these mechanisms foster or hinder situated risk assessment knowledge.
4. To explore the mechanisms scaffold workers use to share and learn situated scaffolding techniques and risk assessment knowledge.
5. To determine the extent to which scaffold workers' socially-constructed conception of risk is reconciled with health and safety practices acquired through formal training, and any other conceptions of health and safety, organizational or statutory, managed by the organization.
6. To determine how scaffold workers legitimize their mechanisms of scaffolding and risk assessment and whether this creates any conflict with formally constituted scaffolding and risk assessment mechanisms.
7. To explore the appropriation dilemma faced by scaffold workers on their unlikelihood to risk their lives for the sake of bargaining rents with the management.

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: N/A

Reasons for the change:

- 1.
- 2.
3.

5.3 Realisation of the objectives

(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

The objectives of this project were achieved through the following procedures:

1. Research gaps on the research of situated knowledge were identified through rigorous literature review. Interview questions were designed for exploring answers corresponding to the limited knowledge regarding how situated knowledge can be legitimized, shared, and appropriated despite its highly tacit and embedded nature, particularly under the threat of modern bureaucracies emphasizing scientific ways of working.
2. Two sets of interview protocols were developed – one set for interviewing scaffold workers and another set for interviewing managers of scaffold companies.
3. Invitation calls and emails were sent to a list of 50 scaffold companies in Hong Kong. The invitation asked for face-to-face interviews with the company manager as well as two to three scaffold workers. There were 11 companies accepting our invitations.
4. Semi-structured interviews were first conducted with the company managers, with requests for referral to interviewing their scaffold workers. Interviews and analysis of interview data (coding and categorizing) were conducted simultaneously; minor changes were made to the interview protocols in this interwoven process.
5. After interviewing with and analyzing data from thirteen managers and eight scaffold workers, interview invitations were sent to related government officials, union leaders, construction managers, and scaffold users (construction workers) for triangulating the expressions of the scaffold workers and managers. Interview protocols for those different targets of interviews were developed accordingly. At the same time, we kept on asking for referrals from our interviewees for more scaffold workers to be interviewed.
6. Interviews and analysis of interview data continued until a saturation point where no new observations regarding the research objectives could be identified and triangulation of data has been achieved. At that saturation point, a total of 48 interview attempts had been conducted, with usable data generated from 38 out of those 48 interviews. Data from the remaining 10 interviews, who were all scaffold workers, were deemed not usable either because the interviewees needed to end the interview early due to urgent issues (i.e. incomplete interviews) or because the interviewees' difficulties in understanding questions and expressing their experiences to address our questions. This is no surprise as most of the scaffold workers are of low educational qualifications.
7. Comparison of the coded transcripts of the 38 usable interviews was carried out to identify the emerging themes regarding the legitimization, sharing, and appropriation of situated knowledge. As a procedure to enhance the reliability of our findings, each transcript was coded and categorized separately by the PI and the Co-I and the coding and categorization were then cross-checked to solve any differences. The comparison of coded transcripts was conducted by the PI and Co-I together to look for similarities and differences (and the reasons behind) to generate the reported findings regarding the prominent observations in how scaffold workers perceive the value of their scaffolding and risk assessment knowledge (relating to ROs #1, 2, 6), how scaffold workers share and learn their knowledge amidst the increasing pressure on scientific measures for enhancing occupational safety (relating to ROs #3, 4, 5), and whether and how scaffold workers can use their knowledge to bargain for better treatments and dignity (relating to ROs #6, 7).
8. Upon producing the findings, theoretical implications on the management of situated knowledge and the value of the knowledge-as-situated-practice perspective in knowledge management research were proposed.

5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

Objectives <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i>	Addressed <i>(please tick)</i>	Percentage Achieved <i>(please estimate)</i>
1. To determine how scaffold workers who operate in highly uncertain environments conceptualize their working knowledge, how they define it, and how this conception of knowledge is constituted in their everyday practices.	√	100%
2. To determine the extent to which scaffold workers perceive their everyday practices as a social accomplishment, and whether and to what extent it is tied to their social identity.	√	100%
3. To characterize the types of mechanisms management adopt for ensuring health and safety, and the extent to which these mechanisms foster or hinder situated risk assessment knowledge.	√	100%
4. To explore the mechanisms scaffold workers use to share and learn situated scaffolding techniques and risk assessment knowledge.	√	100%
5. To determine the extent to which scaffold workers' socially-constructed conception of risk is reconciled with health and safety practices acquired through formal training, and any other conceptions of health and safety, organizational or statutory, managed by the organization.	√	100%
6. To determine how scaffold workers legitimize their mechanisms of scaffolding and risk assessment and whether this creates any conflict with formally constituted scaffolding and risk assessment mechanisms.	√	100%
7. To explore the appropriation dilemma faced by scaffold workers on their unlikeliness to risk their lives for the sake of bargaining rents with the management.	√	100%

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome

(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)

1. Regarding the legitimization of situated knowledge, it was found that modern bureaucracies pose significant threats to the value and the legitimacy of situated knowledge. The government and the company management tend to discount the value and the reliability of situated knowledge held by the scaffold workers, thus creating threats to their constructed identity and professionalism in scaffolding and risk assessment.
2. Regarding the sharing of situated knowledge, there is significant conflict between the traditional way and the modern formalized way of the teaching of bamboo scaffolding. Traditionally, workers entered bamboo scaffolding through apprenticeship programmes organised by individual scaffolding companies. This entrance approach, however, is deemed as informal and loosely organised by the government. Starting from April 2017, aspiring workers must participate in the formal training courses organised by a public agency named the Construction Industry Council (CIC) to obtain formal qualification before joining the trade. Due to this new legislation, the traditional apprenticeship has come under threat from modern bureaucracies. However, a majority of scaffold managers and workers we interviewed raised the concern that the scaffolding courses provided by the CIC are elementary and have ignored the improvised nature of bamboo scaffolding. Some of them even think that the formalized training makes their work more dangerous because of the insufficient preparation of the novices joining the scaffolding work.
3. Regarding the appropriation of situated knowledge, appropriability is basically non-existent in the case of bamboo scaffolding. Our interviewees indicated that it is impossible to use their knowledge as a bargaining chip to improve their treatment because scaffold workers can never withhold their knowledge to create threats to their managers. Withholding knowledge would mean endangering their own lives and the lives of others. This suggests that the common knowledge appropriation problem identified in past studies in office settings may not apply to the context of bamboo scaffolding.
4. The above findings demonstrate the contested nature in legitimizing, sharing, and appropriating the situated knowledge of bamboo scaffolding. The value of scaffolding knowledge is constantly threatened by the bureaucratic measures imposed by the government and the company management. Even though some of the managers have been frontline workers themselves who rely heavily on their situated knowledge at work, due to the company's interest and policies, they tend to discount or distrust the situated knowledge of their workers and strictly enforce bureaucratic measures. This change in managers' attitudes is due to the heavy penalties imposed by the government when safety regulations are breached and to the compensation that the company has to pay when industrial accidents occur. It is natural, therefore, for managers to forgo the situated knowledge that they used earlier in their careers and turn to compliance with bureaucratic measures.
5. Due to the richness of the findings, two journal manuscripts are under preparation to deliver the research findings. One of the manuscripts specifically focuses on the legitimization and appropriation of situated knowledge with the themes of threatened

identity and inappropriability while the other manuscript focuses on the sharing and learning of situated knowledge which is characterized by contestation and improvisation.

6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action (*Maximum half a page*)

Observation on the case of bamboo scaffolding is a single example of situated knowledge. It nonetheless has reinforced and added to previous findings generated from coalminers and construction workers. Future research should continue this line of research on the management of situated knowledge with other examples of situated knowledge and/or observation on other cultural contexts. One promising research direction is on the relationship between the construction of situated knowledge and cultural characteristics. Moreover, more research is needed on the appropriation of situated knowledge. The inappropriability by scaffold workers seems to have challenged the knowledge-as-power argument in the conventional KM literature. Thus, there is a need to examine the appropriability of situated knowledge in other contexts to verify the applicability of the knowledge-as-power argument in the context of situated knowledge. The above future research directions will be realized in future FDS proposals via collaboration with foreign researchers, e.g. from Africa, to diversify the context of the study and allow comparison of the findings between the current study and the future study.

7. Layman's Summary

(*Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words*)

Knowledge management (KM) has mainly been studied in office settings. Yet, knowledge in other non-office settings, such as scaffolding knowledge, is no less important to be a target of KM study. Specifically, knowledge in non-office settings is often tacit and situated in the social practices of workers. It is therefore meaningful and valuable to explore if the legitimization, sharing, appropriation of knowledge are done in the context of situated knowledge, as opposed to the conventional view of knowledge such as manuals and databases in office settings. Based on a study of the bamboo scaffolding trade in Hong Kong, it was found that the legitimization and the appropriation of situated knowledge are very difficult due to their intangible and situated knowledge. Further, the basic recognition of the value of situated knowledge is being discounted by management bureaucracies who advocate scientific ways of working. The sharing and learning of situated knowledge is more than a simple send-and-receive of documents or files between workers. Instead, it is mainly done through years of apprenticeship and improvised practices. Overall, the study shows that the legitimization, sharing and appropriation of situated knowledge is much more complicated and challenging as compared with the objectified knowledge in offices.

Part C: Research Output**8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the institutional repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
			Yes	Law, K. K.*, Kamoche, K.	Sharing and learning of situated knowledge: Contestation, improvisation, and inevitable devotion. Target journal: <i>Organization Science</i>	No	Yes [Attachment 1]	Yes	Yes
			Yes	Law, K. K.*, Kamoche, K.	Legitimization and appropriation of situated knowledge: Threats and challenges. Target journal: <i>Human Relations</i>	No	Yes [Attachment 2]	Yes	Yes

9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i>	Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Accessible from the institutional repository <i>(Yes or No)</i>
July / 2017 / Copenhagen, Denmark	The legitimization, learning, and appropriation of risk assessment knowledge amongst bamboo scaffolders	The 33 rd European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) Colloquium	No	Yes [Attachment 3]	Yes	Yes
February / 2017 / Park City, Utah, USA	Situated knowledge is power relations: Its legitimization, sharing and appropriation	The 23 rd Organization Science Winter Conference	No	Yes [Attachment 4]	Yes	Yes

10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

(Please elaborate)

The knowledge-as-situated-practice perspective is a recent development in the field of knowledge management (KM). The way to manage situated knowledge, however, is less known and awaits further research. This theoretical perspective and its potential for academic development haven been elaborated in a postgraduate course *Managing Knowledge*. Students are led to discuss the importance and value of this ‘alternative’ perspective in KM and how this perspective can be further researched to achieve more comprehensive theorization.

11. Student(s) Trained

(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
N/A			

12. Other Impact

(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)

N/A

13. Public Access Of Completion Report

(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)

Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access	Reasons
N/A	

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FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report - Attachment

(for completed projects only)

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS16/B02/15

Principal Investigator: Kuok Kei LAW

Project Title: Situated knowledge in power relations: Its legitimization, sharing and appropriation

Statistics on Research Outputs

	Peer-reviewed Journal Publications	Conference Papers	Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters	Patents Awarded	Other Research Outputs (Please specify)
No. of outputs arising directly from this research project [or conference]	2 [Under Preparation]	2			