A longitudinal multi site study of how individual employees create new practices in employer branding by the use of social media.

“P: The best it can do for you is to say something like, “When your informants mix up organization, hardware, and politics in one sentence, don’t break it down first into neat little pots; try to follow the link they make among the elements that would have looked completely incommensurable if you had followed normal procedures.” That’s all. ANT can’t tell you positively what the link is.

S: So why is it called a ‘theory’ if it says nothing about the things we study?

P: It is a theory, and a strong one I think, but about how to study things, or rather how not to study them – or rather, how to let the actors have some room to express themselves.

S: Do you mean that other social theories don’t allow that?

P: In a way, yes, and because of their very strengths: they are good at saying substantive things about what the social world is made of. In most cases that’s fine; the ingredients are known; their repertoire should be kept short: But that doesn’t work when things are changing fast. Nor is it good for organization studies, information studies, marketing, science and technology studies or management studies, where boundaries are so terribly fuzzy. New topics, that’s what you need ANT for.” (Latour 2005)
Table of content

Summary 3

Part I  Research problematic

1 Introduction 5
2 Preliminary literature review 7
  2.1 Method of literature review
  2.2 Result I: Emergent area of interdisciplinairy research
  2.3 Result II: Practical relevance
  2.4 Result III:theoretical relevance
  2.5 Implications for the proposed Ph.D.

3 Research Question 12
  3.1 Methods and stakes in research questions
  3.2 Research question and sub research questions
  3.3 Managerial research questions

Part II  Research methodology

4 Philosophy of science: Paradigms or discourses? 15
  4.1 Translations in discourse
  4.2 Paradigm matrix
  4.3 Critique of positivistic IS research
  4.4 Research as dialogic discourse
  4.5 The method is the writing

5 Syntaxes of entanglement 17
  5.1 Theory and research streams
  5.2 Relational ontology and syntax of actors
  5.3 After paradigm shift and dangerous opportunity

6 Methodology 20
  6.1 Explorative study versus hypothetico-deductive study
  6.2 Process versus variance study
  6.3 Design of longitudinal real time field study

7 Methods 23
  7.1 Three classic methods
  7.2 Observation as tracing syntaxes of practice
  7.3 Interview as interventive constructions sites
  7.4 Document analysis as analysis of inscription of practice

Part III  Research plan

8 Field study 26
  8.1 Field study overview and detail
  8.2 Procedures and principles

9 Publication 28
  9.1 Publication overview and detail
  9.2 Procedures and principles

10 Communication 30
11 Research exchange, conferences and courses 31

References 32
Summary

The thesis proposal is presented in three parts.

Part one presents the research problematic
• The combination of social media and employer branding opens up new opportunities for individual employees to become significant actors that create new practices. The emergent practices in employer branding by the use of social media causes both practical opportunities and challenges for managers and theoretical challenges for scholars.
• A preliminary literature review points to the relevance of interdisciplinary research that extends the existing literature with a focus on the ‘middle’ of the employee life cycle. The literature review points further to the relevance of research that methodologically is characterized by being empirical, qualitative, longitudinal, and have the emergent practices of the individual actor as a focus point.
• The research question is motivated by both a practical and theoretical interest. The research question: How do individual employees create new practices in employer branding by the use of social media? is operationalized via four sub questions. Finally the thesis proposal also formulates four managerial research questions.

Part two presents the research methodology
• The dialogic discourse is presented as the philosophy of science for the proposed project because it matches the philosophical debate of the twenty first century and what is at stake in organizational processes characterized by a multiplicity of actors and polyphonic voices.
• The research project is characterized as an explorative study in contrast to a hypothetico-deductive study, and it is described as a process study in contrast to a variance study.
• Classic information system theory about the relation between technology and organizational change is used to establish a theoretical frame of reference for the analysis of social media in a corporate context. Two contemporary research streams in social media are introduced. The phenomenological concept of technology is suggested as a third alternative approach for the study of social media practices in employer branding.
• The design of the longitudinal study concerns: 1. Real time study and retrospective study. 2. The relation between empirical processes and theoretical concepts. 3. The unique single case study and the comparative multi case study.
• The three classic methods and their specific versions in this project are presented: 1. Observation as tracing syntaxes of practice. 2. Interview as interventive construction sites. 3. Document analysis as analysis of inscription of practice.

Part three presents the research plan
• The field study plan in overview and detail for the first year is presented. The procedures and principles for the field study are presented: 1. Involvement of actors. 2. Guiding questions. 3. Design of intervals of field study and analytical activity.
• The publication plan is presented in tables as subjects for planned publication and as publication pipeline. The procedures and principles for the publication plan are presented: 1. Substantive and conceptual/methodological papers. 2. From conference papers to journal publication. 3. Co-authors, colloquia and other feedback systems for writing.
• Finally communication activities, research exchange plan, conference participation and Ph.D. courses are presented.
Part I

Research problematic
1 Introduction

1.1 Social Media Employer Branding as emergent practice

Today's organizations have started to move employer branding activities from traditional media to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and many more social media platforms\(^1\). The organizations already do it by using social media as advertising space, but they have also started a more profound and game changing practice by creating profiles that we a few years ago thought were only meant for private persons.

A pilot study showed that the emergent practices in some organizations resemble bricolage while it in others is the outcome of long-termed prioritization and preparation (Haahr 2012). The pilot study also found that some organizations for coping best possible with the new frontiers in social media hire specialists in social media and reputation management while other organizations outsource the new activities.

But also individual employees have started to create social media profiles for employer branding objectives. The immediate goal for the organization is that the employee both externally and internally (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004) function as an ambassador of the employer brand, and thereby creates talent attraction. The more precious objective is to engage the employee into a career development process and thereby reach the ultimate goal of talent development and retention. But the talents of today definitely also has his or her stakes in the engagement…

The aim of the proposed research project is to study the emergent practices that is the outcome of organizations that engage their most talented employees in becoming active in social media.

In an organizational perspective, it is significant that a multiplicity of actors and polyphonic discourses characterize the use of social media in a corporate context (Haahr 2012). From a strategic managerial perspective this situation can be welcomed as a necessary springboard for organizational innovation (Christensen et al. 2008), but also be regarded as a disciplinary challenge calling for regulations of employees' practices both during and outside working hours (Zerfass et al. 2011). Along with excitement about business adventures in social media we also find that social regulation, legislation and legal twists are the order of the day (Sánchez Abril et al. 2012, Determan 2012).

In a media perspective it is noteworthy that Facebook has seen the growing market potential in employer branding and the corresponding career performance management, and in alliance with Monster.com has developed the application "BeKnown" as a competitor to Linkedin. Glassdoor, which is still unknown for many in Europe, but already has critical mass in the U.S., functions as a dedicated platform for evaluation of employers, just like TripAdvisor does in the travelling industry. Also Aarhus University has thus got the first evaluations. The research in accountability in relation to TripAdvisor (Scott and Orlikowski 2009, 2012) and social media (Stark 2009), and of accountability in general (Shotter 1984), it is therefore relevant to extend to employer branding.

In a information systems perspective social media is interesting because it is a relational practice, not a transactional or a decision making practice as it has traditionally been regarded (Potts and Jones 2011, Mokros and Aakhus 2002, Schultz 2000). Social media is less about signals and more about symbols (Feldman 1981, Aakhus 2012). Social media have both promises and challenges in digitization of word of mouth (Dellarocas 2003). The use of employee referral in employer branding is an example of this: Social media will evidently play an important role for utilizing the strength of weak ties (Granovetter 1973), but may also create unprecedented forms of complexity and conflict.

If we return to the focus for the proposed project, research in the individual person's use of new media has historically drawn attention to the appearance of fluid borderlines, new rhetoric arenas and identity platforms (Goffman 1959, Boyd and Ellison 2007, Persson 2010, Meyrowitz 1985). Likewise the individual person's use of social media in a corporate formative context (Ciborra and Lanzara 1994), can be expected to become a journey between Scylla and Charybdis. - Is it as a private person, citizen,
colleague, employee, friend, manager or worker? How should the person who retweet on Twitter or ‘like’ on Facebook in a corporate context be regarded by others and herself (Rybalko and Seltzer 2010)?

The focus of the project is therefore not just innovation of talent, but talent innovation: Talent innovation as an emergent practice embedded in modern information technology.

If the emergent practices are interesting from a managerial point of view, they are not less interesting seen from a methodological and theoretical point of view. Are we conceptually to understand the emergent practices of individual actors (Schultze and Orlikowski 2004) in social media as a boundary spanning phenomenon (Kellogg et al. 2006), or as actants in syntaxes both including people and technology (Latour 2005)? How do we best methodologically study the changes in practice as an emergent process? Is it done through a longitudinal real time study (Van de Ven and Poole 1990) to avoid the pitfalls of the retrospective study. Or will we get a stronger outcome via a retrospective multi case snap-shot study because it will make us able to map the variation across many companies (Glick et al. 1990, Van de Ven and Huber 1990)? Are we to follow the IT practitioner’s forward-looking and optimistic view or will we be able to make a more convincing case if we follow the organizational researcher’s critical sense for patterns repeating themselves (Orlikowski and Barley 2001)? Or, is it precisely by muddling through such paradoxes (Poole and van de Ven 1989) that we can generate game changing knowledge?
2 Preliminary literature review

2.1 Method of literature review
First a search in SCOPUS was initially conducted because of its large number of journals. Second a search was made in Business Source Complete because of its focus and depth on business studies. A search on the specific process of individual employees practicing employer branding showed no results, and a broader search directed by the combination of the ‘topics’ of employer branding and social media was therefore conducted. Concerning the search terms used: Both “Employer branding” and “Social media” are relatively new and umbrella-like terms, and the search was therefore supplemented with relevant keywords for both terms. Business Source Complete was chosen because of a larger number of relevant findings. A search on the combination of the two main and supplementary terms in peer reviewed articles and proceedings on more than 5 pages resulted in 47 articles. Several of these though, were not real peer reviewed articles. Via citation and reference lists, the corpus of literature has afterwards been supplemented.

Silverman (2000) and Stebbins (2001) discuss if and when it is relevant to conduct a literature review. Silverman advises the doctoral student to “write it up after your other chapters” (Silverman 2000, p. 229) and also asks: “do you need a literature review chapter?” (Silverman 200, p. 230). A forefighter of exploratory research (Stebbins 2001) is very explicit about these matters: “By contrast, literature reviews in exploratory research are carried out to demonstrate that little or no work has been done on the group, process, or activity under consideration and that open-ended approach to data collection is, therefore, wholly justified” (Stebbins 2001, p. 42).

Webster and Watson (2002) pinpoint the objective of the literature review by advocating that a literature review should move from being author-centric to being concept-centric in the analytical process, and that it should also be a practical communication task that has sense-making as its objective.

2.2 Result I: Emergent area of interdisciplinary research
The literature on social media and employer branding has dawned during the last five years. The area has considerable attention in the general press and popular publications, and has also got traction in industry journals and periodicals. But for peer reviewed publications the domain of social media and employer branding is still in its early dawn as the number and dates of the publications found also witness.

Another related fundamental characteristic feature of the research in the field of social media and employer branding, is its interdisciplinarity. A cross-citation analysis (Small 2010) of the articles results in a map of a very loosely coupled corpus of peer reviewed literature.

2.3 Result II: Practical relevance
What analytic gaze is it relevant to use on the corpus of literature about social media and employer branding? In a situation where the research is emergent and scarce, it is important to focus on the fundamental framing of the field. The basic employee life cycle process from start to end has therefore been chosen as the analytical framework. The process exists in different versions from few to several phases, and is congruent with the 13 propositions by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004). To pin point the tendency in the emergent literature, the very fundamental narrative process of start, middle and end, will be used here. See table 2.1.

Concerning the start-phase of the cycle we find the following research issues:

---

2 Supplementary terms include: "Employer branding": "employer brand" or "human resource" or "human resource management" or recruitment or recruiting or "talent management" or "employer reputation" or "internal marketing". "Social media": "web 2.0" or "social computing" or "online social networks" or "online network" or "social network site" or “facebook” or “twitter” or “linkedin” or “youtube” or “flickr".
• Legal and ethical aspects in how employers and recruiters track, monitor and use information about candidates on social networking sites is analyzed (Brandenburg 2008, Brown and Vaughn 2011a, Chang and Madera 2012a, Clark and Roberts 2010, Davison et al. 2011a, McGrath 2012, Slovensky and Ross 2012).

• Validity and value in using the available information on social networking sites. This includes how organizations can secure the validity of the evaluation of candidates (Bohnert and Ross 2010, Kluemper and Rosen 2009), and it includes in a wider perspective how organizations can utilize social media business intelligence in ways relevant for employer branding (Seebach et al. 2012).

• Consciousness of the image management in students profile postings and of the constituents in students perception of employer brand, e.g. authenticity, as basis for proactive actions for a successful employer branding (Peluchette and Karl 2009, Waldeck et al. 2010, Henderson and Bowley 2010, Brecht and Eckhardt 2012, Brecht et al. 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Termination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Remembering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Retention</td>
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| (Antes and Schuelke 2011) | (Cooke and Macfarlane 2009) | (Davison et al. 2011b) |
| (Grudin and Skeels 2009) | (Kaupins et al. 2012) | |
| (Leidner et al. 2010) | (Martin et al. 2009) | |
| (Mulin and Reen 2010) | |

Table 2.1 Research issues in relation to employee life cycle

Concerning the middle-phase of the cycle we find the following research issues:
• Employee introduction and assimilation. Especially the question of how generation Y expects active organizational use of social media and of how generational differences matter is relevant for the success of assimilation of employees (Leidner et al. 2010).
• New specific interactive learning and people development opportunities in social media (Cooke and Macfarlane 2009, Kaplan and Haenlein 2009, Mulin and Reen 2010, Martin et al. 2009). A special area within learning is the development of creative leadership (Antes and Schuelke 2011).
• Internal organizational conditions for governing employees active use of social media is perceived as a matter of developing policies for employees use of social media (Kaupins et al. 2012).

Concerning the end-phase of the cycle, we find the following research issues
• Termination in relation to social media is according to Davison an almost not researched area (Davison et al. 2011b). The search did not result in articles about 'remembering' or post employee reputation.

A number of articles fall outside the used employee life cycle categorization: Three articles are meta studies of the relationship between human ressource and e-enablement (Martin et al. 2011, Martin and Reddington 2009, Martin and Reddington 2010). Two articles are studies of the adoption of social media (Barnes and Mattson 2008, Heikkila 2010).
The life cycle categorization of the articles demonstrates that the large part of the articles focus on the start phase of the life cycle. A smaller part of the articles focus on the middle phase of the life cycle, and only a part of one article focus on the final part of the life cycle. On the basis of the categorization of the found articles, there is a significant tendency in how current research prioritize the three phases of the employee life cycle. Although the tendency is significant, it should be underscored that it is on the basis of a small total number of articles and in an emerging field of research.

To extend the emergent area of research in the middle phase, the articles have been used as springboard for formulating the four sub research questions. See chapter 3.

2.4 Result III: Methodological and theoretical relevance

In the methodological and theoretical analysis of the literature, four basic characteristics have been in focus. First if the literature is empirical based and if there is used a qualitative or quantitative approach (Van de Ven and Poole 1990). Second if the methodology is cross-sectional single-snapshot or longitudinal (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). Third if the level of analysis is organizational or individual (Baskerville 2011). Fourth if social media is understood as an embedded practice or a tool (Orlikowski 1991). The characteristics are selected for analysis with the objective of conducting a fundamental analysis of the existing corpus of literature in general, and in particular aimed at studying emergent technological practices. The result of the analysis of the first three characteristics are included in table 2.2.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Basic research characteristics</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Level of analysis</th>
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<td>Non/ empirical - Quantitative</td>
<td>Cross-Sectional Single-Snapshot</td>
<td>Longitudinal</td>
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<td>Empirical</td>
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Table 2.2 Basic methodological characteristics

First, concerning the basic research characteristics, it is significant that for an emergent phenomenon less than half of the studies are empirical, and of these only half are qualitative. The remaining articles found are based solely on existing literature and therefore not in first hand contact with the emergent
processes in the field of social media and employer branding. If research into emergent phenomenons are solely based on literature there is a risk of extending existing and rather orderly schemas and understandings of organizational change processes (Van de Ven and Poole 1990). Quantitative studies can be highly relevant for gaining generalizable knowledge, but do not give us access to the level of detail in change processes we need in order to understand human interpretation and interaction in the research site.

A noteworthy empirical qualitative study is Girard and Fallery (2010) that both include qualitative empirical research in the form of interviews, and furthermore suggests a theoretical shift. Girard and Fallery argue that we need to go from a resource based view to a social network analysis approach to become able to grasp the difference between recruitment in web 1.0 and web 2.0.

Noteworthy as an empirical study is also a learning project for graduates that methodologically functions as soft action research (Checkland 2000). Cooke and Macfarlane (2009) in detail describes how graduates experiment with web 2.0 technologies as an integrated part of the learning process. A strength of the study is that it does not end up in technological determinism. Instead the significant criteria for the project is conceptually framed via Wenger (1998) as a matter of community of practice. Although the authors of the research project do not characterize it as longitudinal, the article nevertheless communicates the learning practices as a process and emphasizes the significance of duration. The graduate participants are not predicated as such, but are actually made into their own ‘technology stewards’ before Wenger et al. in “Digital Habitats” (Wenger et al. 2009) coin the term. In another case of learning, the concept of social media is more instrumental and deterministic (Mulin and Reen 2010), but nevertheless describes an innovative learning process in the context of social media.

Henderson and Bowley (2010) on the basis of a literature review points to a gap in literature on the use of web 2.0 technologies from a public relations and organization communication perspective. From Henderson and Bowley’s own discourse analysis of the employees participation in a campaign that included tension between the organizational identity and the branded image, further research should include both knowledge about the target groups actual behavior on social network sites, and the governance that organizations employ to control the authenticity of spokespeople’s own voices.

Second, concerning the research methodology, it is significant that only one article presents a longitudinal study. Snap-shot studies (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991) are dominant. See chapter 4 for more about dominant research approaches in informations systems research. Especially in a situation of an emergent phenomenon as social media, the study of changes over time is important if we are to understand how practices in employer branding changes and what these consist of. In this situation qualitative – and explorative - longitudinal real time studies are of special importance if we want to understand the human interpretative and emergent aspects of social media in employer branding. Leidner et al. (2010) presents a longitudinal three-year case study of how social media is used for assimilation of new employees. Due to the qualitative longitudinal study the authors through interviews have been able to follow the employees’ interpretation of a change in policies for the use of social media.

Third, concerning the level of analysis, none of the empirical articles have its focus on the level of the individual, and therefore do not analyze the unique, singular practices of actors in social media in an employer branding context. From the empirical articles that include interviews (Girard and Fallery 2010, Henderson and Bowley 2010) we get quotes from interviewees, but no specification of their practice as individual actors.

Fourth observation concerns the theoretical conceptualization of the role of technology in the organizational change processes. With a few exemptions that explicitly analyzes this cardinal relation, the rest of the studies boldly spoken regard social media as merely a tool for communication. Articles that explicitly analyzes the significance of the ‘combination’ of employer branding and social media include Laick and Dean (2011) and Girard and Fallery (2010). Laick and Dean (2011) point to authenticity as being characteristic of web 2.0, and that organizations therefore should take advantage of. Due to lack of empirical evidence the article is not aware of the built-in conflicts Henderson and Bowley (2010) detected. Girard and Fallery (2010) suggest a shift in theoretical perspective to grasp the social dimension of web 2.0 as mentioned above, but understand technology through the metaphor of
‘tool’ and thereby reify the social processes (Orlikowski 1991). See chapter 5 for further analysis of the concept of technology.

The four observations point to an emergent field of literature with interesting possibilities for contributions through future research. The next paragraph presents the immediate implications for the proposed Ph.D. project.

2.5 Implications for the proposed PhD project
The literature review points to four main implications for the proposed Ph.D. project.

First the literature review points to an interdisciplinary awareness as an important part of future research in social media in employer branding. Organizational behavior, PR, technology studies, learning disciplines, corporate communication, business intelligence, media studies and more disciplines can all contribute to the inquiry. The interdisciplinary character of the literature and the research interest in this research project is intended to match this condition.

Second the literature review points to the relevance of focusing especially on the ‘middle’ and ‘end’ aspects of the total employee life cycle. The ‘middle’ and ‘end’ phase of the cycle can be regarded as the social capital behind the branding activities in the ‘start’ phase of the employer branding cycle: The ‘middle’ phase is identical with the core commitment and contribution of the employees to the value creation processes. Both the main and the sub research questions presented in next chapter reflects the importance and variety of the practices in the ‘middle’ phase of the employee life cycle. Also auto-communication (Aggerholm et al. 2011) is relevant and important to include in the conceptualization of the practices. Regarded as a substantive domain, the proposed research project is an extension of the existing research in the ‘middle’ phase of the employee life cycle.

Third the literature review points to the relevance of a research project characterized by the following methodological elements: empirical, qualitative, and longitudinal study that have the individual level as a focus point. Earlier research in the IS field has also pointed to the study of organizational practices on the level of the individual as an important and relevant research arena (Baskerville 2011, Schultze and Orlikowski 2004). Likewise for longitudinal studies of emergent change processes (Pettigrew 1990). The attention to philosophy of science and methodological approach in part two of this research proposal is intended to match these implications.

Fourth the literature review points to the relevance of a methodological and theoretical framework that can include the multiplicity and entanglement of the practices of technology and people, and thereby provide the requisite variety necessary to describe and understand the emergent processes in the research site. The focus on methodological and theoretical questions in part two of this thesis proposal is intended to match these implications.
3 Research question

3.1 Methods and stakes in research questions
The purpose of this section is briefly to clarify the general conditions regarding the tradition of asking the very research question. Two different methods for generating research questions exist (Alvesson and Sandberg 2011): Gap-spotting and problematization. Gap-spotting consists in identifying or constructing gaps in existing literature that need to be filled, it may include creative construction of gaps and the gap may be defined by “specific negotiations between researchers, editors, and reviewers” (Alvesson and Sandberg 2011, p. 249). Alvesson and Sandberg emphasize that problematization is not “ready-made” alternative theories or “stock questions and puzzles”, but genuine problematization of the ground of assumptions underlying existing literature.

The objective of the literature review has been to include elements of both gap-identification and problematization in the proposed project, and the research question therefore aims to include both aspects.

In a special issue on research approaches in Journal of Management Inquiry in 1992 Lawrence and Weick represented two classical positions. Paul Lawrence (Lawrence 1992) represented the standpoint that research should be problem-driven taking its point of departure in real world problems and the practice of management. In contrary, Weick (1992) represented the viewpoint that the objective of research is to be theory-driven and contribute to the scientific discipline. Brinberg and McGrath (1985) have in the highly formalized validity network schema a similar distinction between a research path where the substantive domain has priority, named applied research, and a path where the conceptual domain has priority, named theoretical path.

The initial approach for the proposed research project was problem-driven as an interest in how organizations via the individual employee as actor can explore and exploit social media for employer branding. The problem-driven interest has afterwards been added an analytical curiosity concerning the theoretical challenges in analyzing the practical problem. As already described, the proposed project intends to use actor network theory as frame of reference, and tentatively use the concept of syntax to analyze and describe the emergent practices. But to keep the research project truly generative. The concept of syntax will not be included in the research question. To further recognize the problem-driven dimension, I include four managerial research questions that correspond to the four sub research questions presented.

3.2 Research Question
Based on the above presented results of the pilot study and of the literature review, it is found relevant to conduct a longitudinal study of social media actors’ emergent practice in employer branding. The longitudinal study makes me able to trace and analyze the practices as an emergent change process in time (Pettigrew 1990). The analysis of the individual actor sharpens the focus on the syntax of both human and non-human actors as significant in the emergent practices (Latour 2005). I therefore propose the following main research question:

How do individual employees create new practices in employer branding by the use of social media?

The main research question will be studied through four sub research questions that function as specifications of the main research question. The four sub research questions are tentative, and should be regarded as analytical frames to guide the explorative study.

1. How do individual employees create emergent organizational practices as boundary actor between individual, corporation and community?
2. How do individual employees create emergent learning practices as an integrative part of the employer branding performance?
3. How do individual employees create emergent communication practices through community conversations and digital turn taking?
4. How do individual employees create emergent practices of human and non-human interaction through post social object relations?
3.3 Managerial research questions

The four managerial research questions correspond to the four sub research questions presented above. In the validity network schema, Brinberg and McGrath (1985) use three conflicting values for the substantive domain in a generative stage 1 research: System well-being, System task performance effectiveness, and System cost. The managerial research questions are formulated with an emphasis on the system task performance effectiveness value.

1. How do we best create innovative practices by the use of social media in employer branding?
2. How do we best create competitive performance via social media in employer branding?
3. How do we most efficiently communicate with social media in employer branding?
4. How do we best explore and exploit social media as technology for employer branding?
Part II

Research Methodology
4 Philosophy of science - paradigms or discourses?

4.1 Translations in discourse
The dialogic discourse is chosen as the philosophy of science for the proposed research project. The objective is to match the philosophical debate of the twenty first century and to match the conditions for innovative processes and enablement of creative chaos (Chen 2009) in tomorrow's organizations. The objective is furthermore to explicit what is already implicit at stake in the most recent works of Orlikowski and Latour.

Former examples of using the dialogic discourse is Schultz and Leidner (2002) who studied knowledge management and knowledge management research, and Levine and Vaast (2005), who studied the emergence of boundary spanning actors and objects in a corporate–market context (Levine and Vaast 2005). Studies by Schultz and Leidner (2002) and Paucar-Caceres and Wright (Paucar-Caceres and Wright 2011) suggest that the dialogic discourse is otherwise seldom practiced or used as frame of reference in IS journals.

4.2 Paradigm matrix
Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) introduction of four sociological paradigms in 1979 has had immense influence. But perhaps more influential than the four paradigms themselves, the axes of the matrix have had a tremendous impact on scholarly thinking, namely the axes of subjective versus objective, and regulation versus radical change. The elements of the ladder dichotomy have often been substituted by structure and actor (Knights and Murray 1994). With a similar impact, the matrix’s subjectivist-objectivist axis has also been applied to qualitative research (Morgan and Smircich 1980).

In a study of the dominating paradigms in IS research, (Goles and Hirschheim 2000) applies the four paradigms of Burrell and Morgan (1979). They are critical of the dominating positivism within IS research, and advocates for a 'rise of pragmatism' where there is 'multiparadigm perspectives'. But by confirming the framework, they according to Deetz (1996) thereby reproduce and confirm the positivist approach they claim to criticise.

4.3 Critique of positivistic IS research
An alternative to Burrell and Morgan’s matrix of scientific paradigms comes from the study of accountants made by Chua (1986) who identifies 3 research epistemologies: Positivist, interpretive and critical. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) employ Chua’s 3 epistemologies in their study of research streams within information systems, and find that most research is conducted within the positivist epistemology. Most interesting in relation to the proposed research project is the ‘time period of study’.

The dominating research designs are survey, laboratory experiment and case study. Under the lens of the ‘time period’, it is very significant that the positivist approach in information systems research is more or less identical with a ‘cross-sectional: single snapshot’ investigation method as I also found in the literature review of social media and employer branding. Following Van de Ven and Huber’s (1990) distinction between variance and process studies, it is evident that variance studies dominate information systems research in these 1991 findings, as well as in our 2012 findings. The study of organizational change as processes are in disfavor.

It is noteworthy that ‘process traces’ in the 1991 study by Baourdi and Orlikowski only account for 1 percent of the studies. Also only one of the studies found in the literature review on social media and employer branding is a longitudinal study. See table 2.2. The findings of Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) are up until today confirmed (Chen and Hirschheim 2004, Richardson and Robinson 2007, Falconer 2008, Myers and Klein 2011).

4.4 Research as dialogic discourse
Deetz (1996) criticizes the theoretical framework by Burrell and Morgan because it has been used to reify research approaches, making them into well defined objects, and because its dimensions blur important differences in research as practiced today. What makes a difference in the way we conduct research according to Deetz, is the discursive practice of the researcher.
In a critique of the subjective – objective distinction, Deetz writes that the framework reproduces a neo-positivist philosophy of science, and claims that it will not go away because it affords protection, privileges and identity for both ’objective’ functionalists and ’subjective’ interpretivists. Referring to Husserl, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, Deetz writes that the dualism itself between subjective and objective as a central part of the twentieth century philosophy has been refuted.

As an alternative to Burrell and Morgan's four paradigm matrix, Deetz suggests what he names two 'dimensions of contrast'. One dimension is about the origins of concepts and problems: local/emergent or elite/a prior. The other dimension is about the relation to dominant social discourse: Consensus or Dissensus. The dimensions are presented as a ‘grid’ with four discursive spaces. The discursive spaces should not be regarded as autonomous paradigms. They should rather be regarded as a ”provisional ordering of discourses” that in practice are not sealed off from each other, but interact and have impact on each other. And this interaction and impact is not just between different authors, but also within one and the same researcher's work.

4.5 The method is in the writing

In line with Deetz, Cunliffe (2011) understands the method as a phenomenon that is produced through the discourse of the practice, e.g. the use of language. A preached epistemology is therefore not necessarily practiced as method. Cunliffe scrutinizes this by analyzing how different epistemological approaches, subjectivist or objectivist, claim to use the same research methods. Interview is one example, but also grounded theory and case studies are used by both positivists and interpretivists. Cunliffe demonstrates how this comes for a day in three ‘problematiques’: the objectivist, the subjectivist and the inter-subjective way of writing. See table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problematique</th>
<th>Discourse characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Objectivist’</td>
<td>The text written about “the organization” as existing and factual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Subjectivist’</td>
<td>The text is written in tentative ways about possible significations at play between organizational actors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Intersubjectivist’</td>
<td>The text is written as a reflective dialogue within a situation, “a knowing in-situ where all participants are implicitly knowledgeable and therefore work together in living conversation to shape meanings, insights, and a way of moving on” (Cunliffe 2010, p. 665).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Discourse characteristics

Stebbins (2001) also discusses the use of language in relation to methodology, and advises the exploratory researcher to use the present tense as the best way to express exploratory generalisations (Stebbins 2001, p. 47).

Petit and Huault (2008) pin point discrepansies between espoused principles of constructivist epistemology and the used principles. The used principles are often lacking or positivist: “Our research points out that the principles of constructivism are difficult to adhere to within research design. It underlines the lack of specific methodological devices and lack of adaptation with the epistemological system of reference” (Petit and Huault 2008, p. 73.). The advice from Eisenhardt and Graebner to constructivist researchers confronted with this challenge is to be explicitly about the objective, and to include “well-crafted tables, appendices, and visual aids to demonstrate the theory’s underlying emperical support and the anticipated richness of the case data, and to tie these tables clearly to the text” (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007, p. 29).
5 Syntaxes of entanglement

5.1 Theory and research streams

I relate to the contemporary question about how best to conceptualize social media in an organizational context (Aakhus 2012), it is worth noting that there is a long and solid tradition in Information Systems research for inquiry into exactly this intricate coupling of technology and organizational change processes.

The seminal reception of the relation between technology and organizational change practice by Markus and Robey distinguish between the technological imperative, the organizational imperative, and the emergent perspective (Markus and Robey 1988). In prolongation of this conceptualization, and including a critique of Burrel and Morgan (1979), Leonardi and Barley (2008) with a constructionist approach present a clarifying analysis of how we can build better theory about technology and organizational change if we do not “conflate the distinction between the material and the social with the distinction between determinism and voluntarism”(Leonardi and Barley 2008). The final example the authors use to convince the reader that the materiality of a technology can shape practice without determining, it is from Barley's seminal longitudinal multi case study of implementation of technically regarded identical new technology in two different hospital departments.

In a study of how the relation between technology and organizational change is conceptualized in contemporary research, Scott and Orlikowski find three research streams. The three streams regard the relation between technology and organizational change as either discrete entities, mutually dependent ensembles, or as socio-material assemblages (Scott and Orlikowski 2008). Orlikowski (2010) reconfigures this reception into three distinctive conceptual positions, namely absent presence, exogenous force, and emergent process, but then also proposes a fourth perspective on technology: Entanglement in practice. Where the former positions are seen as examples of an ontology of separateness, that can be traced back to a Cartesian dualism, the perspective ‘entanglement in practice’ is seen as a relational ontology which rejects the idea of separated objects and subjects, and privileges neither technology nor human beings as actors (Orlikowski 2010).

5.2 Relational ontology and syntax of actors

The strength of the ‘entanglement-in-practice’ perspective is that technology is not reified as a tool. An example of such a reification is perfectly expressed in the subtitle of McAfee’s “Enterprise 2.0. New Collaborative Tools for Your Organization’s Toughest Challenges” (McAfee 2009). But the potential risk is also that the specificities of the technology as an actor vanish in the analytical and contextualizing process. If this happens then the good theoretical intentions ironically turn into a perspective similar to the ‘absent presence’.

To counterbalance this tendency it is therefore necessary to reintroduce the sensibility for non-human actors and objects found in the phenomenological tradition. Yoo (2010) criticizes two dominant streams in technology research, namely the hermeneutical and the alterity relationship. From a phenomenological position he argues for the necessity of a third position: the embodiment relationship. Of special relevance for our study of social media, the consequence of this conceptualization is that “The relationships on these social networks are not simply representations of existing social relationships. They are relationships of a different kind” (Yoo 2010, p. 219-220, italics by Yoo). This Merleau Ponty-inspired perspective on the relationship between technology and users are in line with the works of Latour (2005) and Knorr-Cetina (1997). It shares their interest in the technology itself, and also the specific embodiment and relations.

About the multiplicity of possible positions in the signifying chain of human and nonhuman actors, Latour (1992) writes that they are less interesting than the syntax itself as the distributing force: “The distinctions between human and nonhuman, embodied or disembodied skills, impersonation or “machination”, are less interesting than the complete chain along which competences and actions are distributed” (Latour 1992, p. 165). In an actor network theory perspective, it is the process of translation and inscription itself that is worth studying. Social media is not just an intermediary between actors. Social media is a mediator.
This translation and inscription can take place on several levels and between levels. In the case of employees using Facebook for employer branding, we can analyze the translation on the level of Facebook as a world of interactivity in itself, but we can also analyze it at the level of posting messages, sharing photos, ‘likes’ etc. Regardless of level of analysis, it is in these communication processes that altered competences and actions are distributed. Often without our consciousness or consent.

In the analysis of TripAdvisor, Scott and Orlikowski (2009) note that most of the time we use technology without giving it much attention. The role of TripAdvisor is described as a “defining influence” and it is said that it “configures the nature of knowledge production that takes place”. Via Barad’s (2007) concept of apparatus, and completely in line with the former quote of Latour, TripAdvisor is described as follows: “apparatus are not assemblages of humans and nonhumans; they are open-ended practices involving specific intra-actions of humans and nonhumans” (Scott and Orlikowski 2009).

About the written communication activity it is said that “Language is very much part of the sociomaterial apparatus at work. Rather than being treated as static text, the reviews need to be given textuality. […] The review is a window into the world of the person writing it (Scott and Orlikowski 2009, p. 18). This echoes Latour when he writes that “the inscription of builders and users in a mechanism is very much the same as that of authors and readers in a story” (Latour 1992, p. 160).

5.3 Research streams on social media: Paradigm shift or dangerous opportunity?
To establish a frame of reference for the proposed project, it is relevant to ask what characterizes contemporary research in social media. With the above analysis of technology as springboard, it is possible to detect two research streams.

The first stream of research regards social media sites like Wikipedia, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn and many more as symbols of a new interactive future. It is important to note that not only individuals as private persons take advantage of these platforms (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Also companies want to profit from the new social networking opportunities, and are therefore now creating profiles and becoming active in the Social Media (Culnan et al. 2010).

This stream of research suggests that social media bring a paradigmatic shift that takes communication practices away from a field with a high degree of control to an arena of open dialogues out of managers’ control (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Phrased in the words of classical communication theory, social media represent a shift from a transactional paradigm to a relational paradigm (Jones et al. 2009), that social media are a springboard for open dialogues with stakeholders who wish to create better and longer lasting relations (Fieseler et al. 2010). Especially in the field of corporate social responsibility (Roland 2009), social media have been seen as a media platform with potentials.

In the arena of open innovation, focus has been on how corporations can take advantage of collective consumer innovation (Kozinets et al. 2008) or how employees and networks of peers can and will perform tasks "for free", and thereby what kind of accomplishments, uncoordinated groups of users are able to produce (Lakhani and von Hippel 2003).

The second stream of research focus on how social media can make a company vulnerable for a crisis (Tripp and GrEGoire 2011). The YouTube video showing United Airlines mistreating a guitar case or the authors even predicate Dominos’ “YouTube crisis” are the preferred examples in this stream of research (Veil et al. 2012).

In line with this second stream of research, other recent studies focus on how companies therefore hesitate to exploit social media for conversation (Morsing 2011), or more subtly affirms the importance of being active on e.g. Twitter by officially creating a policy and a strategy, but in reality doesn’t execute on these legitimizing proclamations (Castello et al. 2012). It is also possible that company explicitly choose to use a "strategy of absence" in their reputation management (Aula 2010). These studies are in direct contrast to publications that downplay potential conflicts or crises into a parental note (Kane et al. 2009).
Just like it is highly interesting to study and learn from innovative uses of social media, it is also relevant to study and learn from companies that hesitate or are not active at all on social media. But not to end up in a dead end road of either very optimistic or pessimistic approach, it is first and foremost important to open the black box of social media.

To open social media as emergent technology practice for investigation, we have to open as well the concept of the social, of media and of the combination. The tendency in the two mentioned research streams is that the social as well as media are conceived as a fait accompli. Media is conceptualized as a neutral technology, a channel of transportation or an intermediary, not as an active mediator. And social is regarded as a substance or a domain, not as an emergent process. An exemption from this is the already mentioned study of TripAdvisor by Scott and Orlikowski (2009) in which it is demonstrated that not only does TripAdvisor reconfigure the daily communication practices in the travel industry (Scott and Orlikowski 2009). Furthermore, TripAdvisor with a much deeper impact also inscribes actors in new relations of worth and accountability (Scott and Orlikowski 2012, Stark 2009).

The point of departure for the proposed research project is that in order to understand social media as an active mediator, we need to include the use of the technology, the technology in practice. One promising way to include the use of technology is to follow the insights and analytical methods of what has been named practice theory. Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) write that “In organizations, people often focus on the technological artifacts with their tangibility, relative stability, and apparent predictability of performance, and they downplay the technologies in practice that produce outcomes that are situated, dynamic, and emergent” (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011, p. 1247). Following this approach, we not only need to be specific about the type of technology we are coping with in the case of social media, but more importantly pay close attention to the situated and emergent practices and outcomes.

The risk is to mistake the new technology for being a new practice. Huysmann and Wulf (2005) write that “although it might be the technology that helps to connect people, it is the social capital that helps them stay connected” (Huysman and Wulf 2005, p. 85). In this perspective, the telecommute case (Orlikowski and Barley 2001) is exemplary for studies in social media and employer branding to learn from. Reflecting on our limited analytical gaze, we necessarily have to ask if it is only from another level of analysis, e.g. a macro perspective, or after a longer time span that processes become recognizable as new practices (Pettigrew 1990)?
6 Methodology

6.1 Explorative study versus Hypothetico-deductive study

According to Brinberg & McGrath (1985) in "Validity and the research process" we may distinguish between preparatory generative studies, investigative hypothetico-deductive studies, and replicative generalizability studies. See table 6.1. The ideal behind this triptykon is the research methods of natural science. Maybe because Brinberg & McGrath so evidently and explicitly adopt this ideal, that they present a very differentiated view on division of labor and cooperation in research processes. This manifests itself when they write as follows about the relationship between the stages one, two and three:

“The work of stage one, in any of these three domains, is preparatory, exploratory, and above all generative. It consists of finding or inventing elements and relations – concepts and conceptual relations, methods and comparison techniques, phenomena and patterns among them – that are or might be of value for stage two and stage three work.” (Brinberg & McGrath 1985, p. 31)

“Stage-one researchers are system experts in various systems within each of the three domains. Some are experts in various kinds of methodology, some in various conceptual systems, and some in various substantive systems. Usually, different sets of people do stage-one research in each of the three domains. Furthermore, these are often different people than those who do stage-two research”(Brinberg & McGrath 1985, p. 17-18).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Function</td>
<td>Preparatory</td>
<td>Investigation</td>
<td>Replication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central tasks</td>
<td>Identification, development, and clarification of elements, relations, and embedding systems for each of the three domains.</td>
<td>Selection, combination, and use of elements and relations from all three domains to produce a set of empirical findings.</td>
<td>Verification, extension, and delineation of particular stage-two findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research paradigm</td>
<td>Generative or constructive</td>
<td>Logical-empericist or hypothetico-deductive</td>
<td>Generalizability or credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria of validity</td>
<td>Value or worth</td>
<td>Correspondence or fit</td>
<td>Robustness, generalizability or external validity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1 Validity criteria for research stage 1 - 3

The validity criterion for a generative study is value of worth, see table 6.2. In the methodical domain, value of worth is about the relationship between generalizability, realism and precision. Thorngate and Weick (Thorngate 1976, Weick 1979) have similar prioritization criteria for studies. In the conceptual domain the values to be handled and prioritized is Parsimony, Scope og Differentiation. In the substantive domain, the three disederata for the validity criterion are System Well-Being, System Task Performance Effectiveness, and System Cost. In all three domains, the three disederata can be regarded as values which in the specific research project are to be handled and prioritized in order to make validity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Substantive</th>
<th>Conceptual</th>
<th>Methodological</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value criteria</td>
<td>• System well-being</td>
<td>• Parsimony</td>
<td>• Generalizability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• System task performance effectiveness</td>
<td>• Scope</td>
<td>• Realism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• System cost</td>
<td>• Differentiation</td>
<td>• Precision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers focus</td>
<td>• A substantive system expert</td>
<td>• A conceptual system expert</td>
<td>• A methodological system expert</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2 Validity criteria for stage 1
6.2 Process versus variance study
There is a strong tradition for operating with two principal types of theories about change within social sciences in general and within organization research in particular: Process theories and variance theories (Van de Ven and Huber 1990, Van de Ven and Poole 1990).

In process theories the focus is on changes as something which are created and which develop, grow and end as a time matter. Process theories ask with a ‘how’ and answer with a narrative, containing a descriptive and/or explanatory generative mechanism. A matrix with the dimensions ‘mode of change’ and ‘unit of change’ can be established, and generate four superior theories of the ‘engines of change’: Life cycle, teleological, dialectical and evolutionary (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995). By adopting a process theory view, a dynamic and synchronous perspective of the research question is established.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic question</th>
<th>Process theory</th>
<th>Variance theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time dimension</td>
<td>Syncrone</td>
<td>Diacrone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation logic</td>
<td>Narrative with generative logic</td>
<td>Dependent-independent variable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3 Process theory and variance theory

Variance studies focus on what comes in advance and creates change, and what comes next and is the result of the change. Variance theories ask questions with a "what" and answer by an account of the statistical relationship between input factors (independent variables) and outcome criteria (dependent variables). The process itself is not in focus. By adopting a variance theory view, a diachronic perspective of the research question is established. See table 6.3 for an overview of the differences between variance and process theory.

Van de Ven recommends that a research project combines a process study with a subsequent variance study. The reason for the order is that key properties of order and sequence are first to be developed and refined before tested as generative throughput mechanisms between input and output. The process study and the development of process theory are thus the foundation of the variance study's tests of the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

The process study is relevant for the project because the focus is on describing and explaining change as a process evolving over time. The process study matches conceptually Latour’s sequence-dynamic concept ‘syntagm’ and my research question. The variance perspective is not prioritized in the research question, and would also require established theories and propositions for the specific subject of study, and this is not present in the project.

6.3 Design of longitudinal field study
Designing af longitudinal field study includes at least three classic questions (Van de Ven and Huber 1990, Van de Ven 2007, Barley 1990, Glick et al. 1990). 1. How do the researcher analytically cope with change processes that unfolds in time: As an ongoing real time study or as a retrospective study? 2. How do the researcher cope with the relationship between theoretical concepts and empirical processes? 3. How do the researcher cope with the strength of the particular and the integrative perspective in a single case field study versus the strength of the comparative and selective perspective in a multi case field study? In the following paragraphs these questions will be elaborated.

6.3.1 Real time and retrospective
A longitudinal study can be designed so that it observes and analyses during the course of change, in real time. Or it may be designed so that observations and analysis take place after the course of change, in retrospective.

Considerations regarding resources speak for the use of the retrospective study. To observe retrospectively requires fewer resources, and general understanding is easier to establish. A significant example of this is Isabella’s (Isabella 1990) studies of the participants conception of sequences in a change process. This study does however also point out the limitation of the retrospective study of...
changes, viz. that already established interpretation schemas will often appear, not giving room for emergent events and patterns in a change process. In short, in a retrospective study more sense than sensibility will appear. In our study it is the latter which is interesting and therefore a real time analytical approach will be prioritized. Emergent practices and patterns speak for a real time study as in Van de Ven and Poole’s MIRP study (Van de Ven and Poole 1990).

The strength in real time observation of emergent processes in a longitudinal study does also contain challenges qua the quantity of information or incidents. Van de Ven and Huber (Van de Ven and Huber) therefore point to the advantage of combining existing studies based on a retrospective method with ongoing studies based on real time methods. A recent example of combining a retrospective and real time methodology is seen in a study of learning processes (Bingham and Davis 2012).

6.3.2 Concept and empirical process
Actor network theory, and in general a phenomenological approach, will function as the theoretical frame of reference for coping with the intricate relationship between concept and empirical process. The ‘unit of analysis’ will be the syntax of social media practice in employer branding. The concept of practice refers to practice theory (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011). More fundamentally it refers to Garfinkel's etnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967) and Latour's use of it. The concept of syntax refers to Latour's use of Greimas’s ‘actant analysis.’

The research is therefore fundamentally about tracing the syntactic combinations that constitute the practice in the form of acts doing something for and with each other, with objects etc., and thereby undergo translations. Practice can in other words be understood as syntactic constituted translations, and it is through the syntax that translations can be traced and described. Like Garfinkel, Latour is critical of explanations which are not immanent. Inspired by Greimas, Latour prefers the term actants because actors are to be seen as formal instances more than empirical essences. But even these actants, Latour is skeptical about as to their importance for the analysis: “The distinctions between human and nonhuman, embodied or disembodied skills, impersonation or “machination”, are less interesting than the complete chain along which competences and actions are distributed.” (Latour 1992). In an actor network theory perspective it is the process itself of translation and inscription which is valuable to analyze.

Scott and Orlikowski (2009) echoes Latour's focus on the process-related and narrative when they in a Barad inspired analysis of TripAdvisor write that “apparatus are not assemblages of humans and nonhumans; they are open-ended practices involving specific intra-actions of humans and nonhumans” (Scott and Orlikowski 2009, p. 16). In the present project, the special focus points expressed in the sub research questions should also be precisely traced through syntagmatic and narrative analyzes of practice.

6.3.3 Multi case and single case longitudinal field study
To obtain the strength of comparability and of empirical robustness, the proposed project will be conducted as a multi case field study on both the individual and the organizational level. The research process is planned to start as a field study in one organization during the first year. After the first year, the field study will include two more organizations. The reasoning is that the first year of field study will be used to sharpening the focus on what processes to shadow, how and who to interview, and what documents to include in the analysis.

During the first year of study the research project is already as multi case field study on the individual level. On the organizational level, the reasoning is that the research process is more focused and directed after the first year, and that the project therefore is ready for including a selected group of employees in two more organizations. The goal of including three and not only two organizations in total, is that the comparative analytical processes will be challenged not to end up in worn out dichotomies concerning the organizations as comparable ‘cases’.
7 Methods

7.1 Three classic methods
The analysis of practice will be made by the three classic methods: Observation, interview and document analysis. The methods are to support the overall research approach and the requirements emerging from the special conditions in a digital and distributed organizational environment. With Marcus’ ‘multisite ethnography’, not a village of dichotomies, but a distributed and complex world, I will present the adequate methods: observation as follow or trace, interviews as interventive/dialogic interviews, and document analysis as narrative text analysis.

These three research methods are the three classic constituents of triangulation in ethnography and case study. Ideally they are chosen to complement each other and thereby in a certain tradition to constitute a triangulation of knowledge. The distinction between observation, interview and document makes sense when we think of them as distinct, objective practices, but will often become combined and overlapping practices, not least due to the researchers' active role in all three methods. From a practical point of view, it will for example in certain situations be of advantage to conduct observations before an interview, but the reverse process can also be profitable.

Different writers like Yin and Latour recommend that the researcher keeps a register of the research activities. Notes, diaries and more systematic records during the research process may be regarded as neutral registration activity, but they may also be conceived as an active part of the research itself. Latour writes that we write down risky accounts: We write texts, we don’t look through some window pane, and therefore he suggests we go back to basics by keeping 4 separate notebooks: A log of the inquiry itself, a book with information kept in chronological order and in categories, a book of ad libitum writing trials, and finally a book in which we register the effects of the written account on the actors (Latour 2005).

In the following sections I shall account for how the three methods are affected by the special conditions existing in both the substantive, conceptual and methodological field.

7.2 Observation as tracing syntaxes of practice
Observation of actors' actions in relation to the use of social media will comprise i.a. tweets, comments, replies, conversations and photo sharing. Actions may also comprise preparations, planning and evaluation of activities. Access to the real actions will be made in two ways. By observing the actual text production made via the social media, and by shadowing the employees individually in their daily work. Actors do also comprise non-human actors such as technological platforms.

In the substantive, empirical field, we have some special conditions due to a digital and distributed organizational environment. In the conceptual field, we state with our research question that established dichotomies for organizational and communicative practices are being eroded. In the methodological domain, the "follow" technique is introduced as an adequate method under such conditions.

The multi-site study can be experienced as a challenge compared to the übersichtlichkeit of the ‘village’, and Marcus also asks if all ethnographers are competent to practice multi-sited field research? Multi-site ethnography is not just about a multitude of sites. The approach also includes a critique of mainstream dichotomies that are highly relevant in my project, since the new syntaxes of practice in focus are exactly about melting down these dichotomies to become able to understand what is at stake in the ongoing change processes. The article also critiques the traditional understanding of the position of the researcher, and suggests the ‘situational researcher’ as an adequate description. Finally Marcus suggests several ‘tracing’ or ‘following’ strategies for investigation that resembles ANT in many aspects. All aspects are interrelated and a part of a research approach or discourse very similar to what we have described earlier as ‘dialogic’.

The specific organizational and digital conditions for observation in the proposed research project have affinities to both the research site described by Scott and Orlikowski (2009) in the TripAdvisor study, and the research site described by (Cunha and Orlikowski 2008) in their study of how online discussion forums are used in organizational change processes.
But “Multi sited ethnography” is definitely not just about the ‘world’ out there in form of empirical sites and worn out dichotomies. It is indeed also about the understanding and inscription we as researchers practice. In a discussion of one of Marcus’ most recent articles, (Marcus 2010), Roepstorff (2011) conceptualizes this as the ‘double nature of the experiment’: The experiment both points towards the world and the material that are investigated, and towards a reflexive understanding of the tradition and the conceptions that guide the interpretation of the material. ‘Observation’ is therefore definitely not just observation, but from the very beginning interventive and inscriptive practices. When we surpass the Cartesian dualism, we as researchers as well become an example of entanglement in practice. Our research project becomes an inscription process. Where Scott and Orlikowski (2009) stress this condition by the use of conceptual digressions, Latour often in playful ways interpellates the reader as a part of the inquiry (Latour 1996).

7.3 Interviews as interventive construction sites
The interviews will focus on the actors’ practice in relation to the research questions. Guided by Brinberg and McGrath (1985) three focal points will be thoughts, feelings and actions in relation to the practice.

With a dialogic discourse as the ideal framework for the research project, interviews with actors will play a special role and take place in a special way in the investigation. Van de Ven emphasizes several places in “Engaged scholarship” that the dialogue and the cooperation with the actors of the research project are decisive both for the actual research results and for the development of social studies. Latour writes with his usual sense of French one-liners about ‘When things strike back’ (Latour 2000), and in the motto for this Ph.D. project, that the actors must have room to express themselves.

The interview itself is an example of a potential inter-subjective or dialogic discourse and thus match the theoretical framework outlined for the research. A special proactive form of interview is the so-called interventive interview. Interventive interviews is originally developed and conceptualized by Karl Tomm (Tomm 1988) within the realm of family psychotherapeutic practice, but has since been translated into other disciplines, among others to the field of organizational change processes (Luscher et al. 2006). The interventive interview bears the fundamental sign of dialogic studies through the intervention that both include an analytical and a constructive dimension. Luscher et al.(2006) combines the interventive interview with the concept of paradoxes referring to a tradition for regarding paradoxes as vehicles of studying organizational processes (Poole and van de Ven 1989). The objective of the interventive interviews is to induce collaborative analysis and sensemaking in the research process. With the words of the ANT professor, the objective of the interventive interviews is “to let the actors have some room to express themselves”. In doing so, the interview and the research process also becomes a construction site, about which Latour (2005) writes that “Usually the advantage of visiting construction sites is that they offer an ideal vantage point to witness the connections between humans and non-humans.”

7.4 Document analysis as analysis of inscription of practice
Document analysis in relation to practice (actions, thoughts, feelings) can include the employees’ own notes, proposals from the management, calendars etc. These documents are not just objects existing outside the transformations, but like actors they may be subjected to an analytical trace or follow practice. In the early studies of scientific processes (Latour and Wolgar 1979), it was just that kind of gaze that Latour and Wolgar used: How are documents created through their ‘journeys’ and how is a practice syntax hereby created, in this case a scientific practice? In our case, an example is the strategy paper about the involvement of 25 employees and their use of social media. The paper has been produced and finalized in an ongoing process by the various organizational actors involved in the project. Such a document has certainly some degree of inscription effect which is worth including and analyzing as a part of the syntax of practice.

From a similar practice theoretic standpoint, such documents can be perceived as knowledge sharing as well as indexes of individual and organizational processes (Østerlund 2003, Østerlund and Carlile 2005), which is indeed relevant for my research project.
# Part III

## Research plan

### Research plan 2011 - 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field study</strong></td>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>Prep</td>
<td>Start Case 1</td>
<td>Case 1</td>
<td>Case 1</td>
<td>Case 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exchange Courses Conferences</strong></td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X.X X</td>
<td>X IRIS</td>
<td>HSTAR X</td>
<td>ECIS</td>
<td>CBIR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8 Field Study

8.1 Plan for field study

8.1.1 Overview for field study 2011 - 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>September 2011- March 2012</td>
<td>Pilot study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>March - June</td>
<td>Preparatory organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>September-November</td>
<td>Field study START: Case 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>February-March</td>
<td>Field study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>October-November</td>
<td>Field study. Inclusion of Case 2 and Case 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>February-March</td>
<td>Field study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>October-November</td>
<td>Field study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>February-March</td>
<td>Field study END</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.1 Overview for field study

8.1.2 Detailed plan for field study 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Detailed description of purpose / objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March - June</td>
<td>Preparatory organizing of field study</td>
<td>• Initial meeting about research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Participation in strategic seminar on use of social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• One day follow of editor for Facebook profile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Meeting about status of employee engagement project, international aspect, selection of participants for interviews and follow-observation, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September-November</td>
<td>Field study START</td>
<td>• Interviews with all participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• One-day follow-observation sessions with a selected group of participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Document analysis of Facebook and Twitter profiles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.2 Detailed plan for field study 2012

8.2 Field study procedures and principles

The field study approach is inspired by two Ph.d. scholar guiding books: Reassembling the Social by Latour (Latour 2005) and “Engaged Scholarship” by Van de Ven (Van de Ven 2007).

8.2.1 Involvement of actors

The longitudinal field study will begin by conducting periodic meetings with small groups of actors (focus groups) from various parts of the organization that are involved in comparable change efforts or new ventures. The objective of these meetings is to discuss the meanings and effects of the research questions: How and why do practices develop over time? How and why are these practices related to the four sub research questions? The objective is furthermore to explore methods to study the research
questions: What research methods are feasible in relation to which processes and which actors? The involvement of actors also have a wider perspective for the research process. As Van de Ven writes “Moreover, these meetings often identified individuals whom we negotiated with to become study advisors, facilitators, or co-investigators.”(Van de Ven 2007).

8.2.2 Guiding questions for observation, interview and document analysis
As described above, guiding questions will be developed through involvement of the actors. To facilitate this process of operationalization I have found inspiration in different sources.

One source is Van de Ven and Poole’s (Van de Ven and Poole 1990) five tracks of ‘coding’. The five tracks concern the following basic constituents in a practice understood as a narrative:

- **People**: Actors involved in an incident, the roles and activities they perform a given point in time.
- **Ideas**: the substantive ideas or strategies that actors use to describe their practice at a given point in time.
- **Transactions**: The informal and formal relationships among actors, internally and externally, involved in the incident.
- **Context**: The events outside of the practice unit in the larger organization and industry or community which are perceived by actors to affect their practice.
- **Outcomes**: When incidents provide evidence of change, they are indexed as representing positive, negative or mixed value.

Another valuable source is Huysman’s social capital inspired analytics concerning the conditions for designing knowledge-sharing tools (Huysman 2004). As a support for e.g. shadowing the actors, the analytics have three very relevant and fundamental research questions:

- **Who shares knowledge, and how is knowledge shared?**
- **What knowledge is shared?**
- **Why and when is knowledge shared?**

Finally the works of Latour and other scholars in the tradition of actor network theory will be used as source of inspiration and practical guidance in establishing an operational analytics for the field study.

8.2.3 Design of intervals of field study and analytical activity
The objective of the longitudinal study is to trace and describe the changes in practice as changes that unfold in time: As emergent practices. It is therefore important that the field study is designed as a double process. It has to facilitate a process of emerging oneself as researcher into the practice processes to grasp their complexity. But it also has to facilitate enough analytical distance in time and space to detect changes of significance. By conducting two months of field study twice a year, and consequently two times four months of analytical distance, it is the goal to establish such a double analytical movement in the field study. The reasoning is, that two months are enough time to emerge into the processes as researcher, and that after four months of absence from the research site, it is on return more self evident and less a matter of interpretation and negotiation if change in practice has emerged. The described design of the field study matches the earlier described method of interventive interviews and also establish intervals for practicing Garfinkel’s ‘breathing’ methods.

An argument for the intervals of field study and analytical activity is also the question of resources in a situation of synchronous obligations in the field of teaching and counseling.
9 Publication

9.1 Publication subjects and pipeline

9.1.1 Publication subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper</th>
<th>Research question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>How do individual employees create emergent organizational practices as boundary actor between individual, corporation and community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How do individual employees create emergent learning practices as an integrative part of the employer branding performance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How do individual employees create emergent communication practices through community conversations and digital turn taking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How do individual employees create emergent practices of human and non-human interaction through post social object relations?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.1 Subjects for planned publication

9.1.2 Publication pipeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper 0</td>
<td>Pilot study</td>
<td>Conference version I</td>
<td>Conference version II</td>
<td>Conference version III</td>
<td>Journal publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conference version I</td>
<td>Conference version II</td>
<td>Journal publication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conference version II</td>
<td>Conference version I</td>
<td>Conference version II</td>
<td>Journal publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conference version I</td>
<td>Conference version II</td>
<td>Journal publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.2 Publication pipeline

9.2 Procedures and principles

9.2.1 Substantive and conceptual/methodological papers

The Ph.D. will be written as a paper based dissertation. The tradition of the paper based dissertation is that it consists of cover section on theoretical and methodological questions, and a main section consisting of papers on the substantive research question. This double character of the dissertation it is relevant to prioritize and be conscious of in both the paper directed work and in the daily work processes: Is it preferable to start and prioritize with a focus on theoretical writings with the intention of becoming competent and publishing papers in the conceptual and methodological domain? Or is it preferable to kickstart and prioritize the field study and the fundamental analysis of the emperical material into conference papers?

In an early version of this thesis proposal four conceptual and methodological papers were placed first in line. The reasoning was that these matters were important and that they could be written regardless of the early phase of the field study. After valuable feed back this plan is turned upside down.

The subjects of the papers are identical with the four sub research questions. See table 9.1
9.2.2 From conference papers to journal publication
The short term objective is to present conference papers on the empirical results from the field study in a basic analytical form as soon as possible. An argument for this strategy is also that there exist very few empirically based articles as demonstrated in the literature review. The long term objective is then through feedback processes to improve these conference papers into journal publications.

I regard the writing process not as a linear progression, but as a rather iterative process. My very first paper, “Exploratory framework for organization’s as actors on Facebook”, is a perfect example of a first version of a conference presentation. In the workshops at IRIS 2012 I got valuable feedback on how to improve not just the paper itself, but also my research process and analytical approach. Regardless of the iterative nature of writing papers, I have made a schematic linear illustration of the process as a paper publication pipeline. See table 9.2

9.2.3 Co-authors, colloquia, and other writing feedback systems
To sustain the publication process, I plan to facilitate it via co-authoring, colloquia and other feedback systems. I plan to exploit the advantages of co-authoring papers with a more experienced researcher as much as possible. This will help me learn to cope with the ‘format’ of papers, but also my personal explorative start-up working profile will benefit from a co-authorship. As a broader directed initiative to establish network and feedback opportunities, I plan to organize informal colloquia on both the substantive and methodological matters of the proposed project. If a proposed elective course for master students about employer branding starts in the spring semester of 2013, this will also give me the opportunity to use lecturing and counseling as a living feedback system.
## 10 Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>• Presentation about social media as learning platform at Interdisciplinary Center for Entrepreneurship, Aarhus University.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2012 | • Presentation about enabling innovation at Burning Man conference organized by the Danish Culture Institute, Copenhagen.  
• Interview about social media in employer branding for special issue of Jyllands-Posten.  
• Presentation about social media in employer branding at conference held by University Career Center, Aarhus University. |
| 2013 | • Presentation “Talk the walk. Enablement of organizational innovation in a social media world” at conference held by VIA University College.  
• In progress: Lecture series on social media in organizational business context at the Danish University Extension in Aarhus (in Danish: "Folkeuniversitetet i Aarhus"). |
| 2014 | • |
| 2015 | • |

11 Research Exchange, Conferences and Courses

11.1 Research exchange

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>H-STAR, Stanford University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Center for Information System Research (CISR), MIT.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am in the process of planning the research exchange activities.

11.2 Participation in conferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>IRIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>ECIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11.3 Participation in Ph.D. Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2011 | Research methods in practice, DOME , 3 ECTS  
| | • Classic Organization Theory, DOME 6-10/6; 5 ECTS  
| | • Work Systems Theory: A Theory Base for Information Systems, DaRSIS, 23/5, 1 ECTS.  
| | • Social network analysis, DOME 14-20/8, 5 ECTS |
| 2012 | An introduction to research design, DOME, 5 ECTS  
| | • Writers Course, KU  
| | • Social media, CBS, 5 ECTS |
| 2013 | Publish or perish |
References


Castello, I., Etter, M., et al. (2012). Why Stakeholder Engagement will not be Tweeted: Logic and teh conditions of Authority Corset. Paper presented at the Academy of Management 2012, Boston, USA,


Persson, A. (2010). Front- and backstage in "social media". Paper presented at the Studies of Language: Contributions to the Discipline” organized by the Research Committee Language and Society at the XVII World Congress of Sociology., Gothenburg


Weick, K. E. (1979). The social psychology of organizing. Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.