

## **Human Relations – Abstract Submission**

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**Title of paper:** Organising and social relationships in non-traditional contexts: A Study of the Organisational Behaviour of Software Test Engineers, Contributing to the Digital Transformation of Banks in the Irish Financial Sector

**Preferred stream:** Organising and social relationships in non-traditional contexts

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Purpose:**

Identity and sensemaking are particularly influential concepts for scholars in the management and organisation field and are the central focus of this paper, which will examine the organisational behaviour and social relationships of Software Test Engineers (STEs) within the non-traditional context of a recently conceived digital first banking environment. This study will be particularly interested in how such professions appropriate and subsequently enact their own realities, which will be of interest to readers invested in identity and sensemaking work (Brown, Colville & Pye, 2015). Prior to the pandemic, the vast majority of organisations were not prepared to support remote working (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018), but were subsequently compelled to adopt this practice in order to survive (Rofcanin & Anand, 2020); resulting in the de facto global trial of the feasibility of remote working (Kniffin et al., 2021). Roles such as STEs were particularly well suited to adopt this practice due to the nature of their professional relations, technical aptitude, and in many cases - previous experience working remotely (Gibbs, 2009).

#### **Study design/methodology/approach:**

As the researcher is a member of both the organisation and the STE team, the research is designated as ‘insider’ research. Insider researchers are native to the environment under study, hence this qualitative approach empowers them to produce insightful work based on deep insights derived from lived experiences which cannot be replicated by any other form of research method (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). This method will be combined with principles of auto-ethnography and reflective practices, as the researcher presents himself as an ‘object of research’ (Learmonth & Humphreys, 2012; Fernando, Reveley & Learmonth, 2020). Ethnographic research involves the study of a culture’s common values, beliefs and relational practices, in addition to shared experiences to aid both insider and outsider cultural members to better understand the culture under study (Ellis, Adams & Bochner,

2011). Ethnographers become participant observers to achieve this, by taking field notes of cultural occurrences in addition to other people's engagement with these occurrences, as well as how the researcher's own role impacts such cultural happenings (Geertz, 1973); hence the researcher will adopt such practices to supplement the rich data derived from semi-structured interviews with participants. Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) further contend that auto-ethnographers are generally compelled by the conventions of social science to conduct a detailed analysis of these experiences. Therefore, auto-ethnography addresses the insider nature of this research through the practice of reflective diary keeping on behalf of the researcher, in order to more clearly define how STEs within the organisation identify themselves and their professional relationships, whilst making sense of the organisational dynamics which help to shape their own professional realities within the organisation (Stamper & Liu, 1994; Brown, 2002).

Three key cohorts compose the population of interest for this study: (1) STEs within the Bank of Ireland test team (of which the researcher is a member) to better understand their behaviour, perceived identities and sensemaking processes, (2) roles from the wider GWS (Group Web Services) team which work closely with STEs, to acquire insight into their perspective of STE behaviour. Such roles may include Developers, Project Managers, Scrum Masters, Business Analysts etc., and finally (3) Senior Executives (from the wider organisation), which most likely have no professional relationship with STEs, but can instead furnish the researcher with in-depth insight into the organisational culture of the bank, which will be invaluable when the researcher seeks to map the experiences of STEs, to within the cultural context of the organisation (Martin, 2014).

The roles above account for a diversified range of individual identities/experiences, with varied educational backgrounds including business/IT, and cohorts from traditional banking/finance stock, all working as either contractors or employed directly by the bank. This is a unique research opportunity to study the human relations of a 'virtual team', which has leveraged technology to transcend traditional organisational boundaries, including the relational, geographical, and even temporal; as team members combine their efforts across cultures, locations, and time zones (Gibbs, 2009).

### **Originality/value:**

The research will contribute to practice by highlighting the organisational behaviour of a specific team with growing prominence and importance within the organisation, as it undertakes a process of change to digital first customer interactions (Sia, Weill & Zhang, 2021). It will contribute to the methods of insider research by being transparent and reflective of the practical and philosophical challenges of this form of ethnographic research (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Contributions to theory will emerge as the research process develops, but will be centred around sensemaking and identity, and the development/maintenance of non-traditional professional relationships of STEs within an Irish financial institution.

**Keywords:** *identity, sensemaking, diversity, professions, organisational dynamics, qualitative approaches*