

Practice Disruption in Service Ecosystems: The Case of K2 2008 Disaster

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Purpose – Practices are integral part of resource integration within service ecosystems. Extant studies aiming to explain the dynamics of practices have predominantly focused on permanent change in service ecosystems. Nonetheless, unanticipated disruptions such as unanticipated war, accidents, power cut or illness create an unwanted, unplanned and in many cases unimaginable situational context for actors, forcing them temporarily to adapt their practices in a short period of time. In this study, we aim to unpack the enactment of physical, mental and social processes by which service ecosystem actors experience in managing such unanticipated disruptions.

Approach – We adopted an ethnographic approach in this study to account for observable actions as well as feelings, sense making processes and meanings associated to those actions. We chose K2 2008 mountaineering disaster as the context of our study, an event which has been accurately documented and has been visually recorded. Further reflexive interviews with key people involved in the incident provided the full understanding of the context.

Findings – We identified three key processes through which climbers made sense and managed disruption: 1) apprehension, 2) coping and 3) recovery. First, there have been multiple interpretations at multiple point in time of what the disruption was. Climbers' identity work was salient in this process, where they constantly defined and redefined themselves, their status and differences with others opposing their views. Second, the coping actions were improvised by the climbers and they (individually or collectively) engaged in boundary work to create new resources or bring new use to the existing resources. Third, the survivors and the families and friends of those suffered engaged with causal attribution, sense making and mending processes to recover from the course of events.

Originality/value – Our findings have implications for both service emergence and practice theory literature. We illustrated that practice disruption is a process, socially constructed by service ecosystem actors. Actors respond to disruptions to defend, enhance and recreate their resources and use their apprehension of disruption as a form of demythologizing practices to disentangle their engagement from a devaluing myth associated with the disruption. Furthermore, we indicated that service ecosystem institutions, their boundaries and identities defined within those boundaries disappear in the coping phase. In this setting, timeflow does not exist as no pattern of temporality is embedded in resources. Indeed, actors experience full power over institutions and boundaries, whereas they are bounded by time to create new resources and institutions.

Key words – Practice Disruption, Service Ecosystem Disruption, Service Ecosystem Emergence

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