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Sociomaterial practices in networked strategy accomplishment: idiosyncrasy and revulsion

In a study of networked informal businesses, we explore how sociomaterial practices are employed in day-to-day accomplishment of strategy by firms and across the collective. We find that the firms make unconventional use of standard materials and methods that demonstrates combinations of idiosyncratic usage and may be contextually bounded or individually mediated. We also find sociomaterial practices that revile certain artefacts. In doing so we add perspective to prior literature on sociomaterials and strategising by developing three conceptions of sociomaterial practices based on the interests of strategic actors, the sites and nature of strategic interactions in the accomplishment of strategy work

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Introduction

Strategic actors have resorted to practical coping; which includes the adaption of conventional materials as needed in situ, ushering in the strategy tools-in-use perspective (Jarratt and Stiles, 2010; Jarzabkowski, Giuliatti, Oliveira and Amoo 2013; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). Evidence further shows that the strategising context could render the sociomaterial practice of adaption of conventional materials not fit-for-purpose. Instead, strategy actors may engage in wayfinding by inductively creating custom-built materials as a way of coping with practical exigencies when confronted with complexity that characterises strategising in pluralistic contexts for instance (Burke and Wolf, 2021). Yet, while recognising that context plays an important role, these extant SAP studies have focused on sociomaterial practices in the context of planned, single firm strategy, occurring in large formal firm settings. We know little about sociomaterial practices in unplanned, networked or small-firm strategy in spite of calls for SAP scholarship to focus on sociomaterial practices in an on-going and day to day basis, across a range of physical and social spaces of strategy work (Demir, 2015; Whittington, 2015). We note that SAP scholars have responded to calls to study the situated use of sociomaterials as a function of strategic actor and context, and for that matter the adaptation of sociomaterial practices based on the interpretation of the strategizing environment (Suddaby, Seidl, and Le, 2013; Kohmataka, Whittington, Vaara, and Rabetino, 2021). However certain micro-activities, such as the social construction of these sociomaterial practices at the intersection of macro-institutional practices on one hand, and actor agency at the other have largely been neglected. More so, whilst we know that situated use of sociomaterials may be institutionalised individually across organisations and even fields, our understanding of sociomaterial practices as a network of collective institutionalised practices across organisations and fields is limited (Suddaby et al., 2013).

Hence in this paper, we explore how sociomaterial practices are employed in the doing of day-to-day, emergent, and non-deliberate networked strategy as collective action. We pursue this through analysis of data involving closely networked small informal businesses and their formal firm network partners. We posit that there may be different extents to which the use of material artefacts may be institutionalised as convention, as the evidence suggests that strategic actors in different strategising situations have either adopted, adapted, constructed or created custom-made materials in a manner that more or less followed convention (Burke and Wolf, 2021). We see that our particular context combines/reconciles low institutional constraints on material use among informal businesses (largely because of their informality and flexibility) with higher institutional constraints when interacting with formal organisations and actors (who have a relatively stronger need to stick to convention). This paper therefore sets out to answer the research question: *How do sociomaterial practices help strategic actors deal with day-to-day strategizing that is emergent, non-deliberate, and involving networked actors across organisations and fields?* Our analysis thus adds to previous SAP studies that have not focused on the sociomaterial practices in the accomplishment of emergent and networked strategy amongst actors from varied social spaces, with varying levels of institutional constraints.

Theoretical framework

Practice scholars subscribe to the constructivist ontology that treats and studies the material and the social as ontologically inseparable: they are *mutually dependent assembles* (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008: 446); an *emergent process*, an *entanglement in practice* (Orlikowski, 2009, p. 127) or better still a *constitutive entanglement* (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1437). A cardinal assumption is that actors, organisations, organising, and materials are in a dynamic and evolving relationship; the interrelations are emergent as much as they are embedded, and thus are neither deterministic nor voluntary. Rather they are contingent, mutually constitutive of each other and co-evolve over time (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008). A more radical ontological variant of the social constructivism thesis posits that materiality is intrinsically social and that ‘there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also

social' (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1437). This perspective proposes sociomateriality thinking, where the meanings actors assign to materials materialise the material – in other words materials become, granted the meanings actors ascribe to them. In effect the configurations, and meanings of materials are more or less a blank cheque which is only determined in the accomplishment of strategy work (Orlikowski, 2009). Accordingly, materiality is contingent on historical, socio-cultural and institutional contexts. We thus interrogate the emancipatory and constraining properties of material artefacts, in addition to how they shape, and are shaped by strategy work in situ.

Consistent with the sociological perspective we adopt, sociomaterial interactions between the context, strategy actors, and motivations, purposes, and outcomes represent a worthwhile SAP research agenda (Jarzabkowski 2004; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). In the context of more formal, deliberate and explicit strategizing, strategic actors may be constrained by institutional conventions and routines in the use of material artefacts – considering the tenets of formality which are largely characterized by standard operating and reporting procedures, bureaucracy and rule-following practices. We argue that the context of highly networked, small informal businesses that may not be similarly constrained by institutional conventions presents a more non-deliberate and emergent perspective. In contrast to their formal counterparts, informal businesses are low on standardized procedures, infrastructure, and rule-following (Darbi, Hall, and Knott, 2018; Darbi and Knott, 2022). This context further promises to portray a different set of dynamics in the relationships between material artefacts, strategic actors, and strategy practice. Granted that the interactions are between a diverse set of strategic actors in both formal and informal organisations, we expect to uncover idiosyncratic, socially conditioned, and non-conventional enactment of the use of material artefact that have yet to be fully explored in the SAP literature (Jarzabkowski, 2004).

In one of the foremost studies exploring the possibility of a single material artefact taking on multiple roles and meanings in the accomplishment of strategy work, Werle and Seidl (2015) found that the same material artefact may be classified into more than one category/typology depending on *how* and *when* it is employed. This and similar studies began to shed some light on the role of material artefacts in strategy work in a more immanent and emergent context. These works also explore and conceptualise material artefacts as epistemic objects, coming from the backdrop that material artefacts employed in strategy work may not have inherent, fixed or stable properties, roles or function. Instead, artefacts take their roles or meanings from the process of their situated use (Knorr Cetina, 2001). In another study, Demir (2015) conceptualises the relationship between material artefact and the social world in a form of object-subject solicitations, and shows that strategic events that invoke actor and material interactions explain affordances accorded by material artefacts more than strategic intentions of the actors.

We build on these earlier studies by invoking context as the origin of possibilities and constraints for strategic actors and sociomaterial practices in the accomplishment of strategy work. We argue that a strategising context dominated by collective network interests (Damayanti, Scott, and Ruhanen, 2017) offers an avenue for appreciating how actors creatively engage strategic partners and material artefacts in strategic interactions. We further expect that strategic interactions that unfold in the accomplishment of networked strategy, especially in a non-conventional setting, offer opportunities for examining how a unique mix of strategic activity, actors, events and potential consequences may play out in sociomaterial practices.

Methods and Design

Research setting

We selected an informal sector setting because of the promise of uncovering distinctive and unconventional uses of material artefacts that may challenge assumptions of formal business material use and practices that we are often too familiar with. Our research setting is located in Accra Newtown, the informal printing hub in Ghana. Their operations and strategising involves a range of businesses and actors in the formal sector, as a result inter-organisational relationships with other strategy actors outside their informal sector social space or field is commonplace. Another reason for the choice of setting is we surmise that examining material use and practices between actors from both informal and formal sector fields may amplify the linkages amongst idiosyncrasies of material use, strategy actor identities and the generalities or otherwise of material practices.

Data collection

We selected 6 informal printing businesses in the various specialities mentioned above as cases. Data was collected using ethnographic techniques in a multi-method, multi-sited fashion (Nicolini, 2009) – data collection included 35 audio-recorded formal semi-structured interviews (which lasted between 20 to 85 minutes) with participant informal printing businesses and employees (15); their formal printing business competitors (6), their formal business clients (4); their informal printing business competitors (6, some are amongst the 6 participant informal business). We also undertook four (4) semi-structured interviews at regulatory agencies. Observation data was collected through half to full day visits to the premises of participants in Accra New Town which culminated in field notes. We did seven (7) site visits to informal partner businesses', as well as formal partner businesses' by way of shadowing owner managers and employees further enriched the data collected as field notes covering informal interviews and talk (Karataş-Özkan, 2011). Secondary documentary data include website content/pages of regulators; news items about informal business regulation and practices, and academic literature on informal sector. Everyday participant observer ethnographic data was included as part of the data set (Watson and Watson, 2012).

Data analysis

The analysis involved an abductive reasoning style where the researcher moves between evidence and received knowledge, through a continual engagement and re-engagement in light of evidence from our data (e.g. Demir, 2015; Jorgensen and Messner, 2010; Werle and Seidl, 2015). Following Werle and Seidl's (2015) analytical approach, we focused on the types and nature of use of different material artefacts in the inter-organisational relationships involving strategic actors within the informal printing hub in addition to those actors they are involved with outside the hub. The material artefacts and related practices, which constitute our units of analysis were not selected a priori. Rather, we observed during our fieldwork that these were germane to understanding the exchanges and interdependencies in the networked strategy, in addition to how the various businesses and strategic actors individually and collectively pursue and achieve outcomes in the inter-organisational relationships. The analysis aimed at identifying the nature, role and use of the material artefacts, and the nature of the involvement (direct and indirect) of the different strategic actors located in the different physical and social spaces in the construction of the material practice. In this regard, and consistent with our aim to theorise why, where, and how strategy actors may adopt, modify, adapt, and create material artefacts in situ, we were struck by the ways in which material artefacts took on notably unusual or distinctive roles and meanings (Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Findings

Built spaces. Built spaces accorded the social accomplishment of strategy work of the informal printing businesses in two broad ways: First by virtue of close proximity amongst the main actors (the informal printing businesses) and second, by way of small office and work spaces. Because they operate at close physical proximity to each other, the informal businesses knew in reasonable detail the dealings and operations of other informal businesses. This seems to engender open communication and trust in addition to social controls against opportunism, thus promoting close associations, collaborations and networking. By means of these horizontal networks they are able to work closely together to deliver a product or service, develop and exploit business opportunities:

I started as a hawker; I usually go round the regional and district capitals selling printed books by others [informal businesses]. It got to a point I was not getting supplies from them so I saw an opportunity to reproduce their works. I saved some money so I rented a small place close to them, and started reproducing a few books to start with; I was initially taking most of it to their [informal businesses] print houses for printing and then go hawking to sell it. (Informal business actor)

Again the informal businesses therefore do not vigorously pursue growth in size as a strategic imperative but instead defer to networking and working closely with other informal businesses to make up for their constraints and limitations, as illustrated by an owner/manager in the following vignette:

If you intend to have all the machines you need, you'll even not have space so you specialise on one side, and somebody else specialises on another side. So sometimes we have to swap works, like he [another informal business] can do something and I can finish it for him – like laminating, cutting, trimming and all that.

As part of this on-going naturalisation of small operating spaces, new entrants are variously socialised into the field. This is traceable to apprenticeship and initiation-like practices, so like the ‘fish in water’ metaphor (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Watson, 2014), these practices promoted dispositions congruent with the social space within which they happen, and these unfold in a more or less deterministic fashion. In effect, these agents became complicit in the preservation and use of small built spaces.

Mobile phone. While pervasive use of mobile phones may be considered standard business practice, including in formal businesses, what is insightful is their situatedness and the divergent meanings we may gain from the way they are used here, and thus their consequentiality for business survival (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021). The novel and creative appropriation of the mobile phone and its particular contribution to the operations, business opportunities and survival of informal businesses has been reported elsewhere (see; Meagher, 2014; Tsarwe & Mare, 2020). We found that the use of mobile phones created socio-culturally embedded functional networks and virtual infrastructures through which reciprocal and mutual relations are established without the need for face-to-face contacts (Tsarwe & Mare, 2020, p. 1). This engendered flexibility, by allowing and normalising information sharing and the signing off of business agreements and transactions on the move, in light of their aversion to bureaucratic rule following. The informal businesses were often seen and heard offering jobs to network partners as well as agreeing to contracts on the phone in the absence of written legally-binding documents as conventional practice will have it. This artefact more or less replaced the need for another type of artefact (written agreements and contract documents) usually associated with partnering practices:

I don't need to be there for anything to be done..... We can be having meetings not physically but on the phone and all that. (Informal business actor)

But how and why did the informal printing businesses come to mobilise and accomplish the extended situated use of the mobile phone in the doing of strategy work in this unconventional fashion? We recall that informal businesses are low in bureaucratic rule following and steeped in open communication, whistleblowing, and reference practices. Key assumptions underlying this open communication praxis were contingent on situated use of mobile technology and other material artefacts. The mobile phone was instrumental in operationalising open communication in the interactions amongst the informal businesses. Essentially the mobile phone was integral to signing new contracts, sharing ideas, providing references, and social controls that governed the relationships:

Maybe others have seen you working for a company like Unilever and then somebody else brings the same Unilever job to their office, they will often call you and it's like –how come you lost that job? Maybe your prices were on the higher side or what? Or you lost because of this or that. (Informal business actor)

Invoices. While invoices are standard and conventional artefacts in business transactions, we observed they were put to a multiplicity of non-traditional uses besides the conventional. The invoice was integral to bartering exchanges amongst the informal businesses, as the informal printing businesses employed it mainly to keep track of partners' accounts and indebtedness. It had more or less replaced receipts that are conventionally issued as proof of a completed transaction. The invoice was adapted for keeping most accounting and financial records pertaining to the relationships with other informal printing businesses. For instance they were used to record payments done or received from other network partners on behalf of another:

It gets to a time we can work for about a year or two without payments, he [informal business partner] notes everything down –we all have our invoices. I can work for him to the tune of [amount] and he can also work for me the tune of [amount]. We just have to sit down later and balance ourselves, so when I get a job; there is no need for me to pile up money to go to him. I readily go there to do whatever, however we have a limit. (Informal business actor)

Some participants invoke the invoice anytime references are made to written contracts and agreements. An owner/manager of a participating informal business in responding to the salience of signing contracts and agreements or otherwise in their relationships with other informal businesses retorted:

No, because of the nature of the relationship you just have to note your invoice and date as to what you did, and sometimes we don't even talk about costs till it's time to sort it out together – this is how much I charged the client, how much are you giving me?

Additionally, a common practice is where informal network partners front for each other and assume all the risks that accompany the execution and delivery of jobs to clients on an informal printing business network partner's behalf. In some cases, jobs bore the subcontracting informal printing business's trademark, brand, business name or invoice. Somehow, there were socially structured motivation, strategies, and controls that rendered this practice acceptable. These practices were more or less a *modus operandi*, geared towards practical day-to-day coping with their limited access to capital and low levels of bureaucratic arrangements which consequently limited market opportunities relative to their formal business competitors:

Also, if you do not have the financial resources, you may accept a job and subcontract it to someone [another informal printing business] you believe can deliver the level of quality you expect. So you supervise and monitor to be sure that quality is not compromised. So what it means is that you could have executed that job if your financial situation were ok. The main motivation is that you wouldn't want your client to go about looking for someone [outside the network of informal printing businesses] to do the job; you will rather take it [accept job] and deliver the job [done by member in the informal

printing business network] to the client as if you [the original informal printing business] executed the contract. (Informal business actor)

Invoices are mobilised variedly even in the case of formal businesses buyers that the informal businesses work with. We observed that some agents in formal organisational spaces were complicit in the co-construction of the invoice as non-standard artefact inconsistent with their ingrained formal business material practices. Agents in such formal organisations who are big buyers to the informal printing businesses found ways to reconcile their bureaucratic institutional material practices with the largely non-bureaucratic material practices of the informal businesses and actors. Owner/manager of an informal business and a branding manager of a formal business client partner illustrate this in the following comments respectively:

Hmmm that's [documentation] another issue that we normally overlook. They [formal partners] do not demand it; they only expect you to give them an invoice. (Owner/manager of an informal business)

Few weeks ago, I was working with some guys who do my billboards for me, they are always at your beg and call. I asked how much they will charge, and they mentioned a paltry figure, and I know a formal firm would have charged 5 times more. So I chose to top-up and made an offer but they couldn't produce even an invoice I asked for, the next day they brought a bad one and I advised them to go for something better, and come back. By the third day they came with it and issued me an invoice. (Brand manager of formal business client partner)

We impute identities and idiosyncrasies and come to the conclusion that there exists close entanglement between the actor and the use of the invoice to the extent that it led to multiple social constructions of the use of the invoice. Somehow in order to socially construct the invoice for its situated use in this inter-organisational relationships, strategic actors in formal businesses had to find ways to accommodate the informality arrangements of the informal printing businesses. The Communications Manager of a formal business client partner shares his thought on how the informal business's non-compliance (low bureaucratic arrangements) dovetails into his business's own formal reporting requirements (high bureaucratic arrangements):

Well earlier, I said that we do only about 20% of requirements with them [informal printing businesses], and these ones are not on large scale so we can find a way round it. But everything is about... if you can prove it with a receipt or invoice – you see private businesses are not like public sector ones where you need to go through tender before getting things done. Private businesses have a leeway. In terms of documentation, I know they themselves do not keep documents, you can imagine if the guy comes in and you ask him how many printouts have you done in a week? Already he is running away from taxes, but whichever way, they must feed.

In essence, actors in the formal businesses strategically 'personalise' and reset their site-ingrained idiosyncratic sociomaterial practices for the purposes of assessing some value (social and economic) from their relationships with the informal businesses.

Paperwork. The informal businesses as strategic actors avoided, downgraded, and more or less rejected the use of some normative material artefacts because they were inconsistent with their informal business arrangements and practices. These arrangements and practices devalues paperwork, and this devaluation consequently forms the basis of their low bureaucratic rule following. We recall that open communication is key to their strategising, this in turn is encouraged by a disposition towards unwritten and undocumented forms of communication:

Most of the things we do work more or less in the abstract, because there are no concrete agreements on the financial details before work on projects are done, faith and trust become very important in the

relationship. The sub-contractor [informal business network partner] most of the times has to pre-finance, so we all work first in anticipation of a future payment when work is finally delivered to the client. (Informal business actor)

From the thread that ran through the accounts and observations, paperwork artefacts are not fancied given their informality-conditioned practices. Since government and formal firms were the biggest buyers of their products and services, the informal printing businesses strategically were more inclined to form long-term relationships with actors in these formal organisations who act as middlemen. So the informal businesses would rather defer or ‘outsource’ paperwork to these middlemen in the networks called canvassers, in a manner that took care of their low level of bureaucratic arrangements. Over time this has become the accepted strategy practice amongst the relevant actors:

But for me I prefer the third party [middlemen] arrangement to going in directly for the contract – because it requires a whole lot of documents and things... and sorry to say I don’t care about that. (Informal business actor)

Somehow the informal businesses drew on frames of reference that resonated with their informality dispositions to deliberately devalue documents whilst foregrounding the importance of other business imperatives:

Because most of the contracts allow very short time for delivery, so the time required to do those documents and paper work could as well be used in executing the job. (Informal business actor)

Essentially paperwork was at the core of their ability to attract business from their big buyers, this was also key to overcoming their low level of bureaucratic arrangements that made them less attractive relative to their formal business competitors, yet it is this abhorrence of this essential artefact that reinforces this limitation. The informal printing businesses therefore through networks engaged in capital exchanges (Bourdieu, 1990) with agents including those in formal organisations in order to continuously meet statutory requirements that value the doing of paperwork.

Discussion, conclusions and implications for theory

This paper set out to answer the research question: *How do sociomaterial practices help strategic actors deal with day-to-day strategizing that is emergent, non-deliberate, and involving networked actors across organisations and fields?* We contribute to the SAP and socio-materiality literatures by developing our findings on the situated use of material artefacts in networked strategy into three conceptions of sociomaterial practices based on the interests of strategic actors, the sites and nature of strategic interactions in the accomplishment of strategy work (Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Contextually-bounded sociomaterial practices. Depicted as a shared and locally-conditioned practice which bounds a group of strategic actors, who collectively construct the sociomaterial practice given the exigencies of their social space. For example, in our study, built spaces, mobile phones and invoices were imbued with particular properties that enhanced the value in the strategic exchanges amongst the strategic actors in the informal printing hub, in way that same artefacts would not have elsewhere (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Jarzabkowski et al., 2021).

Individually-mediated sociomaterial practices. Practices where individual actors across strategy sites make modifications or accept adaptations to their site-specific sociomaterial practices, granted unfolding events and the expected outcomes for the individual. For instance, though the sociomaterial practice that characterised the use of the invoice amongst strategic actors in the hub is not typical in the context of formal business spaces, individual strategic actors in formal business spaces could break

from longstanding institutional norms and sociomaterial practices (constraints) for ‘good’ reasons, that other actors in those same spaces may not find plausible.

Reviled sociomaterial practices. Characterised by the abhorrence or downplay of specific sociomaterial practice by a group of strategic actors in their specific site, as they do not conceive the practice as imperative, granted their site-conditioned idiosyncrasies and exigencies. They employ other strategies such as differing or outsourcing to other actors including intermediaries outside the immediate site, if they conceive a desirable outcome from the particular sociomaterial practice. For example we have shown that paperwork, a sociomaterial practice which is relevant, valuable and pertinent to strategy work in one organisation or social space (e.g. formal sector) may be reviled by strategic actors in another organisation or social space (informal sector) at any point in time.

Our findings are consistent with previous studies that have examined sociomaterial practices as a dynamic interaction between strategic actors, a material artefact, an event and strategic imperative (Burke and Wolf, 2021; Demir, 2015; Jarzabkowski et al., 2015; Werle and Seidl, 2015). The current study goes further by showing sociomaterial practices as instantiation of individuals and groups of actors navigating the contours of conventional versus unconventional sociomaterial practices in the pursuit of some collective strategic imperative. We found that a sociomaterial practice that is typically bounded by convention in one site of strategy work, could be subjected to actors’ idiosyncrasies in other settings and situations, resulting in idiosyncratically-laced set of sociomaterial practices that group members are bound by, but different from those of other groups of strategic actors. We also show how particular sociomaterial practices are necessitated by the need to reconcile with convention when a strategic actor interacts with actors outside their settings or sites of strategy practice. So in ‘dealing with’ informal businesses, an actor in formal business and organisation did not draw on her site-specific sociomaterial practice per se, which may be bound by convention. Instead, we found a co-construction of sociomaterial practice, mediated by individual actor’s idiosyncrasies; this accorded for instance a material artefact distinctive and multiple roles and meanings in their situated use. This findings contrasts with the ‘massification’ portrayal (Whittington, 2015).

Particularly, we build on prior studies by offering a classification of sociomaterial practices depicting how each may comprise individual, group, and also site-conditioned idiosyncrasies. We have also shown that this is the case for even artefacts that are highly bound by conventions largely because strategic actors may need to resort to idiosyncratic and socially conditioned response to non-conventional circumstances in their use. Our classification advance those developed in prior studies (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Werle and Seidl, 2015) in some respects. We contribute to the broader SAP discourse on how strategic actors locally adapt strategy practices in the face of contradictory field logics, as well as distinctive and embedded institutional practices (Kohmatakai et al., 2021). Specifically, by widening the scope of actors and spaces in the social construction of sociomaterial practices, we contribute by teasing out the associations between strategy interactions, use of material artefacts, strategic actor identities, organisational spaces, and sociomaterial practices. Coming from this backdrop, it is also instructive to note that the same material artefact may be captured under any of the categories in the classification, as the focus is on the situated sociomaterial practice, rather than the inherent qualities of the artefact. In this regard, the current study shows how the invoice is used idiosyncratically within the informal printing hub, but used in conventional form at arm’s length or under duress when interacting with the formal sector. Consistent with the current study, Werle and Seidl (2015) also found that the roles and functions of a material artefact are not instructive, so the same material artefact may be associated with more than one classification depending on how it is employed, and this may be temporarily-conditioned. However, our classification offers a more all-encompassing conception of the co-construction of sociomaterial practices, at the intersection of both individual and group idiosyncrasies. Our notion of reviled sociomaterial practices is also novel in SAP

and sociomateriality research; it builds on literature suggesting that material artefacts have the potential to limit the performance of strategy work (Rasche and Chai, 2009).

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Table 1. Overview of material artefacts employed in the sociomaterial practices

Material artefacts	Empirical examples	Sociomaterial practices
Built spaces	• Small operating spaces/premises of the informal printing businesses • Close spatial proximity between one informal printing business and the other • Frequent business-related visits to partners' premises	• Symbol of informal printing business operations • Minimising risk of opportunism • Minimising investment in equipment/space • Forging close relationships to exploit business opportunities • Unreservedly sharing equipment, supplies and expertise • Conceiving other informal business network partner's premises as extensions of their own
Mobile phone	• Pervasive use in dealings with informal business network partners especially	• 'Signing off' of business agreements and transactions amongst informal businesses • A substitute for written legally-binding documents amongst informal businesses • Sharing ideas/strategic intent amongst informal businesses • 'Whistleblowing' as a social control mechanism amongst informal businesses
Invoice	• The sole artefact for keeping business-related information and records	• Keep track of informal business network partners' accounts and indebtedness • Record payments done or received from other informal network partners on behalf of another • Invoked as a substitute for written contracts and agreements including dealings with formal firm network partners • Collusion amongst informal business network partners in 'bidding' for jobs/contracts • Swapping jobs and executing contracts on each other's behalf
'Paperwork'	• Non-use	• Largely differed to middlemen

Table 2. Classification of sociomaterial practice

Classification	Sites of strategic actors	Nature of strategic interactions	Example(s) from the study
Contextually-bounded sociomaterial practice	Actors located in same/similar site/social space	Group	Built spaces Invoices Mobile phones
Individually-mediated sociomaterial practice	Actors located in different sites/social spaces	Individual	Invoices
Reviled sociomaterial practice	Actors located in same/similar site/social space	Group	Paperwork