

**Pragmatism: A lived and living philosophy.
What can it offer to contemporary organization theory?**

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Brief Bios

Bente Elkjaer (BA, MA, and PhD) holds a chair in organizational and workplace learning at the School of Education, Aarhus University, Department of Learning, which she is also the current head of. Bente Elkjaer has within her research taken a special interest in developing a theoretical perspective on organizational learning inspired by American Pragmatism (particularly the works by John Dewey), which she has called the “third way”. Further, Bente Elkjaer was for five years (2005-09) the Editor-in-Chief of *Management Learning*, and she is also the Head of the *Doctoral School of Organizational Learning* (DOCSOL) at the university.

Barbara Simpson (BSc, MSc(Hons), PhD(Auckland)) is a senior lecturer in organization studies in the University of Strathclyde Business School, Department of Management. Her research, supervision and teaching interests revolve around the topics of organizational change, innovation and creativity, which she approaches from a constructivist orientation that seeks to uncover the dynamic nature of organizational practices. In this context, she has drawn particular inspiration from the classical Pragmatist philosophers, especially George Herbert Mead. Her work is published in *Organization Studies* and *Organization*.

Introduction

“Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.”

Charles Sanders Peirce (1878: 293)

With these words, Peirce heralded a sea change in the philosophy of human thought and reasoning that not only dominated American philosophy for the ensuing half century or so, but also had profound influence in the practical domains of law, education, politics, religion, social theory, and the arts. This statement, which has come to be seen as the originating maxim of Pragmatism, suggests that the meaning of ideas resides in the actions that they lead to rather than in their antecedent causes. This principle was subsequently picked up and further developed by William James, who proposed “The ultimate test for us of what a truth means is indeed the conduct it dictates or inspires” (James, 1898: 259). Similarly, John Dewey, whose central interest was the nature of knowledge and knowing, emphasized the consequential character of knowledge as “an instrument or organ of successful action” (Dewey, 1908 [1977]: 180), while George Herbert Mead’s focus on the social dynamics of meaning-making lead him to suggest that if “the gesture of a given human organism ... indicate[s] to another organism the subsequent (or resultant) behavior of the given organism, then it has meaning” (Mead, 1934: 76). In all of these, the explicit link between knowledge (or meaning) and action suggests that ideas are more than mere accretions of past experience, but rather, their importance lies in their projected influence on future experiences.

Peirce, James, Dewey and Mead are widely regarded as the originators of classical Pragmatism. They were all committed to finding practical ways of accounting for

human conduct and meaning-making in all of its dynamic and social complexity. They sought practical solutions to the myriad practical problems that arise in lived human experience. By linking knowledge and action, they departed dramatically from the prevailing rationalism of their philosophical times, which they saw as too abstract and too academic to be of practical value. Not surprisingly then, their ideas were greeted with howls of derision from the more rationalist members of the philosophical community. Famously, G.K. Chesterton (1908: 62) wrote “Pragmatism is a matter of human needs ... and one of the first of human needs is to be something more than a pragmatist”, while Bertrand Russell (1961: 782) issued the following warning against Pragmatism:

“... I feel a great danger, the danger of what might be called cosmic impiety. The concept of 'truth' as something dependent upon facts largely outside human control has been one of the ways in which philosophy hitherto has inculcated the necessary element of humility. When this check upon pride is removed, a further step is taken on the road towards a certain kind of madness ... this intoxication is the greatest danger of our time, and ... any philosophy which, however unintentionally, contributes to it is increasing the danger of vast social disaster.”

For the Pragmatists, however, these criticisms simply served to confirm their assertion that what people believe to be true is what they find to be useful. James observed:

“When the pragmatist undertakes to show in detail just *why* we must defer [to experience], the rationalist is unable to recognize the concretes from which his own abstraction is taken. He accuses us of *denying* truth; whereas we have only sought to trace exactly why people follow it and always ought to follow it. Your typical ultra-abstractionist fairly shudders at concreteness: other things equal, he positively prefers the pale and spectral. If the two universes were offered, he would always choose the skinny outline rather than the rich thicket of reality. It is so much purer, clearer, nobler.” (James, 1907: 68)

As with any frame breaking shift in thinking, Pragmatism has been exposed to endless re-interpretation, its ‘new wine’ often becoming tainted by the ‘old bottles’ of more established paradigmatic perspectives. Many commentators have suggested that Pragmatism’s day in the sun has long gone (e.g. Thayer, 1982), dismissing it as philosophically passé and politically naïve. Others have associated it negatively with the excessively liberal optimism and economic progressiveness of American big business, while a persistent critique has been that Pragmatism lacks sufficient coherence to be deemed a distinctive doctrine or ‘school of thought’. Indeed, Lovejoy distinguished thirteen logically independent meanings of Pragmatism from his reading of Peirce, James and Dewey, concluding that “the pragmatist is not merely three but many gentlemen at once” (Lovejoy, 1963: 1). This confusion was further exacerbated by the originators themselves, who never could quite agree on what to call their way of thinking – after James (1898) coined the term ‘pragmatism’, Peirce set about distinguishing his ideas from James’ by calling his own approach ‘pragmaticism’, which he suggested would be a name “ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers”

(Peirce, 1905: 105). Meanwhile Dewey preferred the terms ‘experimentalism’ or ‘instrumentalism’ to capture his notion of ideas as playful instruments for experimental action (Dewey, 1925 [1984]), while Mead adopted ‘social behaviorism’ to label his perspective on Pragmatism. In Lovejoy’s view, this lack of a clear and stable definition, let alone a single unifying label, was a fatal flaw that doomed Pragmatism to philosophical insignificance.

It has to be said, however, that the originators of Pragmatism never set out to establish a doctrine or a school of thought. Rather, they saw their ideas as a movement or a turn in philosophy that offers a method of inquiry as an empirically grounded way for accessing fresh insights. This movement continues today, as evidenced by a steady stream of new collections and anthologies that have continued to develop Pragmatist ideas through constructive debate and application to real problems (see for instance Haack & Lane, 2006, and the international journal 'Contemporary Pragmatism'). This ongoing inquiry is what makes Pragmatism a living, evolving philosophy that is still very much a work in progress. In this sense, it is no different from other relatively recent developments in philosophy, such as phenomenology or analytical philosophy, which are equally difficult to pin down to a clear and unambiguous doctrine. We suggest, therefore, that there is still much to be gained by revisiting the works of the classical Pragmatists and their legacy. This is particularly so in the field of organization studies, which is in the throes of seeking new and creative engagement with the ways that people conduct themselves in organizations and account for their lived experiences of organizational life.

What we aim to do in this chapter is to elucidate those aspects of Pragmatist thinking that are particularly relevant to the field of organization studies. In undertaking this task, we must declare that our specific knowledge of Pragmatism is informed primarily by the works of Dewey and Mead. Although we will, of necessity, write from this position, we do not wish to imply any ranking or prioritization of these writers above the others. They are, in our view, all productively mutually informing, and in many ways it makes little sense to make hard distinctions between their ideas. We also acknowledge that our research interests revolve specifically around issues of organizational learning and creativity, which we will draw upon to illustrate our arguments. We will further argue that Pragmatism has great potential to inform organization studies more generally, especially in the theorizing of organizational practices.

In the next section we begin by laying down an understanding of the context and influences that contributed to the original development of Pragmatism. Then we move on to elaborate four key themes that, we suggest, can usefully inform understandings of the lived and living aspects of organizations and their members. The practical utility of these themes is then discussed in relation to organizational learning theory, where we consider not only learning as socialization, but also learning as creative practice. The chapter then moves on to explore the extent to which the influence of Pragmatism can be seen in contemporary organization theory. In particular, we focus on the groundbreaking work of Karl Weick and suggest ways in which his theories of organizing and sensemaking might be further elaborated using Pragmatist thinking.

The Classical Pragmatists in Context

Pragmatism, of course, did not simply spring out of nowhere. The seeds of its emergence can be traced to Anglo-European traditions of philosophy and literature stretching from Heraclitus and Aristotle to Descartes, Kant and Hegel. The original Pragmatists were also deeply influenced by the scientific developments of their time, including Darwinian evolution and Einsteinian relativity. The intellectual soil that then nurtured these seeds, and which also gave rise to such literary giants as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Jefferson, was distinctively American in its theological practicality and democratic common sense. America looked forward to a new world of possibilities and backwards at the class-divided social structures of Europe, which privileged traditions and family ties ahead of actions and abilities. The country's boundaries towards the West were open and fascinating, while at the same time, industrialization and mass production were transforming society. Philosophically, this period was characterized by a multiplicity of contradictions that set science against religion, positivism against romanticism, intuition against empiricism, and the democratic ideals of Enlightenment against the traditions of aristocracy. In this context, Pragmatism served as a consensual method of doing philosophy that sought to transcend these many dualisms (Scheffler, 1974).

The common ground occupied by the original Pragmatists was sceptical of absolutes and wholes, and of certainties and finalities. They challenged universalist and foundationalist assumptions, suggesting pluralism and evolutionary emergence as more fruitful explanations of our contingent and changeful world. For them, "pure experience" (James, 1912 [2006]: 19) was the source of practical, actionable knowledge. It is through our experimental and reflexive engagement with each other

and the natural and social worlds of which we are a part that over time we affirm habits and uncover new insights to inform our ongoing conduct. By these means, we continuously construct and re-construct meanings of both our worlds and our selves. These characteristic themes frame Pragmatism as a distinctive system of philosophy, which we denote throughout this chapter with a capital 'P', to distinguish it from more common parlance in which pragmatism is simply an everyday matter of getting the job done. A pragmatist in this latter sense is someone who is less concerned with meanings and explanations than with results (at whatever cost).

This common ground aside, there were significant and persistent differences between Peirce, James, Dewey and Mead. Each made a unique contribution to the emerging philosophy of Pragmatism, leading to a contest of ideas that is still very much alive in the contemporary literature. Let us now briefly examine the distinctiveness of each of these four originators of Pragmatist thinking.

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) was educated as a chemist and worked for much of his life as a scientist, but it is for his extraordinarily innovative contributions to philosophy and logic that he is best remembered. His intellectual reach encompassed philosophical issues as diverse as scientific metaphysics, theology, cosmology, and aesthetics, and he is recognized as the founder of modern semiotics, in which the interpretation of signs provides the medium for meaning-making. Although the breadth of his thinking extends beyond Pragmatism, Talisse (2007) argues that Pragmatism nevertheless lay at the heart of his philosophy. Unlike James, Dewey and Mead, however, Peirce never conceived Pragmatism as a philosophy in its own right. Rather he saw it simply as a method to clarify thinking by clearing away obstacles

and diversions along the pathway of meaningful inquiry. As is evident in the Pragmatist maxim with which we opened this paper, Peirce's method explicitly connects meaning to the conceivably practical consequences of our actions. It is by reflecting on these consequences that we clarify our meanings. For Peirce then, clear reasoning is a continuously evolving process that is inherently creative and aesthetic (Anderson, 1987). He developed the idea of abduction as a way of distinguishing this spontaneous, creative action from deductive and inductive forms of reasoning. Whereas deduction probes the boundaries of thought within a closed system, and induction structures evidence to support the formation of opinions, the abductive process involves the imaginative creation of explanatory hypotheses, generating alternative 'may-bes' in response to 'what if' inquiries. Ultimately, he argued that all scientific reasoning is dependent upon abductive processing as this is the only possible source of novel ideas (Anderson, 1987). In sum, Peirce's focus on the consequences of action, the abductive generation of alternative futures, and the semiotics of meaning-making processes are his abiding contributions to Pragmatist thinking.

William James (1842-1910) also began his career as a natural scientist, receiving his PhD in medicine in 1869. His dual interests in psychology and philosophy lead to him holding university chairs at Harvard in both disciplines at different times in his career. His intellectual contributions include 'Principles of psychology', which is still regularly cited today, and his 'Essays on radical empiricism', which set out a comprehensive critique of the rationalism that dominated philosophical thinking at the turn of the twentieth century. Throughout his work, however, the threads of Pragmatist thinking are always evident. He is often credited as the founder of

Pragmatism, having introduced this term in a lecture he delivered in 1898. Although he openly acknowledged Peirce's work of twenty years earlier as the source and inspiration for his ideas, it was James rather than Peirce who captivated philosophical imaginations. He extended Peirce's Pragmatist maxim beyond a method of doing philosophy, to become a complete, systematic philosophy that incorporates its own metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. Within this, the connection between ideas and actions as co-constituting aspects of human conduct represents a radical departure from the prevailing idealist, rationalist, and empiricist trends in philosophy. James argued that the process of apprehending alternative futures to inform actions in the present necessarily engages the human mind, both cognitively and emotionally (Barbalet, 2004). In effect, James psychologized Peirce's original conception of Pragmatism, shifting away from the notion that the meaning of a proposition lies purely in its practical consequences, to the view that meanings are a matter of believing them to be true (Talisso, 2007). Peirce was vehemently opposed to this revision of the Pragmatist maxim, arguing that it is empirical experience, not belief, that clarifies meanings (Peirce, 1905).

The third of the original Pragmatists was John Dewey (1859-1952), who was strongly influenced by Hegelian thinking in his training as a philosopher. His ideas have been influential in many fields, not least education, where he pursued questions relating to the nature of learning and knowledge, and ethical judgment in the formation of moral ideals. Like Peirce, he saw Pragmatism as a method of doing philosophy rather than a solution to philosophical dilemmas. And like James, he also extended Peirce's Pragmatism, but in quite a different direction. Specifically, Dewey took the embryonic model of inquiry proposed by Peirce (1877) and developed this into a

comprehensive theory that frames inquiry as a continuously unfolding social process in which meanings are constructed as people engage with each other (Dewey, 1933 [1986], 1938 [1986]). He made much of the continuity of lived experience that links the past and the future through the actions of the present. Reminiscent of Peirce's notion of abduction, Dewey argued that critical thinking, or inquiry, is a method of generating working hypotheses or 'warranted assertabilities', the consequences of which may be tested through either imagination or concrete action. Whereas Peirce saw an individual's doubt as the starting point for critical thinking, Dewey insisted that it is doubt in the situation that initiates inquiry (Talisie, 2007). In Dewey's hands then, Pragmatism became a method to think and act in a creative and insightful manner in social situations.

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) was a close colleague and lifelong friend of John Dewey, and also another foundational contributor to the Pragmatist project. He was a social psychologist whose efforts were directed towards developing a philosophically grounded theory of sociality that incorporated the key concepts of process, emergence, and evolution (Mead, 1934). Although his intellectual contributions are often conflated with those of Dewey, his unique legacy lies in the elaboration of Peirce's ideas about the nature of mind, language and signification in understanding the construction of meanings. He argued that people simultaneously construct both their sense of self and their sense of situation in ongoing, symbolically mediated processes of social engagement. He described these processes as cycles of gestures and responses by means of which we come to understand each other's conduct, and to better anticipate how others might respond to our own actions (Mead, 1913, 1925). The self that engages in these gestural conversations is ineluctably social and

comprised of two inter-related aspects: the objective 'me' is the embodied behavioral norms and values of the social groups to which a person claims membership, and the subjective 'I' is a person's spontaneous, performative response to the social conventions and habits represented by the 'me'. The 'me' permits a reflexive attitude towards the self, while the 'I' is the principle of action and impulse that introduces uncertainty and the potential for novelty into the processes of the self. It is in the continuous interplay between these two aspects of the social self that meanings are reinforced and constructed afresh. These dimensions complement and add empirical descriptiveness to Dewey's notion of critical thinking.

From the foundations laid down by these four originators, the Pragmatist project has continued to grow and evolve through the works of other early contributors such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jane Addams, Clarence Irving Lewis, Charles Horton Cooley, and Mary Parker Follett. More recently, widespread interest was re-ignited by the publication of Richard Rorty's (1980) 'Philosophy and the mirror of nature'. What came to be seen as a neo-Pragmatist revival has been much criticized by followers of the classical Pragmatists as "an idiosyncratic, unorthodox, and, in many estimations, perverse vision of what [P]ragmatism is" (Talisie, 2007: 3). Essentially Rorty abandoned experience, which the original Pragmatists had held to be the very stuff of philosophical theorizing, in favour of language and the linguistic turn, especially as it appears in the French literary tradition of Jacques Derrida. Talisie (2007) argued that Rorty's provocation has created a veritable industry in philosophy to criticize and correct his 'misguided' conception of Pragmatism. Principal amongst Rorty's critics, Hilary Putnam accused him of a cultural relativism that rejects the notion of truth, seeing it as mere self-deception. By contrast Putnam, who is more informed by the

analytical philosophy of science and technology than by literary criticism, emphasized a commitment to warrantable, justifiable forms of knowledge that emerge through the process of inquiry, which is so central to the Pragmatist agenda.

This debate between Rorty and Putnam has served to reinstate Dewey as a legitimate contributor to contemporary philosophical discussion, while also reviving interest in Pragmatism more generally. Increasingly, contemporary philosophers are engaging with the important task of lifting Pragmatism beyond its very American roots by reinterpreting it in the context of more recent developments in European philosophy. So, for instance in America, Richard Bernstein has extensively reworked Dewey's ideas on practice, ethics and political theory, Mitchell Abouafia has brought the thinking of Bourdieu and Habermas to bear on Mead, and Richard Posner has built on Oliver Wendell Holmes' Pragmatist-inspired writings on jurisprudence, while in Europe Hans Joas has deepened understandings of Mead's notion of creative action. All in all then, it seems that Pragmatism may still have much to offer in today's world.

Four key themes in Pragmatism

In this section we introduce four key themes in Pragmatism, 'experience', 'inquiry', 'habit' and 'transaction', all of which have to do with what it means to be human, and how selves and social situations can be seen as mutually informing and co-constructing dynamics. As such, these themes transcend the conventional separation between individual and organizational levels of analysis. They are deeply interwoven and difficult to tease apart, but we must do so here in order to present them in a readable way. Our ultimate intention though, is to consciously and deliberately bring

them together as an integrated whole that offers a complete theoretical description of social practices in organizations.

We begin with the notion of experience as both active and passive rather than as a mere accumulation of past actions. Then we move to consider inquiry, in which experimental thinking and action develop ideas and concepts that re-constitute the present situation. Next we turn to habits, which are defined in Pragmatism as dispositions towards specific actions. And finally, we discuss the notion of transaction, which is concerned with the social actions that constitute experience and habit and out of which inquiry is derived.

Experience

Experience is a consistent theme amongst all of the classical Pragmatists. James (1912 [2006]), for instance, rejected the notion of ‘consciousness’ as too diaphanous to have any meaningful function in the development of philosophical first principles. Rather, he argued for a radical empiricism based on the temporal processes of ‘pure experience’ in which the experiential tissue of life is continuous in time. Similarly, Dewey had already laid down the ideas for his later, more mature notion of experience in his 1896 paper, in which he critiqued the way the reflex arc concept in psychology deals with the relationship between knowledge and action (Bernstein, 1966 [1967]; Dewey, 1896 [1972]). He rejected the possibility of understanding human conduct as a mechanistic sequence of sensation, idea and response, which contrives to separate thinking from doing rather than taking both as “functional elements in a division of labor which together constitutes a whole” (Dewey, 1896 [1972]: 100). He preferred to talk about “organic behavior” as a basic unit of conduct

in which knowledge and action are inseparable processes. Dewey further argued that Darwin's theory of evolution demanded a complete reconceptualization of experience, not as a mere accretion of past impressions, but as "the intercourse of a living being with its physical and social environment" (Dewey, 1917: 6). He saw experience as the experimental activities of organisms as they adapt to, and within, their environments. That is, experience comprises both the passive effects of situations upon selves, and the active influences of selves on situations.

Dewey elaborated his distinctive notion of experience as follows (Dewey, 1925 [1981]). Firstly, experience is more than just knowledge, and indeed, if experience is defined in purely epistemological terms, then there is a risk of losing sight of the transactional and social dimensions of experience as everyday living. Secondly, he strongly refuted the notion that experience is a purely subjective and private affair, which was a prevalent attitude in philosophical circles after Descartes. Dewey argued that all experience has an objective dimension but that 'sharing experiences' must be more than a metaphor because shared objective situations are always interlaced with subjective experiences. Thirdly, experience serves a projective and anticipatory function in linking present actions to future expectations; in other words we live life forwards by projecting our past experiences into our anticipations of the future. It is this connection to the future that underlies all intelligent activity. Fourthly, emphasizing the temporality and continuity of experience, Dewey claimed that it evolves through a continuous series of situations. And finally, although experience is not primarily an epistemological term, it is not possible to think of experience without reasoning, because ideas and concepts will always be part of experience.

Mead's contribution to this theme was firstly to elaborate Dewey's second point of definition above by arguing that experience is necessarily social. From Mead's perspective, experience can only be understood in terms of sociality:

“Meaning ... arises in experience through the individual stimulating himself to take the attitude of the other in his reaction[s]” (Mead, 1934: 89)

That is, we gain insight into situations by attempting to see them through the eyes of others. In the absence of such common, or shared, experiences of social situations, social order cannot develop. Like Dewey, Mead emphasized the combination of, and interplays between, both passive and active aspects of experience. Further, he argued that because selves are socially constructed, it is not possible to objectively experience the self without social engagements that offer a mirror to reflect the objective self. Experience then, is the process of constructing and re-constructing meanings of both selves and situations. Recognizing the importance of these social dimensions, Dewey later regretted the many misunderstandings that his description of experience had engendered. In 1951 he wrote to Arthur Bentley (with whom he authored the book “Knowing and the Known” (1949 [1991])) that he would have used the term “culture” had he been able to rewrite his book “Experience and Nature” (Boydston, 1981 [1925]). Consequently, when we use the notion of experience here, we intend it in this broader sense as clearly social, cultural and historical.

Mead's second contribution to this theme was to recognize experience as a temporal flux that is located in the living present, and is informed by both the interpreted past

and the projected future. It is in the now that lives are lived and meanings are enacted by drawing on the past to anticipate future consequences. The inherently temporal and narrative qualities of social participation cannot be adequately addressed by theories that see time as a mere succession of discrete moments, or what Bergson (1919) referred to as spatialized time. The “veritable mountain of fragments and writings” (Joas, 1997: 167) that Mead left on this subject demonstrates the extent to which his later thinking was directed towards the problem of temporality and how it might be integrated into a comprehensive theory of sociality (see for instance Mead, 1932, 1938). The key insight for the purposes of our argument here is that experience is constituted through events that emerge in the present out of the continuity of social actions. As people find themselves located between the past and the future, they are obliged to construct new meanings, reconstruing their histories in order to understand the emergent present. These new understandings are projected forward into the future to anticipate and shape the outcomes of present actions, while at the same time themselves being shaped by these anticipations. Ultimately then, experience arises in the continuous interplay between past and future, which informs and gives meaning to social actions in the living present.

Inquiry

Both Peirce and Dewey located a certain sort of logic, which they called ‘inquiry’, at the heart of their respective versions of Pragmatism. Peirce described inquiry in terms of a model of doubt and belief, where doubt signals some form of disruption to thinking and action, while belief is the state of resolution that is gained once doubt has been clarified (Peirce, 1877). It is belief that guides us into habitual actions, while doubt raises uncertainties as to the appropriateness of specific actions. Dewey

elaborated the notion of inquiry as a response to a specific type of experience, that which arises as an inevitable consequence of the continuous, self-correcting process that he called “the experimental habit of mind” (Dewey, 1910: 55):

“Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (Dewey, 1938 [1986]: 108)

Dewey argued that inquiry in everyday life has the same structure as scientific inquiry. He saw it as a process that starts with a sense that something is wrong and that the normal course of activity cannot proceed uninterrupted. This invites a phase of deliberation that endeavours to understand what it is that is wrong, what is the nature of the obstacle to continuing action, what resistance needs to be overcome? Then there is a phase of analysis and diagnosis of the conditions that are creating the impediment to continuing action, followed by thought experiments in which possible solutions are abductively proposed (Dewey, 1933 [1986]). It is in this process that Mead’s subjective ‘I’ comes into play. This is the spontaneous, performative principle of action that introduces variation and novelty into experience. Without the ‘I’, the self’s habits of mind would be entirely determined and bound by collective norms of conduct. Thus inquiry involves the probing actions of the ‘I’, which are the source of creative potential in human actions (Joas, 1996). The final phase in the inquiry process is to implement the preferred working hypothesis, the results of which then inform another cycle of inquiry (Dewey, 1938).

Mead (1938: 3-25) articulated a very similar model of reflexive thinking that comprises four dynamically interdependent phases: an Impulse arrests ongoing action when a difference is perceived between the anticipated results of this action, and the results that actually occurred. In other words, there has been a failure to adequately anticipate the consequences of these actions. Then there is a phase of Perception, where this mismatch between anticipation and actuality is explored to reveal the conditions that need to be resolved. This is followed by a phase of Manipulation during which alternative hypotheses are formed and evaluated. Mead's cycle then closes with a phase of Consummation, in which modified actions are enacted. These models of Dewey and Mead are complementary, both capturing the temporal interweaving of social agency, reflection and experience, and demonstrating the creative potential for new thinking in all social actions. They challenge teleological assumptions that outcomes of actions are, or can be, pre-determined; indeed, in a pre-designed world there is no space for the expression of human creativity. Inquiry cannot be reduced to a response to purely abstract thoughts because it is anchored in everyday situations. It is part of life to inquire, mull things over, come to conclusions and make evaluations. We do it all the time whether we are aware of it or not. This is how we learn and become cognizant of our world and who we are in this world.

Habit

All four of the original Pragmatists were concerned with habit, especially as it relates to inquiry. Peirce (1878) saw habit as a type of action that is repeated in response to recurring situations. It is when these habitual actions are disrupted that inquiry may be invoked. James recognized the social significance of habit, describing it as "the enormous flywheel of society, its most precious conservative agent" (James, 1891

[1952]: 79). Dewey's notion of habit can be traced to his critique of the reflex arc (Dewey, 1896 [1972]), where his term 'organic coordination' may be read as organic habitual conduct. Later, especially in his 'Human Nature and Conduct', Dewey unfolds his notion of habit as:

“(...) that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity” (Dewey, 1922 [1988]: 31).

Habit may be understood then, as “a readiness to act overtly in a specific fashion whenever opportunity is presented ... [Thus,] the essence of habit is an acquired predisposition to *ways* or modes of response (...)” (Dewey, 1922 [1988]: 32). In other words, habits are acquired dispositions to respond in certain ways in certain circumstances; habits allow us to anticipate our own and other persons' conduct in a given situation, as well as how a situation may unfold. In Mead's terms, habits are the dispositions that come to be embodied in that aspect of the self he called the objective 'me'. As such, habits are expressions of social norms of conduct, but at the same time, they are dynamically emergent, admitting the possibilities of mutability and change over time. This position contrasts significantly with more conventional views of habits as rigid and fixed.

Mead's 'significant symbols' are also relevant in the context of habits. He defined significant symbols as actions that call out the same response in the gesturer and the responder, they are "... nothing but the stimulus whose response is given in advance" (Mead, 1934: 181). Habits of behaviour make it easier for others to anticipate our actions in given situations, and as such, they contribute to the construction of sociality. It is sociality that provides the insight necessary to be able to anticipate someone else's responses to our own actions, and thereby to regulate our own conduct in terms of likely outcomes. Significant symbols then, allow us to see our actions as others might, and to consciously shape the roles that we adopt in different social contexts. In Mead's view, all human sociality is based on significant symbols and symbolic behaviours such as habits.

Dewey further proposed that customs are habits expressed more or less uniformly within any social group in which members are engaged with the same environmental situations. The socialization of new members into a group requires these newcomers to incorporate the group's customs and established modes of transaction into their own habits of action. It is these customs that guide us in terms of acceptable codes of social behaviour including ethical distinctions between virtue and vice, and aesthetic considerations in social activities. In effect, customs are symbolic forms of action by means of which we can communicate cultural expectations of conduct within social groups.

Transaction

The notion of the social self as a being that is continuously in the making, in effect a becoming, is central to Pragmatism. Both Dewey (1949 [1991]) and Mead (1934)

wrote extensively about the intersubjective processes of social engagement by means of which becoming emerges. This is well illustrated by Mead's discussion of gestural conversations wherein one person's gesture calls out a response in another person, which in turn calls out a further response, and so on in an ongoing cycle of communication. It is through these communicative processes that we become socialized to any given group of people, we form mutual expectations of conduct, and at the same time we come to understand both self and situation. The social meaning of any given gesture is reflected in the response that it engenders, and as the cycle of gesture and response proceeds the meanings that we construe are either reinforced, or challenged, or completely disrupted. In other words, our social interactions may be seen as both expressions of habitual conduct, and creative, improvisational processes of making new meanings.

In his later writing, Dewey sought to make finer distinctions in this process by differentiating between interactions (actions between entities), and transactions (actions across entities) (Dewey & Bentley, 1949 [1991]: 112-115). Bernstein explained this distinction as follows:

“Transaction is a refinement of interaction. In a transaction, the components themselves are subject to change. Their character affects and is affected by the transaction. Properly speaking, they are not independent: they are phases in a unified transaction. Thus transaction is a more rigorous formulation of the category of the organic which is embedded in Dewey's earliest philosophic writings. Transaction is a generic trait of existence” (Bernstein, 1960: xl).

When the relation between self and situation is understood in terms of inter-action, this implies physically and mentally separated subjects who interact on the basis of specific regularities or principles by means of which they can influence each other. Alternatively, when selves and situations are related to each other on the basis of a trans-actional understanding, they may be seen as mutually constituting aspects of an integrated unity.

Dewey's purpose in making this distinction was to separate this Pragmatist notion from the more common usage of 'interactionism' in the literature. Returning to Mead's work, it is now clear that when he used the term 'interaction' he was in fact referring to what Dewey later termed a 'transaction'. The interactants in a gesture / response cycle both shape, and are shaped by, their interaction. Rather than constructing meanings between themselves, they actually are the emergent meanings. Mead further argued that in any system of inquiry, transactions are not limited to the inter-subjective domain. For instance, transactions between the 'I' and the 'me' function intra-personally to construct the social self, and once significant symbols arise in a social situation, they facilitate and mediate an extra-personal level of transactional engagement and meaning-making. Thus the notion of transaction challenges the more conventional view of social systems operating at various, more or less discrete levels, by promoting instead an understanding of social practices as the continuously emergent weaving together of social selves and social situations.

In the next section, we demonstrate how these four key themes in Pragmatism may be used in developing a transactional approach to organizational learning. Then, in the

following section, we explore more broadly how Pragmatism might enrich processual understandings of organizations, such as that offered by sensemaking theory.

Pragmatism in organizational learning

The literature on organizational learning has for many years contained an unfinished debate on whether organizations are able to learn, or whether individuals must learn before their knowledge is somehow transferred to the organization (Cook & Yanow, 1993). In the early literature, organizational learning was defined as individuals' acquisition of information and knowledge, and later as analytical and communicative skills (Argyris & Schön, 1996; March & Simon, 1958). Scholarly reaction to this understanding has been to take learning out of the purely cognitive domain of individuals' minds, locating it instead in the processes of participation in organizational communities of practice (Elkjaer, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Whereas the former is focused upon mental representations, the latter is concerned with the maintenance of organizational practices, in which learning is associated with socialization and the institutionalization of knowledge (Gherardi, 2000). From this perspective, however, it is difficult to understand how organizational learning can be creative, innovative, and generative of new knowledge and action. An understanding of learning as participation in communities of practice tends, in other words, to overlook the conservatism, protectionism and the tendency to recycle knowledge in organizations, rather than critically challenging and extending it (Fenwick, 2001).

A Pragmatist definition of learning (and organizational learning) encompasses all four of the themes outlined above (experience, inquiry, habit and transaction) to frame learning as a social practice that is both creative and habitual, and in which

knowledge is necessarily open-ended and fallible. Learning then, is the acquisition of more varied and complex predispositions to act, through which the world becomes more differentiated and “infused with meaning” (Biesta & Burbules, 2003: 37). In other words, Pragmatism has potential to offer new insights into some of the problems in the current literature on organizational learning by conceptualizing learning as:

- Transactional, encompassing all levels of the learning system, rather than one (individual) and then another (organizational);
- Derived from inquiry in which knowledge and action are continuous and co-constituting rather than knowledge/participation followed by action/practice;
- Not only about socialization (habit), but also creative practice, where the two are intertwined in real-time experience.

To illustrate the benefits of Pragmatism in understanding organizational learning we now examine a classical piece within the international organizational learning literature, namely the works of Argyris and Schön, who themselves claim to have Pragmatist roots (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Elkjaer & Wahlgren, 2006). Their central concern with ‘actionable knowledge’ is very much in line with Pragmatism (Argyris, 2003). In our view, however, they depart from Pragmatism by retaining a fundamental dualism between knowledge and action, which, in turn, generates an avalanche of further dualisms.

For instance, Argyris and Schön see organizational learning as first and foremost a task of individuals because:

“Organizational learning occurs when individuals within an organization experience a problematic situation and inquire into it on the organization’s behalf” (Argyris & Schön, 1996).

When individuals make an inquiry, it can lead them to modify their understanding of the organization. If this individual learning is to turn into organizational learning, it must become part of how other individuals understand the organization in terms of organizational routines and stories.

Argyris and Schön resolve the problem of transfer between individual and organizational levels by defining the organization as a political entity in which individuals act and learn on behalf of the organization. In our Pragmatist understanding, the relationship between individual and organization is not guided by individuals’ choices but by the transactional interplay between the two. The meanings attached to individuals and organizations are, therefore, highly interdependent and continuously evolving. This transactional approach draws together subjects (individuals), objects (knowledge) and situations into a mutually constituting, dynamic whole. To see organizational learning as fundamentally transactional is to focus on the interplay between selves and situations rather than treating them as discrete levels in the social system. If these levels are treated separately, then we are left with the intractable problem of having to glue them together again. We propose that learning does not begin with either individuals or organizations, but with uncertainties about the situations in which people find themselves. Responses to these uncertainties are guided by habit and the playful experimentation of social selves exploring new ways of defining and solving uncertain situations.

The second major dualism in the Argyris & Schön account of organizational learning is the separation of knowledge and action, whereas Pragmatism sees both as integral aspects of inquiry. Argyris and Schön do use the term inquiry but in a way that holds knowledge and action apart rather than integrating the two together. This interpretation of inquiry is underpinned by their understanding of predispositions to act (i.e. habits) as based upon individuals' 'theories of action', which are mental models or representations of actions. In other words, they see selves as theories of action (knowledge) that then guide the actual actions taken.

Argyris & Schön further differentiate between theories of action as 'espoused' or 'theories-in-use', which are respectively those theories of action that can be expressed in words, and those that can only be inferred from observation of individuals' actions. Theories-in-use may remain tacit because they are either indescribable (the individuals who enact them are unable, rather than unwilling to verbally describe the knowledge embedded in their everyday actions) or undiscussable (any attempt to reveal their incongruity with the espoused theory of the organization would be perceived as threatening or embarrassing and, as such, best kept in the quiet). Again, we think that this focus upon mental models fails to show how knowledge ('the mental') is always linked to action, and that knowledge encompasses action not as a representation but as a disposition towards certain ways to act. If knowledge is conceived in these representational terms, it becomes difficult to see where creativity comes from (i.e. where is the experimental and instrumental playfulness with different solutions to defined problems?). This cognitivist approach implies that it is within humans rather than between humans (and materialities) that problems are

solved and new knowledge is generated. This is very different from the Pragmatist approach that situates learning and knowledge production in transactions between selves and situations rather than within selves and outside situations.

In a Pragmatist take on organizational learning, the predispositions to act are habits, which are much more than mere mental models. The cultural and historical dimensions of habit suggest that organizational learning is a situated social practice rather than merely a social technology to be implemented. The notion of habit reminds us of the gradual transition between organizational routines and organizational change; it reminds us that organizational learning may be both reproductive, by producing more of the same or similar experience, and innovative, by producing novel experience. It is precisely in maintaining habit as disposition to act in open-ended and creative ways that experience and inquiry are linked in Pragmatism.

Inquiry is 'how we think'; it is the method through which learning takes place and reasoning is nurtured by guidance (e.g. teaching). Inquiry in a Pragmatist sense cuts across description and normative guidelines because it involves both emotion and judgment. It is initiated by an uneasy situation, an unsettled or disturbed situation (experienced as emotion) that requires resolution (involving judgment), and which in turn, produces learning. The notion of inquiry also alerts us to the open-endedness of experimental, creative and innovative reasoning.

Now turning to the third issue that we highlighted above, the intertwining of socialization and creativity, Pragmatism alerts us to learning (and creation of

knowledge) as experimental and instrumental. In other words, it invites us to see ideas and concepts as tools to play with and to use in reasoning. This helps us see how expansion and transformation of organizational routines can happen through inquiry and anticipatory reasoning. To learn in a Pragmatist sense is to infuse uncertain situations with meaning, which involves firstly defining the situation as a problem. This means that learning is a process of constructing selves and situations, resulting in actionable knowledge. In Pragmatism, this creation of meaning can never be predicted by any *a priori* assignment of power, because it is always relative to a situation.

Organizational learning through inquiry is, in other words, opening learning to the playfulness of how concepts and ideas are intertwined with actions not only in a reflective and backwards looking sense but also in a forward looking way. Routines and habits (i.e. predispositions to act in certain ways) will always prevail in organizations but Pragmatism stresses how experimental and instrumental ways of using ideas and concepts in a forward looking, abductive way helps us to see how creativity and innovation are also inherent in organizational learning. Understanding experience as the lived and living processes of selves engaging with the natural and social situations changes the focus from patterns of access and participation in the organizational communities of practice to ways in which participation unfolds (Gherardi *et al.*, 1998). Possible questions to ask then are: Do these ways of participation allow for inquiry into interruptions and challenges of the status quo, is it possible to maintain an open-ended understanding of solutions to organizational problems, and how is it possible to create, recreate and even transform experience?

In sum, our Pragmatist version of organizational learning starts from an understanding of organizations as lived and living organisms, which consist of certain habits (i.e. habitual dispositions to act). These are learned through experience by inquiring transactionally into uncertain situations. The trigger for inquiry is a felt uncertainty or tension, which produces experience that sometimes can turn into knowledge ('warranted assertabilities') in the sense that it can be communicated through language (signs and symbols), and thus shared. Creativity lies in the abductive orientation towards the future, which is explored by the 'I' as it plays with and puts together new ways of engaging with social situations.

Argyris & Schön's view of organizational learning starts from the assumption that action is guided by theories-of-action, where this appears to be their interpretation of the Pragmatist notions of habit, and inquiry. They do not speak of transaction but 'interaction' between individuals and organizations, and mental models appear to have replaced experience. To us this means that it is not possible to understand organizational learning across levels and across the knowledge-action divide, but most importantly it prevents us from understanding socialization and creativity as inherent in all transactions and not to be tied into systems of different loops of thinking.

By contrast, a Pragmatist take on organizational learning alerts us to socialization and learning as relational practices; it alerts us to the connection between knowledge and action and to learning as transactional (involving both selves and situations).

Pragmatism sees organizational learning as a temporal continuity, having a certain rhythm that is not only process or 'flow', but also rest and repose. The anticipatory

outlook on knowledge and action makes organizational learning creative and non-intentional, and it allows us to transcend the problems associated with the traditional separation of levels of analysis. When initiating organizational learning, we look for disjunctions, relocations and tensions because it is here that we find the seeds of creativity and innovation embedded in the organizational habitual knowledge and actions. This view of organizational learning encompasses emotion, ethics and aesthetics alongside ideas and concepts as mutually informing aspects of experience.

Pragmatism, practice and sensemaking

We now turn to consider what Pragmatism has to offer the wider field of organization theory. Philosophically speaking, there is a fundamental cleavage in the contemporary scholarship of this field that separates entitative and processual orientations towards scholarship and inquiry. This distinction is thoroughly articulated, for instance, by Tsoukas and Chia (2002), who contrasted two distinct ontologies: 'Being', which locates reality in substances, things and events, and 'Becoming', which approaches reality through flux, flow and continuity. The limitations of the entitative, or 'being', perspective in organization studies were recognized by Weick (1979: 44) when he exhorted us to "stamp out nouns". He argued that the language we use shapes the ways in which we think about, and engage with, the organizational world. "If students of organization become stingy in their use of nouns, generous in their use of verbs, and extravagant in their use of gerunds, then more attention would be paid to process and we'd learn more about how to see it and manage it" (Weick, 1979: 44). In response to this call to action, there has been a veritable explosion of '-ing' words in the organizational literature, such as organiz-ing, learn-ing, know-ing, do-ing, and strategiz-ing. But because gerunds can function as both nouns and verbs, this semantic

device has not produced as radical a shift in thinking as perhaps Weick might have hoped. Indeed, this same literature continues to be relatively uncritically peppered with dualistic distinctions between, for instance, individual and collective levels of analysis, or contrasting states of stability and change, revealing the resilience of entitative thinking in organization studies.

The adoption of a processual, ‘becoming’ ontology really does require a radical rearrangement of the ways in which we talk about the dynamics of our social world, but in shifting to this alternative position, much of what an entitative view can offer is lost. A more complex approach to organization would require us to transcend this dualistic separation between entitative and processual ontologies. Challenging such dualisms was very much part of the Pragmatist agenda. Dewey in particular railed against the artificial separation of body and mind, and knowledge and action, arguing that these dualisms cut across dynamic processes, disrupting their continuity. Both Mead (1932) and Whitehead (see Bakken & Hernes, 2006) argued that a more comprehensive view of society (and therefore organization) must draw upon both verbs and nouns, but without privileging either. This implies a different philosophical paradigm in which the interplay between verbs and nouns produces an ontology of practice (Simpson, 2009) that is located in the lived experience of organization and the ways in which meanings interact with people’s conduct. Working in an alternative paradigm like this implies not only a shift in ontology, but also in other philosophical dimensions such as epistemology, metaphysics and ethics. We propose that Pragmatism offers just such a well elaborated system of philosophy that allows us to understand organization as an ever-changing movement of meanings and actions

punctuated by events that signify the socially constructed understandings arising out of the otherwise undifferentiated flux of experience.

To illustrate this potential, we now focus specifically on the organizational theorizing of Karl Weick, who is widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers in contemporary organization studies (Sutcliffe *et al.*, 2006). He is best known for his theories of organizing and sensemaking, and is much cited for his provocative, and often counter-intuitive turns of phrase that oblige us to pause, to inquire, and to make new sense from his words. Throughout his very considerable oeuvre, the influence of William James is abundantly evident. Weick's work is threaded through with James' imagery of the world as "a buzzing, pulsating, formless mass of signals, out of which people try to make sense, into which they attempt to introduce order, and from which they construct against a background that remains undifferentiated" (Czarniawska, 1998: 1). Equally, Weick regularly cites Mead, albeit as seen through the eyes of the symbolic interactionists and the Chicago School more generally (e.g. Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1969; Strauss, 1956). However, he only rarely cites Dewey, and even less frequently, Peirce. It would seem likely then, there may be more that Pragmatism could offer to Weick's already fertile theorizing. In particular we consider there are at least three areas for potential development:

- Continuity as the interplay of past and future in the present;
- The transactional nature of social agency; and
- Reflexivity as an explicit element in the theorizing of social practices.

In many ways, Pragmatism and Weick's theories are very synergistic, but he deviated from Pragmatism in his basic recipe for sensemaking, which he expressed in his signature question "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" (Weick, 1979: 133). That is, we come to know the meaning of our actions only after the event. Meaning is, therefore, constructed retrospectively, or as Weick said "[m]uch organizational sensemaking consists of writing histories" (1979: 200). Equally, however, "[t]he person is able to understand an event only after imputing both a history and prospects to the puzzling enacted display" (Weick, 1979: 200). In this, Weick hints at the importance of future prospects as part of sensemaking, but although he does discuss "future perfect thinking" (Weick, 1979: 197-200), this future orientation remains under-theorized and is not integrated into his theories of organizing and sensemaking (see for example Gioia & Mehra, 1996; Patriotta, 2003).

By contrast, the Pragmatist maxim with which we opened this chapter (Peirce, 1878) points directly to anticipated future consequences of actions as the source of meaning in the present moment. These future anticipations may be understood in terms of Peirce's notion of abduction (Anderson, 1987), in which hypothetical actions are projected forward into the future. Past histories are used as resources in constructing these hypotheses, but it is their imagined consequences that inform the actual actions taken in the present moment. Sensemaking then, may be seen more fully as a continuous process of reconstruing meanings that are drawn simultaneously from the past and the future. It is this interplay between past and future that gives temporal continuity to actions in the living present (Mead, 1932). The abductive possibility of anticipating different and alternative futures eases the bonds of our histories and opens up novel opportunities for further action. Without this future orientation,

sensemaking is necessarily constrained to a convergent, retrospective process that perpetually reproduces history. Pragmatists would argue that this denies the inherent creativity of life and living, and without this, our understandings of people's conduct in organizations will be impoverished.

The second area where we think Pragmatism might usefully enhance Weick's theorizing is by embracing more fully the implications of a transactional, rather than merely interactional, view of social engagement (Dewey & Bentley, 1949 [1991]). Weick (1979: Chapter 4) initially defined interacts and double interacts in terms that are consistent with Mead's (1934) notion of the 'conversation of gestures'. However, he went on to argue that double interacts are constituted as 'stable subassemblies' of interlocked behaviours involving two or more individuals, where these subassemblies are the building blocks of organizational structures. This formulation tends to reduce interlocking behaviours to a somewhat mechanistic interpersonal exchange that focuses rather too narrowly on the cognitive and representational aspects of organizing and sensemaking, while denying the creative potential of our social engagements.

By contrast, the Pragmatist approach seeks to transcend the entitative distinctions that set cognition and structure apart from bodily sensation and agency respectively. It emphasizes the social nature of agency whereby the meanings of both selves and situations are co-constructing and immanent within each other. By focusing on actions rather than actors, the transactional perspective offers a more holistic view that is not restricted to any specific level of analysis. Indeed, this capacity to transcend levels of analysis is a defining quality of the Pragmatist notion of transaction, which is also

inclusive of emotional and aesthetic actions as well as the influencing dynamics of power in social situations. We suggest that many current topics in organization studies, such as identity work, emotion work, idea work, and strategy work, might usefully be elaborated in these transactional terms.

Finally we turn to consider reflexivity in organizing and sensemaking. Weick (2006: 1731) recently declared “Order, interruption, recovery. That is sensemaking in a nutshell.” While this summary statement highlights the key events of sensemaking, it leaves unspoken the human experience of this process. By comparison, Dewey’s more elaborated process of inquiry (1933 [1986]) locates critical reflexivity and human transactions at its centre as it proceeds from habitual action, through a disturbance or interruption, then on to an analysis of the causes of the disruption, the abductive generation of options for further action, and finally the selection and testing of a preferred course of action to overcome the immediate causes of the interruption. Reflexivity arises in transactions because it is here that sociality is constructed as we attempt to see the world through the eyes of others. Mead (1925) argued that transactions are the site where the self can appear to itself as an object of reflection and inquiry. Self awareness is not generated in circumstances where habitual actions continue uninterrupted; rather it is when unanticipated eventualities demand new meanings that a reflexive response is called out. Every gesture made during this transactional process is made in anticipation of some specific response or outcome, and every response invites reflection on the extent to which the anticipated outcome was realized.

This incremental, experimental process of constructing new meanings out of unexpected events is thus dependent upon the human capacity to reflect not only on past events, but also on the repertoire of alternative futures that can be creatively imagined. So for instance, the indigenous Maori people of New Zealand talk about ‘walking backwards into the future’, which means that as their lives unfold forwards, they are ever conscious of the function of history not only in shaping their present actions, but also in guiding them into the future. This relentless dynamic of anticipation and action is what provides continuity in practice, and it is reflexivity that admits this temporal experiencing of time and the possibilities of change as emergent and evolutionary. In this way then, Pragmatism demystifies reflexivity, making it a normal and natural part of all social practices.

The three themes that have focused our discussion here were prompted by our reading of Weick’s theories of organizing and sensemaking. We do not intend to suggest that our analysis of these theories is exhaustive; it is merely illustrative of the potential for Pragmatism to bring new and subtly nuanced insights into the domain of organization studies. Nor do we intend to suggest that Weick’s ideas are the only ones that might benefit from some Pragmatist insight. We propose that Pragmatism has considerable potential to contribute to better understandings of the social dynamics of organizational practices more generally. In this, we frame Pragmatist thinking as a complete system of philosophy that transcends the common distinctions between entitative and processual ontologies by focusing on practice as the intricate interweaving of social agency and temporality. In this way, the meanings of events and objects in the present moment are inseparable from the continuity of experience, where this experience arises in social transactions.

Conclusion

Organization theory today is increasingly faced with seemingly intractable problems as scholars struggle to find adequate ways of engaging with the multi-site, multi-cultural complexities of globalized business, and the at best, only partially predictable social dynamics of organizational practices. In this chapter, we have proposed Pragmatism as a way forward that offers a potentially radical alternative to the currently dominant paradigms of organizational scholarship. Entitative and processual philosophies each provide valuable insights into the nature of organization, but equally, each has its own limitations. The Pragmatist alternative seeks to transcend this entitative / processual dualism by understanding organizational practice as the continuous and emergent weaving together of social selves and social situations. Its focus is very much upon the social nature of real-time actions that constitute living and lived experience. This perspective, then, offers a way of approaching ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions that remain difficult to address by more conventional means.

The distinctiveness of Pragmatism can be traced back to the originating maxim first articulated by Charles Sanders Peirce in 1878. In this, he suggested that the meanings we ascribe to events and actions in the present moment can be understood entirely in terms of the future consequences that we anticipate arising from these events and actions. This future orientation sets Pragmatism apart from philosophies that account for meanings solely in terms of retrospective interpretations of past experiences.

Pragmatism recognizes retrospection to the extent that it informs what we imagine will happen next, but it is this future anticipation that actually gives meaning to our actions in the present. In this way, Pragmatism acknowledges the constitution of both

agency and structure in social practices, but without privileging either. At the same time, it theorizes the temporal continuity of present moments as both anchored in the past and thrusting into the future. This approach to temporality as a continuously emergent social process of meaning-making invites new ways of engaging with the dynamics of organization.

In addition to these broad defining themes, we have identified four theoretical concepts that are potentially very useful to organizational scholars. These four concepts, 'experience', 'inquiry', 'habit' and 'transaction', are mutually informing and interdependent aspects of all social practices. Unlike the everyday notion of experience as the knowledge gained from doings, the Pragmatist use of this term relates very specifically to the dynamic relationship between knowledge (or meaning) and action in the conduct of the living present. Inquiry is the social process of critically reflecting upon and questioning the taken-for-granted order, which is every bit as relevant in day-to-day conduct as it is in more specialized forms of knowledge production, such as scientific work. Habit is seen as the predisposition to act in certain ways; inquiry is stimulated when these habitual ways of acting prove inadequate for any given situation. Habits are what makes it possible to live within society, but importantly, the Pragmatists did not see habits as rigidly fixed. Indeed, it is the mutability of habits that admits the possibilities of creative change in social practices. And finally, transactions are the site where the interplay between experience, inquiry and habit is continuously explored and regenerated across all levels of the social system.

We have demonstrated the use of these four Pragmatists concepts in the context of organizational learning, suggesting that this field is an obvious target for some fresh theoretical thinking. In particular, we chose to take a closer look at the work of Argyris & Schön because they claimed Pragmatism as the point of departure for their theory of organizational learning. We suggest, however, that they have not fully embraced the potential of Pragmatism as their work continues to reflect dualistic distinctions between knowledge and action, and individuals and organization. These constraints limit the extent to which their theory can accommodate the creative as well as the socializing aspects of learning. We then extended our argument to show that Pragmatism offers tools that are much needed in contemporary organization theory. Using Weick's theories of organizing and sensemaking to illustrate our argument, we proposed that the Pragmatist formulations of continuity, transactional engagement, and reflexivity offer useful ways of further developing organizational scholarship.

Ultimately though, organization and management studies is an intensely practical domain where practical problems demand practical solutions. To paraphrase Kurt Lewin, we suggest that there's nothing so practical as a good philosophy that provides the intellectual tools to challenge assumptions and to understand issues in new and deeper ways. From its inception, Pragmatism has always been a very practical philosophy, although we acknowledge that its diversity of ideas has created difficulties for scholars who might wish to come to grips with it. Nevertheless, a slow trickle of papers informed by Pragmatist thinking is beginning to emerge in the organizational literature (e.g. Cohen, 2007; Locke *et al.*, 2008; C. W. Weick, 2008), which we see as a positive sign for future developments. What is needed now is

concerted effort to develop methodologies that are true to the principles of Pragmatism, and which can better inform empirical inquiries into the practical problems of organization as a dynamic and emergent process of meaning-making. The experimental, instrumental and anticipatory aspects of Pragmatism as a lived and living philosophy offer a rich vein of inspirational themes, which in our view, will reward further exploration and elaboration in the field of organization and management studies

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