Abstract for Conference: From “Practice Turn” to “Praxeological Mainstream”?

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The “practice turn” has engendered a diversity of perspectives on social theory, research and methodology. This includes both diverse characterizations of practice and the inclusion of a range of constitutive aspects or dimensions of practice. We focus on the latter. Our aim is to account for the ontological, epistemological, axiological and hermeneutic dimension of practice. We do so without treating any one of them being posited as either derived from others, nor being privileged as prior to, or more fundamental than any other. While abandoning a univocal or fundamental stance, we hold that a heterogeneous integration is neither arbitrary nor merely eclectic because these different dimensions must function together as complementary explanatory tools in developing accounts of social settings robust enough to support theory, research and intervention.

Skipping over a vast field of diversity and specificity, we choose to summarize our account of practice in three broad premises. The first, at the same time the most obvious and most far-reaching, is the primacy of interventionism. This is the insight that reality – that is the environment that we live and move about in and that rubs and brushes against us from all sides, and that we overwhelmingly experience as ‘out there’, largely independent from ourselves - is a product of our ongoing practical engagement with the world (Cook and Wagenaar, 2012; Law, 2009, 1). The second premise concerns temporal emergence. This is the insight that the constraints and affordances of the outer world only come to us through our experience of them in emergent time. The significance of temporal emergence is that two key elements of a practice account that are necessarily connected to each other in the sense that they bring each other into being - time and experience - are folded into it. The third premise regards the interpenetration of the human and the material in the way we act on, and understand, the world (Pickering 1995; Pickering and Guzick 2008). We develop these dimensions of practice as explanatory tools of understanding supportive of research, assessment and intervention, not as ontological, positivist or foundational claims about the “objective” character of practice.

Our account of practice in this paper builds upon our earlier work (Cook and Seely Brown, 1999; Wagenaar and Cook, 2003; Wagenaar, 2004; Cook and Wagenaar, 2012; Wagenaar and Cook, 2012, Wagenaar, 2011; Wilkinson and Wagenaar, in revision). We develop our current work by organizing it around a number of large policy cases. The one we present here concerns administrative reform and citizen participation in the city of The Hague. For almost two decades the city has formulated and implemented a series of experiments and innovations that are aimed at involving a range of
stakeholders in the governance process in the city. The case is interesting because it involves a diverse and changing roster of actors, different rationales, and a wide range of interventions aimed at addressing a multiplicity of problems that are framed in different ways. Although from a distance we discern a certain consistency in the succession of reforms in that they are all aimed at creating collaborative forms of government, they are not designed, steered, or imposed by a central authority. Neither can they be described as one, unified program or project, but rather as an ongoing stream of interventions, which develop partly by design, partly by way of improvisation. In our practice account we try to account for the dispersed, decentered nature of this process of administrative reform. We are concerned with how specific elements of knowing, context, values and meaning have informed the decentered practice of administrative reform in The Hague.

**Literature.**

Cook, S. and Seely Brown, J. (1999), Bridging Epistemologies; the Generative Dance between Organizational Knowledge and Organizational Knowing. *Organization Science*, 10, 4: 381-400


