Pragmatism: A philosophy of practice

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Short Bio:

Barbara Simpson is Professor of Leadership and Organisational Dynamics at Strathclyde Business School in Glasgow. Her PhD in Management, which was awarded by the University of Auckland in 1998, marked a sea change from her earlier career as a physics-trained geothermal scientist. Nevertheless, traces of this past experience remain evident in her work today, which brings the principles of action, flow, and movement to bear on the processes of creativity, innovation, leadership and change. She has pursued these interests in diverse organizational settings including hi-tech businesses, professional firms, public utilities, arts companies, SMEs and micro-enterprises involved in the manufacture of plastics and food products. Her current research is deeply informed by the philosophies of the American Pragmatists, especially George Herbert Mead's thinking on process and temporality. She has published her work in journals including Organization Studies, Human Relations, Organization, R&D Management, and Journal of Management Inquiry.

Pragmatism: A philosophy of practice

The word 'pragmatism' is commonly used in the English language to denote the practicalities of just getting on and doing what the situation demands. It seems to invite easy compromise, short-term expediency, and taking the path of least resistance without the encumbrance of theoretical principles or values. In the context of research, it has often been used to imply an anodyne alternative that might be adopted when there appears to be no clear paradigmatic preference to guide the process of inquiry; in effect, it is presented as philosophically neutral, a 'non-philosophy' that skims over the surface rather than trying to resolve ambiguities in any of the assumptions underpinning different research questions and approaches. This is a vulgar conception of pragmatism that offers little reason for confidence in any knowledge claims that it may produce. By comparison, Classical Pragmatism[1], which is the subject of this chapter, is a thoroughly elaborated philosophy that accounts for the social experience of living and working together. As philosophies go though, it is unusual because it rejects formalisms and abstractions in favour of a genuine concern for how our worlds continuously unfold through our collective efforts to cope with the day-to-day exigencies of modern life. Pragmatism thus has considerable potential to inform those aspects of business and management research that are concerned with the dynamics of human and social practice.

The beginnings of Pragmatism can be traced to intellectual movements that were emerging globally in the mid-nineteenth century (Bernstein, 1972). These were exciting times when

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[1] Henceforth I will signify this specifically philosophical meaning with an initial capital letter, Pragmatism

new developments in science, such as Darwin's (1859) theory of evolution and Maxwell's (1865) theory of electrodynamics, were firing the imaginations of scholars across all disciplines, opening up new ways of thinking about the "blooming, buzzing confusion" (James, 1890 [1952], p. 318) of our world. It was a time of great flourishing, not only in philosophy and science, but also in the arts and literature. Pragmatism arose in the particular context of post-Civil War United States of America. It proposed radically different ways of thinking about the future, the lives that citizens would live, how they should be educated, how they could give voice to their views, and how they might engage in political processes. Democracy, education, liberty and justice were the central planks of the original Pragmatist movement, and arguably they still remain at the heart of contemporary culture in the USA (Menand, 2001). However, it is also fair to say that the reach of Pragmatism now extends far beyond its geographic origins, as a living philosophy that addresses human practice in any situation, regardless of its cultural or historical context.

As with any movement of thought, the precise origins of Pragmatism are buried in the myriad conversations amongst intellectuals of the day. However, four key contributors are generally recognised: Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead. They most certainly knew each other and discussed each other's work, but it was never their intention to form a 'school of thought' called Pragmatism. The differences between them were considerable, leading to a certain amount of ridicule amongst the philosophers of their day. For instance, Lovejoy (1908) claimed to have identified 13 distinct interpretations of Pragmatism from his own limited reading of Peirce, James and Dewey, while Chesterton (1908, p. 62) complained that if pragmatism "is a matter of human needs … [then] one of the first of human needs is to be something more than a [P]ragmatist". On closer examination though, there are numerous threads that tie these Pragmatist

philosophers together as a coherent group (see the list of classic Pragmatist readings provided at the end of this chapter). They were all concerned with the effectiveness of thinking/doing, where in their view, thinking and doing are as inseparable as two sides of the same coin. They developed a future-oriented instrumentalism that starts from doubt, and proceeds through an experimental attitude of inquiry to construct emergent futures. At the same time, they were reformist intellectuals committed to the improvement of society. Both Dewey and Mead worked with Jane Addams, another recognised Pragmatist from this period, on the Hull House project. This exemplary model of the settlement-house movement was directed towards improving the lives of workers in the rapidly industrialising city of Chicago by promoting activism at the local level. To support this agenda, they developed a method of participatory democracy, which they described as a community of inquiry (Shields, 2003).

Commentaries on Pragmatism often map out a 'rise, fall, and rise again' pattern that saw these ideas relegated to dusty bookshelves by the mid-twentieth century, but then re-emerging in the neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty (1980) and his student, Robert Brandom (1994). Whilst this narrative undoubtedly reflects the rise of analytic philosophy and the subsequent linguistic turn in social theory, it neglects developments in Pragmatist thinking that were ongoing throughout the twentieth century, as evidenced in works as diverse as those by Blumer, Cooley, Follett, Lewis, Miller, Rescher, Schiller, Sellars, and Thayer, to name just a few. Today, Classical Pragmatism, which is distinguished from Rorty's linguistic neo-pragmatism by its attention to the situated doings, rather than just the sayings, of practice, continues to develop as a living philosophy (see for instance Aboulafia, 2001; Bernstein, 2010; Joas, 1993; Rosenthal, Hausman, & Anderson, 1999; Talisse & Aikin, 2008)

that is continuously on the move. It is futile, therefore, to try to pin down a definitive

definition of exactly what Pragmatism is; it is perhaps better understood as a celebration of

pluralism that offers a multiplicity of enticing options for researchers who are seeking more

dynamic and more processual ways of engaging with their research contexts and questions.

Doing full justice to all of this rich diversity is an impossibility, especially within the

constraints of a book chapter such as this, so in what follows I will attend specifically to

those elements of Pragmatism that I have found most useful in my own research in the

business and management domain. This is very much a personal perspective that is in no

way intended to preclude alternative takes on what Pragmatism has to offer; indeed, I

would encourage others to mine their own interpretations from this philosophically rich

vein. I begin in the next section with an analysis of where Pragmatism 'fits' in relation to

other philosophical positions that commonly appear in the social sciences. I then go on to

tease out a set of six inter-related theoretical concepts that have potential to directly inform

the study of organisational and management practice as thinking/doing. The chapter

concludes with a brief survey of how Pragmatism has already been used in some of the

disciplines of business research.

The philosophical dimensions of Pragmatism

The underpinning assumptions that characterise Pragmatism may be summed up as a

radical commitment to a non-reductive naturalism, which is anti-foundationalist, anti-

dualistic, and emergent. From this perspective, we are always already active in the natural

world, so the meanings that we attach to life are never independent of our own actions and

collective histories, and neither can they be reduced to entities that have any independent ontological reality. William James (1912 [2006]) argued that empirical engagement with a world that is in continuous motion entails direct experience gained through immersion in the situation of concern, unmediated by theoretical constructs or abstractions. It is continuity in the flow of experience that, in his view, defines the reality of nature. He contrasted this with the rationalist tendency to partition experience into discrete and unconnected things, which produces a static snapshot of the world in an instant of time. For James, a radical empiricist attitude "must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system.*" (1912 [2006], p. 20, italics in original). This emphasis on continuity and process is a unifying theme in Pragmatist thinking, albeit that individual writers express and explore it in their own unique ways. Pragmatism may thus be subsumed under the umbrella of process philosophy, which is an area of growing scholarly interest in organisation studies (Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, & Holt, 2014).

An immediate corollary to this naturalistic view of a world-in-process is the rejection of foundationalist assumptions about knowledge as ultimately founded on justified beliefs and immutable laws of nature. For researchers working from a reductive perspective, these laws are understood as essential building blocks that permit truths to be revealed about the complexities of nature. However, if nature is perpetually evolving, not only can there be no enduring laws, entities, nor indeed any other pre-determined stabilities, but also there can be no beginning nor end point to the process. Nature is then understood in terms of the

dynamic inter-plays between its co-evolving aspects, where both the whole and the parts are in continuous, co-constructive engagement. The particular insight that the Pragmatists bring to this evolutionary dynamic is to understand the continuity of nature not as a mere product of history, but also as a function of what we anticipate may happen next. In other words, we make bets on how the world will be tomorrow, and it is these bets that shape our actions today (Menand, 2001). This idea was first articulated by Peirce in what has come to be accepted as the original Pragmatist maxim:

> "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." (1878, p. 293)

In an ever-changing, probabilistic world then, far from being the immutable facts proposed by Descartes, the beliefs that guide our actions are our best guesses, or bets, about how things will turn out if we act this way or that. Whereas rationalists assume a strong teleological view in which outcomes are largely pre-determined, Pragmatists adopt a more fallible, short-term, non-intentional teleology that blends outcomes and actions as co-evolving aspects of a world-in-process (Simpson, 2009). By rejecting the philosophical claim that knowledge must have foundations, Pragmatism challenges the epistemic principles that are commonly used to describe how knowledge may be objectively grasped and represented (Talisse & Aikin, 2008). It offers instead a view of knowing as a social and situated accomplishment that both shapes, and is shaped by the lived experience of knowers; in other words, epistemology and ontology cease to be distinct philosophical categories.

Dualisms distinguish between two epistemological categories of nature that are seen as mutually excluding opposites. For instance, Descartes' distinction between mind and body and Aristotle's separation of practical action (praxis) from scientific reasoning (theoria) are examples of dualisms that have profoundly influenced Western philosophy. Also in the social sciences, dualisms such as micro and macro, individual and collective, change and stability, art and science, are all well established. The making of such distinctions is, of course, an essential function of language, but when a linguistic clarification becomes fixed as a habit of thinking, the world is reduced to a set of bounded entities, which at best offer a greatly simplified representation of the objects and ideas, the 'things', that constitute meaning. The anti-dualistic stance in Pragmatism is a critical response to this 'thingification' of lived experience in a world-in-process. Dewey in particular took up this cause, reworking and refining his arguments throughout his long working career. For instance, in his early critique of the reflex arc, Dewey (1896) challenged the familiar stimulus and response dualism in psychology. Using as an example a child reaching out to a burning flame, Dewey protested that an analysis which starts with the sensation of light as a stimulus, which then elicits the response of grasping the flame, which in turn results in a burning sensation that stimulates the response of withdrawing the hand, and so on, provides nothing more than "a patchwork of disjointed parts, a mechanical conjunction of unallied processes" (1896, p. 358). In his view, the stimulus/response dualism slices across the dynamic unfolding of the situation, reducing it to a contrived series of discrete and static instants in time. He offered an alternative perspective in which the movements of sensory-motor coordinations are taken to be ontologically prior to both stimulus and response, so it is these movements that reveal the empirical qualities of experience. In order to capture unfractured continuity then,

rather than defining 'things' in dualistic terms, Dewey conceived them as unfolding and interweaving histories, or trajectories, that are made manifest within the possibilities afforded by any given situation (Dewey & Bentley, 1949[1960]). 'Things' may then be re-conceptualized as performative adjustments within the ongoing flow of practice.

Pragmatism's commitment to continuity calls for ways of theorising practice as a never-ending process of transformation that weaves stability and change together into some sort of unified but ephemeral fabric. Stability and change are not conceived here as alternative, or competing 'pictures' of the world, but rather as complementary tools that work together to facilitate action. It is in their interplay that novelty emerges and situations are transformed, and without emergence there can be no possibility of emancipation or social improvement. This notion of emergence as fundamental to the Pragmatist project is most clearly evidenced in Mead's thinking about the function of creativity in evolutionary processes (see Joas, 1996). Mead set out firstly to counter classical foundationalist assumptions that for emergents to appear in an evolutionary process, they must have been immanent from the outset, and secondly to challenge vitalist assumptions that emergence implies mysterious forces at play. For him, creativity emerges in the social dynamics of practice. It is when we figuratively stand in the shoes of someone else, "taking the role of the other" (Mead, 1934, p. 254) that we reflexively realise alternatives for further co-operative action; and equally it is when different past and future trajectories interact in the present that new directions emerge as turning points, or qualitative changes in the flow of action (Simpson, 2014). Practice is thus conceived as a social and improvisational process that is accomplished within the spatial and temporal dimensions of living contexts. Mead's unique contribution to the Pragmatist understanding of emergence lies in his radical

departure from classical ideas of time in order to develop a social temporality in which trajectories of movement are works in progress, continuously re-constructed in the activities of social engagement (Garud, Simpson, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2015).

The picture I have painted here of the philosophical underpinnings of Pragmatism, although resonating comfortably with the lived experience of practice, is nevertheless quite distinct from more familiar 'paradigms' of research. What then is 'real' from a Pragmatist perspective, and how can we know this reality? Putnam (1990) argued that Pragmatism's ontological commitment is constructed within conceptual frameworks, the continuing relevance of which is dependent upon their pragmatic value in guiding our best bets on what will happen next. Thus although no description of the world can be inherent in nature, it can still matter to the extent that it serves human interests and purposes. It is inevitable that what serves as real will emerge over time and as situations vary, which in turn challenges conventional notions of causality. Putnam coined the term 'pragmatic realism' to capture the non-reductive pluralism of this mild form of realism, and its capacity to accommodate the continuity of emergence. He was at pains to emphasise though, that pragmatic realism does have explanatory significance in the day-to-day unfolding of practice, so it must not be dismissed as unfettered relativism.

To appreciate the philosophical differences implied by a Pragmatist approach to research, it is helpful to compare it to other approaches commonly used in the business and management domain. Burrell and Morgan (1979) mapped out what they saw as the range of possible paradigms available to organisational analysts. They used a 2×2 matrix that differentiates between Functionalist, Interpretive, Radical Humanist, and Radical

Structuralist paradigms, each of which is defined in terms of its own unique combination of ontology, epistemology, assumptions about human nature, and methodologies. In the intervening years, this matrix has been widely used by researchers as a philosophical positioning tool, but it is also increasingly criticised as an over-wrought and incomplete image of the world, one that privileges modernist assumptions about the nature of reality at the expense of more postmodern sensibilities in research. Although Burrell and Morgan did locate a number of different theoretical approaches on their paradigm map (see 1979, pp. 29-30), they did not include Pragmatism in their original analysis. Given, however, that their framework is based on two dualistic distinctions (between Objective and Subjective, and between Regulation and Radical change) and a representational rather than a performative logic of inquiry, it is difficult to see any possibility of a fit for Pragmatism, with its anti-foundationalist and anti-dualistic orientation. This lack of fit invites researchers to liberate themselves from the constraints of Burrell and Morgan's framework in order to appreciate other philosophical perspectives that may be more sensitive to the postmodern problematics of continuity and flow (Chia, 1995).

Some key concepts in Pragmatism

In the preceding section, I have laid out the distinctive philosophical features of the Classical Pragmatist project. I now turn to examine six theoretical concepts in Pragmatism that I have found useful in the empirical study of practice in business and management – Abduction, Inquiry, Habit, Social Selves, Gestural Conversation, and Trans-action. The presentation of each of these as a discrete concept must, however, be understood as a purely heuristic

device; in practice they are better understood as inter-weaving and co-constructing

dynamics.

Abduction

Much of Peirce's writing on Pragmatism was concerned with eliminating ideas that are

doubtful or unclear, and clarifying ideas that may be difficult to apprehend (Peirce, 1965:

Vol 5, para 206). As part of this process, he proposed abduction (sometimes also known as

retroduction) as an inferential logic that complements and extends deduction and induction.

It is, he argued, the process of forming an hypothesis to explain a given situation; abduction

is a creative leap, "an act of insight" that "comes to us like a flash" (1965: Vol 5, para 181). It

is the only conceivable source of novelty in thinking/doing as it suggests the possibility "that

something *may be"* while "Deduction proves that something *must* be [and] Induction shows

that something *actually is* operative" (1965: Vol 5, para 171, italics in original). Peirce

illustrated the syllogistic differences between these three logics using the example of a bag

of beans (1965: Vol 2, para 623):

Deduction	Rule	All the beans from this bag are white
	Case	These beans are from this bag
	∴Result	These beans are white
Induction	Case	These beans are from this bag
	Result	These beans are white
	∴Rule	All the beans from this bag are white
Abduction	Rule	All the beans from this bag are white

	Result	These beans are white
	∴Case	These beans are from this bag

Here the logic of deduction proceeds from a general rule (all the beans in this bag are white) to the prediction of a particular outcome (these beans are white), while inductive logic works in the opposite direction, drawing a general rule from particular observations. By contrast, abductive logic lacks the certainty of deduction or induction; rather it brings new insight by suggesting a possible explanation for observed events (these beans are [may be] from this bag). Whilst deduction and induction are adequate inferential tools for a world that already exists, the emergence of a world-in-process cannot be accounted for without the logic of abduction. Returning to Peirce's original Pragmatist maxim, the practical effects that any object may have are anticipated abductively as hunches, or bets that we place on the future. "[I]f we are ever to learn anything or to understand phenomena at all, it must be by abduction … every single item of scientific theory which stands established today has been due to Abduction" (Peirce, 1965: Vol 5, paras 171-172).

Peirce likened abduction to detective work, which depends not only on observing the fine details of the situation, but also on formulating plausible explanations for these details. "I perform an abduction when I so much as express in a sentence anything I see. The truth is that the whole fabric of our knowledge is one matted felt of pure hypothesis confirmed and refined by induction. Not the smallest advance can be made in knowledge beyond the stage of vacant staring, without making an abduction at every step" (Peirce quoted by Sebeok & Umiker-Sebeok, 1988, p. 16). The skill of the detective, as exemplified for instance by Sherlock Holmes, is to gather many small observations and to abductively infer their

possible consequences within this ever-changing fabric of knowledge. By testing each of the logical components of an hypothesis one at a time, the detective meticulously reduces the uncertainty of the situation. It is precisely this reduction of doubt that Peirce saw as necessary if we are to "make our ideas clear" (1878). Within the domain of business and management research, the importance of abductive logic has been recognized in generating new theory (Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008) and indeed, as a critical element in all scientific reasoning (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). Whilst it is not a research methodology in its own right, abductive logic is always required when researchers seek explanations for the unexpected and surprising events in their experience (Agar, 2010). To the extent that practice is understood as emergent then, the inherently creative concept of abduction is what links practice to theory (Joas, 1996).

Inquiry

For Peirce, 'inquiry' is a process that is initiated when there is doubt, and completed when this doubt is resolved. It is a learning process in which meanings are reconstructed in the continuously evolving relationship between practice and context. Doubt signals some sort of deficiency in the continuity of practice/context, which in turn invites the generative action of inquiry. Whereas Peirce saw it primarily as a logical process for clarifying ideas, Dewey took the concept of inquiry much further, developing it as an existential, rather than merely cognitive process that transforms what he called 'the situation', which is the whole set of conditions out of which actions emerge, into something new. "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], p. 108). He maintained that inquiry is pervasive

in all human experience. "In everyday living, men examine; they turn things over intellectually; they infer and judge as 'naturally' as they reap and sow, produce and exchange commodities" (1938 [1986], p. 106). The difference between common sense inquiry and scientific inquiry is, in Dewey's view, simply a matter of their respective subject matters; both, he argued, share the same basic structure of inquiry. It is valuable then, for us as researchers to delve deeper into what this structure is.

Inquiry begins with doubt, which is experienced as an existential unease, or a felt sense, that arises when our bets on what will happen next prove to be inadequate. The first phase of inquiry involves finding an explanation for this sense of unease by structuring it as a problem of some sort. In this sense, inquiry precedes more familiar 'problem-solving' processes or techniques, for which the problem is given at the outset. Using abductive logic, explanatory hypotheses are inferred; their veracity is then tested using deductive logic; and finally inductive logic confirms that the hypothesised relations are indeed at work. Thus from beginning to end, inquiry is grounded in the temporal unfolding of practice. All three of the inferential logics, abduction, deduction, and induction, are here involved in a continuous interplay that produces what Dewey called 'warranted assertions', a term that acknowledges the tentative nature of all knowledge as it is continually challenged in emerging situations. This understanding of the provisional nature of knowledge is a clear rejection of 'spectator' epistemologies that seek certainty by locating the observer in a fixed position outside the flow of action. Rather, the researcher is invited to plunge in as a participant in the emerging inquiry. In contrast to much of the contemporary advice on research methods, which advocates either an exclusively deductive, or inductive, or sometimes even a purely abductive approach, inquiry offers a more comprehensive

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understanding of human experience and practice in which all three logics of reasoning are engaged. It is the interplay between these logics that gives inquiry the dynamic potential that has been recognised and valued by business and management scholars working in organisational learning (Elkjaer, 2004), experiential learning (Miettinen, 2000), and in routines theory (Cohen, 2007; Winter, 2013).

Habit

Every inquiry involves habits of action that function as both a resource and an outcome of the process. It is habits that allow us to anticipate what will happen next, and they guide us in taking actions appropriate to the current situation. The "what next of chief importance is the one nearest the present state of the one acting ... Now the thing which is closest to us, the means within our power, is a habit" (Dewey, 1922/1957, pp. 36-37). In theoretical terms, habits are commonly thought of as automatic reflexes that require no conscious thought; they are seen as mechanical, recurrent, and predictable patterns of behaviour that are idiosyncratically individualistic; and once established, they remain as permanently fixed features of an individual's conduct. Defined in this way, it is difficult to integrate the notion of habit into the dynamic continuity of inquiry as an emergent process. The Pragmatists, and once again particularly Dewey, set about re-defining habit as altogether more fluid, more lively, and more social than the commonly-held understandings. For them, habit is not a mechanical response to a given stimulus, but rather it is an acquired and mutable predisposition to act in certain ways in certain situations; it is "an attitude of response" (Mead, 1938, p. 3), not a rigid prescription for action. As such, habits are only ever loosely teleological, never fully determining how practice will unfold. In addition, they are

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themselves continuously modified as they are re-assessed in the moment-by-moment situational contexts of inquiry.

Although this is a very different interpretation of 'habit', Dewey preferred to continue using this term, arguing "we need a word that expresses 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" (1922/1957, p. 31). A crucial feature of the Pragmatist view is that habit is an inherently social concept. Habits are not immaculately conceived; they are acquired as we engage with other actors in a variety of situations that influence both our own, and others' choices about what to do next. Dewey argued that the customs and institutions of society exist not as agglomerations of 'individuals' habits'; they arise because our predispositions to act are both formed and exercised in situations that are always already social. This active quality of habit provides a basis for moral society, where the values embedded in habits are always open to reflexive revision and cultivation. From a Pragmatist perspective, the values we live by are warranted not by pure reason, nor by external fiat, and neither are they intrinsic to nature, but rather they arise in human conduct and the choices we make about what to do next. For Dewey then, if society is to thrive, it needs an education system that develops an experimental habit of mind to foster the critical intelligence required to respond in ever-changing circumstances.

Social Selves

It should, by now, be apparent that the Pragmatists were not seeking to theorise at either individual or collective levels of analysis. Indeed, they rejected this dualistic form of thinking

in favour of a more holistic and dynamic approach that sees individual selves and their social situations as inseparable in the continuity of just getting on with living. In his social psychological theorising, Mead (1934) developed this idea of selves as ineluctably social by considering the self not as a discrete identity nor even a suite of interchangeable identities, but as a social process in which the conscious mind progressively unfolds and becomes manifest. "It is absurd to look at the mind simply from the standpoint of the individual human organism; for, although it has its focus there, it is essentially a social phenomenon; even its biological functions are primarily social … We must regard mind, then, as arising and developing within the social process, within the empirical matrix of social interactions" (1934, p. 133). He argued that it is only through the social dimensions of living that we can become conscious of the self, because it is only by participating in social situations that we are able to stand back and see the self through the eyes of others as an object located within the social process.

Mead further elaborated this notion of 'the self as social process' by invoking two different aspects of the self, which he called the 'I' and the 'me'. Here he does not construct the 'I' and the 'me' as dualistic opposites on a common dimension of 'selfness'; rather they should be understood as a duality; that is, two completely different ways of experiencing the self. This distinction between dualism and duality is crucial to the Pragmatist project; whereas dualisms are epistemological phenomena that arrest the continuity of process, a duality identifies two ontologically different orientations that are incommensurable (Dewey, 1917). For instance, a common duality in the business and management literature is the distinction between ostensive and performative (or structure and agency) perspectives, where the ostensive view seeks to represent reality, while the performative view enacts reality in practice (Latour, 1986). This same distinction is evident in Mead's presentation of the 'I' and

the 'me' as different aspects of the self (1934, pp. 173-178). He described the 'me' as the embodied habits of conduct that have been accumulated through social engagement, where habit is understood in the predispositional Pragmatist sense as mutable and acquired through experience. This is the objective, ostensive aspect of self, which is accessible as an object of deliberate, reflexive examination. The 'I', on the other hand, is the spontaneous, performative response of the self to the present moment. It is an anticipatory gesture that may either reinforce the habits of the 'me', or introduce novel alternatives. Whatever the consequences generated by the 'I', these ultimately may become embedded in the habits of the 'me'. In the process of inquiry both the 'I' and the 'me' are involved, with the 'I' introducing the abductive logic of what might be, and the 'me' reflecting the inductive logic of what is. "The self is essentially a social process going on with these two distinguishable phases. If it did not have these two phases there could not be conscious responsibility, and there would be nothing novel in experience" (Mead, 1934, p. 178). It is in the interplay between the 'I' and 'me' then, that both selves and situations emerge.

Gestural conversation

The vehicle for this interplay, Mead argued, is ordinary everyday conversation, in which signs and symbols including spoken and written language, are used as communicative gestures in the ongoing construction of social meaning. Every such gesture anticipates a response by in some way participating in the other, by taking the other's role, or by standing in the other's shoes; the response that is then called out is itself another anticipatory gesture. It is in the to-and-fro of gesture and response that we not only come to a clearer idea of the world-in-process, but we also develop the capacity for collaborative action. "[T]aking the rôle of the other, an expression I have so often used, is not simply of passing importance. It is not something that just happens as an incidental result of the gesture, but

it is important in the development of co-operative activity. The immediate effect of such rôle-taking lies in the control which the individual is able to exercise over his own response" (Mead, 1934, p. 254; see also Mead, 1925). The consequences of this control thus ripple out across social situations while at the same time diffracting the rippling effects of other conversations. In Mead's view, community can take on "an institutional form" (1934, p. 167) by means of "the generalized other" (1934, p. 154), which is the attitude of a whole social group. This is what allows an individual to participate in the attitudes held in common in a community or organization. For instance, Mead gives the example of players in a baseball game for whom it is not sufficient to anticipate the moves of individual players; they must also be able to assume the attitudes of the whole team in order to improvise together in a coordinated way as the play proceeds. Without the generalized other, there is also no possibility for internalised conversations of gestures to occur, and thus no opportunity for abstract thinking. "And only through the taking by individuals of the attitude or attitudes of the generalized other toward themselves is the existence of a universe of discourse, as that system of common or social meanings which thinking presupposes at its context, rendered possible" (1934, p. 156). It is clear then, that for Mead the gestural conversation must not be reduced to a purely inter-subjective, micro-phenomenon; rather it is the motive force in the processes of building communities, institutions, and societies.

Taking the role of another, whether this be a specific other or a generalized other, admits the possibility of at least temporarily standing in different shoes and experiencing the current situation differently. It is in perceiving differences between self and other that doubt arises, and this in turn may trigger a process of inquiry. For Mead, the experience of simultaneously occupying two different roles, or frames of reference, is a necessary requirement for any event to be considered social. He coined the term 'sociality' to describe

"the capacity for being several things at once" (1932, p. 75). This capacity appears not only as an ability to simultaneously occupy different standpoints, but also it has a temporal dimension, which Mead described as being "betwixt and between the old system and the new" (1932, p. 73). Thus doubt may also be triggered when we are confronted with changing situations where the old and the new are not in sync. By weaving temporality into the conversational dynamics of sociality, Mead has constructed a comprehensive theory of practice that focusses on relational movements across time and space.

Trans-action

In this final phase of my selective review of the complex jigsaw of Pragmatist thinking, I turn to the 1949 book that John Dewey co-authored with Arthur Bentley, late in the careers of both of them. They were interested in exploring differences between the various ways in which action may be theorised. In particular, they recognised trans-actions as philosophically distinct from inter-actions (see also Emirbayer, 1997; Simpson, 2016). For them, 'inter-action' refers to a dyadic mode of engagement that is characteristic of the modern, rational, Western world. It describes movements in terms of "particles or other objects organized as operating upon one another" (Dewey & Bentley, 1949[1960], p. 73) in a controlled environment that is independent of any wider context of space and time. This is a mechanistic image of action in which outcomes are produced by forces that act between objects, but which also leave the objects themselves unchanged. The game of billiards is the classic image of this form of action, where balls can influence each other's movements but remain unchanged in their own essential nature. By contrast, Dewey and Bentley's notion of 'trans-action' engages with the world-in-process by privileging flow ahead of 'objects' or 'things', which are always necessarily provisional and tentative. They sought a holistic account of lived experience such that "'thing' is in action, and 'action' is observable as thing"

(1949[1960], p. 123). For them, trans-action is "unfractured observation—just as it stands, at this era of the world's history, with respect to the observer, the observing, and the observed" (1949[1960], p. 104). Here the actor is continuously emergent within the flow of the integrated whole, which is itself emerging. Some interpreters of Mead's 'conversations of gestures' have treated this dynamic in inter-actional terms (e.g. Blumer, 1969), but his thinking is actually better accommodated by a trans-actional understanding of the relational and processual movements of meaning-making. Trans-action suggests a post-modern sensibility (Chia, 1995) that demands new ways of thinking and talking about experience and practice. In Dewey and Bentley's view, any effort invested in developing these new ways will be worth it, because it will open up the types of questions that are increasingly central to researchers today.

For example, although Pragmatism has often been criticised for its neglect of issues of power and authority, a central concern of business and management scholars, the inter-action / trans-action distinction does invite some new ways of thinking about this perennial problem. The inter-action model represents the commonly accepted view that the force to act resides within specific individual entities, whether these be billiard balls, CEOs, political leaders, top-performing companies, or dominant nations. This force to act is expressed as "power over" (Follett, 1996, p. 103); that is, more powerful entities exert power over others. Power then, is an attribute of individuals that may be acquired and possessed. By contrast, the trans-actional view is always already saturated in power, which is then manifest in the changing movements of flow as socially coordinated actions emerge. Here, power is in the situation rather than in individuals, and is itself constantly morphing as an expression of coactive "power with" (Follett, 1996, p. 103). "Our task is not to learn where to place power; it is how to develop power … Genuine power can only be grown, it will slip

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from every arbitrary hand that grasps it; for genuine power is not coercive control, but coactive control. Coercive power is the curse of the universe; coactive power, the enrichment and advancement of every human soul" (Follett, 1996, p. 119). The function of management development then, is less to develop specific attributes in specific managers, and more about building the habit of working together as situations evolve.

Pragmatism in business and management studies

In the preceding section I have mapped out just a few of the theoretical concepts that are encompassed within the scope of Pragmatist thinking. This breadth of vision has been taken up and continues to be developed in numerous disciplines including philosophy, education, jurisprudence, public administration, social theory, and political science, but surprisingly its impact in business and management studies remains muted. It does appear occasionally as a source of conceptual inspiration in sub-disciplines such as strategy (Powell, 2001, 2002), operations research (Ormerod, 2006), innovation (Nooteboom, 2012), creativity (Adler & Obstfeld, 2007; Arjaliès, Lorino, & Simpson, 2013), new product development (Carlile, 2002), ethics (Martela, 2015; Wicks & Freeman, 1998), gender studies (Rumens & Kelemen, 2010), routines (Cohen, 2007; Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013; Winter, 2013), human resource management (Watson, 2010), and also in the philosophical underpinnings of sensemaking and organisational learning (Elkjaer & Simpson, 2011). At the same time, scholars are increasingly seeking better ways to engage process and practice-based views in areas such as strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski & Paul Spee, 2009), organisational knowing (Nicolini, Gherardi, & Yanow, 2003), leadership-as-practice (Raelin, 2016), and entrepreneuring (Steyaert, 2007), all of which call for more performative ways of working that can better engage with the flexibility and creativity of living organisational experience (James, 1912 [2006]; Latour, 1986; Lorimer, 2005). Whilst Pragmatism clearly offers an appropriate and

useful way of approaching the dynamics of human conduct in social situations, there are still questions to answer about how to develop more relevant theories of organising, and how to conduct empirical work that engages more fully with the performative dimensions of social practice.

Recent theoretical developments include an article by Farjoun, Ansell, and Boin (2015), which outlines an approach to new theory development that focusses specifically on Dewey's (1922/1957) book, 'Human nature and conduct'. In so doing, the authors have acknowledged there is a task of translation to be undertaken in bringing Dewey's ideas alive in the domain of organisational theorising. Their argument is that through its recursive logic and commitment to the emergent ephemerality of 'things', Pragmatism offers a fresh perspective on the dynamics of change and complexity in organisations, which is both richer and more realistic than alternative accounts drawn from rationalist and structuralist theories. To illustrate this point, they demonstrated how Pragmatist concepts may be used to address specific challenges in the organisation studies literature such as the agency/structure problem, and the boundary problems associated with defining conceptual categories. However, they also acknowledged that Pragmatism has even greater depths that as yet remain unplumbed by those organisational scholars questing for more dynamically-informed theoretical ideas.

Whereas theoretical concepts offer ways of framing inquiries into the thinking/doing of situations, Pragmatism goes beyond this to seek a synthesis of theory with the radical empiricist possibilities of practice. It is in engaged practice that performative meanings are brought to life, shaping the ongoing continuity of social action. Empirical work in this performative tradition requires a close re-examination of all of the usual methodological

assumptions that we bring to bear in doing qualitative research, and in particular, it urges us to go beyond the static classifications and foundational assumptions of representationalism. In my own work, I have approached this problem by exploring the specific concepts that I have developed earlier in this chapter, but as sensitisations that influence my inquirer's gaze rather than as reductive theoretical constructs for elaboration. So for instance, Philippe Lorino and I have investigated the performance and implications of routines in the practical context of a manufacturing business that had recently introduced a computer-integrated manufacturing system (Simpson & Lorino, 2016). We accounted for an unfolding series of events by tracing the emergence and transformation of habits in a socially and temporally extensive process of inquiry. We identified the abductive turning points in this inquiry, probed the conversational dynamics of thinking/doing, and revealed the trans-actional engagements amongst the various actors, both human and material. Taking this approach allowed us to expand our thinking beyond the well-known surface features of Pragmatist philosophy to demonstrate how it actually works in practice, in particular developing more performative understandings of the particular situation of our inquiry. These understandings are, of course, embedded in the wider domain of Pragmatist thinking/doing, but they are given greater clarity by a sensitisation to key Pragmatist concepts.

Pragmatism's value to business and management studies is its particular resonance with questions relating to practice and process, where the field is still wide open to new inquiries and fresh insights. In my view however, the potential for Pragmatism to inform practice research and management education is likely to remain fragmented and indistinct unless researchers are willing to engage a fresh methodological orientation that genuinely invites a theory/practice synthesis. In writing this chapter, I hope to invite adventurous inquirers to dive in and explore more of what Pragmatism may have to offer.

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