

Re-making Jobs: Enacting and Learning Work Practices

Oriana Milani Price, Hermine Scheeres and David Boud, University of Technology, Sydney

Abstract

This paper takes up understandings of organisations where practices constitute and frame past and present work, as well as future work practice possibilities. Within this view, work practices, and thus organisations, are both perpetuated and varied through employees' enactments of work. Using a practice lens, we are particularly interested in the ways workers simultaneously maintain and alter practices in their workplace—we characterise this as re-making one's job. This perspective challenges ways in which managers often depict jobs and everyday work—as rational, linear and easily describable. We suggest that workers at various levels of responsibility contribute more to the formation of organisational practices than is often assumed. The processes of re-making jobs and remaking organisational practices create tensions that we posit as sites for learning. This paper addresses these issues through a focus on work practices in two Australian organisations that have been undergoing significant cultural change.

In this paper we explore what happens to particular kinds of organisational practices when new workers are employed to enact them. We draw attention to the kinds of things these workers do to work out what their jobs entail. In considering this working out, we highlight points of tension between workers' enactments of their jobs and existing organisational practices. We propose that these points of tension are potential sites for individual and organisational learning. In working out how to do their jobs, the new workers in our research are, we maintain, engaged in re-making their jobs. The jobs that these workers were appointed to do were formally described and represented in organisational documents including job descriptions and organisational charts. Thus, they had been established and defined within the possibilities of already existing organisational practices and understandings. However, at the same time these workers brought their own understandings of the required work, and had to work out how to work in their new context. The ways in which these workers talked about how they enacted self-generated job construction demonstrated an impact on organisational practices, suggesting that this re-making of jobs contributes to the re-making of organisational practices. We understand this re-making of jobs to be the site where the simultaneous perpetuation and re-making of organisational practices occurs.

In the first section of this paper we consider the significance of taking up a practice approach in conducting our current research. We begin by briefly discussing the 'practice turn' and proceed by outlining the work that a practice approach has enabled us to do. In

the second section the work of Schatzki (2005, 2006) is highlighted. We take up Schatzki's understandings of practice and use these to frame the findings of our research. In the third section, we explore some of the elements of the individual and organisational learning literature in relation to a practice approach to learning. In the fourth section, we outline our methodology and our analysis. In the fifth section, our discussion, we outline some of our research findings. We begin our discussion by first outlining two key practices that characterise the organisations we researched. Next, we examine how these practices have been taken up alongside other existing organisational practices. Through the experiences of new workers charged with the implementation of key organisational practices, we bring into focus the ways in which workers come to work out and re-make their jobs. Finally, we describe the points of tension that occurred as workers re-made their jobs, and suggest how these intersections and tensions construct practices that can be sites for individual and organisational learning. We conclude this paper with implications for further research.

The Utility of a Practice Approach

The 'practice turn' has been named to highlight a contemporary shift in theorising about social phenomena, including organisations (see for example Schatzki (1996, 2005, 2006), Schatzki et al. (2001) Gherardi et al. (1998, 2000), Nicolini et al. (2003), Kemmis (2005)). It brings to the fore conceptions that all human activity including 'knowledge, meaning, science, power, language and social institutions' (Schatzki et al. 2001, p. 11) are part of and constitute the 'field of practices' (p. 11). In doing so the 'practice turn' steers clear of theoretical dualities (for example, individual/social; structure/agency etc.) grounding thinking and theorising in practices as the 'primary building block of social life and meaning' (Boud and Lee 2006, p. 47; Schatzki et al. 2001). Those using a 'practice' approach generally agree that practices are 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organised around shared practical understandings' (Schatzki et al. 2001, p. 12).

The usefulness of a 'practice' approach to this research in particular and to organisational studies in general, is in providing a meso level of analysis, that is, one that interconnects the individual and the social. In framing organisations as 'bundles of practices and material arrangements' (Schatzki 2006, p. 1863) or 'systems of practices' (Gherardi 2000, p. 215) a practice approach positions the worker, the social context of work and the organisation as mutually produced, where knowing and doing cannot be separated (Gherardi 2000). By using a practice approach to understand our data, we have been able to focus on the mutual production occurring in the organisations under investigation. This has enabled us to uncover ways in which worker and organisational understandings of practices become shared, enmeshed, carried forward and at the same time re-made. In constituting learning as integral to practice, a practice approach has enabled us to understand this re-making of jobs and organisational practices as a site of individual and organisational learning. In the next section we take up Schatzki's (2005, 2006; Schatzki et al. 2001) notions of practice and organisations to frame our research findings.

Organisations as 'Practice-Arrangement Bundles'

Schatzki (2006) understands organisations as 'bundles of practices and material arrangements' (p. 1863) that persist and frame past, present and future possibilities. Organisations are seen as encompassing existing and altered practices that entwine people, technology and spaces where practices occur. Practices are described as consisting of elements of both structure and action. Structure includes understandings of the 'how to' of a practice, the rules, possible ends and goals as well as more general understandings. Action is about the carrying out of a practice. The already existing practice structures that encompass organisations frame action possibilities. Practice structures frame and sustain a practice by impacting on the material arrangements of that practice as it exists in the context of organisation. Practices are understood to be carried forward within the practice memory of an organisation and by workers enacting those practices (Schatzki 2005, 2006; Schatzki et al. 2001).

For Schatzki, organisational practice memory encompasses understandings, rules, ends and projects as elements of practices that exist even when practices are not being carried out. These persisting rules, ends and projects are often captured in organisational documents, history and infrastructure. In this way organisational practice memory is described as existing beyond the aggregate memories, interpretations and understandings of workers. In their enactment of organisational practices workers carry practices forward and at the same time vary those practices in some way. This is because, whether consciously or unconsciously, workers carry with them understandings of similar practices from other contexts (e.g. previous jobs, prior experiences and/or knowledge). In enacting organisational practices, workers' understandings of those practices (structure-action elements) become enmeshed with previous understandings of similar practices from other contexts— in this way practices are perpetuated and at the same time varied (Schatzki 2006).

The idea that practices persist and frame organisational possibilities while at the same time become transformed, is also discussed by other writers. For example, Kemmis (2007) describes practitioners' understandings of their practices as 'already shaped by a historical consciousness...ways of living that have already preceded them' (p. 5). Change in practice not only requires changes in the actions of the practitioners but also changes in the 'extra-individual features of a practice' (p. 8)— the social and cultural elements. Similarly, Habermas (2003) drawing on the work of Heidegger, writes of people as 'historical and social beings... always already in a linguistically structured lifeworld' (p. 10). Finally, for Gherardi (2000) practice is 'always a product of specific historical conditions resulting from previous practice and transformed into present practice' (p. 215). This transformation results from both the way our world is and has been constructed and experienced by ourselves, others and our own present doings. In taking up the idea of practices having social and historical dimensions that go beyond the immediate context, practices can be considered as transcending any one worker or any one organisation.

The transcendence of practices beyond any one worker or organisation, suggests that practices may be the social thing that connects organisations and helps us understand

what organisations are. According to Schatzki (2005), organisations are interconnected with other organisations in ‘nets of practice-arrangement bundles’ (p. 479). These nets can include markets, governments, competitors or any other entities that constitute an organisation’s operating environment. Change in practices within any one element of these nets can have a rippling and often unpredictable effect across other interconnected parts. Following Schatzki, we propose organisations as complex understandings and enactments that are not easily describable and which are often messy and unpredictable. We suggest that changes in organisational practices are mutually constituted by the organisation’s contextual circumstances (internal and external) and workers’ readings and enactments of those circumstances. This perspective on organisations challenges linear, rational and top driven descriptions of organisations, jobs and change, which are often used by managers and presented in management manuals and textbooks. We suggest that views of organisations as described in documents such as organisational charts, job descriptions, performance management and procedural systems, though useful and probably necessary as starting points in modernist organisations, nevertheless construct work as too easily captured and described. Further, the learning involved in becoming and ‘being’ a worker or an organisation implicated in linear and rational models of jobs and organisational practices, also often appear as clear and definable. We propose that the enmeshments of practices and enactments that constitute organisations, present much more complex sites for individual and organisational learning. In the next section we provide a brief overview of how we understand learning.

Sites for Learning

For Schatzki (2006), learning is viewed as a crucial element in the perpetuation of organisational practices. As practices persist and impact upon past, present and future enactments and possibilities, these are understood as impacting on what is learned, how it is learned and by whom. Through ‘teaching and transmitting’ (Schatzki 2006, p. 1868) and by workers describing, examining and questioning, the contextual characteristics and interrelationships among practices that are embedded in organisational practice memory, are learned from others in the organisation. This transmitted practice knowledge is not simply replicated. Rather, different workers attain different understandings about organisational practices. These different understandings occur ‘due to differences in [workers] training, experiences, intelligence, powers of observation and status’ (Schatzki 2005, p. 480). It is these different understandings that contribute to the simultaneous perpetuation and variance of practices. Similarly, some others, writing from a practice perspective, understand learning as ‘co-present’ (Gherardi 2000, p. 214) in everyday organisational practices and suggest that it is through participation and co-construction of everyday work practices that workers learn. As workers interact to create shared meaning and understanding, they ‘acquire-knowledge in-action’ (Gherardi 2000, p. 214) and at the same time they re-produce and change that knowledge in some ways (Contu and Willmott 2003; Gherardi et al. 1998; Weick and Roberts 1993). Thus, not only are organisational practices perpetuated and at the same time varied or re-made through worker’s enactments, but also the knowledge embedded within them is reformed.

In considering the individual learning/organisational learning relationship, Cook and Yanow (1993), maintain that learning moves from individual to collective through

changes in organisational procedures, structures and routines. Others suggest that organisational learning occurs when ‘actors reflect on their practices ... to understand the connections between determinants, action and outcomes’ (Dragonetti et al. 2005, p. 6). Using Schatzki’s (2005, 2006) idea that practices are embedded in organisational practice memory and that knowledge is embedded in practices, it follows that changes in practices also change practice knowledge. As new practices (and associated practice knowledge) are embedded in organisational practice memory— organisational learning may be understood as occurring.

From the brief comments on learning presented above, we take up a number of ideas. First, workers co-construct organisational practices and create shared meaning and understandings of those practices—they learn the how-to, the contextual characteristics and interrelationships of practices. At the same time, we suggest that organisational practices (as embedded in organisational practice memory) play a role in framing what is learned, how it’s learned and by whom. Second, as workers acquire knowledge of organisational practices, they, at the same time, re-produce and change that knowledge in some ways. These re-productions and changes in knowledge occur because workers carry with them different understandings, knowledge and experiences from other contexts. These different understandings not only can contribute to the simultaneous perpetuation and variance of practices, but also to changes in the knowledge embedded in them. We propose that as new knowledge about organisational practices becomes embedded in organisational practice memory, organisational learning ensues. In the sections that follow we introduce our research in more detail. We outline our research project, the research sites, methods and analysis and present our findings.

Researching Practices in Two Australian Organisations

Our interest in organisational practices is related to a current Australian Research Council project, *Beyond Training and Learning: Integrated development practices in organisations*. The focus of the project is work practices, in particular, organisational practices that facilitate learning. We understand these organisational practices as those practices within organisations that are: (i) independent of formal training programs and not defined explicitly in terms of training or education; (ii) managed and implemented by people whose primary job function is not training or learning; and (iii) deployed for purposes of achieving outcomes other than learning, but that carry within them learning of some sort (Chappell et al. 2009; Price et al. 2007). In this paper we explore a worker-generated integrated development practice (IDP)— re-making one’s job—in the context of newly introduced organisational practices in two of the four organisations we are exploring.

The two research sites discussed in this paper are public sector organisations: a community education college (henceforth the College) and a local council (henceforth the Council). Our intention in selecting these research sites has not been to undertake a comparative study. Rather we have sought to discover the range of IDPs that occur across the organisations, and the various ways in which they are deployed and experienced by workers. One similarity that emerged between the two research sites during our analysis is that workers at both the College and Council talked about having undergone a period

of externally imposed organisational changes.

The College is a community sector organisation located in the inner city suburbs of the city of Sydney. It provides community and adult education, ranging from adult literacy, language, business skills and computing courses to weekend hobby courses. The College employs ten full time employees, ten casual employees and over three hundred sessional tutors. The management structure of the College has few hierarchical levels. The Principal is responsible for the day-to-day management of the College and reports to the College Board. Reporting to the Principal are three Faculty Managers, the Customer Service Manager, the Bursar and a Marketing and Promotions Manager. These managers lead small work teams comprising of both full time and casual employees. The Council is a large local council in the Sydney metropolitan area. Local councils represent the third layer of government in Australia and are responsible for service provision and governance at a local community level. The Council provides a vast number of diverse services to its local community. These include the provision of library and community services, road maintenance, waste collection, building development assessments, parks and community centres as well as health and regulatory services. The Council employs approximately six hundred employees. The Council's structure is hierarchical, with the General Manager overseeing all operations across four divisional groups. Reporting to the General Manager are four Group Managers who are responsible for the day to day running of specific parts of the Council's operations. Within each division the structure includes a Group Manager, business unit manager, team leaders and workers. The General Manager reports to the elected Council. The elected Council comprises twelve politicians who are either independent candidates or affiliated with a political party. The role of the elected Council is to make strategic policy decisions.

Exploring Workers' Experiences of Work

The research methods of our project include semi-structured interviews, observations and analysis of organisational documents. Forty semi-structured interviews were conducted with workers across hierarchical levels and functions of the two organisations under discussion. All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. We carried out approximately 20 hours of observation of work practices and took field notes. We analysed organisational documents including annual reports, business plans, policy and procedure documents and job descriptions from both organisations. The semi-structured interviews have enabled a focus on the re-told experiences of workers as they enacted and extended a number of newly introduced organisational practices. The document analysis has enabled us to understand the formalised descriptions of these organisations, the practices and the jobs within them. The data generated from these methods enable various accounts of practice and jobs to emerge. Observations of the worksites were carried out prior to and after the interviews allowing us to understand further the work of the organisations and of the work and worker practices. These gave us a 'feel' for each workplace.

Working Through Organisational Documents and Workers' Experiences

We analysed a number of organisational documents. These included annual reports, business plans, policies and procedural documents from both organisations. Through the document analysis we were able to build our understanding of the contexts within which each organisation was operating. We ascertained the priorities for each organisation, the image each was attempting to portray to its stakeholders, the espoused values and ways of operating. We also examined more specific documents pertaining to jobs and roles for employees including job descriptions, performance appraisal documents, promotions information and more general descriptions of work practices. We combined these understandings with data generated from our observations.

The analysis of interview data involved a number of steps. As the interview data was initially captured using a digital recorder, all interview recordings were transcribed. The first step then involved reading all transcripts once to identify the major IDP related themes that emerged from each interview. Once this was completed, our second step involved drawing together themes and describing them in relation our understandings of IDPs. We then re-read the interview transcripts while listening to the recordings of the interviews. In this re-reading/re-listening step of our data analysis, we re-confirmed the major themes that emerged from each interview as well as identified new ones that extended our notions of IDPs. We worked throughout on how we could represent the work of people and organisations as practices using the theoretical ideas we were developing. The data discussed below are from one integrated development practice that we have named 're-making one's job'.

Understanding 'Re-making Jobs' as 'Re-making Organisational Practices'

In this section we discuss what is emerging from our data in relation to how new workers know what do in their jobs and the ways in which these workers come to understand and enact organisational practices. We begin by describing the context within which the College and the Council are operating, including how recent cultural changes have been taken up within each organisation. Secondly, we discuss the ways in which a significant feature of this change—new practices of customer service and commercialisation—have been introduced at the College and the Council respectively. We explore how these new practices have been introduced alongside existing practices. We then focus our discussion on the practice of re- making one's job, by drawing on the experiences of new workers charged with the implementation of the customer service and commercialisation practices. We highlight the ways in which these new workers, in working out how to do their jobs, have been re-making their jobs and at the same time re-making the organisational customer service and commercialisation practices. We conclude our discussion by drawing attention to tensions that have occurred in the enmeshment of re-made jobs and perpetuated and re-made organisational practices. We describe these tensions as sites of individual and organisational learning.

The College and the Council as Practice-Arrangement Bundles

Both the College and the Council have been subject to significant cultural change. These changes have occurred in the industry contexts to which the College and the Council are connected. As a result, understandings of what it is to be a contemporary community and public sector organisation have been reframed for both organisations. For the College, changes in the State Government funding, reporting and evaluation structures have meant that in order to continue operating, the College has had to develop new ways of working. These new ways of working have included the implementation of an operating model built around quality accreditation (Australian Training Quality Framework), seeking sponsorships and offering marketable courses to attract profits (Traynor 2004). Unlike other community colleges in New South Wales, the College has been successful in the execution of these changes (note that success here refers particularly to the prevailing political agendas). This success has been demonstrated in a number of ways. Firstly, in the College's ability to continue operating in surplus, while other community colleges have been amalgamating or ceasing operations. Secondly, in the College's ability to generate sufficient profits and re-invest these profits in the provision of community and equity programs.

For the Council, the application of the New South Wales state government 'New Public Management' (NPM) reforms of local government organisations have significantly altered the parameters of operation. In response to the NPM agenda the Council has chosen a path of frame-breaking reform. This kind of reform has been described as 'revolutionary, decentralised, transformational' change (Jones 2002, p. 45). At the core of this reform has been a major restructure and the creation of a new division focused on for-profit service delivery. The creation of a new for-profit service delivery division has led to new modes of operation across the whole of the Council. Unlike other local government organisations, the Council has been one of the few local government organisations to successfully implement major NPM reforms (note that success here refers particularly to the prevailing political agendas). This success has been described as the Council's ability to implement reforms while at the same time strengthening its financial position and continuing to meet increasingly complex community expectations. We explore these changes in more detail in the section that follows. We discuss the ways in which new organisational practices that have resulted from these externally imposed organisational changes have been implemented within these organisations. Specifically, we discuss the ways in which customer service and commercialisation have been implemented within the College and the Council respectively. We draw attention to the ways in which these newly introduced practices are bound by the practices already existing within these organisations.

New Practices at the College and the Council

New operating models around customer service and commercialisation have spawned new practices in both organisations and these practices have had an impact on all workers in some way. The application of these practices within both the College and the Council has not simply reflected the private sector models from which they were drawn. Rather, they continue to be re-made by new and existing workers. At the same time this re-

making is framed by the existing practices already embedded in the College and the Council. In discussing the introduction of customer service practices we draw from data generated from interviews with workers at the College, while in discussing the introduction of commercialisation practices we draw data from interviews conducted at the Council.

In our initial interview with George the College Principal, there was much talk about changes that had been occurring within the community education sector. George understood these changes as driven by the New South Wales state government's agenda, which sought to move community colleges towards a more self-funded operational structure. These changes in funding and reporting structures have had an impact on the ways in which education provision is understood within the adult community education sector and within the College. George talked of these new understandings as a shift from the:

“...old authoritative approach to education...to a customer approach...that was a big change... a constant challenge for us...to make sure that we focus on the quality of what we do...to meet the customer or student expectations”

In response to the need for a self-funded operational structure, the College has introduced a greater proportion of marketable (full fee) courses to its course offering mix. Alongside the course offering changes, the College has also initiated an array of operational changes. To reformulate its image an extensive internet and marketing presence has been established. This has been achieved through the development of an interactive website and glossy new promotional materials featuring all course offerings. Second, to cater for the expansion in course offerings, a number of new sessional tutors have been employed and a new permanent venue to house design and technology courses has been established. To meet the new funding criteria the College has achieved accreditation in line with the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQFT). Finally, underpinning these operational changes and the new image of the College has been the application of a customer focused approach. George talked of how the application of the customer focused approach has been consolidated with the introduction of customer service practices and the establishment of a “...complete customer service team”.

Within the Council, the New South Wales state government NPM agenda is reflected in the introduction of private sector commercial practices. The establishment of a For Profit Service Delivery (FPSD) subsidiary has been described as the most significant step towards the take-up of private sector commercial practices at the Council. Ron, the Council's General Manager, described the FPSD division as a:

“...stand alone service delivery organisation ... bidding for work outside ... that basically puts about one and a quarter million dollars on the bottom line ...so it is run very much as a commercial operation”

The follow-on effect of the creation of the FPSD subsidiary has been major restructuring across other divisions of Council. The restructure resulted in the establishment of three new divisions, the Corporate Governance (CG), Ecologically Sustainable Community

(ESC) and Service Commissioning and Contracts (SCC) divisions. The role of SCC division is to manage all contractual relationships for the delivery of services to the local community. In particular the creation of the SCC division is necessary in order for Council to manage a new kind of operational relationship with the FPSD subsidiary and other contractors. Where in the past services were initiated and delivered by Council directly, the application of commercialisation practices has required that all services delivered become contestable in the market place. This has meant that the newly established FPSD subsidiary must compete with other commercial providers and be awarded contracts by the SCC division in order to deliver services on behalf of Council. In the context of commercialisation, the relationship between the SCC division and the FPSD subsidiary is no longer an internal operational relationship but rather one that is managed through the establishment of commercial agreements.

The establishment of the Customer Service function at the College and the SCC division at the Council has occurred through the drawing together of existing and new practices. These newly linked practices may be said to represent understandings of customer service and commercialisation practices at a point in time in the College and Council histories. These new understandings have been developed within the possibilities of the already existing practices and are being captured and embedded in the College and Council organisational practice memories. Ways in which old and newly introduced practices are combining have emerged from our initial analysis of the changing discourses in organisational documents. For example, in the College handbook course participants are referred to and named in different ways. These namings include 'student,' copying the term used in policy documents prior to the introduction of customer service practices, and 'customers' or 'clients' following the references in later documents such as the College's customer service charter (Price et al. 2007). Similarly, examples of coming together and embedding, have emerged from our analysis of Council's planning documents. In successive Council operational planning documents we have noted a shift from more traditional community-focussed local government discourses to business-oriented discourses. In these organisational documents, Directors have become Group Managers, departments have become business units and so on. These discourses both reflect and construct understandings of an organisation's work and employees' jobs.

One strategy that both the College and the Council have instigated to facilitate the shift towards new workplace practices has been through the recruitment of new workers. When Emma joined the College, she had had extensive experience in customer service roles within the private sector. Emma described her work experience as corporate, and she saw this as having made her 'very business focussed'. Ron joined the Council after having had more than 20 years experience as a marketing executive in the private sector. He described the Council's expectations of him in his job as Group Manager of the SCC division as:

“... bring[ing] the commercial world into local government... they were changing the direction of this ship and they weren't going to do it with somebody that had steered similar ships in the past.”

Both Emma and Ron were recruited from outside the industry sectors to which the

College and the Council belonged. In the case of these new workers, it appears that a crucial determinant in their appointment to their jobs has been their extensive work experience in the practices that their new organisations were initiating. They demonstrate their embodiment of these practices in how they positioned their new jobs in their ‘business’ talk. These workers were seen to have the capacity to bring with them understandings and knowledge useful to the College and the Council in the application of customer service and commercialisation practices. We explore in more detail how these new workers have worked out how to do their jobs. In particular, we draw attention to the ways in which they have perpetuated and at the same time varied the customer service and commercialisation practices of their organisations. Our focus is on the ways in which these new workers in re-making their jobs contribute to the re-making of organisational practices.

Perpetuation of Practices, Re-making Jobs, Re-making Practices

At the College, Emma was appointed to the Customer Service Team Leader position. Her duties and responsibilities were communicated to her in formalised organisational documents including her job description. In these documents, Emma was charged with the implementation of customer service practices. As Customer Service Team Leader, Emma was responsible for the day-to-day operations of a small team of workers who answered telephone enquiries and processed course enrolments. In leading the customer service team Emma talked of how she took these organisational descriptions of her job as a starting point, but at the same time brought into the College understandings about customer service practices she had developed from other work contexts. In describing her initial period within the role of Customer Service Team Leader, Emma talked of how she reconciled the differences in what she understood to be customer service practices and the already existing customer service practices of the College.

“... I saw a need for increasing the customer service [because there wasn’t] a lot of customer service focus [within the College]”.

Emma talked of how she saw opportunities for extending the College’s practices by: “... looking at customer service from every angle” and described one of the ways in which she communicated and achieved this change was by:

“... put[ing] together a package for [George—the Principal] to look at a role that managed the whole of Customer Service, so all the off site stuff, managing all the casuals...increasing the customer service training of staff...pushing every limit...the title of Customer Service Manager which I kind of made up myself because there wasn’t that job before”

‘Put[ting] together a package’ entailed drawing on 15 years experience of customer service practices together with an appraisal of the organisational context— its current practices and its new goals and so on. What Emma engages in is the perpetuation of existing practices, for example ‘managing all the casuals’ while at the same time varying them by ‘increasing the customer service training of staff’ in order to bring into being customer service practices that fit with the College’s quality directions. The

processes involve re-making her job—notably recognised as such in the job title of Customer Service Manager, which Emma creates for herself.

At the Council, Ron was appointed to the Group Manager SCC position. Not unlike Emma, Ron's duties and responsibilities were communicated to him in formalised organisational documents including his job description. In his job as Group Manager SCC, Ron was expected to drive Council's commercialisation practices throughout his division, by 'directing and controlling of Service Delivery Contracts' (SCC Group Manager Job Description, Council, 1999). Ron talked of how he had permeated what he understood to be commercialisation practices within the SCC division. Ron described the SCC division as 'a totally new role in local government', and, rather than simply focusing on 'directing and controlling service delivery contracts', he took these formalised descriptions of his job as starting points. Ron told of how he took a marketing approach in his job as SCC Group Manager and focused on becoming a product and service manager:

“...Here, nobody knew, literally, nobody knew [what all of Council's services were]...One of the first things we did was actually put together a list of our products, and I think we came up with something like 126... the work silos was perfect for local government, and so, that's one of the things we've broken”

Through his job, Ron introduced new understandings of the ways in which Council's products and services were to be managed. He shifted silo-based operational practices towards commercial service management practices. The existing Council practices of commercialisation became enmeshed with Ron's understandings of commercial service management practices developed over his 20 years in the commercial sector. Ron re-made his job and the practices of the Council. During our interview with Ron, he also described how he was continuing to re-make his job and Council's practices to be more in line with those of a commercial enterprise in his current job of General Manager. He described how, by drawing on his previous experience in the private sector, he had been reconciling the financial management practices of a General Manager with those he understood to be the financial management practices of a CEO in a commercial enterprise. Ron redefined the parameters of his current job as General Manager to have direct control over the financial management and re-made the budget practices of the Council. He talked of how as General Manager, he was:

“very uneasy with having people like finance in [FPSD subsidiary of Council of which access and control could only be exercised through contractual arrangements]... if you're going to run an organisation, the manager, the CEO needs to have direct contact with the [Accounting and Finance function]—so I brought Finance back... our budget process... used to take two and a half months... it's now done in 3 weeks”

What has been revealed by both Emma and Ron is that in perpetuating the practices of their organisations and enmeshing their already existing understandings of those practices, these new workers have challenged the textualised descriptions and understandings of their jobs. In working out what their jobs are and how to do their jobs, in enacting the practices of their new organisations, these workers have been re-making their jobs. We

use the term re-making because the jobs that both Emma and Ron had been appointed to had been established within the possibilities of the already existing organisational practice memories and understandings of the College and the Council. In re-making their jobs and the practices of customer service and commercialisation, Emma and Ron have not had carte blanche. Rather, this re-making has been framed within the possibilities of already existing and persisting practices embedded in the organisational practice memories of the College and Council. Both Emma and Ron have been negotiating between their understanding of customer service and commercialisation and the already organisationally embedded understandings of customer service and commercialisation. These negotiations surfaced tensions between the potentially re-made jobs and re-made practices, and the already existing and persisting practices of the College and Council.

Emma described these tensions as things she encountered everyday in her work with others at the College:

“...I am pushing it, continually pushing it... sort it out, I think that there’s a need [to question existing practices and thinking] but also a limit [to how much can be questioned and challenged]”.

Similarly at the Council, Ron described tensions he had experienced between existing and new practices when he attempted to enact a commercial approach in his dealings with the elected Councillors. In the new context of commercialisation, the Councillors were expected to enact the practices of a private sector Board of Directors. These new practices required Councillors to disengage from micro operational issues and focus on corporate outcomes and strategic policy decisions. Yet, when Ron attempted to work with the Councillors in these new ways—drawing on the ways he had previously worked with corporate boards—he found this new approach difficult and constrained because the elected Council is:

“...much more disparate, less focussed on a corporate outcome [than corporate Boards], but that’s just the nature of the beast”.

We found these kinds of tensions surfacing in the ways in which other workers talked about the re-made practices of customer service and commercialisation. At the College, one of the Faculty Managers, Fred, described the tensions between the new practices characteristic of customer service as delivered in a business context and the existing College practices of providing education services. Fred understood these as:

“... a competition between two discourses if you like ... here there are people who think we are running a business...they ignore the structural difference between a community college and a small business and see a community college as a small business... they don’t really understand education ... whereas other people understand that fully and see that [education] as being the whole raison d’etre of the organisation ... to provide equitable accessible education ... because the College Council is made up of people with both of those views...and the staff are made up of people with both of those views... both of those views are put forward and you know... inevitable tension”

Similarly, at the Council the tensions between the work practices of being a local government organisation and being a local government subsidiary competing in the commercial world were highlighted by Kirk the Group Manager of the FPSD subsidiary. Kirk told of how the application of commercial practices was constrained by the Council's existing reward and remuneration practices:

“...it's been more difficult [to apply commercial practice in some competitive service delivery areas] ...we have got award employees on award conditions working award hours [and we give our people] good employment conditions which often is not reconcilable in terms of the competitive environment...”

We understand these tensions, produced by the coming together and enmeshing of re-made jobs, re-made practices and already existing practices as not necessarily destructive. Rather, what our data shows, is that these points of tension can be re-viewed as sites of individual and organisational learning. We explore the ways in which learning is implicated within these tensions in the next section.

Tensions as Sites of Learning

The tensions between re-made jobs, re-made practices and already existing practices that have emerged from this research implicate learning both on an individual and organisational level. We begin with individual learning that has been occurring at the College and at the Council. For new workers like Emma and Ron much learning has been about context. Both Emma and Ron, in working out their jobs, questioned and examined the existing practices of their organisations. In re-making her job as Customer Service Manager, Emma told of how she had been learning to adapt new customer service management strategies in response to the existing practices of her new work context:

“...because I am corporate background and very business focussed, I am very black and white especially with staff, you know three strikes you're out... here it's a lot more softly approach there's a lot more community and I am adapting”

Similarly, coming from the private sector, Ron talked about how when he first joined the Council he 'knew nothing about local government'. Ron learned about this new work context and industry, and this learning enabled him to become the natural successor for the General Manager's position. As Group Manager of the SCC division, Ron drew from his previous experiences of “running \$160,000,000 company...” but soon learned that with the context of the Council, commercial practices such as raising funds by increasing prices are constrained by Government legislation:

“[Council] is not flush with money... [And it] can't put...price[s] up other than the rate cap [imposed by State Government], which is 3%, and that the award increase is 3% every year, so anything that comes in goes straight out... [and unlike in the Corporate world, Council] ... can't generate funds... by adding new products...or get market share by promoting, going interstate or exporting...”

We found that at the same time as new workers like Emma and Ron had been re-making their jobs and the practices of their organisations, existing workers had also been learning.

The learning for existing workers has been about the new directions and practices and how to enact these as practices within their jobs. At the College, in re-making her job to Customer Service Manager, Emma became responsible for a group of workers who were Site Coordinators at the College's geographically dispersed teaching venues. The Site Coordinators were an existing team of workers who attended the leased venues while courses were being conducted. In their original jobs these workers had been expected to: "sit at the venue and open [prior to the classes commencing] and close it [at the end of the night]". In re-making the existing practices of customer service to encompass the jobs of the Site Coordinators, Emma shifted the work practices of the Site Coordinators and re-defined these jobs to include a focus on customer service. Emma described this shift as creating tensions between old and new and required the Site Coordinators to learn about and become "customer service... representing the College". These tensions and new learning were highlighted by Zorro, one of the Senior Site Coordinators who demonstrates his struggle with competing discourses in his paradoxical statement:

"I'm not the customer mentality... I'm the community mentality...people who pay money to do a course you're not a customer...you're a student...it's a bit hairy...because they are a customer and the customer is always right..."

In learning new directions and how to enact them, Emma described the Site Coordinators' response to the practices as mixed—some "like it and some [not]". However, since the introduction of the approach to customer service practices, Emma was confident that learning was occurring within the Site Coordinator's group. She could see evidence of the new customer service practices being "slowly infiltrated [into existing] processes".

Similarly, in re-making the practices of Council to be more akin to the practices of commercial organisations, Ron described how existing workers, involved in the establishment of the FPSD subsidiary, had been learning about the application of commercial practice through participation in work re-design teams. By participating in work redesign teams, existing workers challenged the current work practices of Council. After reviewing current work practice, workers recognised that "if [the FPSD subsidiary is] going to be competing in the plumbing business, [by doing what we do] at the moment... it's not going to happen". Through the examination of the practices of other successful commercial organisations and questioning Council's organisational practices, these workers developed new understandings about what it meant to become commercial, and the kinds of practices that were necessary in a competitive environment.

Our data also suggests that learning has been occurring at an organisational level within both organisations. Within both the College and the Council new meanings and understandings appear to have become embedded in the organisational practice memories of these organisations. Within the College, customer service practices were being understood as a necessary part of being competitive and attracting students and funding to the College. As an organisation, the College was learning to negotiate the tensions between the new practices of customer service with existing social justice beliefs and practices. Ann, a Faculty Manager at the College described this negotiation as a balancing act:

“ ... the only way you can really do it [negotiate the tensions] is that you can say—without the business side of things there wouldn’t be a community college—and all those equity programs would disappear—and that’s the justification for going down that path”.

Similarly, Kirk described the Council as an organisation that had learned about enacting commercialisation practices and the challenges that competing in the commercial sector creates. He told of how Council:

“...closed up a business last year and ten people were made redundant. After 5 years or 6 years of trying it was a continual battle, one getting the work, two getting to make a profit on it and three getting the money in... there was \$1/2 million owed to us... I had to go out there and really heavy people and... my God is this what it comes to ... the organisation continually changes as a result of those learning experiences.”

We found the tensions between re-made jobs, re-made practices and already existing practices to be sites for both worker and organisational learning. As new workers at the College and at the Council participated in and co-constructed (and re-made) work practices, they learn about the practices and context within which they work. They learn the how-to, the contextual characteristics and interrelationships of practices embedded in the practice memories of their new organisations. As these new workers co-constructed organisational practices and created shared meaning and understandings alongside existing workers, the existing workers have also been learning. As new and existing workers have been learning and enacting the re-made organisational practices, these different understandings not only contribute to the simultaneous perpetuation and variance of practices but they also contribute to changes and re-production of the knowledge embedded in them. As the re-made practices of customer service and commercialisation have shifted existing organisational practices and understandings, these have become embedded with the organisational practice memories (i.e. articulated as new organisational imperatives, described within organisational documents and artefacts and enacted in the doings and saying) of both the College and the Council. We understand these changes in organisational practice memory as constituting organisational learning.

Re-making Practice

We draw a number of tentative conclusions from the research presented in this paper. First, we have provided further empirical support for the organisational phenomenon theorised by Schatzki (2005, 2006)—the simultaneous perpetuation and variance of organisational practices. Further, we have extended understanding of this theoretical work by identifying and describing one way—workers re-making their jobs— through which this simultaneous perpetuation and variance of organisational practices occurs. Both at the College and at the Council perpetuation and variance of organisational practices has occurred simultaneously as workers have enacted the practices encompassed in their jobs. In perpetuating these practices and enmeshing their already existing understandings of similar practices in other contexts, workers within both organisations have been re-making their jobs. In re-making their jobs these workers have

also been re-making the practices of their organisations.

Secondly, in re-making their jobs and the practices of their organisations, new workers within the College and the Council have been negotiating tensions. These tensions are between the re-made jobs, the newly introduced practices and the already existing (and persisting) practices of their organisations. We found these tensions to be sites where both the workers and their organisations are engaged in learning. New workers have been learning organisational practices and reframing their existing knowledge in their new organisational context. Existing workers have been learning new approaches and how to enact these as practices. As old practices have been re-made into new ones and implemented by new and existing workers, new organisational learning is embedded in the organisational practice memories of the College and the Council—organisational learning has occurred within these organisations.

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