A Practice Theory in Practice

Analytical Consequences in the Study of Organization and Socio-Technical Change

Inti José Lammi
Appealing calls are often made towards the study of phenomena through so-called practice theory. However, the implications of the use of practice theory, if taken seriously in analysis, are rarely discussed. The chief concern of this thesis is the applicability of the most radical dimensions of practice theory. By drawing from the key proponent of contemporary practice theory, Theodore Schatzki, this thesis assesses how practice theory can inform empirical analysis and what it can offer organizational studies in particular.

Defining practice theory as an interpretative lens, this thesis proposes a methodology for the study of practices that finds organization in two senses, within practices and between them. Putting such a proposition to the test, a study of socio-technical change at the Swedish Social Insurance Agency is utilized as an illustration of the use of practice theory and how empirical issues tred forth in analysis.

The illustration shows how classical organizational issues are re-imagined by proposing an alternate kind of context, practice as context. Not solely a descriptive effort to grasp what people do, the study presents how doing is explicable by examining the multiple contexts of organizational life. Having defined practices as unfolding phenomena, the practice analysis also presents a moderately processual analysis fitting for the study of material re-arrangement and the re-organization of practices. The distinctiveness of the practice analysis, and the interpretative work it demands, is further demonstrated by comparison with established ways of analyzing activity and organizational phenomena, including such approaches that imagine organizations as cohesive wholes and those that study organizing.

This thesis offers an approach for those who want to undertake empirical research using practice theory, demonstrating its unique possibilities. Such an approach is of interest for those who want to heed calls to attend to the practicalities and materiality of organizations.

Keywords: practice theory, organization, organizing, work, technology, materiality, socio-technical change, methodology, qualitative research, site ontology, public administration
Para mi abuelo, Hernán.
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## Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>TS</td>
<td>Timespace of the Social, Schatzki, T. (2010a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>Being and Time / Heidegger, M. ([1927]1962)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>Philosophical Investigations / Wittgenstein, L. (1958)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSIA</td>
<td>Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Försäkringskassan)</td>
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1. Opening

If we think of a craftsman performing his craft, we would most likely have an active performance in mind, as one involving tools used in order to transform some material into an object. In the performance of the craft, we could imagine tools to have an important role as a means to an end and to be valued in terms of how well they serve as such. While perhaps a master craftsman could use a defunct tool if the situation calls for it, a tool could still be measured in terms of how well it fits the craft in its application.

The relationship between the craftsman and his tool is comparable to the relationship between the social scientist and theory. Social scientists have a couple of tools at their disposal, including methods of data collection and analysis, but they most prominently deal with theory. In contrast to the craftsman, the endeavor of social science could be seen as engaging with theory both as a conceptual tool and as an outcome. There are a great number of theories, and forms of theories, that social scientists draw upon and contribute to in the attempt to explain social phenomena. If compared to the way the merit of the craftsman’s tool is to be seen in its active use, one could similarly pose that the merit of the tool that is theory is to be seen in regard to how it can be used. If it has seen little use or it is not clear what its use might mean, one would reasonably be wary about the potential merit of a particular kind of conceptual tool. I will here pose that this is the case with the idea of practice theory.

Across a variety of disciplines, including organizational studies, there has been a ‘turn to practice’ and to theories of practice. For one unfamiliar with such a turn, or the idea that one can have a theory of what is deemed to be the opposite of theoretical activity – practice – the above might seem quite strange. As we will come to touch upon very soon, practice theory can be understood as one kind of tool for social analysis, and one that challenges the established tools of the craft by not conceptually treating practices parsimoniously. However, as I state here, the call to attend to practice can nevertheless in part be likened to the provision of a tool for the craftsman by asserting its usefulness with little discussion and presentation on how the craftsman ought to use this at all. Ironically, practice theory is not necessarily very practical. To begin with, it is not particularly clear what practice theory is, and what its use even would imply.

In this thesis, I will try to do something different than discussing only the conceptual merit of a particular theory, and instead primarily engage with the

1 It is, after all, the case that organizational inquiry is always dealing with practices, not the very least with the practice of management (Czarniawska, 2015).
question of how it can be used by demonstrating its use. The kind of inquiry in mind is one that similarly touches upon the performance of a craft and the tools involved. We are here interested in what it means in practical terms to engage with a particular theory, to engage with practice theory in practice, in the craft of social analysis. To achieve this end, we will get acquainted with a specific meaning of practice theory, and one that draws on change as a way of attending to practices.

The theory, and conceptual tool, in question is one that has been of importance in defining theories of practice. Through its lens, organizations are seen as constellations of sets of organized activity called practices, which in turn are bundled with materiality (SS, SP). Drawing from this theory, I argue, is to envision and account for the structure of practices, i.e. their constitution, as context of activity and trace how practices interweave with the material to resemble what is commonly referred to as organizational phenomena. Rather than examining formal organization first and foremost, being surprised by the fact that practices might not resemble formal schemata or that matter matters, there is plenty to be found by only directing ourselves to practices. Although resembling an interest in the actions of organizing rather than the stable entity referred to as organization, something specific is meant by practices here. It is not action per se but a way to grasp action. As we will come to see, what is presented here is a specific way to see action and practices, and to speak about these with a certain directedness.

Stating that something specific is meant by practice is to regard that a theory of practice can be something specific with its own kind of interpretative challenges, and that it is a specific tool comparable to other tools available for organizational inquiry. To begin discussing how this is the case, we will first have to start to define what our specific meaning is.

1.1. The vagueness of the notion of practice

It is today not a rare sight to see academic work that draws from ‘theories of practice’ or is referred to as ‘practice-based.’ From the vague mentions of a practical approach in the 1970s in the work of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1979) to the contemporary turn to practice (Schatzki et al., 2001) that has been ongoing for nearly two decades, practice-based work has been pervasive in multiple disciplines of social science. In conjunction with its pervasiveness, it is also a difficult line of work to discuss coherently. Even an examination of books of practice-based studies in the discipline of organization studies can reveal a diverging understanding of what such work entails (e.g. Gherardi, 2012; Nicolini, 2012). In fact, ‘theories of practice’ and ‘practice-based’ work can be described so differently that various advocates for practice-based work can come to diverging conclusions of what such work actually is or ought to be (Miettinen et al., 2009). It is perhaps not entirely unjust to state that there
is a muddled understanding of what an orientation toward practice actually implies, and that it therefore makes little sense in discussing what a practice approach is without further clarifying what is meant by practice. This is specifically the case when one states, as do I, that practice theory is generally underdeveloped and rather unassessed in terms of how it ought to direct analysis. It is a particular form of practice theory that I have in mind in stating this. Before going any further, it is important to first determine what attending to practice implies and clarify the meaning drawn upon in this thesis.

To accomplish this first objective, I begin by going through why scholars have been drawn to the mention of practice and what has been done thus far. This perhaps most notably gives some insight as to why practice matters and is turned towards quite generally, and why this thesis bothers at all with the demonstration of its use. After doing so, we can assess in what sense it can be beneficial to determine how one analyzes that which matters – practices – and why I pose that this has been left unattended to. The idea here is that with some clear idea as to why practices matter, and the role of analysis, one can get a grasp of the problem this thesis tackles. More so, one gets a preliminary grasp of how this problem relates to social science, its use of theory, and how practice theory has the potential to be an analytical tool among others at the disposal of the social scientist.

A major, and perhaps most common, reason as to why some have turned towards practice is the perception that mainstream scholarly work has a tendency to ignore practice, practical affairs, and practitioners. This takes shape in the complaint that scholars have abandoned the study of the practices that make organizations possible, or at least do not pay sufficient attention to these. The practices of workers (Heath and Button, 2002; Orr, 2006), practices of strategy-making (Whittington, 1996, 2006), managerial work (e.g. Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011), and the work that organizations depend on quite generally (Suchman, 1999; Barley, 1996; Barley and Kunda, 2001) are continuously deemed to be understudied or undervalued phenomena. The risk of outdated theories of work and organization, and academic work that is far removed from the concerns of practitioners, has been mentioned in arguments to at least attend to practices empirically. For such a reason, practice-oriented work can be seen as work that wants to focus on practices as empirical phenomena (e.g. Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1240).

Another argument for undertaking practice-based work has to do with the role of technology. The introduction of novel technology in organizational settings has been understood to not only alter technological arrangements (e.g. computer systems and the like) but also to alter the social life of organizations, leading to change that more justly could be referred to as socio-technical change. A so-called practice lens has been appealing for students of organization and technology who specifically state the importance of beginning to include materiality in accounts of social life as a means of assessing what such change might mean (e.g. Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski
The necessity for doing so is the emergence of change in light of the proliferation of modern technology (e.g. Orlikowski, 1996), the risk of giving a skewed understanding of the material requirements of modern organizing (Leonardi and Barley, 2010, p. 3) and the very material consequences of such organizing (Carlile et al., 2013). If one is interested in examining technology and materiality writ large, a means to do so has been to examine the practices that supposedly involve technology in some manner. Underlying this interest is the idea that the effect and role of technology lies in it being involved in practice, as technology in practice (Orlikowski, 2000). This sort of reason to attend to practices is not necessarily based on the idea that practices in themselves have been forgotten, but rather that one through the examination of practices can get to generally underappreciated aspects in organizational studies: materiality and technology.\(^2\)

These kinds of arguments can also be heard in tandem with a more theoretical endeavor that not only attends to practices empirically but also attempts to form a theoretical reconceptualization of established scholarly domains.\(^3\) What I refer to here is the appeal to attend to ‘theories of practice’ as a way to see social life differently. Such motivation might be explained by the perceived limitations of earlier, established approaches in social science. Put in simple terms, early practice theorists such as Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Giddens (1979, 1984) can be said to have criticized two major research traditions: subjectivist, hermeneutical studies and objectivist, structuralist studies. Studies of the former kind, which only focus on actors while primarily concerned with their subjectivity, are criticized for the narrow understanding of an actor’s behavior which comes when one forgoes contextual and material considerations that form the objective conditions of social life. Overly emphasizing actors in themselves, as individuals, bestows an impoverished sense of social life and what such life depends on. Studies of the latter kind, objectivist/structuralist, that instead tend to overemphasize structural properties and primarily engage in studies of aspects ‘beyond practices,’ beyond practical considerations, are disparaged by practice theorists, but for other reasons. Strands of the latter kind of inquiry tend to ignore practical concerns of actors while simultaneously ignoring the actual structuring that goes on through practices. The structures of social life are active accomplishment through practices and do not really exist unless drawn upon

\(^2\) One could, as Latour does, state that it is strange in itself how materiality has been sliced away. In his view, materiality in the sense of nature and the ‘non-social’ has never truly been detached from us although we would like to believe this is the case in modern times (Latour, 1993). In a different form, one would state that organizing has always had a material basis and material consequences (as rebellious philosophers already acknowledged centuries ago).

\(^3\) Or as Giddens stated: ‘a systematic reconstruction’ of social science (1979, p. 240). Incidentally, the mention of Orlikowski (2007) above falls in line with a kind of reconstruction (with a different direction in mind).
in them. From the perspective of practice theorists, an overemphasis on the actor or on the structural conditions tends to miss social reproduction through practices.

Whether it is the actor that is to be understood, or the larger social phenomena, practice is always of essence for practice theorists. The term ‘practice’ is then given a specific meaning beyond ‘what people do’ but is instead where the social happens, not as abstracted but as situated and not as immaterial but as material, by recognition of what participation and reproduction of practices depend on. Theories of practice in different ways stress that practices are the sites where understanding is structured and intelligibility is articulated (SP, p. 12).

Efforts to re-conceptualize subject matter can be more or less radical and are prevalent in a wide variety of social scientific disciplines. One can find studies of climate change policy (Shove, 2010), caretaking practice (Hopwood, 2016), education and pedagogical studies (Kemmis et al., 2013), cultural geography (Maus, 2015), sociology of health (Blue et al., 2016), consumption studies (Warde, 2005; Shove and Pantzar, 2005), and information and library research (Lloyd, 2009), to mention some examples of re-conceptualizations.

In the field of organization studies, we find the spectrum of re-conceptualization to be quite varied. Essentially, what has been sought after is an alternate focus than that provided by studies of individuals detached from the situations of action and/or studies that focus on organizations as static entities. In the study of practice in work and organizing, the relationship between knowledge and practice has been noteworthy for the theoretical endeavor to re-imagine the theoretical treatment of knowledge. Rather than a focus on knowledge as a form of resource in organizations (cf. Grant, 1996), such critique has directed itself towards knowing in practice. An alternate critique has been in regard to the treatment of technology in organizations and the nature of change (Orlikowski, 1996, 2000). Past attention to the topics of organizational knowledge, technology, and change have by students of (organizational) practice been posed as only understandable in regard to the practice in which they matter (e.g. Gherardi, 2000, 2001; Orlikowski, 2002; Nicolini, 2011). These phenomena are not outside practical doing but only manifest insofar as they are drawn upon in practice. More recently, similar lines of reasoning have been evoked with specific kinds of organizational endeavors in mind, such as strategy-making (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007), accounting (Ahrens and Chapman, 2007), and marketing (Schau et al., 2009).

While the theoretical mentions above entail an active drawing from the idea of seeing the social differently, through practice, one ought to be careful in assuming that all efforts of re-conceptualization share in drawing from the same insights. At the cost of the rise of a turn to practice, one also finds a muddled understanding comparable to the jumping onto a bandwagon due to its popularity, with no notable commitment to the study of practice (Corradi
et al., 2010; Miettinen et al., 2009, p. 1313). This implies that what is precisely meant by practice is far from clear and the very reason for evoking the mention of practice can at times be quite contradictory. There are then swathes of work that can share in name but are quite distinct approaches, e.g. practice-based view of strategy (Bromiley and Rau, 2014) and strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016b). Moreover, one also finds examples of eclectic understandings that make mention of practice but do so by embedding it with concepts that appear antithetical to the arguments of practice theorists.4

That the theoretical mention of practice might resemble jumping onto a bandwagon with little theoretical coherence is not all, however. For the theoretically committed students of practice, the notion of practice is not only an empirical question but also a theoretical one that calls for a different sort of research paradigm or program (e.g. Nicolini, 2012, pp. 12-14). Exactly what such a program entails might vary among students of practice but a general feature can be noted. It is not only a question of how to study what people do and the technological artifacts they do it with, but also a way of conceptualizing and analyzing the whole practical affair. Even studies undertaken with great proximity to a certain practice, with rich descriptions, can fail to analyze the practice itself (Llewelyn, 2008). This would imply that naïve empiricism in the social sciences, the idea that all there is naked observation without interpretation, does not give us a way of answering questions about how and why practice is undertaken. Provocatively put, the idea that practices reveal themselves if one looks closely enough is crudely naïve (Geiger, 2009). In any case, detailed ‘micro’ studies of what people do have been undertaken for quite some time and are too far from novel to warrant any particular need of practice theory.

A practice theoretical program conceives instead of a further step; practices can go from the objects superficially attended in description to be the object of analytical attention. In stating this, a particular form of analysis is imagined that can give a sense of the constitution of practice, its material basis, its rationale, its meaning, and its wider importance. To accomplish such an analysis, practices are seen as theoretically significant in themselves and not simply taken for granted.

To make sense of the pervasiveness of academic work on practices or efforts that in some manner draw from ‘theories of practice’ or are ‘practice-based,’ I will here make a differentiation between practice-oriented work and practice theoretical work. The former can be understood as the general

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4 An example of this is Smets and Jarzabkowski (2013, p. 1304), who attempt to connect micro/macro levels to understand ‘institutional logics’ that underlie practices. Such an effort can be compared with the view that a coherent practice approach does not engage with transcendental elements such as forces or logics, but instead only practices (Nicolini and Monteiro, 2017). To invoke ‘logics’ is to make a distinction between practices in themselves and something that governs them but lies beyond practices.
category of work that in some manner attends to practices empirically without
the intention of subscribing to a practice theoretical understanding of these.
Moreover, one could include those efforts that are eclectic in the sense that an
analysis of practice in a more limited sense engages with theoretically driven
elaboration and analysis of practice. I do not mean to disparage such work
here, and I will include in this category a broad selection of works that are
quite theoretically elaborative in themselves (e.g. Smets and Jarzabkowski,
2013; Smets et al., 2012) or have been instrumental calls for the empirical
study of kinds of organizational practices (e.g. Whittington, 1996). It is not
due to a lack of theoretical elaboration in general or a lack of empirical study
of practices that we will not discuss this large group of works in greater detail
here, but rather to move closer to our question of what practice theory in
practice can be.

Moving on, practice theoretical research can be understood as work that
entails both empirical attention and analytical attention to practices, grounded
in its own theoretical understanding. The point of departure of this thesis is
practice theoretical work. This should not be understood as a radically
different endeavor detached from any empirical reasoning that attracted
scholars to practices. The empirical reasons to attend to practices are here
combined with a theoretical re-imagining that has largely posed practice
theory as its own form of thinking (e.g. Schatzki, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002). This
thesis subscribes to the view that work (and managerial) practices and
technology are not phenomena to be underappreciated but should rather be
appreciated as central phenomena that constitute what is known as
organization, and for that purpose are deserving of their own examination as
points of departures for analysis. This is largely compatible with the idea that
contemporary societal concerns, such as the proliferation of technological
change and the alteration of work, warrant such a focus. This much is shared
with strands of practice-oriented work. However, we see these phenomena as
grounded in practices in a theoretical sense. It is here that we will see some
commitments that are not necessarily shared among other studies of practice,
and which challenge conventional organizational analysis (as we will come to
see in this thesis).6

5 By mentioning Whittington’s work here, I do not posit that the whole tradition of ‘strategy-
as-practice’ research lacks a practice theoretical understanding. An exception is the work of
Jørgensen and Messner (2010). I would be careful, however, with positing that the field as a
whole is practice theoretical. Both the work of Chia and MacKay (2007) and Vaara and
Whittington (2012) make the point that ‘strategy-as-practice’ research could do more to fully
approach a practice theoretical approach and take social practices seriously.

6 As a note, I do not consider the broadly defined practice-based studies (or practice-based
theorizing) to be merely practice-oriented work. Some scholars, like Gherardi (e.g. 2009a, p.
535) posit that practice-based studies are empirical studies with no common definition of
practice. In short, I would state that practice-based studies/theorizing is a very broad definition
that could encompass both practice-oriented work and practice theoretical work.
This initial demarcation of our interest here provides us a means to define more closely what attending to practices means, and also the kind of challenges that await us if we want to examine the use of practice theory in practice. What awaits is a final hurdle before we can truly begin. We need to determine what kind of practice theory we have in mind.

1.2. Narrowing down the definition of practice

In order to accomplish the task of analysis, theories of practice have been instrumental to practice theoretical work. What a practice analysis is or ought to entail is dependent on what is meant by practice. More specifically, one would need to ascertain the presuppositions of what matters in regard to practice, and the specific theoretical significance of practice.

Adding to the general fuzziness of practice theory is perhaps most notably that there is not one theory but several. From the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984), to the attention to practice among anthropologists in the 80s (Ortner, 1984), the last couple of decades have seen a heightened attention to theoretical endeavors that in diverse ways focus on practice (Schatzki, 2001). It is from a set of diverging theories across disciplines that practice theoretical work draws on, and not from a unified theory of practice.

No matter the radical re-imagining of any field of study, diverging understandings of practice are drawn upon in practice theoretical research. To speak in any meaningful manner about what a practice analysis is, one should first determine which specific meaning of practice is referred to among the plethora of alternatives. This issue is seldom discussed, as ‘theories of practices’ are often mobilized in conjunction without great specificity, which muddles the basis of what is meant by possible theoretical re-imaginings. While practice theorists agree on the centrality of practices, they do not agree on what practices are. Discussions of performativity, materiality, spatiality, embodiment, and so on relate to a variety of theoretically motivated agendas of those who touch upon practice in some manner. Because of this plethora of variety, what is suppressed and seldom touched upon is the importance of conceptual differences between so-called ‘theories of practice,’ and what these differences can mean for analysis.

If we are to examine what a practice analysis can be understood to be, we need to decide upon a point of departure to have any hope at all of succeeding. Although the multiplicity of theories of practice are generally acknowledged, and, I wager, the tendency to throw the label ‘practice theory’ around is as well, one could still state that there is a particular kind of thinking that contemporary work drawing from practice theory entails. The analytical treatment of contemporary practice theoretical work diverges from past forms of analytical treatment, such as those which emphasize the linguistic, the
cognitive, the individual and his relations and so on, in a more or less cohesive fashion (e.g. Reckwitz, 2002). If we focus our attention to the most notable proponents of such distinct kinds of thinking, a group of contemporary practice theorists are perhaps most central. Contemporary practice theorists such as Theodore Schatzki, Andreas Reckwitz, and Elizabeth Shove are some examples of those who most ambitiously advance the distinctiveness of practice theoretical reasoning in contemporary social analysis.

What is here regarded as distinct is the attention to practice as entity, organized in a particular fashion, as a way to theorize particular sets of activity. This stands in contrast to practice as praxis, as the whole of human action (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). In the former, practice theory provides a vocabulary of concepts to understand the constitution of practices, bestowing great theoretical significance to these foregrounding the practical accomplishment, the context that practices produce, the practical know-how of such doing, the material constitution thereof and the normativity and meaning of practice. Such dimensions define practices as units of analysis in themselves, existing alongside people (Schatzki, 2017a). In the latter, general attention to activity suffices as criteria and can also include an understanding of activity in contrast to theory. Theories that posit to explain or explore actions by pointing to what goes on ‘beyond practices’ or to view these as only an effect of individuals and their interrelations can be included in this category, inviting a great deal of approaches to be regarded as holding sufficient family resemblances as ‘theories of practice.’ Notable mentions of the latter kind are approaches such as actor-network theory (Latour, 2005) and appropriations thereof in the study of organizations (Czarniawska, 2004), which generally trace actions and their interrelations as a method.

Making a kind of distinction as I have here is not necessarily easy, and some would most likely object to my mention of those I have referred to as contemporary practice theorists. This is quite understandable in light of the expansive definitions of practice theory one can find (Miettinen et al., 2009), and efforts to expand these definitions. Such expansive definitions are understandable if the idea of activity as unit of analysis is understood in broad terms. As examples, one can find the mention of systems of activity that can stretch in scope considerably (e.g. Engeström, 1987, 2000), or the mentions of situated actions and interactions among individuals, referring to a wide

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7 Gherardi (2017) via Morley (2017) defines such a kind of practice theory as ‘element-based.’ In a sense, this is for our current purpose a good way to define that practices are something in themselves but ordered in their own manner by certain elements.

8 An example of an effort to expand the notion of practice theory is found in the work of Nicolini (e.g. 2012, p. 11). What such an effort proposes is that theories are sufficiently similar, according to Nicolini’s standard, to be mobilized together despite not making explicit mention of practice or having the same philosophical heritage and so forth.
variety of traditions such as social phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology as forms of practice theories (Gherardi, 2012). Such comprehensive definitions are common for what is known as ‘practice-based studies.’ It is a premature discussion at this point to exactly point out why approaches such as these differ from one another in depth, but one that we will touch upon later on in this thesis.

To make this clear, I will here focus on contemporary theory of practice that regards practice as its own unit of analysis, not by emphasis of actions being situated, being part of systems that can stretch in scope, or being the equivalent of interaction, but by emphasis on the context that practice is. The lives of people, as practitioners, proceed within the bounds of practices. As an example, to illustrate the kind of meaning bestowed to the word ‘practice’ here and what it means as a unit of analysis, we would not regard managers primarily as individuals, nor primarily see the intersubjective relation between managers as interaction, but rather see that managers can act as managers through the practice of managing. It is the context through which we can grasp what managing is and is not; certain activity is intelligible as managing with an idea of the organized set of activity that managing is imaginable as.

The reason for demarcating in this fashion is to make clear that practice theory is something distinct rather than something all-encompassing and an increasingly meaningless choice of words to denote theory. It is hard to imagine a kind of theory regarding social phenomena that does not in some sense, at least indirectly, conceptualize something affecting and/or explaining action. Focusing our attention to the committed crowd of contemporary practice theorists, a more specific understanding of practice is accessible with a far more specific idea of what it means to speak of practice analysis. Although Gherardi (2009a) has another understanding of practice in mind than the one we will focus on here, she also similarly poses that the term ‘practice’ can lose its critical explanatory power if it is taken to be synonymous with disparate, theoretically unrelated meanings. More recently, Gherardi (2017, p. 38) points out that there is a need for a better understanding of the differences among approaches to practice. I take this as a suggestion that I am not alone in trying to be more specific in regards to what we mean by practice, and that it is timely that an effort such as this is undertaken. Yet another reason for this narrower grasp of practice theory is that the theoretical re-imagining implied in practice theories most notably draws from a more narrowly defined group of theories, and in contemporary form finds its shape most prominently in the

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9 Although Gherardi’s (2012, pp. 201, 204) understanding of practice theory and its genealogy is quite encompassing, suggesting her definition to be practice as praxis, her mention of practice as containers of activities could suggest an understanding closer to what I refer to here as contemporary practice theory. Her pluralistic approach does not, in my reading, make this clear.
work of Theodore Schatzki. We are here then essentially doing the opposite of what Gherardi (2012, p. 199) states the mention of practice entails; we will not overlook differences to explore similarities between streams of research but rather define one in itself.\(^{10}\)

As a source of inspiration for a variety of practice theoretical renditions (e.g. Kemmis et al., 2013; Warde, 2005; Reckwitz, 2002; Shove et al., 2012), Schatzki’s account amounts to perhaps one of the most central and detailed theories that research on practice as a unit of analysis draws from. Its treatment of materiality has also made this kind of practice theoretical thinking be presented as a source of contemporary thinking on materiality (Cecec-Kecmanovic et al., 2014), or as an alternative to attend to materiality in social studies (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008, p. 464). It is a practice theory from which further practice theories, of similar mold, are derived. In the case of coming into contact with practice theory, whether in the mention of the oft-cited anthology that coined the term ‘turn to practice’ (Schatzki et al., 2001) or in the empirical literature that draws upon it (e.g. Maus, 2015; Hopwood, 2016; Ahrens and Chapman, 2007; Hydle, 2015), it is difficult to avoid coming into contact with Schatzki.\(^{11}\) The key reason for this is that Schatzki has come to define what a practice theoretical social ontology is. As a social ontology, a view of the social world is implied, and Schatzki’s view points to the fundamental social significance of practices as phenomena in themselves.

This thesis will extensively draw from the work of Schatzki, and for that purpose I will briefly describe the general set of concepts and ideas such a view of practice entails. According to Schatzki, practices are organized, temporally unfolding sets of doings and sayings. In other words, actions (including the discursive) can be seen as organized in the form of practice, in the context of practices. The organization of practice is understood in terms of understandings, rules, and normativized ends and affectivity that make performances of a practice intelligible, acceptable and so forth (SP). Moreover, practices transpire with and amid material entities in arrangement. The performances of practices always imply it being bundled together with such materiality, and the site where the social happens is always one that includes both activity in practices and material arrangement (SS). There is nothing beyond the level of the site, in the sense that social phenomena are

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\(^{10}\) By looking for something specific in the mention of practice theory, we are not then looking across streams of traditions to re-brand them as practice theory. To be quite honest, I have never really understood what drives scholars to re-brand well-established approaches, such as ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. While worthwhile as points of comparison, it further muddles and obscures the conceptual differences between these approaches. I also do not think that these traditions have anything to gain by being labeled practice theory as they are relevant and well-established in their own right. The same goes for actor-network theory.

\(^{11}\) This is also true of work that I have already categorized as ‘practice-oriented.’
not found in distinct levels but are discussed in terms of how large they are and how practices and arrangements form these (Schatzki, 2016b).

While reminiscent of what a view of organizing might be (Bittner, 1965; Weick, 1979; Czarniawska, 2004), a key feature of such contemporary practice theory is that it conceives of behavior as explained by attending to the ‘contexts’ of practices in themselves. Activity is not treated as merely actions of actors in associations or the outcome of structural factors. This feature not only sets it apart from common explanations of activity – some which we will be acquainted with later on – but also sets contemporary practice theory apart from the theories of Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Giddens (1979, 1984). In the work of Bourdieu and Giddens, practices are not in themselves central as units of analysis but primarily are the result of actors’ disposition, i.e. habitus, in certain fields or merely the actors’ enactment of rules and resources. While commonly referred to as practice theories, the work of both Bourdieu and Giddens, unlike Schatzki’s, lack an emphasis on practice itself (cf. Caldwell, 2012, p. 295). Rather than a general concern with activity, contemporary practice theory presupposes a particular kind of understanding and theoretical vocabulary to address the constitution of practice, its material basis, and the interconnections of practices. Having such an understanding of practice in mind, we can in a more specific manner discuss what a practice analysis is. Moreover, we can see the possibility of the use of contemporary practice theory as also relating to the empirical concerns such as the lack of attending to practical considerations and the material basis of organization.

This point of departure is not without consequence to the examination of phenomena deemed as ‘organizational,’ and it is not without its own challenges. It is not only the muddled understanding of the turn to practice that is problematic. Indeed, the task of analyzing practices when drawing from certain central concerns of practice theory is its own endeavor with its own set of problems. This fact is seldom discussed and has received scant attention thus far. Few explorations have been undertaken in terms of what a cohesive, committed approach to contemporary practice theory entails in actual use and the consequences of its use in areas where it has been regarded as favorable in advance. We find calls to take practice seriously, to realize their critical power (Geiger, 2009), but with little mention of what kind of analytical challenge awaits if we do.

1.3. The problems of practice theory

Accounts of practice theory tend to be very philosophical in nature. As put by Warde (2005, pp., 135, 149), practice theorists are seemingly more driven by metatheoretical purposes than by empirical ones. As a reaction towards established approaches, the practice theorists mentioned above have primarily attempted to ground their theories on more sound conceptual bases than
theoretical alternatives. A consequence of this emphasis is that the question of
its empirical use has been left hanging. Much effort has gone into the
presentation of intriguing ideas and the potential of such ideas but less has
gone into the discussion of how such ideas can be applied for empirical
analytical use.

While the theorist inclined to engage in metatheoretical musings might not
find this problematic, the case is different for empirically oriented social
scientists. According to Reckwitz (2002, p. 257), the value of practice theory
needs to be examined in terms of where it leads us, the findings it produces,
and how well it functions as a sensitizing framework for social inquiry. The
heuristic worth of practice theory cannot presumably then only be found in its
theoretical edifice, albeit it is often arguments appealing to this that can be
noted. More than a decade later, contemporary practice theory is still deemed
to be in its infancy with little discussion on its application (e.g. Hui et al.,
2017, p. 2). Appealing calls to attend to contemporary practice theory are
made for the study of empirical fields (e.g. Lloyd, 2009), but with little
guidance on how this ought to be done.

It is then of little surprise that despite there being a growing number of
studies that in some manner draw from contemporary practice theory, one can
note some harsh criticism that touches upon some of the challenges of practice
theoretical research. A primary concern is the role and use of theoretical
concepts. According to practice theory, the constitution of practice is
understood in terms of various concepts that define the dimensions of practice.
If activities are assumed to pertain to practice if organized and linked by
understandings, rules, and normativized ends and affectivity, one would also
expect studies of practices to explore these dimensions of practices. However,
an account of practice drawing from Schatzki’s theory has seldom been
“operationalized” coherently to reflect a serious consideration of what these
dimensions mean in analysis (Gherardi, 2015, p. 4). An examination of
empirical efforts using practice theory does reveal that much work is less
centered on the actual discussion on a grasp of practice theoretical concepts
or on the application of these (e.g. Ahrens and Chapman, 2007; Jørgensen and
Messner, 2010; Hopwood, 2016). While fruitful efforts in themselves, the
process of inquiry that these authors (and others) went through to see practices
is not available to us. As an example, Maus (2015, p. 217) regards Schatzki’s
ontological vocabulary as an analytic method that is put to use with little
mention of what this method required in terms of interpretative work. While
the omission of discussion of these concepts in empirical efforts might be
grounded by an effort to show rather than tell, these tend to be sparse in
application quite generally, or selective in their analysis regarding breadth of
concepts utilized (e.g. Weenink, 2016).

To what extent practice theoretical ideas could be sensitizing for analysis,
as a way of relating to the empirical (Blumer, 1954), has hitherto received
little attention. The question of how one ought then to ‘apply’ practice theory
(in terms of sensitizing concepts), to deter from burgeoning case descriptions without any conceptual contribution (e.g. Weick, 1979, p. 38), and show the distinctiveness of analysis drawing from practice theory, has been left largely unattended to. The lack of thorough discussion on the application and demonstration of the use of contemporary practice theory also means that what has been eluded is a grasp of the necessary analytical operations that drawing from this theory ought to imply, and how theory as a tool can be utilized in analysis. This is not restricted to the grasp or stating of the structure of practice, as posed by Gherardi (2015), but deals quite generally with the concern of analyzing practices as units of analysis. Examples of some of the challenges range from the question of how one ought to discern practices, make demarcations in accounts to define them, and how to account for the elusive dimensions of practices (e.g. practical understanding). Furthermore, any sensible discussion could be expected to reflect upon one key aspect of practice theory: its proposition of practices as unfolding phenomena rather than static, as an alternative to the study of the becoming of the social (cf. Fortwengel, 2017). Challenges extend also to the idea that the notion of practice-materiality bundles can be used to illustrate the entwinement of the social and the material. Thus far, this has largely not been undertaken and has left the notion of practices as bundled with materiality rather unassessed for empirical use despite being regarded as a favorable approach (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008). More so, there is limited work that accentuates what the use of these ideas might mean for organizational inquiry. One would have to expand the scope to a broader definition of practice (e.g. Gherardi, 2012) to get some insight, but risk in this motion also making less clear what a contemporary practice theoretical direction, as defined here, would imply. In many ways, the interpretative work that ought to follow from a study of practice is obscure.

The extent of current use, or lack of use, of contemporary practice theory might have to do with the origin of the theory itself. Both Gherardi (2015) and Nicolini (2012) point to the well-theorized edifice and the philosophical background that this particular form of theory rests upon, as diverging from the tradition of empirical social study. Instead of drawing concepts from empirical study inductively, practice theoretical reasoning proposes a set of concepts that later need to be placed into context of their use. Essentially, this is understood to have led to a theoretical mold that seems detached from application. Nicolini (2012, p. 180) goes as far as to state that contemporary practice theory is underdeveloped and arguably a burden for empirical research since it is not clear how it is to be applied. Such concerns are not entirely unfounded. Schatzki in particular provides a great breadth of concepts that range from the covering of the structure of practice, the interrelations of practice and materiality, and a great variety of social relations that explain how practices form complexes (such as organizations). However, such a breadth of concepts can reasonably be posed as staggering if examined all together, particularly so because there is little work on the application of any
of these concepts. An appropriate response to such a breadth could be a selection of worthwhile concepts, but then a basis that justifies a narrowing down would reasonably be expected with some mention of application nonetheless. A gap needs to be crossed.

What are then reasonable expectations of an analysis that draws from contemporary practice theory? We could indeed wonder about a great deal in regard to the study of practice in terms of its methodology and analytical operations. What is the meaning of practice theory in the context of use? How do we ‘see’ practices and their illusive dimensions, and what does such seeing require? For the student of organization, a good question is also how one would account for organizing and coordination among practitioners and across practices, and not to forget: How do we ‘speak’ about the whole affair in our accounts? There is simply little discussion in terms of what kind of accounts practice theoretical work can be expected to produce, and the limits of such accounts. This is at the core of the problem this thesis tackles. It is not that past applications are flawed as such, but rather that they are vague in the notion of applying it at all. More so, one could wonder what the consequences are if the presuppositions of practice theory are taken seriously, and what it could mean for organizational inquiry that is already supposedly directed to practices empirically (and through alternative theoretical lenses). As put by Geiger (2009), there is a lack of studies that demonstrate and highlight the difference of a practice analysis from a conventional organizational analysis.

From the above, one could wonder why one would bother at all with contemporary practice theory if it is conceived as underdeveloped. Branding practice theory as impractical for empirical use is not, however, the same as stating that it can never be further developed for empirical use. Only because one could state that there have been sparse applications does not imply that applications cannot potentially draw more from theory. One could as well proclaim that there is more to gain, or in the very least that organizational studies drawing from contemporary practice theory would be easier to undertake if the issue of application would be given more attention.14

12 We have already mentioned how practice theory can be seen as a bandwagon (Corradi et al., 2010), but perhaps one could question it on the grounds that it might serve as complex jargon for its own sake or to merely publish ‘meaningless’ research (cf. Alvesson et al., 2017). I hope to prove here to a reader that this need not be the case.

13 A sign that further expansion of the chosen practice theory might prove useful can be seen in the past explorations. In the context of organizational and management studies, Ahrens and Chapman (2007) is an enlightening case that illustrates how organizational practices mold and shape each other to actively constitute organization despite diverse intentions across contexts of activity, and how the notion of management control results from such interrelations.

14 As it were, this can be likened to the concern of organizational studies being rather limited in its drawing from theory not originating from its own domain (e.g. performativity), and thus not sufficiently gaining from the radical heuristic potential that lies in wait (cf. Gond et al., 2016).
Alternatively, one could state that the worth of practice theory would be far easier to determine if its current flaws would be examined. Perhaps one needs not draw more from practice theory because it has little to offer? Even someone skeptic of the role of theory in analysis, favoring inductive or looser approaches to theory, would achieve some certainty in light of this.

Although I have pointed to a couple of problems related to the use of contemporary practice theory, it is not as if scholars cease to be drawn to practice theory with an idea of its worth, or that the arguments for why practices in organizations matter lose significance simply because these are hard to study. As stated above, a concern for practices, their material constitution and so forth remains relevant insofar as the so-called ‘turn to practice’ continues to attract students of organization. There is little indication that this will cease to be the case. It would then be sensible to be able to clarify what a drawing from such central practice theoretical work as Schatzki’s can entail.

A critical reader could retort that we have here discussed specific challenges that exclusively relate to the specific practice theory that we have chosen. If true, our problem is of limited relevance if one disregards Schatzki’s work. In light of such possible criticism, I would state that it is by being specific as we have here that we touch upon challenges that ought to be quite generally of significance for any attending to practices. Considering also the centrality of Schatzki’s thought in defining practice theory and that theorists tend to draw from it, one could pose that what we speak of here is relevant beyond Schatzki’s work alone. As an example, Nicolini (2012) might have a more expansive definition of practice theory than we have, but still considers Schatzki’s work as part of a toolkit for attending to practices (in a broader sense). In such a toolkit, Schatzki’s work is not irrelevant; it is after all a part of the kit.

The choice to settle on some definition of practice, on one corpus of work, is also not made exclusively to treat its own specific problems but rather to achieve the possibility to gain greater proximity to specific aspects that arise from an attending to practice quite generally. Even more simplified schemes of practice such as that of Shove et al. (2012), which happen to relate to Schatzki’s work, are elucidated in terms of application by attaining such proximity, albeit such theories might differ in terms of theoretical breadth.15 Quite generally, in this thesis, I will make use of the metaphors of the tasks of

15 I would, perhaps boldly, assert that work that generally presents a mold of thinking, such as that of Shove et al. (2012), does not truly treat the very question of its use by showing the operations that such use ought to entail. Despite being simple in terms of theoretical architecture, such work engages by, as the authors themselves state, “taking endless liberties” in the discussions of its concepts (Shove et al., p. 121). Such work might be simple in its theoretical architecture but does not treat the very question of its use by showing the operations that this ought to entail.
seeing/speaking about practices as a way of attending to practices. Such tasks are here presented as having a certain directedness whereby certain questions emerge that present reflections on how we ‘direct’ ourselves to practices. While the concepts reflected upon more specifically are Schatzki’s, these are not to be seen as solely of relevance in such kind of work. As I will pose these reflections here, we could go as far as to compare the tasks of seeing/speaking about practices understood here with a general seeing/speaking that also occurs outside the narrow interests of practice theorists.

I have thus far discussed the idea of the use of contemporary practice theory without greater specificity of how this is to be examined. If we think back on the case of the craftsman and his relation to his tool, I stated that the worth of the tool lies in its use in the craft. To more readily examine the worth of the tool in question, of contemporary practice theory, we need to examine its use in the practice of investigation. In this thesis, its use is not without a dialogue with empirical material. Such a dialogue is achieved through an empirical case that revolves around socio-technical change in what would commonly be referred to as an organizational context, touching upon a common appeal of practice theory: its relation to social change and materiality. This means that we are not only interested in theory alone, but also in the idea of what the meaning of theory is when put to use. In other words, we will assess the worth of practice theory by attending to practice theory in practice.

1.4. The aim

The aim of this thesis is the assessment of the applicability of contemporary practice theory in order to determine what such theory can offer organizational studies. By doing so, this thesis will answer the following question:

What are the analytical consequences in the use of contemporary practice theory in practice?

In order to answer this question, the forming of a practice analytical frame will be undertaken through the examination of relevant concepts, including those appropriate for organizational inquiry, and the way these can be assessed in the analysis of empirical material. This will be achieved by an appropriation of concepts, not only to take the assumptions of practice theory seriously (Schatzki, 2016a, p. 40), but also to assess their practical use.

The empirical case in question, of socio-technical change, will be the means through which the examination of practices is possible. Socio-technical change is understood here as broadly referring to change that is not isolated to dimensions of technology or the social alone, but rather both simultaneously. In this sense, the applicability is primarily assessed in terms of what practice theory can say about the examination of organizations as unfolding
phomena with an eye on the materiality involved. The implication of talking
about the worth of practice theory, particularly when illustrating its merit with
the help of an empirical case, is that one can also assess what is distinct about
an undertaken practice analysis in comparison with established ways of
examining similar cases of socio-technical change in organizational settings.

1.5. The meaning, audience and the outline of the
thesis
Among worthwhile and meaningful contributions that social inquiry can
present, one can in rough terms imagine two kinds. One is the meaning that is
found in studies that either are widely read by a public or have policy
implications. Generally, the meaning of such kinds of studies are hardly
questioned (unless one disagrees with the types of solutions presented).
Another is the kind of meaning found in studies for a more specific group of
academics. For a general public, the latter kind of studies are not directly
meaningful. Methodological and philosophical texts are seldom interesting for
non-academics, although the application of the ideas proposed by such texts
could be.

I commit to the idea that academic work is not journalism. Rather than
simply being interested in what is novel or sensational (as journalists),
academic studies depend on theory. This dependence need not be antithetical
to writing of work that could be of wider interest. Some of the arguments in
favor of the ‘practice turn’ can also be seen as reasons to address issues that
could be of public relevance, such as avoiding poor understandings of work,
organization, and of the effects and use of technology. Admittedly, at times
the interests of academics, and their use of theory, can seem to be a concern
in itself. My effort is to scrutinize theory to hint at what theory can mean
beyond the confines of metatheoretical discourse. This thesis can be placed
among those methodological texts that primarily are of interest to academics.
However, assisting an understanding of how theory can be used is to assist the
character of studies that happen to draw from them. So, while the primary idea
is to assist a greater understanding of analytical consequences of a certain
theory, a related hope is that such study also can contribute to further empirical
investigations that perhaps approximate a meaning of a wider kind. The
‘meaning’ is then found in the sense that work that draws upon the theory we
focus upon can be improved, and that the analytical process it requires is made
clearer.

Let me assess how I see this being possible by stating the intended
audiences. The thesis has two intended audiences: students of organizations
and students of practice. I use the expression ‘student’ to refer generally to
scholars or investigators broadly interested in these topics. For the students of
organization, I primarily attempt to present an alternative point of departure for the study of organization. This alternative approach sharply contrasts with traditional organizational theory. It could be added, however, that many of the ideas resonate most notably with the ideas of organizing along with a general concern of the real-life scenes of action in organizations (Bittner, 1965; Weick, 1979; Czarniawska, 2004) and the materiality of organizations (e.g. Orlikowski, 2007; Leonardi and Barley, 2010). Although there is attention to the empirical event of socio-technical change, what is implied is more specifically a processual understanding of organizational practices that undergo some form of change. We will not engage with the broad and extensive literature that is primarily occupied with the question of ‘organizational change’ through which the notion of organization not only diverges but, in some ways, directly conflicts with the conceptualization of practice that is presented here. A student of organization is presented an alternative understanding of organization, one that is more becoming of the so-called practice turn and is given some means to assess what the stock and merit of practice theory is when taken seriously.

In regard to the students of practice, I refer to the interdisciplinary interest in practice theory. Such an interest extends to variations of research interests that touch upon practice within organization studies (e.g. Whittington, 2011). While primarily intended for the study of organizations and organizational practices, some of the discussion here could also be transferable to the study of practices of other kinds. Throughout the thesis, common points of convergences will be touched upon that are of relevance for the study of practice, even if the understanding of practice might diverge. As we will see, we will sporadically encounter others who have referred to similar conceptualizations of activity and the task of studying it (although we have different points of departure in these encounters!). In stating this, I do not define my work as fitting only within a specific niche of literature or micro-tribe, e.g. only organizational studies or only practice studies, but rather that it informs across disciplinary boundaries and across tribes.

Having stated this, what the reader can expect is a text that begins from the perspective of practice theory in order to reach the topic of organization in a gradual manner. It is primarily at the end of the thesis, when a solid basis for a practice analysis is presented, that I touch upon the traditional views and interests of organizational studies in order to contrast these with the presented perspective. To be more specific about what the reader can expect, I will briefly describe the structure of the thesis and its different parts. The thesis is composed of three parts and eight chapters, including this introductory chapter.

Part I (Ch. 1-2) provides the basic foundation of the thesis. Most importantly, the theoretical foundation of practice theory is presented, from which I draw vigorously throughout the thesis (Ch. 2). The inquiry will focus on my interpretation of the work of practice theorist Theodore Schatzki. In
order to make clear the kind of assumptions that underlie my approach here, I will also present some philosophical assumptions that will be drawn from throughout the thesis. Central in this part of the thesis is the selection of suitable concepts for the study of practices, such as the organizing principles of practices. Materiality is also discussed in terms of material arrangement, and how practices and arrangements bundle to form the ‘site’ (a central notion in the contextualist understanding of practice). Furthermore, the chapter narrows down on relevant concepts for conceptualization of organization and change.

Part II (Ch. 3-5) covers my appropriation of practice theory in terms of its meaning when put to use, and the challenges in doing so. By going beyond philosophical assumptions, the metaphor of seeing and speaking about practices is presented to give a view of the character of using practice theory (Ch. 3). The form of this seeing and speaking is determined by a view of what kind of practice theoretical concepts are of relevance, and what their use in accounts might imply. This is followed up with methodological considerations (Ch. 4) that entail how I perceive practice theoretical investigation to be possible, and how I myself have undertaken the empirical study that is used as illustration. Although I would state that the thesis is primarily directed towards the presentation of how theory can be used, it also touches upon some discussion of suitable methods in the study of practices.

The illustration, which is a practice analysis of empirical material (Ch. 5), is presented in three parts. The empirical material is from my examination of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and its practices of casework, administration, and management. Having studied a couple of settings, and one over time, I present an examination of how chosen concepts function for what approximates an organizational analysis. In a more detailed account, the event of socio-technical change is utilized as a means of accessing elements of practices. The illustration begins by attempting to present the material less couched in theoretical terms, so that the reader can follow its later application.

Part III (Ch. 6-8) is the final part and offers reflection on the kind of effort presented here and its prospects. This is done by analyzing the work in terms of the problems of practice theoretical research and some chief characteristics of the undertaken effort (Ch. 6). Moreover, the practice analysis is compared with a variety of contrasting views to further elucidate what is distinct about contemporary practice theory when utilized as heuristic device. The selection of literature that is presented to show this distinction touches upon previous studies of technological change in organizational practice and alternative views of grappling with organization and organizational activity (Ch. 7). Finally, the conclusions and limitations are brought forth and discussed to assess if, and how, the aim of the thesis has been reached (Ch. 8). In this final chapter, we also touch upon on what remains to be done in terms of suggestions for further inquiry.
2. Practice as Site

Two interrelated topics will be touched upon to describe practice theory. One of these is the philosophical background of practice theory, and why it can help to understand the arguments for why practices matter. The other is a presentation of a coherent mold of practice theory achieved through a synthesis of different texts. The reader is presented the bulk of the theoretical content that is central to this dissertation.

While some of the aspects touched upon here might appear less apparent or relevant at first sight, these will be clarified successively to present this theory in steps that gradually become more concrete. The task here will resemble what many attempts of defining social theory somehow touch upon: the general presuppositions of that to be studied. My idea is that this theoretical view cannot be properly assessed unless the adequate groundwork has been laid and all cards are put on the table.

2.1. Heritage of practice theory

A reader who is skeptical of philosophical reasoning might wonder why philosophical intuitions are worthwhile to engage with, and more so why any discussion of social reality sprung from philosophizing is relevant to the inquiry of work and organization. One could connect most research traditions to some form of philosophical roots, although for some it so happens to be that they are sufficiently established that there is little need for its advocates to attend to philosophizing to clarify what is distinct about what they do and why. This was of course not the case for the founders of social science, such as both Durkheim and Weber at their time, who also engaged in the task of defining the social subject matter that was to be studied. Even contemporary approaches that attempt to define the distinctiveness of their project of study attempt the same in some sense (e.g. Bhaskar, 1999). This stretches also to those who in a way want to discard the question of what the

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16 For those particularly negatively inclined I recommend reading the work of Tsoukas and Chia (2011). Philosophy can be seen a resource for further understanding to draw upon also for organizational inquiry (e.g. Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007, p. 1272). The strangest kinds of comments that I have received for even bothering with the mention of discussing assumptions have been that these are not at all relevant. Not all ontological views are so carefully examined by students of the social, particularly so among unreflective students who do not feel a need to examine own assumptions and see where such assumptions take them (cf. Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009; Deetz, 2009).
social is in principle, but who similarly engage in the task in their own way to argue for their own method (e.g. Latour, 1986).\footnote{When Latour rejects the kind of thinking that engages in the defining of the social \textit{a priori}, he similarly attempts to show why this is justified through a redefinition of the social (Latour, 1986, pp. 272-273).}

The great divide between research traditions, such as objectivist and subjectivist paradigms of research, is centrally related to disagreement in regarding both what social reality is and how one ought to examine it (e.g. Giddens, 1984).\footnote{When Giddens examines these two aforementioned traditions, he examines both the concern of what the social is, in terms of ontology, and how we can know about it, in terms of epistemology, in order to assess his own view of social science between these two, venturing into social philosophical domains to accomplish this.} It would be wrong then to assume that philosophical disputes are beyond social science since we can see the disagreements between different forms of social study already in the general presuppositions from which they ventured forth. We could imagine each social scientific approach as one that, when it comes to research in practice, engages in the making of maps. Due to diverging definitions of the social and the chosen point of departure, we would not be surprised to find that the maps across approaches do not resemble each other. The reason being – especially in the case of largely conflicting approaches – that the maps are perhaps not even of the same terrain, country or Earth to begin with. In this sense, presuppositions determine what is examined at all at the start of inquiry and what is defined as that to be put on a map (as well as how the map should look).\footnote{The idea of social science making maps here was drawn from Latour’s slightly different metaphor for the tasks of social study (cf. Latour, 2005, p. 165).}

For our purposes, we will clarify the philosophical ‘baggage’ for the purpose of being transparent as well as for the reason that we will stretch into the ‘baggage’ the further we go for the purpose of defining what practice theory in practice can be and why it is distinct. A noted feature of practice theory is the primacy of practice; a feature that rests upon a social ontological claim that has shaped theorizing among practice theorists. To make clear what is referred to with the mention of the term ‘social ontology’ here, ontological analysis is understood to be analysis of the basic characteristics of social life.\footnote{Note that I do not here refer to the recent mention of a so-called ontological turn that has gained traction and focuses on questions of multiple, different social worlds, as perceived by different cultures and communities. (e.g. Kelly, 2014; Pickering, 2017; Law, 2004).} The claim of the primacy of practice, which we will examine shortly, is of an ontological nature and is one that practice theorists have adopted through certain philosophical inspiration. As we will see in this chapter, the elements and concepts of practice theory can be directly traced to the arguments of past philosophers.
To begin, practice in terms of action is one of many central topics of Western philosophy. The question of practical doing, such as that of undertaking a craft, and how it related to the detached reasoning of philosophy, was already being examined as early as the 4th century B.C. by the ancient philosopher Aristotle. The practical was also a concern of the Stoics, who conceived of virtuous living as dependent on a form of praxis (e.g. Epictetus, [c. 108 AD]2008). As a topic discussed by classical philosophers, it has stretched its way through the history of philosophy through numerous works of numerous thinkers in different ways. It is perhaps due to the multifaceted treatment of activity in the realm of philosophy that those interested into practice can be equally varied in their ways of drawing from such philosophical work. It is, for our purpose, not a complete account of the treatment of past works that is of interest. More specifically, we will go through what has been said by two philosophers, Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein, who not only pushed the practical to the foreground in their work but did so while simultaneously providing some noteworthy insights. I will briefly describe the ideas of Wittgenstein and Heidegger as they can be related to practice theory so as to clarify what is meant by the idea of the primacy of practice that we will draw from, and which will prove to have some consequences later on.

Not to worry, we will examine each thinker in a cursory manner by only focusing on specific parts of the work of these philosophers, beginning with Wittgenstein. The famous, early work of Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1922) dealt primarily with logical propositions and the meaningfulness of statements (as they related to some form of representation of facts), issues far from the concern for the practical. Rather than the striving for clarity of statements in themselves (as facts) and the attempt at resolving the flaws of language of the *Tractatus*, what is more interesting for our purposes here is the subsequent self-criticism of Wittgenstein in his uncompleted but post-mortem published work, such as *Philosophical Investigations* (1958, hereafter referred to as PI) and *On Certainty* (1975, hereafter referred to as OC), among others.22

While in his early work Wittgenstein examined the statements in themselves, the later work would instead investigate the use of the statements

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21 There are several examples from Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics ([c. 349 BC]2014), e.g. Book I, Ch. 7, 10; Book II, Ch. 1, 9; Book III, Ch. 3, 5; Book IX, Ch. 9; Book X, Ch. 8. For a more extensive view of action and what governs activity, see Book VI.

In Epictetus, an example of the importance of not only reading books but also practicing in accord with the knowledge contained in these is raised to stress the importance of Stoic praxis ([c. 108 AD], 2008), Discourses I, 4).

22 My selection of the later work of Wittgenstein has been made with the intent to project some of the sensibilities his philosophy had. The range of work that a practice theorist such as Schatzki draws from extends beyond those I mention here.
in everyday life. If there was any confusion in regard to the structure and meaning of language, this was due to the philosopher missing the context of the use of language. To point this out, Wittgenstein introduced the notion of language games to direct attention towards the interwoven character of language, activity and context (PI, p. 23). The meaning of words was, in everyday life, sensible as part of its use in ‘games.’ Only a philosopher that has strayed too far from the practicalities of life would be confused about the everyday use of language by examining the words outside of these ‘games’ (e.g. OC, §501, §601). Wittgenstein’s insight in this extended beyond mere linguistic expression, e.g. such as how statements could be understood in light of their situation (such as a law court, OC, §8) to address the intelligibility of acts in general. Our comprehension of such acts as a move in chess depends on our sensibility to the context of our doings and sayings, e.g. the game of chess (PI, p. 108). Further still, even our grasp of affects (such as grief) is dependent on our familiarity with the contexts of life (PI, p. 174).

The introduction of a contextualist understanding of behavior was conjoined with a fundamental critique of the view of behavior as governed by rules and propositions. Wittgenstein noted the relevance of other forms of possible knowing beyond propositional knowledge, such as the know-how involved in the performance of tasks as well as our familiarity with phenomena that could not be expressed in propositional terms (cf. PI, p. 36). More so, even the possibilities of grasping propositional knowledge was to be seen as (and seen differently) by attending to the everyday of language games (cf. OC, §622). Famously, rule following itself was stated to be a custom, practice and institution (PI, pp. 80-81). If we attempt to justify our actions in terms of rules, we will eventually state that we simply do as we do in the games we engage in (cf. PI, p. 85). Rules do not explain themselves but leave loopholes open so that a practice has to speak for itself (cf. OC, §139). Our behavior and interpretation of behavior is tied to the very practicalities of life in numerous ‘games,’ and rule-following is only sensible in regard to these ‘games’ (as an act itself). 23

If these ideas are taken seriously, they have implications for our view of actors and sociality. The practical and context-bound traits of the later Wittgenstein amount to Wittgenstein’s central contributions to contemporary social theory. While diverging readings are possible, we will focus on the

23 A similar point is made not in light of rule following but also in regard to the possibility of judging the knowledge claims we make through propositions. Giving grounds to justify our evidence comes to an end that is not one of seeing propositions as such but rather one of pointing to what lies at the bottom of ‘language games’: our acting (cf. OC, §204).
significance of Wittgenstein for practices.²⁴ It is such a significance that has informed both Schatzki’s and Giddens’ (1979) readings of Wittgenstein. Ideas of the importance of action, of context, of the practicalities of life, of alternative forms of knowing beyond propositional knowledge are ideas notable in practice theory and have their origin in the later work of Wittgenstein.

If we turn to Heidegger, we encounter a different kind of philosopher who developed ideas that nonetheless have been compared to those of the later works of Wittgenstein.²⁵ It is primarily the early work of Heidegger that is relevant for the present discussion, and which most specifically deals with questions of activity. The work I speak of is Heidegger’s Being and Time (BT). Regarding the question of being, which was Heidegger’s primary philosophical concern, he posed that a couple of traits are inseparable from human being and discussed these through a variety of neologisms, using hyphens, to rid his text of common associations to everyday/philosophical language. According to Heidegger, human being is always a being-there/Dasein (BT, p. 8) and a being-in-the-world (BT, p. 53). In the world in which our being is found, we are also always being-with others (BT, p. 118) and being-amidst things (BT, p. 107).²⁶ It is through this being-with that we also are social (cf. BT, p. 129), and through the being-amidst we concern ourselves with objects around us. Heidegger exemplifies his idea of being by noting one of its fundamental traits: activity. As humans, we engage in acts, referred to as dealings, in the world (BT, p. 67). It is through our dealings that we apprehend and engage with things around us and apprehend things as either ready-to-hand, for our use, or as present-at-hand, as simply present (BT, pp. 68-72). For whatever end that drives us for our activities, we engage in dealings with equipment around us in-order-to achieve that which we do for-the-sake-of. At the same time, dealings are not isolated from the world (and other people) as they occur in reference to them (BT, pp. 153-154). The craftsman in his craft has a user (of his produced artifacts) in mind. An ontological account of man would not, according to Heidegger, be possible without acknowledging the primacy of these traits.

²⁴ Among proponents of the so-called linguistic turn in social studies, which turns away from practice to primarily look at language in itself, one can find a different understanding of Wittgenstein.

²⁵ Dreyfus (1991, p. 35) refers to the deep similarities between these two thinkers. Beyond practice theory, an example of work that particularly focuses on the synthesis of these two thinkers is Egan et al. (2013).

²⁶ Someone informed of Heidegger’s work might note that I am using the term being-amidst rather than being-alongsid e, following Dreyfus (1991). While this might appear quite trivial at this point, we will see that our definition of practice later on is Heideggerian by making mention of what practices transpire ‘amid.’
For our current purposes, what is worthwhile to take with us are a couple of central Heideggerian ideas. We are in the world with things and with each other. Any social theory or inquiry building on these Heideggerian intuitions regarding our being would have to be non-individualist (Schatzki, 2007b, p. 246; Aspers and Kohl, 2013). Moreover, one would expect sensitivity to the role of activity through which things around us matter to us in one way or another. Combined with the ideas of the late Wittgenstein, we have a collection of the central insights of practice theory. As practice theory makes the claim that practices are fundamental, arguments from both Heidegger and Wittgenstein are utilized to strengthen the case for an alternate definition of social reality. Practice theory forms a symbiosis of social theory and philosophy. To the extent that it is a kind of theory that draws from philosophizing, it is perhaps not surprising that the philosopher Schatzki has been a central proponent of this theoretical movement.

2.2. On the material for a synthesized take on practice

To speak of a Schatzkian view is in some sense to speak of a synthesis of work, albeit there is still a notable distinctiveness that makes it its own. Notable is the commitment to the conception of the site of the social, i.e. the place where the social happens, as composed of practices and material arrangements. Another example of this distinctiveness is that although Schatzki’s work has been referred to as belonging to a Wittgensteinian/Heideggerian tradition (cf. Reckwitz, 2002), one can note that Schatzki has made what he calls a creative interpretation of both Wittgenstein’s work and Heidegger’s work. Schatzki perceives these two thinkers as contending with similar questions, and thus borrows from each in order to examine human activity (Schatzki, 2013). It is best, however, to see it as a theory that might build on the intuitions of Wittgenstein and Heidegger but which has been built beyond these (cf. Schatzki, 2007b, 2016c).

As a form of theoretical project, practice theory has become what it has over time, with some notable shifts in Schatzki’s thought. The selection of material that will be presented in this chapter is a combination of bits and

27 The impact of these two thinkers is not limited to the depicted practice theory here. Giddens’ thought is supposedly inspired by Wittgenstein. The influence of these thinkers can even be noted in organization theory (e.g. Chia and Holt, 2006; Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009; Tsoukas, 2009).

28 E.g. Schatzki (2016c) critiques the Heideggerian idea of breakdown and has at times only partially drawn Heideggerian concepts (cf. TS, e.g. p. 47). The Wittgensteinian approach in his first book is presented by drawing from a variety of thinkers, including Heidegger.

29 In the past, Schatzki (1988, p. 247) stated that his stance is a form of ontological individualism, a position he later critiqued.
pieces from a variety of work that takes the development of practice theory into account. From the breadth of Schatzki’s work, the presentation will focus most extensively on his accounts of practice with a particular focus on his two first books. In his *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (SP), Schatzki laid the main foundation of his ontology. This work covers the most fundamental concepts of his work, such as intelligibility, normativity, and his notion of the teleoaffective structure. In his later work, *The Site of the Social* (SS), Schatzki extended the edifice of his theory to give a more comprehensive account of materiality. It is in this work that the concept of the practice-arrangement bundle emerges, and that the notion of site is elaborated on.

The choice to concentrate on these works rests on the assumption that the core of the site ontology of practice theory, the idea that practices are sites where the social happens, has been grounded and formed in these. When speaking about practice theory, it is largely these two works that are referred to (along with the work of Bourdieu and Giddens). To complement these, I have chosen to address a couple of his later papers through which Schatzki has made certain changes in his thinking that are worth addressing, and draw sparingly from Schatzki’s third book, *The Timespace of Human Activity* (TS), to expand on similar lines of thinking. Schatzki’s neo-Heideggerian tendencies are quite notable in his third book, where practices are of less interest than existential/subjective awareness of proximity and time. The choice to not draw heavily from Schatzki’s third book is largely because it extends beyond practice theory and does not directly help us deal with some of the central issues that we will discuss later on. That is not to say that Heideggerian thought or, more specifically, the notion of timespace, is of no relevance (as we will discover in Section 6.2).30

To touch upon how notions such as ‘site,’ ‘bundles’ and ‘material arrangement’ relate to practices, we will first go though some of the relevant core assumptions in Section 2.3. By doing so, one can understand how the theory can bestow practice with the significance it does. In Sections 2.4-2.7 such assumptions are built upon to present a view of the social that presupposes the significance of practices. I will make clear, however, that my exposition has been undertaken with the aim of presenting a way of thinking primarily rather than arguing for its ontological plausibility. I will not present the entirety of Schatzki’s work and arguments here. Readers are obviously advised to read his books if they want to examine the philosophical arguments properly. For the purposes of this thesis, I want a reader not familiar with

30 That the third work of Schatzki goes beyond practices is perhaps an unfair assessment on my part. Another reason for avoiding venturing too far into the notion of ‘timespace’ is because we would have to deal with far more than simply practices, and the seeing and speaking about these.
practice theory to become aware of some of its core concepts so that we can later assess their use. Because some of these will be mentioned again as we move along, further elucidating their significance for the purpose of this thesis, I also ask a reader to bear with me in the following sections. *For those concepts that are of relevance later on, further examples will be provided throughout the thesis.* We will, after all, deal with the use of the ideas presented here.

### 2.3. On the assumptions of a theory of practice

In the wedge between social ontologies, one encounters multiple notable disputes that make them incommensurable. By examining the specific ontology of our interest, we will briefly touch upon these. Practice theory, which rests upon a kind of ontology referred to as ‘site ontology,’ can be understood in contrast to two larger traditions that Schatzki on repeated occasions has discussed and been critical of (e.g. SS, Ch. 3). One of these is individualist, nominalist ontology, the other is societist, contextualist ontology.31 The former considers that social reality is composed of individuals and their interaction, and only this.32 Per this view, any referral to society, nations, and organizations is more adequately referred to as a short-hand term to individuals and their relations (that compose society, nations, and organization).33 In everyday life we just happen, out of convenience, not to stress that mention of society is simply (and only) this if such a stance is to be assumed. Proponents of such a view are Max Weber and Bruno Latour.34 The

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31 Schatzki has also used the term ‘socialist’ to refer to views that regard society as more than the sum of its parts (cf. SS). His later efforts (e.g. 2003, 2005) use societist rather than socialist.

32 Ontological individualism is not to be understood to be the same as methodological individualism, a perhaps more common form of individualism that social analysts stumble upon. The former relates to the notion that society is no more than the individuals whereas the latter is the idea that – regardless of how society is formed – individuals ought to be the central unit of analysis in empirical inquiry.

33 A note for the philosophically informed student, Schatzki refer to nominalism in a social theoretical sense rather than a purely philosophical one (cf. SS, p. 66).

34 What comes to mind here is Georg Simmel’s definition of society as that which “merely is the name of a number of individuals, connected by interaction” (Simmel, 1964, p. 10). Weber largely conforms to this view, stressing that the status of collectives is only by cognitive and practical ends treated as real things by people, and that sociology only ought to regard these as the resultants of the acts of individuals (cf. [1956]1978, p. 13). Although both of these views are capable of discussing aspects such as society itself (e.g. Simmel, 1910), society is nonetheless envisioned as a composite of individuals and their interrelations. We will make acquaintance with the work of Latour later on, where we also find a definition of actors that includes the non-human and focuses on the interaction between human/non-human (e.g. Latour, 2005).
other view, that of societist, contextualist ontology, considers that larger social phenomena, although these are acknowledged to be produced by the doings of individuals, are constructs that are distinct from those enveloped by them (SS, p. XIV). The social here then is a realm of its own, as social facts and systems, which holds considerable power over individuals, implying that the individual is not what ought to primarily be referred to in regard to the social. Proponents of this view include the likes of Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons. For students of organization, these perspectives are of relevance in the treatment of the notion of organization. Is ‘organization’ simply the product of individuals and their acting or is it an entity, e.g. a system or organism, of its own?

Site ontology stands in contrast to both these traditions as they are traditionally understood but contains elements of both nominalism and contextualism. It is not a large system or an individual that is the focus of site ontology, but rather the concept of site. While the word site can give connotations of a physically located space, Schatzki gives an alternate signification to the word ‘site.’ For Schatzki, the site is where the social happens. It is not individuals *par excellence* that compose the social nor is there any larger system that envelops all. Central for Schatzki and fellow practice theorists is the claim that the site is practice (SP, p. 12). What is nominalist here is the idea that the site, or practice, is the basic reality through which ‘larger’ phenomena are constituted and what is contextualist is that individuals only are intelligible due to practices.

As we will see later on, in the final part of this thesis, these aspects will be significant when comparing with various perspectives. Perhaps as was most clear for the early proponents of social science, the presuppositions of a science are of significant importance for where one ends up. Not only are presuppositions of importance in the direction of analysis, but we might essentially speak of completely different things if we do not agree on what the

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35 An exemplar to illustrate the societist/contextualist school is Durkheim’s thinking. Durkheim’s definition of social facts, his primary unit of analysis, is telling of what the social is: types of behavior, thinking, and feeling “which possess the remarkable property of existing outside the consciousness of the individual” ([1895]1982, p. 51, emphasis added). In this sense, the social has a distinct existence, as institution. This special existence emerges through synthesis, becoming something of its own *sui generis*. We see this more distinctly in Durkheim’s example of life. What is it that is alive in the biological cell? The particles and atoms, or the combination that produces the living cell? It is only through the creation of institutions, as social facts, that we have the social as alive, and it is distinct from the parts that compose it in the same way that the cell is what is alive rather than its particles (Durkheim, [1895]1982, p. 39). The idea of society as organism comes to mind in such a comparison to biology. Individuals amount to the parts of the organism as individual thinking forms a collective consciousness. However, the idea of Durkheim as a true non-individualist is questioned by Schatzki (cf. SS, p. 127). Nonetheless, Durkheim is quite illustrative of what is referred to here.
subject matter of our inquiry is. The notion of organization is seen radically differently between these stances.

2.3.1. On conditions of life and the mind/action/body

Above we have already touched upon varying treatments of the social, pointing to the notable dispute in the definition and nature of the individual. All social ontologies (and most theories as well) operate with a conception of the human being, i.e. the individual, even if it is not at the forefront (as is the case with Durkheim). What the individual human being is understood to be is not obvious and is perhaps at the root of theoretical arguments (cf. Giddens, 1984, p. 221). In what sense is this so? Part of the reason is the contested idea of the individual as independent (or not). Similarly, the idea of the possession of mind and performance of activity is a controversial topic in social theory (SP, p. 20). Hence, accounts on what determines action often have an accompanying conception of mind and what ‘mind’ means in this case. The same applies for Schatzki’s account of the human being, which also deals in part with mind and action. These are expressed in unison as mind/action.

While an extensive account of the views on the minds of individuals would divert attention from my purpose here (cf. SP, Ch. 2), what is worth mentioning is Wittgenstein’s view of the mind. For Wittgenstein, the mind was not conceived of as a substance in its own domain, although psychological phenomena were not denied. The psychology of man, i.e. the mind, was understood as:

“[…] how things stand and are going for someone; and mental phenomena (e.g. believing, hoping, expecting, and seeing) are aspects or ways of this.” – SP, p. 22 (emphasis added)

These mental phenomena are in short referred to as “conditions of life”. These conditions of life, as the aspects of how things stand and are going for someone in his or her existence, are expressed by the episodes that make them present in the world (SP, p. 31). An important dimension of this view is the conjoined assumption that the conditions of life, the aspects and ways, are expressed bodily doings and sayings. The mind is expressed by the body in the episodes that comprise life. There is no causality between conditions of life, i.e. mental phenomena, and action. The bodily acts are the conditions of life being made manifest and present (SP, p. 23). The choice to emphasize that the doings and sayings are bodily is in line with other assumptions about the individual being. To be human is to be a body that is able to perform bodily doings and sayings and to experience bodily sensations and feelings.

36 This is also, and more fully, referred to as the Mind/Action/Body, which is also the title of the second chapter in SP.
These ideas superficially resonate with behaviorism, the idea that all there is to study is behavior and no mind by itself. It is worth stressing that the claim that conditions of life are in the world, acted out, does not imply the absence of mental phenomena. The similarity to behaviorism might rest on the word behavior as interpreted by psychologists, but Wittgenstein’s understanding of this notion diverged.37

In any case, bodily activities are the expression of conditions of life in the world. In that sense, the body is referred to as an expressive body as it expresses conditions of life. We will only cursorily discuss what is meant by body as a means to touch upon what we also mean by individuals as social beings in the world. For Schatzki, bodily expression is understood in three ways. First, the body is a manifesting body, through which the body is a medium for the continuous expression of conditions of life. Secondly, the body is a signifying body. Whereas some conditions are more explicitly expressed, which are referred to as mental conditions, others are less so. The latter bunch are referred to as cognitive, or intellectual, conditions (SP, p. 38). The distinction between mental and cognitive serves to distinguish between the expressive and less expressive, e.g. cognitive conditions are less forcefully expressed. For an observer, the cognitive conditions one person might hold are not so evidently picked up but are inferred, i.e. signified to others by the body. What the body signifies to others, i.e. the inference or ascription of cognitive conditions of life, is based on considerations of a person’s background, position, and – important here – the context (SP, p. 44). Finally, the body is an instrumental body, through which bodily performance is assumed to be unceasingly instrumental in the achievement of ends. Embedded in this final modality of bodily expression is the assumption of human action projecting towards an end (telos in Greek), and thus being teleologically driven. The reasoning underlying this is Schatzki’s reading of Heidegger. Being-in-the-world, that is being as we are, is to be understood here as also necessarily implying a coming toward. We both are in this world and we are also directed towards something in this world (Schatzki, 2013). This is not to be confused with the idea of the body as an instrumental tool. Schatzki assumes that a person selects among ranges of possible expressions one that is singled out, specified as what one does at a given moment in a particular situation for the sake of a condition (SP, pp. 43-45). Note here the

37 Generally what behavior is, is seen here to be far more comprehensive than a reductionist understanding of what we readily see in behavior, on the surface. In very simple terms, we see the mind as we see the body act. From such a view, the following quote is illustrative that behaviorists miss the point about behavior, particularly so by only looking at the residue thereof: “Then psychology treats of behavior, not of the mind? What do psychologists record? What do they observe? Isn’t it the behavior of human beings, in particular their utterances? But these are not about behavior.” (PI, p. 179).
similarity with the Heideggerian understanding that action is undertaken for-the-sake-of such and such.

Accounting for the body here is central due to Schatzki’s claim that activities are bodily, and ought to be understood as bodily acts. Acts are not immaterial in the sense that they are done in a separate realm but are instead performed in our world, before our very eyes, as bodily. The notion of the body is, however, poorly grasped if the human being is perceived to be in isolation from both circumstance and context.

2.3.2. On the importance of circumstance and context

We have in the beginning of this thesis already stated that practice theory explores the context of practice. Essentially, with the mention of context we can be both speaking of the forming of the individual and of the subsequent behavior.

How it comes to be that circumstances are so forming of the individual is here answered by how conditions of life arise. For conditions of life without a clear biologically established expression, an important bearer on their form is what can be referred to as the understanding of life patterns. Behavior expressing conditions of life is tied to circumstance in the weave of life (e.g. PI, p. 174). Behavior is by necessity in the world, and it takes circumstance in the world into account and in that sense, is conjoined to circumstance. This behavior-in-circumstance when reoccurring and in collection leads to an understanding of the sort of patterns of behavior one could associate to a condition of life in a particular circumstance or context (SP, p. 72). As previously stated, certain conditions are not expressed but are primarily inferred. What is inferred is gained by this understanding of life patterns and conditions of life in relation to circumstance. As Schatzki claims “[…] given these understandings, behaving this way (etc.) in these contexts signifies that one is in the condition involved” (SP, p. 72).

The kinds of contexts imaginable are the patterns of behavior of people involved, e.g. what they have done in the past; the combinations of conditions that an individual already holds, e.g. having a bad/good day; and the wider and immediate situation, e.g. the kind of expression imaginable at a party in comparison to that in a locale in which a fire erupts. While circumstances and contexts can be of different kinds (SP, pp. 35-36), what underlies Schatzki’s thought is that one kind of circumstance and context is central: social practice. Practices envelop patterns of behavior, combinations of conditions, and situations. This occurs as such patterns, combinations and situations are laid

38 Related to this I often wonder how well this applies to my understanding of my cats, and if my cats – in some sense – can understand my conditions of life by a grasp of life patterns as well. As a cat person, I cannot help but think this is the case.
down and lived through practices, and people’s behaviors are informed by these through practices as well (SP, p. 37). It is primarily this kind of context that is relevant here and that I will focus on.

One way of characterizing what a contextualist understanding of practice implies is that certain doings and ways of being are implied in a practice such as soccer. Certain ways things stand and are going for someone are common or typical for soccer, such as hopes, expectations and so forth (e.g. hoping/expecting someone to pass the ball, scoring to win the game, etc.). Continuous failure to score a goal that frustrates a player into yelling would be a common expression, as would the yelling and cheering of players who score. As practice, soccer underlies the intelligibility of past behavior of others, opens up for possibilities to experience certain combinations of life conditions, and would open up for certain situations. Regarding the latter, a corner kick in soccer presupposes soccer as practice and so does the possibility to win the World Cup in soccer. The same could be said of common references in culture at large (e.g. films, books, news) that touch upon the practice.

What we can see here is that the commonly fuzzy word of context is given a distinct meaning here. Context is not simply the idea of ‘environment’ or societal system. Context is here not meant as simply situation but closer to ‘bands’ and ‘strips’ of time-space that include gestures and talk as aspects of context (cf. Giddens, 1984, p. 71). What Schatzki refers to as social practices is the primary context that embraces certain behavior, speech, training and learning, making it possible for people participating in them to be in certain conditions of life and to relate to these (SP, p. 36). Which conditions of life that are expressed by the particular bodily activities depend on the social practices in which people learn to perform the bodily acts and take note of and respond to the bodily acts of others (SP, p. 23). As a human being begins her life, her limited bodily repertoire grows in interaction in enlarging and expanding contexts and circumstances that bestow a growing number of conditions of life and expressions. As we live our lives, we continuously make new experiences, meet new people to interact with, and act in enlarged sets of situations and practices through which we develop our ways of being and understanding (SP, p. 61).

In this lies the constitution of the individual per Schatzki’s view:

“It follows that because social practices fashion expressive bodies and institute conditions of life, they also constitute individuals, namely, the people who are in and to whom can be attributed the instituted conditions expressed by fashioned bodies.” – SP, p. 83

The range of possible bodily expressions of conditions of life is a social product (SP, p. 53), and so then of course are those to whom these are attributed as well. While a range of conditions of life and expressions thereof might be independent of practice, e.g. the biologically imposed range (e.g. pain and crying), any form of complexity of mind and action is perceived as
instituted by practices. This implies that any expression of the body that is complex – in contrast to primitive reaction (SP, p. 62) – is both constituted within and carried by practices (SP, p. 24). It is not so that people have life conditions solely because of practices; there is an organic component to emotions (Schatzki, 2017a, p. 42). However, even a supposedly biologically imposed behavior can be socially molded to some degree, e.g. sexual practices and their change over time. Since individuals are capable of being in and participating in numerous practices, individuals are also capable of obtaining a complex understanding of life patterns. Such understanding supplies rich and varied bodily expression, the ability to report on one’s conditions of life to others, and the means to understand the bodily expressions of others.

The social constitution of mind/action/body through practices plays a considerable role in the constitution of individuals who are one of us. By echoing Wittgenstein (PI, p. 223), Schatzki (SP, p. 66) states that “being one of us means, more broadly, that a person speaks and behaves intelligibly to us.” The notion of intelligibility is paramount. Through the participation in common practices, the range of expression we as individuals hold also becomes common in some manner. Actions either make sense as they occur in practice or are graspable through questioning from other practitioners (SP, p. 66). Due to commonalities in life and human existence, e.g. needing to eat, facing death, prone to desire sex, etc., human beings are intelligible to one another in some sense as we find ourselves in similar situations, participating in similar practices due to these situations. Obviously, in many other regards we are not intelligible to one another. Life patterns corresponding to conditions of life are invariably irregular (SP, p. 32). Certain behavior will go beyond the limits of intelligibility and become unintelligible. This can occur when encountering new and unfamiliar practices. Boundaries of intelligibility are also not to be understood as fixed and thus are neither practices nor individuals themselves (SP, pp. 67–68). What makes sense in a certain practice might no longer make sense at a later point in time.39

The boundary of intelligibility also dictates another kind of boundary: normativity. Practices are not spaces in which anything goes, but rather spaces in which a certain action is more in line than another. To be intelligible in a certain practice, and thus be able to participate, is to behave in a manner in which one can be intelligible. This already suggests that one cannot behave completely randomly and still be within the boundaries of intelligibility. Within practice one finds a sense of oughtness or rightness regarding the

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39 Intelligibility can also stretch to the point that the encounter with novel situations will prompt bodily activities/expressions of individuals among us that – despite the novelty of the situation – are still intelligible to us. That one can innovate might even, according to Brandom (1979, p. 193) who draws from alternate philosophical sources, be a sign of skillful participation.
behavior therein. How a participant in a practice ought to understand and respond is guided by a normativity, also referred to as acceptability.

“The understanding of X-ing, for example, opens a range of ways of acceptably X-ing as well as prompting and responding thereto.” – SP, p. 120 (emphasis added)

The range of acceptability also suggests that one ought not to see practices as something that seizes bodies to make them dupes of practice. Acceptable behavior is not necessarily our intent in practices. Schatzki joins the side that questions the primacy of the independent individual but does not favor a deterministic view. Practices are not more “real” or have a higher ontological priority than people (Schatzki, 2017a). Practices supply considerations that actors can observe or ignore depending on what the actor is driven by. Schatzki presumes, however, that a fact of life is that we uphold normativity. That we can choose among practices, or can do differently, does not imply that we actually break out of regularity (TS, p. 184).

To conclude, we can understand human life as a developing set of conditions/actions attributable to a human body which expresses these in practices. The developing manifold of conditions attribute to the possibility of new ways of behaving for certain ends and such behavior being intelligible. Central in this thinking is that practices are of utmost importance if we want to understand the site where the social happens (SS, p. 147). Individuals are “always already” caught up in practices and coexist through these (SP, p. 172). What makes sense for people to do is dependent on given certain states of affairs and for the sake of some way of being (TS, pp. 114, 120), but how we understand states of affairs and pursue ends presuppose practices.

2.4. Defining social practices

From here on out we will come in touch with some of those concepts that are most critical in this thesis. Having thus far stated that what is referred to as practice is of importance to describing the human condition and social life, I

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40 Differently put, neither can exist without the other. “No people no practices; but, equally, no practices no people” (Schatzki, 2017a, p. 28).
41 “What a person does on any occasion depends not on practices, but instead on (1) the understanding he has of his situation, which in diagnosing this situation as somehow unacceptable, specifies a wished-for condition that remedies the unacceptability and that which the action performed is designed to bring about; and (2) the motives (“sentiment”) out of which a particular action conducive to the wished-for condition is “chosen.” An action, consequently, is a motivated response to an unacceptable situation that aims to bring about a condition relieving this unacceptability (SP, p. 96).
will now describe more closely what is referred to by ‘practice.’ Practices are open, temporally unfolding sets of doings and sayings (cf. SP, p. 89; SS, pp. 70-72). As manifolds of activity, these are also understood as organized. That a practice is open and temporally unfolding is to suggest that practices are continually perpetuated and extended temporally (SS, p. 72). As open-ended, they are not composed of a finite number of activities, in contrast to ‘dead’ and no longer performed practices (Schatzki, 2012, pp. 13-14). As doings and sayings, they are – as noted in the section above – of a bodily kind. Moreover, both doings and sayings are included in the same fold as practice.\(^42\) Within this fold, neither the discursive or the non-discursive are given priority over the other (SS, p. 77).\(^43\) As an example of the above, we can imagine the Eucharist. Not everything goes in the practice that is the Christian rite of communion (the Eucharist). However, the actual contents of communion have evolved and the rite is enacted and named differently in different Christian traditions. To state that its current content is finite is largely impossible as it is continuously performed and probably will continue to be. Eventual schisms in the Christian faith or evolution of the rites are possible. We can state that the practice is open-ended no longer, and technically finite, when humanity abandons Christian rites such as the Eucharist completely. Finally, the rite of communion is performed through both bodily doings and bodily sayings. Human bodies move in a certain fashion, e.g. move the cup of wine (or grape juice), eat the piece of bread, and say certain things, e.g. the priest consecrating the elements. To observe this practice is to observe both doing and saying.

Let us touch upon the relation between actions and practices. Actions pertain to practice but are not only understood in terms of basic acts. Basic actions constitute higher-order actions that form series of basic actions in their wake. Hence, activity is understood as sets of doings and sayings. In regard to the sets of actions, Schatzki aggregates these in different orders (SS, p. 73). An aggregation of basic doing and saying constitutes what is referred to as tasks. While specific basic actions that form tasks might differ from time to time, it is the speaking of tasks that enables us to speak of boiling water or peeling potatoes, while ignoring that it might not be composed of identical basic actions or be performed in an identical way every single time. In the case of boiling water or peeling potatoes, what matters is that the aggregation of basic actions resembles a seemingly similar task. Yet another higher-order action exists above that of tasks. An aggregation of tasks is referred to as a project.

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\(^{42}\) For our purposes here, we are then not treating sayings as pertaining to ‘discourse’, in the sense of a large social phenomena of language (cf. Schatzki, 2017b), or making a distinction between so-called material practice and discursive practice (cf. Reckwitz, 2008).

\(^{43}\) One can imagine that certain practices are perhaps more readily understood as primarily constituted by doings rather than sayings.
If we consider the tasks of boiling water and peeling potatoes, these particular tasks can be part of a project of preparing food/ingredients for cooking. The project of preparing food need not necessarily consist of exactly the same basic actions or even the same tasks, but what would in this case matter would be the aggregation that makes up a particular project. A project such as that of preparing ingredients could then be envisioned as part of the practice of cooking, which in turn consists of other projects too. The idea of projects extends beyond simple aggregation to also designate that actions tie into a purpose which action is directed towards (Schatzki, 2013, p. 183). If asked, the one preparing water or peeling potatoes would conceive of these tasks as preparing ingredients (the project) in light of the end of cooking their meal. Conceiving of the sets of actions as basic actions, tasks, and projects, amounts to a hierarchy of action that finally relates to the idea of an end. Variations of acts of different kinds make up the activity that is cooking, managing, playing chess, etc., and their undertakings relate to the general context of practice because of this. This will be described more thoroughly on the next page. Important to note is that the mention of “hierarchy” is for the purpose of creating some order among the total amount of action that is part of practice, and that a categorization one points at is not set in stone nor universally valid. As stated by Schatzki:

“A practice’s actions, above all its task and projects, do invariably exhibit regularities. A practice, however, also embraces irregular, unique, and constantly changing doings/sayings, tasks, and projects.” – SS, p. 74

The irregularity can emerge by circumstances forcing the performance of occasional actions, such as dealing with the breakdown of elements within a practice. In a cooking practice, finding alternative ways of heating food if an oven or stove breaks down would amount to some irregularity to its performance. There is also the possibility of novel actions due to the reorganization or innovation of a practice. This topic will be covered in more depth later.

2.4.1. On the practice-organizing principles

The overall regularity of practices is dependent on the organization of practices. If practices are to be grasped as sets of actions organized by something, we need not only grasp actions per se but also the organization as well. As noted in the previous section, practices are understood as a context in which a person’s participation requires the capability to behave intelligibly or be formed to become intelligible. To intelligibly participate is to remain within the boundaries of intelligibility and the sense of oughtness expressed therein. This is refined and translated into four principles which revolve around both intelligibility and normativity: practical understanding, explicit
rules, teleoffective structure, and general understanding. These principles are assumed to link the actions that constitute a practice. One can note that the specific mention of these four reflect our presuppositions mentioned in the section above.

*Practical understanding* refers to the ability to perform the activities of a practice. Practical understanding highlights three conjoined abilities. One needs to know how to do something, how to identify that something, and how to respond to that something (SS, p. 77). Through these, two practitioners can be linked through their practical understanding that allows them both to identify the same practice. This does not govern activity of people in the sense of something directly normative, but rather as something that opens up the ability to execute the action of practice and identify it. In comparison to Wittgenstein (PI, p. 36), the idea of practical understanding corresponds to the know-how in the playing of the clarinet and knowing how a clarinet sounds. Schatzki would add that it is not simply knowing how to do or identify that something but also knowing how to respond to that which is familiar.

The second principle of *explicit rules* refers to the:

“[...] explicit formulations, principles, precepts, and instructions that enjoin, direct, or remonstrate people to perform specific actions. To say that rules link doings and sayings is to say that people, in carrying out these doings and sayings, take account of and adhere to the same rules.” – SS, p. 79

Through explicit rules an explicit sort of normativity is envisioned; a sort of normativity one could expect to be the result of authority that forces the making and subsequent following of rules. In a Michelin-star-awarded restaurant, it is not enough to know how to cook and prepare food; it is also important to follow the rules that dictate exquisite cooking, such as, at the very least, following clear directives that might pertain to the treatment of luxury ingredients or the directives of a health department of some sort.

Explicit rules are not underlying our ability to do anything, as such ability is contained in practical understanding. Cooking depends on more than simply rules. Explicit rules are the authoritative codification (formulations) of ‘oughts’ one could imagine finding in a manual and are generally expressed and articulated. Acknowledging explicit rules is to acknowledge the use of formulations that dictate what one is and is not allowed to do, and that such formulations matter and help constitute practices. What would a board game or the practices of accounting be if they did not take heed of rules? Important, however, is that these are only explicit rules as practice-organizing when

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44 In SP, Schatzki does not explicitly mention general understanding as an organizing principle but collapses such understandings as part of the teleoffective structure. This principle is first mentioned in SS as its own.
45 In later work referred to as action understandings (TS, p. 73).
activity is undertaken in light of these rules (TS, p. 213). That is, the explicit rules need to be explicit rules-in-practice.

The third principle is that of the *teleoaffective structure*. This ominously named concept relates to the hierarchy of activity mentioned above. Moreover, it relates to the previous section’s mention of the instrumental body. The teleoaffective structure is best understood as a range of normativized and hierarchically ordered ends, projects, and tasks aligned with normativized emotions and moods (SS, p. 80). Through this concept, Schatzki implies that practices hold a range of correct and acceptable goals. What this particular structure does is that it ties into an end of tasks and projects found in a practice, thus creating end-project-task combinations. These combinations are expected to be within the normativized, acceptable range of participation. Moreover, a practitioner that performs these actions is expected or invited to also, in some manner, conjoin these to an affective dimension. The affective dimension implies that a practice opens the door to emotions or moods that a practitioner can experience, and might be expected to experience, within the enactment of a practice. We can imagine the athlete winning a race or the expression one connects to the attending of funerals. Certain practices are more or less structured affectively, and emotions need of course not be so clearly tied to every single practice imaginable.⁴⁶

Tying this to the previous section, what is referred to by the teleoaffective has to do with the behavior-in-circumstance that relates to a range of conditions of life. The conditions of life of the affective kind are conjoined with the instrumental modality of bodies, i.e. the ends pursued by participants (but that they are not necessarily thematically aware of; SS, p. 81). We undertake actions for ends and emotions tied to or opened up by the context of practice, and these actions can be understood to be end-project-task combinations. The assumptions regarding the human body and behavior(-in-circumstance) translate into the teleoaffective structure governing practice (contrast to a view of practice as not governed by ends/future; cf. Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72).

The notion of the teleoaffective structure is not inherently found within the individual but rather within the practice (SS, p. 80). While the conditions of life of individuals are their own, which conditions that are expected and opened up depend on practices. Stating that the teleoaffective structure is found in practices is not to dismiss the will of individuals but to acknowledge practices as the arenas people can participate in, and contest, for the sake of

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⁴⁶ According to Reckwitz (2017) practices are affectively attuned in one way or another. Curiosity, fear of repression, boredom can be seen as signs of affectivity in practices normally perceived as affective-neutral. More so, affectivity can be seen as tightly knit to motivation. As Reckwitz (2017, p. 120) claims, there is some affective incentive to participate in a practice. Our participation in practices could be motivated by positive desire or by the incentive to avoid a negative outcome of some kind (e.g. fear of repression).
ends conjoined with emotions/moods. As ‘arenas,’ practices are open-ended and never completely settled. Thus, the teleaffective structure is to be understood as indeterminate, which Schatzki touches upon more by stating that:

“The indefiniteness (of practice) is partly due to the indefinite variety of circumstances in which any practice is carried out and partly due to the fact that there are always more projects, tasks, and even ends that participants can acceptably carry out (e.g. novel ones hitherto untried or unconceived; the limits here are those of participants’ imaginations).” – SS, p. 83 (parentheses in original)

The fourth organizing principle is that of general understanding. Not to be confounded with practical understanding, a general understanding pertains to beliefs and concerns that tint practices. In comparing different religious practices of the Shaker community, a religious sect in Northern America, Schatzki writes:

“[…] the sense of common enterprise, concern, and fate that is central to people forming a commune also helped compose these practices’ organization. This general understanding was expressed in some of the same steadfast, determined actions that expressed an understanding of work as religious sanctification.” – SS, p. 86

This kind of understanding exerted its influence in the life of this community and was expressed in the practices of work quite generally. To some extent, the general understanding of practice grounds the singular practice in a larger picture and forms the overall meaning of that practice. The tinting of practices could be understood as the suffusing of understandings through practices and complexes (Allison et al., 2017, p. 4). In doing so, they appear more or less intangible, although they are grasped by participants and expressed in their practices.

One could perhaps see a substantial piece of Bourdieu’s anthropological work as focused on general understanding of practice.47 This is due to the nature of general understandings as also underlying our symbolic understanding, i.e. understanding of what a symbol represents (TS, p. 163). In a more modern example, we could imagine that the practices of two distinct political movements, one radical and one conservative, could superficially

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47 The following excerpt gives a sense of the value of general/symbolic understanding in Bourdieu’s accounts of Kabyle practices (1990, p. 230): “The first haircut is so important because hair is seen as female and as one of the symbolic ties that link the child to the maternal world. It is the father’s task to perform the first haircut (with a razor, a male instrument) […]”. Another enlightening example is the view the Kabyle people held in regard to their lands in farming practices (e.g. Bourdieu, 1990, p. 116). Stating this is, of course, assuming that the oppositional-based structure that Bourdieu works with is not understood as completely detached from the logic of practice itself, a topic he discussed to great lengths so as to make doubtful the possibility of actually accounting for the true understandings of practices.
resemble one another by being political movements but be suffused by the ideologies that each movement clings to, resulting in variations in activities, manifested in these, largely reflecting what is deemed as good/bad and so forth. The anti-capitalistic ideals of a radical movement versus the pro-capitalistic ideals of a conservative movement would bestow a distinct view of the symbol of capitalism as good or bad and be actively drawn upon in varieties of acts such as chants at demonstrations. While general understandings might suffuse multiple practices, these general ideas are incorporated into practice and not wholly ideational.

Together, these principles define in a more detailed manner what kind of context practice is understood to be. A practice is a specific context in which one needs practical understanding to participate in, and in which one follows rules and performs activities in line with the acceptable range of end-project-task combinations and their conjoined affectivity, while the activity itself is tinted by beliefs and values. These practice-organizing principles come into play in our activities, guiding ‘what makes sense to do’ for the sake of certain ends and so forth, circumscribing our doing.

As human beings, we are formed by our participation and molding in various practices. We are also capable of phasing in and out of multiple practices, from the one to the next, or perhaps to multiple ones at the same time. In the case that an organizing element of a practice is shared with another, one can speak of the crisscrossing of practices (SS, p. 87). Crisscrossing, or overlapping, is part of the very character of practices (SS, p. 157). A practice is seldom in isolation but instead in a web of practices. Within a setting such as an industrial factory, one can find numerous practitioners performing numerous practices that might share traits, crisscross, and overlap partially. While cooking, you might also be in a conversation practice with a friend, while preparing to host a large dinner party. Conversation, cooking, and preparing a party might then be overlapping practices in that instance. Practices are not discrete entities. What defines any sort of boundary is primarily the idea that one’s participation and performance of action is linked by the organizing principles (cf. TS, p. 77). Within the theoretical framework here, we can see practices as overlapping if practices share in activities. Since

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48 In his early work, Schatzki stresses that not all practices are organized by all four principles. Only integrative practices are (cf. SS, p. 88). Another, simpler kind exists in what is referred to as dispersed practice. A dispersed practice is not equally sophisticated in its organization and is simply guided by practical understanding. One such kind of practice is describing. Describing can occur within a multiplicity of integrative practices and is not in itself constrained by rules or teleoaffective structure to the same extent as other practice. This idea has later been rejected (per his own personal account).

49 This implies that practical intelligibility is formed by the contexts of practice. For further discussion regarding these concepts in interplay see TS (pp. 144-147).
practices are understood as organized actions and that every performance is linked to the organizing elements of a practice, practices sharing activities implies a sharing of organizing elements.\textsuperscript{50}

**Summary**
Practices are defined as open-ended, temporally unfolding and organized sets of bodily doings and sayings. The bodily acts of a practice can be understood as tasks and projects. These aggregated sets of acts are tied to and are organized by four components that circumscribe doing: practical understanding, rules, teleoaffective structure, and general understanding. Practices do not have clear-cut boundaries and can also overlap with one another.

2.5. **Arrangement, relations and bundles**
A site is not only practice but also the entities there. It is the acknowledgement of this that gives practice theory a material aspect to it. A social practice is not solely the individual’s keepsake nor is it one devoid of the possibility of others being there. The social is also not in any sense its own realm cut away from entities.

I will briefly cover this to give an idea of the status of the material. What is meant by entities here are people, artifacts, organisms, and things of nature (SS, p. 22). Before going further, it is imperative to grasp that Schatzki does not consider entities – no matter the kind – to lay around isolated from one another. Instead, these occupy positions in regard to one another. These entities hang together. The hanging together is to be equated with the order of things and co-existence, finding its parable in individualist analysis (e.g. Weber, Latour). If we imagine entities and their interrelations, we are imagining a hanging together. The words order and arrangement are used interchangeably by Schatzki but denote the same thing: the particular way the

\textsuperscript{50} Since the writing of the *Site of the Social*, Schatzki has largely remained true to his definition of practice and practice-organizing elements. A couple of exceptions are some of his later papers, such as Schatzki (2005, 2010b), where he has been less detailed in his accounts of the organization of practice. Noteworthy in his later work is the referral to the practice-organizing elements as practice memory (TS, pp. 216-221). As a form of social memory, the practice memory amounts to a property of practice, which reflects the past practice organizing elements that circumscribe activity in the present. As a property of practice, it is not something fully remembered by each participant. The discussion on practice memory is conjoined with a discussion on the constitution of the individual through other kinds of memories (practical/body/personal memory) and on the existence of practice memory as a temporalspatial affair. For my purposes here, the combined practice-organizing principles amount to the practice memory and no greater differentiation is made.
material entities are positioned to one another, and hang together (SS, pp. 18-21). For simplicity’s sake, I will refer to these solely as arrangement.51 Arrangements are assemblages of entities, through which social life transpires with, and amid, which characterize the concrete elements of human coexistence.

Crudely put, the entities of arrangements can be defined as human beings versus general things. Describing people might appear trivial, but there are certain things worth being taken into account. I already highlighted the notions of mind/body/action, the expressive body and its relation to the context of practice. These assumptions are relevant for our current discussion. Human coexistence affirms that practices are part of the human condition. People hold a privileged position in regard to other entities, by being capable of practical intelligibility. People ‘understand’ what they want to do, and do as such, with intentionality (SS, p. 75). This is not to be confused with rationality, as it primarily implies that people can intend to do things and that such doing is guided by a sense of how one ought to do so. Hence, this does not necessarily reflect what would be sensible to do (Schatzki, 1988, p. 245). This humanist position is referred to as agential humanism. It is humans who are envisioned as those who carry out practices (SS, p. 105). Although we go beyond individualism, we do not forgo attention to human agency as so-called post-humanists do.52

The agential humanist position does not deny that non-humans have a form of agency, or rather do things. Non-human entities can, on their own accord, disrupt human affairs. The Fukushima disaster coupled with the earthquake in Japan in 2011 molded and destroyed practices while also giving way for crisis managing practices, and practices tied to those, in the Fukushima area. While one could argue that these things were intertwined with human culpability, such as the mismanagement of the nuclear plant in Fukushima, a degree of the disaster was beyond human control and as such appears to be the doing of the non-human. A less dramatic example of non-human doing is the way technology continuously prompts us to do one thing or another, or possibly limits our doing. The other classes of entities – the non-human – do then

51 This is also the term that Schatzki seems to use most in his more recent work.
52 Schatzki signals the centrality of the human subject by writing that “human activity holds a special causal, prefigurational, and constitutive significance for human life in general and social existence specifically” (SS, p. 193). We will later see that this position collides with what is called post-humanism. Post-humanism can be said to not agree with the idea of the centrality of the human subject (cf. Latour, 2005; Callon, 1986; Law; 1986; Barad, 2003). One can note then that we have made clear that our definition of practice is essentially one that begins from the human, and that the mention of post-humanist practice theory contradicts our general assumptions here (cf. Gherardi, 2017). It is worthwhile to note that essentially Schatzki’s position is sympathetic to an attending of non-human agency but is unwilling to equate that to human agency.
obviously play some role in human coexistence, although the doing of the non-human is not to be equated with human doing.

The human being is not separate from non-human entities. We might refer to a divide between the human and ‘nature’, but these are not separate realms (SS, p. 180). Artifacts are man-made tools, buildings, and other produce of human doing. We can see these as either physical objects or realized in physical objects, e.g. as cyberentities (Schatzki, 2010b, p. 136). Organisms are such things as animals, plants, and other living things in a more natural sense. Finally, the peculiarly named class of ‘things of nature’ refer to such ‘things’ as earthquakes, the climate, the weather, mountains and so on. These categories are not necessarily easy to differentiate between if one truly wishes to find dubious entities that fit into several categories.\textsuperscript{53} Technological objects are, after all, the alterations of natural things that have been made into artifact (cf. SS, p. 179; Schatzki, 2010b, p. 138).

2.5.1. Relations between practice and arrangement

Emphasizing relations – between practitioners and material entities in a practice – is a common trait of contemporary practice theories. Here, social existence is acknowledged as transpiring as part of bundles of practices and material arrangement. The social site is the mesh of practice and arrangement, and of the relations between these two. What defines the formation of bundles is the idea of multiple kinds of social relations that form this ‘mesh.’ It is through these relations that entities and practitioners are positioned in social existence, and this involves not arrangement alone but also practices that actively order arrangement.

Over time, Schatzki’s account of the actual relations has shifted.\textsuperscript{54} I have chosen, due to the manner in which it has progressed, to primarily account for the oft-mentioned relations to give a picture of how relations can be understood. The purpose here is to briefly illustrate how these relations are imagined, rather than to present arguments to justify them. The primary relations can be understood as those of causation, intelligibility, intentionality, prefiguration, and constitution.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{53} As Latour (1993, p. 50) points out, what are ozone holes, global warming or deforestation if not also hybrids of human/non-human doing? In this thesis, artifacts are defined as the result of human doing but best understood as tools and we do not equate human/non-human actual doing. In other words, a distinction is still made.

\textsuperscript{54} The initial list was never intended as exhaustive (SS, p. 41). The more recent relations of intelligibility and constitution were not referred to as relations alongside the above in SS, although they were regarded in both SP and SS in other ways.

\textsuperscript{55} This listing mostly resembles Schatzki (2010b, 2012).
Causation exists among entities in the sense that one entity can affect another. Briefly put, causation deals with how one entity can act or trigger the action of another (SS, p. 41). The causality between entities can be expressed among the whole spectrum of entities, e.g. a human being can affect another entity but also be causally affected by a thing.

Intentionality has partly been covered above and can be said to be a classic aspect of social theory. In the hands of Max Weber (cf. [1956]1978), intentionality was the primary determinant for social action and intersubjectivity. For Schatzki, it deals with how a human is directed towards another human or entity. The directedness is construed as one performing actions towards the other, but also having thoughts, beliefs, intentions, and emotions about the other (SS, p. 44). Intentional relations are social relations when they help compose human coexistence (and practices) as they commonly do. Intentionality is perhaps one of the key traits of the human condition that mark the distinctiveness of human agency, i.e. the capacity to act.

Prefiguration is a complex concept comparable to the idea that there are fields of possibility of action, which more commonly is spoken of in terms of constraint or enablement. Social affairs, and entities in these affairs, prefigure the doings of a human by the way that they affect possible paths of action. More specifically, prefiguration refers to the qualification of possible paths of action that register certain acts as easy or hard, obvious or obscure, tiresome or invigorating, and so on. The perspective here, that one action is considered desirable at all or that some actions are not plausible, relates to entities and practices. In part, prefiguration exists within the arrangement of entities as a relation among the entities in the arrangement (SS, p. 45), as we could imagine the craftsman’s possibility to repair something depends on available materials and the condition of what is to be repaired. However, that one would speak at all about that such and such action is constrained or not also depends on practices that make the craft what it is. Hence, prefiguration as a whole is the joint effect of practices and arrangement (SS, p. 256).

Constitution defines the manner in which material arrangement and practices constitute one another, as either essential for one another or as pervasive. As an example, one could imagine the manner in which computers and similar hardware are constitutive of various practices such as software engineering or computer gaming. The opposite is also true. Farming practices are constitutive of the arrangement of entities in a farm in some sense. Hence, practice and arrangements can be co-constitutive (Schatzki, 2010b). This resembles the more prevalent understanding of sociomateriality (Orlikowski, 2007), derived in part from the work of Barad (2003), that seems to imagine all in terms of co-constitution. Important to note here is that the relations of constitution are never mentioned to be as general in the sense that all entities are co-constitutive of each other. Entities hang together but do not necessarily constitute each other (cf. Faulkner and Runde, 2012).
Finally, *intelligibility* can be understood as a relational construct between humans and other entities, achieved through practices. Entities are made intelligible in practices to humans who carry on practices amid them (Schatzki, 2010b, p. 141), and are thus bestowed a meaning within the horizon of a practice. The manner in which human beings themselves are bestowed meaning – and identity – by a practice makes for a relation of intelligibility between human and practice. In the case of relations between people, a concept such as social role is intelligible through practices.56

The differences in how certain relations might persist between human and non-human, as well as between practices, can make the web of relations imaginable rather complex. Not all these relations are to be considered sensible both ways, between practice and arrangement. Relations are also not mutually exclusive. A poorly functioning train in the Swedish winter, famed for being a particularly bad season for train commuting, will prefigure practices that occur with and amidst train travel and their practitioners by making certain action more or less likely, but will also be made intelligible in a certain manner within the involved practices. Moreover, a broken-down train will cause action and also make certain practices alter in shape.

Multiple relations of different strengths and thicknesses such as these are imagined to exist in social life. The relative strength of multiple relations marks how practices and arrangement bundle. If both practice and arrangement are thoroughly tied together through relations, one can then speak of a bundle of practice and arrangement, also referred to a practice-arrangement bundle.57 It is not my intent here to emphasize the complexity of relations as criteria for the consideration of what defines a bundle (as will be discussed in Chapter 3) but rather to point out the way bundles are conceptualized. Essentially, in defining relations in the varied manner that has been done here, we see that the social is defined in such a sense that we are directed to acknowledge a multiplicity in the way the social *hangs together*.

In the previous section, practices were deemed the equivalent of the site where the social happens. Here, what is pointed to is that the site also is where entities hang together in various ways. In short, the site is a practice-arrangement bundle (SS, p. 123). These dimensions of bundles are not ontologically distinct from one another but only analytically distinct.58 The

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56 I am aware that I here venture into topics that deserve far more attention than I can afford in this thesis. The concept of social role, as understood in traditional (functionalist) programs of research, has previously been a point of critique of practice theorists. According to Giddens, a concept such as role needs to be seen as constituted by practice (cf. 1979, p. 117). It is in such a sense that social roles are referred to here.

57 These have also been referred to as practice-order bundles.

58 This is to be contrasted with Shove et al. (2012) who conceive of materiality as an element of practice. I have had discussions with fellow students about whether Shove et al. (2012) pose something significantly different than Schatzki in terms of the treatment of materiality. In my view, this is not the case. Essentially, we will see that practices always are material in a sense.
analytical distinction here is not to imply the neglect of materiality in any way. Practices always transpire with and amid arrangement, and while arrangements – as the hanging together of entities – might persist without human touch, the human condition is one continuously enveloped in practice-arrangement bundles.

Practices in turn also arrange arrangements. One could imagine farming as a practice-arrangement bundle that is both practice and arrangement, but where practice is actively arranging the entities of the farm, and thus affecting the arrangement it is bundled with. Since in social life there is a plethora of practices, so too are there multiple bundles across that which Schatzki refers to as the plenum of practices (cf. Schatzki, 2016b). Totality of social life could be imagined as lived in this plenum of practices, in which the totality of practices is bundled in complex ways with all entities in arrangement(s).

Note that I use the plural form of arrangement. The arrangement of entities is not only assumed as one big arrangement but can also be delineated into multiple ones, multiple “hanging togethers.” Even the hanging together of a particular is tied to that of other arrangement. Imagine the entities arranged in what could be understood as a mall. Now, if we would happen to conceive of the entities of a mall as entities in an arrangement, in the singular, we would have demarcated entities. These entities in our arrangement are, however, also tied to other entities beyond the mall by means of infrastructure, e.g. provision of technology or roads that connect to the mall. The demarcation of a particular arrangement, Schatzki conceives, is dependent on the demarcator (SS, p. 46). While no clear boundaries might exist to be readily grasped, it is possible to imagine the sort of ties that exist and thus make it appropriate to conceive of bundles of practice and arrangement, e.g. the practice of repairing cars, and the arrangement of cars, tools, a workshop of sorts and so on.

To complicate things further, it is not as if entities are bound to a single practice at a time. Not only can practices overlap with each other, but also entities might have relations with several practices and, as noted, to other arrangements. Practice-arrangement bundles can relate with other practice-arrangement bundles. Bundles form complexes or compounds (Schatzki, 2016b), and in larger scale also constellations of practice-arrangement which make the plenum of practices. Instead of speaking of levels of analysis, or micro and macro levels, Schatzki envisions one single level, or no level at all (Schatzki, 2016a). There are only practices and arrangement as far as the eye can see (or the beholder of the eyes can imagine). The social reality is flat in this sense.59

59 Our chosen approach then conflicts with the idea of tall ontology, and the appropriation of such an idea for organizational inquiry (Seidl and Whittington, 2014). Cf. Schatzki, 2016a/b, for more on flat ontology.
A flat social reality implies a rejection of the idea that there are structures on a distinct level that govern practices. Such things as institutional forms and properties do not exist in spite, or outside, of everyday life (cf. Giddens, 1984, p. 69). Abstractions such as these are only understood as the thought and activity that occur in practices transpiring with and amid material arrangement.

Before we conclude, I want to make clear the way I will use the expression of bundles. Schatzki has on occasion used the mention of bundle to designate not only how a practice and arrangement are a bundle, but also how multiple practices are bundled (cf. 2005). For the latter meaning, I will use the word ‘complex.’ I have done this for the sake of avoiding confusing a reader with what is intended and because we will see that complexes are a separate challenge to grasp later on.

Summary
Social life is a hanging together with other material entities, implying that the definition of sociality entails materiality in the form of human bodies, artifacts, organisms, and things of nature. These bundle together with practices, forming practice-arrangement bundles through various kinds of relations such as causation, intentionality, prefiguration, constitution and intelligibility. These bundles constitute the site of the social and any other social phenomena, including larger constellations or spheres of social life.

2.6. Forms of sociality and Organization
So far, I have only accounted for the practices and bundles, but not for the way these practices are imagined to constitute what commonly is referred to as organizations. There is a certain leap between picturing practice and how it is bundled with certain entities to imagining how collectives of people undertaking different activities in public administration or firms are constituted. This will be amended here by attempting to conceptualize organization by drawing from the resources that have been presented thus far. Schatzki himself has on occasions touched upon the very same topic for the explicit purpose of conceptualizing organization (Schatzki, 2005, 2006), and at a later point touched upon further possible conceptualization (TS).

Before I begin, I will refer to organization as commonly referred to by organizational scholars (e.g. Selznic, 1948; Thompson, [1967]2008) as ‘Organization’ to not confuse it with the notion of the organization of practices, i.e. the structure of practice.60 Hence, an ‘Organization’ is something

60 Another reason is that I have always found there to be something quite mysterious in the mention of an Organization that I think is projected better here by spelling it with a capital O.
larger’ than the organization of practices alone. More specifically, ‘Organizations’ are myriads of relations between practices and arrangement constituting multiple interrelated bundles. If we imagine a modern firm, from our view here we would imagine this as a complex of practices of management, administration, marketing, industrial labor and so on. The performances of such practices occur in conjunction and might also share in arrangement, e.g. practices such as marketing and accounting persist in the same offices in the same building, using the same computers etc. Anything like organizational acting, the notion that ‘Organization’ can be an actor that can do such and such action, is according to what we state here the performances of practices that constitute ‘Organization’ with/amid certain arrangement. Organizations are not solid actors or ‘static’ but are continuously happening (e.g. Schatzki, 2006). Admittedly, in everyday life we commonly speak about Organizations as if these were entities. From the perspective of practice theory, such speaking about Organizations is the use of a shorthand term to refer to practices and arrangements. I will in this thesis use the term Organization to reflect the common speaking about Organization but with some irony in regards to the idea that these are entities of any sort (beyond the legal definition).

To begin, relations and bundles do not explain how life proceeds within bundles and how lives hang together (SS, p. 147). Simply saying that Organizations are constituted by practices says little about how individuals imagined to pertain to an Organization, organizational members, coexist and do what they do together. To address this, we need to discuss forms of sociality and coexistence we could imagine bundles of practice/arrangement open up. These forms of sociality/coexistence can be understood as additional ways to understand a social reality composed of practices and material arrangements. I will account for three of these forms of sociality that I will regard as complementary to understand larger phenomena such as Organization.

The first – which I will present as compound – are commonalities and orchestration. According to Schatzki, human bodies in sites can share the organizing elements of practices through interpersonal structuring of mentality and practical intelligibility. In other words, by participating in similar practices a common grasp among practitioners is possible, and along with such a grasp comes a common sense of what makes sense to do. Commonalities refer to the holding of common understanding, rules, ends, projects, or emotions, and so on. If we assume that people are formed by their being initiated into practices, such commonalities are expected. If two practitioners are capable of behaving intelligibly to one another between practices, this would be in part due to the commonalities in organizing elements. Some form of commonality is necessary for orchestration. Orchestration is the possibility for people to perform different interdependent actions in different practices and still comprehend and know how to behave in response in a site. Waitresses in a restaurant will both have commonalities and
behave in orchestration. The latter would be seen in the way that multiple
waitresses orchestrate their activities in relation to one another, taking orders,
delivering food to different tables in a restaurant, communicating with chefs,
and finding ways to coordinate and do different tasks according to the needs
at the time.

Another form of sociality is important for the understanding of larger
phenomena: causality defined as chains of actions. Chains of actions are the
causal, activity links between practices. These are not necessarily based on
some form of common understanding, on orchestration, or necessarily on
being within the proximity of similar practices. Chains of action can stretch
far beyond a setting and link a large number of different practices together.
The activity of one practice can prompt activity in another practice and so
forth. Industries, politics, and what we deem as economic systems or markets
are constituted by practices linked in such a manner.

The last form of sociality I will mention here has been partly covered in my
examples above: the sharing of material setting/configuration in which human
bodies coexist, as it is at an office, a mall, or a university. Human coexistence
transpires not only through practices but also in shared material settings
(Schatzki, 2005, p. 472). Within a university, multiple practices within the
setting will transpire using the same building, infrastructure and so on.
Walking through a university, one will see numerous people performing
numerous practices, in parallel, in proximity to one another. In the case of an
emergency, such as a fire breaking out, all of those practitioners would be
affected as people in the setting would react to the fire. Being within the same
material setting is thus also a form of coexisting. Of course, what we define
as material here can be more expansive. Through technological connections,
physically non-adjacent entities are brought near to link physical settings.

These forms of sociality are ways of illustrating that social life can have
different forms in the bundles of practices and arrangement. What can be
noted is that the concept of chains of actions has been a steadfast mention in
the work of Schatzki, and one argued to be a primary way to trace large
phenomena and multiple bundles that relate to one another (Schatzki,
2016a/b). It is the interconnecting of bundles that constitute complexes,
exuses, constellations and other larger social phenomena. Such
interconnections between bundles is imaginable through chains of actions.

We have here a preliminary understanding of the forms of sociality that we
could expect in complexes. We could go further by drawing from Schatzki’s
more recent work to complement this. Schatzki points out how practice-
arrangement complexes:

“[…] embrace interrelated actions, conscious, deliberate, and purposeful
cooperation, the pursuit of common goals, common rules, and enjoined
teleologies.” – TS, pp. 73-74
These traits, he argues, are such traits found in the complexes to that we refer to as Organization. Through such sharing of coordinated action, combinations of actions to achieve results someone has intended (TS, p. 69) is a possibility. Who this ‘someone’ is can be exemplified by referring to how a worker reacts to a managerial commandment, which perhaps also denotes a certain compatibility to the understanding of power, domination and authority across practice-arrangement bundles and complexes. An Organization would thus be a complex of bundles in which coordination is possible.

These forms of sociality, and the possibility of coordination, can be imagined in conjunction and as partly overlapping. From this point of view, our everyday understanding of Organization would presuppose at least dimensions such as these. If we would imagine a small firm we most likely imagine multiple practices and across such practices we would expect commonalities in the understandings among practitioners. Such understandings would make it so that orchestration is possible in work, and that chains of actions are intelligible across practices. One practice in/at an Organization is affected by the doings of another. Moreover, to see these practices we would undeniably also see the participants themselves. The performances of the practices of a firm are only sensible due to the bodies of practitioners, artifacts and so forth. The unfolding of the practices that constitute Organization are not immaterial. If someone said that they would visit the firm, we would imagine that they would visit the shared material setting, the concrete walls where events happen (e.g. Weick, 1979, p. 88). Such a setting might not be only one specific physical locale but stretch beyond these through technological means to connect further physical locales to compose a larger shared material setting. A corporation would be imaginable as such a large, shared material setting whereas a smaller firm would perhaps be seen as a far more demarcated one.

Finally, coordination is intelligible in the continuous happening of Organization. The decision making of management is often understood to lead to a chain of actions pulling toward a certain direction due to how practices are interlinked. It is not only the performances of conjoined practice-arrangement bundles that constitute Organization, but also the possibility of coordinated actions to achieve some intended results.

A couple of key traits between this conceptualization of Organization and traditional definitions can be pointed out preliminarily to clarify what is intended here. First of all, a complex of practice-arrangement bundles invites quite different understandings of social life than one that regards formal organizational schemes or the utilities produced by a ‘system’ (e.g. Barnard,

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61 What a ‘small’ firm is can be questioned both in ostensive, measurable terms as well as in performative terms (cf. Hallin, 2009). The example here is merely for the purpose of directing imagination rather than specifying size properly.
Moreover, a complex is not a self-maintaining system that sees to its needs as its own entity (e.g. Selznick, 1948). In other words, a complex is never an entity in itself but always a set of practices and arrangement interconnected (through commonalities, chains of actions and shared material setting) across which coordination is possible. Admittedly, utilities can be produced across practices in coordination and the formalities of Organization might function as explicit rules for certain practices by defining what is correct for such and such practice, but even then, these are not privileged in themselves as defining criteria of Organization.

This understanding of Organization resembles an effort to focus on the processes of organizing, by emphasizing the interdependency of actions in sequence (e.g. Weick, 1979). It is not, however, common processes of interpretation that are emphasized (e.g. Weick, 1979, pp. 3-6) nor an immaterial view of activities. These forms of sociality are not meant to be pulled apart as isolated. Acknowledging shared material setting will also in part resemble the tendency to envision organizations as a ‘place’ (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 779), but it is not solely the setting as such but the setting as well as the practices through which coordination, practices and so forth transpire. While our approach here might resemble a conceptualization of Organization as a texture of practices (Gherardi, 2009b) or nets of actions (Czarniawska, 2004), we need to be aware that we have a specific meaning bestowed upon the notion of practice and activity that these alternate notions have not.

I will discuss these ways of theorizing organization/organizing, and further distinctions, more extensively in Chapter 7.

2.7. On the endless becoming and change

As stated previously, it is in part the perception of a changing and fluid sociality in light of technological novelty that made practice theory attractive for some scholars. This has particularly been the case for the use of alternate practice theory, such as that of Giddens (1984) in studies of socio-technical change (e.g. Barley, 1986; DeSanctis and Poole, 1994). The question of change is imperative here as practice-arrangement bundles are not static phenomena. After all, they are defined as open-ended and temporally unfolding. But what does this appreciation of open-ended, unfolding practices mean in regard to change? In everyday life, the notion of change is sometimes brought up to point at things that have changed from one state to the next, e.g.: “Things have changed, they are not like they were before.” At times, such statements are made by pointing to how one no longer recognizes whatever has changed due to the change itself. By stating that practices are unfolding, are they then constantly changing in such a sense? Within social life, doing holds a central place in the “endless happening of the social site” (SS, p. 210),
but such happening does not imply that every moment is the social anew in an unfamiliar guise.62

To begin, the engine that drives the unfolding, the social becoming, is that of agency (SS, p. 233). We have already previously stated that we acknowledge human and non-human agency in terms of the possibility of doing/affecting things, privileging human agency in terms of its richness. Such richness is found in the acknowledging that practices are a ‘human’ thing through which human actors engage. I mention this because our discussion here in regard to change is, as perhaps is expected by the reader by now, expected to turn to a discussion of practice. While Schatzki poses that many others theorize change in terms of a focus on individual and collective action or institutional and systemic traits, what is centered upon in his account is change in terms of practice and material arrangement (SS, p. 234). Such a point of departure means that we will understand change in terms of how endless becoming constantly affects both practice and arrangement. On the side of arrangement, endless becoming can be expected in terms of how entities interact (SS, p. 237). Indeed, even physical movement in action re-arranges an arrangement in spatial terms. Differently put, if we imagine the office of a small firm, essentially the hanging together is affected by the way people move around there as they go on with their activity. Moreover, the non-human contributes to the arrangement in many ways, e.g. computers and networks, and can also contribute to alterations in arrangement. If a coffee machine breaks down in any work setting in Sweden (a country of coffee drinkers), we would surely expect a re-arrangement to occur that would involve efforts to repair the machine or possibly the procurement of a new one. We cannot only acknowledge the possibilities of re-arrangement in these terms, however. Any interaction between the human/non-human above implies activity that can be understood in terms of practice. If a coffee machine breaks down, what it affects (e.g. drinking coffee during meetings) and efforts to repair or replace it can be understood to occur under the aegis of practice. Human agency is manifested through practices, and if the non-human in some sense affects or provokes human doing, this also happens in relation to practice (SS, p. 240).

Turning to practices, endless becoming does not imply practices in constant flux. While the shape and details of practices change, many practices remain more or less the same in our recognition. People used to hold weddings and/or

62 This is not only true in regard to practices but also to the subjective experience of these in timespace. In his later work, Schatzki poses an alternative understanding of the topic of change and becoming that contrasts with that of both Deleuze and Bergson (TS, e.g. p. 200). Both Deleuze and Bergson (as well as Whitehead) are philosophers that define what is referred to as ‘process philosophy,’ a branch of thinking that has influenced process theory in organizational studies (e.g. Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). I will simply point out that our discussion here is distinct in terms of what is brought up in regard to whatever is meant with ‘becoming.’
write doctoral theses centuries ago, and still do (although perhaps in different terms). A way to understand this is to see the continuous performance of practices as activity that can redirect practices or rearrange arrangement in a minimal sense, and rather be regarded as a form of maintenance of these (SS, p. 234). The perpetuation of practice can be stable and conserving. While such perpetuation is continuously unfolding it would not be regarded as ‘notable’ change. This is not always the case, however, as we know of practices that have changed dramatically in some sense, e.g. ways of communicating, by pointing to something specific in them that has changed (e.g. the use of smartphones rather than telegraphs). In such cases, we would perhaps not regard the continuous unfolding as stable and conserving. Of course, both in cases of stable and conserving maintenance and in cases of radical change we see something akin to ‘change’ going on. There is an unfolding, an endless becoming in either case. How then do we meaningfully speak about ‘change’?

Schatzki states that we do not, at least not in the traditional connotations of the word:

“There is no question of either stability or change. The only question is how slight or prodigious the differences are over time among the doings and sayings, rules, and teleoaffactive structures that compose practices.” – SS, p. 254

Essentially then, the concern is how significant changes are over time. The dichotomy between stability and change is left aside for the question of more or less notable difference. The endless becoming of the social is a “continual production of difference” (SS, p. 255).

Whether differences expressed are notable or not, there are a couple of forms imaginable that characterize the possibility of differences arising and how they could take shape (SS, pp. 246-252). Difference can take shape beyond the mundane breaking down of a coffee machine. We will only make brief mention of some forms here, directing ourselves to concerns that will arise as relevant later on.63 To begin, a common occasion is the insemination of new elements of practice, or entities in an arrangement. The spreading of ideas or management fads would largely be the dissemination of elements of practices. As these happen to be imposed upon a practice, these are inseminated. The proliferation of technology in social life is not the spread of technology but also a form of insemination. Modern technology being imposed onto practices to ‘modernize’ them is a common example of this and amounts to what is commonly referred to as technological implementation. Such an occasion could be seen as very intentional, as the result of obvious coordinated action. However, the production of difference needs not always

63 Schatzki’s list of forms/mechanisms regarding change is quite comprehensive (SS, p. 252). Since some of these will not be relevant later on, I have decided to be selective in my mention here.
be so dependent on coordination. Practices can be understood to evolve unintentionally, as the activities that perpetuate them are differently performed over time. Such an occurrence could lead to the dissolution of some practices and the emergence of other practices to replace them (SS, p. 245). Naturally, in speaking about occasions of change, we primarily direct ourselves to a specific occasion as if it would suffice to cover any instance of the production of difference. Insemination of entities (e.g. “technological change”), contagion of ideas, unintended evolution and so on, can be at play simultaneously to make a demarcation difficult.

Having stated our interest then in how the unfolding of the social site comes to differ in shape, we can clarify in a concise manner what difference implies to us. By doing so, we can perhaps begin to see how a practice theoretical view of endless becoming differs from alternate views (e.g. Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Essentially, any difference is produced over time. Any notable difference can be imagined by comparison between two points of time, between how things used to be and how things are now.\(^\text{64}\) To speak of difference without a sense of the past states of a practice-arrangement bundle would be difficult. Moreover, we also need to be aware that the dimensions that we state can be different at different points of unfolding. As our brief discussion of causes of change suggests, change is not necessarily only ‘social’ or ‘material’ but can be both.\(^\text{65}\) Hence, difference can be defined in terms of both a re-organization of practice and a re-arrangement of material arrangement.\(^\text{66}\) As we know from above, practices and material arrangement are not in isolation from other practices and arrangements. This implies also that we ought not to forget the very relations that define practices and arrangements as bundles, and the complexes of these as further dimensions that come to be shaped differently over time (SS, p. 246). Beyond these dimensions, we should also make brief mention of what amounts to slight and prodigious difference. In Schatzki’s terms, what amounts to significant

\(^{64}\) This resembles what Giddens states in regard to stability over time. Stability is only grasppable with the idea of a close similarity between how things are now and how things used to be (Giddens, 1979, p. 198).

\(^{65}\) This seemingly banal statement merely serves to yet again stress that we are not in a realm of the social without a material dimension, and similarly that it is not solely material aspects that can change but also the social. As we will discuss in the later parts of this thesis, the view presented here contradicts the views of others.

\(^{66}\) Schatzki actually mentions the re-organization of practice and the re-composition (SS, p. 241). The former reflects a change in the organization of practice (rules, teleoafffective structure, understandings etc.) while the latter term reflects a difference in the activities that compose a practice. In my appropriation, I do not see a greater need to make a distinction between these as a change in activities ought to follow from a change in the organization of practices and vice versa. Schatzki makes the distinction for the sake of stating that re-organization can be intentional whereas re-composition can be unintentional.
difference (as what is ‘new’) is a matter of comparison, context and judgment (SS, p. 256). To determine how notable differences over time are, we would need a standard in mind to judge and compare.

2.8. Concluding remarks

The edifice of the theory above centers on the site, and as far as it does so, it also conceives of practice as central to account for the site. Even the social constitution of the individual is differently imagined than alternate views on the matter (e.g. Berger and Luckmann, 1967, pp. 149-157), simply due to the focus on the role of practices. In later work, Heidegger famously stated that we dwell in language and that language is the house of being ([1947]2008). For Schatzki, it is practice that is the house of being (SP, p. 111). We dwell in/through practices that constitute the site of the social. The site itself is the bundle of practice and arrangement, and where we as human beings act with and amid other humans and/or other entities, e.g. artifacts, animals.

It was mentioned how practice theory is between ontological positions such as individualism and societism. Without taking an extended detour, it is possible to at least point out some notable differences briefly. To ignore practices, as do individualist ontologies, is to understate the importance of context that is presupposed for interaction among individuals. To look beyond practices, as do alternate societist ontologies that speak in a too encompassing manner of contexts, is to understate the particularities of different practices that make intelligibility so variedly expressed in social life.

A theoretically rich understanding of practice is proposed here with a specific meaning of the word ‘context’ that defines practices in a different sense than alternate theory. It is not so that what we propose here is the equivalent of the idea of social action, as the intersubjective acting with intent among individuals (Weber, [1956]1978). Although such an acting could be represented by the social relation of intentionality, we see more than such relations in the site of the social. Furthermore, practice here is also not the same as situated action, in the sense that certain activity happens in a particular space and time (cf. Giddens, 1979; Gherardi, 2012; Suchman, 2007). The context of practice is not the same as objective space, nor the equivalent of the in situ of real life actions, but also the organized set that actions pertain to.

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67 This is not to state that alternate views on the social constitution of individuals cannot be compatible with that presented here. As an example, I find Mead to generally present a view that could be conceived of as comparable but with a different focus, e.g. on the idea of self (cf. Mead, [1934]2015, pp. 135-164).

68 A point of comparison here would be Schatzki’s later work, which focuses on subjective timespace of actors as something that exists alongside practices (TS).
Discussion concerning the grounds of intelligibility in social life can be found in different forms than that provided here. In the work of the sociologist Garfinkel, the recognition of actions, beliefs, and aspirations as reasonable is dependent on the “trusted, taken for granted, background features of a person’s situation” (1964, p. 173). In light of such a position, we want to add that practices as bundles also define where the social happens. Schatzki’s understanding of practices is that these are both temporally unfolding manifolds of sites of understanding and are simultaneously enacted in doing. Hence, we cannot equate our view of practices simply as frames we share to interpret and order activity and social life (e.g. Goffman, 1974). Practices are not only mental constructs. Practices are also not only sites of understanding but also provide for situations, in terms of actions, events, interactions and so forth, that presuppose practices (Schatzki, 2017a, pp. 35-36). A corner kick in a match of soccer is possible due to the bundle that is soccer.

There are alternate views that approximate the definition of practice presented here, such as the practice theories of Bourdieu and Giddens. Here, practices also figure as sites of understandings and action. What diverges considerably between Bourdieu’s, Giddens’ and Schatzki’s theories is how practices are organized. In Schatzki’s view, both Bourdieu and Giddens primarily envision practice as almost exclusively governed by practical understanding and run into problems for doing so (SP, Ch. 5; Schatzki, 1997). In Bourdieu’s work, the idea of mental schemata inscribed in the body of practitioners (habitus) selects and produces practices in conjunction with the field practitioners find themselves in, in light of the objective conditions that have formed their lived history (1977, pp. 81, 116; 1990, p. 56). Centrally, however, the actual understanding of practices is governed by habitus and does not require reflexive awareness or obvious cognitive operations on the part of practitioners (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 117). As Schatzki’s critique points out, how conditions ought to direct the understanding of practice, which in Bourdieu’s case follows an oppositional structure, rather than the practices themselves is not clear (SP, p. 143). Moreover, Bourdieu’s idea of practice is not compatible with a Heideggerian understanding of teleology. Even if a certain undertaking might seem to realize a certain end by conscious will, this is a sort of illusion in Bourdieu’s view (1990, p. 61; cf. 1977, p. 117). The ‘true’ overall end is the maximization of material and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 183). Besides simply acknowledging the striving towards capital and habitus that governs as bodily disposition, functioning similarly to practical understanding, any effort of the social scientist to map the logic of practice similarly is deemed illusory.

In the case of Giddens, the structure of practice is composed of rules and resources (authoritative/allocative). As Schatzki points out, however, the idea of resources ultimately depends on the notion of rules. Having command over certain allocative resources or having authority depends on the structure of rules so that these allocative resources can be under one’s command or so that
one’s authority is authority at all and respected in a setting (SP, p. 155). Resources aside, the rules that Giddens makes mention of are not like those explicit rules we have mentioned above. In Giddens’ view, rules are informulable and thus knowledge of rules from which to draw upon in practice is tacit (1979, p. 67; 1984, p. 21). For Giddens, these tacit, informulable rules serve the same purpose as that of know-how. From this critique, the structure of practice is arguably only a kind of know-how. Even though Giddens makes mention of the reasons (and wants) that practitioners might hold (e.g. 1984, p. 6), these are posited as not actively relevant for routine doing that most daily doing is (1979, pp. 218-219; cf. 1984, p. 50). As such, these are not actively drawn upon in practice and we are left with only a kind of practical understanding. What we then find is that Giddens and Bourdieu neglect the possibility of explicit rules and teleaffective structure (and to some degree general understandings) to be practice-organizing principles. Further differences exist that one could point out, such as the neglect of materiality in Giddens’ view, that we will leave aside now. One must, of course, mention that Giddens and Bourdieu have had more in mind than any discussion of practices alone in their works and that their theories extend beyond what has been presented here.

If we turn to the contemporary family of practice theories, we find yet further traits from which we can see how our way of treating practices here is distinct. One point of comparison is Andreas Reckwitz, who presented a programmatic version of practice theory to juxtapose it with alternate cultural theories. In his version, practices are routinized types of behavior consisting of elements such as bodily doing, know-how and background knowledge, things (and their use), states of emotion and motivational knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). Whether this theory is supposed to function as theory beyond its use as point of comparison is not clear. Nonetheless,

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69 Turner (2001) has a convincing critique of the idea of tacit rules, hinting that it would assume shared sets of tacit rules for mutual intelligibility to be possible, despite that many practitioners more sensibly participate for their own purpose and have learned the practice through different means/circumstances. If Turner is believed, tacit rules then amount to an unnecessary, and unlikely, concept for understanding practices. We do not posit the same set of hidden rules or the same form of practical understanding, but only an understanding that allows for intelligible behavior.

70 Schatzki’s critique extends beyond my mention here to also touch upon the intellectualizing tendencies of Giddens, who also equates action with enacted formulas (SP, p. 158).

71 Essentially, Giddens views resources as the equivalent of materiality. These resources are either authoritative or allocative. The former is immaterial and more akin to power, whereas the latter vaguely corresponds to the material one could draw upon as resource. However, how one would actually utilize ‘allocative resources’ is not specified as such and seems to rest upon the ‘command’ of such resources. In other words, even material resources seem to depend on authoritative control. In putting it this way, materiality is pushed further away in the work of Giddens than in the work of Bourdieu and Schatzki.
drawing from this programmatic version one finds the work of Shove, Watson and Pantzar (2012). In their work, we find the elements of practice to be materials, competences (e.g. know-how), and meaning (in terms of symbolic meaning, ideas and aspirations). We do not find mention of explicit rules as worthwhile elements of practice in either of these alternate accounts, and something like the idea of teleoaffective structure is differently construed (as affective/motivational knowledge or as meaning/aspiration). The omission of rules as elements of practice is not to suggest that these are not relevant per se as Shove et al. happen to discuss how rules or standards can formalize some practices (2012, pp. 103, 105).

Perhaps more interesting is the treatment of teleology. As an example, Shove et al. (2012, pp. 24, 82) have chosen to not tie the ends of practices to combinations of activities but simply to treat these as performances without greater specification. That one undertakes performances for the sake of ends in varied ways, and that these constitute the arrays of acceptable/correct doings is of less import for them in their discussion of elements of practice themselves. This constitutes, in their reading of Schatzki (SP, pp. 89-90), a grasp of practice-as-entity that can be contrasted with practice-as-performance (Shove et al., 2012, p. 8). This would be, in our sense, to divide the organization from the activity that supposedly draws from it and make practices temporally and spatially unfolding phenomena. An omission of how performances constitute practice in terms of combinations of tasks is also a trait of Reckwitz’s account, which primarily lifts ‘routinized’ doing as sufficient for understanding social reproduction. To what extent these differences are problematic or whether they are justified for the sake of illustrating a way of thinking (e.g. Shove et al., p. 121) is something I will not examine further. My idea has been to present alternate theories so that a reader has a greater idea of what makes our own approach distinct and to understand that differences exist.

To conclude, it is worthwhile to mention that while there might seem to be a totalizing element of the presented practice theory as if it ‘explains all’ it is not intended as such (cf. SP, p. 202). Eventual limitations that make this evident are, however, not something we will explore here. What awaits is the question of how this particular approach can come to bear in social investigation, and particularly so for the study of Organizations.
PART II

TOWARDS A PRACTICE ANALYSIS
3. Preparing the Frame of Analysis

Having come to terms with the ontological reasoning of practice theory, the question that remains is what it could mean for social scientific inquiry. It is only by regarding the possibility of such inquiry that we (in the context of social science) can regard practice theory in practice. Of course, what this means needs to be clarified. We have some central concerns to discuss here such as the relationship between ontological inquiry and empirical investigation, the meaning bestowed upon practice theory in practice, and some preliminary sketching of how this practically will be possible. The topics in this chapter are intrinsically linked to the topics of epistemology and methodology. To define these in simple terms, epistemology is the study of knowledge and reflects the question of how knowledge is possible, whereas methodology is the study and theory of empirical inquiry and its methods. Any social investigation undertaken reflects not only a sense of what the subject matter to be studied is but also the possibility to construct knowledge about the subject matter and the method to do so.

3.1. The potential use and meaning of practice theory

There is a divide between the common understandings of ontology in social theory and empirical investigation. To discuss how philosophical insights are to guide and be of relevance for empirical inquiry, we need to begin by discussing what the role of philosophy (and social ontology) in social science can be.

Although Schatzki (2003) admits that ontology is a sort of theory, one needs to pay attention to the notable difference between how one speaks of theory. Ontologies do not compete on the same level as many explanatory theories in social science. Empirical exploration can never fully vindicate or justify an ontological view (SS, pp. XVI-XVII); ontology is not within the realm of testable hypotheses. Schatzki’s own undertaking to present an ontological alternative entails ontological reasoning and the use of examples to illustrate some concepts briefly. The effort to show the fruitfulness of empirical work that presupposes his ontological alternative has not been a strategy he has favored (SS, p. XVI). But then how does social ontology relate to empirical work? Social ontologies provide the foundation for analysis. This echoes the claim of Heidegger (and others like him) that ontology matters for the possibility of science in defining what subject matter is from the outset (cf. Rouse, 2007b, pp. 175-181). With this in mind, Schatzki’s own work provides ontological concepts to understand the subject matter of practices.
Despite the difference in the effort of the social ontologist and that of the social investigator who undertakes empirical work, there is potentially a fruitful link between these. The contribution of ontological investigation to empirical work is the provision of a way of thinking that can be picked up for use. Ways of thinking can translate into ways of investigating insofar as ontology is taken seriously (cf. Schatzki, 2016b, p. 40). The question is how this ought to be done and how certain ontological/theoretical assumptions ought to affect empirical research.

In some of his more recent efforts (e.g. Schatzki, 2012, 2016b), Schatzki has contributed in books with the agenda to advance research using practice theory (cf. Higgs et al., 2012; Spaargaren et al., 2016). Having previously discussed how a Wittgensteinian approach in the social sciences ought to look (Schatzki, 1991), he has later engaged with the task of communicating to empirical investigators the research implications of his own ontology. We will touch upon some of the implications that Schatzki has identified as a starting point here, focusing primarily on those implications he sees from his own work.

As seen by Schatzki, the use of his ontology while examining social phenomena implies a rendering that entails:

“[…](1) delimiting whatever activity episodes (if any) compose an event or phenomenon of interest (this is especially crucial vis-à-vis social events, for example, interactions); (2) uncovering the practice-arrangement mesh, net of meshes, and/or confederation of nets (a) of which these activity episodes or the phenomenon of interest is a component or, conversely, (b) that composes the phenomenon in question (as in the case of, e.g., government); (3) uncovering the further meshes, nets, and confederations to which this mesh, net or confederation is connected, intentionally or unintentionally; and (4) tracing the chains of human and nonhuman action that, in circulating within, passing through, and linking all these meshes, nets, or confederations (a) render the latter harmonious, competitive, or conflictual and (b) either lead to and spiral away from the social event of interest or maintain or transform the target social phenomenon.” – Schatzki (2003, pp. 197-198)

Seemingly, the task of a social investigator is to unravel the constitution of social phenomena by translating the phenomena, and what and how it is linked to other, to the Schatzkian terms of practice-arrangement meshes (or bundles as I have referred to them as). The idea that social life is composed of a plenum of practices reveals itself in the statement that phenomena quite generally are composed of practice, and that phenomena in some manner can be translated into practices (SS, p. 266). Whether one speaks of events or phenomena would not matter as these notions are invited to be conceived of as manifestations of practice-arrangement bundles. Of importance here is the ability to uncover practices and arrangement that constitute the studied phenomena. On this issue, Schatzki advises that this is done by:
“[…] identifying the ends, projects, rules, and actions that compose them (practices), whereas arrangements are uncovered both by attending to the setups where specific practices occur and by tracing the physical connections that link these setups to further ones.” – SS, p. 198 (parenthesis added for clarification)

The importance of grasping both practice and arrangement has been reinstated on several occasions. To grasp phenomena as rendered into practice and arrangement is to also examine interactions between practice-arrangement bundles and overlaps between these (SS, p. 199). This can be expanded to also be an acknowledgement of the relational constructs that Schatzki has developed in order to attend to the concept of practice-arrangement bundles. As stated at a later point:

“Investigating social phenomena through my ontology directs attention to how practices and arrangements causally relate, how arrangements prefigure practices, how practices and arrangements constitute one another, and how the world is made intelligible through practices.” – Schatzki (2010b, p. 146)

The relational constructs – causation, prefiguration, constitution and intelligibility – emerge here not only as to be perceived implicitly as that which composes the bundle of practice and arrangement but also as something that attention ought to be directed to. This implies the necessity to describe how social affairs transpire in arrangements of humans, artifacts, organisms, and things of nature tied to practice (cf. Schatzki, 2010b, p. 145). The advice to pay attention to the relational constructs imaginable in uncovered practices and arrangements does not, however, come with a particular guide on how to do so. In yet another paper, Schatzki advises that a means to deal with relations quite generally lies in his understanding of forms of sociality alongside the overlapping in the organization of practices. Hence, he advised that one ought to examine:

“[…] commonalities and orchestrations in […] actions, teleological orders, and rules; chains of action […]; material connections among nets; and the desires, beliefs, and other attitudes that participants in one net have toward […] other nets” – Schatzki (2005, p. 476)

Many of the concepts Schatzki has used to describe the nature of social reality make a return here as concepts that a social investigator ought to be attentive to, ranging from the organizing elements of practice, the relational constructs that form bundles, to the forms of sociality expressed in bundles. Ontological concepts are posed as relevant for social analysis. While this advice gives an idea of what Schatzki believes to be a good starting point to identify practice and arrangement, it does not dismantle the obstacle facing the social investigator on how one should both study and account for fundamentally important aspects of this view. Briefly put, Schatzki has pointed to a couple of his concepts that a social investigator could consider but has not described how it ought to be done.
3.1.1. Practice theory and interpretation

To begin to discuss how practice theory ought to be used, we first need to clarify the meaning bestowed upon it as theory. While one well-versed in practice theoretical literature might find such a discussion obvious, I will take a slight detour to examine this question because it is not necessarily obvious for all readers. As an example, in the opening of this thesis we compared the craftsman and his craft with the social analysts and their theory-as-tool. Not everyone would necessarily agree with the metaphor of theory as tool, and one could also wonder exactly what kind of tool is intended here. More so, in Chapter 2, we have defined practice theory by going through a form of abstract *a priori* theorizing regarding the social constitution of individuals and the meaning of context. Such kind of theorizing is not all that is referred to by ‘theorizing.’

The discussion of the meaning of theory is far too large of a topic for our current purposes, and so we will examine it in a delimited manner. There is not only one answer to the question of what theory means in the social sciences (e.g. Corvellec, 2013). One can, indeed, find multiple definitions of theory even within the same specific discipline of social science, such as in sociology (e.g. Abend, 2008) and in organizational studies (e.g. Sutton and Staw, 1995; Weick, 1995a; Llewelyn, 2003). Furthermore, one could find different ways of relating to theory and theorizing that envision social investigation to be the equivalent of inductive work or alternatively only searches for the solution to ‘problems.’

So, which meaning do we have, and in what sense could theory be a tool for our purposes? To understand our choice here, we will start by examining what kind of meaning will not be relevant (but is quite common in social science). Judging from the above, there is enough said to preliminary determine what a grasp most likely cannot be. Schatzki does not at any point open up the possibility that the theoretical concepts are to be seen as variables befitting a propositional scheme that can be tested. This implies that we can rule out definitions that would regard this theory for the study of definitive, operationalizable variables that interact in a measurable fashion to determine ‘universal laws.’ This is, of course, rather obvious. Many of the notions we have stated above are not of a propositional kind and considering their philosophical source – the later works of Wittgenstein and so on – they could not be! The point of acknowledging practical understanding is exactly to pose

72 One could discuss the historical concept of theory, ranging from its role in ancient Greek philosophy as *theoría*, to its shape during the formation of the sciences the last couple of centuries, to its contemporary form in the natural and social sciences (e.g. Liedman, 2013). It is, of course, the meaning of theory in the domain of contemporary social science that is our point of departure here, although this is also not delimited enough.

73 Moreover, there are also different ways of describing how theories come to be, in part conjoined with an understanding of what theories are (cf. Weick, 1989; Swedberg, 2014)
that behavior and action are not solely dependent on propositional knowledge. More so, we have the impossibility of clearly defining and pointing out the boundary of intelligibility of practices. We could go further in stating that we also have less than adequate means for the discussion of theory as predictive. What can we predict by stating that the social happens in the site? That we have relations that bind together practices with their materiality in various ways? Seemingly, we have already stated that practices are open-ended and unfolding so as to dispel the thought of dupes of practice neatly predetermined! Although perhaps one could, in some manner, make narrow appropriations as basis for alternative forms of research of measuring kind that are not in line with Schatzki’s own advice, this would probably imply the pulling apart elements that are not suitable for hypothesis testing and prediction (such as that of practice-organization) – and at that point, are we still talking about practices and arrangements as bundled? A pulling apart of some of these key notions would most obviously be a reversal of the project of practice theory as commonly understood: of staying in touch with and theorizing practices as a basis for the examination of social affairs. While such an effort could perhaps be worthwhile, it lies further away from an understanding of practice as presented in Chapter 2.

There are some indications of a more fitting meaning of theory. First, we have the comments regarding its use by Schatzki that direct to a general rendering of phenomena into practices, not losing track of these. Secondly, we have some past use and past commentary of similar kinds of theory that define practice theory as a sensitizing framework for empirical material (cf. Reckwitz, 2002). The kind of meaning we have at hand is interpretative; a type of meaning touched upon in the past (cf. Schatzki, 1991). As defined by the sociologist Herbert Blumer, such a kind of theory:

“[…] seeks to develop a meaningful interpretation of the social world or of some significant part of it. Its aim is not to form scientific propositions but to outline and define life situations so that people may have a clearer understanding of their world, its possibilities of development, and the directions along which it may move. […] Its effective fulfillment requires a sensitivity to new dispositions and an appreciation of new lines along which social life may take shape. Most social theory of the past and a great deal in the present is wittingly or unwittingly of this interpretative type.” – Blumer (1954, p. 3)

Since we are not after the empirical verification of the ontological reasoning as such, what we are after is the possibility to use such reasoning as a frame to direct ourselves towards the empirical for the sake of understanding. Such kind of theory is one that guides our inferences rather than one of finding verifiable causal explanations, axioms or laws (cf. Abend, 2008, p. 179). I will here conjoin interpretative theory with interpretative inquiry that covers such inference-making. Specific emphasis will be put on the ‘seeing’ of the world. What we have in mind when we regard practice
theory as tool is a lens or a pair of glasses through which we can ‘see.’ It is by the wearing of such a lens that we could imagine an uncovering and unraveling of the hanging together of social phenomena as proposed by Schatzki.  

Interpretative inquiry pertains to a general branch of study referred to as hermeneutics, which is concerned with the meaningful understanding of a subject’s point of view, of action, or of a text, and so on. We have not in mind a general interest in the hermeneutical tradition but a more specific one. After all, practice theory is critical of traditional hermeneutics (e.g. Giddens, 1984). As defined by an understanding more akin to our practice theoretical foundation, the question of interpretation is directed to the site-context of practices, or as Taylor (1971) refers to these: the interpretation of intersubjective meanings from which forms of activity are comprehensible. If we turn to Wittgenstein, interpretative social science is more specifically an interest in the grasp of practice (Schatzki, 1991). Such a grasp entails forming an understanding of the ‘spirit’ of practice and is more akin to what we understand by interpretative inquiry befitting our interest in practice theory. As a reader knows, practices are also not matters of pure social stuff but are bundled to the material. It is a practice theoretical interpretation attuned to this fact that is of relevance here for our effort.

Having now defined a preliminary interest in the grasp of practice, one faces the question of ‘how’ this ought to be done, and what it means to put on this pair of glasses for empirical purposes. This question is not as simple as it might seem. As put by Warde:

“[…] elements of a philosophical account of practice cannot be simply transposed into empirical analysis. As general theories of practice they tend to be idealized, abstract and insufficiently attentive to the social processes involved in the creation and reproduction of practices. Understandably so, for their preoccupations are different, metatheoretical rather than empirical.” – Warde (2005, p. 135)

Even if we can determine a meaning to the use of practice theory, there is work to be done. Regarding this issue, Schatzki has little advice to give and neither do we necessarily find a decent clue through the examining of past use of practice theory. Applications in so-called organizational settings are illustrative to what I refer to here. Ahrens and Chapman (2007) reimagined management control and business development as bundles of practices and arrangement. By mentioning certain happenings, the organizing components of the studied practices are referred to very briefly and so are the means of assessing how practices are conjoined to one another (Ahrens and Chapman,

74 In stating this, we also reject the idea of ‘grounded theory.’ Per Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory is such theorizing that comes from simply looking at the empirical without a frame or explanation held in favor a priori. Our rejection of ‘grounded theory’ is not so much the rejection of examining what is before coming to an explanation but rather that we state that our observations will not be naked or unguided.
Similarly, Jørgensen and Messner (2010) in their study of product development in a firm connect particular observations to Schatzki’s ideas occasionally (e.g. pp. 198, 200, 201), and thus only partly tend to Schatzkian key concepts. Empirical applications of Schatzki’s theory are seldom exclusively drawing from it. Instead, Schatzki’s ideas are referred to as a useful vocabulary to be combined with others (e.g. Maus, 2015). Effectively, this implies that we do not find any cohesiveness across empirical instances of use since these do not appear to use the same words nor necessarily the same language. This might be due to efforts to bring practice theoretical concepts into disciplines with their own traditions and alternative theoretical concepts that social investigators prefer to engage with. In such use, practice theory provides a set of concepts to be used on occasion, often to elucidate a couple of empirical events, seldom with mention of how practices were uncovered and the like.

As discussed in the beginning of this thesis, use of practice theoretical concepts might be stunted by their perceived limitation (e.g. Nicolini, 2012; Gherardi, 2015). Limitations could be discussed in terms of what the concepts fail to mention, as well as to their inability to serve as sensitizing concepts through which we find the possibility of interpretation (Blumer, 1954). More crucial is that we have little discussion in terms of the actual operation that a ‘seeing’ of practices ought to involve and that there is no clarity in how such ‘seeing’ ought to be reflected in an account. In regard to accounts produced, are these to be records of the “potentially labyrinthine complexity of bundles” or are these to be overviews with less detail (cf. Schatzki, 2005, p. 477)? One could perhaps wonder how one ought to be capable of making any accounts of some concepts due to their very nature.

To attempt to target this uncertainty, I will go through a couple of motions of how I have seen the potential to use practice theoretical concepts not for the benefit of ontological analysis, the domain of Schatzki, but to engage with them as ways of speaking about practice in social analysis. The choice of the metaphor of ‘speaking about practices’ is to designate a different kind of task that the student of the social undertakes when he depicts and studies social phenomena when using a practice theoretical vocabulary. This will follow a particular logic, a kind of grammar of their use, that amounts to my own appropriation of Schatzki’s ideas regarding empirical investigation, and from which we can begin to assess practice theory in practice.

75 An example of the limitation of concepts in terms of what they might lack to mention is that Hopwood (2016), rather than solely basing his effort on practice theory as we have defined it, finds it necessary to draw from alternative resources to discuss materiality.
3.2. Speaking about practice

Most meaningful activities that social studies focus on are the kinds of activities that are usually part of practice(s). Whether it be strategy, managing, working, friendship practices, cooking, or playing chess, these are not simply actions but organized sets of actions. There are disciplines of study that focus on particular practices such as these, with particular interest in how and why they are undertaken and also what is undertaken in detail. Questions of how, why, and what is being done relate to a principal concern of interpretation regarding practices. In literature, we do, however, stumble upon varied notions of practice (SP, p. 89). One of these is that of practicing as the learning how to do X, as is the primary interest of the work of Lave and Wenger (1991). Another is that which we have become familiar with in Chapter 2, as the site of understanding that is organized in such and such a manner. A third is practice as the term is mostly used, as simply the equivalent of action (as praxis). Quite generally, there is little reason to separate these second and third notions of practice in the work of Schatzki; practices are not understood as outside of action that makes them real and unfold. The distinction between practice as site and the performances of practice is more fitting in work where such a distinction is made (e.g. Shove et al., 2012). To make clear, I will regard the second and third understandings of practice here as that which one sees and speaks about. It is not one’s *own practicing* to gain higher levels of mastery that is of relevance *per se* but that there is an organized set of undertaken activity to begin with and how we can understand this.

Our point of departure will be the seeing and speaking about practices quite generally, including practices that we do not participate in as practitioners. The point of departure is not only generally more in line with Schatzki’s recommendation to render phenomena into practices but is also a prerequisite for a way of seeing/speaking about practices fit for studies of organizational phenomena, i.e. larger phenomena. It is largely unlikely that social investigation of Organizations engages with an idea to master all practices of Organization oneself, but rather that it aims to report on the practices of others from an outsider’s perspective.

Before we begin our exposition here, I will also state that I will not extensively problematize the necessary familiarity we need to infer on practices. Our point of departure will be that such familiarity in itself is not the problem but rather that the question is how one, even with great familiarity, ought to ‘see’ and ‘speak’ about certain concepts in a plausible manner. Of course, the question of familiarity is of relevance for our possibility to infer on practices at all, particularly in social investigations. Such discussion will be reserved for the next chapter. The reader is asked, while reading this chapter, to imagine that we are dealing with a seeing/speaking about practices that is not too far removed from the common, i.e. not greatly exotic practices for us (in terms of culture/language).
We also have to clarify a particular aspect of the kind of ‘seeing’ practices that we suggest here. Following our reasoning in Chapter 2, we do in everyday life infer on practices and act through these in a non-theoretical manner quite naturally. Having stated this, we have the question of what kind of interpretative process we are to direct ourselves to here if we, no matter what we do, make inferences on practices. To answer this, we will begin by directing ourselves to the specific aspects that we assume constitute practice, e.g. the practice-organizing principles. The choice to address the ontological components that constitute the organization of practices is in line with the idea that a practice theoretical understanding reflects a couple of dimensions as particularly important if its ontology is taken seriously (Schatzki, 2016b, p. 40). According to practice theory, the practice-organizing principles account for dimensions or aspects of practice. While one could say that one simply assumes the world to be constituted by practices and then make little effort to show what this means, not making an account that connects to the dimensions that practice theory lifts, such an effort would seemingly make little use of practice theory (and at that point, why mention it at all?).

It is the dimensions and aspects of practice, following our theoretical understanding in Chapter 2, that we will regard as that which we want to grasp in a kind of interpretative process. If we do not engage with a set of practices that are taken for granted and not examined in themselves, and instead see these as objects of inquiry in themselves (cf. Taylor, 1971, p. 29), these dimensions of practice are of relevance. To make clear what I refer to here, we can imagine a non-interpretivist study of practice that does not engage with these dimensions of practice but primarily engages with what Taylor referred to as ‘brute data’ of the measurable kind. Such a study could examine, perhaps, the regularity of certain actions (how often and for how long they are undertaken) and the measurable attitudes of people (through a survey) largely forgoing an interest in the constitution of practice beyond these expressions. In doing so, the practice is taken for granted rather than examined in itself. Studies of ‘brute facts’ do not necessarily engage with the ‘spirit’ of practice in the sense that the structure of practice comes forth. When we state then that we have an interpretative understanding of practice theory in practice, we can define it more specifically that it is the ‘spirit’ of practice that is sought after through interpretation (Schatzki, 1991), and that such a spirit is understood as presented in Chapter 2. It is this task that will be discussed here. After all, it is practice theoretical concepts that have been pointed out as poorly attended to.

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76 To state it provocatively, it seems to me that there is a general tendency to use terms such as ‘sociomateriality’ or ‘practice theory’ in academic work that could be read as well without considering what such terms were meant to address initially.
in social analysis by critics (Gherardi, 2015, p. 4), and it is these that constitute our understanding of the subject matter: practices.

What this essentially means is that our task of ‘seeing and speaking’ about practices will have a specific direction, and one that diverges from alternate understandings of practice. Not all give the same theoretical meaning to practice or lift forth the same dimensions. As an example, we have mentioned Taylor’s interpretative view on the meanings of practice, but for us such meaning is not – as is the case for Taylor – primarily in language (cf. SP, pp. 128-129). Having mentioned hermeneutics above, a discipline known for its focus on texts (understood at times figuratively, cf. Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009, p. 100), we propose a different kind of interpretative direction that goes beyond text and language. To take practice theory seriously is to have this specific interpretative direction in mind.

We will begin by discussing the aspects of practice of interest as explicit rules, practical understanding, general understanding, and teleoaffective structure. Through these we find the ‘meaning’ of practice that is sought after. These we will discuss as being interpreted through the grasp of that which we ‘see’ as circumscribing activity. Our task is to determine how each practice-organizing principle can be said to be ‘seen’ through a non-participatory position, that is inferred, and how we can ‘speak’ of them when examining an action pertaining to a practice. Our grasp of practice is primarily this: we are interested in the possibility of both seeing the dimensions of practice and speaking thereof. I will state that there are then two concerns. How clearly can we see the practice-organizing and to what extent can we speak thereof? Our effort here resembles an exercise of an epistemological kind, e.g. dealing with the question of knowledge, how to know things and justify our knowing. It is arguably a discussion of the epistemological consequences that is lacking among those who analytically attend to practices using practice theory (cf. Simonsen, 2007, p. 178). It is the character of such an operation that Bourdieu (1990), albeit with a different understanding of

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77 As an example, a Bourdieusian view would not see practice to speak of it alone without referral to the ‘habitus’ of actors. Similarly, an approach following the recommendations of Giddens would probably attempt to discern tacit rules and resources, including rules to obey authority. Drawing from Schatzki’s work, the task is differently framed. There is more to say about the organization of practice as we draw from a wider breadth of aspects of what such organization can be taken to be.

78 When I regard the organization of a practice, it is in fact an integrative practice that I have in mind. It is integrative practices that probably are of greatest general interest for the empirical researcher (Warde, 2005, p. 135), and for this reason only integrative practices will be discussed and not dispersed practices.

79 Referring to a ‘way of speaking’ in social investigation is not particularly novel. Ways of speaking have been understood as invitations to ways of redirecting ourselves to phenomena in novel manner in the past (e.g. Weick, 1979, p. 234).
practice in mind, found to be unexamined in his practice theoretical critique of established research paradigms and particularly so in regard to what a social investigator can be imagined to produce in the form of textual accounts of practice.

The making of an account of concepts will be here understood as social analysis of aspects of practice. If we imagine the link between understanding (of a subject matter), ‘seeing,’ and speaking of the subject matter, it is the final two that we will focus on. When ontological concepts are used to speak of practices as described here, they are converted from the language of social ontology to the language of the social analysis of empirical kind.  

The discussion on the way of seeing and speaking of practices here is not one bound by a rigid set of rules but instead is illustrated through examples of more or less pragmatic ways of speaking that are within the boundaries of the reasonable. In other words, we are not looking for a checklist that one adheres to slavishly but rather one that opens up for manageable interpretative work (and challenges, as we will see in Chapters 5 and 6). As concepts, these are not to be understood as contextual features that equate to deterministic variables that stand apart from actors (cf. Holstein and Gubrium, 2004, p. 269) but as ways to describe aspects of practices and ways people participate in practices. The concepts are not drawn out as to be conceived of as self-contained or isolated variables separate from the practice they pertain to, but only spoken of to reflect aspects of practices. What I refer to as ‘seeing’ is not the ‘seeing’ explicitly and isolated, but the making of inference upon behavior. What is obviously ‘seen’ are the bodies in social settings, but it is not the body per se that will be accounted for but rather the circumscribing principles of practice that we infer as we examine bodies (with things).

Before we conclude, I also want to point out that we will begin our discussion with individual practices to later turn to complexes and interrelations between practices.

3.2.1. On explicit rules

To begin, certain aspects of social phenomena can more readily be articulated than others. The same holds true for practices. I will discuss the practice-organizing elements briefly to show this challenge in terms of how we can both see and speak of aspects of practices. Let us begin by discussing what perhaps can appear to be the most obviously articulable organizing principle: that of explicit rules. Our interest in regard to explicit rules lies in that these are practice-organizing. Let us make clear what this means by making brief mention of the work of Wittgenstein. Drawing from Wittgenstein we could

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80 A similar point is made by Maus (2015), who regards Schatzki’s ontological vocabulary as fit for an analytical method.
wonder how to define the rules by which someone proceeds in practice (PI, p. 38). For a rule to organize a practice it needs to be so that action occurs in light of this rule. An abandoned or ignored rule not heeded is not such a rule that organizes a practice. Simply finding a manual is not a finding of rules heeded. But then how do we find those rules heeded, those rules one proceeds by? Wittgenstein famously catered to a couple of possibilities. One could regard rules that we can ‘read off’ a game as natural laws governing whatever we see (PI, p. 26), or we could regard the kinds of accounts that someone acting would give us if we asked him what his rule in behaving is. Naturally, we are interested not solely in rules we as observers can ‘read off’ from acting alone – one could after all be mistaken in such ‘reading’ – but more specifically those rules which organize practice. Furthermore, we are interested not in the rule only a specific individual might reply is heeded but the rule that matters in the context of behavior that is practice.

To illustrate what is meant, we can imagine our own participation in a game of chess. Simply moving pieces of wood on a board is not the playing of chess. Anything does not go in chess. Certain explicit rules matter. An example of these treading forth can be imagined if we picture ourselves making an illegitimate move in chess. In such a case, it is by being told or understanding that the particular move we attempted to perform is ‘against the rules’ and that it is not accepted (particularly so if our co-player and other people observing the move state this clearly). A particular move in chess is normally understood as undertaken heeding certain rules, and in our example, we broke such a rule. In such a case, one can make explicit statements such as “you cannot move that piece like that, it only moves like this and this.” If we are experienced players ourselves, we would know that we broke explicit rules, or another experienced player would tell us and so on. Such cases are easily imagined in terms of any game we can play, insofar as these are understood as games where not everything goes. This would be an example of an explicit rule that matters in practice, a rule-in-practice. Such an example would be indicative of ‘correct’ play, in line with rules, rather than mistakes that one otherwise could risk ‘reading off’ as an observer (cf. PI, p. 26). Certain rules are at play, whether every participant is so readily aware of each one, and these are possible to be made explicit among participants. If you stop someone to ask why they did an action in a certain way as part of a practice, it is possible that the person or someone else could account for how they followed certain rules. These could be expressed in propositional terms such as “In chess you have to move this piece in this way” and so on, and do not only define the

81 It is not only by emphasis on those present that we could argue that a move is illegitimate. Even those that are not present at the spot could perhaps watch a recording of a game of chess and deem what they see as unacceptable and against rules that actually should have been heeded if the game played supposedly is chess.
rules that particular individual decided to heed but also relate to the practice
as a whole. In other words, such a statement is made with the idea that others
also heed the same rules (and/or that they ought to).

While we can find sets of explicit propositions in a manual of sorts, it is as
soon as it can be invoked in regard to activity undertaken that it is the kind of
rule we are interested in. To paraphrase Wittgenstein, it is at such a moment
we can find an example of a rule that speaks through practice (OC, §139). This
is indicative of yet another kind of concern. As a practice is continually
performed through the undertaking of different actions, so are different
explicit rules possible to articulate as they are heeded on different occasions,
bound by circumstance or activity undertaken. An account of rules-in-practice
is necessarily an account of different activities or circumstances and possible
explicit rules heeded as such an occasion. A rulebook of a game might have
certain general propositions of how one wins a game but is further illustrated
with specific rules for specific situations. To find the rules that are heeded is
then dependent on whatever activity is undertaken in a practice, implying that
the grasp of a complete set of rules, detached from occasion and circumstance,
is implausible. The heeding of rules needs to be understood in relation to
certain action, so that we know that the manual found in fact is heeded.

While the game of chess is good for illustrative purposes, not all practices
have definitive sets of rules. In Chapter 2, we already defined practices as
generally indefinite. This implies that any grasp of all rules heeded if looking
beyond the neatly closed-off games proves impossible.82 With such a
limitation in mind, we can then direct ourselves to explicit rules as follows.
The grasp of seeing, for an observer, is when one is made aware that certain
action takes certain explicit rules into account. To be made aware of this one
relies on the moments that make these come forth, e.g. moments of instruction
and correction. Furthermore, it is plausible that general accounts from
experienced practitioners in regard to activities can be considered as means to
‘see’ rules-in-practice.

The possibility to witness these moments or get access to these accounts is
a methodological concern. Own experience, the tolerance for the novice of a
practice to ask basic or stupid questions, and the willingness of others to
express these in interaction are factors (Spaargaren et al., 2016, p. 18). While
explicit rules are articulable in the sense that what is ‘seen’ is easily
convertible to a speaking about these, we can make some comments on the
character of an account. As much as we cannot see a complete set of explicit
rules, unless the practice plausibly is a closed-off game such as chess (after

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82 One could challenge what I state here by saying that we can collect all explicit rules of
chess, implying that such a practice is not indefinite. To this one could retort that one could
imagine versions of chess, the evolution of games like chess, and possible future games that
draw from chess to illustrate the indefiniteness of even such kinds of games over time.
the 19th century and with a specific version in mind), we can also not make a complete account of all explicit rules. Essentially, the concern is with a general grasp of expressions and propositions of practice that relate to specific actions that one does and does not do (in such and such a fashion or not at all) without an intent to be exhaustive. The idea here is not to imagine that one ought to capture a single rule for a single action but to relate expressions of propositions that relate to actions as is feasible. As we have already discussed in Chapter 2, we do not consider explicit rules to be all that organizes practices. We do not have as aim to only explain how all follow a certain rule; drawing from Wittgenstein indicates that one ought to not do so anyways (cf. Schatzki, 1991).

We need to comment on one final aspect of rules due to our particular interest in what is commonly referred to as Organization. The mention of rulebooks can give the idea that we here only regard formal rules, expressed in text. Such rules are of import in settings of work, of managing, accounting and so forth. As is commonly known in organizational inquiry, the case is that even very bureaucratic Organizations have, and perhaps even depend on, informal rules to be possible (Selzwick, 1948). Explicit rules need not only be formal but stretch also to the informal. It might be sensible to demarcate between formal rules, such as regulations, and informal rules, such as codes of behavior that are not written down but can still be expressed, as it might be so that the consequences of breaking these might be different. For our purposes, these both are treated equally in the sense that both formal rules and informal rules can only be regarded as rules-in-practice insofar as they are actually heeded. Without a more specific case at hand, I will leave this distinction aside for now.

3.2.2. On practical understanding

Moving on from the most articulable to other elements we encounter other challenges. Practical understanding as an ability to participate in practice and to identify the participation of others is comparable to a form of know-how or tacit knowledge.83 One cannot articulate an ability to participate and identify the activity of others participating. Making an explicit account of practical understanding is to make a codified account not based on the real principles of such understanding (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 103; SP, p. 92). If person A can do X-ing, or identify X-ing undertaken by B, I cannot readily describe the X-ing

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83 The ideas of Gilbert Ryle (1949) and Michael Polanyi (1962) might have some common ground with what we suggest but one ought to be careful in extending this comparison. What is suspect, from our perspective, is the reading of Polanyi as speaking of ‘tacit rules.’ As discussed here, rules are of an explicit, propositional kind and not ‘tacit.’ In Ryle, we find instead a form of reductive behaviorism that has its own share of connotations (SP, p. 24).
beyond stating that the ability to do X-ing and react to X-ing is presupposed and present. Even in the case that I would attain some form of practical understanding so that I could participate fully in a practice myself, I would be incapable of articulating that understanding fully as I would struggle to provide an elaborate account of my ability that truly captured what it is (cf. Polanyi, 1962).84

Explicit accounts and practical understandings are essentially different (SP, p. 129). This is hardly a particularly unique issue for this concept or many concepts that theories draw from. What can be articulated is not the essence of the ability, but simply accounts of the manifestations of the ability in certain ways. Hence, an attempt to account for the ability to X or react to the X-ing of others is to state that a person can do X-ing. If we engage with the question of the practical understanding of cooking, we thus regard the ability to prepare ingredients, put the stove on the correct temperature, cooperate and orchestrate one’s own activities with that of another to be the traces of such practical understanding. The idea here is that such activities presuppose a particular kind of practical understanding, which we only partially can refer to by acknowledging that the activities are possible at all. A complete depiction of X-ing that stretches to reach practical understanding in itself is unfathomable. There is nothing to guide us as a true frontier to practical understanding beyond simply stating that a performer is intelligible as a better or worse participant insofar as we have some familiarity with the practice in question. This would be what one would naturally draw upon to judge a performance as simply unintelligible or state that someone is incapable of participation.

We could ask ourselves what it takes to do X-ing in the sense of how one attains the required understanding to do X-ing. Such assessment of traces can prove fruitful to discern the complexity or qualification of the required practical understanding. It is thus that we intuitively can grasp the demand to participate intelligibly and skillfully in certain practices such as karate and see the performance of martial art techniques (e.g. black belt karate katas) as distinct from the understanding required to participate in rock-paper-scissors. This intuition can be stated by depicting that it takes a certain effort or skill to participate (e.g. a certain training, mastering a breadth of tasks).

To conclude, any account of practical understanding is an account sensitive to the requirements of participation in practice by attending to the possibility of undertaking the actions of practice, and the barrier of participation that needs to be surpassed to be able to participate. We have nothing more but the inferior stand-in that is propositional forms of understanding for the non-propositional (SP, p. 93).

84 The same is true in cases of thinner understandings as well, such as the ability to recognize flute playing although one is incapable of playing oneself (cf. SP, p. 93).
3.2.3. On general understandings

Unlike practical understandings, general understandings are more fathomable through inquiry. However, as there might be a multitude of beliefs, concerns, and virtues, and some of these might not be so openly discussed as they reside in the background in the form of convictions, there is some unavoidable uncertainty regarding the depiction of these. While they might rest in the background, Schatzki (SS, p. 243) argues that general understandings occasionally become objects of attention, reflection and even discussion, and that they ought to be for them to be maintained in practices. During such times of reflection, practitioners might well articulate aspects of general understandings as they come to the fore as objects of their attention. Hence, general understandings are assumed to be discursively emitted (Welch and Warde, 2017). Following this line of thinking, one could claim that one can get occasional glimpses if one gets the opportunity to follow periods of reflection.

A period of reflection that lifts the beliefs, concerns, and virtues to the fore would not necessarily lift all simultaneously. Depicting the general understandings at one point of reflection would, probably, be a depiction of those understandings that have become objects of attention at the given time. While the whole range of understandings would need to be discussed, articulated, and reflected upon to be maintained, there is nothing stating that such maintenance need occur for the whole range of understandings at the same time. If it is so that the periods of reflection emerge due to circumstances that necessitate discussion and reflection, then arguably one can most easily trace the kind of beliefs, concerns, and virtues that emerge as objects of attention at such a given circumstance. I would like to add that it would not be too unreasonable to suggest that these moments of reflections, in limited form, could be ‘triggered’ by an investigator. As an example, a naïve outsider might by the asking of questions give reason to express certain beliefs/ideas/concerns.

There is something distinct from the inquiry of rules heeded to take note of, as general understandings tint practices in a way that might not be so obvious. A certain idea does perhaps not tie to tasks, in an evident manner, to form task-specific accounts (as one could arguably do with rules). General understandings are to be expressed in actions quite generally. Of course, while a task can plausibly be undertaken following a certain idea or in light of a certain concern, it does not necessarily follow that all tasks are undertaken with such an expressed idea/belief/concern and so forth. More so, it might not be particularly enlightening to pinpoint that such and such basic action that pertains to a practice reflects such and such ideas or beliefs. It is the practice as a whole that is organized to involve these.

Another aspect of general understandings is that these are understood to suffuse multiple practices (Hui et al., 2017), and to be commonly organized
across interlinked practices. A consequence of general understandings permeating multiple practices is that individuals’ statements regarding values, ideas, and beliefs that in some manner relate to practice can be conceived of as manifestations of general understandings across complexes to some extent, even if the practitioners undertake different practices. By grasping the general understanding of one practice, we are simultaneously grasping the general understanding of other practices. How far the suffusing stretches, and how ‘common’ these understandings truly are, is difficult to imagine without a more specific case at hand. While it might appear reasonable to assume that the practices of a religious sect might be organized by similar general understandings (giving the same importance to the same symbols), it might not be farfetched to suppose that one could find varying expressions of beliefs, ideas and so forth despite considerable commonalities among practitioners of different practices. How the general understanding can be understood to organize a certain practice is not evident by simply stating that such and such practice holds the same idea, perhaps because the same ideas are expressed in a different manner in the sense that they guide what ‘makes sense to do’ differently in meeting practices, accounting practices and so forth.

If we take Schatzki’s (2012, p. 16) example of general understanding as the nobility of educating students, I do imagine that such sense of nobility could be differently expressed and discussed among teachers, students, and principals due to different proximities to education. This would not imply that such a general understanding is different for whatever practices we can imagine in a university where education is pursued and provided, but that different dimensions of the very same nobility are imaginable. Of course, whether this is the case is largely a concern of empirical inquiry and the specifics of a case at hand.85

To conclude, one can ‘see’ general understandings if provided an opportunity to see some range of these expressed during moments of reflection. These moments depend on circumstance and occasion that make them reasonable topics and can perhaps be triggered by an investigator. Since general understandings are articulable, a ‘seeing’ is convertible to a textual account without greater concern. The concern is the ‘seeing’ and not the ‘speaking about’ general understandings. Due to the nature of general understandings as reasonably suffusing multiple practices, one ought not necessarily look for these in attending to a sole task in itself. However, one could examine more closely how even the general understandings that suffuse multiple practices might be differently understood across practices that hold these in common.

85 It is also due to my empirical work that I have come to appropriate general understandings in this manner.
3.2.4. On teleoaffective structure

Finally, the concept of teleoaffective structure remains to be discussed. Characterized as invariably complex and indefinite, this notion is a particularly ominous concept in a discussion such as this. The constitution of the teleoaffective structure is the ends, purposes, emotions, and moods found acceptable within a practice. These are also constituted by the life conditions expressed in bodily acts in practices. While certain conditions can be readily manifested, such as sadness through crying, others are not. What someone believes or feels when performing an action is not always so easy for others to see as they do not manifest openly. Hence, we have the more easily graspable and the more elusive conditions of life. These elusive, cognitive conditions can only be inferred through the knowledge of the status of a participant observed, the general atmosphere of the setting, or – more importantly – a deeper grasp of the nature of the practice the elusive cognitive condition pertains to. One would wonder how this is to be graspable in a definitive manner without major effort or if it is possible at all (cf. SP, p. 80).

An alternate way of examining this is to look at the normativized hierarchy of action, the end-project-task combinations. Activity undertaken in a practice is for the sake of ends which a practitioner is projected towards. To reiterate briefly, the tasks undertaken are understood as parts of projects that are tied to ends. A depiction of activity can be perceived and categorized as follows. Tasks A, B, and C are undertaken as part of project X for the end(s) Y (or more), forming the hierarchy of action that is an end-project-task combination. Practices do allow for more than one single combination of activities at a time. A limit is the imagined combinations of activities within the normativized range of practices. Essentially then, the concern is with the identification of tasks, projects, and ends undertaken in a practice which can be captured. While teleoaffective structure is indefinite, our account thereof is not as it produces specific examples of end-project-task combinations. So, if we describe cooking in terms of tasks such as the preparing and boiling of potatoes, preparing a sauce, and the frying of some meatballs, we can also see these tasks as part of a project undertaken for an end. Such an end, whether it is for the sake of eating a dish ourselves or to cook for a customer at a restaurant, when conjoined to the activity becomes an example of such an end-project-task combination.

Turning to affectivity, a depiction of end-project-task combinations can also be accompanied by the emotions and ends inferred or manifested. That is, what participants feel, hope for, and what they show as they undertake their end-project-task combinations amount to what is attempted to be described. This becomes as follows: Tasks (A, B, C etc.) are undertaken as part of project X for the end(s) Y, conjoined with emotions and moods Z. Stating that affectivity is conjoined to an account of end-project-task combinations, is to state that I primarily favor the following of the teleological in practice.
Examining ends is what I believe to be a less challenging task than the capture of more elusive affectivity (i.e. elusive conditions of life). Incidentally, ends are conjoined with emotion so that the capturing of ends does not imply that no place is left for a conjoined mention of affectivity. Affectivity motivates participation (Reckwitz, 2017), and participation in practice is to invite the possibility to be affected by other people, ideas, or things. Hence, I assume that the possibility to account for affectivity is bestowed by accounting for the ends that motivate participants in practices and how things matter to participants in light of this (cf. Blattner, 2007, p. 81). Such accounts of what matters are assumed conjoined to accounts of ends and grounded in these.

While we can imagine the identification of tasks and projects as an effort of categorizing activity we get a glimpse of, what do we do with ends and affects? If Schatzki (SP, p. 49) is to be believed, human beings are capable of accounting for their actions and their ends, and their conditions of life can be inferred from the context they are expressed in. When we witness someone winning a competition or contest, most of us would see and infer relief or joy. Similarly, most of us would assume that professional athletes engage in competition with the end to win in mind. While it might not always be possible for us to see what drives practitioners, we can ask them about the ends/purposes of their actions and they would be capable of telling us something about it, if they decide to be honest and forthcoming. Ascertaining true ends is arguably fraught with difficulty if we do not believe the accounts of participants. Admittedly, some could even argue that our own ends are hard to grasp (because we are not necessarily thematically aware of pursued ends, SS, p. 81). The idea that the investigator would hold a better grasp of the ends of a practitioner is, however, one I will reject. If we want to understand the considerations of actors, actors’ accounts of their considerations are the best we have got.86 Even if one might not be aware of ends normally pursued, reflection on those ends pursued presents a means to assess these for a practitioner. The assumption here is then that people are motivated by ends in their actions, that these are conjoined to emotion, and that they are able to account for this. I have above stated that it is by emphasis on ends that we conjoin emotions. For the question of emotions that do not manifest in obvious fashion, I do not see any other way of getting a hold of these than relying on the accounts of participants; the alternative would be looser inferring, which approximates simply guessing.

It is important to state what this belief in the accounts of participants implies. An account of pursued ends does not imply that further ends are not being pursued. Also, I do not perceive it to only be a problem if participants, or even myself, state reasons that appear more noble than “true” ends. Even if a participant would state an end simply because it would be believed to be a

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86 This assumption is similar to Schatzki’s own (SP, p. 152).
more acceptable answer, we have possibly grasped something: a normativized end. This would allow us to continue speaking of the normativity that circumscribes doing, reflecting expected/normativized affectivity. Obviously, wholly dishonest accounts cannot be disregarded as a possibility, particularly when conjoined to forms of deviant, unacceptable behavior that does not abide to the normativity of a practice. The issue of dishonesty, however, is based on a ‘true’ account being withheld and not on a ‘true’ account being impossible. Dishonesty aside, the indefinite nature of normativized ends and the potential of contestation implies that a singular account of what is correct cannot be easily determined as the only one. Essentially, doing what I propose here could produce multiple accounts of ends and affects that we then conjoin to activity. As Rouse (2007a, pp. 50-51) states, any normative conception of a practice is to be regarded as the result of a mutual interaction among participants. We can then, by judging multiple accounts together, form an image of at least which of our accounts are more or less within the bounds of the normative. It is then, in this sense, that we can examine the combinations of activity that follow from the teleoaffective structure of practices.

It is also important to note that being motivated to do something for an end does not have a bearing on whether the end is achieved in a future state of affairs (TS, p. 172). The normativized array of ends is something which presently guides, and as far as it does that, it circumscribes present doing. It is not something measured in accordance with how well ends are met. Furthermore, we also have to be aware of what an account of combinations of the teleoaffective structure cannot be. The teleoaffective structure is indeterminate as practice is unfolding; the accounts we make thereof are determinate. This means that the combinations of activity found are but a slice of something unfolding that is – like many of the other practice-organizing principles – not captured in its entirety.

3.2.5. On the images we can grasp

There are some challenges worth acknowledging. These are the problems of the nature of accounting of practice, the unfolding nature of practice, the issue of circumstances and occasion, the problem of participants perceiving the same practices differently, the overlapping of practices, and the relation between the depth of an inquiry and the scope/detail of depictions.

I have above pointed to the importance of ‘seeing’ the organization of practice by paying attention to the accounts of practitioners. This is yet another assumption, and one found to be particularly important by Giddens (1979, p. 215) to actually understand the context of behavior of actors and see actors’ “penetration of institutions which they reproduce in and through their practices”. As Garfinkel (1967, p. 70) puts it as he draws from Wittgenstein, if we see actors as participating in ‘games,’ we need to ask ourselves ‘What is their game?’ If we are interested in their game, we necessarily need to relate
to their practical considerations. This is particularly important in the case the practitioners’ considerations conflict with those imagined by investigators. The accounts of practitioners are, however, bound by the situation of their practices and by the limit of what can be expressed discursively, and so practitioners might give accounts of their own conditions of life and practices but not by making the inarticulate explicit or going beyond accounting of their own practices (Giddens, 1979, p. 144; 1984, p. 281). This needs to be acknowledged for the concerns of analyzing practices, i.e. ‘seeing’ practices.

Beyond ‘seeing,’ one is also limited in regard to the task of ‘speaking.’ As practices are understood as open-ended, temporally unfolding, a complete depiction of these are a general impossibility. The temporal unfolding of practices implies that practices are continuously happening, and that a capture of practice would have to be a capture of something which is continuously unfolding. Our account in text fails to provide this. To every story, account or narrative there is in an end in a text. We could imagine an account that leaves further imagination open as to what happens next, but our account in itself is static. New rules, understandings (both practical and general), and evolving teleaffective structures are to be expected of a living practice. We are then dealing with static slices of ‘real’ practices in our texts; we can only produce images of practices in the past tense. Arguably, the same problem here is a general problem for any depiction that has an eye on unfolding phenomena, even beyond studies of practice.

The question of circumstance and occasion is also, at first, seemingly problematic. The occasion and circumstance play a role in what is examined, and thus what is possible to depict. The points of reflection are not steadfast but fleeting, occasion-bound moments. Certain projects, and combinations of activity, emerge due to occasion. Certain rules would presumably only make sense in the occasion they are relevant. The multiplicity of circumstances both affect practice, and the depiction of practice. Hence, a depiction is bound to the circumstance of the performed practice at a given time and place. Otherwise, the depiction would be akin to a complete unearthing from an Archimedean point, an alluring yet impossible alternative that most clearly distorts an understanding of practice according to Bourdieu (1977, 1990). The complete unearthing ought not to be the objective. We will touch upon this again to stress what we can do about this.

Another point worth acknowledging is the issue that practices cannot be conceived of as understood in the same way by all practitioners. Participants do not necessarily hold an identical grasp of the practices they participate in but enough of a grasp to be intelligible to one another. This holds true also in the case that it is oneself that engages in a practice. Arguably the same problem is encountered by other studies of other phenomena as well. It is, for our purposes here, not imperative that all actually share identical understanding. While a boundary of intelligibility cannot be spelled out completely, we do in everyday life operate with a sense of unacceptable, worse, or better
participation in practices. I would wager that we actively speak thereof in everyday life, and that we have more or less certain conceptions of what a practice entails. A case of people having their own, unique conception of a practice and being penalized for ‘wrongful’ participation would, however, also be enlightening in regard to what the circumscription of practice is. This is not to state that our conceptions necessarily are identical. Multiple statements from the number of participants we happen to encounter or see and the observing of people that are penalized corroborate our sense of boundaries. A way of speaking about practices using a practice theoretical vocabulary would in equal fashion be corroborated by the number of statements and observations. Admittedly, this way of speaking of practices by corroborating accounts of practices entails giving yet another version of a practice through an individual interpretation of what is normative and acceptable that covers over divergences held by practitioners in understanding.

Increasing the uncertainty of any depiction is that practices might overlap, and that clear boundaries between practices do not exist (SS, p. 87). A study focused on the practice of fishing in the company of others would perhaps have a difficult time in completely demarcating between the practices of fishing and friendship, or perhaps family bonding. Certain practices might also be interwoven so as to make them better understood in complexes, as noted in Shove, Pantzar and Watson’s (2012) definition of complex. This is worth acknowledging if it might be so that the elements of practice are shared among practices. It is so that certain components of practices help organize multiple practices (TS, p. 73). Each practice is not insular.

The question of demarcation is a fundamental task, and one that partly lends itself to the particular depth of analysis warranted by the practice analysis, the focus of the analysis, and the accounts of practitioners. We can imagine two ways of doing this. If multiple actions that share in elements of organizing and occur in close proximity are undertaken by the same practitioners, one could either treat these actions as pertaining to a sole practice or to multiple. If one treats this as a sole practice, one would state that multiple tasks and projects are held by the same organized set. If one instead treats it as multiple, one would state that the many tasks and projects simply amount to the crisscrossing of practices. Do we treat the preparing of potatoes, the slicing of vegetables, and the frying of meatballs as distinct practices or as one and the same: cooking? If we are interested in the accounts of practitioners, the fact that the preparing of potatoes, slicing of vegetables, and frying of meatballs might share in teleology could be taken as an indication that they pertain to the same practice. I would assert that dissecting practices for the sake of avoiding a potential crisscrossing would be mistaken. This is not only in my simple case of cooking here but also in the case of fishing above. What is to state that fishing is to be an activity that by necessity needs to be held separate from conversation among friends?
Largely, we cannot avoid going into discussion of desired depth of the analysis and how minute and detailed one’s depiction of a practice ought to be as we discuss the treatment of overlapping. In other words, we have to decide on a level of detail for our own purposes. Whether a general standard can be provided is unlikely, but what is perhaps most important is to discuss the minimum requirements of depiction and the reasoning for a minimum baseline. My point of departure is that one can depict the *images of practices*. These images are static and only fragments of the practice depicted. But for what is such a ‘flawed’ image good for? When one regards the image of each kind of element of practice, these can provide the general gist of a practice. This would be like placing pieces of a puzzle together. For example, the end-project-task combinations of a practice do not only conform to the teleoaffective structure, but also adhere to rules, need to be able to be performed (intelligibly), and are understood to rest upon the general understandings. It is by acknowledging the four elements that one can attempt to understand the normativized range of action and what action presupposes. The question of which activity belongs to a practice is answered by determining, while depicting, if the activity plausibly can be linked to the four elements. Linking here means an observing of action by reflecting on the different sides of practice that each organizing element provides. I will acknowledge two as particularly illustrative in this: the practical understanding and the end-project-task combinations. If a certain task can be stated as presupposing the four elements of a specific practice, a natural starting point is most notably the ability to perform the tasks conjoined to projects and ends at all. This emphasis would resolve the concern of the overlapping of practices making depictions difficult, as the concern of demarcation would not entirely depend on whether a certain element is shared among practices. In a firm, multiple practices might overlap in general understandings but not in tasks and practical understanding.

Here, a critical reader could argue that stating whether activity is tied to the four elements would be difficult. The four elements, and their traces, could be so uncertain in their depiction that the linking would be an uncertain affair as well. To preempt such critique, it is important to state what is not meant by linking the elements. Linking a certain task or basic act to the traces of the four elements does not imply that the four elements would so readily be manifested in one specific task examined at the same time. Whether end-project-task combinations can be reasonably stated to be linked in broad strokes is far more crucial than a drawing out of elements in a manner that does not benefit a pragmatic practice analysis. Hence, I propose some lenience in this while acknowledging the shaky ground we stand on. Instead of extensive depiction, I advocate for the depiction of the most notable traits of each element and the most notable combinations of activity, rather than an exercise to be exhaustive in one’s account. Of course, what is referred to as ‘notable’ lies in the eye of the beholder.
Here, I have assumed that the aim of the depiction of a practice is to depict the general gist, and not that there is a deeper purpose in the examination of a particular dimension. When I refer to a general gist of a practice, I use the term ‘gist’ to refer to some grasp of the ‘spirit’ of practice and not a complete unearthing. To merely capture the gist of practice provides a sufficient basis to explore our treatment of practice-arrangement bundles and complexes of practice.

3.3. Speaking about bundles

The social site is understood as both practice and arrangement, and arguably any fair account building on such understanding ought to at least relate to this. It is difficult to understand the practices without regarding the materiality involved in the activity. Thinking back on the craftsman and his craft, our understanding would be rather lacking if we did not consider the tools, the material, and what is produced.

The study of arrangement is not a distinct challenge for practice theoretical analysis. Examining a setting, how people and tools hang together, is a common feature of ethnographic research (e.g. Orr, 1996). More recently, interest in the notion of materiality has been argued for its general significance (e.g. Orlikowski, 2007; Leonardi and Barley, 2010). In the case of examining practices, attending to artifacts can also be conjoined with an interest in the heritage and history of a practice and its community (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 101).

For us, the task of imagining bundles of practice and materiality builds on a set of varied dimensions that are differently defined from these other mentions. As described in Chapter 2, the thickness of multiple relations between a practice and arrangement ontologically define the bundle. These relations pose a challenge. First, bundles are the result of various kinds of relations between practice and arrangement, while relations also exist between entities in an arrangement. Secondly, Schatzki’s definition of relations has varied over time.\(^\text{87}\) In discussions of ontology, it might be reasonable to claim that relations of intentionality, intelligibility, causation, prefiguration, constitution, and many more exist among entities hanging together and practices. I wager, however, that working with all of these concepts is nigh

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\(^\text{87}\) Over time Schatzki has introduced a set of relations and has given different descriptions of how practice and arrangement bundle beyond those we have come in contact with in Chapter 2. While I have tried to present the most notable ones, I have not managed to fit them all in. For example, Schatzki (2016b) has added that practices affect, use, and are directed toward or inseparable from arrangements, while arrangements channel, prefigure, and facilitate practices. One could, arguably, interpret these as alternate descriptions of those relations presented in Chapter 2.
impossible for empirical use. If one imagines that there is a large number of entities that a practice transpires with and amid, one can also imagine that there is a complex web between the entities and the practice. A complete mapping of relations is far from reasonable both in regard to their actual capture and to the sort of attention that is supposed to be given in the actual account thereof.

From the complete set of relations and imaginable entities, I will direct my attention to a subset that I think provides sufficient means to begin assessing bundles. Underlying my idea here is to imagine a baseline for an account of practice, so that we direct ourselves to the most noteworthy entities of bundles and make sure these are not missed. On the issue of bundles, the point I make here is that we can distinguish what practices transpire with and amid by noting in what sense they involve entities. A practice can directly and indirectly involve entities. Let me present briefly what I suggest by providing an example.

If we imagine the practice of woodworking, we can more or less easily imagine the artifacts that most directly define such a practice. We have hammers, wood, electric and conventional saws, hand planes, hand-operated drills or electricity-powered ones, workbenches, nails, and so on. We then obviously have the people that undertake the performances as well: the woodworkers, and the locale for such performances: e.g. a workshop. The practice of woodworking comes to directly involve such entities in its regular performances. This might appear quite obvious and we have in our examples thus far imagined practices by mentioning what they directly involved in this sense (e.g. the wine and the Eucharist, or soccer, the player and the ball). I will focus here, for illustrative purpose, on the directly involved as artifacts used. Essentially, an effort to grasp practice is also an effort to understand artifacts that are directly involved in the sense of being actively used and highly relevant for the constitution of the activity of practice.

Now, we have to note that we can imagine two kinds of performances that involve entities in a direct sense: common performances that provide a more or less obvious sense of the entities involved, and more occasional kinds of performances that can be of a less obvious kind. Regarding the latter, we can imagine that certain circumstances make some entities on occasion tread forth in performances. If we go back to our example of woodworking and imagine that the electricity is cut due to a storm, a couple of things that might not have been directly involved normally come to matter. The electric blackout might imply that the conventional tools that perhaps normally see little use but do not require electricity come to be used (e.g. the hand-driven drills or conventional saws). Such kinds of entities treading forth are the kinds tied to occasional performances and to the possibility to witness these occasions. The artifacts that are only used if occasion calls for it might not be those we most directly define as constituting a practice, or are used as much, but are involved nonetheless. Here, the distinction between the common and the occasionally
involved comes to be a question of how much use an artifact sees and the kinds of occasions these might be tied to (and how common these are). If electric blackouts occur regularly, we could perhaps redefine our sense of those only-occasionally-used-artifacts to actually be regularly-used-artifacts.

Both that which is commonly involved in a practice in a direct sense, and that which can come to be involved in light of circumstance have something in common in terms of how they define a bundle by privileging the use of artifacts. Even our mention of alternate tools coming to be used on occasion depends on the idea that a practice is organized to involve their use. So, when the electricity is cut, the hand saw or drill comes into relevance because the practice in question is organized for this to be possible. What to do then with the electricity we have mentioned in our example? There is the possibility that many entities fall into the background, as infrastructure, e.g. electrical infrastructure, and are thus not noted but still remain important (e.g. Star and Ruhleder, 1996). It just so happens that their importance comes forth occasionally, but even then, might not be related to ‘use’ in a direct sense. One needs only imagine the reliance of modern communication on the Internet and the bother of the occasional absence of a good signal or Wi-Fi to understand what I refer to here.

How do we capture such infrastructure by privileging use? I will here state that we are also after the indirectly involved, which is defined as that which is not directly used but still matters in terms of how it can prefigure and constitute entities a practice relies upon. Woodworking occurs in a locale that is of no little importance for what is actually performed, e.g. a workshop, and can come to be dependent on infrastructural aspects such as access to electricity in order to make certain entities function as artifacts at all. While it might not be so that woodworking must involve a workshop, or must involve electrical infrastructure, it is still so that such entities are of relevance as they prefigure and even constitute the activities of woodworking in a sense. This is not the least what we could imagine is the case for contemporary forms of work and practices that heavily rely on computational infrastructure. In other words, the indirectly involved entities include those that are not of active use but indirectly affect or make use possible. We could see this as constitution without use. My expression that the indirectly involved is not ‘used’ could raise a question. “Is not the use of an electric drill the use of electricity?” In a sense, but it is not so that a practice that involves a drill is organized to make electricity in itself useable but that electricity is a necessary component for the functioning of the drill that is used. Secondly, if these are not directly ‘seen’ in performances, one could wonder how these are to be depicted and grasped. One important way of doing so is to grasp that which shows the indirectly involved matter; one would have to see how the indirectly involved might affect and come to matter by examining its effects on performances. A certain sensitivity to the material setting a practice is performed in is a good start, but
also a sensitivity to circumstances that most notably speak of their importance, e.g. kinds of breakdowns. We will discuss this further later on.

Let us summarize what is suggested here. First, practices come to involve certain artifacts in a direct sense by being used, and practices being organized to make this so. Secondly, practices come to involve artifacts in an indirect sense by allowing aspects to be used. I propose that one ought to describe what comes to the fore and not feel obliged to account for all that hangs together because they do so ontologically speaking. It is in this manner that the concept of the bundle can prove of use for empirical use. Directing oneself to entities to ‘see’ them as one ‘sees’ practice is then never to see an entire bundle. One can only depict a slice of any bundle and not more. This will have to suffice as a prerequisite for further speaking about bundles.\textsuperscript{88} Rather than pursuing an account of the number of relations and their supposed thickness to able to speak of bundles, relations can play the role of bestowing a vocabulary to reflect upon the ways practices transpire with artifacts after a preliminary assessment of bundles is made. Relations are then used to further reflect on bundles to ask how the hanging together looks, e.g. what makes an artifact be used or affected and how. Causality, intentionality, and intelligibility are similarly reflected in the way entities are involved. This is to be assessed after we have a preliminary understanding of involved entities.

My discussion here is one way to see bundles. I have focused on artifacts primarily. When I come to show what I suggest here, by a tracing of socio-technical change, it will be evident that it is precisely artifacts that are of interest. I have here not problematized whether it can be difficult to distinguish other kinds of entities as part of bundles (e.g. the weather), or if it is difficult to distinguish the people that are bundled with a practice. We have an artifact-centered concept of bundles.

Moreover, I have assumed that there is a simple way of distinguishing between entities that practices involve commonly/occasionally and directly/indirectly. I have not proposed the scope of how far one goes in determining what ‘common’ is or how far one stretches to see what affects indirectly. In my eyes, this is mostly an empirical question but I will take the opportunity here to discuss an important aspect regarding the nature of artifacts.

Most of my examples of artifacts have been of a very concrete kind, such as physical objects we can touch. This discussion on bundles and entities needs to also be sensitive to the question of information technology. Not mentioning information technology is arguably problematic as our modern-day forms of sociality engage considerably in shared digital settings, i.e. social

\textsuperscript{88} This is largely in line with Schatzki (2016a), who claims that exhaustive enumeration is unnecessary.
media and forums. We have here an opportunity to reflect further on how to define the boundary of what is and is not involved. While Schatzki’s examples have revolved around forms of information technology (SS, pp. 157-174), this has only briefly been explored theoretically in terms of acknowledging that artifacts can involve that which is stored in physical objects as well (Schatzki, 2010b, p. 136). Artifacts are then acknowledged as physical objects, e.g. a hammer, and as stored in physical objects, e.g. software in a computer. Digital technology is a kind of technology without matter in the concrete sense, complicating any discussion of materiality in modernity (Kallinikos, 2012, p. 77). Much modern technology is only present as digital content. But then in what sense do practices transpire with these *artifacts within artifacts*?

Let us imagine a work practice that involves a computer in one of its tasks. First, we have the obvious concrete materiality of the physical form of the computer. Secondly, within the computer there are digital files and digital software, i.e. digital entities. A computer is more than just a box of electric circuits but is also an arranged set of digital entities. Arrangements are not only to be perceived as the soccer player and the ball (both very material entities) but also as the software programmer, the computer, and the software to program. Envisioning information technology, and digital entities, in this manner is to perceive them as arranged entities within an artifact, *as artifacts within an artifact*. For software programming to be a possibility, it involves both the computer, an artifact in the concrete sense, and software, an artifact within the artifact. What practices transpire with stretches beyond mere concrete objects.

Much more could be said about artifacts of this kind. Within a computer there is a great amount of entities that could be defined as a kind of computational infrastructure, i.e. the Internet, that arguably could fall in the background as much as traditional infrastructure tends to do. Technological proliferation has meant that parts of the world are flooded with devices and computers that can access the shared digital infrastructure of the Internet, which poses that many in the current Western world have some form of shared digital arrangement. We see here a case of the indirectly involved that makes the issue of where we draw the line relevant. The question of where an arrangement begins and ends, and what a shared material setting truly is, could imply that we have more to contend with as we depict practice-arrangement bundles today than in the past. Similar to my advice previously given, I would state that a central question is the proximity and relevance of a certain phenomenon. Does the practice involve a certain digital entity? If so, then it ought to be depicted in what sense it is involved, directly or indirectly, as discussed above. This would not imply the need to depict all digital infrastructure. If a certain modern-day work practice engages with software on a computer, it is not necessary to stress that such a practice also involves other entities that are never obviously relevant for the practice or affect it in the sense that the access to electricity affects the electric saw (e.g. MS Paint).
The overcoming of distance through modern technology, and the mass of entities uncovered when examining said technology, does not truly mean that all entities imaginable are ready-at-hand, in Heidegger’s terminology, and meaningful in the context of practice.\textsuperscript{89}

To conclude, the idea of seeing and accounting for performances is crucial to be able to account for materiality. It is by talking about a specific action and giving an account of the involved entities that we achieve a speaking about practice-arrangement bundles. The indirectly involved is interesting to us insofar as it affects performances that we can see. As an example, giving an account of cooking would imply a form of a narrative of different activities undertaken with different things, e.g. peeling potatoes with a potato peeler and boiling these in a pot on the stove. If there is no water available so that one instead decides to roast the potatoes, then this comes into account as one tells of the activity undertaken. One could note that this ‘seeing’ activity can be assisted, as we have stated above, by drawing from accounts of practitioners. With performances in mind, one could ask which entities are used in these. A practitioner’s sense of the commonly involved, or why one has decided to do things one way with a certain entity instead of another way, are ways to enrich an account.

3.4. Speaking about overviews of Organization

According to Shove et al. (2012), the examination of a practice ought to be sensitive to that which a practice shares with other practices. A practice is not insulated from others and might very well depend on other practices to persist. A plethora of figurative concepts are used to designate the larger-scale phenomena composed of practices, e.g. complexes, constellations, and nets. Such notions figuratively reflect the idea of interlinking and largeness. As we have come into contact with in the previous chapter, we are not interested in the ‘larger’ being anything beyond practices. Simply because we want to see and speak about multiple practices that share in traits is not to imply that we are speaking about something distinct from practices. We are interested in connections between practices.

To speak of “larger” phenomena in an analytical manner and not solely figuratively (Nicolini, 2017, p. 103), I use four interconnected alternatives: commonalities, shared material settings, chains of actions, and coordination. These amount to the forms of sociality that we previously referred to as constituting Organization. These means to touch upon interrelations between practices are understood as sensitizing to find the interrelations and possibly

\textsuperscript{89} Cf. Schatzki’s interpretation of Heidegger for a far more comprehensive take on this (Schatzki, 2007a, p. 63).
also interdependencies between practices. It is not, however, so that these are studied in themselves. The tracing of interconnections of practices will then not engage with the focus of studying connective tissue in the first hand (Blue and Spurling, 2017), but rather by doing the opposite of the demarcation of practices and looking for the overlapping of practices. A point of reference here is what Wittgenstein referred to as the constructing of overviews as means to grasp the ‘spirit’ of practice. As noted by Schatzki in regards to this, the:

“[…] social scientist should collect together different practices related to the one to be understood in such a surveyable fashion that she sees the connections among them, that is, how they hang together” (Schatzki, 1991, p. 318).

Through the wider placing of a practice in a wider context and through comparison with others, the overview is essential not only for the sake of a wider understanding of phenomena but also for having a chance at understanding the specific practice of interest as well. This is largely compatible with what we state here. A problem with Wittgenstein’s proposition as presented by Schatzki (1991) is that one needs first know which practices are related to the one under investigation by first grasping the spirit of that practice, and somehow this grasp is only attainable through the construction of the overview. This problem, I claim, is less severe than one might imagine while attempting to construct an overview. As Schatzki in his later work has noted, a study that supposes that it can study the constitution of practices would probably in its making touch upon other related practices and can recognize this by awareness of forms of sociality (cf. Schatzki, 2005, p. 476).

Acknowledging the chosen forms of sociality to be attentive to overlapping does not, however, indicate how many practices and how much arrangement need to be seen and spoken about. If we imagine a factory, as a shared material setting, we could therein find numerous interlinked practices. The foreman, the workers, an operative manager, and so on could be assumed to participate in work practices that share in setting, have commonalities, and are tied in chains of actions. Furthermore, we can imagine other practices within the same setting, such as practices of friendship, chatting, workplace disobedience, coffee breaks, and eating lunch together. Practices not performed at the physical setting could also arguably be tied to workplaces, e.g. after-work pub visits. Commonalities and shared material settings can quite generally be imaginable throughout society in the form of common general understandings suffusing multiple practices or through shared societal infrastructure (e.g. the Internet).

It is the eye of the beholder, the eye of the demarcator, that most obviously draws a line between what is of interest. One could argue, however, that not all practices are tightly knit together or strongly interrelated and that specific Organizations thus do not stretch considerably unlike constellations of
Organizations (e.g. industries, sectors, business-to-business networks). An argument that strengthens such a view is gained by acknowledging what remains to be discussed: coordination. Essentially, coordination implies that multiple practices embrace common goals. This resembles commonalities but is not the same thing; one deals with understandings, rules, and mutual intelligibility whereas the other deals with common teleology. For some practitioners in some practices to follow the heed of other practitioners, one would expect that the practices in turn are organized for this to happen. Essentially, for the worker to heed the foreman’s instructions might just be part of the job, defining the practice of manual labor in question. To pose that all that formally pertains to an Organization is coordinated in this sense would be farfetched and would mean that many of the worries of managers are non-existent. Insofar as we are interested in the pursuit of common goals across practices, we would more reasonably expect a more delimited number of practices that at any single point are coordinated. While a supply chain might involve a number of practices that all seemingly work for the same final states of affairs, e.g. the production of cars, the instances of coordination across practices are more delineated. Perhaps an idea of the end-product would be possible, e.g. a worker at a plant knows that such and such product is used for such and such purpose but acts in coordination with a more tangible end in sight that is in common with that of his fellow co-workers in the plant.

I would furthermore also include a certain skepticism to the idea that all practices that pertain to a formal organizational scheme, simply because they are formally connected, necessarily are in coordination. As much as one would first be expected to see practices before speaking about them, we would have to first see coordination to speak about it. Of course, we should by now be aware that speaking about coordination across practices implies the need to also see and speak about the practice-organization, and to begin from the point of view of practice. Here, we also touch upon the question of the formal and the actual. Organizations are, as commonly understood, bureaucratic in the sense that considerable procedure and formal schemes that represent ideas of the Organization and how it ought to function are imaginable. Practically, in the case of ‘formal’ Organizations, one encounters roles and their prescriptions. Since we would be interested in practices rather than formal schemes in themselves, we would have to be interested in the actual practices that actively make the role what it is and where the role is played out. Formalities do not suffice in themselves. We could liken this to the case of finding a manual of rules where we would have to ask ourselves if the rules are heeded ones and the manual matters at all.

Let us briefly touch upon how what we state here might be accomplished. To begin, we have touched upon how the examination of a practice would probably struggle to demarcate it completely from others. Perhaps one finds managing as one practice that involves meetings, lunch breaks, mingling at events and this then makes one ask where managing begins and ends and so
on. Managing involves those who are managed but participate in different practices. Some issues of demarcating also touch upon the question of different practitioners, with different roles and who undertake different practices, who also hang together in the sense that they participate in the same meetings, same setting, are interrelated and so forth. One encounters commonalities between practices in the sense that one infers that similar rules/understandings and so on make practitioners who undertake different practices comprehend one another. Different performances in proximity to one another might not be fully comprehended, e.g. one worker might not fully know what another does, but are sufficiently grasped so that there is a common understanding of some sort and perhaps also some degree of orchestration. One might note that practices involve similar artifacts (e.g. intranets) and occur in the same locales (e.g. buildings) so that their practitioners share material setting. Moreover, one notes how certain acts observed interlink with other acts observed. Simply examining one waitress in a restaurant is bound to invite noting other practices in the vicinity. Some practices cannot help but to interlink with alternate doings (e.g. waitering, cooking, and eating dinner at a restaurant). Finally, one investigates whether the doings of the observed practices share in teleology and whether coordinated actions are possible at all (e.g. do different practitioners listen and do as the ‘boss’ says?).

By attending to these forms of sociality, and coordination, one attends to an understanding of Organization which needs to be ‘filled in’ with content and detail. We have here assumed that one would know from the start that a particular examined practice pertains to an Organization, something that is arguably difficult to avoid due to everyday speaking about Organizations and corporations. I would argue that the conundrum is not whether a certain practice pertains to Organization due to this everyday understanding, e.g. one knows that cooking actively constitutes a functioning restaurant, but the question here is to make an overview of how a certain practice overlaps with others to constitute Organization.

To conclude, embracing the overlapping and examining the interrelations of practices gives a view of what we could regard as Organization in our ontological terms. While an interest in Organization is understandable for the purpose of so-called organizational inquiry, one could argue that the treatment of interrelations between practices are crucial anyhow. It is by examining the linkages of practices that we more readily grasp the ‘spirit’ of practice according to a Wittgensteinian view of social science.

3.5. On that which comes to the fore

I have in this chapter repeatedly stressed the importance of circumstance and opportunity. Our use of the term ‘circumstance’ can be confusing. In Chapter 2, we also discussed how practices were a kind of behavior-in-circumstance
whereas we have here discussed how aspects of practices as context can tread forth due to situations. We have in this chapter spoken of circumstances as the kinds of states of affairs at a given point. Aspects of the organization of practice, such as the general understanding, are more readily grasped during times of reflection as they tread forth in light of such a kind of circumstance (cf. SS, p. 243). While there might exist an explicit set of rules, the capture of their articulation would require a situation to prompt their expression (or talk about them). For certain tasks, certain entities might be more relevant than others but since some tasks might only be undertaken in light of certain circumstances, the grasp of involved entities is similarly dependent on given states of affairs. Underlying this is the idea that practices are not only organized and constituted in such and such manner but that circumstances that lead to certain acts and expressions make this more or less evident.

I have above described this as something unavoidable. Practices are, after all, always performed in ‘circumstances,’ involving certain states of affairs and situations and so on (Rouse, 2007a, p. 52). It might just be so that certain circumstances are taken for granted as normal so as to not warrant particular attention as circumstance. One ought to then be careful in assuming that practices are at any point ‘outside of circumstances.’

Rather than an impossible rejection of ‘circumstance,’ we can instead regard how circumstance guides depictions of practices. I will present three ways one could imagine how states of affairs at a given point can serve a seeing/speaking about practices. First, one could imagine simply grasping what is most commonly the case. If one is interested in the everyday of work in an Organization, the mundane of everyday life might simply be what is sought after. Here, however, since there might be few instances of active provocation of reflection or of rules treading forth and such, one could arguably be limited in instances of noting on practice-organizing principles. In short, the observer as the one who sees and speaks as a fly on the wall might be further removed from certain dimensions in his depiction. Moreover, the idea of what is everyday, the mundane, the most common and so forth might be elusive depending on the case at hand.

Secondly, one could imagine that one, with a given idea of certain states of affairs of interest, perhaps does not seek the mundane but actively seeks the moments of reflection or of the occasionally undertaken tasks with the occasionally involved artifacts and so on. What I am stating here could be compared to the idea of looking for breakdowns to gain an insight into particular affairs. In philosophy, the example of breakdowns was advanced by Heidegger in regard to the relation towards equipment to reveal characteristics commonly not apprehended in our dealings (BT, pp. 73-76). When a tool breaks down, we stop to examine it in a different light than that of unconsciously working with it. We become conscious of what is around us, not through reference to our dealings but as they are outside of such reference as they really are (cf. Dreyfus, 2001). In the social sciences, the idea of looking
for moments of strangeness of some kind exists in an alternate form. As an example, Latour favorably regards the possibility to examine the social by examining innovations (e.g. of a material/technological kind) and the sense of strangeness and distance conjoined with interruptions from the normal (Latour, 2005, p. 80). Here it might be the expression of practices in certain states of affairs that is sought after, e.g. stock trading during an economic crisis.

Third, one could imagine the triggering of a moment of reflection or disruption. In the social sciences, Garfinkel comes to mind as not simply examining but causing breakdowns to disclose background understandings of actors (e.g. 1967, pp. 36-38). The observer actively disrupts practices to see them more clearly. Less dramatic is perhaps what most social science achieves by seeking modest moments of reflection and the like through the use of interviews. Asking questions about the rationale for tasks, the rules heeded in certain acts, the affectivity and so forth is to trigger such a modest moment. It is mostly this that I have repeatedly considered in this chapter when I have stated the use of accounts of practitioners to be fruitful means to see the practice-organizing. I would wager that many social investigations of a qualitative kind perform combinations of the above to varying degrees, perhaps for different parts of their inquiry.

To discuss this further, I will present my own approach for my own use of practice theory. In the beginning of this thesis, I posed the intent to trace ‘change’ in practices. The kind of change that has been chosen as means to disclose practices can be referred to as ‘socio-technical change.’ As we discussed in the previous chapter, there is an endless becoming in social life that takes shape in practices through various ways, such as the spread and insemination of ideas and artifacts or the evolution of practices. This endless becoming is understood as the production of difference over time. In other words, the interest in socio-technical change is the interest in a certain kind of production of difference over time. The temporal dimension here is, as in any seeing/speaking about practice, demarcated in some sense as a period of time. As stated previously, while practices are unfolding our accounts thereof are not. Attentiveness to this period of time is what I will call an attentiveness to an ‘event of change.’ An ‘event of change’ is essentially a bracketing of a particular time frame in which a kind of difference emerges that is taken into account in observation and in textual accounts. In this sense, ‘change’ serves as the arrival of an opportunity, a kind of seemingly out-of-the-ordinary circumstance in the unfolding of practices. Certain circumstance and change

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90 A point of comparison to what is mentioned here is the neo-Heideggerian effort of Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus (1997) that draws from the idea of temporary breakdown to articulate what is implicit in the steady coping of practice. In their understanding, the examining of socio-technical change could be seen as the use of a ‘reconfiguration’ to disclose aspects of practice (Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus, 1997, pp. 24-29).
to circumstance produce a kind of difference, and this production of difference serves as a window opening for the investigator to observe through. This fits into the second idea presented above: that of examining states of affairs that are assumed to make the spirit of practice tread forth.

Any emergence of difference through some kind of occasion is essentially an ‘event of change’ when it is bracketed in some manner. While I will focus on socio-technical change as ‘event of change,’ one could imagine other causes (e.g. the spread of ideas, radical innovation, institutional/economic crises). In management studies, Langley (1999) proposes a similar kind of notion by drawing from Giddens: temporal bracketing. Temporal bracketing serves as a manner to examine empirical material of processes over time to make sense thereof. A difference between temporal bracketing, as defined by Langley, and what is suggested here is essentially the purpose of bracketing events. The tracing of an ‘event of change’ can be understood as engaging primarily with the mapping of difference in the constitution of practices (and not simply a means to assess data).

The above implies that we are dealing with a temporal dimension in our seeing and speaking. If the temporality we can account for is acknowledged, our effort amounts to a study of the ‘life of practices’ as historicized in a sense (e.g. Shove et al., 2012, p. 44). This deserves some brief mention in the very least. One could retort that any capture of change would simply be capture of whatever is new and different and not practice as it were. However, while whatever comes forth might depend on circumstance, it is not so that what comes forth is entirely and wholly an aspect of the present. Practices are not without a past that persists even in light of circumstances at a given point in time (e.g. Schatzki, 2006b). From this we can gather that an ‘event of change’ not only is a means to understand what a practice is at a given point of time in light of changing states of affairs, but also can give some kind of glimpse of what has been. Although we have primarily engaged with the practice-organizing principles insofar as they currently organize practice, we can further stretch to note what used to organize practices. What we state here is relevant for our interest also in the possibility of making overviews of practices and their interlinking, and thus also for our discussion of Organization. Schatzki (2006b) has claimed that the grasp of the happenings of a complex such as an Organization requires a grasp of its past. This is by no means a radical perception of seeing and speaking about the social but one that is merely attuned to the stance that people see and act in the present with history in hand (Weick, 1979, p. 201). Much of what we have discussed so far needs to have this in mind. One speaks of performances with an eye on past ‘circumstances’ and changing ones. If we imagine the possibility of contestation and moments of reflections upon general understandings in light of an ‘event of change,’ whatever is discussed does not come entirely ‘out of the blue’ with no connection to what has been. What is contested and perhaps defended is in the past; past understandings are challenged and come forth.
There are a couple of issues one could note here. To discuss any ‘event of change’ one would have to know how one could at all frame whatever happens in a certain social sphere of life as changing in a specific manner without some degree of prior familiarity with said social sphere. One could also retort that examining ‘events of change’ generally makes one miss the mundane and everyday that is central to the reproduction of practices. To answer such a concern, one could perhaps pose that we are here interested primarily in how we could see and speak about certain concepts and that it is in light of wanting to have more to see/speak about that one is interested in disclosing practices in this manner. Admittedly, in doing so one is simultaneously directed in one’s account so that certain things are more or less notable. From another angle one could also criticize the idea of ‘events of change’ by stressing that since production of difference is a constant feature of the social, the examination of practices is perhaps always examining ‘events of change.’ It is here so that we are speaking of change with the idea that analytically worthwhile difference is produced that makes elements of practice tread forth.

To conclude, we have here discussed how certain states of affairs and circumstances guide a depiction of practices and how one could imagine ways to take this into account. One could seek to depict practices by examining them in the mundane, everyday with less concern for having much to say about practice-organizing principles. Alternatively, one could seek disruptions. To discuss this in more specific terms, I have also discussed the use of ‘events of change’ as a means to direct oneself to disclose practices with a certain direction in mind. Yet another means touched upon is for an observer to trigger moments of reflection through the use of interviews or perhaps even causing breakdown. Evidently, one can imagine multiple ways to ‘seeing’ practices that focus on different ways that aspects of practices tread forth.

3.6. Concluding remarks

Beginning with defining a way in which practice theory in the practice of empirical investigation can be imagined, this chapter has engaged with trying to demonstrate how concepts that originally hold ontological significance could be seen and spoken about in investigation. By doing so, concepts have been translated to imagine these in social analysis of an empirical kind.

To summarize our discussion, examined actions are to be understood as tasks and projects undertaken for ends conjoined with affects, made possible by certain practical understanding, and undertaken in light of explicit rules and general understandings. To ascertain these, one would reasonably want to both observe the actions in question and to ask practitioners about their ends/affects, the rules they heed, and the ideas/concerns they have regarding their practices. In regard to bundles, rather than ascertaining the imaginable complexity of relations it is argued to be preferable to simply assess what is
directly/indirectly involved in a practice. A discussion regarding bundles is primarily concentrated on artifacts rather than on people or things of nature. To treat the interlinking of practices, and more specifically the matter of Organization, forms of sociality and coordination have been presented as guiding means to go beyond the singular practice and craft overviews that improve a grasp of practices writ large. Examining Organization through a practice theoretical view implies also that one ought to examine the dimensions of Organization through practices, with the understanding that formal schemes do no suffice in themselves. Since much of the possibility to speak about practice depends on whatever treads forth at a given point of time, given states of affairs are of importance and one can relate to these in various ways (e.g. as ‘event of change’).

Only a selection of concepts has been chosen for a broad examination. Not all concepts in Chapter 2 are presented as crucial for our accounts of practice, although they are important for our ontological understanding, and we have been open about the inherent limitations in any eventual effort. However, without a more specific direction and application of these concepts, our discussion here is considerably broad to assess their use properly. Essentially, one ought to understand what is presented here as an invitation to ‘fill in’ with empirical detail. The way of speaking about practices can be treated as mold for a textual account.

In the following chapters, further illustrations are provided to show the use of my reasoning here through the help of drawing upon empirical material. In doing so, we will have further opportunities to touch upon some of the limitations we have discussed here. In Table 1 below, I present a simple overview of the concepts we have discussed and that we will get further acquainted with.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Grasped by</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practice organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit rules</td>
<td>Formal/Informal rules adhered to in performance, expressed in moments of instruction or in accounts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical understanding</td>
<td>Attentiveness to what is undertaken as manifestation of ability and sensitivity to what it takes to obtain such ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General understanding</td>
<td>The ideas, concerns, beliefs, and sense of virtue relating to participation in practice, expressed in accounts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleoffective structure</td>
<td>Categorizing notable activity (project/task) and the ends expressed (in accounts) as those pursued in activity. Attending to expressed affects (in accounts) conjoined to activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bundle</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directly involved artifacts</td>
<td>Direct use of artifacts in performances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirectly involved artifacts</td>
<td>What the use of artifacts might depend on, e.g. infrastructure (as it comes forth due to circumstance).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complex/Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonalities</td>
<td>Pursuing the overlap in the organization of practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared material setting</td>
<td>Pursuing the overlap in materiality implicated in practices (e.g. tools, locale).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chains of action</td>
<td>The interlinking of activity across practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>The pursuit of common goals across practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The relevant practice theoretical concepts
4. Investigating Practices

In this chapter, we will discuss two topics. One is how the study of practice is an inquiring practice of its own for the purpose of gaining sufficient familiarity with what is examined, and how we can define this practice. Another is the chosen activities I have undertaken as part of that very same practice to collect empirical material that serves for analytical purposes in Chapter 5. Underlying the treatment of these topics are what I perceive to be the consequences of my reasoning in Chapter 3.

4.1. On our comprehension of practice

The study of practice(s) is a practice that conceives of another practice as its study object. A researcher participates in a kind of practice that conceives of certain practices as objects of inquiry from which one hopes to construct textual accounts of. Social inquiry always rests upon practices such as these but there is a difference in the way that the study object functions for a student of practice in the forming of the practice analysis. At least distinct in our effort is that certain aspects of practices are under the loupe: the practice-organizing principles, what practices transpire with/amid, and the interlinking of bundles.

Such a view of attaining a sense of practice can be contrasted with the way that one comprehends practices in life quite generally. People acquire an understanding of practices around them on a daily basis. To learn about these one observes, one asks about the practices, one reads about them, and one also attempt to participate for the sake of practicing. These are the means we continuously use to become familiar with practices in everyday life, as well as when we encounter practices in other cultures (and perhaps also when we examine practices from past eras).

If one agrees to the presuppositions of practice theory, arguably both the investigator’s grasp and that of us in everyday life ought to resemble one another considerably. Simply put, any inference on practices relates to some form of comprehension we hold regarding these. In the previous chapter, we most notably made mention of the possibility of examining practices and inferring the practice-organizing by observing actions and asking questions making little mention of this issue. Arguably, to at all be capable of saying that such and such action pertains to a practice depends on a certain form of comprehension for it to be identified as such at all. A point of departure here, before we go into the matters of the study of practice itself, will be that the attainment of comprehension of practices is dependent on a form of proximity to these but that the question of how such proximity is achieved can be discussed. Hence, one would have to ask what the extent of required
comprehension is to at all be capable of speaking about the practice-organizing principles and what is necessary to attain such extent of comprehension.

In a simplified scheme for illustrative purposes, we can imagine three levels of comprehension of a practice. First, one could be well immersed into a practice as an active participant and thus readily understand it and be able to participate intelligibly and within the boundaries of the acceptable. In such a case, one’s participation would be acknowledged as legitimate by other fellow practitioners. Second, one could comprehend enough of the general gist of a practice so as to understand some of it when observed. Such a level of background familiarity would not imply that one could actually perform the practice and grasp all of it. Third, one could be estranged from a practice to the point that affairs appear so exotic that only bits and pieces are comprehended in a crude manner. This third form of comprehension makes for what can be conceived of as a lack of understanding.

I have throughout this thesis presented examples of practices that I assume a reader has managed to comprehend from some familiarity with these under the assumption that these are not too far removed from what is familiar to be sensible. I am myself not a great chess player, soccer player, or cook, and have never worked as a manager but still have made examples judging myself to hold sufficient comprehension of the second type above and not the third. Similarly, I have hoped the same is true for readers.

One could say that I have not greatly problematized our familiarity and comprehension of practices. A reason for this is yet another drawing from Wittgenstein: the idea that people have much in common with each other (Schatzki, 1991). In Wittgenstein’s view, even a grasp of alternate, foreign cultures is within our grasp (PI, p. 82). As Schatzki (1991, p. 317) states, this grasp is possible insofar as an investigator is capable of not projecting her own community’s way of understanding and seeing upon alternate ways. The question is to what extent our grasp goes from crude to being somewhat intelligible and fair. My mention of Wittgenstein here is to make the careful claim that perhaps what I have referred to as the first and second levels of comprehension are not too far removed from us.

Let us take an example of why I pose that our comprehension of practices is not always of a crude kind. Let us imagine someone proposing to another. I would wager that what proposals might mean was intelligible to us even before we have – if we have that is – taken part in such an act. We could nonetheless infer more or less on the purposes and meanings of proposing for marriage, and we would understand the meaning of certain responses (“Yes!” or “No”) and that the one proposing would probably be sad if the one proposed to were to decline. Without formally stating that practice is an epistemic object we have studied “scientifically,” we commonly understand a great range of them to the point that even emotions and expectations that are not openly expressed are graspable anyway. Why is that? Probably because of the many
ways that literature and entertainment treat such a practice as proposing and many others. I would wager this quite broadly to be the case. If it always was so that we had to participate ourselves to understand a practice, human intelligibility would be so limited that our forms of sociality would be heavily constrained.

An everyday way to ascertain that we have some form of comprehension of a practice is to let our comprehension be challenged and judged according to some standard, such as that of the community of practitioners.\(^9^1\) The academic investigation of practices does not necessarily abide to the same standard as that of a practitioner. It is a scholarly standard that is relevant for the investigator of practices. Through such a standard can we imagine the role of the investigator of practices as someone providing fair depictions of practices, following a transparent method for doing so. The investigator cannot be assumed to understand without performing an inquiry that can bestow a sense of familiarity with the practices and such inquiry can also be judged. There needs to be some empirical material, some form of analysis thereof, and adequate presentation of the whole. The third mode of comprehension above, the crude understanding, would (hopefully) never suffice and thus not be appropriate when speaking about practices. Such speaking would be rootless and superficial, producing assertions with the mere semblance of understanding (Rouse, 2007b, p. 179).\(^9^2\)

Although I have stated that this dissertation only uses empirical material for an analytical illustration, I have decided to here account for my own view on methodology and choice of methods. I do this to show which kind of academic standard I adhere to, and to make clear in what way my speaking of practices relates to a level of comprehension of the practices represented. I have made mention of these levels for the sake of arguing that a study of practice ought to have a certain understanding in sight, directing the choice of methods to achieve such comprehension. Next, I will touch upon what kind of empirical approach is suitable for a study of practice. Thereafter, we will touch upon how empirical material has been collected and examined in order to present an analytical illustration of contemporary practice theory.

4.2. The methodology of practice theoretical inquiry

In the previous chapter, we stated that we saw the meaning of practice theory to be of an interpretative kind. Hence, we already stated an interest in

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\(^9^1\) Such a judgment would certainly be the case for the determining of one’s ability to be intelligible among other practitioners (Brandom, 1979, p. 188).

\(^9^2\) Heidegger’s view of idle talk and complete rootlessness is comparable with speaking of practices one does not understand (BT, p. 168; Blattner, 2006, p. 132).
interpretative inquiry by primarily focusing on what inference and interpreting practice (and its organization) might imply. While we previously regarded such a choice as fitting due to the intellectual heritage of practice theory, and the nature of some of its concepts, we will here discuss this choice from the perspective of undertaking actual empirical investigation.

The choice of methods in question is qualitative. Our point of departure is that the choice of qualitative methods rests upon the difficulty of imagining any other kind of approach to be fit for the collection/generation of empirical material for a practice analysis. Quantitative methodology is a poor fit due to the inability for it to serve as means to gain proximity to practice (Schatzki, 2012). My stance is then not in line with the likes that view practices as possible to be examined through a quantitative outlook or through simulation modeling exercises (Holtz, 2014). 93 Perhaps quantitative inquiry could be interesting to observe slices of practices (as did Bourdieu, cf. Bourdieu, 1990, p. 199) and arrangement, but would be poor at uncovering practice. More specifically, the contours of practices and their organization would be hard to capture through such means. One could perhaps argue that images of general understandings would be possible to grasp through quantitative inquiry, e.g. through surveys, but then one would have to ensure that beliefs and concerns expressed can be tied to the practice they pertain to and this is arguably difficult. Like Weber’s ([1956]1978, p. 12) interpretative sociological approach, we could state that a quantitative approach, e.g. one that finds patterns and statistical probabilities without regard for the meaning of action, is of no help for us. We are not only interested in ‘brute data’ (cf. Taylor, 1971) but are in need of material and analysis that furthers our possibility of fruitful interpretation of practice.

A further dimension of interpretative inquiry is the interest in language. On multiple occasions we have stated that it is by what is discursively emitted by practitioners that we could understand the practice-organizing and so on. This indicates that we depend on language to make sense of practices, which in turn always is an interpretive affair. Language is an important clue to the activities of a setting and a means to get access to practices (Schatzki, 2012, p. 24). This link between language, as the accounts of practitioners, and practice has already been stated in Chapter 3. Such a link has been examined in light of practice theoretical insights of another kind. In Giddens’ reading of Wittgenstein, the meaningfulness of language is inseparable from definite social practices as the former is the latter’s medium (1979, pp. 4, 40). Our approach to gain familiarity of practice cannot help but be directed to the

93 Schmidt (2016, p. 56) proposes that quantitative methods could serve what he calls praxeologizing research by helping interpretation and ought then not to be used to make “detached hypotheses.”
different ways that practitioners speak about their practices as means to interpret practices.

Although we can disregard a quantitative interest in ‘brute data,’ we have another kind of concern conjoined to the task of interpretation. As seen by Taylor (1971), the point of ‘brute data’ is that such data is ‘seen’ similarly no matter who the observer in question is. The same is not true of interpretative social science, which always produces interpretations that can be questioned and rejected by those that make alternate interpretations (cf. Taylor, 1971, p. 46). There is no verification of a correct interpretation in the form possible in the correlations and causality found in ‘brute data.’ As argued in Chapter 3, only the fragments of images of practices are possibly observed and spoken of, and these can only be derived in relation to the performances of participants, affected by ‘circumstance’ and so on. In much of this we are less capable of tearing apart practices in order to prove our grasp true, as is the case for a reductionist interest in the components of phenomena in themselves.

‘Subjectivity’ is inseparable from activities such as these. Inquiry on practices involves someone observing, and speaking, which implies that any account necessarily is someone’s observing and someone’s speaking of such observations. From the perspective of the interpretivist, this is the case no matter one’s own inclinations and views about the objectivity/subjectivity. Combined with the idea that one captures what treads forth at a given point in time, one is faced with a poor means to attain a ‘perfect’ picture. While this might be disappointing for the social scientist who wants to mimic natural science, it is less of a concern for the practice theoretically inclined social scientist. While meaning is found in an interest for the subjective, we are not only in a domain of the subject alone but in common forms of meaning of a certain aspect of practice. In other terms, we are interested in the intersubjective and in the presentation of this by attending to practices. Our effort entails an attempt at presenting what is common in practices. As discussed in Chapter 3, we can substantiate a view of practices by considering whether expressions grasped are held in common among practitioners. While no ‘true’ interpretation is within reach, we can discuss in terms of more or less plausible ones that capture the most pronounced features of practices.

Incidentally, the interpretative stance here is not one reminiscent of social phenomenology or wholly inductive studies. It is not a view of sociality understood from the point of view of the individual that is of interest, as some phenomenological sociologists care for (e.g. Schutz, cf. Misgeld, 1983) but rather the context (cf. SP, pp. 174-176, 180). Said context cannot be assumed to be so readily grasped by attending to the individual alone. It is not an ‘egological’ understanding of social life that is sought after (Aspers, 2010; Aspers and Kohl, 2013). The following of the elements of practice is possible by provisionally de-centering the human subject by studying the configuration of practice in tandem with the human subject (Shove et al., 2012, p. 22). As ought to be evident by now, a set of concepts that are not locally derived are
utilized in order to achieve such an effort. We are not wholly inductive nor non-theoretical but bring in concepts to which we are directed in order to de-center individuals.

Conducting a qualitative investigation can be broken down into smaller steps along the way, according to the choice of methods. I have undertaken a combination of fieldwork broadly speaking, with interviews and observations, and have also attended to documentation. This would be in line with the idea of the “practice turn” as an empirical program with ethnographic sensibilities (Miettinen et al., 2009, p. 1312). The study here relates to aspects of what fieldwork is but less so with the intent of anthropologists or with the idea of adhering to some idea of “true,” rigorous anthropology (cf. Marcus, 2006; Bate, 1997).\footnote{I guess the particular approach here cannot be said to even be “quasi-anthropological” according to some (Bate, 1997, p. 1150). Needless to say, I did not bring my toothbrush when undertaking my inquiry (as Bate would have recommended).} A true ethnographic approach involving extended time in the field has not been pursued. My choice to not commit to ethnography is based on the idea that site ontology in the study of social affairs is not a study of situated activity, as understood by ethnographers and practice-oriented researchers, but instead a way of describing social phenomena as constituted by practices even in broad terms (Shove et al., 2012, p. 11).

I am not stating the incompatibility with ethnography but relaxing the association with such kind of work. There is a common idea that the ‘micro’ attained through laborious fieldwork is more ‘real’ than anything else; I do not subscribe to such a view (cf. Geiger, 2009). The pursued way of speaking about practices that I will illustrate is one made possible through what I have referred to as the second level of comprehension of practices above. I do not claim a full familiarity with the practices as a practitioner, nor have I intended to achieve such a kind of familiarity. I have not aimed to become absorbed by the culture of a practice and make it my own as practitioner (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 95), but absorb enough to avoid idle talk about studied practices. This fits an understanding of a way of speaking of practices that does not primarily begin from the point of the expert’s introspective reflection of their own practice, but the examining of the practices of others. More so, it does not assume that full familiarity with a practice equals a way of speaking of the same practice in theoretical or in satisfactory descriptive terms. Practitioners might diverge in their account of a practice among themselves as their own participation evolves (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 96). Moreover, there are many practical experts of practices that would find the task of theoretically analyzing practices to be far removed from their own concerns, and from their own doing. As put by Bourdieu (1990, p. 91), it is not so that familiarity translates into an account of what actually governs practice in theoretical terms, as such interrogation is different than the point of view of...
action and more reasonably a separate kind of view and activity. A staunch defender of ethnographical detail could retort here that what Bourdieu states is less problematic for the informed researcher. After all, they could participate and still be up for the task of analysis after participation. In regards to this, it is worthwhile to note that even ‘participant observation’ as a means would still resemble what Bourdieu (1990, p. 34) referred to as the participating in a “game as a game while waiting to leave to tell about it.” As one tells about it, one is no longer participating. The form and shape of the ‘telling part when one is away’ is central here.

One could interpret what is stated by Bourdieu to discredit any account of practice, and it is in part this that he does since his definition of the logic of practice is defined in terms of practical understanding of sorts and is not articulable, so that even interviewing a practitioner to talk about a practice is not the same as the actual undertaking of practice. Such a stance is agreed upon here more in regards to practical understanding. One cannot articulate such understanding simply because one has attained some form of mastery. However, this does not mean that one cannot talk about ends pursued, affects and the like. The latter is still conceived as available through accounts and some proximity to practice. One could retort that we invite other kinds of concerns by distancing ourselves from an idea of close proximity to practices. A distance to practice can lead to the potential difficulty of ascertaining the validity of claims from the field, e.g. in terms of operational, observed behavior, or presentational, appearances maintained by informants (Van Maanen, 1979). As stated in Chapter 3, the accounts of practitioners are important to inform a way of speaking of practices and such accounts could be dishonest. At the same time, a form of distance is not without a kind of benefit of its own. A sufficient level of estrangement to the observed practices allows for the asking of ‘stupid’ questions without informants questioning one’s intent (Spradley, 1979, pp. 50-51). Furthermore, for background expectancies of everyday life to come into view it has been argued that one needs to be a stranger to the “life as usual” or attempt to become one (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 37). As put by the sociologist Georg Simmel, one confides in the stranger with confessions that would be withheld for those closest to us (1964, pp. 402-408).

With this in mind, one would do well to remember that the problem is that we are not only to attain a form of familiarity to a specific practice in particular, as could be the case through one’s own participation as practitioner, but also be capable of constructing overviews of interrelated practices. To suggest one ought to participate in each and every interrelated practice is farfetched. After all, we could encounter numerous practices that we might wish to examine up close but be barred from participating in or following with the proximity we wish for. This could be expected of the study of Organizations where access to undertake participant observation or extensive shadowing is barred due practical reasons (cf. Czarniawska, 2007, p. 13).
Students of organization seldom can participate in all practices studied. This does not necessarily invalidate the use of practice theory for organizational inquiry. If one aspires to analyze multiple practices, and construct overviews, it does not follow that one wants or needs to participate in every single practice to be able to talk about it in excruciating detail. The only valid concern is whether it is possible to attain a sufficient familiarity as ‘outsider’ to be capable of grasping the ‘spirit’ or gist of practice at all. The issue of ‘getting to the truth of things’ in regard to a lack of proximity and potentially flawed accounts of the participant is resolved here by in part acknowledging that accounts reflect the normativized (what ought to be done/ought to be acceptable). Additionally, using multiple viewpoints and points of reference give yet another way of determining what “is the case” (however flawed).

A commonly approached way to study Organizations is the making of case studies, and it might in part resemble what we are suggesting to do in attaining a sense of familiarity without personal participation. A case study is a study that engages with a phenomenon in its “context” (Yin, 1981). As an approach often used in organizational studies, case studies involve a number of methods, such as qualitative and quantitative, that lift a particular phenomenon, often that of an Organization, to be systematically studied. The “context” is Organization. Noteworthy proponents of case studies of Organizations are, however, of a positivistic bent, assuming that case studies can contribute to generalizable propositions of states of affairs (Eisenhardt, 1989). Through the study of one setting, one is assumed to be capable of crafting hypotheses that can be ‘tested’ across comparative cases to make ‘analytical generalizations’ (Yin, 2014, pp. 40-42). Embedded in such thinking is the logic of replication, a remainder of the sort of thinking that perceives social inquiry as something that ought to test theory by making proper natural science experiments (cf. Tsoukas, 2009, p. 295). Such an aim, and the possibility of this, is not central for our analytical illustration. As discussed in Chapter 3, we are not testing propositions or hypotheses. Moreover, the knowledge produced when studying and speaking about practices does not amount to something that necessarily is empirically generalizable. In my view, I do not know if particular instances of social life in some sphere of life are the same elsewhere in terms of empirical content. They can, of course, be similar (and perhaps more so after reductionist treatment) as it otherwise would be difficult to refer to soccer, chess and so on (as I have here throughout this thesis). However, I do not know to what extent instances of similar practices truly are similar empirically without further study.

Knowledge is not only developed of the particular alone, however, as one could speak of the refinement of concepts. The many concepts we have come into contact with in Chapter 3 can be fleshed out and examined in use to be refined in terms of what they can say about the social and what they can be understood to reveal quite generally. What is generalizable here is of a
heuristic kind (Tsoukas, 2009). Refined concepts themselves can then be ‘applied’ in other spheres of life in other studies in order to assess whatever is studied there. Important to note, however, is that the concepts are empirically underdetermined in other spheres of life until they are examined in these spheres. Rules, practical understandings and so forth can be ‘seen’ in other studies but what they actually are is not clear until examined.

In any case, attention to particular settings is not to imply that the analysis is constrained to the very local. In Chapter 3, it was argued that a grasp of practice requires a sensibility to its interrelations. We will pursue a strategy that allows for what Nicolini (2012) regards as the zooming in and out of complexes of practices. Such a strategy provides both a means to construct overviews and to engage in more detailed examinations of practices. The idea of zooming is not to be mistaken for the idea of micro-macro structures such that one leaves the micro to examine the distinct macro. As stated in Chapter 2, we are firmly planted on one sole level: that of practices. By zooming out we imply that we cover more practices but with less detail. When we zoom in, we cover specific practices, with greater detail.

Before proceeding with a presentation of how the material for the empirical illustration was gathered, we could comment on a final aspect of our qualitative, interpretative approach. What we have presented here does not fit into alternate categorizations of qualitative approaches (e.g. Deetz, 2009; Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Questions such as the overall political agenda of knowledge production, in the form of activism, have not been deemed those of primary concern (e.g. Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), and will not be brought up here.95

4.3. The inquiry and its process

The kinds of practices that I have attempted to study to gain necessary comprehension are work practices constituting what is known as the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, Sweden’s main provider of social benefits (hereafter referred to as SSIA). Our speaking about the SSIA here is to be understood as the use of a shorthand term that refers to a constellation of practices and materiality. In other words, the SSIA, as one of the main providers of social insurance, is here envisioned not in terms of its formal schemes alone but more specifically by examining how the provision of social insurance actually is accomplished.

95 Obviously, an effort to orient organization studies towards practices as theoretically significant is a kind of agenda. What is meant here is the more politically colored idea of social justice as that which is not of immediate relevance to the illustration as a whole.
The material that a reader will become more familiar with in the next chapter was not gathered in one fell swoop. The material was originally gathered from an interest in an occurrence of socio-technical change with only a limited understanding of the nature of said change. The inquiry itself required me to take a couple of steps, to engage in an iterative process between different settings and variations to the sought level of depth. As study objects go, there is little secrecy in regard to the formal “structure” of the SSIA. The steering documents and the formal “organizational scheme” of the SSIA are publicly available, as often is the case for the public sector in Sweden. Despite the formal transparency, in the SSIA’s own formal accounts and reports, there is a veil between the public and the bureaucratic behemoth that is the SSIA. What is going on among the workers of the SSIA as they do their work is less than clear by just examining reports or their own homepage. It is, however, what was going behind this veil that is of interest in our examination. With limited knowledge of the “inner” workings of the SSIA, and of its “work organizations,” my initial ignorance was successively lessened through several encounters with the SSIA as a whole. The encounters were of varied kinds. One kind of encounter was with those involved with the production of a technological artifact that later was implemented. The other kind of encounter was with those whose practices were to involve the artifact in their everyday work. Although most of the material we will come in contact with reflects encounters of the second kind, the first kind of encounter was crucial for the first step of my process of inquiry.

4.3.1. First step – Coming into contact

My initial interest in studying the SSIA was due to hearing that the SSIA planned to implement new technology to affect their practices. When I speak of ‘the change’ or the ‘planned change’ it is generally this effort that I have in mind. Admittedly, change is a constant aspect of the social (as unfolding) and we are here primarily using a shorthand term to demarcate what has been studied in some sense, i.e. the ‘event of change.’

My learning of the effort itself in the early stage of my inquiry was largely dependent on informants. After coming into contact with the individual who was in charge (the implementation coordinator), I was given access to documentation regarding the planned effort and was allowed to visit the headquarters of the SSIA for interviews. In total, the team in charge was visited four times for a total of six interviews (with the coordinator in charge

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96 It was essentially serendipity that played a great part in finding out about the implementation. I had heard, from an IT vendor, that the SSIA was interested in acquiring data analytical software. This made me curious and led me to contact SSIA’s phone operators directly. With some perseverance, I finally got in contact with someone in charge of IT at the SSIA who informed me of the case we will delve into in the next chapter.
and two consultants), and two meetings observed (with representatives of work settings). This contact was maintained from late 2014 to the fall of 2015 with additional mail contact between visits.

These contacts were paramount for my empirical effort for two reasons. First, through my contact with those in charge of the effort, I was able to understand the background to the effort and gained familiarity with the implemented artifact and its characteristics. Secondly, I gained information about the nature of the implementation that was planned to occur during the period of 2015-2016, which helped me direct my efforts in my inquiry.

4.3.2. Second step – Getting a grasp of the settings

To understand what the change would mean in practice, I subsequently strove to get a view of the practices that were to be affected. All of my efforts to gain familiarity with the work practices of the SSIA began in the early spring of 2015. Any prior effort was directed to studies of documentation regarding the work practices.

My first in situ experience of the work of the SSIA was at an office located in a large Swedish city that belonged to a division referred to as “Sjukförsäkringen” (Health Insurance). As the name denotes, the social insurance payments dealt with here were more specifically for applicants suffering from health-related problems. Visiting this setting five times over a period of two weeks, I followed a unit composed of three teams of caseworkers (roughly 6-10 in each team) and a unit manager in their daily activities, observing their work and their meetings, and being allowed to follow up with questions through interviews. This gave me a grasp of the flow of work in offices, of how different work activities were interrelated, how tasks were distributed among the caseworkers, and the tasks of the overseeing unit manager. Informal matters and the perceived problems were also noted, e.g. high amounts of stress in work, disagreement with top management among caseworkers, and other work-related concerns. In total, this amounted to six interviews and two work meetings observed at the setting.

Initially, my plan was to study the technological implementation in this setting, and to return later on. However, because of a delayed implementation at the setting due to technical challenges (of which I, at the time, had little understanding of), I pursued alternate settings to study. Initially, two settings were considered for subsequent study but only one was chosen to look at more closely due to a perceived chance to study more dramatic manifestations of change. The setting that was only superficially examined was an office of the “Kundcenter” (Customer Center) division that both engaged in casework processing and functioned as a call center for the SSIA. The responsibilities of being phone operators proved significant enough to imply that caseworking was not the primary task of this office nor was there any initial indication that the planned effort would significantly affect work here in any notable way.
This second work setting was only visited once and four interviews were undertaken. Although not studied further, my experience with this second setting proved useful to gain a grasp of the possible variations of work undertaken at the SSIA.

It was from both my pre-study and this initial vetting that I concluded that an investigation of the practices of the SSIA with any sort of depth beyond superficial comparison could only be a study of a portion of the whole constellation of practices and arrangement that the SSIA is. After coming to this conclusion, I abandoned any ideas of further studying multiple, diverse settings. Instead, I sought to utilize a handful of examples to illustrate a setting in more detail. The study object in question was an office pertaining to a division focusing on benefits targeting families with children, named “Barn/Familj” (Child/Family). The particular setting was one I deemed, at the time, as most likely to change and to do so in a more dramatic fashion. This particular insight was in part gained through contact with the setting itself, and the team in charge of the “technological implementation.”97 The choice of setting thus depended on achieving some degree of familiarization with the SSIA and on the help of informants.

In sum, I have visited three settings of work, two of which were visited repeatedly. Only one of these was studied more extensively, as we will cover here next.

4.3.3. Third step – Getting a closer look

The Child/Family-office mentioned above proved to be the main study object that most of the analytical illustration will cover. In its design, the more in-depth study resembles a longitudinal case study of roughly 27 months, stretching from the spring of 2015 to the fall of 2017. This span of time represents the time frame of the study. Although the study had a longitudinal dimension, the number of visits were not as numerous as can be imagined to be the case for traditional ethnographies. The setting was only visited four times, although these visits were of the more extensive kind, leading to 19 interviews and three observed meetings (see Appendix).98 The visits in question were partly done during times that were deemed to be major events. What amounted to major events were aspects such as major system updates or occurrences that unit managers openly addressed as possible sources of

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97 As informants told me, implementation was sure to hit a snag and could prove to be interesting for further study. It intrigued me at the time, and still does, how informants were so willing to direct me to what they thought were problem areas by their own accord.

98 Generally, each visit was an effort to interact as much as possible with as many as was feasible. I would arrive roughly at 9 or 10 AM and stay till roughly 4-5 PM, which was around the time those at the setting would leave the office themselves.
problems. To know about these events, it helped that I had some familiarity with the schedule of updates and that unit managers were interested in informing me about issues over e-mail.99 The choice to study major events was motivated by seeking patterns of difference that stirred up or in some manner were expected to cause the practices involved to “react.” This falls in line with the idea of capturing what comes forth, and the treatment of change and circumstance as integral for the study of practice.

Three aspects that could be questioned regarding the time frame of the study come to mind. First, there is the case of whether my study suffices as a study of change as it was undertaken during the very point of change, with little study of how things were before the planned implementation. In regard to such critique, it is perhaps good to know that the technology might have made its appearance in the setting in the spring of 2015, but that it was not until later that it saw active use (late 2015). By then, I had already made two visits. More so, the idea of seeing parts of the past come forth in the present, as was discussed in Chapter 3, makes this less of a concern. Secondly, one could wonder how my few number of visits truly captured major events or how these events were representative for the complete period of time. In regard to this, I have attempted to let informants help me reconstruct states of affairs between visits. In other words, interviews were directed to fill the gaps between visits to reflect on aspects such as changing circumstances and the like. Third, one could argue that the ‘event of change’ studied could stretch beyond the frame of time studied and that further major and illustrative events would occur at a later point of time (or that important events occurred before as well). I will here state that I have not been interested in capturing any form of finality or a “complete” sequence of events.

To conclude, it can be worthwhile to state that what I know now was not what I knew then. During the period of study, the outcome of the actual attempt of change was unknown (for informants too!). Furthermore, the planned technological implementation was more ambitiously planned than what it turned out to be in reality. The actual software implemented was only the first step in a major change that was never realized during the time of the study. The majority of my collection of empirical material in this study primarily entailed what initially was to be preparatory work to get an insight prior to even bigger change that never manifested. What I believed to be preparatory work turned out to be the bulk of the study in the end.

99 A unit manager was very forthcoming with information and kept me updated on a steady basis.
4.4. Sources and treatment of empirical material

Having told of the process of inquiry in broad strokes, we will next turn to the specific sources of material themselves and how the material was treated. Such a discussion is not solely for the sake of transparency in social inquiry but also for the sake of discussing how specific methods and material can be used in practice theoretical inquiry.

During my study, multiple methods were used, such as the use of documentation, interviews, conversations, observations and the like. This corresponds with previous work using practice theory (e.g. Jørgensen and Messner, 2010; Hopwood, 2016; Maus, 2015). The collection of material was done both to study events that occurred during the time frame, and also to study some past events. Conversations on past occurrences were used, similar to the interview study of Rosenberg and Keller (2016), as well as documents on past events.

4.4.1. Documentation and correspondence

Documentation was both provided by employees of the SSIA and obtained through official channels such as the SSIA’s reports. In initial stages I also accessed reports by the Inspection of Social Insurance, a governmental agency that evaluates both the SSIA and the Swedish Pensions Agency. The documents provided by the SSIA ranged from an internal report covering the practicalities of work distribution, to plans for future changes to the very same practicalities, to more practical work guidelines used in parts of the “work organization.” Being allowed to gain access to such documents proved useful in order to attain both a feel for the formalities expressed in different settings, and to tag along in different happenings or meetings that I was allowed to participate in. Essentially, the practices studied were of the kind that generally evoked a language of abbreviations that at times required documentation for any sense of comprehension to be possible. Although it was possible to ask questions if I did not understand something, I attempted to minimize this to not solely engage in interactions with the purpose of comprehending the forms of expression.

In addition, I also gained access to some internal mail correspondence between parties in settings and could observe their concerns through text. This was complemented with my own correspondence with unit managers at the settings over e-mail to keep in touch between visits, and get updates on different happenings, both planned and unexpected. The use of documentation had another purpose as well: certain documentation, e-mail correspondence and one internal report contained information about what practitioners thought of the state of affairs and of their practices.
4.4.2. Interviews and conversations

The use of interviews and making conversation played a significant role in my inquiry. The choice to engage in interviews to understand practices subscribes to the idea that participants in practices can describe and talk about their practices through discursive means (Hitchings, 2012). Such reasoning has guided approaches that exclusively utilize interviews when studying practices (e.g. Gram-Hansen, 2010; Rosenberg and Keller, 2016). In total 35 interviews were undertaken at multiple settings (see Appendix). These were held in Swedish and their duration stretched from ½ hour to 1½ hours in average.\(^{100}\)

My choice of informants to interview was both purposive and based on convenience. Roughly half of my interviews were with caseworkers, the most represented group at settings. Among groups of informants I tried to select broadly among those available during visits. While this led to the possibility to talk with more caseworkers, a disadvantage I realized after the undertaking was that this selection led to few opportunities to systematically come back to some of those previously interviewed for repeated formal interviews one on one (for the setting visited multiple times). This was particularly the case for caseworkers and less so for unit managers and the administrative assistant.\(^{101}\)

Beyond my own “sampling strategy,” some interviewed caseworkers did also happen to quit working at the SSIA between visits while others were unavailable during my later visits (e.g. some worked from home.).

The interviews were largely of the loosely structured, non-standardized kind in settings of one-on-one encounters or in groups where the informants were aware of the entire situation being framed as an interview. Being loosely structured implied that I had some form of an idea of what I wanted to ask in advance, but that the structure often was largely dependent on circumstance and the answers bestowed by informants. These were not intended as standardized exercises in the sense that they often also were surprising interactions. What I believed would matter did not, what I believed would prove disappointing was not, what I believed was alarming was not, and so forth.

The most fruitful kinds of interviews were those provided in the form of accounts of past events. These accounts would be concerning work activities, the workplace as such, relations with others, or past states of affairs quite

\(^{100}\) Two notable exceptions can be mentioned. One interview was roughly three hours long whereas another one was roughly seven minutes long. My choice to regard the seven-minute-long interaction as an interview was largely its rich content. The informant spoke in great detail, albeit for a short time, about the procedures of work before the time of digitalization, which made a notable impression on me and facilitated my understanding of what digital work had replaced.

\(^{101}\) I did note, however, that a unit manager who acted as a key informant was far more willing to converse with me and be interviewed by me (although there was yet another unit manager in the setting).
broadly. At times, my questions would generate such forms of accounts in which little effort was required on my part to keep the story going. Such instances have been regarded as ‘oral histories’ serving as means to get a sense of the realities of informants, their world (Musson, 1998, p. 11), and their practices (cf. Schatzki, 2012, p. 25). Some of these interviews were group interviews, which had roughly 3-10 participants at a time, and included mixed groups of respondents (in terms of work roles). In some of these interactions, one of my questions could prompt the telling of a story that was supported or rejected by other participants. Interaction among those present in these encounters was useful to gain a grasp of normative assessments, e.g. what people thought was appropriate behavior in light of events (cf. Halkier, 2010). Serendipity played a great part in the possibility to have these group interviews. On two occasions, work meetings held by informants turned into group interviews and on other occasions it happened to be convenient to take the opportunity to ask multiple informants at the same time.

Another fruitful kind of interaction were conversations, which were less orderly and more informal, about matters that stretched from concerns of work, personal life, and at times even questions about my work life. Conversations were initially less constrained by my lack of knowledge and served to expand my understanding of the settings. Each visit entailed an effort to participate in informal practices such as drinking coffee in the coffee room or eating lunch with respondents, while participating in conversation. Although not audio-recorded, these kinds of conversations formed part of my general impression. These have not been included in the appendix, although they at times proved to be more extensive or informative than some interviews.102 More so, the use of conversation proved essential in the building of trust between me and informants. This necessity could be noted in a couple of encounters. Some informants believed that I was present in order to supervise and report to upper management. Others believed that my affiliation to a department of business studies implied that I was not interested in their point of view or their practices. Misunderstandings and differences were importantly dealt with through conversations that let informants know more about me and my own agenda (cf. Spradley, 1979, pp. 36-37, 46).

4.4.3. Observations

My observations across settings were of the three kinds: general observations of the setting during visits, observation of work, and observation of group meetings. With general observation, I refer to the examining of a setting and

102 What I mean here with a conversation being more extensive than an interview is in terms of duration. A conversation while eating lunch could stretch to be roughly one hour long or longer.
its layout during my visits. Such kinds of observations are unavoidable if one visits a workplace or setting of any kind. The observations of work were instances of me being allowed to sit next to someone doing their work. I did not assume that I would not disturb the work as a fly-on-the-wall. I embraced the fact that my presence was a kind of disturbance and engaged in conversation with informants on occasion to ‘lighten the mood’ and attempt to put them at ease as they were observed. Engaging with those observed was beneficial for another reason. Much of the work at the settings was computer mediated. As put by Barley and Kunda (2001, p. 85), examination of computer-mediated work is difficult through mere traditional observation, as traces of activity are elusive and only briefly noted. Whenever things happened that I did not quite catch, I would ask workers questions and let them explain what they had done. Making my presence known was necessary to ‘slow down’ workers in their activities and grasp some of the small things they would do rapidly.

These observations of work were done in tandem with interview situations. Roughly half of my interviews at work settings were tied to observations of work activities, ranging from 10 to 45 minutes. Possibilities to observe would emerge spontaneously after I asked informants about the activities they undertook. Hence, my interview situations would at times phase into observations of work demonstrations. In some instances, the informant would show me the procedure they were talking about and perform a kind of casework processing and so forth. When this happened, I tried to scribble down whatever I saw was going on, including the different programs and tabs that were accessed and the kind of operations that were necessary to open them.

Finally, I also observed eight group meetings (see Appendix). These were both local or held over video conference with parties not present. Serendipity played a part in the participation in such meetings. In the work settings, these meetings proved valuable as opportunities to see people engage with one another in discussion, expressing diverging opinions regarding different work activities and events.

During observations of meetings, I took notes even though I also audio-recorded most of my interactions. The notes were useful to reconstruct events to try to gain a more complete sense of events. After a visit, notes were used to form small narratives of what I had seen, including my general impressions.

103 Some interactions were undertaken in unrecorded format to not raise suspicion or disturb the interaction (e.g. Spradley, 1979, pp. 73-74). For the latter kind, where I deemed it possible to disturb the interaction, I have instead taken notes. See the Appendix for further information.
4.4.4. Treatment of the material or ‘data analysis’

My empirical material is a combination of documentation, field notes, and interview transcriptions. The material has been examined during the time of the study and after with the aim to consider empirical material holistically and in an iterative manner. This way of apprehending and examining the material is not one of the kind of systematic, minute ‘data analysis’ favored by those who primarily work inductively from data by incessantly breaking down paragraphs and words (e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I have not operated with an assumed heightened ‘objectivity’ and ‘rigor’ through the counting of numbers of words and pages (cf. Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009, pp. 62-67). Such counting only accentuates how articulable concepts tread forth as ‘brute data.’

Examination of the material here was done manually and with the intent of forming cohesive narratives that captured my interpretation of the visited settings and the witnessed events couched in theoretical terms. To accomplish this, a form of modest coding was undertaken and combined with the writing up of narratives. I understand coding broadly as the idea of categorizing aspects and parts of collected material in order to make sense of it through certain so-called ‘codes’ that are brought from theoretical frameworks or emerge through the material (cf. Flick, 2014, p. 373). In the sense that it has been undertaken in the initial coding of the material, descriptive codes were of relevance. These have been used in order to designate parts of the material in regard to descriptions of the work setting, forms of activities, aspects related to technological systems, managerial efforts and so forth. The purpose of placing descriptions on the material was to get a general grasp of what was going on. Due to the gradually growing familiarity with the settings during the gathering of material and its assessment, the coding was undertaken in an iterative manner as material was obtained. This implied a certain leeway in regard to ways of mapping data, as new things would emerge that (re-)directed my sense of what was going on. Considering that I gained familiarity gradually and because of an interest in an ‘event of change,’ I was unable to determine ample descriptive codes in advance as I did not know what would happen and what would come to matter in my empirical descriptions. All coding was done in the original language of transcripts and documents (Swedish), and later translated in the write up of my narratives.

104 That is not to imply that a structure established through counting is otherwise necessarily a bad thing (e.g. to retain a good access to data) but that it does not constitute the analysis as it was undertaken (cf. Silverman, 2001, pp. 35, 228).

105 Coding was done manually on paper and through the use of word processing software. Data management software (NVivo) has subsequently been used to overview the material.
It is primarily in the writing up of my narratives that I have used theoretical concepts. The use of concepts reflects the discussions in the previous chapter and has depended on noting instances that reflected normative expectations, beliefs regarding work, and expressions of affectivity and the like. Although descriptive codes were treated as more emergent, the same was not the case for theoretical concepts in the narratives. Considering how the task of seeing practices has been defined, the concepts have only provided a guided seeing and have not implied a pre-given rich content before their use. I can briefly give some concrete examples of how concepts were used in the assessment of material. Rather than posing that these concepts were operationalized in the sense they are in quantitative studies or positivist qualitative work where one treats the social as measurable (cf. Silverman, 2001, pp. 88-90), I will engage with a far looser connotation to the term operationalization by referring to how a ‘seeing’ of such and such concept could be done in the material. A reader must be aware, however, that what I present here is for the sake of illustration and does not treat the whole process of writing up of the material. I will give some brief examples that reflect the organization of practice, which perhaps is the most elusive dimension of practice theory. Some of these examples are from an interaction that entailed work descriptions, only making mention of what was said and not what was observed during said observation.

As we touched upon in Chapter 3, expressions of practical understanding are unfathomable in articulate form. Instead, I would engage with examples that shed light on certain abilities that practitioners were capable of. As an example, an informant said:

“It is difficult to distinguish how much you work with the systems and how much time you spend doing actual casework.” – Caseworker

Such a statement is taken as expression that one is expected to be able to use a system to participate in the practice, and that such ability is part of the practical understanding of the practice in question. Examples of kinds of uses within the systems are more specific examples of ‘seeing’ practical understanding:

“You have to do ‘journals’ (a kind of case). It can be that a client calls and wants money fast. If we have no ongoing case with the same client registered in the system, such a call becomes a ‘journal’. If we have a case involving the person who called, we write something called ‘conversation’ (a specific kind of information within a case). In a tab in the system one then writes whether the person has been sick and does not want remuneration or perhaps wants money quick or wants to be contacted.” – Caseworker (parentheses added for clarification)

106 Quote from interview no. 9, see Appendix. Referred to in Chapter 5 again.
107 Quote from interview no. 19, see Appendix.
From the description of work above, we see some brief examples of specific
tasks, cases and information that a caseworker can be expected to understand,
respond to and so on. Following the reasoning in Chapter 3, doing tasks such
as these, referring to aspects of the system and ways of work in a specific
manner and so on, implied a certain practical understanding. Any description
and observation of work was seen as giving glimpses of practical
understanding. Of course, being there and seeing caseworkers work with the
systems in a way that corresponded to the description was an important part
of seeing the practical understanding of the practice.

Regarding explicit rules, any kind of statement regarding instruction on
procedure that was heeded was seen as expression of these. As an example, a
caseworker would work according to a set of prioritizations that would
designate what to do. Speaking about these would be reflected in examples
such as:

“This is our list of priorities; we follow this when we work. […] We always
do ‘journals,’ ‘conversations’ and ‘actions’ (a kind of case) first, then other
cases. […] Today we only do ‘journals’ and ‘conversations’ to get rid of old
cases.” – Caseworker (parentheses and emphasis added for clarification)\(^{108}\)

Alternatively, in a dialogue, I asked a naïve question to see the reasoning
behind a particular doing:

“Me: What stops you from choosing this other case instead?
Caseworker: There is this…*slight pause*…prioritization that we must take
into account.”\(^{109}\)

Simply knowing that prioritizations were there was not always enough as
one will note later on; caseworkers would tend to work with prioritizations in
a flexible manner. Nonetheless, any kind of instruction regarding what one
ought to do, and that a particular informant was capable of expressing in light
of certain actions, would serve as an example of explicit rules here.

Moving on to the teleoaffective structure, this concept has been treated
primarily by a grasp of the various tasks undertaken and the ends pursued in
these (as argued in Chapter 3). Let’s examine a kind of example that
highlighted combinations of tasks undertaken for the end of processing a case:

“Caseworker: I do this in the morning, I go to this folder. There I can see cases.
[…] Then I search for ‘journals.’
Me: Do you have to mark the folders you want to search in?
Caseworker: Yes, I have to mark all the folders I am expected to work in while
searching manually. Then I mark that I want to work with ‘new journals.’

\(^{108}\) Quote from interview no. 19, see Appendix. Edited slightly to avoid technical language.
\(^{109}\) Excerpt from interview no. 34, see Appendix.
Caseworker: See... *starts examining the case file*... the baby was born this date and the woman then has parental leave till this date. Then I write here that the baby has turned one year old. Right, I have to look at the history of the client... *continues examining the case by clicking around*

The specifics of caseworking can be difficult to process from this example, but one can note here that a variety of tasks are undertaken one after another. The overall purpose of the procedures is to determine the remuneration for a parent that is on parental leave. A variety of actions are undertaken to pursue this end, and considering that caseworkers process multiple cases, the end is then to process casework of a specific kind quite generally (rather than only to help a specific client). Any kind of designation between projects and tasks in the material was assessed in regard to how projects amounted to a larger slice of activity, e.g. processing casework, whereas tasks amount to the various steps undertaken, e.g. searching for cases, examining a chosen case, and writing certain information into the case. One can perhaps note that there is a certain overlap in the kind of account given by the informant and how different elements of practice are ‘seen.’ An account of work could give a sense of a certain practical understanding, the rules followed, and the combinations of tasks undertaken simultaneously.

The affective dimension of practice was differently assessed, e.g. as whatever was notable as a kind of feeling that practitioners would state they felt in light of a certain action undertaken. An example of how this could look is the statement a caseworker made regarding a specific activity undertaken:

“I feel this is fun, to work around and make stuff like this work. I also feel I have a bit of control too.” – Caseworker (emphasis added)111

This often took certain circumstances into account, as in the case above it was due to a new responsibility given that a caseworker expressed that a part of the job was fun. In part, the circumstances related to the ‘event of change’ that was studied. In some interactions, affectivity was also expressed in light of changes that were not appreciated in the practice of work:

“There is not continuity in anything. So... it is still very messy. I think it irritates people. And then you feel that you don’t really know where your work is and that you lack a sense of control.” – Caseworker (emphasis added)112

Turning to general understandings, any expression of ideas, concerns, and values emitted were taken as part of the practices examined. Some of these ideas also emerged from interaction that related to the ‘event of change.’ The following interaction among caseworkers and an administrative assistant

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110 Excerpt from interview no. 19, see Appendix.
111 Interaction from interview no. 33, see Appendix.
112 Interaction from interview no. 31, see Appendix.
revolved around a decision to use a new software that did not work as intended but that caseworkers nonetheless were expected to use:

“Caseworker A: But we have no solution to this issue. How am I supposed to work with this software?

Caseworker B: But we have been told to do so.

Administrative assistant: But it’s not your problem if things don’t turn out well.

Caseworker B: But we have to think of the clients.

Caseworker C: We have a responsibility in our work to make the best out of the situation, so it becomes our problem if it doesn’t work.”

Such interaction was assessed as giving some insight into the concerns or ideas, such as both the importance to heed directives and to care for clients, which were held among practitioners and that arose due to a moment of discussion. Another example of this is the following, which gives some insight into the idea of knowing work better due to proximity to the work (among other reasons):

“I know what is important in my folders and I know my cases and I know that a case that won’t come up in the interface (referring to a new system) today perhaps is the most important case of the day, and I know what the case is about. Me knowing so is disregarded completely by this new thing. My view and my knowledge about my cases are not taken into account.” – Caseworker

These examples illustrate the manner in which general understandings, in the form of ideas about work and concerns regarding work, were assumed to tread forth in part due to moments of reflection and discussion, as was touched upon in Chapter 3.

It is important, however, that a reader is aware that a considerable part of the treatment of the material entailed the putting of pieces together for a general grasp. This implied the interpreting of the material in light of the wider social ‘context’ studied and my grasp thereof. In the case of interviews, these were interpreted in light of insights from other sources of data to form a cohesive whole (Cassell, 2009, p. 506). In other words, each interaction was not broken down as an isolated interaction seen separately. A grasp of caseworking as a whole was then gained by a comparison of different expressions across interactions. Furthermore, the grasp of a practice was furthered by the grasp of another practice due to the interrelations between these. It was in such a manner that I gained familiarity with the material, although admittedly it was not only by examining material after it was produced in text that familiarity began to accrue. The interpretative process directed towards practices was – to paraphrase Wittgenstein (OC, §141) – such

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113 Excerpt from interview no. 20, see Appendix.
114 Excerpt from interview no. 20, see Appendix.
that light dawned gradually on the whole. This cohesive grasp was not only
achieved by being at the settings or examining codes by themselves but also
by the forming of narratives. The narratives are both the result of constant
rewriting as my familiarity grew, and the means I used to structure happenings
and material for the sake of presenting it to readers (cf. Langley, 1999, pp.
695-697). The empirical material as is presented in the next chapter is a
collection of narratives produced through this procedure.

A limitation of sorts is that these narratives have not been presented to the
informants in the settings in the form of text for the sake of verifying if I got
empirical details right. Because these were written in English with theoretical
concepts embedded I did not deem them to be of interest as such. Instead, I
have throughout the study tried to present aspects of the narratives in
interviews, e.g. “I have understood things like this, is this valid or what do you
think?”.

4.5. Ethical considerations

Prior to conducting my studies, I signed agreements to not share information
that could be regarded as sensitive, such as information about applicants
seeking benefits. Abiding to this requirement did not prove problematic to
describe the practices undertaken. At every setting, I also asked for permission
before audio-recording any interaction (e.g. interview or group meeting).
Additionally, I agreed to not refer to any caseworker by name in my own
accounts. The latter also, I believe, led workers to be more forthcoming in
their accounts, and particularly so when stating their disagreement with upper
management. I have in addition chosen to not state where the studied offices
were located. It is not my intention that offices where people held critical
views could in anyway be reprimanded by their statements.

Initially, I had planned to share my findings (not only in terms of
theoretically dense narratives) with the settings. However, as I had noted a
risk of exposing both workers and unit managers to further scrutiny due to
critical comments or cases of resistance emerging, I chose not to. For this
purpose, the material has not been presented as a cohesive whole to the
settings or to the project group that was in charge of the technological
implementation, but rather in edited excerpts communicated to them.

4.6. Concluding remarks

In this chapter we have engaged with two topics. First, we have discussed the
kinds of comprehensions we hold of practices quite generally, to later connect
this to a definition of an appropriate empirical approach. This entailed settling
for what an interpretative inquiry of practice entails methodologically. Having
stated that a sufficient level of comprehension is needed for the sake of analyzing practices beyond a crude understanding, but that it is not necessary to become a participant oneself, we have also preliminarily defined what practice theory in the practice of organizational inquiry means. The second topic we touched upon was my own collection and treatment of empirical material and how I have reasoned along the process.

There are at least two kinds of limitations in this chapter that one would do well to point out. One could argue that the discussion about modes and levels of comprehension about practice could be considered as a crude point of departure for determining a fitting standard for empirical work. Simply stating that one needs not be a full participant and that one ought to not be completely foreign to the practices examined does not designate how much material is appropriate. Hence, one could critique whether the effort here is sufficiently aware of the challenges of attaining a sufficient grasp of practices through empirical inquiry. In response to such a view, I want to stress that the material here was collected and utilized for the purpose of fostering a form of self-reflection and used to show such reflection rather than the stiffness of rigor for the sake of empirical work alone (e.g. Czarniawska, 2016, p. 617). The means for analytical refinement of the concepts presented in Chapter 3 has been sought through empirical work to assess practice theory in practice (cf. Tsoukas, 2009). Primarily the case has been to achieve an illustration of how empirical work and analysis thereof could look while avoiding a too crude grasp of practices, and for such a sake the point of departure and undertaken work has been deemed sufficient.

A second limitation is that we have not dug deeply into the “camps” of interpretative, qualitative methodology. As an example, one finds both the kind of approach that sees qualitative studies as being on trial and having to conform to standards of greater transparency and structure (cf. Silverman, 2001) or one could hold closer to a more ‘romantic’ approach that eschews talk of rigor and cumulative evidence as naïve attempts at poorly mimicking natural sciences (cf. Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009, p. 22) and masking the ‘out-there’ of the social world (cf. Law, 2004). I have tried to stay clear of this divide in how social science ought to be performed as it does not necessarily guide our understanding of what has been discussed in Chapter 3. However, I have accounted for what has been done in the process of collection and the breadth of material collected so that a reader can judge parts of the process of research for themselves and in light of their own methodological stances. As an example, while one could criticize the lack of rigor, I have tried to be sufficiently transparent in my presentation of material in the following chapter so that one could first see what kind of familiarity I gained in a non-theorized account of what I have studied and later see a more analytical account. In doing so, the camp of ‘rigor’ could perhaps distinguish the division between data and interpretation (Silverman, 2001, p. 222). The crucial point, however, is that a reader ought to be able to see how the concepts are brought to use.
The relation between the way of speaking of practices and the empirical material of actual practices spoken of will be further discussed in Section 6.1.

To conclude, one could see that any scholarly ‘seeing’ of practice rests upon not only methodological considerations but also a certain breadth of work. To undertake research is its very own practice with its variations of tasks pursued that have been illustrated here.\textsuperscript{115} When we have referred to a scholarly community to judge our performance as researchers, it is partly with an eye to what has been mentioned here that they would do so. Of course, we can also be judged in regard to what awaits: the analysis of practice.

\textsuperscript{115} Stating that the tasks of empirical inquiry can be examined through the very lens one examines empirical material with is an underappreciated way of being transparent about what inquiry might imply in practice (cf. Sergi and Hallin, 2011). I will return to the idea that the use of practice theory is a kind of practice of its own later on.
5. Analytical Illustration

“We have seen that the bureaucratic concept of work is an idea of a high degree of precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs – these are raised to the optimum point in the bureaucratic administration [...]” – Weber (1946, p. 214)

Weber’s writing on the emergence of bureaucracy is a common focal point for any mention of civil service or public administration. The very idea of its efficiency might commonly be doubted and a skeptic might deem many of its operations to be Kafkaesque. Nonetheless, the central importance of bureaucracy for some sectors of social life is, however, less often doubted. Such is perhaps also the case for the organizational behemoth referred to as the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. The SSIA is primarily known for its provision of social insurance. As an agency, it is quite commonly seen as an archetype of bureaucratic Organization in Sweden due to its central role in the functioning of the Swedish welfare state.

Social insurance is provided through various work activities undertaken in what are simply referred to as ‘offices.’ The most central activity in the provision of social insurance is caseworking; a kind of work that implies the examining of applications from the public and assessing the eligibility of remuneration. This is the point of departure in terms of practice that we will focus on. We will here get in touch with a couple of ways caseworking is pursued.

I will not present the following illustration by tearing it apart in loosely tied examples, but rather will attempt to provide some degree of detail about activities and events so as to present what my understanding of Chapter 3 can produce and demonstrate that it does not consume the empirical but instead provides means to examine it. I do this also to show how a study can look rather than pieces of one. I will begin by accounting for how such differences and similarities can be noted in the performances of each setting I was in touch with. The general presentation of the material will begin with brief descriptions of my empirical material described as non-theoretically as possible in order to then later describe these as rendered into practice-arrangement bundles. This presentation of my empirical material is part of the way I will show the use of sensitizing concepts. It will resemble a division of first-order (empirical accounts) and second-order (interpretations) material (Van Maanen, 1979). An account with no implicit theory present is doubtful but my purpose in doing this is to show my rendering in explicit fashion.

In the first part of this chapter (5.1), I provide some form of general overview in order to demonstrate the gist of my subsequent rendering of different settings, or offices, into complexes of practice-arrangement bundles. Following a Wittgensteinian conception of interpretative social science, the
constructed overviews are crucial for a grasp of the ‘spirit’ of practice. Here, the practices are described in order to get a sense of the contours of the bundles of practice-arrangements, in a zoomed-out manner. The descriptions presented are preparatory for what follows in the next sections. Specific attention is given to the practice of caseworking in this section.

Sections 5.2 and 5.3 are zoomed-in accounts of a particular setting. I begin with a depiction of the past state of affairs, which is followed up with a depiction of the ‘event of change’ and how things started to change. I also present some background on the rationale of the change with material on the artifact implemented. By attending to two states, before and during the event of change, I provide a backdrop of information so that one can see how I have engaged in the depiction and tracing of change. As we have previously stated, to understand a practice one ought to understand both its past and its future (cf. Schatzki, 2006a/2006b). What this means is that the depiction of an earlier state and then of a later state enhances the understanding of both states and gives a more comprehensive account of the practices as a whole. This will also reflect the nature of the kind of inquiry undertaken. By seeing what would happen at a later point, I also understood what had been seen at an earlier point (cf. Garfinkel, 1967, p. 77). In these sections, we come to see more detailed overviews (of a specific complex) with an eye on an ‘event of change’ that we will come to learn more about shortly.

A final note for the reader is that information on interviews and interactions mentioned here is found in the Appendix.

5.1. Similarities, variations and contours of settings

The common image of the civil servant is that of the bureaucrat who strictly heeds procedure in their affairs and deals with paperwork. A caseworker is a kind of bureaucrat. Caseworkers also heed procedure, and perhaps most importantly, deal with files. ‘Dealing with files’ means that caseworkers examine applications and make sure that these are in order. If not, they ask for, or retrieve, information from applicants to correct these and make decisions on eligibility of remuneration. A decision is made by comparing the information in a file with certain regulation. This image fits into the common perception of a caseworker of the SSIA. The reality of this kind of work – casework – is largely dependent on files and rules.

However, caseworking is not uniformly manifested. First, the actual applications and the regulations used to process said applications can differ across instantiations of caseworking. A variety of applications exist as social insurance is quite broadly defined, and regulations cover a wider variety of such applications. Secondly, the instances of caseworking happen in actual settings that have their idiosyncratic elements, such as variations in tasks or roles to assist in the work and its distribution. At the same time similarities
between settings also exist, such as the sizes of ‘units’ and ‘teams,’ the common division between unit managers and caseworkers, similarities in the material elements involved in work, and also a similar vocabulary to designate aspects of work.

So where to start in this exposition? In his seminal analysis of bureaucracy, Max Weber (1946, p. 197) pointed out that the management of the bureaucratic office is based upon files. The ‘files’ give each ‘bureau’ its distinctiveness (Giddens, 1984, p. 152). If we entertain this idea, a way of to begin depicting how caseworking can differ in different offices is to understand the work with ‘files’ and their distribution. Beyond distribution, we cannot neglect the activities undertaken with the files themselves nor the tools implied in such activities. There is more than rules and files alone. We will, however, begin with the distribution of files and the way they provide a hint to the distinctiveness that defined settings.

5.1.1. Distribution of files

While in Weber’s time, the ‘files’ were written documents worked on by officials and scribes, the modern bureaucracy involves different kinds of ‘files.’ As applicants with different needs reach out to the SSIA, via Internet, phone, or by submitting a paper form, in the hope of receiving remuneration, the computer systems of the SSIA create computer-based case files of applications. The files in question are digital. Depending on the type of case, the system creates the case in a particular folder belonging to an office tasked to deal with such a case. This occurs as cases emerge continuously in the systems.

The type of case was a large determinant for where the case would end up being processed, e.g. which division and which office of a division. Forecasts of the capacity of each office were taken into account in this distribution, as cases were distributed to spread out the workload among offices. After a case had reached the digital folder of a division, the distribution was done according to the geographical location of both applicant and recipient office. If a client in a region were to submit an application, it would probably be caseworkers in an office in the same region who would process it.

After the cases reached an office, the cases were distributed to the units and their respective caseworkers. Involved in the work of distributing within an office were the unit managers and administrative assistants. The latter was an acknowledged type of worker in official documentation although they were

116 An exception would be if an office had too much to do, and caseworkers from another office would step in to take a couple of cases. This occurred in one setting visited (Child/Family).
not found in every office. In my contact with settings, only an office of the Child/Family division had an administrative assistant.

Important to note here was that the specific way of distributing cases within offices, that is, among the practitioners situated in the locale of an office, could depend on yet further factors. At an office working with Health Insurance-related cases, the distribution of work was dependent on the task of determining the difficulty and type of case prior to assigning it. Such a process was not carried out by the unit managers but was instead handled by the caseworkers collectively in lengthy, complex processes undertaken during weekly meetings. The complexity of casework could range from determining whether the contents of any application were in order, to having to initiate further inquiry by asking for additional information from an applicant. Different activities were necessary to accomplish different kinds of processing of cases at different settings. One kind of demanding activity would be to actually meet and talk with a client in person. This was occasionally the case for Health Insurance-casework. No matter the varying complexity of casework, one particular kind of activity was performed at every office visited: an inquiry to determine the qualifying income of a client, which is tied to remuneration.

In offices with a lack of a very notable range of complexity in casework, meaning that casework did not differ as greatly as it could at Health Insurance, the distribution worked differently. One common way of distribution was the designation of dates of birth to caseworkers that they were responsible for, e.g. days 1-10, months November-December. All cases with applicants having their date of birth between days 1-10 in November and December were then handed to the caseworker responsible for these days. By designating dates of birth that cover a whole year, an office was capable of distributing the work evenly among its caseworkers, giving each caseworker an individual pool of work. This was then complimented with prioritizations, such as doing specific kind of cases in a specific order among one’s ‘days.’ That is, if a caseworker had to cover days 1-10 in November-December, they would select specific cases from among this pool of work in a specific order. The prioritizations were partly set by the top management of the SSIA’s different divisions in national guidelines, and then modified by unit managers according to local short-term goals. A simple prioritization was to do cases of applicants that

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117 This was, as far as I saw, largely specific for offices of that division. The cases of an office of Health Insurance could be expected to have a range of complexity, measured in expected time it would take to process these and in the variety of kinds of activities needed to be undertaken to finish processing the case. Much of this depended on the assessment of the health status of an applicant. After such selections of cases were made, the teams of caseworkers would be designated either a few complex cases or multiple simple ones. Observations of this were undertaken during interaction no. 11.

118 From interview no. 35.
had been unattended for a certain amount of time in the pool of work, in order to ensure that no case was left lying around for too long. Another kind of prioritization was to help applicants assumed to have urgent needs.

In certain divisions, caseworkers could affect the work distribution on the level of their own teams. Teams were the designation for groups of caseworkers (ranging from 6-10 across settings) that were tasked to assist each other and share in responsibilities. On the occasion that a caseworker was missing from a team or could not complete their own cases, other caseworkers would step in to take over their pool of work. Such affairs were also discussed at weekly team meetings. At times, specific alterations were also made to the prioritizations that were supposed to be followed, and some caseworkers would be designated additional responsibilities to ensure that neglected cases were processed. Whether caseworkers had this kind of responsibility and possibility to self-manage among team members was dependent on the division an office belonged to. Most notably, this kind of teamwork was noticed in offices with less complex cases (e.g. Child/Family).

Caseworking could also occur in other kinds of offices with other responsibilities, such as those of the “Customer Center.” As a unique division, its offices did not actually focus on doing casework but instead only did so when their workers were not too busy answering phone calls or e-mails from applicants. If one were to call the SSIA’s official phone number, one would probably end up with someone working at one of these settings. Such a worker would roughly spend 10-20% of their time doing casework, and the rest of their time doing other tasks (e.g. phone calls, e-mails). Central in the distribution of work here was a group referred to as “traffic planners” in the headquarters of the SSIA, who directed casework to Customer Center “offices” to relieve the burden of work from other divisions. Although I never met one of these “traffic planners,” my brief interactions at this setting revolved around these as crucial parts of work distribution. These caseworkers would not have their own pool of work but would instead be provided cases occasionally by these planners to relieve other offices.

5.1.2. Common tools of work

Besides the distribution of work, another important dimension was the set of tools of work. Every caseworker had a set of equipment in order to perform their tasks. Without exception, every caseworker had their own desk, a computer (stationary and/or laptop), telephone, headset, and an access card to gain access to the building where the office was located. Additionally, with

119 Obviously, it is possible that there were other tools used than those listed here, and that I failed to observe them. If this was the case, these other tools were never mentioned in any interaction I had with the caseworkers.
the card, one could register that one was at work, and access the SSIA’s computer systems and the intranet. The intranet contained general SSIA-related news for its workers, as well as information manuals in pdf format containing guidelines on how to use the systems and how to do casework. Such manuals were readily available for the workers, and physical copies thereof could occasionally be found on desks of caseworkers. These documents were pivotal. Every decision made by caseworkers had to follow and heed certain regulations imposed on the SSIA from a political direction (e.g. the Swedish parliament). Caseworkers looked up certain regulations in order to make decisions on cases. In addition, caseworkers often utilized self-made documents, such as templates to write letters to applicants or simple guidelines for certain systems. As an example, a particular system within the systems was referred to as TP. The TP system was used to determine the income of clients stored in public records and to see past applications for benefits. To navigate the system, some caseworkers had a strip of paper with codes, as the dated system required the input of codes to produce data of different kinds. While some employees had memorized the codes, and thus did not need any strip of paper containing them, others had codes plastered on papers next to their computer screens.

Another thing provided were the means to communicate internally. Every employee, including unit managers, administrative assistants, caseworkers, and top management, had their own e-mail address and access to an internal communications system (called Lync). Through the latter, the members of the SSIA were able to send messages to each other and to have video conference calls. These means were readily available to workers through their computers and could also be accessed from home on their work laptops. This partly meant that it was possible to work from home, although most workers did show up physically at the office.

The systems played a large role in how casework was done. In the past, pre-computerization, cases were stored in real, physical cabinets, in physical folders, and only existed on paper. Caseworkers were instructed on how to file incoming cases and how to process them, such as writing on paper and filing said paper in folders. Every application would be its own folder, containing information specific to the relevant case in real physical form. Replacing the physical cabinets, folders, and paperwork was a web of systems that workers of the SSIA relied extensively on, and that had been further developed over the years. The days of relying on real physical case files were long past.

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120 The TP system was one of the first computer systems introduced for casework processing.
121 This was the case at both Health Insurance and at Child/Family (interviews no. 9 & 31). I do not know if one was expected to show up on a regular basis, but every setting had meetings one was expected to attend.
122 From interview no. 22.
Modern caseworking relies extensively on computer systems as the paperwork had become computer work. Although an applicant could send in a paper form, such a form was scanned in and then viewed from the systems as it was processed. If a caseworker wrote a letter for a client, this was done in a text editing program within the systems, and if a paper copy was sent to a client it had been sent because a caseworker clicked on a button within the systems that made it so that the text was sent in the form of a printed-out letter from the post office in Östersund, a city in the north of Sweden, that took care of all postal concerns of the SSIA.

5.1.3. Activities in the system of files

The system that held all case files was referred to as the Case Management System and was composed of a myriad of modules with varied functionalities. When speaking of the systems, it was often this one that was referred to, and it was this system that was the primary tool used by the offices. For an outsider, the complexity of the systems was staggering. For a proficient caseworker, the systems were tools inseparable from the job and easily navigated.

To access the Case Management System, an access card had to be placed into a device connected to a computer. Within the system one could see the different accessible folders in the form of a list. Opening a folder produced another list of cases that could be selected and examined more closely. For each specific case within the systems, different attached documents pertaining to the case, such as a medical certificate, the actual form filled in by the client, and other additional information were accessible. Caseworkers could also add information to cases. In the event that crucial information was missing, a common task was to gain access to and add such information to a case file. At times, the information lacking was so critical that a new case file was created in the system that entailed getting such information from clients (e.g. their income and employment status). The creation of new cases to process other cases was a common occurrence, and part of the standard procedure. This meant that there were more cases than there were actual applications from clients. Besides the creation of new cases, caseworkers could also write notes in what is referred to as the ‘journal’ tied to the case. The information input in the journal stated what had been done in the case and why, in order to inform later processing. It is important to note that cases often were not processed in one go, but instead required the completion of several steps. For the latter, the ‘journal’ proved important in the event that several caseworkers accessed the case. Used in the stepwise processing were symbols that appeared in the list

123 From interview no. 9. In my understanding, this was done because the task of collecting missing information was quite substantial.
of cases accessed. These symbols were used in two ways. Time symbols were put in as caseworkers right-clicked a case and manually entered a date by which they considered the case ought to be looked at again. When the time frame had passed, an “alarm” was set off and a clock symbol next to a case turned red within the system. Another kind of symbol appeared when new information had been received for a case.  

In the systems, cases were accessed through a manual search function. Selecting this specific function opened a bar into which search queries were input. Searchable options were specific kinds of cases, the date of birth of applicants, and symbols. After inputting the query, the search results were presented as a list of cases that were sorted according to case type, symbols and so on. A caseworker’s designated pool of work was continuously accessed by repeated searches, as the search query needed to be done to access new incoming cases. The only exceptions to this were those caseworkers who received a select few but very complex cases, as was the case at the division of Health Insurance. There, caseworkers would instead ‘reserve’ and tag cases as their own, producing their own list of a few cases. This particular procedure was far from common at other settings, where employees instead relied on continuous manual searching to access their work.

For cases to be accessible through searches, the cases needed to be placed in the agreed upon folders that were selected when searching. Essentially, a search for cases was a search for a specific file in a folder. The folders were named according to whatever kind of case it would contain, and to ensure that the folders were in the state expected, the structure of folders was continuously maintained by caseworkers or others, such as administrative assistants, who moved cases between folders. This was partially done automatically, as was the case when case files emerged in the systems due to new applications reaching the systems, but at times cases were also moved manually from one folder into the next for the sake of restructuring folders. 

Most casework was commonly accessible by anyone, including fellow caseworkers who had their own pile of work, unit managers, and administrative assistants. Due to how open it was, how case files at times moved between folders and also were processed in various steps by multiple caseworkers, there were rules on how to work with the system. A manual with instructions on caseworking and how the system had to be used was available through the intranet for the SSIA’s employees. Roughly 200 pages long, the manual explained step by step how one was supposed to log data, what was supposed to be written, and so forth. There was, however, more than just one

\[124\] From interviews no. 13 & 19.  
\[125\] From interviews no. 9 & 19.  
\[126\] A reason for this was that automatically generated cases could emerge in the wrong place.  
\[127\] I saw this manual during my observations on a couple of occasions (e.g. from interview no. 9).
system and one manual. There was also the previously mentioned TP system, which provided crucial information needed in order to process cases, and often was used in parallel with the Case Management System. It was a common sight to see caseworkers with both systems opened next to each other, as they jumped back and forth between these two.

“It is difficult to distinguish how much you work with the systems and how much time you spend doing actual casework.” – Caseworker128

The quote above reflected the notable presence of systems in each setting. Considering the reliance upon systems to process cases, treating the use of systems as separate from the task of processing cases was difficult.

The use of systems differed between divisions. At Customer Center, most of the instructions received, such as if one ought to answer a phone call or an e-mail, were given by an alerting system (called Interaction Client).129 It was also this system that told the caseworkers here, who happened to seldom do casework, when they had to do so. The variations of tasks prompted by the system were dependent on a scheduling system, in turn, which stored a schedule for caseworkers.

These systems were complex and hard to grasp for an outsider, but for an experienced caseworker they were taken for granted as they performed their activities. As stated above, which systems and how they were used depended on the setting. This implied that the taken-for-granted-ness was different across settings, and that variations were to be found in the interaction with the systems.

5.1.4. Meetings, spaces, and flow of life

From the description above, one could assume that observing caseworkers doing their work would imply merely observing someone sitting in front of a computer, navigating ominous, complex systems. While the systems were notable in my visits, there was more to be seen.

Examining available information and comparing with regulations to evaluate the right decision was the core of fully processing a case. Processing a case could, however, entail the need to complement lacking information. This was achieved by contacting a client or an employer. For some caseworkers, it was also so that contact with clients to obtain missing information could entail actually meeting clients in person, e.g. to determine their health status.

Meetings were also regularly held at meeting locales. Such meetings could involve those locally present or also include those at other offices, in the form

128 Quote from interview no. 9.
129 This system was a particularly prevalent system at this division, from what I was told (in interaction no. 16) and was not observed at other offices of other divisions.
of video conference meetings. Meetings among caseworkers would diverge across settings. A common kind of meeting was the standard, weekly planning meetings undertaken with the purpose of seeing if caseworkers in a team were absent (and had to be covered for), to discuss the pace of work and other relevant issues. The contents of those meetings differed in terms of how they could affect work distribution. As mentioned above, at Health Insurance, additional meetings were undertaken for the purpose of categorizing how demanding the processing of some cases was expected to be.  

Besides meetings, there was something that I, as observer, could not miss. Essentially, each office of the SSIA shared an atmosphere of some sort and a kind of pattern across interactions was notable. Observing a setting was to observe caseworkers approaching one another and asking for advice and help. The work of a caseworker was not wholly solitary or bound to a screen. As an observer, an office was only silent during times people left the office, e.g. for lunch breaks or when nearing the end of the day (and some would leave early). Otherwise, the offices were areas full of life. The sounds one heard at an office were sounds of constant talking, whether over the phone or among caseworkers in person. Communication was then not only something undertaken within systems.

In part, a sense of the life at locales had to do with the actual layout of offices. Depending on the actual office space and building, caseworkers were in some settings seated adjacent to their respective team members, and teams adjacent to teams in the same unit. Two of the settings had rather open offices, with desks placed alongside one another in a large room. Another setting instead had classic office spaces, with each caseworker in a separate, small room adjacent to team members. The settings with open offices were notably noisier whereas the classic office milieu was not. No matter whether offices were closed or open, I found coffee rooms in every office visited. These were common spaces for all employees, including caseworkers and unit managers. These were rooms filled during breaks or lunch, and also during such occasions where a lot of informal communication would occur.

In sum, the flow of life at a setting was the steady chatter of people, seeing people in front of screens, on coffee breaks, and at meetings. No setting lacked these kinds of interactions that transitioned from one activity to another in common spaces.

5.1.5. Speaking about practices – Contours of work

Rendering offices as practices and arrangement bundles is to render activities of settings as practices and to consider the material arrangement they transpire

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130 I observed such a meeting (interaction no. 11).
with and amid. From my brief depiction, doing this can only create a shallow depiction that does not attempt to fully state the organization of practices. Instead only contours are provided. It is from this point that I begin my account here in order to later on give a more zoomed-in account. Incidentally, we will here begin to see the process of defining practices and their demarcation that will prove fruitful further on.

As stressed earlier, the site of the social has two dimensions: practices and arrangement. The practices of caseworking entailed the processing of cases, the navigating of systems, planning meetings, contact with clients, and so forth. These activities occurred alongside other activities such as those of work distribution, moving cases back and forth, and being prompted to do casework by traffic planners (at Customer Center). Moreover, the practices are not understood to be uniform across settings. Some caseworkers would visit clients in person or spend considerable time and effort on the categorization of cases. A variety of activities were undertaken for the sake of processing cases. Such an end was not all there was, as others would primarily spend time answering phone calls. Quite generally, we can acknowledge that the instances of casework implied a certain understanding for practitioners being capable of participating, e.g. knowing how to navigate systems. Furthermore, we can see that formal rules play a substantial role in the arrays of activity that compose caseworking. One was expected to not only navigate systems and categorize case files but also to undertake correct procedure, in line with some formal rule. The specific tasks undertaken for the projects of caseworking, and the specifics of rules and understandings implied to undertake such actions, depended, of course, on the office. From this we can form an idea of the instances of caseworking at different settings.

Regarding the material, one notes the office buildings, desks, computers, the systems on these computers, the functionalities within these systems, manuals, documents, telephones, meeting rooms and coffee rooms in my description. These were all physically tied to one another in these spaces, as the shared material settings of each office. More notably was how these were involved with practices. They were both directly involved in activities as used (e.g. the systems) and indirectly involved (e.g. rooms). These settings were also visited and lived in by practitioners. Visiting a setting was to visit this arrangement/configuration, to see practitioners, desks, computers and so forth.

The material arrangements in each setting were different from one another in at least two respects. One such obvious difference relates to the kind of material entities that were found in certain arrangements but not in others. I am here not only referring to the fact that the same people, the same desks, the same building and the like were not available in each setting. When comparing arrangements that were not in spatial proximity, the question of whether identical entities form arrangements is perhaps not of import. Only the same intranet, the same computer systems and the same basic manuals were identical. In the comparison of arrangements that were spatially distant from
one another, the question would be rather if the entities were similarly arranged. To some extent they were similarly configured, as caseworkers of each arrangement always had access to a desk and computer they were seated in front during work time. The way caseworkers and desks hung together were largely similar, as one could imagine in contemporary office work. Each setting held such a similarity. Differences in terms of open or closed offices were examples of divergences in terms of ways of hanging together. At other times, certain kinds of entities were not present in all arrangements. In the arrangement of the Customer Center office, specific systems could be noted to be used that seemed to be absent/not used elsewhere (e.g. schedule system, Interaction Client). This difference in terms of entities relates also to kinds of practitioners. There was an administrative assistant in one office (Child/Family) but not in other settings visited. Each arrangement involved different kinds of cases and so on. Hence, arrangements can differ regarding the specific entities found in each, and also how they were involved in practices. While one can find similarities, such as the few instances of truly identical entities in each arrangement and in the manner in which similar categories of entities, e.g. caseworkers and desks, were positioned in relation to one another, each setting was its own hanging together and its own coexistence of entities.

There is a risk in only discussing entities physically present at a setting. For the arrangement at the office of Customer Center, the traffic planners were perhaps not locally present but nonetheless a part of the hanging together of that arrangement. The planning in the systems that affected the order of work for workers at Customer Center was the work of these planners after all. The possibility for caseworkers to work from home does not imply that they cease to hang together with other employees, with case files and so forth. Our treatment of a setting acknowledges that it is not only spatial proximity that defines the contours of an arrangement. Moreover, some number of entities in the arrangements described were perhaps present but were not described as so tightly knit to each arrangement. Most obviously this was the case for case files. All casework was accessible through a shared registry and in the SSIA’s shared folder structure. Despite each arrangement sharing these, they were not equal in proximity to each. Not all cases were accessed by workers in every office.

These differences in relating to material entities are dependent on the particular practices that bundle with them. It was due to the practice of

131 An internal report that we will get in touch with later on stated that administrative assistants were common in work settings. I had initially expected to encounter more of these in my own visits.

132 At least this was what I was told. My informants never tried to access cases from other divisions but only demonstrated that those assigned to other offices within the same division could be accessed.
casework and work distribution as it was understood at the office of Customer Center that the traffic planners were part of the arrangement. It was also due to how caseworking practices in each setting did not engage with the case files of other settings that it is not sensible to see all case files across all offices as relevant for every instance of caseworking. For certain practices, tasks such as accessing certain case files made certain aspects of arrangement present, as was the case for caseworkers and their relationship to their pools of work. While one could perhaps imagine the complete shared material setting of the SSIA as a whole, some caution should be exercised in a narrow examination of specific settings (within this imagined larger whole) to ensure that particularities between the settings are not overlooked. What was shared was not shared equally.

Let us now take a closer look at how we can understand the bundles we have touched upon. To implicitly talk about bundles is unavoidable when looking at practices. A practice such as caseworking – in its contemporary form – was intimately linked to the very systems, case files, and the like that the practice transpired with. The varied instantiations of the practice of casework at different offices would causally affect, alter, and use certain systems, manuals and regulations, and the caseworker in her or his performance would also be affected by cues from the system, as was the case after a list of case files had been produced by the system after a manual search. Without the systems and case files, the practice of caseworking in each setting was unimaginable. Caseworking implied certain constitutive elements that were found in the arrangement, e.g. the case files, manuals, systems and so forth, which either were truly constitutive of the practice or in the very least pervasive.

Similarly, the way that we acknowledge practice and materiality bundled as we talk about caseworking suggests we need to acknowledge more than caseworking alone. Caseworking as activity was related to other activities, such as unit managing, case categorization, administrating, informal social practices, and so on, and all together formed the complex that was each office. If we are to state that there are strategic prioritizations or manuals that caseworkers ought to heed but are not produced by caseworkers themselves, we are aware of some form of coordination being present that makes this so. Similarly, we could acknowledge a certain way of speaking and designating cases that stretched beyond a sole practice to incorporate further ones. It is not implausible to assume a degree of commonalities between conjoined practiced. The specific character of coordination, chains of actions and so forth are not addressed here beyond the mention of work distribution (e.g. traffic planners at Customer Center). We can start discussing what we are missing then in our brief depiction here.

I have in my depiction spoken of practices and their arrangement by jumping from setting to setting and contrasting these. One can note two issues in doing this. I have, above, tried to refer to practices in the form of
caseworking, work distribution, and case categorization, but have not spoken of these in detail or their interlinking with other social practices. I have also notably privileged work practices such as caseworking. The starting point of my understanding reflected here was that caseworking was the bulk of activity of offices (except for Customer Center).\textsuperscript{133}

While it is possible, to some extent, to focus on caseworking as such, it is impossible not to note that the practice-arrangement bundle that was caseworking was related to other practices in each complex. We might refer to practices as simply caseworking, and in other walks of life as teaching, while being aware that it does not imply identical performances across settings. Not every instance of teaching is necessarily the same. At the same time, similarities are notable in terms of caseworking across complexes. A common vocabulary was expressed across settings to refer to systems and types of cases to reveal a certain similarity. Each setting had its own instance of caseworking, which resembled that of another setting. A variety of expressions among settings revealed a family resemblance. Such family resemblances were most notable when little attention was given to the actual contents and details of casework.\textsuperscript{134}

In my description above, I have primarily focused on the tools of the trade and the distribution of work. Little attention has been placed on minute attention to the variety of tasks undertaken. From a superficial look at general traits of caseworking across settings, the bundles are only shallowly attended to. This has consequences for the distinction between what practices transpire directly and indirectly, which defines the distance between certain entities in certain practices. I have in my observations of the settings noted the entities that practices transpired with, directly, such as case files, and systems, but also the things that they transpire with in a more indirect sense such as the buildings, desks, meeting rooms and the like. Without more specific examples of how the indirectly involved treads forth in relevance beyond our understanding that caseworking occurs in the vicinity of desks, coffee rooms etc., we cannot go more specifically into what this might mean. If we think back on our example of woodworking involving either conventional or electrical tools, we have no account here that hints at the turning point from one entity treading forth instead of the other. We will, however, touch upon an example later on as we go into a more detailed examination.

To conclude, one can see some contours that give a grasp of what the complexes are but parts of our overviews are missing. The overviews have

\textsuperscript{133} My focus on work and a particular kind of work can be noted in my cursory mention of Customer Center’s specific focus on making/answering phone calls.

\textsuperscript{134} Two caseworkers who had done caseworking at both a Health Insurance office and a Child/Family office considered caseworking at the two divisions to be distinctly different. Caseworkers that move between divisions are for this reason still expected to undergo a training period in order to transition between settings.
been based on limited observations of what was the case during visits, with no mention of ‘events of change’. The comparison proves useful to primarily understand work practices, their local instantiations, and resemblances across settings. Secondly, this analysis gives me a foundation for a deeper kind of analysis than what has been provided here. My hope is that a reader at this point will have some form of familiarity with the work that constitutes the SSIA and begin to get a sense of how it could be regarded when described in terms of practice and materiality bundled in different complexes.

5.2. A complex in focus

To go from an overview of different complexes to the depiction of one in particular is bound to involve some repetition on my part as I now describe one particular setting more thoroughly. Also, some aspects that proved relevant for other offices will not prove to be relevant here. To make clear what kind of complex we will examine here, I will point to some characteristics that defined the work undertaken.

Located in an office complex shared with other offices from other divisions of the SSIA, the studied setting had its own share of the larger building, with its own office spaces, a coffee room, and meeting rooms. As a part of the Child/Family (Barn och Familj, BF in short) division centered on dealing with benefits targeting families, the studied office focused on moderately complex cases and the processing of large numbers of cases. As the types of cases dealt with were moderately complex, they did not necessitate the meeting of clients in person, nor the long-term processing that was typical of Health Insurance issues.

Casework processing made up the bulk of the work that had to be done at the office. If any phone contact was made with clients, it was done with the purpose of processing casework and not simply to answer questions or provide information (as was often the case at Customer Center). Those tasked to undertake this work, the caseworkers, were roughly 50 in total in the setting. I will attempt here to expand the account to examine more work activities than caseworking alone. Alongside these caseworkers, three additional people were present. Two of these were unit managers, and the third was an administrative assistant.

5.2.1. Types of cases and ideas of teams and ‘production’

Caseworking here implied processing incoming applications, determining whether these were eligible for payment, and administering payments, while ensuring that established procedure was followed. No advanced case categorization was undertaken at this setting. Two kinds of benefits were those most commonly provided by the Child/Family division. Parental benefit
(föräldrapenning, or FP in short) is a form of benefit normally provided for extended periods for the care of a recently born or adopted child. In Sweden, parents receive a total of 480 days of parental benefit that they can split among themselves. Another kind of benefit is so-called temporary parental benefit (tillfällig föräldrapenning, or TFP in short), which is provided for parents who care for sick children and ask for remuneration for doing so. The amount received for remuneration is dependent on what is referred to as sickness benefit qualifying income (sjukpenninggrundande inkomst, SGI in short). A common kind of casework was to determine the ‘SGI’ of clients. Cases were often regarded as either FP, TFP, or SGI inquiries. A fulltime caseworker was expected to do both FP and TFP, but part-time caseworkers primarily focused on either FP, i.e. parental benefit, or TFP, i.e. temporary parental benefit. All caseworkers I met did inquiries on qualifying income. When I speak about kinds of casework, it is these kinds of inquiries that are meant.

The caseworkers in the setting belonged to one of two units at the setting. Each unit was in turn divided into two teams, making for four teams of caseworkers in total. Caseworkers worked in teams in order to do other activities, such as the planning of the workload for the week, the sharing of work in case of absence or other difficulty, and assisting when difficult cases required the help of others. These activities were undertaken in individual office rooms where caseworkers worked while processing casework, and in the meeting rooms where caseworkers would meet to discuss and plan their work for the week. The tools used were those most seen at any other setting of the SSIA, entailing computers, systems, telephones and so forth. Alongside these physical tools, regulation/procedure existed to regulate both casework processing and the actual use of the systems. Each caseworker had their own pile of work, assigned through the use of the date of birth of applicants as touched upon in the previous section. Planning and case file accessing revolved around this distribution scheme. As informants used to say when referring to the work pool of caseworkers, everyone had their ‘days.’ In regard to both planning how to deal with one’s work pool and which cases were to be done first, caseworkers heeded what they referred to as ‘prioritizations.’

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135 In Sweden this called ‘Vård av Barn’ or VAB for short.
136 To be eligible for remuneration, a client’s SGI is important. This figure is determined by assessing the yearly income of a client. If one applies for remuneration for a period of sick leave of X amount of days, one normally receives 80% of what one would have earned during such a period (but adjusted according to one’s yearly income).


137 Before I visited the setting, there were three units and a total of six teams. After a unit manager retired, the units were shuffled to the constellation I was acquainted with.
this setting, these would on occasion be updated by unit managers and sent by e-mail.138

Case files were not automatically delivered to caseworkers in the system but accessed manually through search queries. The prioritizations of work were to be input during such manual searches. It was not uncommon that these were not slavishly heeded. There were some reasons expressed as to why priorities were not followed. Caseworkers occasionally expressed a desire to plan their own day so as to be capable of doing specific tasks at specific times.139 Reasons could vary from not wanting to cause inconvenience for applicants by contacting them too early/late to also cover ideas about having an own sense of how to be most efficient. Rigidly following priorities was not always ideal, partly because they did not fit into caseworkers’ flow of work.

“If I feel a bit tired, I focus on doing some simple cases first, and then later when I have mustered enough energy I’ll tackle the more difficult ones.” – Caseworker140

Because caseworkers knew their work firsthand, they also expressed that they knew how to tackle it better. Moreover, caseworkers at times had their own ideas regarding the kind of cases that ought to be prioritized, which reflected a disagreement regarding the kinds of applicants that were most in need. This disagreement with established priorities was reflected upon during the team meetings held twice a week at which casework was planned. It was during these meetings that caseworkers would occasionally devise their own prioritized lists that slightly differed from those produced by unit managers. Since all work was distributed in separate, individual pools, as all had their ‘days,’ the incongruences between the caseworkers’ own set priorities and those set by the unit manager were not perceived to be that significant. In the end, everyone had to do their own pile of work. If the order cases were dealt with varied slightly, it did not mean that cases would be ignored. The responsibilities of each caseworker were tied to their own pile of work to which they were accountable for.141

Despite the very notable division of responsibility among caseworkers through their own piles of work, there was still a dimension of teamwork beyond the planning meetings. Caseworkers occasionally assisted one another in the event of absence or other difficulty. This meant that the pool of work

138 From interview no. 34. Generally acknowledged in conversation as well.
139 Caseworkers would refer to this possibility (and later on, lack of possibility) as an important part of work (interviews no. 20, 31, 33 & 34).
140 Quote from interview no. 20.
141 In the past, caseworkers shared a pool of work in their units, but this resulted in what one caseworker called “everyone’s responsibility is no one’s responsibility” as it was believed that difficult cases were neglected when no particular individual was responsible for them (from interviews no. 19 & 25).
would occasionally expand to incorporate the work of others if the need arose. Additionally, it was common that caseworkers would ask each other for advice or discuss tricky cases. Teams were accountable for their share of the “production” of casework, and a common responsibility for the team’s share of work was excepted among caseworkers. If such responsibility was not catered to among team members, the overseeing unit manager would give team members instructions to help one another to ensure smooth work flow.\footnote{From interviews no. 19 & 34.}

Caseworkers openly spoke about their self-identification as civil servants in three senses. First, caseworkers notably expressed the need to heed adequate procedure in the decisions made. The everyday decision making was referred to as rule-based, and work within expected to be done in compliance with the rule of law.\footnote{This was notable both in conversation and in the general speaking about decisions. Assessing the income of clients, determining how fast a case was to be processed (often in terms of days it was allowed to rest in the systems), and so on were common ways of expressing that forms of procedure were heeded. Differently put, certain procedure was presupposed in doing and talking about caseworking.} The rule of law entailed aspects such as who was eligible for what kind of pay, and less so the kind of prioritizations concerning one’s work order during a day. The possibility of making a correct decision rested upon the collecting of adequate information. To do well as a caseworker was to be able to know how to collect needed information and make the ‘correct’ decision.

Secondly, a common perception among caseworkers was an awareness of tackling a never-ending stream of casework that had to be kept in check. The processing of cases was referred to as ‘production’ in the setting (and in the SSIA quite broadly). Speaking about production, the need to produce as much as possible, or the strains of production, and so on were common ways of speaking about work among caseworkers. This was conjoined with the idea of teamwork as caseworkers helped each other produce.\footnote{The idea of doing as much work as possible was in part a remnant from a past way of working that evaluated workers according to how much they produced. An expression used to refer to the amount one had produced was to say one had to ‘collect sticks’ (in Swedish, ‘att plocka pinnar’). Although an active evaluation of productivity was less prevalent at the time of my visit, caseworkers would still talk about collecting sticks. From interview no. 31.}

This metaphor of production coexisted with the general idea of contributing in the undertaking of an important task: the provision of welfare. Caseworkers saw their work as that of helping clients. This constituted a third way of regarding themselves as civil servants. A focus on the client was not infrequently expressed in lines such as “we have to think of the client” or “we
cannot leave clients unattended.” If a sense of responsibility toward clients/applicants was not sincerely felt, it sure seemed to be expected in some form. To both produce and care for clients involved some tension. Such a tension was something caseworkers expressed as notably felt during periods of high workload. Frustrations regarding volume peaks were directed toward “higher ups,” such as upper management, who were conceived of as being too far removed from the practicalities of casework to understand the strain of the work but nonetheless expected caseworkers to produce even more than usual. It was not unusual that caseworkers would in conversations speak about how the strain of work could take its toll. At least four to five of those I met had experienced being burned out from their work as caseworkers.

5.2.2. Administration, unit management, and other activities

Another set of activities was performed by the administrative assistant of the office. Managing the systems and ensuring that case files were in the correct place (folder) within the system was a continuous task as case files emerged in the systems and caseworkers processed and created new ones while processing. Such a task primarily befell the administrative assistant. Others’ use of the system, and the provision of training so that caseworkers understood how to use the systems were also key concerns for the administrative assistant. Outfitted with largely the same set of tools, and a similarly sized office in the vicinity of the caseworkers, the administrative assistant was tasked with producing and providing guidelines for local use to help caseworkers do their work in the systems. These aforementioned administrative activities did not constitute the full labor of the position. Additionally, the administrator would assist in casework processing of simpler cases such as temporary parental benefit. This was done extensively during periods of high workload but also on occasion at the end of work weeks to ensure that leftover cases were not ignored. In other words, the administrator would take parts of the workload from others. This varied set of activities also included the responsibility to occasionally arrange office meetings to brief employees on news at the office.

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145 The excerpt mentioned in Chapter 4, in which a caseworker would in light of an eventual decision affecting clients object with: “But we have to think of the clients” reflects such a statement (From interaction no. 20). Such a view was also expressed in conversation and in a letter received that was critical towards the use of technology we will encounter shortly.

146 This was common during early spring when children often are sick, and parents take parental sick leave to take care of their children. The month February is a particularly busy period and is often referred to as “VABuari” (VAB-uary). VAB is the acronym of parental sick leave. One of my visits was during the early spring, and opinions expressed regarding this were made then (e.g. interview no. 31).

147 Some of the caseworkers present did not work full time. These were often transitioning back to work after a period of sick leave.
such as new initiatives (e.g. new system updates). Practical responsibility for initiatives such as the implementation of new procedure or the like were such things taken care of by the administrator. These different activities, some undertaken continuously and others occasionally, together amounted for a variation of work, as the administrative assistant switched between activities in order to be a support for the office for needs that would arise. As needs would vary over time, so would work. Essentially, this was a welcomed aspect of the work. The administrator would gladly share stories about past efforts, as well as ongoing efforts, as welcome breaks from routines.148

In contrast to both caseworking and administration, another kind of work was undertaken by unit managers. These operative managers did not process casework or manage work systems but instead worked to arrange the distribution of work, overseeing the work flows of different teams, and were held accountable for the work undertaken by their units of caseworkers. This would involve setting up and altering the work priorities, which reinforced the vision of upper management not locally present. Moreover, unit managers also briefed their units through e-mail or at arranged unit meetings, and managed occasional workplace incidents. The two unit managers present had one unit each, and each unit included two teams of caseworkers. Monthly unit meetings were then held by each unit manager with their own unit of caseworkers and were more strictly defined as briefing meetings where caseworkers occasionally could ask questions or voice concerns to their unit manager. Reporting on broader issues meant that unit managers spoke less about minute, practical matters, in contrast to those meetings arranged by the assistant.149

In terms of equipment, this work was undertaken in slightly larger individual offices, but with the standard equipment of computer, phone, access card and the like. Overseeing work flows was primarily done using the same system used by caseworkers and the administrative assistant. While both caseworkers and the administrative assistant organized meetings of their own, the unit managers organized office or unit meetings in larger meeting rooms for briefing purposes. Using video conference software/equipment, another kind of meeting would occasionally be held with upper management from the larger regional group of the division to discuss the occasional issue and future initiative.150 It was also at such meetings that unit managers would be held

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148 From interview no. 21.

149 Some of these unit meetings involved both unit managers and could occasionally also include the labor union. Referred to as ‘samverkansmöten,’ the labor union would be given a chance to represent the voice of caseworkers and make unit managers accountable in some sense, or at the very least have them answer questions regarding work conditions and so forth (from interview no. 26). I had only heard about these, and never attended one myself.

150 What I refer to here as regional management is a group of office managers from other settings in the region, including the head of the region.
accountable for the performance of their units. Unlike others at the office, the unit managers spent considerably more time on meetings, balancing between unit/office meetings and those held with parties not available locally. The contents of the latter meetings, often with upper management, would on occasion be communicated at unit or office meetings locally, as unit managers also served as information channels. Unit managers balanced being aware of their position in the chain of command with the practical, local concerns of their units.

These work activities at the setting presided alongside other activity during a normal work day, such as coffee/lunch breaks. One sole coffee room was located in the middle of the setting and shared for both coffee breaks and lunch. These breaks from work were, at the times visited, encounters that involved the presence of most workers and times when the general silence and occasional chatter was exchanged for loud conversation and interaction. The shared coffee room did not include any form of cafeteria to buy food, but those present brought their own food from home. Those who preferred to buy their lunch during lunch break would regularly meet and go to one of the nearby restaurants. As in any other setting, other informal activity could be witnessed such as the occasional chatting or greeting in the hallways. The tools described here also existed alongside other things in the setting such as restrooms, coffee brewing machines, refrigerators in the break room, decorations, pictures of loved ones on the desks of workers, and so on.

5.2.3. Speaking about practices in a complex

Unlike the broader descriptions regarding several settings, we have in this section gone into more detailed descriptions of specific work activities. Our descriptions above, which were intended to be non-theoretical, build on seeing activities as practices. We will now make this clear by speaking about these practices in a theoretically explicit form. Essentially, it is here that we will start to see a more detailed use of a practice theoretical vocabulary (e.g. talk of projects is done with the teleoffective structure in mind and so on).

The work activities described above are to be considered as the practices part of a complex. I will define and discuss the work activities in the form of three practices: caseworking, administrating, and unit managing. These, when considered as practices, are but some of the many practices imaginable in the complex. This means that we will not see accounts of coffee breaks or the occasional chatter in themselves. Essentially, by speaking as we will do, we will focus our account of the complex in a certain direction.

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151 One such meeting attended was interaction no. 23.
152 I joined both the coffee breaks and went out for lunch with a group of caseworkers during my visits.
The chosen practices will be depicted as practices composed of numerous activities linked by a set of organizing components. Incidentally, the practices chosen reflect the roles of those present at the setting. Being a caseworker was an official role and something that implied the participation in a set of activities organized in a certain way. Rather than treating the workers at the office as reflecting roles in themselves, outside of practice, we will instead focus on the context of activity that these workers actively constitute in their performances (which also constitutes the roles). Rather than seeing our speaking as focused on an administrator or the notion of unit management, we will direct ourselves to administrating and unit managing.

5.2.4. Speaking about caseworking as practice

Beginning with caseworking, we can understand caseworking to entail a particular kind of practical understanding that made participation in the activities of casework possible, and that circled around: a grasp of the division of labor; the manner in which casework was to be planned; the terms used to designate the different types of cases, forms, and systems; a grasp of the regulations that were to be used in order to determine what to do in each case; a feel for when and when not to contact an applicant; the ability to navigate systems and process cases within these; and a grasp of how teamwork ought to be divided among caseworkers. Hence, a specific kind of practical understanding existed and moreover also linked the many different activities of caseworking to one another. The explicit rules guiding the practice were the designations of labor distribution, the strategic prioritizations imposed, and an extensive collection of regulations and instructions on correct procedure, which were continuously evoked in work. Participants were expected to follow extensive sets of formal rules that specified what was expected in the processing of cases. The collection of rules addressed almost all work activity to some degree, e.g. in terms of how to navigate and work with the systems, which kind of applications were eligible for remuneration, and the prioritizations dictating the order cases were to be processed in. In regard to the latter kind of rule, the prioritizations given by unit managers, these were, however, at times superseded by other rules crafted by teams of caseworkers. The rules devised in teams can be understood as informal ones.

Overseeing the activity found within the boundaries of the practice, as things were, and aggregating it in projects is imperative to get a view of the teleological hierarchy of activities. I will here posit projects as such kinds of activities that were undertaken in the context of casework processing. In the case of caseworking, two projects were notable and easily defined by their most notable ends: the planning of casework and then the later actual casework processing. Planning included tasks such as examining established priorities, making adjustment to the priorities, and shifting the division of labor in case of absences in teams. As a project, this was undertaken both collectively in
teams at team meetings, and also individually when planning one’s work day. For actual processing, tasks such as accessing case files, determining if the applications were eligible, contacting clients, and so forth were noted. The myriads of tasks undertaken in the systems in order to process casework, as an end, are included in such a project. Within the normativized range we also find what resembles a third project tied to the end purpose of helping to cover for one another. This was visible with tasks such as swapping case files among caseworkers, asking and being asked for advice, or taking over casework in the case of absence. Such a project can be embedded into both planning and processing in general but warrants mention as part of the teleology of caseworking. These projects were all within the normativized range, as projects to be undertaken and that seemed expected of participants to be those performed. Such projects and tasks were also conjoined with what could, albeit slightly, be noticed as the most acceptable emotion/mood in the form of concern and care for the needs of applicants as well as for one’s own team of caseworkers. During periods of high workload, the emotions and moods expressed during casework were – in contrast – irritation, frustration, and stress, due to the reoccurring difficulty of managing one’s own work piles, helping clients, and helping one another in a team. This range of affectivity, captured through accounts, was the most apparent in what I as an observer at first did not expect to be a very affective practice.

Alongside these organizing components, the general understandings related here would be an expressed concern to help clients and follow the rules, and the nobility of doing so. Such a sense of virtue was also related to the idea of the practice as important for society, and that the participation in the practice implied being a civil servant. This, I assume, to be but smaller manifestations of a general understanding that cannot only be assumed to be held by caseworkers. Also, administrating and managing would, to some degree, share aspects of beliefs, concerns, and senses of virtues that related to the perception of being a civil servant working for societal benefit (e.g. in terms of mentioning the helping of clients as an active part of their work duties even if such help was indirect). However, the idea of working for society was by caseworkers conjoined with the idea of being on the frontlines of this work. Caseworking entailed, as far as I saw, the idea that one understood the bulk of the work better than higher-ups. Proximity to work, to team work, and to clients were steadily expressed as root reasons for this and were used as arguments for setting one’s own work priorities.

For the entities that the practice transpired with, the most notable ones were those directly tied to certain tasks. As we have described the tasks, we have also described the entities present and the sense in which they were involved. This reiterates part of what we have touched upon in our previous section. Aside from the obvious ones such as the computer placed on each desk, different activities implied different entities. Among these entities, it is perhaps easiest to stress that the Case Management System (along with the TP
system used to access information on clients) was extensively bundled as a notable artifact within an artifact. However, not all entities were of a digital kind. While the accessing of a case file required a distinct manual functionality in a system, knowing what to search for could involve a printed-out note that stated the prioritizations of work. As stated in the previous section, caseworkers would on occasion have strips of papers with codes to navigate some systems. Moreover, the undertaking of the meetings in teams involved a locale for such a meeting to be held, and so on. In sum, caseworking bundled with desks, papers, manuals, computers, systems, functionalities, case files, and means of accessing these.

5.2.5. Speaking about administrating as practice

The next practice to be discussed is that of administrating as practice, i.e. administrating. There is some challenge in my mapping of this practice due to the multiplicity of activity that was undertaken under the guise of administrating, and because only one practitioner participated in such a practice. The fact that its performer, the administrator, also participated in caseworking, albeit to a limited extent, already points to the overlapping of practices (cf. SS, p. 87). This is, of course, if one conceives of the activities of that one administrator as the performance of one practice instead of as the partial performance of multiple. No easy demarcation is possible here. Another case of overlapping can be discussed in regard to the meetings held, organized, and lead in the complex. As some of these were on occasion held by the administrator, and at other times by the unit managers, the actual activity cannot be clearly designated as either pertaining to one practice or the other. The issue of meetings arises insofar as one does not regard meetings as a separate practice. I will here address these overlapping aspects as projects within each practice, largely because supposedly overlapping activities were understood quite differently depending on their purpose and so on.

I will follow the idea that a practice is activity linked to the organizing elements to analyze administrating as practice. Doing so will show in what terms administrating can be treated as a varied practice. To begin, administrating was organized in such a manner that casework processing, the management of systems, the developing of manuals or instructions, the arranging of meetings, taking on the practicalities of implementing new aspects of work were possible. The ability to perform these activities was also conjoined with the ability to support and arrange training of caseworkers with occasional meetings in order to do so. The multifaceted and varied nature of administrating can be discussed in order to accentuate why this practice is referred to as its own, as administrating as practice. First, a certain practical understanding was implied that allowed for a variety of tasks to be possible, and also to be comprehensible by others. This practical understanding was not the equivalent of that of other practices in their entirety. As an example, only
a certain simpler kind of casework processing was undertaken to take care of leftover cases. The participant, the administrator, could do casework processing but could not be regarded as a full participant of caseworking. A range of what caseworking entailed was not pursued as part of the variety of tasks that defined administrating. That administrating partly implied the training of caseworkers and the partial participation in such activity had another interesting consequence that we can note to mark the distinctiveness of the practice. In the training of caseworkers, certain rules were evoked to direct the efforts of caseworkers while one’s own partial participation in caseworking implied the heeding of procedure directing caseworking. Each project, e.g. partial caseworking and training caseworkers, was performed in light of different rules. Such distinctiveness in the heeding of rules can be seen in the examining of the project of casework processing, as administrating did not imply the complete same set of explicit rules as regular caseworking. I refer here to the sort of explicit informal rules that stressed, for example, that one ought to help team members, which were not heeded by the administrator. The administrator’s participation in caseworking was without team members. In the project of casework processing, only procedure regarding actual processing played a role, and any range of behavior tied to teamwork or planning was nonexistent.

While overlapping was a notable feature, a clear distinction can be made regarding the teleoffective structure of the practice. Examining the teleological hierarchy reveals that work activities, e.g. training caseworkers or case file management, equate to projects with different tasks bound by the same overarching teleological purpose: to offer general support by instructing or relieving others of varied set of activities.

Instead of seeing administrating as entailing partial caseworking as a project, one could also regard the administrator as participating in two practices: administrating and partially participating in caseworking. There is a certain blurriness here that one could very well embrace as long as one is aware of distinctions, primarily in the full range of practical understanding and end-project-task combinations. Despite some overlapping, caseworking could not be seen as fully engaging with the same form of understandings, activities and ends as administrating, and the same applies vice versa. It is then perhaps understandable that also in regard to the general understanding, which we attain by noting expressions participants make concerning values, ideas, and senses of virtues by participants in light of their practice, one finds a kind of difference. For the administrator, proximity to clients, production, and teamwork were not expressed as concerns (in conversations with me or interactions with others). Instead the administrator expressed the joy of varied work and the enjoyment and importance of undertaking a variety of different temporary efforts; a self-identification as civil servant implied something else for the administrator. If we see these practices as distinct, in light of their undertakings and organization, such nuances are noticeable.
Examining the bundle between administrating as practice and arrangement gives an additional view of the differences. The production of training manuals and instructions was the production of artifacts to the arrangement that was to be bundled with other practices, i.e. caseworking. This implied that administrating directed what other practices bundled with. Moreover, the materiality evoked by administrating and the way it treaded forth was notably distinct during different performances. The way the structure of case files and their folders treaded forth for the administrating practice was dependent on the project undertaken at the time, e.g. caseworking processing or case file managing.

To conclude, administrering as practice is a practice that poses a challenge in clear demarcation due to its varied nature. Another concern is that we are dealing with a practice that was essentially only performed by one person at the office, making any kind of observation to be inferred in terms of aspects of practice (rather than simply personal traits of the administrator as individual). As an example, the idea of the importance of caseworking was a generally expressed notion among caseworkers. The idea of the enjoyment of variation and the welcoming of it was only expressed by the sole administrator. Both observations are inferred as reflections of the organization of the practices as general understandings. A critic could claim that I am taking the role as administrator as an analytical shortcut to demarcate the practice as one. I would retort that one could claim that the role of the administrator is simply what it is because a variety of performances are intelligible and expected to be performed by one sole performer due to the practice of administrating being understood to be performed in such a way in the complex.

5.2.6. Speaking about unit managing as practice

Unit managing as practice is the last one I will address here. Describing the circumscribing practice organization of unit managing, we can begin by acknowledging the practical understanding we can see glimpses of. Participation in unit managing was dependent on a practical understanding that centered on the ability to mediate between directing workflows, designating division of labor among caseworkers and representing the respective units one was accountable for, and the knowledgeability of being a liaison between local concerns and regional management. Accountability was tied to a certain performance in the complex, such as amount of casework processed and other measurable or reportable aspects of interest. Holding and leading unit meetings would reasonably reflect an understanding of such activities and concerns. Hence, participation in this practice relied on an ability to react to performances of both caseworking and upper management and to manage accountability of the work activity of the complex.
As mentioned above, regulations were actively drawn upon in the practice of caseworking. Alike administrating, managing implied the imposition of certain rules onto other practices, e.g. changes in caseworking procedure. Specific details regarding procedure concerning system management and caseworking were, however, more removed from the actual performance of this practice. Instead, the rules heeded in this practice related to procedure regarding how one complex ought to relate to the more extensive “hierarchical” structure of the rest of the SSIA (i.e. the rest of the constellation of practices). During meetings with upper management, unit management entailed the receiving of instructions or set goals that were expected to be followed for the complex as a whole (and most notably to direct the doings of caseworkers). Changes in work procedure and strategic priorities that guided caseworkers was one such concern addressed.

A crude categorization of the projects of managing reflects a project of reporting to upper management, with the end to appease (or appear to appease) upper management in some manner. Tasks composing such a project involved not only attending to meetings but also other tasks in the complex so as to be able to “show” that one had done what was expected. Another project, and partly overlapping with the first mentioned one, was to keep the processing of casework in check. Tasks such as arranging the distribution of casework and making alterations in prioritizations to direct the teams of caseworkers to do certain kinds of work temporarily were included in such a project. The latter project could be tied to the former. After all, keeping tabs on production was a way of appeasing upper management.

Unsurprisingly, unit managers were not the equals of caseworkers even if they could interact informally. Managers listened to upper management and spoke to caseworkers. Expectations of having to implement rules at one’s own office, and being accountable for one’s own office, had ends in partial conflict. One to appease upper management and another – at times hinted at – to help caseworkers do their work. Being subordinate to top management but directing other practices in turn largely tinted the general understanding of this practice, in the sense that the virtue of helping caseworkers do their job and also making the ‘machine’ run smoothly and in compliance with directives were simultaneously held in balance.

5.2.7. Forms of sociality and coordination in the complex
In part reiterating certain dimensions described above, certain convergences among these three practices can be noted and describe how these are interrelated in at least three regards. Commonalities were notable in the overlapping of the organization of practices. For practical understanding, it was notable in the manner in which the actions of each practice were intelligible and identifiable by participants in another, e.g. doing casework implied prompting the activity of unit managers, and unit managing implied a
grasp of the activity of caseworkers. Not only similar procedures in systems denoted this, but undeniably also a vocabulary with distinct designations and abbreviations for different case files, documents, systems and so on. Also, general understandings were shared in some regard, and perhaps most visibly in a couple of beliefs or concerns expressed. One sees the idea of serving the public as civil servants, of actually helping people, and the virtue of doing so. These ideas gave the practices a similar tint, albeit their practitioners held different formal hierarchical positions and their expressions reflected the differences in hierarchy and proximity to certain activities, e.g. caseworking meant proximity to clients and case files.

Another point of convergence was the shared material setting, e.g. meeting rooms, computers, and systems. The activities of these three practices occurred in physical proximity through a shared materiality. Both the overseeing of work and its undertaking entailed a shared system and so on. Sharing material setting did of course not mean that the practices shared equally. In terms of digital artifacts, functionality such as the manual searching used for accessing cases or the use of systems to access the information of applicants was more pervasive in caseworking than it was in unit managing. Even in physical space, such as in a meeting room, the participants would hold different positions due to their practices. Hence, one could expect unit managers to stand at the front of a meeting room while briefing whereas caseworkers would be seated and listening.

What made these three practices a complex was not only commonalities, the sharing of material setting, or the physical proximity of their performances. Unit managing entailed the directing of caseworking with the help of administrating (e.g. the training of caseworkers). The activities of one practice constituted at times the means for another, as the practices were both tied through chains of actions. In this we also find a form of coordination. Caseworkers were directed by unit managers to produce according to expectations of upper management through prioritizations. Common goals were pursued in the ‘production’ of cases, and in the provision of social insurance. How these were actually pursued, and how the practices that entailed their pursuit were interrelated, implied that practices such as managing and administration could prefigure the doings of caseworking. Arguably, such relations could be present the other way around (e.g. caseworking prefiguring the activities of unit managing in some manner or other). We will touch upon how these relations could be ‘seen’ more vividly below.

5.3. On the change of a complex

The depiction of the practices above was a recollection of a previous state of affairs of the complex. The relations between these practices, and the manner
in which these bundled with the common material arrangement, shifted during the time of the study. The particular change noted during this time had to do with a particular material change in the whole of the SSIA. A bit of a background is needed in order to explain why this change occurred and what motivated some to pursue it, and also the nature of our ‘event of change.’ After this background, we will follow the same structure as before in first describing events in non-theoretical terms to later go through the motions of not holding back in regard to our seeing/speaking about practices.

5.3.1. The antecedent of change

Although the ‘event of change’ traced began in 2015, one important antecedent to the change was an internal inquiry back in 2011. This inquiry resulted in a report written by a team of controllers, analysts, IT technicians, and consultants, headed by a group of top managers from multiple divisions of the SSIA.\footnote{The report was named “82467 Förstudie Produktionsstyrning” from April 27, 2012. This section here draws from the 130-page document.} Much of what the report stated reflected concerns that in part took the opinions of unit managers into account. These were seen as representatives of caseworkers. In other words, there is no mention of any caseworkers being interviewed or listened to directly.

In the report, the authors wrote about the potential of improving work processes and ‘production control,’ stating that work distribution and the technological architecture that related to work were problematic. One of the major concerns expressed was the heterogeneous way of distributing cases within different offices and units of the SSIA. Due to the units’ freedom to choose their own logic of work, the distribution of work was deemed difficult to overview. Moreover, it was difficult to ensure that caseworkers did not cherry-pick casework or neglect prioritizations given by management. Such a situation was deemed less than favorable for the sake of directing the work efforts if need be. In short, the report stated that states of affairs were less than ideal for ‘production control.’

Another concern was the disorder regarding the structure of folders within the systems in which casework was placed. With roughly 3000 different folders and nothing stopping the creation of new folders on a local level, there was a perceived risk that the folder structure was neglected and that there might be a risk of abandoned case files in certain folders. In addition, the manual moving of case files and folders back and forth, and the manual searches were deemed to be taxing on the systems.

The flaws found were stated to be related to the technological architecture of the systems and how such architecture was used. To solve this, an “IT solution” was proposed. Two years later, in late 2014, an effort to introduce
said IT solution was about to begin. Over the period of two years, what had 
been developed was more specifically referred to as the “View Manager” 
(Vyhanteraren in Swedish). The new software was meant to alter the way 
work was distributed at the SSIA. Through this software, the intention was to 
eliminate the supposedly taxing manual processes and prepare the 
technological system for future ‘production control’ to be possible.

Briefly put, the software was intended as a tool for unit managers and/or 
administrators to distribute work to caseworkers. Through this new 
functionality, case files would be visualized in the form of so-called “views.” 
Management would be able to both grasp the workload of the staff and directly 
control the kinds of cases that were to be prioritized according to both 
directives and needs at the time, automatizing work distribution substantially 
through the use of these ‘views.’ For caseworkers, the functionality within the 
Case Management System would present cases in an automatized fashion 
according to the ‘views’ created and chosen by management, eliminating the 
need to do manual searches. Hence, the software was an interface between 
management/administration and caseworker, showing different faces for its 
respective users. If implemented, the removal of approximately 12 million 
relocations of cases a year and roughly 100 million manual searches a year 
were imagined by those leading the effort.\(^{154}\) Moreover, the removal of the 
Date of Birth distribution was also aimed at due to it being perceived as 
unappealing and outdated. The distaste for established ways of distributing 
work were notable in statements by the coordinator of the effort.

“Imagine that there is work left to be done but a caseworker sees this and 
notices that it’s not on her day and then ignores it. The neglected client will be 
receiving worse service for simply being born the wrong day. That does not 
make much sense, does it?”\(^{155}\)

Those in charge were aware of the potentially drastic change the software 
could impose on the work undertaken, and therefore it was not intended to be 
imposed by removing the ability to work as one used to, e.g. manual searches 
were still intended to be possible and so on. Moreover, the actual software 
itself did not have any particular priorities built in. The ‘views’ were not given 
but had to be created, and managed – thus the name View Manager.

How these were built was up to the person who had access to a part of the 
software referred to as the View Administrator. Through the View 
Administrator, a multitude of options were available of different criteria for 
choosing casework, such as the kind of case and specific intra-case tasks to be 
preferred. Preference was set by assigning different numerical values to the

\(^{154}\) I was told these figures were obtained by the IT division of the SSIA. From interview 
no. 7.

\(^{155}\) Quote from interaction no. 2.
criteria chosen. The fulfillment of conditions then attributed a value to a certain kind of case (or task) so that it would come at the top of the list of the interface. A ‘view’ could then include and filter among various kinds of cases, tasks within cases, time frames and so on. Not only could an ‘interface’ include several kinds of cases, but it could also be designed for specific groups of workers or individuals, making it possible for multiple caseworkers to have a different ‘interface’ accessible. In addition, ‘views’ could be switched off and be made inaccessible at any time the view administrator wanted to. Basic instructions/documentation and a web course with brief information on the different ways one could use the interface were also produced.

The new software was to be introduced throughout all work settings, starting in the spring of 2015. Throughout this period, the software was to be seen as something to be continuously tinkered with through various updates. This meant that it was not a finished artifact as it made its entry.

5.3.2. The initial reception

Through an update, the new software joined the other functionality found in the systems in the beginning of 2015. What the update meant was that the new interface appeared as a selectable option, as an additional tab among other tabs in the Case Management System accessible by all. It would take a couple of months before it was put to use. First, meetings were held between unit managers and upper management. In such meetings, unit managers in the setting were told that they were expected to start utilizing the interface for work distribution in order to relieve the systems from extensive manual searching. Secondly, the administrator was tasked with experimenting with

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156 As an example, imagine that there are two kinds of cases, ‘A’ and ‘B,’ and one wants to prioritize type A cases. In the creation of a ‘view,’ one would reasonably give type A cases a higher numerical value. If two cases emerge, the view would then always prefer the case with the highest value, ergo type A cases, and then chose type B when there were no type A left. Imagine next that one wants all cases, no matter the type, to be processed within a set amount of time. Then you could assign so that all cases that have been left for longer than the chosen set of time receive an additional value numerical value. ‘Old’ cases that have been left unattended for too long would then be prioritized.

If four cases existed simultaneously within the systems, and these existed on the same list, it could look as follows:
- Type A, old = 4 (2+2)
- Type B, old = 3 (1+2)
- Type A, within time frame = 2
- Type B, within time frame = 1

157 The implementation coordinators involved stated that they knew there would be quirks and issues that were hard to anticipate (e.g. interview no. 7). The idea was then a gradual implementation with the intent to solve unanticipated concerns over time.

158 From interview no. 25.
ON THE CHANGE OF A COMPLEX

the new interface in a closed setting. The testing involved not only attempts to build ‘views’ but also testing to see if a select group of caseworkers would receive the correct cases.\(^ {159}\) The office was designated a pilot for a more extensive effort: to be among the first in the Child/Family division to implement the ‘View Manager.’

The events and the opinions of the change can be categorized into two sorts of receptions. One is the initial reception that primarily covered what happened the same spring it was decided to try to use the ‘views.’ Secondly, a more decisive push was undertaken between the autumn of 2015 to 2016 that involved a couple of key events on the road to the active use of the ‘views.’

Roughly one month after the pilot testing (May), the unit managers and the administrator held a meeting to brief all caseworkers that they were now instructed to utilize the interface in everyday work to access case files.\(^ {160}\) Additionally, mails were sent reiterating the same instructions. Mentioned in conjunction with the call for using the interface was what the unit managers had been told themselves: that the change was being implemented for the sake of the performance of the systems.\(^ {161}\)

At the moment the instructions were issued they were not challenged. It was after a very brief period of use that dissatisfaction arose and was expressed in unit meetings.\(^ {162}\) The perceived problems were of two kinds. First, caseworkers using the views noted that that these were incapable of delivering all case files as expected. While selecting a ‘view’ to access a case worked initially, the views selectable would on occasion state that there were no cases left to be done despite further cases being found if one searched manually. This problem was due to a bug that made the interface not deliver all case types. While signs of the ‘views’ not accessing all case files had been noted during the testing, it was at this point believed that some configuring of the views could fix this within a foreseeable amount of time.\(^ {163}\)

Another concern was more problematic for caseworkers than this particular limitation. The use of the interface implied the selection of available ‘views’ and clicking ‘next case.’ Previously, caseworkers had searched for cases manually while loosely heeding work prioritizations. Manual searching

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\(^ {159}\) From interactions no. 20 & 21. Some of those present at the meeting (no. 20) were also those who participated as caseworkers in the pilot testing.

\(^ {160}\) From interviews no. 19 & 21.

\(^ {161}\) Whether the systems ever were in dire need of this new tool was never expressed to me directly by those in charge. As described above, there was an idea of reducing manual processes involving the systems but I never heard that these had to be urgently reduced.

\(^ {162}\) Many of these complaints were raised during a meeting I observed (interaction no. 20) and several complaints were written down by caseworkers in a letter I received.

\(^ {163}\) Such a view was generally held among those in upper management (from interview no. 23).
implied two things that caseworkers stated were lacking when using the interface. One was that it was easier to overview the amount of work that was expected to be done when doing manual searches. The list of cases available after a search query stated not only the number of cases to be done but also the type of case. In the ‘views,’ this was not the case and some caseworkers expressed a lack of grasp of what caseworkers regarded as important cases.\footnote{From interaction no. 20.}

What was meant as important cases were such kinds of cases that implied further contact with a client, or those that had been left unattended for too long, or otherwise implied more extensive planning by a caseworker to deal with in a way that did not obstruct their workflow. As an example, a common way to contact a client was by calling a client on the phone. In the case that a client was expected to be called by a caseworker, a caseworker would plan an appropriate time during the day to make the call. Work with the ‘views’ did not make the possibility to plan during a day easy since caseworkers could not see what kind of work was expected nor could they choose work. Another example was doing cases that caseworkers struggled with due to unexpected difficulties or complexity. When this happened, a caseworker would often ask other caseworkers for help. To do this in an efficient manner, caseworkers would write a message or otherwise contact a fellow worker as early as possible to inform them that they would need help during the day. After notifying a colleague, a caseworker would continue to do other tasks while waiting for help. Also doing this implied that caseworkers had to be able to plan their day, something that was hindered by the use of the new interface.\footnote{Statements regarding these issues were made informally in the spring of 2015 and were expressed even after the initial reception (e.g. interview no. 34).}

The initial impression among caseworkers was that the ‘views’ made certain activities unlikely or pointless. Caseworkers noticed that they were no longer capable of planning their work days or distributing case files among themselves. For a caseworker who exclusively used the ‘views,’ the sharing of case files among team members was not a possibility.\footnote{Sharing a case file would imply asking a fellow colleague to manually search for a case (by using case ID number) and thus sidestep the directive to only use the interface’s ‘views.’} The planning meetings of caseworkers did not need to examine the prioritization of work given by the unit manager to make any alterations nor could team members plan to swap days to cover for each other anymore. The interface and its use contributed to make the distribution of work far more rigid than before. The rigidity was referred to in arguments expressed for resisting the ‘views,’ e.g. by noting how the ‘views’ would make caseworkers unable to help applicants they perceived to be in need. Moreover, the ‘views’ were conceived of as being incompatible with the definition of teamwork and with the joy of the
work itself. Hence, the actual use of ‘views’ was framed as a kind of neglect of one’s work duties.\footnote{167}

Although some caseworkers more or less accepted the new interface and tried to use it as much as possible, others tried to avoid the new interface completely, picking case files manually as they wished. Nonetheless, all were still expected to manually search to catch leftover case files neglected by the interface in order to finish their pool of work (e.g. their days).

The setting up of the interface required someone to actively manage it. The ‘views’ did not create themselves. The one instructed to undertake the work of managing the interface was the administrative assistant who was the one in charge of the initial testing. The previous activity of managing case files and the folders within the systems was replaced by this new responsibility. In the beginning, this involved an extensive period of training for the administrator, learning to use it by doing the web introduction course, reading up on its use through available documents, experimenting with their own ‘views,’ and later testing these ‘views’ with a group of caseworkers in the pre-implementation testing.\footnote{168} The first ‘views’ made reflected the previous distribution of work, creating a numerous amount of views according to the Date of Birth distribution scheme. That is, the administrator was instructed to match the previous distribution of work, producing individual views for caseworkers to match their “pool of work.”

Over time, work with the interface became more extensive, more hands-on, and a more defining trait of the administrator’s duties.\footnote{169} There were a couple of reasons for this. First, the interface’s early quirks and bugs meant that it failed to deliver cases as intended, requiring extensive, constant fiddling for the administrator who tried to overcome the various bugs in the programming of the system. Such fiddling would involve creating numerous ‘views’ with slightly different preferences and seeing which ones worked. Through this the administrator gradually learned to make less cumbersome ‘views.’ Secondly, the division as a whole, and the offices in the region worked extensively with trying to implement the interface in the routines of work. The administrator’s own extensive interaction with the interface extended to also being expected to attend any meetings with management (both unit and upper management) regarding the progress in implementing the interface. At such meetings, more

\footnote{167} Statements in this section were expressed in informal conversation, in the letter I received, and in the group meeting (interaction no. 20).

\footnote{168} To some extent the web introduction course was composed of a form of text-based guide that was available in two forms. One was as a document of roughly 70-80 pages with no pictures. The other was shorter and had pictures that instead showed different possible ways to build ‘views.’ The longer one was referred to as a ‘manual’ in one interaction with unit managers.

\footnote{169} From interview no. 21.
detailed instructions were provided that would direct the administrator’s tasks in using the interface.\textsuperscript{170}

For the unit managers, the new interface meant an extended period of attention to its implementation, and to work extensively as the liaison between their own units and upper management with this focus.\textsuperscript{171} The directives of upper management were brought down to the setting while potential problems locally were communicated to upper management. In the beginning, weekly meetings with upper management had the interface as main topic. This gradually decreased to biweekly and monthly meetings as a general consensus on how work with the interface was meant to be done was reached.\textsuperscript{172} In the setting itself, meetings with caseworkers simply reiterated the rationale for its introduction, as unit managers simply espoused that use of the interface and its ‘views’ were expected. The weekly meetings in the settings, co-lead with the administrator, came to revolve around the interface. These focused on additional changes or updates to the interface and on the giving of new and detailed instructions on how to work with it.

The unit managers themselves did not extensively train themselves to manage the ‘views.’ No direct actual administrating of the ‘views’ was undertaken by unit managers.\textsuperscript{173} At most, unit managers utilized the ‘views’ to oversee how work was progressing in each view (e.g. number of cases to be processed). Instead, the unit managers gave instructions to the administrator on how the ‘views’ were to be built and set up. The unit managers were still involved in the setting up of work distribution, although they made no ‘views’ themselves, as the past way of distributing labor by setting up days that each caseworker was responsible for was initially translated into views. The unit manager then planned for how many ‘days’ each caseworker was tasked to deal with and then instructed the administrator to do the rest.

While it was the task of unit managers and the administrator to lead the implementation work of the ‘View Manager’ and its views, it was not so that only caseworkers were critical towards the idea of views.\textsuperscript{174} Unit managers nonetheless decided to impose the views. On the question as to why they did so, a unit manager stated:

\textsuperscript{170} The meeting with upper management that I observed was an example of such a meeting (from interaction no. 23).
\textsuperscript{171} This was a general impression during conversations with both unit managers and in e-mail correspondence.
\textsuperscript{172} From interview no. 26.
\textsuperscript{173} While both unit managers tried to get acquainted with the ‘views,’ they never truly worked with them (from interview no. 24).
\textsuperscript{174} Initially, a unit manager mentioned that they were scared that the new interface would go against a tested method of work distribution, and that they were worried about how it would affect the productivity and enjoyment of work among caseworkers (from interview no. 25).
“We have to try for the sake of the systems so they can run better, and we also get the opportunity to affect things. We try to come with suggestions on things we want and hope that they’ll be implemented in the system, although there are no guarantees they will be.” – Unit manager

The administrator who was most involved in the daily work with the ‘views’ was also critical, not least because the software demanded a lot of effort (particularly because of bugs). It was thus so that at times both unit managers and administrators shared some of the criticism heard by caseworkers, especially concerning the amount of extra work that was required by the ‘views.’ Extensive communication between unit managers and the administrator was needed to create the staggering amount of ‘views’ necessary for work distribution. As put by all three, it might have been so that the ‘views’ were not compatible with the Date of Birth distribution. Nonetheless, they still continued to translate it into the ‘views.’ Abandoning Date of Birth distribution was not perceived as an option as it was feared it could entail too big of a change in the work.

On one occasion, the unit managers and the administrator expressed concerns that finally reached the project group in charge of the interface development by pleading for some changes that would be conceived of as favorable by the caseworkers. While it might be difficult to know whether the office’s complaints were successful, as perhaps others might have complained as well, the project group did eventually add aspects that had been in demand by caseworkers. One such example was that caseworkers initially were unable to see the list of cases that the ‘view’ had prepared for them, having simply the option to click ‘next case.’ This was resolved by allowing caseworkers to see the cases that were waiting, so as to give caseworkers a sense of control of their work. This was perceived as a small victory for caseworkers, although caseworkers had no means to choose among cases on the list.

During the summer of 2015, work with the ‘views’ was temporarily put on hold due to a notable number of workers absent and the low staffing. Although a directive to use the ‘views’ was made in the spring of 2015, it was after the summer that caseworkers were expected to exclusively use the ‘views.’ In retrospect, most caseworkers would state that it was in the autumn of 2015 that use of ‘views’ truly began. This second call to use the ‘views’ was

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175 Quote from interview no. 25.
176 That settings translated the Date of Birth scheme onto the new ‘views’ was something unexpected by those in charge of the whole effort. This translation of the scheme was not looked at too favorably due to it leading to such a high number of ‘views’ (at least 50).
177 From interview no. 25.
178 The implementation group was originally not fond of this idea (interview no. 7). Incidentally, the ability to see a list of upcoming cases in the views was only possible if a view contained a limited number of cases.
conjoined with another vision of how work with the ‘views’ was to be done among caseworkers.

5.3.3. The twists and turns of imposition

In the autumn of 2015, one caseworker from each team (a total of four at the setting) was chosen to learn how to make views for their team. Underlying this was a decision taken by upper management for two reasons. First, to alter the negative perception of the ‘views’ and make them seem less as a tool exclusively for the benefit of managers. Secondly, to partly relieve the administrative assistant from some work. After the decision to let caseworkers create views and become view administrators, each team was responsible for the creation of individual ‘views’ for ‘days’ in the team. In the beginning, caseworkers/view administrators were given some free reign to experiment and to discuss with fellow caseworkers on how ‘views’ were to be constructed. Largely, such experimenting followed some template ‘views’ created by the administrative assistant, who took on the role as chief view administrator and taught the caseworkers how to navigate the view administrator tab in the interface. For teams of caseworkers, having their own view administrator meant that casework planning was again a possibility as they could decide on team-specific prioritizations.

To some extent, caseworkers would state that the negative impression of the interface did decrease during this period of time. This was particularly the case for those caseworkers who engaged in view administration and got to see what was going on behind the scenes. Weekly meetings were held among those tasked to work with the views at the setting, and considerable time was spent experimenting and creating ‘views’ that would work. In the past, the unit managers designated days for caseworkers. This was now a task for caseworkers/view administrators. The unit managers instead designated a range of days for the team rather than for specific workers. Having experienced how to create views for their own teams, some teams of caseworkers abandoned the ‘Date of Birth’ distribution scheme. Instead of creating a view for every single caseworker in a team, it was believed to be far easier to simply create team-specific views and make team members share

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179 There had been mention of this idea already during a meeting I observed in the spring of 2015. Interaction no. 23.
180 A caseworker who was particularly positive towards the views was fond of this period of time (interview no. 30). Another who was negative towards the views though that this period was not as bad as what came to be the states of affairs later on, as we will cover below (interview no. 36).
181 From interviews no. 29 & 33.
182 From interview no. 27.
a pool of work.\textsuperscript{183} Only one team out of four decided to stick to the Date of Birth distribution scheme, as the view administrator in that particular team did not find the work too cumbersome.\textsuperscript{184}

Eventually, this time of experimentation came to an end in the winter of 2015. Among all those present at ‘view meetings,’ which included unit managers, regional management and the chief view administrator, it was decided that the continuous creation of ‘views’ was too great a burden and responsibility for teams. To ensure that all views were identical for all units in the region, all teams were ordered to cease making their own views and to work with the formally given template ‘views’ that all heeded a set of prioritizations. Underlying this decision, as a unit manager put it, was the idea that caseworkers should primarily process the formally given cases to ensure that all had the same work order.\textsuperscript{185} Somehow it was more provocative that caseworkers treated given prioritizations in a flexible manner through their own ‘views’ than what it had been before the introduction of the ‘views.’

This practically implied that those who were both caseworkers and view administrators returned to only being caseworkers. They were no longer allowed to make their own views, and caseworkers in teams were no longer allowed to plan alternate ways to tackle the common work pool. The designation of view administrators among caseworkers became a mere formality. The only team that had an active view administrator was the team that clung to Date of Birth distribution. In this team, the view administrator simply copied the main ‘views’ and designated days and for whom in the team the ‘view’ was to be visible. This copy/pasting with minimal editing became a smaller part of the routine in the beginning of the work week, and it did not coincide with any group planning beyond simply altering ‘views’ to cover for absent caseworkers.\textsuperscript{186} This meant that they did not create any of their own views even if the ‘View Manager’ was regularly used.

Centralizing all creation and administrating of ‘views’ did not entail the same kind of concern as it initially did (in the spring of 2015). Since the past way of distributing labor by setting up days for each caseworker was phased out (with only one team being an exception), roughly five views were all that was needed.\textsuperscript{187} Despite a meager number of views, the interface would still not work as intended. The problem this time around was that the ‘views’ would

\textsuperscript{183} A common reason given was that variations in the staffing situation meant that the individual views had to be remade in order to ensure that no case files were left unattended to.
\textsuperscript{184} From interview no. 29.
\textsuperscript{185} From interview no. 26.
\textsuperscript{186} From interview no. 29.
\textsuperscript{187} Two of the ‘views’ were for prioritized FP and TFP cases, and another two were for less prioritized cases of each type. The fifth was a so-called ‘balancing view’ that was meant to make all caseworkers in the region work with the same pool of work on Fridays every week.
regularly crash and cease to work, particularly after the occasional updates. To try to make work with the ‘views’ possible, the administrative assistant engaged in a tiresome new routine of copy/pasting ‘views,’ deleting broken down ‘views,’ and even rebooting the computer. One year after the initial reception of the ‘views’ technical problems such as these were still a major concern. The ‘views’ would not deliver all case files as they were supposed to and this situation persisted during the time of my study. According to the initiators of the effort, the culprit behind many of these issues was called ‘Sune,’ a piece of software working in the background that would disrupt the ‘views’ at this setting. At Child/Family, another project had been ongoing called ‘Auto-TFP.’ The purpose of this project was to automatize the processing of TFP cases (temporary parental benefit) as far as possible through the use of the software named ‘Sune.’ The problem was that if Sune ever accessed a case, it would flip a switch that made the case appear as a ‘touched’ case, even if Sune could not process a case (and manual processing was necessary). Having been handled by Sune, the case would subsequently not show up in a ‘view’ as it was coded as already accessed.

One kind of activity that arose to solve the problem of cases not appearing in the interface was to allow caseworkers to manually search for some cases as part of their work routine. Even if caseworkers were told to primarily work through the ‘views’ they were still expected to “work in the folders,” i.e. manually search for cases. This was not only the case for those occasions when the ‘views’ would crash completely but also to deal with the problem of specific case files not showing up in ‘views’ that worked as best they could. To assist in this searching for cases neglected by the interface, the administrator looked occasionally for kinds of cases that were known to not

\[188\] From interview no. 28.
\[189\] A work around was devised to make the interface capable of noting if a case had been ‘opened through a view’ instead of it being accessed by Sune. This did not solve the issue. It was common that clients seeking temporary parental benefit would make several applications. If their children had been sick and the parents had stayed at home to care for them several times, parents would often make all applications at once. For caseworkers, seeing a TFP case often led them to search for further cases from the same clients to see if there were multiple, similar kinds of cases waiting. If there were cases found, a caseworker would then normally collect all missing information for all cases at once. This was to bother a client as little as possible. The alternative would be that the client would be contacted once for every case, which would probably both annoy the client if multiple applications had been made and be time inefficient. If a caseworker would manually access all cases from the same client, only the initial case accessed from the view would be regarded as ‘opened from the view.’ Other cases would still appear in the view, despite being fully processed as they had not yet been tagged with the code ‘opened through a view.’ In other words, the work around conflicted with the way work was undertaken (from interview no. 8).
\[190\] The decision to allow this was made by upper management (from interview no. 26).
show up in the ‘views’ and placed them in a folder only accessible through manual search query.  

Despite the many complaints about the ‘views’ and the nostalgic talking about an easier time when one could simply access cases manually, most caseworkers I met (in 2016) stated that they primarily accessed cases through the interface. While before the interface’s arrival one could note how a caseworker’s go-to option was to manually search and perhaps check a piece of paper with team specific prioritizations, even the most defiant caseworkers could be observed using the ‘views’ during my observations. It was by experiencing a new way of working through the ‘views’ and comparison with the past that caseworkers could stress a couple of notable differences in terms of their general experience of work:

“Before, when we worked in the folders, it was easier to get a sense of accomplishment. If we would see that a folder had a lot of cases, we could focus our efforts one afternoon and target these cases to keep the folder under control. We could direct our efforts much easier in this way by coordinating in teams back then. It was fun to do so…to see cases disappear like that. It was also mentally satisfying.” – Caseworker

The sensation of getting work done and seeing a pile of work go was not the same with the ‘views.’ Nonetheless, caseworkers abided to the order to use them. When asked why they used the ‘views’ if they disliked them – a purposefully naïve question of mine – a common answer was: “Because we were told to use it.” Its use did not imply that it was popular. Even the most positive among the caseworkers acknowledged the flaws with the interface and expressed a hope that the ‘views’ would at least be capable of accessing all case files. If the problems with the ‘views’ were solved, a new way of working exclusively with the ‘views’ would have been welcomed among

191 Initially, caseworkers were instructed to search manually for these quite generally (from interview no. 28). Later on, these were all placed in a specific folder called the X-folder (from interviews no. 32 & 35).

192 Quote from interview no. 34.

193 The same caseworker would say that not using them was wrong, even if the ‘views’ were bad (from interview no. 36). To change things, some complained at meetings to revert the directive to use them. Such efforts were quite generally unsuccessful, however. The chance to change things in the workplace was conceived of as slim quite generally (e.g. interview no. 37). A caseworker who had been rather active in discussions about improving the work conditions made a tragic comment regarding the potential to actually change anything at all:

“I have been thinking a little because I have been on sick leave since my burnout. Now that I’m back I’ve been at these meetings as a caseworker representative on these issues and I’ve been thinking about how much we’ve gotten accomplished in these discussions. But…I couldn’t come up with a single thing…not a single actual thing that we accomplished that would mean anything for my coworkers. Instead we are always told that things have been decided already and that nothing can be done. Something like that. It’s often something like that. It’s a bit sad (from interview no. 34)”.


some caseworkers. In other words, it was not necessarily so that all caseworkers thought that the idea of the ‘views’ was problematic, but instead simply that the system was haunted by bugs.\textsuperscript{194} This could be contrasted with statements of less positive caseworkers that reflected a clear distaste for the ‘views,’ more than one year after their introduction.

“In some way, it’s built into the views. In the concept of the views there is an idea that a caseworker is not competent enough to select the important cases. Important cases are instead supposed to be selected and programmed by managers and others who think they know better.” – Caseworker\textsuperscript{195}

Essentially, the negative comment above regarded a perceived conflict in the way work was to be understood. As an example of a caseworker’s way of seeing work, a caseworker elaborated that they had their own theory of how work with qualifying income inquiries was best handled that required the possibility to plan their own work day.\textsuperscript{196} In many ways, the complaints after the active use of the ‘views’ reflected the initial concerns and the initial reception. Perhaps one could state that some fears that caseworkers initially expressed came true. The ‘views’ implied a static and clear form of enforcing prioritizations that did not necessarily agree with what caseworkers thought was necessary and important. Interestingly, the way these prioritizations were set in the ‘views’ did not slavishly heed national guidelines for work prioritization. This incongruence was not something that caseworkers were oblivious to. Conjoined with this was the sense of being far more controlled in work, something generally agreed upon among caseworkers. Indeed, even a caseworker that was positive towards the ‘views’ stated that they were more controlled but that this was of little concern and was even liberating in a sense. To be controlled meant less of a need to coordinate work among caseworkers and less time spent on manually searching for work.\textsuperscript{197} For other caseworkers, the very same issues of control were brought up to complain.\textsuperscript{198}

While no direct opposition could be noted in the form of open refusal, local meetings regarding work-related concerns regularly entailed the problem of overburdened workers who claimed that working through ‘views’ made the work worse. Unit managers were not entirely unaware of these kinds of concerns. On the question of how distress was dealt with at the setting, a unit manager stated:

\textsuperscript{194} Such opinions were made in interviews no. 30 & 37.
\textsuperscript{195} Quote from interview no. 31.
\textsuperscript{196} From interview no. 31. Another caseworker similarly remarked how their expertise as caseworker was not taken into account any longer (interview no. 36).
\textsuperscript{197} From interview no. 30.
\textsuperscript{198} E.g. interviews no. 27, 31 & 36.
“People (caseworkers) ask me, how and where are we supposed to work (interface vs. folders) and I tell them that what is important is that work gets done. How it gets done is less interesting. I have first talked like this and then raised the topic of how we feel and how we can support each other at unit meetings.” – Unit manager (parentheses added for clarification)\textsuperscript{199}

The aspect about how the most important thing was that work got done was also an opinion held among some caseworkers. Although most would state that they worked with the ‘views,’ some did actually state that they did occasionally avoid using them if there was a need to be effective. While working through the ‘views’ was more or less manageable during times of low workload, it was increasingly seen as problematic when there was much to do. A reason for this was that caseworkers would simply not be able to catch up with the high volume of incoming cases. Due to the limited time, and the heavy workload, caseworkers greatly disagreed with the way work had been prioritized in ‘views’ and the way the ‘views’ constrained their work. The former, the way things were prioritized, was due to how some cases that caseworkers regarded as the truly critical and crucial ones were regarded as non-prioritized by ‘views.’\textsuperscript{200} The consequence was that caseworkers never reached the ‘truly important cases’ during a hectic workday.\textsuperscript{201} The issue of static prioritizations could also imply that some early starters in teams with no Date of Birth designated ‘views’ only did non-critical cases for a whole day of work. A further concern for some was that work also became far more monotonous than before.\textsuperscript{202}

An opinion held among some caseworkers was that it would be easier to process casework if one was able to plan one’s day however one wished. During a particularly intensive period, two teams of caseworkers agreed to help each other by manually searching for critical cases.\textsuperscript{203} Such examples of defiance were undertaken by those caseworkers who generally stated that they

\textsuperscript{199} Quote from interview no. 26.
\textsuperscript{200} From interviews no. 27, 31, 33 & 39.
\textsuperscript{201} For the purpose of making sure not to bother clients, the most highly prioritized case in the ‘views’ was a case that did not entail the need to contact clients by phone. A reason for such a kind of case to be prioritized was due to how some caseworkers started working at 5 or 6 am. In order to not force these early starters to be invasive and call clients, the ‘views’ intentionally had less critical but also less invasive casework as the first kind of casework to be done.
\textsuperscript{202} This was generally mentioned in conversations with caseworkers (and in interviews as well, e.g. no. 36). It was also recognized by a unit manager (interaction no. 35).
\textsuperscript{203} In one of these teams, some caseworkers agreed to avoid using the views as much as possible. A caseworker expressed the reasoning as follows: “Our team did this, we needed help. We were behind after last week’s work and another team wanted to help us. Then we decided that we would only go straight in and manually search in the folders to get rid of some cases. Although we are not allowed to do so we thought that… you know, we think of what is best for clients, too. We know what is best for clients and what works fastest. So, we did it. But it was only this one time since April. That I know of at least.” (Quote from interview no. 34).
did heed the directive to use the ‘views.’ They were not necessarily outspoken rebels. As another rebellious caseworker stated, since it was expected to manually search for cases the ‘views’ did not pick up, one might as well take advantage of the situation and continue searching manually for more cases but keep quiet about it.\textsuperscript{204} How prevalent such kind of manual searching was, was difficult for me to determine. Other caseworkers would state that they had heard of cases of people manually searching however they wished but that no one really talked about it openly.\textsuperscript{205} One could assume such occurrences were understood as controversial in some sense. Nonetheless, these cases of defiance were never discussed as a problem at the setting. Arguably, this could have been the case because of the few wholly positive voices regarding the ‘views.’ There was no real lack of stories about the problems of the ‘views,’ such as bugs that left cases unattended to for up to six months or the possibility for multiple caseworkers to access the same case through the shared regional ‘view.’\textsuperscript{206} Other concerns arose as people started to work in shared ‘views’ instead of having their own Date of Birth pools.\textsuperscript{207}

The unit managers believed that most work undertaken was done through the interface. Incidentally, there was no intention of following up and seeing if this was the case. Although the possibility might have existed to examine if caseworkers used the ‘views’ or not, there was no established way of measuring if the ‘views’ were put to use, and no perceived need to do so.\textsuperscript{208}

\textsuperscript{204} From interview no. 31.
\textsuperscript{205} A caseworker who was particularly negative towards the views expressed that they used the views as expected and that they were not allowed to do differently (interview no. 36).
\textsuperscript{206} The problem of multiple caseworkers accessing the same case was a typical problem for FP (parental benefit cases) on Fridays when working with the ‘balancing’ view. Up to five caseworkers could accidently access the same case, and to solve this problem caseworkers would contact each other through Lync (the DM client) to discuss who would finally process the case. Alternatively, a caseworker stated they would go grab a cup of coffee and hope that things would be solved by the time they were back (from interview no. 31).
\textsuperscript{207} The sharing of casework in a common pool had its set of challenges not previously expressed when working with Date of Birth distribution. Since it seldom happens that a case file is wholly processed in one go, but instead is often connected to other forms of inquiries, some caseworkers noted the problem of multiple caseworkers having to work in the same case, doing the various steps. This had its own set of problems, as it entailed the necessity for caseworkers to be able to pick up the case and figure out what do with it, to later drop off the case by writing small comments on what was needed to be done next. This kind of communication by examining previous activity in a case was a new experience for caseworkers here and not generally appreciated.
\textsuperscript{208} A unit manager stated that it was in fact not possible to see how the ‘views’ were used (interview no. 26). A caseworker instead stated that a certain screen with statistics on how many cases had been produced from the ‘views’ was visible, and that certainly such a screen was accessible by others (interview no. 33). The screen with statistics was never discussed as something relevant by anyone at the setting but was only referred to as something that was in the way of work and took unnecessary amount of space. Another caseworker did not think the “statistics” were that vital for unit managers since the screen only showed that amount of cases
As an observer I got the impression that the extent the views were used was less important than that it was a constant and official concern to make it work. At the end of the day, practicalities of work were more important than wondering how to access cases through the interface when it did not function as intended.

Although unit managers were regarded as those who locally enforced the use of the systems, and also themselves saw it as a major effort of theirs, there was a certain understanding that unit managers and even regional management had no choice but to implement the ‘views.’ According to caseworkers it was generally known that the ‘views’ were problematic and that unit managers agreed with caseworkers on this.\(^{209}\)

The initial rationale for the implementation of the ‘views’ was never mentioned later on as an argument for its use. Even unit managers were doubtful whether the initial rationale was true and whether the ‘views’ actually helped the initial concern of overburdened systems.\(^{210}\) The decision to use the ‘views’ was generally acknowledged as coming from the outmost highest level of the SSIA. There was a sense of inevitability in regard to the use of the interface among those at the setting.\(^{211}\)

The events implied not only a new way of working among caseworkers; unit managers and the administrative assistant had their share of change too. For unit managers, an increasing amount of coordinating effort to impose and structure strategic prioritizations revolved around the ‘views’ far into 2016. Concerns about poor prioritizations became an even bigger problem due to how constrained they could have become. The problem of poorly implemented prioritizations in the ‘views’ was one of the concerns that a unit manager was aware of.\(^{212}\) Although the unit managers were no longer directly involved in the distribution of work, as they used to be, they did not think that the ‘views’ in any way lessened their workload. As stated above, most

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\(^{209}\) Such opinions were expressed in a couple of interactions, often stating that upper managers wanted to use the views because the money had already been spent on their development. Hence, they simply had to be used (e.g. interviews no. 29, 31 & 36).

\(^{210}\) Among caseworkers this was generally recognized. As one reflected: “When they implemented the ‘views’ they told us there was no choice because the systems were overburdened. They haven’t spoken of the systems anymore after that. Has it worked? Are they less burdened? Aren’t we still searching a lot manually? There has not been any effort to actually be transparent and follow up on that particular issue” (quote from interview 31).

\(^{211}\) In my experience, veteran caseworkers were not as fazed by events as others. From their perspective, the interface was just another update in a larger chain of inevitable technological innovation (e.g. interview no. 30).

\(^{212}\) The choice to stick to a controversial way of prioritizing cases was done to evaluate different alternatives and to minimize constant fiddling and administration related to the ‘views’ (from interviews no. 26 & 35).
meetings were about problems with the ‘views’ or upcoming changes in the ‘views’ and so forth.

Since having become acknowledged as the interface expert, the work distribution heavily relied on the administrator. This was something that unit managers knew of, and somehow wanted to minimize by also learning some of the mechanics of the software. The reliance on one person was seen as problematic in case said person were to be absent from work for whatever reason. The administrative assistant was, however, seen as so far ahead of the rest in the work with the ‘views’ that the reliance was seen as unavoidable. For the administrator, the effort of actively managing the interface and looking for neglected cases took its toll. During a period of high workload, in the spring of 2016, the ‘chief’ view administrator in the region went on sick leave due to exhaustion. After the sick leave, the administrative assistant only worked part-time, almost exclusively with the probable culprit for the exhaustion: the ‘View Manager.’

5.3.4. Speaking about change and difference

The path to the use of the ‘views’ was a bumpy one with twists and turns. Let us see how we can speak about this in explicit, theoretical terms. Before we begin to account for this series of events and occurrences, one has to acknowledge the doings of more practices than those of caseworking, unit managing, and administrating accounted for in Section 5.2. Beginning from the start of my account, it was due to both consultants and upper management that an unfolding of actions in combination were undertaken for certain ends. These pursued ends to alter what people do and what they do it with were achieved through coordination and came to effect in an enduring manner during the ‘event of change.’ More specifically, what had been coordinated was a chain of actions across multiple practices, including such practices that were not directly studied but only vaguely mentioned. Consultants, IT technicians, regional managers and so forth were all involved, performing their practices in coordination during a period of time to introduce a new artifact.

We can distinguish among the coordinated acts in two ways. First, we can see coordination prior to the actual happening in the setting, before the objective presence of the interface at the setting. We could stretch as far back as the preliminary report from 2011 and reach into the technological development of the interface that has been only superficially touched upon here. Secondly, we have coordination in the complex examined here, covering the implementation from the initial reception to the subsequent use of the

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213 From interview no. 35.
214 From interview no. 38.
interface. The former kind of coordination has not been the point of focus for this chapter whereas the latter has.

At the setting, it was at the point when unit managing was organized to follow a rule (e.g. “Now you shall implement the new interface at the office”) as part of this larger chain of actions and coordination that managers began to direct their efforts into a project that had as purpose the general use of the new artifact. For unit managers (and others at the setting) to do as one is instructed by ‘higher-ups’ is generally expected, and this appeared no different in regard to this instruction. The actual implementation began as unit management was to impose the artifact upon the performances of caseworking and administrating, as well as upon itself. If we break down the coordination more specifically, we can regard how this coordinated action began to achieve its result in the studied complex/setting, and how the ‘event of change’ came to produce difference.

To begin, the imposition led to the alteration of the normativized range of acceptable activity at the setting. Such a normative shift, achieved through the formation of explicit formal rules regarding the use of the interface, implied that different action was expected to be performed. Through the normative shift, previous tasks (using the old manual searching functionality and previous planning) ceased to be acceptable while new tasks emerged that were deemed acceptable in their place. This was particularly evident in the autumn of 2015 when the directive to exclusively use the views was made by unit managers at the setting. However, we know that the idea of a difference in terms of the acceptable/expected already began at an earlier point (May 2015) but that it took time before it came to take shape. We are then, of course, speaking of a shift over time.

The studied practices were bureaucratic in nature, with a very defined set of formal rules and procedures as well as a well-defined and narrow range of acceptable tasks and ends. For a complex of practices so governed by procedure, the idea to stress the normative shift is to stress that the use of the new artifact presupposed a shift of the norm, to be reflected in the actual undertakings of the practices. At the setting, claims along the lines of “we have to do this because it has been decided” were naturally occurring among practitioners of all three practices. It was an occasional occurrence in the setting that the range of normativized tasks would alter with the implementation of new artifacts or through the emergence of altered procedure to consider. This was not the first time this had happened, and it was not seen as a significant change in the views of some.

With this in mind, we know that the practices altered shape and that their performances started to show some difference over time. Although we can state that the normative shift was a starting point, it was not only the norm that was to differ. We will examine this next with attention to the three practices we have become acquainted with and how differences would tread forth.
5.3.5. Expressions of change – Caseworking

The normativity of practice is not the sole form of practice-organization, so if we are to speak about the practice-organization in a wider sense we would need to examine practical understandings, general understandings, teleoaffective structure and so forth.

Beginning with practical understanding, it is plausible to state that much had not altered. For caseworking, the new range of correct/acceptable behavior did not imply the acquisition of alternate, noteworthy practical understandings, besides mostly knowing how to access and press the button ‘next case’ with the interface open. Arguably, the use of the new interface was less demanding and could have implied a lowered bar for participation. With this I mean that it is plausible to state that there was far more complexity in the manner that work was to be collected before, such as manual searching and its conjoined activities, than after. It was, however, still so that manual searching occurred and continued being a way to check if cases were missed by the interface (and rebelling implied the previous manual accessing). What was needed was an understanding of when to alternate from the buggy interface to the manual accessing.

A dimension in which we can see what difference treads forth in a notable manner is the teleoaffective structure and the combinations of end-project-tasks. The weekly planning meetings became formalities, and efforts to cover for each other and work as a team were made more inaccessible due to the inability to share work. The manual accessing of specific cases as a task became a more occasional activity only deemed acceptable if undertaken when the interface malfunctioned. In the projects of caseworking, the imposition to use the interface implied a change in tasks to access work. Because the norm of the acceptable/expected ways to access work was altered, so also was the possibility of other connected activity to be feasible or practical.

If caseworkers willfully ignored the ‘views,’ as was the case when they would choose cases by themselves while ignoring the interface, they would only speak of it among themselves. While one form of manual searching was conceived of as within the normative, such as the accessing of cases that the ‘views’ could not access, manual searching quite generally was not. Caseworkers themselves understood that searching freely was less acceptable and did not openly discuss it. What was notable was that such doing expressed a drive to process cases in a certain way, conjoined with a certain striving for autonomy and/or the idea that autonomy was important for processing critical cases. The clinging to the performance of old tasks such as the manual selection of work was intimately linked with such ends and ideas. The actual extent of disobedience was not known among caseworkers, and many could be noted to be utilizing the ‘views.’ A contributing factor here was that the old tasks were difficult to perform as they used to as these had been made possible
by previous work distribution. The prioritizations were primarily set through the ‘views,’ and not shared at any meetings or sent in any e-mails as was the case before, effectively severing a former chain of action. Moreover, for the majority of caseworkers there was no longer a single, own pool of work to draw from. There was, hence, little facilitation for the performance of the previous tasks. Rebellious behavior would imply the choosing of work in a manner that reflected caseworkers’ own prioritizations entirely.

Instead of seeing the defiant behavior as clearly out of range of the acceptable, another explanation is possible. One could still see defiant behavior as something within the normativized range of behavior of caseworking. A couple of examples could support such an interpretation. After some time of using the ‘views,’ some caseworkers had interpreted unit managers as “finally realizing the problems with the views” and turning a blind eye to other forms of manual searching. The statement by a unit manager that one did not care where work was getting done as long as it was getting done, could be interpreted as that it was OK if not all casework was accessed through the ‘views,’ even for such cases that normally could be accessible through the ‘views.’ The behavior among caseworkers to willfully sidestep the views during high workloads could then be interpreted as caseworkers not necessarily doing something that would be conceived of as fully outside of the norm.

Yet another supporting fact for this interpretation was that the unit managers expressed no interest in actually examining if their order to use the ‘views’ was actually fully heeded. Such a lack of interest in surveillance could of course be a sign of trust as well. Nonetheless, caseworkers would not naturally see their rebelling as entirely wrong. As they stated, avoiding the views would be OK because they were in fact working in a more efficient manner. As put above, to actually use the ‘views’ could have been seen as the true neglect of one’s responsibilities as a caseworker, particularly during high workloads. Hence, the act of rebelling and approaching the fringe of the normative was still conjoined with the general idea and ends of caseworking. In being so, it was then not so that the behavior was completely out of line with the view of what caseworking entailed. It was not correct but it was still acceptable. This invites us to see normativized behavior in practices in nuances. Participants are not wholly enslaved or need to behave the same as they remain within range of the acceptable/expected. Some caseworkers primarily used the ‘views’ while others avoided these on occasion, but both of these groups were participating in caseworking.215

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215 Additionally, one could see these nuances as the result of calculative attitudes towards normative sanctions (cf. Giddens, 1979, p. 86). What I mean here is then that one could understand those that were on the verge of the unacceptable to be aware of this but that they figured they would not be sanctioned.
The issue of disobedience, whether seen as completely unacceptable or partly acceptable, was undeniably linked to frustration and anger. Generally, the frustration of caseworkers was noted as part of the participating in this practice during the time of change. Simply being a caseworker during this period of time and working at this particular setting was not necessarily so connected to an acceptable/expected affectivity expressed in frustration, but instead in frustration in the very least being a natural occurrence. One way to understand this could be that caseworkers expressed a frustration regarding the inability to do what they felt was their responsibility as caseworkers. Some observations do, however, make clear that caseworking was affectively attuned before the ‘views.’ It was commonly known that periods of high workload implied a lot of frustration, stress, and exhaustion. The ‘views’ did not relieve such affectivity but – if the accounts of caseworkers are believed – contributed to it.

General understandings came to the fore during an extended period of the imposition as something contested. Those that were expressed during the time of the reorganization revealed a tension between the ideas of being a good civil servant, a team worker, and being a willing cog in a wheel. Doing simply what you were told and abiding to the new imposed range of correct/acceptable behavior clashed with tasks of self-choosing work, planning work in teams, helping clients and the like. Caseworkers who resisted did so under the assumption that the use of the views collided with being a good civil servant, a good team member and so on. Others who abided did so thinking that the following of directives was paramount and that being controlled was a good thing. In the end, however, the following of directives still proved critical. Even the most defiant actually used the ‘views’ in some manner.

5.3.6. Expressions of change – Administrating

For administrating as practice, the imposition of the new interface proved to be a dramatic shift. The previous activity of managing case files and folders was steadily replaced by the new ‘view’ administrating, which emerged as a new kind of activity in the setting. Extensive performance of this new activity was a major project in the administrative practice. Naturally, the previous tasks of folder maintenance were not as critical as previously, albeit still occasionally done for cases neglected by the ‘views.’

To understand the extent of change for this transformed practice, we can regard changes to the practice-organizing elements. First, this new practice required a different kind of practical understanding. At least three aspects were important for this new understanding to take shape: documentation, the web course, and trial-and-error experimenting. Documentation and the web course helped establish a basic grasp of what could be done with the interface. This was later complemented with the experimenting that helped the administrator...
learn to create functional views that satisfied unit managers’ expectations. To learn to administrate the ‘views,’ actual use of them by participating in practice was important. Rules heeded for this new activity were imposed by managerial practices, and locally by unit management. The actual project of view administrating was linked to a similar set of general understandings as that held by the administrative practice, and to be attached to the teleological hierarchy of action by still striving to be of general assistance for the undertakings of caseworking and managing.

As this new side of the practice emerged there was an initially large range of correct/acceptable behavior to be explored, in part due to the trial-and-error working in the early phase of the imposition. In its early form, the practice was guided by the end of testing how the interface could be used to direct work. The explorative dimension of this practice could be seen as a form of project that was dominant until distribution of work was perceived as manageable through the ‘views.’ On occasions, such as updates to the interface, the explorative project would take root to either amend issues in views or to make new views. The re-organization implied the evolution of practice, as in the gradual change in its organization, naturally re-defining the practice as a whole (cf. SS, p. 242). This coincided with the normative shift. After all, the administrator started to use the interface due to it becoming an expected performance. However, administrating was re-imagined after the introduction of the ‘views.’ This new kind of administration, i.e. view administrating, was something that gradually changed as its performer learned more. As it turned out, the more the administrator learned, the more the administrator was expected to use the interface. At the same time, throughout the implementation, the administrator and others were involved in making decisions that redefined view administrating as a whole. The participant and performer of a practice was involved in the forming and re-defining of the practice.

While the tasks of the administrative assistant previously were varied, they became less so and after a while a new title was associated with the administrator: the “view administrator.” Participation in caseworking was still done on occasion, but nonetheless the activity with the new interface proved sufficient to tint what administrating implied. Even if other activities were undertaken, the administrative assistant was ‘swallowed’ by the activities of view administrating. This was notable in regard to the affectivity opened up by the practice. The new tasks were seen as exhausting and demanding, and its participant was notably affected by the burden of trying to perform in an expected manner.

Two ways of speaking about view administrating were notable during the ‘event of change.’ One was the ‘chief’ view administrating undertaken by the administrative assistant. The other was the partial participation in the same kinds of activities by caseworkers during a period of time. I will take the opportunity to discuss varied forms of performances/participation in view
administrating as a way to also show how family resemblances in performances can be described. Although caseworkers who engaged in ‘view’ administrating were formally referred to as view administrators, this kind of performance was only expected and allowed for a set period of time. Hence, we can regard this participation as partial. By partial participation I mean that only a partial set of activities were acceptable and/or undertaken by caseworkers. In the end, the participation was only allowed for a restricted period and was eventually closed off through the removal of the means of participation (e.g. when caseworkers-made-view-administrators no longer could access the administrative functions of the interface).

While a partial participation, as caseworker, needed a similar kind of practical understanding as that which was used by more extensive participation – that of the administrative assistant – we can assume that only some degree of the practice-organizing elements circumscribed the participation of the caseworkers-made-view-administrators. We can see view administrating as a context of behavior in which different participants were expected to perform differently. A way to understand the different positions among its participants is to examine the partial participation in this practice among caseworkers. Caseworkers initially only made ‘views’ for their own teams, in conjunction with the teams’ own planning and priorities. It was only such views that were allowed to be made for a short period. In other words, during the period that caseworkers-made-view-administrators were actively making their own views, it was linked to their own teamwork and casework planning. What was understood as the tasks of the ‘chief’ view administrator was notably different. The end was not to create customized ‘views’ for teams but to inform others of how to work with the ‘views,’ to create templates for standard ‘views’ that reflected prioritizations set by managers and so forth. The participation of the ‘chief’ view administrator was expected to be differently motivated. What we have here is a glance of the varied expressions of a set of organized activities under the same name (under a period of time).

5.3.7. Expressions of change – Unit managing

Last but not least, we can discuss the very practice whose participation implied the imposition of the ‘views’ in the setting. If upper management had decided on something, unit managers saw it as necessary to impose it. We can see this as being the case due to the nature of unit managing. These performances of unit managing were a form of extension of the coordinated action originating from elsewhere. The end/purpose most evident in these undertakings was to demonstrate that implementation had begun in the local complex, and that work distribution was handled, at least officially and formally, with and through the interface.

Why reluctant unit managers imposed a new interface that they perceived as problematic is a question answered in a similar fashion as the question as
to why caseworkers officially used the ‘views.’ To behave as a unit manager was understood to imply that one heeded directives from “higher-ups.” This perception of the necessity to heed directives was not only something that unit managers themselves held, but also something that caseworkers acknowledged. Others expected unit managers to simply do as they were told by “higher-ups.” It is worthwhile to acknowledge, however, that the decree to implement the ‘views’ initially came with a particular explanation, a rationale, that was deemed as legitimate. Unit managers did as they were told also because they believed this would improve the systems, even if such a belief waned over time.

Heeding instructions seemed to have a focus on the apparent use of the interface and dealing with practical issues that would arise in light of this. In this divide, one could perhaps spot the ideas, concerns and so forth that treaded forth during the ‘event of change.’ As an example, the imposition did not imply looking for pockets of resistance among caseworkers or any other kind of surveillance. Moreover, although it was so that unit managing was tied to expectations of imposing the ‘views,’ unit managers did not neglect the problematic issues with the ‘views.’ Their complaints regarding the interface had on at least one occasion seemingly resulted in a form of change.216 Additionally, meetings to discuss the emotional concerns connected to the use of the ‘views’ could be interpreted as undertaken in response to the necessity to impose the ‘views’ and deal with the consequences thereof. I use the term “interpret” as one could see these meetings in two different ways. One is to see these meetings as expected behavior in implementations, and as undertaken primarily to facilitate the implementation. One could also interpret these meetings as undertaken for the benefit of caseworkers.

In the various activities to impose the artifact, one could state that a certain practical understanding was necessary in order to know how to navigate between both the practicalities of implementation and the emotions of coworkers. At the very least, one could imagine a certain skill necessary to accomplish this. Aside from the efforts to impose the interface, the activities within this practice went from e-mailing strategic priorities to caseworkers and setting up work distribution to just e-mailing the priorities to the administrator that put these into ‘views.’ Hence, I find it difficult to note any considerable change in practical understanding to be evinced in the whole range of actions. Despite this small change in other activity, it still proved to be so that the regular meetings regarding the ‘views’ and the discussions regarding the prioritizations to be set in the ‘views’ were a considerable part of the work.

216 Here I am referring to the change that led to the possibility for caseworkers to see upcoming cases in the ‘views’ in the form of a list.
5.3.8. Production of difference in a complex

Looking at the changes to the complex that formed our Organization, our piece in a larger puzzle called the SSIA, the imposition of a new kind of artifact meant alterations, if ever so slight, in the practice-organization of all involved practices. From the complete overhaul of a certain practice to the abandonment of whole projects, the practices were molded one way or another. That it came to be this way was not because the ‘views’ imposed themselves. The interface within the system, as an artifact within an artifact, became part of the shared arrangement of the complex because of certain activity. The studied practices eventually transpired with and amid the interface because it was expected of practitioners to do so. The process until the ‘views’ were actively used was a coming to be part of the bundles of practices and arrangement at the setting that largely reflected the expectation of proper performances involving ‘views’ (in one way or another). Moreover, the practices were re-organized following such expected use of the ‘views.’ The coming to be bundled with the practices was obviously something manifested differently for each practice, not only in regard to the significance the new artifact would hold for each practice but also due to the varied changes across practices.

Coinciding with this, the manual search functionality to reach casework was made more distant and less tightly bundled with the three practices at the setting. Practices transpired to a lesser degree, i.e. were less involved, with the manual accessing functionality in everyday, acceptable tasks. Primarily, the use of manual accessing was relevant in the occasion that the views did not work as planned, or when caseworkers obviously did not want to abide the imposition. The coming to be bundled with the interface coincided with the opposite for other artifacts.

As it unfolded, the coordinated action led to some consequences. We can focus on this in terms of speaking of shifts in the sense that practices transpired with/amid functionality, as above, but can also reflect on what this might mean in terms of relations. I will illustrate the way we can ‘see’ relations here with some brief examples that go beyond the mention of directly/indirectly involved entities. The processes revolving the interface’s imposition, and the activities such as training and briefing, rested upon actors’ intentionality in the setting and beyond it (stretching back to the report from 2011). We presuppose such intentionality for coordination to be plausible. Moreover, these processes and activities eventually led to the interface becoming partly constitutive of some activity in involved practices. The constitution was most obviously seen in the activity of view administration, and it was thus largely co-constitutive with some activities of the practice of administrating. Moreover, the views became intelligible as a means to distribute work in all involved practices. In that capacity and more, they also prefigured these practices. For caseworkers, the use of the views made certain tasks less likely and more difficult, and
indirectly disabled the project of planning among caseworkers in some form. A direct form of *prefiguration* was notable for view administrating with the interface’s various quirks and bugs. The characteristics of the software as a part of a larger system, and its limitations during the period of time, were undeniably important to understand how things changed. The tasks of fiddling back and forth with views that regularly broke down affected the performances of the practices, as was evident in conversations with practitioners and their complaints. Even unit managers were *prefigured* by this, both directly in the sense that they became more engaged with ‘views’ rather than ‘folders’ and oversaw workflow through ‘views,’ and indirectly in other tasks by having to face the complaints and concerns of coworkers due to the ‘views.’

The relations set between the ‘views,’ the accessed case files, and the caseworkers and so on direct us to see that the ‘hanging together’ of social life in the setting was rearranged in multiple ways. The complex, or Organization, examined changed in light of this rearrangement in the sense that the shared material setting changed slightly, the commonalities stretched to matters regarding the new interface, and chains of actions between the practices examined changed somewhat to form new links between practices. Caseworkers, the administrator, and the unit managers were repositioned over a period of time in light of practical considerations. A simple thing such as setting prioritizations of work implied a new chain of actions after the interface was introduced that happened to position practitioners differently.

In addition, we need to acknowledge the gradual development of the interface over time, even as its use had become expected in the setting. The continuous updates to the interface played a role in the actual use of the interface, as properties of the artifact changed slightly over time through activities undertaken outside of the setting. In regard to the material properties of the system, the ‘views’ never truly worked as intended and whether the setting examined ever wanted to fully and exclusively use the ‘views’ for purposes of work collection was not up to practitioners in the setting.

The changes in the bundles at the complex were also dependent on chains of actions originating from elsewhere, as the coordination was a larger affair than what was examined here in detail. This was partly true also for some of the major decisions, such as allowing and ceasing to allow caseworkers to administrate ‘views’ in teams. These were decisions made at meetings with regional management present and so not explained by only examining coordinated acts at the setting itself. Decisions undertaken at such meetings also reflected shifting ideas about how work ought to be undertaken over time, particularly in regard to how caseworking was expected to relate to prioritizations. In a sense one could suspect that the continuous attention on prioritizations, and how they were so blatantly explicit through the interface, made a flexible approach toward these appear more problematic than in the
past. To conclude, a great deal of aspects and relations are sensible to regard and these were also of a shifting kind.217

5.4. Concluding remarks

In this analytical illustration, we have engaged with an array of topics ranging from comparisons across instantiations of caseworking in different settings to a more detailed overview of a complex. In this account, I have attempted to give both a degree of detail about events and performances as well as some explanations as to why and how such events/performances played out as they did. We have understood caseworking as something differently performed at different locales and as something that necessarily has to take in its situatedness to be described more in detail. Our treatment of complex and Organization, by noting forms of sociality and coordination, is here centered on a set of work practices that we have described in terms of how these were organized, their state as bundles, and how they were interlinked.

Using a specific ‘event of change,’ we have applied our discussion regarding the potential to ‘see and speak about practice’ by stressing a couple of observations that resulted from aspects of practices treading forth. In this depiction of change, a multitude of factors are brought in to be able to speak of practices that give a sense of the practices in light of such an event in particular. The dependencies between activities and systems was one crucial dimension, as were the interdependencies across practices that formed the setting into an Organization in our definition. The change in practices evinces that even what could be seen as a mundane change/difference regarding one particular task of accessing or distributing work can lead to a series of changes that give a grasp of the nature of the practices. Questions of autonomy, the importance of teamwork, incompatibilities between artifacts and ways of working, conflicting understanding of task prioritizations, resistance, and emotions of frustration and powerlessness tred forth when new ways of accessing cases and setting up one’s workday are introduced. A tool with the

217 In 2017, I visited once more see what had happened. At this point, four things were notable. One was that there were no caseworkers that worked as view administrators any longer. The formal designation was gone, and so were their capabilities to enter the ‘View Manager’-administrative tab. Secondly, the ‘views’ eventually ceased to crash although they still failed to ‘catch’ all cases. There was no idea at the setting if this was ever going to be fixed. Opening ‘views’ from the administrative tab to oversee work was also sluggish (and manually searching was preferable to oversee work). Third, from what I could gather, caseworkers had ceased to manually search for cases as an act of resisting the ‘views.’ While all present at the setting were still critical towards the ‘views’ and to the monotonous character of work, they had reluctantly accepted them. Fourth, caseworkers no longer held any team meetings. Reasons expressed were that these meetings were fruitless as caseworkers had no purpose in planning their casework any longer.
purpose of changing work distribution changed far more than work distribution alone. More specifically, the imposition of the tool implied a continuous consideration of how the practices ought to be defined (e.g. the case with caseworkers being made view administrators and the repeal of this decision).

Weber’s view of the fate of the bureaucrat springs to mind in light of this:

“In the great majority of cases, he is only a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism which prescribes to him an essentially fixed route of march. The official is entrusted with specialized tasks and normally the mechanism cannot be put into motion or arrested by him, but only from the very top.” – Weber (1946, p. 228)

Although the understanding of there not being any way to truly oppose the imposition was evinced, the route was not a fixed and predictable one. Although the events were not put on hold, there were twists and turns from actual decisions involving those at the setting. Moreover, these twists and turns related to the character of practices, the interconnections between these and the material characteristic of the artifacts.

To conclude, a variety of topics and concerns are brought forth in this illustration of a particular way of speaking of practice. Some of these might undeniably be dependent on the characteristics of the practices that I have chosen to see/speak about. Besides concerns about the empirical material itself (and how it directs what we speak about), we have also perhaps a hint of some of the challenges we face in our seeing/speaking about practices. What kind of choices have we made here, and how can we regard our illustration of the task of seeing/speaking about practices? What awaits us next is to illuminate these aspects, and also to direct ourselves to also consider the many other ways one can see and speak about Organization, change, and activities and so on.
PART III

THE PROSPECTS
6. Accounting for the Interpretative Work

The research aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the application of a practice theory, using the study of socio-technical change as grounds for an examination of its prospects. Criticism against practice theory and, more specifically, of the idea of drawing from site ontology for empirical research entailed that these were more of an obstacle for empirical inquiry rather than a guide (e.g. Nicolini, 2012, p. 180). The lack of literature that specifically engages with the question of how one uses practice theory and crosses the gap between the abstract theorized understanding of practice and the empirical study of practices, was deemed as particularly problematic. Due to this, I claimed that any use of practice theory warranted further discussions regarding the analytical use of practice theoretical constructs. We began examining this subject in Chapter 3, and the resulting application to show our reasoning in practice was given in the empirical illustrative case of Chapter 5.

It is because of the infancy of practice theory that I deem it necessary to examine the analysis itself. Here, our exercise is to examine the kinds of interpretative concerns that we stumble upon when utilizing practice theory in practice that are less obvious in my examination in Chapter 5. In Section 6.1, the practice analysis is examined with attention to how well our analytical illustration fares in comparison to what we have stated in Chapter 3. What is the nature of the craft we have undertaken, and what can be said about its challenges?

In Section 6.2, the analysis of socio-technical change is broken down more specifically into what is referred to as the tracing of bundling. This, I argue, is what generally has been accomplished and done when using a case of socio-technical change as a way of attending to practices and looking for what treads forth. As a form of analytical device, the idea of bundling is compared to preexisting ways of seeing practice-technology interaction and of such interaction in change.

6.1. Interpretative challenges

Reflecting the discussion on the potential to depict the practice-organization, the analyzing process was tied to a form of guided reflection. It was through such a process of reflection that it was possible to begin forming my images of practices, mapping how different acts were to be seen as tasks, and subsequently part of practices. Reflecting upon the sensitizing concepts guided me on along the way throughout the collecting of empirical material and the subsequent period of writing up this up. All of this is far from disconnected from the material. Without practices to see and speak about, our
effort to examine practice theory in practice would have ended after Chapter 3.

A part of the challenge lies behind closed doors and relates to things that a reader does not get to see in any written account. This is widely known to be the case for interpretative research (cf. Silverman, 2001). Simply put, some interpretative work entailed things prior to the writing down, and involved such things as how to judge the way practitioners spoke about their practices and so on.

Drawing from material to form what appears to be a cohesive grasp of practice entails a process that can be compared to that of putting together a puzzle where some pieces do not fit perfectly and others might be missing. This analogy also stretches to interactions with practitioners. Drawing from accounts of practitioners to speak about practices was not without some challenge. My images are fragmented as they are the result of diverging accounts by participants holding diverging interpretations of the practices they participated in across time. This can take the shape of having to weigh different accounts together. An example of this was the different views held regarding the new way of accessing work in Section 5.3 among caseworkers. In this we find the risk that my illustration of practices privileges certain viewpoints among some practitioners at the cost of others. Even in an effort to create a balanced view the problem remains that I have to decide how to judge how much of each side is allowed to be heard.

A part of the challenge rests upon how our own understanding of practice is formed. Needless to say, we do not in everyday life ‘see practices’ in a structured and dissectible manner for the sake of theoretically informed analysis. This is most apparent when we try to draw the boundaries of practice (cf. Shove et al., 2012, p. 121). While practices are more or less distinguishable insofar as they are distinct from one another, the opposite is true of practices that overlap. Such was the case with the administrative assistant and caseworkers on account of caseworking and work with the interface. Although we could perhaps point out that such and such constituted what we referred to as full participation and such and such constituted partial participation, we are tasked to form some kind of boundary to get on with our analysis. Where we came into contact with the nature of caseworking I had decided to take the accounts of those that exclusively participated in such a practice as fitting accounts to ‘see’ practice, but what is it that makes their account the only one to trust? Did not the administrative assistant also participate in part as well? I have deemed one’s extent of participation in a complete range of projects to be a guide in my own ‘speaking here.’ Furthermore, I have also drawn from the way those studied spoke about fellow practitioners. As an example, none of the caseworkers ever mentioned that the administrative assistant was a caseworker, nor were those caseworkers who engaged in view administrating ever defined as ‘true’ view administrators.
Furthermore, we need to acknowledge the operation of inferring that behavior pertains to a specific practice, and that we have grasped the ‘spirit’ of a specific practice. Welcoming the inferring and ‘seeing’ a practice is conjoined with the possibility of overstating the significance of the analytical frame in a particularly crucial manner. In the behavior among caseworkers, I inferred the organization of caseworking as that which primarily circumscribed behavior seen. There is, however, plausible grounds to doubt that one could envision all behavior as described by attending to that sole practice one infers upon, even though practitioners’ accounts say otherwise. For example, caseworkers could be imagined as drawing or participating in multiple practices that I as observer collapse into one single practice: caseworking. To paraphrase Brandom (1979, p. 189): what if a response which we identify as reflecting one practice in fact reflects and is in accord with another? There are good reasons to assume that practices are interwoven with one another and that actors could simultaneously and fleetingly engage in multiple practices back and forth. If so, what one sees is not merely guided by a set of concepts but by the particular practice one has decided to focus on. In other words, there is the possibility that I have magnified particular practices in the analytical operations undertaken to produce Chapter 5, as I have ‘seen’ behavior as part of the singular practice. In the defense of the ‘seeing and talking about practices’ here, one could state that perhaps it would be equally wrong to not acknowledge that a practice, such as caseworking, could be a far more complex set of organized activity than a dissecting procedure would show. It could perhaps be more problematic to ignore that the performances of caseworking are conjoined with greetings, meetings, friendship, drinking coffee among colleagues, planning at meetings and so forth that also constitute and are entangled with caseworking. One could also claim that the idea of demarcating practices has been taken too seriously if one expects to find perfect well-bounded units to be differentiated from one another. The “risk” of aggrandizing might be worth it, and perhaps one must do so regardless.

To conclude, the task of drawing from empirical material is not simply a ‘seeing’ in obvious fashion. By touching upon some of the specific challenges in initial demarcation of practices and the drawing from accounts we can turn to the more specific task of using practice theoretical concepts.

6.1.1. Accounting for our speaking of concepts

In my account here, one sees that concepts such as the organization of practice, the chains of actions, and practices as bundles tread forth in my practice

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218 Some of these activities could be understood as what Schatzki called dispersed practices (SS, p. 88). What justifies treating these as part of a larger set of activity is that these are not ‘proper’ practices in themselves.
analysis in various ways. Is it then a good and credible speaking about practices that we find here? This is difficult to answer without a standard to compare it to, and the voices of fellow social analysts. Who is to tell us that we are unintelligible in our performance of speaking about practices? I do then not suggest that concepts treading forth are simply noted by a count of the number of times certain concepts are used in text, although I find this to be an unavoidable trait of more extensive analytical use of concepts. Although we have stated ways we could see and speak about practice in Chapter 3, hinting at a pragmatic stance to be an appropriate standard, we lack a definitive measure. This is of little concern insofar as we see that we are dealing with sensitizing concepts rather than definitive ones (Blumer, 1954). In what sense can we then discuss how to account for our use of concepts in analysis? Our answer here, and what we will subsequently do, is to account in the sense of discussing how concepts serve the analysis and its making, as well as the interpretative challenges implied by their use. In other words, our topic is how my use of concepts entailed an analytical process that guided me in what might appear as the making of a correspondence, e.g. the speaking, following a set of grammatical rules drawn from the discussions in Chapter 3, combined with interpretive work that we will emphasize here.

The concepts can be categorized into three groups. First, we have such concepts that can be spoken of with some certainty. One of these is explicit rules, which tread forth quite notably in the collection of material, and probably are easier to capture in a bureaucratic work setting. Practitioners were particularly conscious of explicit procedure and rules to be heeded, and plenty of official manuals and directives could continually be referred to as important for particular tasks. Although I have not shared the manual as such, I attempted to share more the sense in which explicit propositions were made that reflected the manual and some activity. Not only official rules were relevant among caseworkers but also informal team rules. The latter were also easily spoken of among caseworkers. This implied that the specific link between certain rules and certain tasks were more or less apparent for capture. Of course, there is the possibility that accounts of rules that practitioners claim

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219 Note here that I do not suggest that these rules are sufficient in themselves. I want to rather touch upon the documentary method that Garfinkel (1967, pp. 96, 99-100) states investigators engage in research as they make their leaps of inference. This makes for interpretative work that cannot solely be regarded as the following of rules.

220 One could imagine an effort to share every single proposition made, but this would perhaps give too much importance to each explicit rule mentioned. It is for such a reason I tried to give more a sense of how one spoke of rules-in-practice than an exhaustive exposition. An exception is the specific focus on the use of ‘views’ and manual accessing and so forth due to their illustrative worth (in my eyes).

221 What I mean here is that informants did not shy away from talking about informal rules, but I do not know if more rules were not spoken of but were relevant.
they heed are disconnected from actual activity. An attempt to pay attention to this has been part of the analysis in Chapter 5, as was the case with noting how those caseworkers that stated they did heed the directive to use the ‘views’ also did not exclusively do so. This could partly reflect similar findings on the way that practitioners might suppose they are acting according to rules while they in fact are not.222

Another theoretical concept I have engaged with in a rather unproblematic fashion has been the end-project-task combinations. This is because I have assumed that participants of practices are capable of stating their intentions and motivations. Categorizing actions and connecting such actions to particular ends practitioners themselves claim relevant, gave a quick overview of the particular character of a practice to examine practitioners’ accounts and my observations. It is not the complete range of ends that has been discussed here, however. Instead, focus has been on the most obvious ends that can be connected to what practitioners deemed to be the general purpose of the practice as a whole, such as processing casework or being accountable for the general productivity of a unit for managers, but whether other personal ends along the way persist is less obvious and not deemed part of practices.

Secondly, we have such concepts that we cannot so readily grasp but still speak of to regard everyday performances. What is meant here is the issue of having to rely on inference in the practice analysis for that which we cannot articulate, as was the case regarding forms of practical understanding. Practical understanding, as the ability of practitioners to both perform their tasks and to react to the tasks of others in the complex of practices, is difficult to accentuate beyond statements that there is a certain ‘skill/knowledge’ barrier that needs to be surpassed to participate in practices intelligibly. A critical reader could point to the fact that the author had not actually participated as a practitioner of the practices studied, and that perhaps this would be indicative of the limits of the accounts here. However, let us not forget that to participate in a practice is not the same as to speak about it. A speaking about practical understandings is always a limited affair. Nonetheless, I want to stress that this affair has been worthwhile. Speaking about practical understanding in Chapter 5 as the presupposing of skill to understand work terminology and to navigate systems was to be fair to the skill observed. Regarding the change noticed in the administrative practice, on its transition to ‘view’ administration, it emerged naturally to speak of the requirements in practical understanding that enabled the administrator to undertake the tasks of the practice. While it arguably is worthwhile in any account of practice to be mindful of the kind of barrier needed to be surpassed

222 Cf. Garfinkel (1967, p. 113) on the case of jurors identifying their activity as jurors in line with official regulations although they actually learned the procedure over time (and at times did not behave in accordance to the regulations they stated they followed).
to participate intelligibly and acceptably in any practice, the radical reorganization of the administrative practice pointed to a more particular benefit of acknowledging practical understanding in the analytical frame. The choice among unit managers to not participate in ‘view administrating’ similarly reflected a barrier they felt existed in terms of a lack of familiarity and know-how that kept those specific individuals away from participating in view administrating.

Third, we have concepts that not only are inferred but are done so only on occasion due to the limited opportunities to fruitfully speak thereof. Efforts to speak of the values, ideas, or beliefs of a practice have been largely limited to simply pointing out the way practitioners have reflected upon their tasks as part of being a civil servant, the importance of autonomy or teamwork, being a “cog in a wheel,” or a liaison for the wills of others. Empirically, this has been achieved by observing statements made that espoused such ideas. Such statements were most notable in light of events. Statements by individuals were seen as expressions of the general understanding of practices when such statements regarded changes to practices. Concerning caseworking, ideas about the importance of autonomy and self-coordinating in teams have been mentioned alongside ideas of the desire to welcome being controlled largely due to the new interface introduced. Of course, statements regarding the duties of a civil servant as a general outlook for practitioners were heard in every setting I visited (even those that experienced no change). However, in the case in Sections 5.2 and in 5.3, the statements that I treat as espoused general understandings amount to concerns about practices directly tied to specific events and changes.

This way of speaking of general understandings in practices is similar to the way that the affectivity has been addressed. The same circumstantial aspects have largely been guiding in my mention of how people felt when participating in their practices. For example, feelings of frustration, stress and powerlessness were noted in light of changes and events that evoked these feelings among participants. Here, there is a similar kind of interpretative maneuver as that done to assess expressions of general understandings in practices. Instead of solely treating the ways participants felt as their own, I have connected these expressions to participation in practice. To participate in

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223 Such a statement was heard even in conversation with those in charge of designing the new interface, although in a different form.
224 Moreover, there might be some difference in the way the general understandings I speak of contrast to others. Schatzki’s own use of the concept (cf. SS) to explain the way multiple religious practices can be tied together as sharing religious ideas in a religious sect or how the ideal of making money guides day trading. Welch and Warde (2017), in contrast, use the concept to discuss ideas of national identity or national culture among others. The general understandings in Chapter 5 are, I believe, more directly tied to the activities undertaken. Hence, I wanted to stress that the proximity to casework entailed that the image of being a civil servant implied something different among caseworkers.
‘view’ administrating, being expected to undertake certain ends and activities was conjoined with a feeling of exhaustion and frustration. Because caseworking had been organized and understood in a certain way for some time, the imposition to use the ‘views’ and heed the priorities set in the views was met with frustration among caseworkers. As evidenced, the states of affectivity are primarily related to the change itself.

One could argue that “bureaucratic” work practices, as those examined, are rather non-affective practices that largely do not have an obvious conjoined affective state to their performance unless performances are disturbed by an ‘event of change.’ We could have, alternatively, perceived affectivity as always present during a workday, perhaps repressed, to then burst forth on occasion or continuously as fear of repercussion for not abiding procedure in daily work. Ontologically, moods (and emotions) are understood as disclosive to how things matter (cf. Reckwitz, 2017) and always present, as even a pallid lack of mood is far from nothing (BT, p. 134). These points make sense but have not been captured in an evident manner. To assume there are moods, emotions, and affectivity is one thing but to meaningfully speak thereof in empirical work is another matter.

I state here that a richly theorized understanding of practice proposes attentiveness to a variety of dimensions in a manner that contradicts the idea of practice theory as too crippling for empirical use (e.g. Nicolini, 2012; Gherardi, 2015). To what degree I have convincingly shown this is another thing. What treads forth in the description and tracing is not a transparent or balanced account of all these elements at the same time but rather a kind of directedness to these elements to trace these as they manifested themselves as relevant. Some of these concepts have been accessed indirectly, and others have been spoken of when it was deemed feasible. Undeniably, it is not only that the difficulty of the task consists in our having to describe phenomena that are hard to get a hold of, but rather the fruitfulness of describing what occurred with certain concepts.

6.1.2. Accounting for materiality and Organization

Speaking of images of practice has also been finding a way to speak of practice as bundled with materiality. By stressing that particular tasks of a practice transpire with/amid certain artifacts, the rendition of bundles focuses on the direct performances and the direct involvement of materiality. This analytical grasp of materiality comes from a problem of otherwise delimiting the analysis but provides a reduction of another kind. Most notably, this strategy says little about how far one ought to go to describe material properties. Multiple tasks and practices all transpired with and amid a set of systems and software, showing different sides of the technology from the pieced-together picture of artifacts and their different appearances in different practices. My specific attention on the new interface and my description of it is an exception,
as I go beyond its appearance in practices to also account for its state prior to its use. This is perhaps so because of my own interest in the ‘views’ to understand the ‘event of change,’ which then obviously leads to more detail on these and less so on other materiality present. My treatment of materiality by primarily noting the tasks of practice, and what kinds of artifacts were implied in these tasks could be further discussed as to how it directs my account. For example, some of the bugs in the ‘views’ were there due to the problems with the software named ‘Sune’ that was mentioned in Section 5.3. ‘Sune’ obviously was affecting and shaping aspects although I have not described it as extensively as I described the View Manager due to my interest in directly involved and present artifacts. We see here perhaps the issue with being guided by the directly involved, primarily, rather than the indirectly involved. Nonetheless, I wager that our understanding of bundles here provides a means to also touch upon the way matter can affect even in an indirect sense. As an example, unit managing never directly bundled with the ‘views’ in the same manner that other practices did but the artifact was nonetheless ‘there’ indirectly and affected the work distribution.

The analysis in Chapter 5 also touches upon how practice-arrangement bundles interrelate. As noted above, it was through the tasks of more than one practice that the View Manager and its ‘views’ were discussed. The doings of a particular practice necessitated details about the doings of another practice. The studied practices were not isolated. In Chapter 3, I argued that the study of a complex of practices is Organization by it being understood through forms of sociality such as commonalities, the chains of actions between practices, a shared material setting of artifacts and practitioners, and the potential for coordination. These aspects have been discussed without being regarded as particularly problematic. Instead, I have seen these aspects to be naturally described as one touches upon practices that interlink in a manner that makes their practitioners hang together in such kinds of forms of sociality. Organization as such never makes any entrance beyond this, simply because it is understood as a sort of hanging together of practitioners, entities, and practices. In my account, simply speaking about practices was to touch upon that which made coordination sensible and possible at all, and I aimed to let Organization be described simply as such.

Finally, I want to point out the treatment of actors and their roles that follows from speaking in this manner. Throughout my analysis, I have de-centered actors to have both them and practices in mind. By doing so, I have not made explicit mention of ‘agency’ (but rather implicitly done so). The case is that individual agency has been embedded into the way practices were described (e.g. Shove et al., 2012, pp. 125-126). I have attempted to avoid the traditional problem of agency/structure, e.g. the question of “free will vs. determined action,” by regarding practices as unfolding phenomena that circumscribe doing but acknowledging that whatever circumscribes can change. The context of practice and the contextualized entities, practitioners,
constitute each other (cf. Schatzki, 2005, p. 468). While we might not speak much about specific individuals, beyond the administrator, we direct ourselves to both practice and practitioners in the same move. It is in this sense that we go beyond treating individual actors in themselves per se and rather treat practitioners who in light of their practices were imposed a certain artifact and the signs of tension and ongoing contestation that followed. The same applies also to how roles have been discussed. To be a caseworker was to have a role with formal expectations, while seemingly caseworkers themselves saw their own role in a different light as well. Both instances of seeing and speaking about a role are assumed here to be dependent on practice. Roles are intelligible in light of a practice that happens to change, and so do roles change as well.

6.1.3. The practice of analyzing practice and its uncertainty

An empirical illustration is a limited effort in contrast to a detailed effort with a clear and specific empirical agenda for the use of a practice theoretical vocabulary. One could question if our mode of comprehension and our familiarity is sufficient or whether we have seen enough of the practices to speak about them. As I have tried to make clear here, the use of statements has been fundamental for our practice analysis, but we have not undertaken ethnographic work of participatory kind, barring us from more detailed accounts of specific practices. If we had done so, an analysis would have been more about a specific instance of caseworking, as an example, rather than a comparison of complexes of practice-arrangement bundles writ large. I do not posit a deep sense of the attachment practitioners had to their practice or aspect such as their sense of their workplace (e.g. Gherardi, 2009a). Having said this, my intent here is not to find flaws that pertain to the design of the analytical illustration.

Unavoidably, I would wager that there is a certain limitation to the representation of practices that could hold no matter the amount of work that is undertaken. As posed by Garfinkel (e.g. 1964, p. 23), no matter the procedure one would end up ‘ad hocing’ when treating empirical material, by seeing representations as appearance-of-order through a leap of inference, and arguably this is so no matter the quantity of data. The concepts used in analysis do not explain themselves but were drawn in interpretive work whereby I have also emphasized what seemed for me to be what I as observer ‘saw.’ It is, however, not the problem of “subjectivity” that is most interesting.

The account here as a whole is bound to a kind of uncertainty that is unavoidable and perhaps fundamental in any speaking of practices. It is essentially this that Bourdieu (1990) in some sense pointed out. The relation between the observed and the observer remains even for the observer with the greatest of proximity. Participating and speaking about practice are essentially
different tasks, and practices are fuzzy and opaque, even for their practitioners (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 12).

This is not only the case for our specific task here, but also a trait of other forms of speaking about practices, including non-academic seeing/speaking about practices. How often are we certain that we know what we talk about in regard to practices, or that our talking truly reflects the dimensions of practice in an exhaustive manner? For everyday purposes we would, I pose, be less inclined to imagine whether our speaking about the practice of soccer truly can reflect what is required to participate, the motivation for others’ participation, or if one can demarcate it perfectly. Here, by drawing some family resemblance to the non-academic seeing/speaking about practices we do of course touch upon a differently organized performance, not tied to any academic standard or a set theoretical vocabulary. When we regard the challenge of speaking about concepts in Section 6.1.2 here, it is of course an uncertainty that is of our own doing, and one that we can try to measure according to how well our speaking reflects what we have come into contact with in Chapter 2.

What makes our task come upon interpretative challenges is that it strives to go into the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of practice by speaking about it in a certain manner (through our concepts), and because we ask ourselves if our accounts thereof are acceptable. Reasonably then, any attempt that does not try to analyze practices and does not involve an attempt to hold itself to account would have less of these kinds of concerns. It is not always the case that an analytical interest lies in practices or in their exploration of how/why. I am here thinking of the interest in practices as purely empirical, describing these more in line of simply what is being done. A description of pure doing, of “what” is being done, is at first glance less prone to the problem of interpretative uncertainty (but perhaps rather to the question as to why one would bother with such a task, the degree of detail or the verisimilitude of such an effort). A purely descriptive effort would not take practice as its object of inquiry but simply take it for granted. The integral uncertainty in the task of seeing and speaking about practices is tied to the analytical aspiration. If we are interested in the analysis of practice, we need to be willing to pay its price in some sense. What the price is depends on how we define our seeing/speaking about practices in terms of sensitizing concepts we engage with.

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225 The avid fan of soccer might possibly regard far more to be part of soccer, bestowing a greater size and significance to it, than perhaps someone who is rather unfamiliar or uninterested.

226 What comes to mind here is the recent controversy in strategy studies about studying practices as “what” is done or to also be interested in the issues of how/who (Bromiley and Rau, 2014; Jarzabkowski et al., 2016a).
Acknowledging the “deficit” of uncertainty is not entirely without benefit. A form of modesty could be beneficial to guard from the totalizing or authoritarian tendency of students to obsess over a way of thinking. A way of speaking about practices ought never to be equated as actually mirroring an “objective” picture or fully grasping a form of logic of practice (cf. Lynch, 2001, p. 146). In other words, we should not see the kinds of issues we stumble upon as we see and speak about practices necessarily as obstacles. Indeed, an account of practice that is not modest or humble but gives the air of perfect coherence is one that, to paraphrase Latour (2005, p. 188), gives the illusion away.

Now, in stating as we do here that we share something with alternate ways of speaking about practice in terms of uncertainty, we could state that insofar as alternate approaches share in analytical aspiration, e.g. through similarity in sensitizing concepts, our interpretation challenges are not only our own. As an example, practice theories of some conceptual similarity (e.g. Reckwitz, 2002; Shove et al., 2012) similarly discuss the capabilities to participate in practice. What we refer to as the capture of practical understanding is not too far from a discussion about what the capture of know-how in alternate practice theories would imply. Our discussion of the capture of general understandings relates to symbolic meanings and beliefs that suffuse practices, finding their parable in other notions that are assumed to be widely held (e.g. organizational culture). Similarly, our discussion about the capture of the teleoaffective relates to discussions about how we can see the ends and emotions of practice, and how this relates to activity. The same is true for a concern for materiality and the interlinking of practices. Some of these points might then also relate to a wider definition of practice theories that might differ in conceptual legacy (e.g. Nicolini and Monteiro, 2017). This is not to imply that similarities are all there is, as we will see when we start to regard the treatment of change and further points of comparison later on.

6.2. Bundling as a three-folded process

As the intent was to see practices through the tracing of socio-technical change, bundles proved important. Depicting bundles necessitated going through a couple of motions as the change occurred over time. We began with an account of the configuration of practices (caseworking, administrating, and managing) and material entities (the people, building, and artifacts) at a

227 While favoring a single image and way of thinking has the benefit of producing something that in turn can more clearly be contrasted with others to sharpen thinking (Weick, 1979, p. 27), the idea of the perfect image can become an obsession taken too far. Weick’s point is that there is a functional value in obsessing as it aids the development of contrasting arguments. While I do agree, I would hope that some form of restraint is in order.
specific point of time. When new materiality was introduced in the form of software within the Case Management System, it was subsequently expected to be used and the state of the complex of bundles changed. As I described how things changed, further points of times were illustrated, giving a temporal and processual dimension to the practice analysis.

To illustrate the less than static nature of bundles as one traces change over time, I will try to introduce a kind of play on words to illustrate what has been a considerable feature of the practice analysis. If we examine the word ‘bundle’ we can note that the word is both a noun and a verb. Most often, we have used the word ‘bundle’ to designate practice-arrangement bundles as a noun. We have discussed bundles, such as caseworking, administrating, or managing, giving them a static form in each account. If we examine the notion of bundle as verb, as ‘to bundle,’ we obtain a more processual understanding of the understanding of bundles as something which is occurring. An alternative verb-form is bundling. To minimize confusion and not lose track of the concept of bundles as we have discussed earlier, I will refer to the verb/process of bundle (to bundle) as **bundling** in this section to emphasize the processual here.

The simple idea of tracing **bundling** builds on the obvious finding that we cannot regard the state of a bundle as permanent in its composition when socio-technical change affects practices. Tracing practices and what they transpire with and amid over time is to trace the bundling of practice and materiality. This is not a completely foreign concept in Schatzki’s work as many of his illustrative examples tend to revolve around practices described to have undergone or be undergoing some form of distinct change. As a notion, bundling is what occurs as an unavoidable result of performances that compose practices (TS, p. 210).

In this section, I will break down what the tracing of bundling entails into a **three-fold**. I use the term ‘three-fold’ to describe a process with three dimensions. When I engaged in accounting for the changes in the practices due to the implementation of the interface, I engaged with speaking of what the practice ceased to transpire with and be molded by. Hence, I mentioned how certain aspects of the Case Management System ceased to alter or be used as much by practitioners. We accounted for how practices and certain artifacts ceased to bundle. At the same time, we saw that the new interface was something that the practices came to transpire with and amid. We spoke of how the practices were bundled with the new artifact, the new interface. Accounting for this was also to account for how the practices changed during the same, as the practice-organizing elements changed. Hence, we also attended to the re-organization of practices alongside the coming to be

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228 It is also an expression used by Schatzki himself to refer to bundles as we have (cf. SP, p. 200).
bundled. From this, we will discuss how bundling as an occurrence over time between a practice and an artifact is a three-fold of a *bundling with something new, unbundling with something else, and the re-organization of practice*.

This discussion engages primarily with the understanding of bundling as occurring between a practice and certain artifacts. Of course, practices are always material as they transpire with/amid arrangement. What we want to emphasize here is the difference in this transpiring over time. To understand to what extent the idea of bundling contributes to our understanding of the relation between practice and artifacts, I will touch upon certain elements already found as implicit traits of practice theory and compare these with other work to elucidate what is different with what is implied here.

6.2.1. Nearness/Farness, and shifting proximity to artifacts

Above I have stated the implicit three-folded tracing in my examination of sociotechnical change. The bundling implied a kind of change that can be more specified in order to understand why the three-folded change is worthwhile to mention. To complete this analysis, I will draw from the philosophical background of practice theory, the work of Heidegger.

Heidegger’s influence is notable in some form in the work of Bourdieu and Giddens, extending also to organizational studies (Sandberg and Dall’Alba, 2009; Chia and Holt, 2006; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009), conceptual work on human interaction with technology (Winograd and Flores, 1986), and empirical work on technology using a practice theoretical approach (Dobeson, 2018). Technology, its purpose and its relation to science are topics that Heidegger himself discussed (Heidegger, [1954]1977). Hence, drawing from Heidegger is not a particularly uncommon thing to do, nor is the link between his thought and the issue of technology otherwise unexplored (e.g. Dobeson, 2016). There are a couple of reasons for using the work of Heidegger in this analysis. My discussion here will focus on the analysis of bundling by accentuating it with a spectrum to make some conceptual distinction between coming to be bundled and ceasing to be bundled. A Heideggerian understanding of spatiality will be used to discuss the relation between practice and materiality in terms of nearness/farness, and what a shift in terms of nearness/farness could be argued to depend on.

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229 We can stumble upon the drawing from Heidegger even in papers that are quite empirically oriented (e.g. Orlikowski, 1996, p. 73).

230 Schatzki’s neo-Heideggerian understanding of timespace would have enriched this section as well (TS). The choice to not extend the theoretical framework with ‘activity timespaces’ comes from the perceived difficulty of fitting it all in one single kind of analysis. My drawing from Heidegger is very liberal in contrast to Schatzki’s later work and far less refined.
Whereas Heidegger was doing his own version of phenomenology and ontological analysis, and there are key differences between practice theory and such efforts (cf. Schatzki, 2017c), I will take some liberties in discussing certain conceptual similarities to help me illustrate what I mean by the three-fold of bundling. I will focus on some of Heidegger’s most famous concepts to explain the relation of doing with things: the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand (BT, pp. 68-72). According to Heidegger, our apprehension of objects can be in terms of mere things and of equipment. The former was what thinkers before Heidegger would have posited as the primary form of apprehension. According to Heidegger, this was wrong. That is, Heidegger claimed that our primary relation to material objects is not the apprehension of mere things but of equipment. The designation between things/equipment served him to point out that our primary relation to our world is achieved through dealings, through which we use equipment. What is implied in this is that our relation to objects around us is not one of seeing objects as neutral objects but as primarily attending to their role in activity. Simply put, we apprehend objects by intuitively treating them as equipment useful for our dealings. This intuitive grasp of objects is not a theoretical grasp of an object salient to us but simply our use thereof (BT, p. 69). This does not imply that we do not apprehend things that are not directly useful. It is, however, so that when one engages in a specific activity or dealing, we primarily engage with equipment as we actually undertake our activity. The apprehension of equipment for our activities is the apprehension of the ready-to-hand. If I want to send a friend a text, I will simply pick up my phone to send the text. The phone would be ready-to-hand in this. This apprehension is to be contrasted with that which is present-at-hand, which is not equipment but mere things. Around us there is quite a lot that is simply present but not brought to use for our dealings at a given point of time.

The idea that certain equipment is ready-to-hand for certain activity resembles the idea of certain practice being bundled with certain material arrangement. As a practitioner engages in a practice, and undertakes a task involving an artifact, the task would be the dealing that would bring the artifact near for the practitioner as ready-to-hand. If we imagine the caseworkers, a variety of different artifacts were available, while not all were relevant for tasks of caseworking and would never be ready-to-hand to them. As an example, caseworkers never used the video conference room and software despite it being available at the setting in Sections 5.2-5.3. This is because a

231 I find William Blattner’s example quite enlightening here: “Indeed, I am often familiar with the entities in my environment without being able to describe them neutrally. What color are the speakers, what shape is the phone on my desk? I have to stop and figure out answers to those questions, because I do not know. I do not know, because my primary access to those pieces of equipment is not through some neutral description of them with value added, but rather simply through their role in activity” (Blattner, 2006, p. 51).
practice such as caseworking is not bundled with all artifacts objectively present. No practice is truly bundled with all artifacts present insofar as one attends to artifacts used. My account of material arrangement in the analytical illustration is both an account of that which was present-at-hand and ready-to-hand, but which entity could be seen present-at-hand or ready-to-hand would depend on the practice (and task) examined. It is in the sense of approximating this that we chose in Chapter 3 to direct ourselves to what a practice directly involved.

So why do I bring this up now? I claim that a grasp of bundling is essentially a grasp of what is subjectively present in the sense that one imagines artifacts used or ready-to-hand. By our privileging of the relation of use in the mention of the directly involved, we have done this implicitly already. The need to make this explicit is that the subjectively present, differently understood, is a subjective space that can be further distinguished. We can then go beyond simply stating that things are commonly/occasionally involved or directly/indirectly involved. From the perspective of Heidegger, we find entities with varying degrees of nearness and farness to our being (BT, p. 103), which we bring near as we attend to them in our dealings (BT, pp. 106-107). The bringing near is to be understood as a subjective bringing near. As we engage in our everyday activities we undertake various dealings for which various equipment becomes ready-to-hand and is brought near. This sense of proximity, or nearness, need not necessarily coincide with objective spatial nearness. Simply put, there is a gap between just having artifacts in a particular setting and their being able to come to be regarded in a practice; a gap in subjective space. I would wager that any interest in the imposition of technology for the sake of it being used would acknowledge this gap. A reader is invited to simply examine their computer or smartphone and consider if all software, i.e. artifacts within artifacts, are brought near and are ready-to-hand in everyday life. My guess would be that many artifacts within artifacts are never brought near despite being there objectively (as mere things).

I have also introduced Heidegger’s understanding of spatiality to invite the reader to imagine what a spectrum of nearness/farness for a practice means when a practice comes to differ over time instead of attending to relations and their relative thickness (which were in Section 3.3 stated as less important to discuss bundles). While we could imagine a spectrum of commonly or occasionally used artifacts, my point is that such alternative spectrum does not per se capture the kind of relational, parallel shift we could see in Chapter 5 and that the analysis depended on. When we perceive a certain artifact to not

232 In this section, I will refer to this as subjective when Heidegger actually speaks of existential space (BT, pp. 101-114). We are appropriating this work not with the purpose of staying true to its original purpose but to speak of social analysis.
be part of a bundle, what we are mainly speaking of is the idea that it is not ready-to-hand. During the period of change, what artifact came near for a task changed as the practice ceased to directly involve artifacts, i.e. was unbundled with them. This coincided with a new artifact that came near as ready-to-hand for practitioners. Now, in the case of bundling/unbundling of caseworking, we can understand this as alternate entities that after a certain period of change start to come near or cease to so that one can imagine a shift in what is near/far. The interface had been inserted into the setting prior to the actual use and was thus objectively present prior to its subjective coming near. When caseworkers proceeded to utilize the interface instead of the manual searching functionality, it was the interface that came near and the searching functionality that ceased to be as near for everyday dealings. For this to be possible, the artifact had to be within some objective proximity, as installed in the systems and thus objectively present, but this being present objectively would not suffice to imply that the artifact would be ‘near’ subjectively nor necessarily be indicative of the degree of nearness.

Change in nearness/farness corresponds to the kind of change which we could see in the process of bundling, and which elucidates that entities shift from being things to become equipment and vice versa. Essentially, the point is that not all is brought near as equipment at the same time. It is this I want to stress by talking about a relational, parallel shift. The socio-technical change traced did not entail a broadening of more and more entities that were to be ready-to-hand, or near, for the participants in these practices. This was exactly the point by those who initiated the chain of events. They wanted to replace the use of manual searching with an interface! Of course, this did not happen abruptly. The ceasing to be bundled of something old and coming to be bundled with something new happened over time as the spectrum of nearness/farness shifted gradually. The two-folded change occurred over time through a series of happenings. Speaking about the commonly/occasionally involved – as we have before – does not lend itself naturally to the idea of a shift and speaking about technological implementation can easily give the impression that one suggests a broadening of more and more artifacts used. This was not truly what happened in Chapter 5, particularly not in sense that all artifacts were equally near over time. My point here is not to reject the role of the objectively present, or the indirectly involved, but extend the kind of thinking that the tracing of two-folded change would imply if one has a subjective proximity in mind.

To conclude, these Heideggerian notions and the case examined give us a way to understand how the tracing of bundling can imply attentiveness to a two-folded process, and how bundling with something can be the unbundling with something else along a spectrum. This is, however, not enough.
6.2.2. The third fold and the character of the process

To speak of the changes in the practices by referral to a shuffling of nearness/farness, we need to reflect upon what coincided with such a two-fold. In the studied setting, such a process only makes sense in regard to the reorganization of the practices. In Chapter 3, I discussed how one could speak of the entities involved by speaking of the tasks studied. Since tasks, as part of end-project-task combinations, are simultaneously linked with the other elements of the organization of practice, we know that tasks depend on the organization of practice. So, for a task to involve a certain artifact, a particular kind of practice organization would then be needed for the task to be performed intelligibly with said artifact.

In Chapter 5, we had a re-organization to explain the shift of nearness and farness. In the work of Heidegger, something similar would be that the relevance of artifacts would alter and that they would be deemed serviceable for achieving another kind of end (cf. BT, pp. 84, 87-88). Such a discussion is not very apt for our attention to practice, although it resembles it partly. Leaving philosophy aside and focusing on practice theoretical concepts, we need to point to the cases of re-organized practices through bundling.

We have both prodigious and slight forms of re-organizations in Chapter 5, measured in terms of the difference that tread forth. Administrating underwent such a radical change that we could speak of either a new or a dramatically altered practice. For caseworkers, the task of accessing casework went from involving one functionality/artifact to another. Not only was the normativized range so that the acceptable performance in regard to accessing work simply entailed the new interface, but the performance of the task was also intelligible as involving it. The only times the manual searching functionality was utilized was during those times that the task was not simply to collect work but also to make sure that no cases were left unattended, or when caseworkers were avoiding the use of the interface (which seemingly was less common over time).233 These were then small variations of the collection of work that were either only undertaken occasionally, for controlling that no work had slipped through, or as fringe behavior, as an act of resistance. As variations of the collecting of work, the occasional use of the manual searching functionality also had other ends than the standard collecting of work.

Grasping that one ought to access casework differently or that management had to coordinate the work distribution with the administrator rather than with caseworkers proved very meager re-organization at first if we only examine the relation of each practice with the interface for a particular task (such as accessing casework). The accessing of files can seem to be a peripheral

233 The incomplete total shift could be explained by a degree of un-readiness-to-hand in the interface (cf. BT, p. 73).
activity. Obviously, the re-organization was wider still. The dramatic change in caseworkers’ planning meetings was another kind of re-organization that occurred during this time frame. Tasks within a practice pertain to a wider array of activity (other tasks, other projects). A change in one task had the potential to alter the possibility for further tasks to be performed, and further projects. That planning casework was no longer a relevant project tied to significant ways of directing work in teams of caseworkers after the change, speaks of how the task to access casework through the interface implied further consequences. The bundling coincided with a general change in the structure of activity of the practice of caseworking, as well as for administrating and unit managing.

In sum, bundling as an analytical device implies attention to three kinds of changes (bundling/unbundling/re-organization) that are all bound by attention to practice. From the analysis of practice, and the tracing of changes in and across practices, we thus find a way of speaking of nuances of change as three-fold. This is yet another trait of the practice analysis undertaken that can be discussed in regard to its merits. My reasoning here is partly abstracted from the particular occurrences in Chapter 5, focusing on the major traits of the analysis. Despite the abstracted argument, not any kind of change is bundling in the sense argued above. To stretch the three-fold of bundling to see what it entails, we could imagine four situations in a setting.

A. A new artifact is used in a practice.
B. An old artifact ceases to be used in a practice.
C. A new explicit rule governs behavior in a practice.
D. A new artifact is placed in a setting.

In the case of A, B and D we have cases of material re-arrangement of varying kinds. A and D would be the joining of new entities and B would be the leaving of one entity. An artifact simply joining an arrangement is insufficient to be bundling as these cases obviously need a practice that comes to be bundled with entities. Case A would be a bundling (a coming to be bundled), whereas case B would be an unbundling (a ceasing to be bundled) as these involve a practice. In Case C, we have a re-organization of practice. Cases A, B, and C would each represent one-folded change if they did not coincide with one another. In the case of D, we do not actually have sufficient information to speak of a bundling as no practice is mentioned.234

Accordingly, we see that bundling entails a couple of qualitative changes to make sense as a three-fold and that thus a certain understanding of change

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234 In Chapter 5, what is implied is something akin to cases A-D simultaneously but only A-C would be directly relevant for bundling (whereas case D is indirectly relevant for the possibility of bundling).
is underlying it. While bundling occurs and gives a sense of an ongoing change that never ceases, I pose here that the three-fold directs attention to kinds of qualitative changes that are significant enough to be attended to. This three-fold does not assume, however, what such qualitative changes need to be in detail and is only a trivial possibility to be acknowledged if not further specified. It proposes a form but not the content. Not all ‘events of change’ need to imply a three-fold after all. I am not claiming there is a three-folded mechanism that governs from behind the scenes to determine events. We only have the particularities of events and practices themselves, including the material characteristics that make bundling a possibility.

We cannot take the worthwhileness of a tracing of bundling for granted simply from a scheme to exemplify its ‘folds.’ I would not have chosen to address a need to trace bundling in Chapter 5 if a new computer mouse that was largely identical to present ones at the setting would have been introduced. To speak meaningfully of bundling would imply the necessity to accommodate it to the case at hand where it proves worthwhile. After all, our illustration of cases A-D was far more simplified than anything that occurred at the studied setting. No clear demarcation was possible to state in Chapter 5 when a true unbundling occurred. The manual search functionality was still occasionally used. Characteristics of the technology utilized did not allow for the exclusive use of ‘views.’ To present the bundling/unbundling as binary states would be too simplistic as it more justly implied a shuffling of nearness/farness for entities in different tasks.

From this we can conclude a couple of preliminary aspects of our idea of bundling here, and particularly by having our illustration thereof in mind. In traditional organizational literature, change is often understood not in processual terms but in what is known as a variance approach (Langley 1999, after Mohr 1982; Van de Ven, 2007, Ch. 5). Such an approach invites reflection on variables that dictate the shape of later states of affairs, and that we can pinpoint and isolate for studies of what happened before and after. Here, this is not what is proposed. Tracing the difference that emerged, by attending to bundling as a three-folded process, is not to be understood as something that can be taken apart for such kind of inquiry. For example, although we are aware that a normative shift occurred, we could not solely regard this due to the explicit rules as such but need to also take into account the general sense of oughtness expressed in normativized projects, as well as in ideas about what work ought to entail. More so, we need to be attentive to materiality bundled with practice. Rather than a breaking apart of practice, which would imply that these aspects are taken out of practice so that practices

\[235\] Of course, such a change would have made for a poor study and poor means to disclose practices.
are no longer relevant, I pose here instead that the three-folds are to be thought of as simultaneous aspects of bundling.

Our notion of bundling and the way it compares to alternate conceptions of tracing change relate to the theoretical edifice one draws from by providing a means to define change and the entity or phenomenon that supposedly changes. As an example, literature on change in Organizations often tend to suppose that it is Organization, defined in terms of layers or as a kind of entity, that changes in some manner (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995). Such literature also tends to cling to the idea of the primacy of stability that does not regard their phenomena as naturally unfolding (Orlikowski, 1996, p. 64). Bundling as it is presented here conflicts with such a traditional view both in terms of what is understood to change and with the idea that change is something exceptional.

Being closer to a processual understanding, the idea of bundling finds itself closer to an idea that social phenomena need to be appreciated in the sense of becoming rather than as static substance. Such a view is referred to as a process theoretical view, which can be defined in terms of both a stronger process orientation and a more moderate one (Langley et al., 2013; Fortwengel et al., 2017). In the sense that bundling corresponds to a processual understanding, our idea of the qualitative changes imaginable – the three-fold – directs our tracing of becoming in a certain manner. This is closer to a moderate orientation. There is a greater specificity to the idea of change here than in a definition of it such as “the reweaving of actors’ webs of beliefs and habits of action as a result of new experiences obtained through interactions” (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002, p. 570). We are positing a kind of pattern to this ongoing becoming, a three-folded kind.\footnote{Incidentally, Tsoukas and Chia (2002) also posit a pattern to change. Organization is for them both an attempt to order the flux of change and an outcome in the form of a pattern. But, as we have already mentioned, the word Organization can mean disparate things and we have a greater specificity of what it means here than simply positing that there is a pattern to be acknowledged.} As such, it could be seen as a strategy to make sense of the unfolding (Langley, 1999), to be used in the covering of a particular case, but one that structures the narrative by the structure of our speaking (of practice-arrangement bundles).

We will leave alternate understandings of Organizations, a topic we will cover in the following chapter, aside for now. There is another kind of literature that is far closer to our tracing of events in Chapter 5, which also conforms to an understanding of materiality and technology involved in such change.
6.2.3. Alternate views on technological change in practices

What technological change might mean can differ considerably. There are multiple frameworks that do not describe technology, practice, and socio-technical change as we have. An example of this is Shove et al., who by examining practices as composed of competence, meaning, and materials, would regard socio-technical change as the shuffling or making/breaking of links between competence, meaning, and materials (2012, pp. 29-35). Even in a theory that one could pose as conceptually similar, we find a difference. In contrast to shuffling or making/breaking links, I have also pointed to that sensitivity to the structure of activity of each practice, denoting a more specific way of speaking of change in practice that is not found or discussed by Shove et al. (2012), who largely leave discussions of tasks aside.

Although socio-technical change has here been used as an event that makes aspects of practices tread forth, there is literature that primarily focuses on technology. In such literature, the empirical study of socio-technical change is a well-established form of endeavor to primarily examine technology and a point of comparison to encounter alternate means to assess socio-technical change. A part of the reason is that studies of technology, insofar as they revolve around practices, seemingly draw from a practice theory of another, less contemporary sort to account for the use of technology. In the literature of enacted technology, technology is ‘there’ when it is used in activities ‘in practice.’ I will describe a couple of accounts of this that are grounded in the area between the disciplines of organization studies and information systems studies, which in some sense can illustrate what is distinct in the manner that technology has been treated here (as three-folded bundling) and also as means to further accentuate the nature of our examination of change. In Chapter 1, we discussed the manner in which diverging understandings of practice theory can direct a speaking about practices quite generally, e.g. in terms of concepts. We are here interested in contrasting our effort with alternative views of practice in regard to change specifically.

A most fitting point of comparison between the practice analysis here and literature on technological change is Orlikowski’s notion of technology-in-practice.237 The background to the idea of technology-in-practice lies in a research tradition drawing from Giddens (e.g. Barley, 1986; DeSanctis and

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237 The work of Orlikowski is arguably of interest in any contemporary discussion about activities and use of technology, but we will direct ourselves most clearly to the use the theoretical premises that define her work. As an example, Orlikowski (1996) is generally a good empirical excursion of what an attending to practices in light of the ‘event of change’ can suggest for an understanding of how things come to be. I think that my empirical material is reminiscent of what that particular paper presents, albeit my work is far less exhaustive than hers. However, one must note that an empirical attending to practices also depends on what is meant with practices. My choice to focus on Orlikowski’s paper from 2000 here is because she is quite transparent with what she means by the term ‘practices’ there.
Poole, 1994; Orlikowski, 1992) that engaged in the highly influential structurational studies of technology (cf. Jones and Karsten, 2008; Pozzebon and Pinsonneault, 2005). From this perspective, technology has been seen to ‘embody’ structures by designers who inscribed rules and resources onto them, which are then appropriated by users. Such early studies are largely conceptually incompatible with the idea of bundling, as we cannot find structures inscribed onto artifacts. There is, however, a later understanding of structurational studies found in the notion of technology-in-practice (Orlikowski, 2000), which similarly defines technology as rules and resources but does not regard such structure to be inscribed onto technology. Instead, it defines technology by its use ‘in practice.’ This latter approach not only amounts to a more faithful interpretation of Giddens (cf. Orlikowski, 2000, p. 406), focusing on emergent structure rather than on embodied structure, but is also more compatible with the practice theory utilized here. After all, Giddens can be understood as a predecessor to contemporary practice theory.

To begin, we must be aware of conceptual similarities and differences, and how vocabulary is used. Technology-in-practice is defined as an enduring activity involving an artifact. The mention of the use itself, and the examples drawn by Orlikowski, make it seem that Orlikowski regards as technology-in-practice that which we have regarded as tasks of practice. From the largely immaterial view of structuration theory (Shove et al., 2012, p. 23), one perceives of technology as a material, allocative resource (cf. Giddens, 1984, p. 34). Our tasks transpired with/amid materiality, whereas Orlikowski’s technology-in-practice enacts structure by drawing on resources alongside rules. Empirically, Orlikowski describes a couple of practices (e.g. software development and consulting) by accounting for a variety of understandings, meanings, norms and so forth that have a bearing on enactments of these practices. These understandings, meanings, and norms are not inherent parts of practices but are found in the “contextual background” from which practitioners draw in their settings (of Organizational kind). The specific technology-in-practices used as empirical illustrations are then lifted out of this backdrop to place the use of technology at the center.

In examining the general premise, we can note substantial differences regarding what a practice is and is not between Orlikowski’s interpretation of Giddens and my interpretation of Schatzki. For Orlikowski, a technology-in-practice is never placed as a task among other tasks and projects that together compose a practice. Instead of practical/general understandings, rules, and a teleoaffective structure of a particular practice, Orlikowski refers to contextual conditions as interpretative, holding shared understandings and meanings; technological, including tools and data; and institutional, including the normative and authoritative structure of the larger social system. This has implications for the understanding of socio-technical change. When transformation occurs, Orlikowski poses that change occurs in light of the three conditions in the setting, and that the emergence and institutionalization
of new technology-in-practices will possibly affect these conditions in turn. What the three-fold of bundling entails, however, is the coming nearer, over time, of new resources/artifacts, and the pushing away of other resources/artifacts, while simultaneously re-organizing the understandings and the normativity within the practice.

The focus on a shared set of conditions for a setting implies something different than the potential re-organization of practice imaginable when tracing the bundling of practice(s). Although we have found commonalities across practices, we can treat each practice with increased attention to its particular changes as each practice itself is a context. If we would have applied Orlikowski’s frame, we would not have envisioned the organization of three different practices but instead seen the contextual conditions as that of the complex as a whole. This would have risked underplaying the differences across practices and the different way different practices in a setting transpired with/amid technology. What is notable then is that two theoretical approaches that speak of practices do so differently.

6.2.4. Imbrications, context and interlinking of bundling

An alternative way of studying the interaction between practice and technology/materiality is to trace human and non-human agency interlocked with one another. This is the case for another interpretation of Giddens in the work of Leonardi’s (2011) notion of ‘imbrication.’ If we examine Leonardi’s (2011) theoretical framework, we find the mention of Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) organizational routines a point of departure. The underlying idea is based on a reading of Giddens’ duality of structure (Feldman and Pentland, 2003, p. 93), and sees routines as abstract ideas, on the one hand, and actual, performed patterns of social interaction on the other hand. According to Leonardi’s account of socio-technical change, it is change in patterns of social interaction constructed in the space between human and material agencies that plays an important role in the study of routinized doing (Leonardi, 2011, p. 153).238 Important to understanding the trajectory of socio-technical change is past imbrication, i.e. sociomaterial routine, actors’ understanding thereof, their perception of possibilities, and their choice of action (Leonardi, 2011, pp. 163-164). That is, human and non-human accomplished routine alongside the understanding of possibilities largely form the patterns of social interaction to come. In our empirical material, the way Date of Birth distribution of work was translated into the ‘views’ would be an example of how routine and past understanding direct the use of technology. Similarly, shifting understanding of possibilities to work with technology could also be understood in these terms (e.g. allowing/disallowing caseworkers to manage the interface).

238 As a note, Leonardi draws from Pickering (1993) to make this point.
My practice analysis, and the account of bundling, diverges from imbrication in a couple of ways. Leonardi focuses on routinized behavior, traits of actors, and interaction between human/non-human to map up chains of ‘imbrications.’ The interactionist approach bestows a different kind of analytical view, as it can produce a detailed account of changed behavior in steps (chains of imbrications) in a manner not undertaken analytically in Section 5.3. I have acknowledged series of happenings but not mapped these to point out how happening A affects happening B and so on, particularly not by accentuating how such happenings are shaped by a form of dialectical interaction between human and non-human. In any case, these chains of routines/imbrications create a shifting routinized pattern of activity that largely is focused on without speaking of the context of practice. It is perhaps rather so that Leonardi engages with context in the sense of patterns of past behavior (e.g. because X did Y, I will consider X to do Y or regard it at least in the future). If translated into the practice theoretical terminology we have primarily used, it is the task itself and the changes over time in how the task is performed with a thing that is analyzed by Leonardi. In our analysis, the task was not seen in isolation from the larger practice it pertained to. Patterns of past behavior alone is not the same as practice, albeit it is so that one could ontologically explain practices as coming into existence through life patterns (cf. Ch. 2). Evident thus is that a contextualist understanding of practice is not explicitly present in the account of the interpreters of Giddens, as practice is not conceived of as constituting a site in the sense we refer to it.239 Differently put, Orlikowski and Leonardi use the term practice to refer to praxis. Performance as praxis is explained by pointing to a large background, a whole, or to interactions between actors (including the non-human).

What is perhaps most notable with the ideas of technology-in-practice and imbrication is that there is a largely diverging account in terms of ‘context’ from which change is portrayed. The divergences in terms of ‘context’ have implications in terms of how the change is supposed to be traced. We have focused on practice as site for our contextual explanation. Moreover, the three-fold of change per my account of bundling is in itself a contextual change that cannot be understood in isolation from other bundles. As we have addressed, the practices were not isolated from one another, but indeed were interlinked through chains of actions and commonalities in practice-organization and so on. If we examine caseworking and what occurred alongside its bundling, the gradual disablement of the project of planning casework and the emergence of a new task for accessing work cannot be completely grasped unless we

239 Leonardi’s “space of human/non-human interaction” is never clearly defined as a bundle in its entirety. It is far closer to the interaction one would expect in the ‘mangle of practice’ (Pickering, 1993), which emphasizes a form of dialectical relation between the human/non-human.
acknowledged additional practices. The same is true for unit managing and view administrating. The acknowledgement of additional practices is not in particular what is unique here. While Orlikowski’s empirical examples primarily entail the introduction of an artifact across several settings, specifically focusing on one community of practitioners in each, she does acknowledge several practices affecting one another. On one occasion, it was due to the incentives bestowed through one practice that practitioners of another practice came to engage in a particular technology-in-practice (Orlikowski, 2000, p. 419). This occurrence is, however, explained by referral to the institutional context of the studied setting, giving little attention to the interlinking of practice beyond empirical description. To further illustrate why the idea of bundling is distinct in regard to the analytical treatment of multiple practices, we need to simply remember that we have regarded the bundling to be processes affecting three separate practices. Acknowledging the practice-specific changes due to bundling further accentuates that change does not occur to a common background of conditions, but that the “conditions” are to be found in the practices. It is necessary then to discuss bundling as not only something involving individual practices and artifacts, but also as a process across interlinking practices. In Section 5.3, the account of the imposition of the interface implied exactly this.

A complete grasp of all eventual change in the chains of actions between these three practices is perhaps beyond the scope of this thesis and its empirical material. We can, however, examine the chain of action that constituted the distribution of work to compare two different states of affairs in broad terms, before and after the introduction of the new interface. Before, managing was directly connected to the practice of caseworking in the distribution through the mailing of priorities. Caseworking entailed response to work priorities given by management in both casework planning and selection of casework (through the manual functionality). After, the chains of actions constituting work distribution involved managing > administrating > caseworking, as the managerial directing of casework was given to the administrator who in turn used the interface to subsequently direct caseworkers. If it were not for the tasks of managing to send instructions to administrating, which in turn engaged in the task of directing work through the ‘views,’ and that the task of accessing from the interface became the norm in caseworking, such a chain would perhaps not have been imagined (at least not in this way). What we see is then a series of interdependencies between

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240 Leonardi also describes how different imbrications were affected by multiple, interlinked activities (2011, p. 162). These interlinked activities are, however, solely defined as acts. A reader is reminded to consider the difference between simply describing activity as such and explaining activity as pertaining to practice.
the tasks of three separate practices as well as between the practices and the interface itself. The general structure of activity (tasks/projects) of each practice was linked together and affected by the introduction of a simple artifact. As the bundling involved a re-organization of tasks that involved multiple practices, we can see the chain of actions change even if a practice such as managing did not undergo radical change through the bundling. Bundling was a unique process for each practice, but nonetheless each practice’s bundling affected the other through these chains. If we regard then the bundling of each practice as dependent and possibly affecting the structure of activity of interlinked practice, we can see that the unbundling coincides with certain abandonment of interlinked activity and the bundling coincides with the emergence of other interlinked activity, leading to a wider range of unexpected change to practices. Incidentally, this stretches to the examination of how practices were affected by technology beyond the sense of how they actively came to use the technology in direct terms by noting the manner in which the very interlinking of practices was altered and expressed due to the socio-technical change.²⁴¹

In sum, the practice analysis has rendered us with the following insights. The use of socio-technical change as ‘event of change’ can be understood as a three-fold of bundling, an analytical device to speak of the transformation of each bundle. The three-fold implied the bundling with the interface, the unbundling with other artifacts, and the re-organization that explained why something gradually came nearer for practitioners of a practice and something else was pushed away in activities. The bundling, in turn, can be examined both as a unique process, so the three-fold of bundling can be regarded for each practice, and as something dependent on other practices. By noting that practices connected to one another through chains of actions linking these together, we can see how the general change to the structure of activity of each practice implies a change in chains of actions. Seemingly, by noting the transformation that was more or less radical for each practice, we can also acknowledge how even less dramatic changes in bundling can imply a different chain of action through which one bundle connects to another. This is afforded by the analysis by it being not only the analysis of a sole practice but an analysis of a complex of practices. We have more than just one bundle and more than one tracing of bundling.

²⁴¹ Although Morley (2017) has other technology and effects of new technology in mind, the idea of appreciating how bundling affects the interlinking of practices touches upon the idea of technology ‘beyond a single practice.’ Although a practice never directly involved an artifact, or required a certain practical understanding for its use, it could still be affected by technology that practices transpired amid (in the second order sense, as indirectly). In regard to this, our limitation is that we could only get to the way a certain artifact affects indirectly by seeing how it affected another directly.
By my account, technology-in-practice and imbrications are understood by referral to practice-arrangement bundles and bundling. This would imply the necessity to perceive understandings, institutional setting and conditions, and the background to undertaken activity as held by practice. By doing so, the analysis avoids conceiving of activity with technology as the result of an individual’s doing in light of a vaguely defined “institutional context,” past understandings and so forth. This would result in a “sociomaterial” view of practice quite distinct from practice approaches that focus on dualities of structure or neglect the organization of practice completely (cf. Leonardi, 2013).242 Important in this is also what practice means to us in terms of organized context. Our seeing and speaking about practice has been oriented to treat practices in terms of a variety of dimensions that correspond to what we, in Chapters 2 and 3, treated as the organization of practice. In our terms, practice is not simply activity (cf. Schatzki, 2010b, p. 145). Underlying this is the intuition that ‘structure’ conceived of, as the organization of practice is more than sufficient for studies of the interplay between practice and materiality. The organization of practice is important to acknowledge in terms of bundling because it constitutes the third fold of bundling, the possibility of re-organization of practices.

My discussion here is not intended to dismiss the explanatory value of either technology-in-practice or imbrications, but rather to show the analytical consequences of heeding a particular understanding of practice in contrast to other understandings. In this thesis, socio-technical change has been treated as the means to disclose practices and not as core research interest in itself (as is the case in information systems studies). Also, coming upon the discussion of treating a practice as an organized set of activities that constitute a context rests upon distinct challenges of its own. Accentuating what contextual traits are in terms of practices rather than a vague backdrop of setting entails some interpretative work as discussed in Section 6.1 above.

Finally, it is not so that this discussion proposes an incompatibility between a more contextualist understanding of practice and a more interactionist or enacted understanding of technology.243 There could be a point of convergence and the potential of a combination of the ideas of technology-in-practice, imbrication and bundling to account for different aspects of socio-technical change. In part, achieving this would correspond with the call of Orlikowski and Iacono (2001) to further theorize what context means in regard to

242 In this paper, Leonardi compares a structural view of activity with an agential realist view (cf. Barad, 2003). It is the latter that is posed as unorganized.

243 The challenge here would be to engage with essentially diverging understandings of the primacy of practice and the meaning of context in the views of Schatzki and Giddens. To use the word ‘context’ to refer to ‘background’ is just one kind of reading of Giddens (cf. 1979, p. 83). As I see it, it would be possible to embed the contextualist understanding expressed in Chapter 5 with an alternative interpretation of Giddens.
information technology. Whether an exploration of different contextual explanations is worthwhile is something that will not be assessed in this thesis.

6.3. Concluding remarks

In this chapter, we have gone through some of what could be said to be notable traits of our analysis. In doing so, we have touched upon the interpretative challenge and the analytical character. These range from the treatment of material, the work with concepts that reflect the dimensions of practices, and the treatment of ‘change.’ These aspects follow from our effort to see what it means to take our presuppositions and concepts seriously. We have also begun to determine in what manner our effort is also distinguishable from others, particularly in our discussion about bundling.

Having now a clearer picture of our analysis, we can begin to determine further ways it can be distinguished as a whole. Although we have done so here in some form, it is possible to go even further to position practice theory among other prevalent approaches in the study of Organization. That is what will be done next.
7. (Dis)similarities

Throughout this thesis we have touched upon alternate views on matters we have discussed, stating that these would be treated later on. It is here that we will engage with this. An assessment of what a practice analysis and its merit rests upon depends in part on what is unique and distinct about it. This is imperative considering the fact that we know that further forms of analysis exist, and that past social analysis already has established a foundation for the treatment of topics touched upon here. Schatzki (2005) has already in part sketched some areas of conflict between practice theory and organization theory, largely by stressing the ontological assumptions and conceptual incompatibilities between these. My purpose here is not to replicate such an effort but to discern the distinctive traits of the practice analysis we have undertaken and how it stands in relation to established literature.

7.1. Traditional organizational theory

Addressing all traditional organizational theory and forms of analysis for the purpose of this thesis is a considerable challenge that I cannot devote enough space to here. Even if I want to state that my comparison here engages with a more bounded, traditional understanding of organizational inquiry (cf. Buchanan and Bryman, 2009, pp. 2-3), there are numerous schools of thought that will be excluded. Among those not treated are theories that treat specific causes to understand the emergence of specific kinds of Organizations, e.g. transaction cost theory (Coase, 1937; Williamson, 1981), theories that primarily treat specific functions in Organizations to understand the subject matter, e.g. decision-making theory (e.g. Cyert and March, 1963), and theories that engage with a specific aspect such as that of firm growth (e.g. Penrose, 1959). I will also not extensively treat the range of theories that make a juxtaposition between Organizations and environment or between Organizations, e.g. population ecology (Hannan and Freeman, 1977) and resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). The many nuances between traditional approaches will more or less be subsumed into a single form that represents the most distinct claim of past theorizing: the definition of Organization itself. Such a definition will be illustrated by touching on notable forms of organizational analysis. The choice of alternate theories below is based on how well they accentuate differences between our effort and established ways of seeing Organization. I have dipped into streams of literature with this in mind and not with the intent to fully explore each stream.

To begin, I have in Chapter 5 treated aspects that are often the main focus of organizational theory/studies, such as work, roles, rules, division of labor,
and technology. These classical phenomena have been portrayed while being grounded in the idea that the social is constituted by practices bundled with arrangements. Hence, these phenomena that I have spoken of are found in sites, uncovered by studying practices. We can ask ourselves now: to what extend does what we have done here conflict with prevalent ways of grasping Organization?

A looming point of reference in any discussion of organization is the sociologist Max Weber, and his theory of bureaucracy. Briefly put, Weber’s view of the status of collectives is that these are the product of social relations between individuals. What this means is perhaps best exemplified by an account of Weber’s view of bureaucracy as ‘mode of organization.’ That the empirical illustrative case entailed bureaucratic work practices only furthers the appeal to begin here. According to Weber (1946, pp. 196-244), the organizing principles of bureaucracy were clear-cut division of labor, specialized tasks distributed according to position; the hierarchical structure, through which officials are responsible for their subordinates in a chain of command; a formalized system of rules and regulations, ensuring the uniformity of operations; an impersonal detachment in work relations, viewing clients as cases and social distance between hierarchical levels; and employment according to technical qualifications. Through these principles, Weber imagined the ideal type of bureaucracy as the modern form of organization (at his time). These could be said to be modes of organization expected to persist in the social relations between individuals that form bureaucracy as ideal type. Each principle is not relevant for our empirical illustration but admittedly some similarities can be noted in the studied setting, such as hierarchy and the importance of rules. We can find some important points that distinguish our analysis by examining these principles.

An obvious difference when comparing with Weber is that we have not spoken of rules or hierarchy/authority as specific units of analysis outside of the practices they were deemed relevant in by practitioners. In our case, formalized hierarchy and rules have primarily been addressed as they were manifested in practices, and not in light of an ideal-type understanding of bureaucracy. Admittedly, Weber (1946, p. 229) did acknowledge the role of

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244 As stated in Chapter 2, Weber’s view of social collectives is that these are the formation of individuals who act in a social manner to form the social relationships that we identify as collectives. Traditional formal organization (Verband) can be understood as a kind of relationship with a set of procedures that gives collectives the character of Organization (Weber, [1956]1978, pp. 43, 48). When the Organization acts, what occurs is organized action; that is, the action of the staff which is legitimated by the procedure/order of the social relationship. No matter what we see as social entities, these are social relationships formed by social action, and ultimately such action can only exist through individuals who act in orientation towards each other (cf. Weber, [1956]1978, p. 14). An ideal type amounts to an abstraction of the character of social relationships.
activity, as reflected in the habitual orientation of officials, as upholding bureaucracy. The notions of hierarchy/authority/rules that often are conjoined with an understanding of formal organization are a kind of abstraction. However, we do not allow ourselves such a kind of abstraction (as ought to be obvious from what we have said in Chapter 3).245

Our treatment of formal organization also implies a divergence from a less idealized understanding of bureaucracy. As an example, the studied settings in Chapter 5 were not broken into formal, rationally ordered structures and goals conjoined with an informal structure resulting from spontaneous efforts of organizational members trying to cope with conditions of their existence (Selznick, 1949, p. 251). Obviously, goals, divisions of labor, the possibility of coordinated actions, and the coping of members are present, but not as phenomena analytically distinguished in terms of formal/informal. We can note, perhaps, that some rules-in-practices were of the informal kind but not treat them as distinct mechanisms of some kind. This means that the practice analysis is distinct from an organizational analysis of mechanisms or principles which attempts to do so. This is not only the case for seeing Organization as traits of relations between individuals but also its treatment as can be seen among those subscribing to the societist, contextualist social ontology of the likes of Durkheim.246 As an example, Selznick (1948) proposed a structural-functional form of analysis to devise ways to theorize Organization, including its informal dimension. Such an analysis would then presume that Organizations were systems with basic needs that undertook activities for the benefit of self-maintenance and self-defense (Selznick, 1948, p. 29). Selznick’s form of analysis drew from, and extended, the definition of formal organization as “a system of consciously coördinated activities” that transform and exchange utilities (Barnard, 1938, pp. 73, 240). Naturally, the divide between formal/informal were to be seen as different sides of the system’s needs (and functions) in Selznick’s account.

The events in Chapter 5 were analyzed by following the practical considerations of what ought to be done (or not) among practitioners, not by the consideration of systemic needs.247 We have instead been interested in the ends and considerations of practitioners, in light of their practice. These

245 This point of divergence overlaps with Giddens, who in relation to Weber’s definition of bureaucracy stated that rules do not follow or interpret themselves (Giddens, 1979, p. 148). Informed by a reading of Wittgenstein, Giddens could not say otherwise.

246 Whether Durkheim is a good representative of societist ontology is questionable (cf. SS, p. 127). However, his view is quite representative of what traditional organizational theory tends to posit.

247 Echoing Giddens, systems have no needs and functions. Imposing functions does also not explain much about whatever is meant with systems (cf. Giddens, 1984, p. 295), and lies outside of our inquiry of practices.
interests are not common for all forms of social analysis. Hierarchy, authority, and formal procedure were not present in themselves and not as means to distinguish analytically between aspects of a cohesive Organization. Not focusing on a divide between the formal and informal also leads to the potential irrelevance of conundrums regarding the myths of structure, and the decoupling between formal structure (e.g. organizational charts) and practicalities (Meyer and Rowan, 1974). In our analysis, we can find aspects that will superficially resemble an examination of ‘decoupling,’ of the divergence between what is said to be done, officially, and what is actually done, in practice. In our account, what was said to be done, officially, and what was actually done, in practice, do not together form a cohesive ‘whole’ fruitfully conceptualized as Organization. It is not so that we regard ‘decoupling’ as a solution undertaken by an organizational ‘whole’ to cover up the fact of organizational ‘decoupling’ between ‘structural units,’ e.g. as a means of avoiding inspection or evaluation (Meyer and Rowan, 1974, p. 357). Obviously, what is ‘official’ and ‘formal’ is of importance in practice as far as it circumscribes, as aspects of rules-in-practice. What is of interest is the actually heeded procedure alongside the considerations of practitioners in regard to what is seen as the ‘right thing to do.’ Underlying this view is a disregard for the thinking of taking ‘serious’ artifacts of formal structure (e.g. the organizational chart) as stand-alone.

This does not only suggest a notable difference from the idea of Organization as a ‘whole,’ but consequently also with inquiry of forms of ‘wholes’ and what such forms might depend on (e.g. Thompson, [1967]2008; Mintzberg, 1983; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). There is of course a difference in what is analyzed and for what purpose between a practice analysis and a ‘wholist’/structural analysis. The purpose of analysis is particularly important to note. The desire to extrapolate from practices and their features to generalize is a particularly obvious such difference (e.g. Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967; Meyer et al., 1993). Among such efforts, a familiar topic such as work practice can be treated dramatically differently. According to Perrow (1967), work was a defining trait of the structure of Organizations, as Organizations were conceived as systems to get work done. As systems to get work done, Organizations have been defined as “technological” systems and configurations of work processes. Comparable to Van de Ven and Delbecq (1974), who map up the structure of work units, the purpose of such studies

248 In Giddens’ (1984, p. 209) discussion of the work of Peter M. Blau, he points out the way so-called ‘structural sociology’ discards the role of values, norms, individual attitudes, and beliefs, and motives. I wager that such critique indirectly relates to the translation of ‘structural sociology’ into organizational inquiry (e.g. Blau and Scott, 1962).

249 This is not to be understood as a claim that informal rules or the like did not exist. It is primarily so that such rules were just simply conceived of as explicit rules of practices analytically.
of work has been to compare structure across different Organizations. Their examination and treatment of work does not explore the practices that underlie work as done here. As put by Barley (1996), traditional organizational theory only engages with matters of work and practice from a highly abstracted perspective. It is organizational structure that is regarded as the primary focus of such kinds of studies, pictured as a hypostatized whole (Perrow, 1967, p. 195) or as the features of an organism (Selznick, 1948, p. 28), whether seen by itself or when placed in relation to so-called organizational environment (e.g. Drazin and Van de Ven, 1985).

Having practice as point of departure is to explore so-called organizational phenomena by not presupposing an organizational whole. While I refer to the SSIA as Organization, it is understood as a name for complexes of practices and arrangement and not as an underlying system. This is not the only divergence between the undertaken practice analysis and organizational theory. Not all organizational theory conceives of Organization as complete and formal wholes. Ahrne and Brunsson (2010) is a notable mention as they acknowledge partial organization as a form of decided order beyond formal Organizations, observable by identification of elements such as rules, hierarchy, membership, monitoring, and sanctions. While such a view challenges traditional organizational theory, it still does not resonate with an analysis of Organizations as constituted by practices. Rather than wondering whether elements of hierarchy, membership, monitoring and sanctions exist quite generally, we have a quite different theoretical basis for our discussion. What is also notable is that the practice analysis entails an analysis of materiality, unlike much of traditional organizational theory (cf. Orlikowski and Scott, 2008) and the thoughts of Ahrne and Brunsson (2010). In Section 2.5, I conceptualized Organizations as complexes of practice-arrangement bundles that can be examined through forms of life such as commonalities, shared material settings, chains of actions, and the possibility of coordination. In doing so, I never bestowed Organization a distinct status as immaterial entity. Most notably, if anything resembling organizational structure is imagined, it is the structure of practice and the interconnection of these bundled with materiality that is its equivalent.

7.2. Organizing, scenes of action and sensemaking

Beyond the realm of traditional organizational theory there are forms of theory and analysis that either are attuned to the study of activity or view the notion of Organization with some skepticism. One could label some of these theories as critical towards traditional organizational theory. It is conducive to treat these critical perspectives here as they seemingly share traits with the undertaken practice analysis. At first sight, the resemblances are akin to family
resemblances, such that one notices that a practice analytical thinking pertains to a previously touched upon way of examining Organization.

Much of the critique of traditional organizational theory predates contemporary practice theory. According to Egon Bittner (1965), both Weber and Selznick assumed that the formal structure of Organization represented an ideally possible but practically unattainable state of affairs. Rather than coming to terms with the impossibility of formal structure, the practically unattainable had remained as the dilemma worthy of attention in the tradition of organizational studies. Effectively, this implied that students of organization continuously contended with the notion of rational, formal structure to tackle an unsolvable problem (Bittner, 1965, pp. 240-242). Bittner was critical of this tradition and spoke instead of the necessity to attend to real scenes of action. This entailed a call to avoid privileging mentions of formal structure, or the managerial technician’s account thereof, in order to see Organization as something enacted (Bittner, 1965, pp. 247-249). Although perhaps it might be less common today to regard the mention of formal schemes without some implicit irony in stock, it is still significant in its provision of its conundrums (although some are less prone to see it as wholly rational).

Similar critique of traditional organizational theory is found in the socio-psychological Weickian tradition. Karl Weick (1979, pp. 34, 88) perceived Organization as a myth that cannot be found if one searches for it. What we deduce to be Organization are actually events and processes that we mistakenly assume to be a substance and noun. Not all organizational inquiry needs to reify Organization, giving these a spurious stability, but can instead be inquiry of the processes, events, and relations (Weick, 1979, p. 44). Such inquiry would focus on the interconnected sequences that form organizational acting, and focus on the organizing, rather than the myth of Organization. For Weick, organizing is grounded in agreements of what is real and illusory among organizational members. Processes of interpretation depend on construction of rules that are used to reduce equivocality and the negotiation of mental schemata for interpretation so organizational members can interlock and coordinate their activities (Weick, 1979, pp. 113, 133, 142). The chief product of Organization is, according to Weick, the possibility of stable interpretations of the equivocal in social life.

Both Bittner and Weick provide ‘enactist’ views. By ‘enactist’ I mean views that regard social phenomena as actually enacted and performed into being rather than taken for granted. Enactist stances in organization studies call for studies of organizing instead of Organization. It is views such as these that I had in mind when I stated, from the very start, that it is mostly with the students of organizing that we have the greatest affinity here. Discarding the idea of Organization as stable entity, one whose change is explained in terms of systemic tendencies or the effort to make the creature called Organization move according to managerial wishes (Orlikowski, 1996), we have here an
alternative meaning of Organization as it were. It is worthwhile to make clear, however, that the emphasis on organizing can take drastically different shape in regard to how one sees the enactment of so-called organizational phenomena, and how it ought to be studied. For Bittner, the real scenes of actions entailed a need to examine the performances of practitioners, while Weick (1995b) instead envisioned the need to attend to the collective sensemaking of events and processes.

Weick’s emphasis on information processing and interpretation entails a very different focus on what coordinated sequences are. Coordination, per our analysis, focused on the chains of actions and the possibility to impose socio-technical change across practice-arrangement bundles. The question of collective interpretation in regard to the imposition of the interface (in Chapter 5) has not been attended to as something separate of the practices they participated in. Weick’s understanding of mutual intelligibility disregards practice as a base for intelligibility (e.g. 1979, p. 102). The so-called mentalist, cognitivist view that Weick holds on to stands in opposition to our focus on practices (cf. Reckwitz, 2002). In the analysis here, the way participants interpreted the new technology was accounted for with their respective practice in mind. It was not solely interpretation/sensemaking as such without regard to the context of practice and the practicalities of work. Rather than asking ourselves: “How do actors make sense of their Organization?” we asked ourselves “What is their practice?”. One could retort that we have been interested in the sensemaking of practitioners in light of change as we tried to understand how they saw and understood the events, but what is worthwhile to stress is that ‘event of change’ as such provided us a means to see their practice. We did not try to determine the process of sensemaking in itself. Underlying this difference lies what different approaches deem to be the central focus of analysis. It is of little surprise that the mention of materiality is far removed from Weick’s analysis, as primarily ideas and processes of thinking are examined in their own realm whereas the opposite is true for a practice analysis.

The practice analysis undertaken here approximates Bittner’s enactist view more than Weick’s. We have also examined real scenes of actions. How these real scenes of actions are grasped differ, however, due to the ethnomethodological bent of Bittner (who was a student of Garfinkel). This similarity might thus make it seem so that our practice analysis answers the call of Bittner, but as will be discussed below in our discussion of Garfinkel there are notable differences even among studies of real scenes of action.

There are extant contemporary approaches that approximates an enactist stance to organization, similarly evoking the verb of organizing rather than the noun of organization. Emphasis of organizing is a general trait of widely defined perspectives such as that of ‘process theory’ with its emphasis on organizational becoming (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Nayak and Chia, 2011), and ‘performative theory’ with its emphasis on organization as ongoing
performances (Diedrich et al., 2013; Gond et al., 2016). We are here getting closer to more notable points of convergence between our analysis and those of others, as one could pose that even our analysis could be seen as pertaining to perspectives of processes and performativity. These perspectives are, however, widely defined and so we would do best in specifying what we want to compare with. There is luckily no lack of specific ways of analyzing to at least begin to make sense of significant traits that are worthwhile to address.

We can find ways of analyzing that focus on the ongoing performances that compose Organization, with attention to the ‘lower levels’ of such an entity, as in socio-technical systems theory, as well as in theories that exclusively focus on action, taking the notion of Organization as layered entity with greater skepticism, such as ethnomethodology (Bittner’s approach) and actor-network theory. More so, we also find other theories that relate to matters of activity and work such as activity theory, which tends to be referred to as practice-based (cf. Miettinen et al., 2009; Nicolini, 2012). A reader will perhaps recognize these approaches as those which, in the beginning of the thesis, were defined as not being practice theoretical. To acknowledge family resemblances is not per se the same as stating that these differences are of little consequence. A comparison here is perhaps more fundamental in ascertaining crucial divergencies between forms of analysis, not the least because it dispels the muddled grasp of practice theory that predominates in organizational studies.

7.3. On systems of activity and work

The term ‘system’ is remarkably common but also remarkably vague considering the different ways it is understood. Without a greater familiarity with its meaning, it is a term that is as meaningless as that of ‘practice.’ As put above, we are aware of the idea that Organizations are systems in the sense that they constitute their own kind of entity. Such is not the only way one could treat systems, and there some traditions that manage to touch upon real scenes of actions while also regarding these as systems in a different sense. There is also a way of referring to systems in a practice theoretical manner.

250 I will not discuss the meta-theoretical dispositions of process philosophy and performativity in themselves. I would not even know where to begin to untangle these views that can be interpreted in such an encompassing manner that we risk losing track of substantial theoretical/analytical differences. To demonstrate why (and why not) our analysis can be jumbled together with either of these approaches, an extensive discussion about philosophical backgrounds (the domain where they happen to differ and the same philosophers are interpreted differently) would be needed, largely leading our effort here into a domain I do not have sufficient familiarity with to do justice.
Giddens (1984, p. 25) defined systems as the situated activities where structure (rules/resources) were implicated, approximating a definition of systems as the equivalent of practices. Such a use of the term ‘system’ is of little illustrative worth here and requires no further exposition. We will instead examine use of the term that diverges from that of practice. The traditions we will examine also provide a greater specificity of the analytical operations involved by treating activity in systems: socio-technical systems theory and activity theory.

7.3.1. On socio-technical systems and layered/tall views

Socio-technical systems is a theoretical orientation that sprung from attention to work and social effects of different technology (Trist and Bamforth, 1951). For its attention to the social and the material, it is still argued as relevant for such inquiry (e.g. Leonardi, 2012; Mutch, 2013). I will briefly cover this approach because it presents what one could deem a perspective that has engaged quite extensively with the question of activity and work, but with very different assumptions as to how. It is perhaps also, due to its legacy, perhaps far closer to the kind of structural/systemic reasoning that contemporary practice theory opposes.

Picturing work practice according to students of socio-technical systems, is to picture work as part of a system that makes up a ‘functioning whole’ (Trist, 1981, p. 9). Such a system is not composed of one kind of work practice but of multiple to be defined as system, and such a system is not only social but also technological. The idea of a system as a whole, conceived as both social and technical, can at first sight resemble our analysis of bundles. There are a couple of differences to be noted, however. A socio-technical system could be defined as a constellation of practices. That is, a system is ‘larger’ than a practice as it is composed of multiple work practices. Moreover, the study of a system does not entail a study of features of specific practice but rather a focus on the finding of variables regarding the variety of work, the roles of workers in a system, autonomy of workers, and the satisfaction of work. Since a system is larger than a practice, something like the organization of a practice is out of reach. This is, of course, not to state that features assumed to pertain to a system, e.g. work satisfaction, are not important or

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251 An exception to the use of the word ‘system’ to refer to practices is Giddens’ discussion of societal systems (1984, pp. 164-165).

252 It is interesting to find a neo-classic work on the study of organization such as that of Thompson ([1967]2008, pp. 51-52) to briefly acknowledge the work of Trist and Bamforth in his remark on technology and structure, although leaving the material aspects of technology aside. It has been a constant source of confusion to me how students of organization have been capable at all of regarding technology by ignoring the material dimensions thereof, especially in modernity.
interesting. Such features would, however, rather be seen as ‘brute facts’ of practice. Moving on, in such a system, the materiality of technology is analyzed to grasp how well it fits the social, to find a match that optimizes ‘output,’ whatever such output is (Trist, 1981, pp. 24-33). The practice analysis of bundling has not attempted to find such a fit. While the tracing of bundling engages with the interaction of the social and the technical, there is no “fit” but simply practices transpiring with and amid material arrangement. What a ‘fit’ would actually imply in the empirical illustration in Chapter 5 is not particularly clear and would probably depend on the privileging of a particular viewpoint of how work ought to be performed. Finally, a socio-technical system is conceived of as part of yet a larger system such as Organization, which in turn is defined as part of yet another system, such as an industry. Socio-technical systems are placed in the textures of environments, which are brought in analytically for a multilayered analysis (Emery and Trist, 1965).

What is evident is that the analysis of wholes, and layers of wholes, rapidly goes beyond the analysis of practices. The appeal of socio-technical systems has partly been its compatibility with a perception of social reality as structured in layers. This does not only result in a form of study that diverges on an ontological level with a practice analysis grounded in flat ontology (social reality as one level), but also by specific attention to what is grasped at. This is not to imply that real scenes of actions are not acknowledged by students of socio-technical systems, but that these are studied in order to speak of cohesive wholes of systems in layers and are subsequently abandoned to speak of other layers beyond instances of work.

I will take the opportunity to touch upon this particular aspect of socio-technical systems theory that extends to other theory. There is, I believe, something that socio-technical systems theory posits that is commonly seen across studies of activity of different kind: the idea of the micro/macro. The common view is that a study of activities and “practices” is the equivalent of the micro/macro. Such lines of thinking are present quite generally in the juxtaposition between practice and “something macro,” even among contemporary practice-oriented work (e.g. Smets et al., 2012).

In the studies of strategy-as-practice, a branch of organizational studies, Seidl and Whittington (2014) have claimed that the idea of tall ontologies, e.g. ontologies that see the social in levels (such as micro/macro), are an

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253 An example of this is how Mutch (2013) conceived of socio-technical systems and Bhaskar’s critical realism to be a good fit, and superior to Orlikowski’s (2007) rendition of sociomaterial practice (which generally lacks mention of structure in any sense as far as I understand it).

254 The descriptions of work practices in Trist and Bamforth (1951) are a rich and fascinating read concerning the practice of mining. It is the explanatory appeal to go beyond these, particularly in later work, that I refer to here.
alternative way to imagine practices. Although Seidl and Whittington make mention of flat ontologies as well, we encounter the idea that practice-oriented work is compatible with tall ontologies. Needless to say, this is not the way contemporary practice theory is understood here. But what does this mean? A tall ontological view begins from the point of view that there is something in the “macro” that conditions the “micro,” i.e. activity/practice. As ought to be clear, we reject such a stance by considering another analytical operation. Rather than beginning from the presupposition that what conditions practices is something distinct from them, we have engaged with showing how practices are organized by attending to their activities. However, we do not suggest that the organization of a practice has been found in complete isolation from any other practice. I have not stuck to a kind of isolationism, pretending that what we have covered exists in its own realm. Explanations that vaguely relate to something akin to ‘environment’ would for a practice analysis entail the tracing of chains of actions, in a zoomed-out fashion, with superficial accounts of practices that together form “larger phenomena,” never conceptualizing these larger phenomena as anything else than composed of real scenes of actions in practices. In this we find a modest kind of empirical inductionism. We cannot make claims about practices without an effort to bring them to light empirically to substantiate our findings.

The greater specificity we have given the term ‘context’ results also in a greater specificity in how we regard a notion such as that of ‘environment.’ Simply put, to refer to ‘environment’ in itself makes little sense. This does not imply that we cannot point to aspects from elsewhere. In Chapter 5, the practices examined were acknowledged as connected to wider phenomena (i.e. other practice-arrangement bundles). Although we did not do so in our analytical illustration, we could have traced further in time and space, but doing so would of course touch upon the degree of detail sought after in speaking about practices.

7.3.2. On activity theory

Incidentally, not all system approaches try to generalize or speak of layers of systems. An exception is activity theory, which often is mentioned as pertaining to the broadly defined category of “practice-based studies” (e.g. Miettinen et al., 2009; Blackler and Regan, 2009). In the context of organizational studies, activity theory has been brought forth in the study of organizational learning and to treat the topic of knowing in organizations (Blackler, 1995). Beyond this, activity theory, also referred to as cultural-historic activity theory, is an approach to examine work and technology that does not define subject matter in the manner students of socio-technical systems do. Still clinging to systems, activity theory suggests that one ought not to analyze institutions or individuals alone but rather as collective systems of action.
Activity theory, a tradition with its origin in Soviet psychology and Marxism, has been embedded into a contemporary Finnish interpretation from which most discussion of contemporary activity theory stems (Kuuti, 1996). According to the Finnish interpreter Engeström (1987), actions are better understood as instantiations of wider systems of collective activity. Whether actions are goal-directed or simply automatic operations, these are understandable only when seen in light of the background of entire activity systems (Engeström, 2000, pp. 961, 964). It is in this background of activity systems that Engeström (1987) places the practitioner, rules, instruments, a community, division of labor, and an object/outcome that serves as a communal end to constitute an ‘activity’ as a whole. Accordingly, an activity is conceived of as a systemic whole, and all elements are related to each other in this ‘whole’ (Kuuti, 1996). For activity theorists, the ‘activity system’ is a way of conceptualizing how object-oriented work can achieve its outcome along a multiplicity of tasks. This multiplicity is in turn ordered into a hierarchy of acts, from ‘smaller’ short term actions, which are established by prior planning operations, which all pertain to the larger system of activity (Kuuti, 1996).

Here there are a couple of similarities with our practice analysis such as rules, teleology, and hierarchies of activity. We have also conceived of activity as pertaining to a wider background, although we have referred to that background as practice or practice-arrangement bundle. This leads activity theorists and contemporary practice theorists to different ways of speaking of the background of activity in terms of what we conceive to be the worthwhile components to discuss. The elements that compose practice, such as the practice organizing, are not per se something comparable to the mention of subjects, community and division of labor. This does not imply that a discussion of these aspects is not relevant in a practice analysis. After all, a community and a division of labor was mentioned alongside the description of the practices in Chapter 5. Describing such aspects were not, however, seen as being the equivalent of capturing the ‘spirit of practice.’ Incidentally, the notion of any such ‘spirit’ is not found in activity theory.

Yet another difference is how an activity system mends actions and materiality together. Engeström (2000, p. 962) conceives of instruments as medical knowledge, questions, and even stethoscopes in his empirical illustration. This collapsing of knowledge and material entities into the same category makes no clear distinction between what socially is presupposed for a practice and the materiality that constitutes its performance. No clear analytical directedness is presented by activity theorists in terms of practical and general understandings or entities. One could regard these differences to be minor and perhaps primarily relate to how one categorizes and places

255 What is referred to here is the characteristic diagram/figure of Engeström (1987, p. 78).
aspects of practices in an analytical framework. In any case, one ought to be careful not to neglect how the treatment of forms of understandings, such as practical/general understandings, by necessity imply different interpretative endeavors, and that blurring these together essentially implies blurring aspects that might be difficult to formulate (e.g. practical understanding) with those that are not. If one sees concepts as sensitizing, as means to direct oneself to the empirical, a lack of distinction could also be argued to imply less attentiveness to appreciate specific dimensions for what they are.

If we examine the teleological dimension of both the practice analysis and activity theory, another interesting difference between the approaches is noticeable. Engeström (2000, p. 964) conceives of the object and outcome of activity as a larger end which multiple practitioners would conceive of as a communal end. In the achieving of this communal end, numerous kinds of actions could be undertaken by different subjects that belong to a larger community. Engeström’s own examples use the actions of nurses and doctors as they undertake their different actions driven by the same object/outcome: to heal patients. It is in these terms that activity theory comes closest to an analysis of Organization. Practice as site is not attended to. Possibly the whole complex at the setting in Chapter 5 would be an activity system, implying that an activity system is larger than a practice and approaches non-reified Organization in some manner. This has a possible consequence for the perception of ends, as activity theorists would distinguish one grand end, whereas a practice analysis would find multiple, smaller ends in different practices that are pursued in various combinations of tasks. More so, the ends of a practice analysis are not measured in terms of an achieved future state of affairs, i.e. an outcome. In activity theory, an object orients people who work in order to achieve an outcome. This is important for activity theorists who can then evaluate how an outcome is reached and see obstacles in the reaching of that outcome. In the practice analysis, I have not explicitly studied if the ends participants state motivates them are achieved. That caseworking entailed an end such as helping fellow team members, which was pursued as a project with its own tasks such as sharing work and so forth, was not implied by me to contribute to the outcome of the complex as a whole. Of course, it could contribute to measurable outcomes such as the processing of a mass number of case files. However, my point was never such measuring. I have also not focused on finding any obstacles in the way of reaching the communal end and outcome. These are not minor divergences between a practice analysis and activity theory but speak of a quite distinct way of ordering what people do, what is assumed to motivate actions, and what is seen as mattering in analysis. Anything like a communal end is in our analysis

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256 The communal end would perhaps be the idea or belief of helping clients, something regarded as general understandings among other beliefs/ideas/concerns.
what we have referred to as coordination across practices. Essentially then, we can grasp an activity system to be an analysis of a complex in coordination in our terms and ascertaining whether ends are met (and why they are not).

In some sense, the activity theoretical diagram subtracts from the imaginable richness of social life. This might not be the case for the whole tradition as such but is probably intended by Engeström to deal with fewer analytical concepts. It is perhaps thus that one would find a lack of general understandings or affectivity in the frame of analysis of activity theory, which were elements that enriched our analysis. Their lack in Engeström’s frame of analysis could be due to it befitting analyses of outcome(object)-oriented activity. In other words, for such a kind of analysis there is little interest in imagining the organization of practice as a whole. However, such reduction results in looking away from the general understandings and affects that one could find in practices of work that largely explain why practitioners, due to different sites of understanding, can understand a specific artifact and way of working so differently.257

The most significant difference between an analysis of activity systems and an analysis of practices is that the former has the specific intention of intervening to ‘improve’ work, to minimize the disturbances that hinder the reaching of a desired outcome.258 Such a normative dimension is inherently lacking in the philosophical background of practice theory and in my analysis.259 This final point marks that activity theorists are not solely interested in the analysis of action. Reflecting Karl Marx’s 11th thesis on Feuerbach, one ought to not only understand but change the world.260 The fit between activity and intervention research, in changing practices for the sake of ‘something,’ is noteworthy. In their attempt to achieve this ‘something,’

257 One could wonder what a reduced analytical grasp implies for practices beyond work. In Chapter 5, I primarily focused on work practices, but I could also have included other kinds of social practices (e.g. greetings, taking coffee breaks, eating lunch). I could have gone as far as to study something far removed from work. In my reading, it is perhaps doubtful if the same could be said of activity theory, especially if one judges it according to its components (division of labor, object/outcome etc.).

258 It is in regard to this embedded normative aim of Engeström’s version of activity theory that it can be understood as far from a radical reading of Marx (Avis, 2007). It holds no revolutionary potential at all, presenting rather the means to conserve states of affairs by easing tensions.

259 The exception here would be Wittgenstein’s therapeutic approach to philosophy and Wittgensteinian quietism, which arguably hold some normative implication for thinkers (cf. McDowell, 2009). One could, however, question how central these kinds of views are in practice theory, despite practice theorists drawing from Wittgensteinian insights. In my understanding, the interesting intuition of Wittgenstein for social sciences is to see life by attending to the circumstances of doings/sayings in life.

260 The thesis in question is the famous statement that: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” (Marx, [1845]1999, p. 574, emphasis in the original).
parts of social life might presumably not be worth bringing in, despite their role and place in everyday life (e.g. general understandings and affectivity). Here there is a risk to be found, and perhaps one that relates to system theoretical reasoning that underlies activity theory and makes it resemble traditional organizational theory: a desire to reach a unified whole that works in harmony. Although such a desire can never practically be satisfied, it remains there as part of the project to change the world. As with the examining of ‘fit,’ one is also left with the question of what a tension-free “system” would have been in Chapter 5. Even if the ‘views’ would have worked as initially intended, caseworkers still opposed them on grounds that related to how their practices were understood. Would we want to take sides to see what needs to be evened out for the sake of reaching an object, whatever that object is? A practice analysis such as that undertaken here notably lacks the need to answer such a question.

7.4. On ethnomethodology

Comparing with two system approaches (socio-technical systems and activity theory), an analysis of practice is notably more fragmented and attuned to the particular. The domain of social action as praxis (the whole of human action) is not only conceived of differently but found in smaller units of analysis, i.e. practices. Our practice analysis is not alone in its rejection of hypostatized wholes. There are forms of analyses of the real scenes of action that are more similar to our practice analysis, and arguably even more attentive to the ‘small’ and particular. One such approach is ethnomethodology.

Ethnomethodology is a sociological tradition focused on the study of practical action and practical reasoning. For its focus on the practical, Nicolini (2012) also defines ethnomethodology as practice theory. In my view, such a claim is only possible with a looser definition of practice theory. My idea in Chapter 1 was to make clear that such expansive definition would cover over substantial conceptual differences. I will discuss these here.

The name ‘ethnomethodology’ reflects the approach as “folk investigations of the principles or procedures of practice” (Lynch, 2001, p. 132). These principles or procedures, also referred to as ‘ethno-methods,’ amount to the shared methods used by practitioners in the continuous production of society. The underlying idea behind ethnomethodology is attentiveness to:

“[…] society’s locally, endogenously produced, naturally organized, reflexively accountable, ongoing, practical achievement, being everywhere, always, only, exactly and entirely, members’ work, with no time out, and with no possibility of evasion, hiding out, passing, postponement, or buy-outs.” – Garfinkel (1991, p. 11)
Briefly put, in Garfinkel’s view we are actively engaging in the construction of our society. From such a view, examining this continuous accomplishment is believed to reveal the day-to-day rational procedures of relevance for this endeavor. This active accomplishment and its particular meaning (its indexicality) is only understood in the scene of action as it happens. For ethnomethodology, the examining of ‘real scenes of action’ is an empirically driven effort that avoids the imposing of scientific rationality upon actors’ everyday doings (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967, pp. 278-282), and is strictly engaged with the methods and background understandings guiding actors.

From such presuppositions, the ethnomethodologist directs attention to the issue of how events and structure are actually produced. In the case of something like ‘order’, the ethnomethodologist would not engage with order as a form of entity but rather with examination of the continuous, situated, local accomplishment of order (Lynch, 2001). Bittner’s rejection of reified, taken-for-granted Organization in favor of organizing makes perfect sense from this ethnomethodological stance. Rather than the systems and entities we have discussed above, ethnomethodology perceives organizing as a potential topic of study (among other sociological ones) and envisions such subject matter as something continuously, actively, locally accomplished through the (ethno)methods practitioners use to accomplish the social.

In Chapter 2, I have attempted to present what might at first seem to be a very similar social ontology, a practice theoretical view of a plenum of unfolding practices (and arrangements) constituting the social. In such a site ontology, the meaning of affairs depends on the site, i.e. practice, where it happens, further alluding to some similarity. By stressing practices and bundling, we also attempt to grasp the social as unfolding, not focusing on static understandings of structure or systemic ‘wholes.’ Our stance can, however, be distinguished from the attentiveness of studies of real-life scenes in the ethnomethodological vein by noting that we have not engaged in capturing ethno-methods of work nor used the same kind of analytical frame. An ethnomethodological desire to capture the shared methods used by the people of real-life scenes, for their practical accomplishments, mutual orientation and sense-making, differs from the practice analysis here and leads ethnomethodologists to other kinds of analytical efforts (cf. Rawls, 2008, p. 702).

A typical analytical device for ethnomethodologists to study how things make sense and grasp the methods used by people is conversation analysis. Conversation analysis is the detailed study of the contents of conversation, through which intelligibility is conceived as manifested actively. Although I also treat intelligibility, I have done so by referring to the practices in which practitioners engage with one another, and not by referring to accomplishment of intelligibility by breaking down conversation through detailed analysis of sentences. For ethnomethodology, to actually look at the continuous
accomplishment of sociality is a sort of inductive, empirically driven endeavor that could make detailed analyses of the unfolding character of a single conversation.

Conceptually, we engage in the embedding milieu that enables a certain intelligibility and normativity and not on questions of “how – just how – contingencies [at hand] are rendered as recognizable objects using shared methods.” (Rawls, 2008, p. 704). I have tried to place activity in line with the embedding milieu according to the organization of such a milieu, similar in a sense to the endeavor of activity theorists, whereas an ethnomethodologist attends to the very specific doings that supposedly manifest the practical accomplishment in the making and the accomplishment of the social world locally.261 This is not to imply that ethnomethodologists do not think they attend to contextual traits, as they do acknowledge the situatedness of use of methods by people (Lynch, 2001). What ‘context’ is understood to mean, however, is not necessarily such that heed our discussion of different kinds of context (cf. Section 2.3.2). Ethnomethodology is not site ontology and perceives of ‘context’ in terms of situation or sequence of expressions/doings.

Ethnomethodology and site ontology differ in the analytical effort they suggest: the former engages with ethno-methods, while the later points to the pre-given but open-ended site of practice. This distinction is significant. Ethnomethodologist Rawls in her critique of site ontology interprets it as something which stresses routines and habits as abstractions and generalizations, “creating standardized ‘units’ of some kind that hold constant across time, person or place” (2008, p. 705). Incidentally, we have treated practices as units of some form, but not as constant or static, as the three-fold of bundling shows, nor have we treated them as “routines.”262 There is also no claim that caseworking is the same throughout settings in Chapter 5; to acknowledge the particularities of the performances of practice was necessary as soon as a more detailed view was sought after. In any case, a practice analysis analyses practice as primary unit of analysis, not the individual’s or group’s use of methods. This does not perhaps pay equal attention to the ‘working up’ of context (cf. Holstein and Gubrium, 2004), but engages from the perspective of centering the analysis on a context that has a past. In other words, behavior was assumed to be part of a context, i.e. practice, that existed prior to participants’ participation and which participants related to and spoke

261 It is interesting to note the degree of detail some ethnomethodologists look for. Rawls (2008) states that Garfinkel ([1948]2006) found even ethnographic studies and phenomenology to have a limited attention to detail.

262 Rawls’ choice to stress routines and habits when she refers to site ontology fits Reckwitz’s account of practice better as it defines practice as routinized (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). The choice to stress routines also approximates the work of Giddens rather than that of Schatzki.
of. It was through this less than minute attention that the interlinking of practices was examined.

Another important aspect to have in mind is what is intended with the word ‘practice.’ For ethnomethodologists, practices are methods such as ‘ad hocing’ or the ‘etcetera clause’ that can figure in conversations or in the coding of a researcher. As exemplified by Garfinkel, ‘ad hocing’ refers to what a coder who supposedly follows strict procedure needs to do to see a piece of text as relating to a case of interest, which betrays the strict following of procedure and instead relies on inference of some sort to achieve coding (Garfinkel, 1967, pp. 20-22). The ‘etcetera clause’ is what people in conversation actively draw upon as conversations unfold, to let new statements and pieces of information guide our making sense of previous statements in a conversation (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 74). For us, it is not these very specific definitions of methods that are of interest. A conversation held among caseworkers as they plan casework would reasonably be seen as a scene to examine something like the ‘etcetera clause,’ but also a scene that is understood in light of the organized set of activities that is caseworking (and its project of planning). What ethnomethodologists call practices are not practices in our sense but maneuvers that might be performed in actual practices such as in the practice of research (coding and ‘ad hocing’) or in interactions in practices writ large (conversation and ‘etcetera clause’). Admittedly, such maneuvers are noticed by detailed attention not catered to in a practice analysis, although a practice theorist could argue that the role of such maneuvers is perhaps only truly understood with the greater ‘context’ of practice in mind. There is probably much more that could be said regarding divergences between practice theory and ethnomethodology and their underlying assumptions, and a more extensive discussion would probably derail the current discussion.

7.4.1. On how situated activity and practice diverge

Next, I will discuss work that draws from ethnomethodological thinking to study ‘situated activity.’ I will discuss two relevant mentions in this fold: Suchman (2007) and Orr (1996). Beginning with Suchman’s work that was

263 One could see the presuppositions of ethnomethodology as individualist. An illustrative example of this is Rawls’ (2008, p. 707) discussion of Garfinkel’s notion of group and game: “[…:] Garfinkel approaches the question of what constitutes a group as a situated production through working acts. He proposes that situated actors, engaged in constructing a sequential order of meaning, constitute a group only when, and only for as long as, the sequential character of the interaction in which they are currently engaged collectively requires of them a mutual commitment to constitutive properties of the situation. The group, as a set of interpretive procedures, is, as Garfinkel says, ‘there before the actor gets there and there after they leave like a standing crap game.’” The emphasis on group rather than practice means that Garfinkel considers the relations in groups to constitute the intelligibility that we have considered practices to provide.
first published in her dissertation from 1984, I will put aside the focus on the design of computer systems, and primarily engage with her rendition of situated activity. Suchman’s discussion of situated action engaged with the purpose of critiquing the idea that actors primarily draw from plans in their activities (2007, p. 69). Instead, Suchman argues that activity needs to be understood as situated activity, and that plans are resources for our situated performances. If we examine her understanding of situated activity, drawn from Garfinkel (1967), Suchman (2007, pp. 26-27) states that actions are primarily situated and that situated actions are essentially ad hoc. Even planned actions are situated when realized, and circumstances planned for can never fully be anticipated and are continuously changing around us. What is intended by stressing the situatedness of activity is that such things as predispositions or conventional rules outside of activity does not determine doing. Instead, it is local interactions contingent on the circumstances of the actor that matter. The definition of circumstance, which is given great import, is that circumstances are both social and material (Suchman, 2007, pp. 52, 70). These forms of circumstances and the ‘embodied skill’ of actors that they draw upon in situated activity (Suchman, 2007, p. 72), resemble something akin to practice-arrangement bundles. The analysis of bundling was an analysis of various phases of socio-technical change that implied a change in social/material circumstances for the practitioners at the SSIA, and the practices entailed some form of ‘embodied skill’ that was referred to as practical understanding. Moreover, a disregard for conventional rules outside of activity could also be found in our interest in rules-in-practice.

There are notable divergences between my approach and Suchman’s, largely due to the differences between an ethnomethodological approach and a practice theoretical approach. While Suchman claims to not erase context or discard the organization of situated action (2007, pp. 16, 177), her analysis of situated action is very much in line with ethnomethodological aspirations to capture intelligibility in a very detailed manner, largely eschewing the analysis of the contextual traits where intelligibility takes place. This is indicative of how even those influenced by ethnomethodology tend to evoke the notion of context or circumstance differently from a practice analysis. Instead of attempting to speak about the organization of practices, Suchman undertakes a fascinating form of conversation analysis of the communication between users of a machine and an expert help system (2007, Ch. 9), engaging only with detailed examination of some interactions with technology. If we compare with what was presented in Chapter 5, a study that would try to mimic Suchman’s approach would be one that would entail a close examination of how people would create ‘views,’ reboot computers to make them function and so on as core parts of the study itself. Skepticism towards plans and conventional rules are mentioned by Suchman for the sake of regarding the use and understanding of technology in a narrow and specific sense. A practice analysis in our sense operates with a different purpose in mind: the embedded
world is what one wants to understand and define more closely to at all grasp the role of technology in light of the practice as a whole.

Attention to situated action is also present in the ethnomethodology-influenced work of Julian Orr. Trained as an anthropologist, and drawing from Garfinkel and Bittner (Orr, 2006), Orr did an ethnography focused on the work of technicians. In this ethnography, he draws from Suchman’s understanding of situated activity in order to stress the necessity to look at the situation of work (Orr, 1996, pp. 10-11). By doing so in his empirical work, Orr points at the insufficiency of work manuals that dictate the work studied (as a kind of plan of work). Instead, the importance of mutual collaboration is demonstrated in his account, favoring the tacit/collaborative dimensions of the situated activity that relate to the circumstances of work.

Unlike Suchman’s more narrow focus on human-computer interaction, Orr accounts for multiple kinds of activities undertaken by technicians, such as work and socializing activities, and their relation to customers, machines, and other practitioners of the same firm. Orr accounts for the territories of work, the way teams of technicians assist each other, how the telling of stories assists the diagnosing of breakdowns in machines, the way technicians among themselves have different roles, and how such roles come to play in different work-related activities. By being attentive to what technicians do, Orr finds a plethora of aspects to mention. Unlike Suchman, Orr does provide a rich, empirical account of the embedded world of situated activity. Nonetheless, such an account is never rendered into a theoretical analysis of that world itself that goes beyond empirical descriptions (as is expected of anthropological work). That is to state that Orr, by attending to situated action, accounts for what people do but does not engage in a task to place activities into a frame of analysis from which they are systematically analyzed as practices in our sense. Orr is closer to the practice-oriented studies that do not engage with theorizing practices to analyze them in accordance with any particular practice theoretical frame (in the sense that practice theory has been presented in Chapter 2). While the lack of theoretical frame need not imply that description goes awry, it is worthwhile to point out that Orr’s work primarily focuses on the practice of technicians. The point is never, for Orr, to address multiple practices in superficial terms in order to zoom out and speak of the interlinking of practices.

Regarding situated activity, and the ethnomethodological approach, what can be noted are thus similarities with the undertaken practice analysis here in the character of the empirical phenomena covered as far as these entail the real scenes of action, and similarities in regard to the central importance of intelligibility, activity, and even materiality. The tasks of practices in a practice analysis are also situated and occur in light of circumstance. It is, however, not solely their being in situ that has been of interest but rather the idea that tasks occur within the range of acceptable action, and that tasks and projects constitute and are part of a larger whole: practice. For us, a shift in
circumstance (and situation), as ‘event of change,’ was the means to access practices through the use of sensitizing concepts. For students of situated activity, one would preferably assume ‘context’ or ‘circumstance’ and then disregard the task of analyzing practices in terms of practice-organizing principles, forms of sociality in complexes of practices and the like. The ‘spirit’ of practice, as stressed by practice theorists, is not sought after. Hence, it is expected that the interpretative work ought to diverge considerably.

The consequences of the neglect to analyze practices without regard to their organization in the ethnomethodological vein can be seen in two ways. As stated above, while Suchman argues that she has not ‘erased context,’ her neglect to further theorize situated activity in terms of the contextual traits more specifically nonetheless verges on erasing it analytically. Of course, to speak in this way is to assume a particular understanding of what the analysis of context would imply. As we presented in Chapter 2, practices are presupposed for inference and the sites through which interaction is possible. An ethnomethodologist would not agree with the idea of a site of understanding proposed in this manner, as Rawls argues against such notion. Indeed, one could suppose that from the view of Suchman close attention to a specific interaction with technology is attending to the context. If one is interested in ethnomethodology, detailed and fine-grained interaction is what an analyst would be directed to deal with an analysis of context. The same is not necessarily true for a practice analysis. From a practice theoretical view, the efforts of the ethnomethodologically inclined are myopic. A practice analysis can entail the possibility to trace practices quite broadly, by zooming out to make overviews of interlinked practices. In fact, such tracing is necessary to have a chance of grasping practices. Extending beyond the small to explore complexes of practices is, however, something that lies further away from those who emphasize situated activity alone.

Secondly, the will to trace ‘situated activity’ can imply that even a rich, empirical account of a multiplicity of activities, such as Orr’s (1996), never goes to the extent to speak of practices in a fully theoretically informed manner. To simply trace situated action involves no obvious analytical ambition beyond that typical of descriptive work ethnographies. One could argue that there is plenty that needs to be simply described and mapped empirically. Descriptive ethnographic work has a major role to play in organizational studies as organizational theorists’ understanding of work might be outdated or faulty (e.g. Barley, 1996). However, it is in part understandable why students of organization find Orr’s work lacking in terms of lifting anything beyond empirical description of a sole kind of work and failing to treat ‘Organization’ (cf. Orr, 2006; Rawls, 2008, p. 702). While the empirical findings suggest the worth of appreciating alternate social interaction as means to share experiences, in the telling of stories, description alone with little theoretical ambition does not suffice for all social investigators.
7.5. On actor-network theory

In much discussion of what organizing can be understood to be, one common point of reference is the treatment of organization as an assemblage of agencies, and the tracing of associations that make organizations a reality, following the view of actor-network theory (e.g. Czarniawska, 2004; Czarniawska and Hernes, 2005). When regarding the students of organization (and organizing in particular), the influence of actor-network theory (hereafter referred to as ANT) is an undeniable and far more established point of departure than contemporary practice theory. That is, Weick’s dismantling of organization (or those above for that matter) to regard organizing is not perhaps the most common approach in contemporary studies of organization. This is especially the case when it comes to the attending to both organizing and technology (along the mention of the work of Orlikowski); a little-surprising fact considering ANT’s origin in studies of science and technology. Whenever students of organization have been seeking to lift the material, the mention of ANT is expected. Hence, we have a more established view of attending to activity in organizations to acknowledge the organizing than our own effort here. This will be our next point of discussion.

It is in many ways reasonable to discuss the approach of ANT to further demonstrate the distinctiveness of our effort here. Such a discussion will not primarily engage with the question of ANT’s popularity but rather its many radical claims that have been compared with that of practice theory. Superficially, ANT has somethings in common with contemporary practice theory and has been mobilized in the same mention when trying to bring attention to activity and materiality, particularly so as an example of performative theory.265

Much can be said about the points of convergence in each strand of theory, and we will try to not go more in-depth than needed for our purposes in this final analysis. To begin, the points of convergence of each strand of theory touch upon two crucial aspects of each. Both ANT and practice theory regard materiality (and the non-human) and both are so-called flat ontologies. The treatment of materiality is a shared concern which implies that both ANT and practice theory assumes that social analysis needs to include more than purely ‘social stuff’ to be reasonable. In sharing this view, ANT and practice theory similarly draw the lines of the subject matter of social inquiry differently than

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264 This is particularly the case in Scandinavia. The influence of actor-network theory in Scandinavian organizational studies also stretches to the concept of ‘translation’ in the Scandinavian neo-institutional theory (Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2009).

265 This is most notably the case when regarding the seminal paper of Reckwitz (2002), which happens to mention ANT as a practice theory. It is also in my own personal experience and interaction with fellow students of practice common that some believe ANT and practice theory to be the same kind of enterprise.
classical approaches. This ‘drawing the lines’ stretches also to both views being flat ontologies, as ANT and practice theory similarly reject the idea of a structured reality in layers, with no need to take systems or reified Organization seriously.

While they might share these concerns, we will here point out in what senses Latour, the main proponent of ANT (along Michel Callon and John Law), and Schatzki, the main proponent of contemporary practice theory, speak of different things and how even the points of convergence are touched upon differently. These differences are not to be seen as trivial but rather guide the social analyst in different directions.

7.5.1. Agential humanism vs post-humanism

ANT is prominently known as a post-humanist approach to social science, with its background in the empirical studies of the work of science and technology. Classical work that established the perspective known as ANT (e.g. Callon, 1986; Law, 1986) is marked by attentiveness not only to human actors but also to non-human ones. Doing so is bound by the idea to not regard social science as a science that only analyzes a social realm in itself, but also brings in what makes social ties durable and plays a role in what we seemingly regard as social interaction: the non-human. The post-humanist title is largely due to ANT’s fervent critique of modern humanism (e.g. Latour, 1993, p. 138). What is implied with the non-human here will reflect our previous discussion of artifacts, organisms, and things of nature (in Chapter 2).

Bringing back our example of the craftsman, his tools, and the outcome of the craft, both ANT and practice theory agree on acknowledging the human and the non-human in such a case. However, ANT goes further than practice theory in the acknowledgement of materiality by bestowing the non-human with the status of actor (or ‘actant’ by drawing from semiotics). According to ANT, non-humans, such as tools, are not mere intermediaries for the doing of the human but are mediators that in the event of action similarly act alongside the human. The craftsman and the tools of the craft are acting together in such a sense. Here, we stumble upon the idea of non-human agency; a characteristic normally bestowed exclusively to humans.

While we are willing to state that materiality matters, ANT goes further. The notion of the human subject and the non-human object are dismantled in favor of the acknowledging of hybrids (or of quasi-subject and quasi-objects, cf. Latour, 1993, p. 51). This is primarily achieved by an interest in translation (and associations), which can be defined as a process:

“[...] during which the identity of actors, the possibility of interaction, and the margins of manoeuvre are negotiated and delimited” – Callon (1986, p. 203)

Quite generally, what is acknowledged is the possibility of transformation in various ways, affecting actors (including and involving the non-human). In
practice theory, the non-human ‘doing’ and prefiguring of human activity are acknowledged dimensions, although Schatzki does not go as far as ANT. Essentially, this might pertain to the neo-Heideggerian element of practice theory, through which the acknowledging of the artifacts that our being is tied to is essentially one that begins from the contemplation of human being. In terms of practice theory, practices are always bundled with materiality but, simultaneously, practices are the horizon of intelligibility for human actors, the arenas for human intentionality to manifest itself. The non-human is not capable of such intentionality and intelligibility, and neither have we equated the artifacts in Chapter 5 with the caseworkers or administrator. Latour, who is critical of the branch of thought that Heidegger’s work pertains to, phenomenology (e.g. Latour, 2004; 2005, pp. 61, 217n, 227n), is not one we could expect to be inclined to agree with neo-Heideggerian arguments. It is here that we find the most notable philosophical and ontological incompatibilities between ANT and practice theory (cf. SS, Ch. 4).268 For our purposes here, what is interesting is that much of the discussion regarding the human agent (social constitution of expressive body) is relatively absent in ANT’s “framework.”269 If anything, the intentionality and purposefulness of human actors are far from unique in any case and human actors are not, according to Latour (2005, p. 244), the only interpretative agents. We can see at least two crucial differences between ANT and site ontology/practice theory: first, the uniqueness of human agency is challenged by ANT while it is guarded in some sense by site ontology; secondly, the idea of practice as a horizon of human intelligibility, intentionality and as a site where the social happens is absent in ANT. What we came into contact with in Sections 2.1-2.3 is not acknowledged by this alternate view. Briefly put, ANT does not acknowledge the sites that are central in practice theory, implying also that our bundles of practices and material arrangement are nowhere to be seen, leaving us only with an equal, symmetric playfield of entities in arrangement (with no practices in our sense). ANT advocates the capture of associations and connections between actors and only this, acknowledging even the non-human as actor in these connections (e.g. Latour, 1986).

266 I define ‘neo-Heideggerian’ here as thinking that draws from the early work of Heidegger (BT) rather than his later work. Moreover, my discussion on humanism relates more to Schatzki’s thinking than Heidegger’s own (e.g. [1947]2008).

267 Some of the criticism stretches beyond simply Heidegger’s phenomenology to his anti-modernist tendencies (Heidegger, [1954]1977). The latter critique of Latour (e.g. 1993, pp. 65-67) is in my view far more interesting than Latour’s rejection of phenomenological thinking.

268 Incidentally, beyond Latour’s tension with Heidegger’s work there is also a sort of underhanded critique of Wittgenstein (2004, p. 244). I wager that Latour would not only object to Schatzki’s work but also to the work Schatzki draws from.

269 The quotation marks around the word “framework” are not to disparage Latour but to project his general skepticism towards frames applied to explain (cf. Latour, 2005).
7.5.2. Among flat ontologies

The interest in associations defines ANT and its flat ontology. Specifically, ANT is only interested in associations as there is nothing else that is of relevance but keeping the landscape flat, abstaining from any deviation that brings in what Latour regards as context or structures and the like. If there is anything such as social laws, Latour (2005, p. 246) places these as:

“[...] not behind the scene, above our heads and before the action, but after the action, below the participants and smack in the foreground.”

In Latour’s work (1993, p. 121), there is no need of any other ‘Ariadne’s thread’ than that of associations traced in a grid of networks. In Schatzki’s work, the mention of flat ontology shares in the distrust for structured realities but acknowledges the context of practice and its organization in the very least. The social is a nexus of practices that might form constellations in size and scale but not in distinct levels but only in one: that of practice. In our analysis, the SSIA was understood as a large complex, and the setting illustrated in Sections 5.2-5.3 was one smaller complex that was traced in more detail. Although we could acknowledge that certain practices (and practitioners) were capable of directing coordination (and starting the implementation of technology), these were not on a different level. Our flat world is one of contexts, but not entirely in the sense that Latour envisions it. Indeed, much of what Latour disparages as contexts seems to relate more to the notions of systems or ‘deep structures,’ ideas that we have also avoided.

Of course, to be capable of discussing structures we need first define what we mean with these. According to Latour, structure would be only sensible to speak of insofar as one regards it as the equivalent of the association across actors, and of actor-networks (which each actor in turn is because of its associations and interferences, cf. Latour, 2005, p. 202). ANT’s notion that there is nothing before the action seems to imply that we are to engage with the social de novo, like Garfinkel (who incidentally is one of Latour’s heroes).

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270 An ‘Ariadne’s thread’ is the solving of a problem through exhaustive and structured means. For ANT, the tracing of associations in a network is such a means of solving a problem, effectively retying the ‘Gordian knot’ that social scientists have cut, unaware of the problems they have caused. In the context of social science, the Gordian knot was the question of how to deal with both the social and nature, which was solved by the cutting of these in two separate dimensions (cf. Latour, 1993, p. 3).

271 There is much that could be said about this. Essentially, Latour’s disparagement of what he refers to as sociologists of the social and of context would probably also target the work of Schatzki’s ideas (and thus also our analysis in Chapter 5). It is remarkable, however, the way the word context is used and targeted by Latour, primarily as something in which the actor is embedded in but made of magical stuff called the social that seems to function for the purpose of making, what Latour refers to as ‘social explanations’ that do seem to go beyond the account of participants. In my reading, Latour’s attack on the notion of context is largely for the purpose of establishing how a flat ontology could be seen as reasonable (e.g. Latour, 2005, pp. 167, 170; Latour, 1993, p. 21).
One only follows the traces after activity, not regarding any form of structure before the action as such unless it amounts to capturable interference (and activity of its own kind). For Schatzki, and our own analysis, structure is in part the equivalent of the organization of practice. In our view, an action did not just happen *de novo* but was organized in some sense. Activity was not simply ‘produced’ out of the blue but inferred as organized and as part of practice. To acknowledge this aspect, we simultaneously acknowledged that caseworking, unit managing, and administrating that we saw were also there before. Making this point might seem quite trivial and a perhaps tad bit contradictory. In Chapter 3, it was proposed that any seeing and speaking about practices ought to engage with what is seen in practice, e.g. with rules-in-practice, so that one would only regard organizing as that seen in the very moment. If a rule was followed in the past but not heeded any longer, it would have been a suspect rule to consider any longer. However, our interest is not without an eye on the past of practices, as was seen in Chapter 5, and then we do care about what happened before the action. It was because there was organization before what later came to be that certain rules were heeded, certain acts were acceptable, certain understandings were held and so on. Even though the organization of practice is unfolding so as to indicate that the before need not be what is always organizing, a practice analysis is nonetheless directed towards an understanding that certain dimensions of practices constitute its organization, which indicates that associations alone are not sufficient to understand social life.

7.5.3. On relying on practices in order to infer

We have here then established some key aspects that diverge, in the very least in terms of theory and ontological presuppositions. In what sense is this relevant for our venture here? Needless to say, by now, we have simply not engaged in the capture of connections between actors (as Latour would have it). We have from the outset focused on the interpretation of action as organized sets of activity (see Chapter 3). Engaging from the effort of taking site ontological assumptions seriously, how could we not take practices seriously as way of inferring upon behavior? In Chapter 5, we did not make connections between the humans and artifacts as simply actors (and did not equate human and non-human to achieve symmetry), but saw the human actors as participating in specific practices that were bundled with materiality, and from which the human actors themselves made accounts of by stating how aspects mattered to them in their practice. To make a map of connections between the caseworker, the artifacts, and the ‘views’ without regard to the normativized ends and projects that caseworkers pursued, the rules they established as those to be followed, and the subsequent bundling between practice and artifacts, would have taken away a considerable chunk of description of what happened. At the very least, describing an action as
undertaken by caseworkers by necessity involved an inference made upon such action being part of caseworking. When Latour (1986, p. 268) regards the notion of translation by emphasizing that every actor is involved in transformation, he does so by acknowledging that actors do so “according to their different projects”; what we want to state is that such projects are understandable in light of practice. Practitioners in Chapter 5 regarded projects in light of whether they were acceptable performances of their practice.

One could retort to our argument above that we have, from the outset, decided to interpret the behavior we see as pertaining to practices as context. Doing so would sit uneasy with the kind of agnosticism and skepticism that ANT asks for as it refuses to acknowledge contexts around actors in interactions, and to ignore the dotted line to what came before the action (e.g. Latour, 2005, p. 166). If caseworkers would state that their adherence to rules is because it is simply what they do in their practice, ANT would have us trace the associations that make this rule-following a possibility to dispel practice as context. We do not need to interrogate our practitioners to make the point about inference-making that is crucial here. We stated earlier that the moving of a piece of wood on a wooden board would naturally be inferred to be a move in a board game, such as chess, insofar as we have familiarity with such a game. Although we could attempt to dismantle the game of chess to ‘simply see connections and associations’ between actors (the pieces of wood, the board, the players), we would nonetheless acknowledge this as a dismantling of a certain practice (in this case: chess) to primarily discern how its entities are arranged. Heeding ANT, somehow, we would be forced to act as if we do not see practices. Needless to say, I am skeptical of how an analysis of arrangement could avoid an inference-making drawing upon seeing of practices and how then we could truly be anti-contextualist as Latour wishes it. If anything, we risk ‘hiding’ the context we depend upon in our inference-making so that we might see practices but not speak about these in our accounts.

From the above, it might seem strange how it is possible to confuse practice theory with ANT, as the latter goes so far in its nominalism to become anti-contextualist, asking us to not see and speak about practices as we understand them here but simply to regard the tracing of action (in the unorganized sense per our definition). In a sense, we could see ANT as more radical in its

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272 In the work of Law (1986), it is hard not to regard the way the text engages with the description of actors and their interlinking with some regard for navigation and astronomy as scientific practice. That is to say that one would rely on these practices as means to describe what actors were doing.

273 A similar argument is expressed by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009, p. 33), albeit ours is more specifically related to practices as that through which we infer.
opposition to traditional organizational theory than practice theory as it not only asks us to get rid of systems and organizational wholes but also the context of activity that actors engage in on a daily basis while also somehow demoting the status of human actors and their agency as well in favor of symmetry with the non-human (e.g. Latour, 1993, p. 129).

The idea of practices as important to understand the social is in part also lacking in forms of appropriation of ANT. One of these is Czarniawska’s (2004) appropriation of ANT that proposes ‘action nets’ as an alternative methodological idea to grasp organizing rather than static Organization. Such a kind of effort entails the provision of action nets as ‘empty concepts’ to be filled with content, to minimize that which is taken for granted prior to analysis. At the same time, Czarniawska acknowledges that action nets have some form of durée, such that while Organization remains a reified myth one can still see it being taken for granted in organizing. To exemplify this, Czarniawska takes some insights from neo-institutional theory and proposes that connections of actions in nets correspond to sets of institutions that function as conventions (2004, p. 780). These sets of institutions rest in what is vaguely referred to as ‘social order,’ a notion not given further clarification to address how actions are attributed intentions or meaning. Are actions and social order part of practices in our sense, or are actions solely connected with others without practices as sites of understanding? In terms of how one addresses conventions as normativity, such a point is important from the view of practice theory. One could be willing to state that Czarniawska indeed refers to practices, and even interlinked ones, as she states:

“One becomes ‘a publisher’ because one publishes books, but, for books to be published, there must be somebody writing them; a ‘writer’ is somebody who writes books, not someone who has a business card with this word printed on it.” – Czarniawska (2004, p. 781)

However, it is also so that Czarniawska (and her colleagues) primarily see that a person becomes associated with whatever they do in light of their action being linked to other action. These links of actions are mentioned with no mention of the sites where such actions come to be what they are (cf. Lindberg and Czarniawska, 2006). Inasmuch as one would be willing to see practices in action nets anyways, these are not analyzed in terms of how the ‘spirit of practices’ has been treated as unit of analysis in a practice analysis. Most

274 The divergence between practice theory and actor-network theory can be made even more noticeable by examining the way that Latour (2005, p. 165) regards the work of Bourdieu and Giddens in the treatment of structure and action. Latour makes sure to even mention less of an interest in phenomena such as ‘social practice’ (cf. 2005, p. 3).
275 Czarniawska cites the work of Harré (1982) to make the association between social order and action in quite the vague manner, hinting for it to be the equivalent of ‘context.’ Incidentally, I judge this specific piece of Harré’s work to provide the means to discuss action in an individualist manner (cf. 1982, pp. 15, 17).
importantly then, the theoretical understanding of anything like conventions is not explicitly stated to be practice-bound as the normativity of specific practices in our sense.

One must point out that in the notion of action nets, there is little theoretical aspiration, no analytical ambitions and no ontological elements of social reality (Czarniawska, 2004, pp. 780, 783-784). Ignoring the possibility of interpreting ANT as a separate theoretical understanding of the social, and instead seeing ANT as a method (cf. Sayes, 2014), we can still not help but arrive at different places in the end. A practice analysis can simply not be equated with an analysis of associations or actions connected together, as each asks us to make different analytical motions and engage in distinct tasks: one to speak of associations, and the other to speak about practices and their organization.

7.6. Concluding remarks

We have here primarily engaged with the perspectives mentioned to look for differences. By doing so, we have touched upon perspectives that clearly diverge from our own, such as traditional organizational theory, and perspectives that are far closer to us. I hope to have proven by now that there are significant differences between the approaches examined here, particularly in regard to the interpretative work they demand. I am aware that a critical reader could question to what degree these differences matter. To a considerable extent, I believe such a question is difficult to answer without discussing one’s research agenda. What is perhaps lost in this comparison is that theories lead to the asking of particular kinds of questions about the social and are not only ‘grids’ placed upon empirical material.

Having stated this, let us summarize our effort here. Among the perspectives we have touched upon, we can more readily see distinctions in terms of status they bestow on activity and materiality, how Organization is regarded, and the direction of the analysis. To illustrate this, I present a simplified overview of similarities and differences with a practice analysis in Table 2 below.

276 What is meant with ANT as a method rather than a theory is that its proponents at times state a disdain for discussions of ontology and social theory. Instead, ANT is seen as a negative, empty grid used as a means to trace rather than to explain (e.g. Latour, 2005, pp. 131, 221).

277 An approach absent here warrants some mention. I have not acknowledged so-called post-humanist practice theory (e.g. Gherardi, 2017). From my point of view, such kinds of theory do not posit practices as organized settings but rather as the emergence of human/non-human agency, in a field called the ‘mangle of practice’ (Pickering, 1993) or as inseparable through intra-action (Barad, 2003). Much of the idea of activity as organized is not present in the guise I have treated it, and so the analytical challenges diverge as far as I see.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Traditional org. analysis</em></td>
<td>Attention to coordination, distribution of labor, roles, rules and hierarchy.</td>
<td>Lacks attention to the specific practices that constitute Organization, the material basis of such practices, and fails to attend to where/how organizational features are actually made manifest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Weickian sensemaking</em></td>
<td>Conceives of Organization as myth and attends to the understanding of practitioners.</td>
<td>Pays no analytical heed to the practical doing with artifacts as basis for understanding and action across practices. Imagines doing in immaterial fashion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Socio-technical systems</em></td>
<td>Attends to activity and materiality, and how these are interwoven.</td>
<td>Extends beyond the level of practices, covering over the organization found in multiple practices for the sake of finding ‘fits’ in systemic wholes/layers of wholes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Activity theory</em></td>
<td>Attends to activity and materiality, never stretching beyond these, and finds a contextual backdrop in activity itself.</td>
<td>Scales down the organization of activity and imagines actions as part of systems that stretch beyond practices. A normative approach for the sake of relieving systemic tension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ethno-methodology/Situated activity</em></td>
<td>Conceives of Organization as myth and focuses on actual doing to address intelligibility. Asks to ‘see’ what is actually done.</td>
<td>Lacks analytical means to assess practices beyond the small maneuvers of practitioners. Does not treat the organization of practices nor their interlinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Actor-network theory</em></td>
<td>Conceives of Organization as myth, including materiality in accounts of social phenomena. Asks to ‘see’ what actually is done, imagining the social as flat.</td>
<td>Ignores contextual sensitivities and lacks analytical focus on the organization of action. Equates the non-human with the human.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. A simplified table of similarities/differences with a practice analysis*
8. Conclusion

Having reached the end, we have sufficient material to go on to give a final assessment of the merits of using practice theory. Before doing so, we will go through a brief summary of what has been undertaken to reach this point. Thereafter, we will discuss the benefits, shortcomings and the worth of practice theory in organizational inquiry, also covering some examples of kinds of inquiries that could stand to gain from practice analyses. Having clarified what we have achieved and what it is worth, we will then cover the contributions of this thesis and assess what remains to be done.

8.1. On what has been accomplished

Having started by acknowledging the vagueness of the notion of practice and practice theory, this thesis settled for a specific point of departure to assess the question of what practice theory is in the practice of research. In clarifying what practice theory was for our purposes, we stretched as far as to the philosophical roots to discuss the presuppositions of practice theory. In doing so, we have made acquaintance with the central insights of contemporary practice theory and have crafted a synthesized summary of Theodore Schatzki’s work to form a cohesive set of assumptions and concepts that defined our understanding.

The product of this effort was not solely a summary and review of Schatzki’s work but also one that was crafted with the intent of a specific use thereof: organizational inquiry. Embedded in such a synthesis was then implicitly the meaning of practice theory as a heuristic device through which social analysis engages with certain sensitizing concepts to study practices. Essentially, the meaning of practice theory in practice was taken to be the task of seeing practices. Such a task is, in the practice of research, one closely knit to the task of speaking about practices. Hence, we have gone through the motions of what both seeing and speaking about practices entails in the interpretation and making of an account. The speaking about practices has been presented by discussing how one could possibly see and speak about the organization of practices, the way practices bundle with materiality, and the way practice-arrangement bundles constitute what commonly is taken to be Organization. In our discussion of these aspects, what has also been posed are the inherent limits of any kind of speaking about practices. Because of our interest in the ‘spirit of practice’ understood with attention to the practice-organizing principles, we also came upon the topic of the very possibility to see practices as depending on the circumstances and situations one would expect the practice to be performed in. A means to have more to see was
argued to be the examination of ‘events of change,’ such as that of socio-
technical change here.

To demonstrate what a speaking about practices might imply
methodologically, discussions regarding what is required to understand
practices and the appropriate means for the study of practices have been
presented along an analytical illustration. It is from the analytical illustration
that we see what the task of seeing and speaking about practices can lead to,
and that we get to see practice theory in practice. With greater specificity, we
have later turned to the very practice of using practice theory to discuss its
challenges, the way it treats the question of change, and in what sense it is
different from other approaches. Essentially, we have taken practice theory
from its philosophical background, to the question of its meaning in research,
to the actual task of research and analysis.

By doing all this, we can now finally answer the question that we set off to
answer: “What are the analytical consequences of the use of contemporary
practice theory?” We will attempt to answer this next.

8.2. On the analytical consequences

Needless to say, the matters of practice are the point of departure of a practice
analysis. This directedness to practice, due to practice theoretical definition
thereof, includes some dimensions that are not standard dimensions of
alternate treatments of social life and real scenes of action. We have, among
other things, acknowledged pursued ends, affects, and the capabilities of
participants; structured actions as tasks and projects; included artifacts; and
have paid attention to ideas that practitioners hold in light of their practice.
While some of these dimensions are conjoined with interpretative work, they
also amount to the acknowledging of characteristics of actors in a study,
acknowledging our practitioners as participants in their practices with
attention to their activity and understanding of practice. Some elements here
could tread forth in other forms of accounts not so bound by a practice
theoretical vocabulary, although the directedness here ensures an inclusion of
a certain breadth of dimension in what is discussed. One could imagine an
account of the events in Chapter 5 only focusing on ‘functions’ and ‘needs’ of
a systemic whole at the cost of accounting for actors’ reasons for their
behavior, emotions, understanding, and their very practice. It is not obvious
that all forms of analysis capture the same dimensions.

A major part of the interpretative work entails envisioning how rules,
know-how, and the like pertain to practices in the structuring of an analysis.
Hence, dimensions such as these are not simply acknowledged but rather
engaged with to understand practices as organized in various ways, connecting
the practice-organizing principles to specific practices. Rather than construing
something like organizational culture embedded in an entire whole, a practice
analysis engages with multiple practices in which organization is found. Furthermore, because practices as organized sets of actions are interlinked with other sets, i.e. other practices, we can also treat the notion of Organization from a different angle than traditional organizational theory. Organization is not a reified entity; it is simply practices interlinked and understood through forms of sociality. A form of organization exists then in two senses, within practices and between them.

As has been presented here, a practice analysis stands to gain from embracing ‘events of change’ in order to disclose practices. Hence, a practice analysis is attuned to change. Due to our focus on practices and their material arrangement, the mention of change was never one that first defined a static, immaterial organizational whole, but rather one that traced the bundling of the practices and arrangements that compose Organization. While we come to terms with the fact that we might not have many predictive capabilities, we instead find that accepting the unfolding and open-ended character of practices implies that we were ready to trace change across not only one practice but also interlinked practices. In this we find that we are not only acknowledging Organization in a processual sense, as organizing, but also have an interest in the nature of change conjoined with an analytical direction. The question of how change occurs is answered here by the attending to bundling/unbundling/re-organization, allowing us to draw the lines of the shifting manner that practices and materiality are bundled, while also being attentive to how change in one bundle is conjoined with the fate of others. As such, the issue is never only if Organization changes, but more specifically the pinpointing of how specific practice-arrangement bundles that constitute Organization happen to change.

It is possible to see further consequences in terms of the challenges one faces when committed to the use of practice theory. A practice analysis entails some interpretative challenges as well as some integral uncertainty that in part stems from the analytical interest in that which cannot be defined in definite, operationalizable terms. A couple of questions could be raised to scrutinize an account of practices, such as the issue of demarcating practices and the drawing upon of accounts of practitioners. Issues extend also to a concern we have given less attention; it is perhaps so that the breadth of a practice analysis very well can be its limitation. We have brought in a certain range of dimensions to not forgo reason, wants, affects, and normativity, which all happen to be challenging to depict. Differently put, perhaps a practice analysis places demands on the analyst to see and speak about a great deal of complex issues. It might not only be so that the uncertainty of the task of seeing and speaking is the major concern of an analyst but rather the possibility that the analyst is asked to do too much. In our illustration, we have presented the possibility to perform a less detailed analysis of practices as well as a more detailed one. While the possibility to use a less detailed form of analysis is
there, choosing such an approach implies seeing and speaking less about practices.

Some concerns with the use practice theory relate also to the meaning bestowed upon it as interpretative; a form of theory that diverges from what others might deem useful. Students of the social interested in making predictions and finding universal laws of the social would not find the means to do so by seeing and speaking about practices as we have defined such a task here. It is also not only the positivist who might object to our meaning of theory. We have defined the meaning of practice theory for the task of seeing and speaking that does not correspond to the demands to ‘change the world.’ As such, the effort here is less suitable for normative studies. One could, of course, tweak a practice analysis to be undertaken for a normative end but such tweaking implies some work that would have to be undertaken by whoever deems such an end suitable.

Even those within the fold of interpretative inquiry, with less normative intentions, could object to what a practice analysis entails. One could, as does Law (2004), argue that theoretical understanding and methods can produce different accounts of reality. Seeing practices implies a lack of seeing common concerns of interest among students of organization. As an example, we have dispelled the importance of formal structure in the classical sense. This implies that the issue of de-coupled formal structure and activity is not a conundrum of major relevance. By taking social practices seriously we simultaneously do not take other concerns seriously. This can be problematic depending on what one perceives to be worthwhile parts of social analysis. Furthermore, one could think that certain issues always ought to be included to form fair accounts of the social and Organization. In the analytical illustration, in part perhaps to the setting studied and the degree of detail chosen, some aspects are neglected, e.g. measures of output performance, politics/power relations, questions of class/gender and so on. To what extent these need to be accounted for most definitely rests upon the interests of a social investigator, and it is obviously the interest and purpose of inquiry that determine to what extent a practice analysis serves as analytical tool for the study at hand. Having said this, there are arguments that might motivate the undertaking of a practice analysis as well. We will treat this topic below.

8.2.1. Arguments for a practice analysis

With some awareness of what a practice analysis implies in practice, a question that lingers is why one would want to engage with the undertaking

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278 As we have defined the task here, we give little means for the kind of normative studies that are viewed positively by both the field of management studies as well as that of critical studies.
of a practice analysis at all. *Why should people care to use practice theory in practice?* Such a question has been answered in many ways among scholars of practice (e.g. Reckwitz, 2002; Gherardi, 2012; Nicolini, 2012; Nicolini and Monteiro, 2017), and so to touch upon it here is to treat a question already answered previously. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to discuss this topic after a comparison between approaches has been provided, as it perhaps further illustrates the worth of practice theory for the purpose of organizational inquiry. We have also in the beginning of this thesis already engaged with a narrow definition of practice in order to assess it, and as such our answer will in part diverge from more previous ones.

Concerns about an interpretative definition of theory or the difficulty in predicting states of affairs is presumably less pronounced by those who hold to a similar definition of theory and similar expectation from its use. This does not indicate that all those similarly inclined would find a practice analysis worthwhile. One major reason is that one could disregard some of the elements brought forth here on the grounds that one does not want to subscribe to the particular ontological view of practice theory. If so, then the capture of practice might seem a partly meaningless exercise as there might not be any context of behavior to grasp through a practice analysis and no ‘spirit’ of practice available. Nonetheless, even with great skepticism towards the need for attending to philosophical thought for the sake of social inquiry we could imagine the practice analysis to be a grid to place material into, asking of us to include a certain breadth of dimensions that might be of interest. In such a sense, a practice analysis still holds some merit as yet another tool for the sake of organizational analysis.

The worth of a practice analysis can be seen differently depending on whether one would be willing to imagine it as a ‘grid’ or ‘method’ or whether one subscribes to the presuppositions of practice theory. For a committed student of practice theory who is convinced by the ontological presuppositions of practice theory, the answer to whether an analysis that builds upon such theory is worthwhile is perhaps obvious. A certain research agenda could arguably be seen as conjoined to practice theoretical intuitions after all, making an interest in analyzing practices understandable. Having said that, one could still wonder if the entire range of concepts or a certain degree of detail is sought after so as to warrant undertaking a practice analysis as has been presented here. The undertaking of a practice analysis needs not be an effort that contends with a full exposition of practice theoretical concepts as has been done here. My initial critique towards past efforts that only partly used a range of concepts was related to the few efforts to make the interpretative work explicit; the point was not that one would have to reproduce the effort here to truly undertake a practice analysis.

In any case, not all would necessarily choose a particular theoretical approach on the basis of it being conceptually superior in some sense, but rather by a pragmatic purpose guiding a particular inquiry. To what extent
social investigators truly chose among those analytical tools available with the criteria of 'usefulness' in mind rather than because one’s environment simply knows a select few approaches or because of one’s background and familiarity with some theories is something that could be discussed. Nonetheless, we can have the idea of a pragmatic investigator in mind and discuss what kind of study could entail a form of practice analysis for such an investigator.

Among forms of organizational inquiry, we have seen that a practice analysis differs in what it accentuates and how it does so. Unlike traditional organizational theory, a practice analysis does not conceive of organizational wholes as that to be studied in terms of structures, ideal type principles or organizational functions. Like system approaches, a milieu is envisioned but the treatment of such a milieu is distinct in its form by the rejection of a system approach that goes beyond practice to juxtapose a whole or micro/macro levels. While the treatment of a complex of practice-arrangement bundles could resemble a system, the point of departure in a practice analysis is not the mapping of how various activities contribute to a systemic whole, particularly not by going beyond practices. Rather, any kind of inquiry interested in examining how things really are done in practice, e.g. what people do across practices in an Organization, with what artifacts and why they do so, could stand to gain from a practice analysis. This is particularly the case when the purpose lies in seeing features that are deemed to pertain to Organization but it is not clear to what extent these are seen in specific practices. As such, the matters of Organization are examined in a broad sense without covering over imaginable particularities. Unlike system approaches, which call for scaling away aspects of the social for the sake of imagining cohesive wholes, a practice analysis calls for the opposite.

Why one would be interested in having an eye on the particularities of social life has to do with uncertainty regarding the supposed coordination and cohesion imaginable in any specific setting. If one expects to find an array of divergencies and differences across settings that compose Organization or one is not confident in the ability to demarcate whatever is deemed Organization without risking losing track of important aspects, perhaps a practice analysis is more favorable. Cases of the latter kind could be the interaction between Organizations (e.g. strategic alliances between firms or cross-sector cooperation), whereby one expects the boundaries to blur in any case.

This line of critique towards traditional organizational theory and system approaches could be found among those approaches that are interested in organizing rather than Organization. Among these alternatives, to which a practice analysis pertains, a practice analysis is not bound by the aim to study the small, and only this, as is the case for ethnomethodological approaches. Detailed accounts of particular occurrences or of particular activities in themselves are not the equivalent of a practice analysis. If one is interested in the study of managing as practice to understand its organization as practice, rather than specific interactions or moments that make managing intelligible,
a practice analysis is a favorable alternative. Similarly, if one is interested in
a wider awareness of what kinds of artifacts matter in a practice, a practice
analysis would be preferable to the detailed study of interaction with a single
artifact.

I would wager, also, that detailed study of the small does not have the
means to address Organization beyond its rejection. To simply treat
organizing as ubiquitous happening everywhere, only seen when examined
very closely, gives less means to extend beyond the local and small for the
sake of a wider kind of organizational inquiry. A practice analysis entertains
the idea of being able to treat Organization in an ironic sense that invites for
the possibility of making overviews of practices. It is exactly the possibility
to go from detailed examination to overviews that make practice analyses
more flexible than the micro-investigation of ethnomethodology. On this
point, a practice analysis might resemble the tracing of associations. There is,
however, a major difference between practice analyses and actor-network
theoretical approaches. For studies who want to hold onto the idea of ‘context’
but not treat it as something large and ominous such as ‘environment’ or
‘system,’ a practice analysis is more favorable than the complete rejection of
contextual explanations that the nominalism of ANT seeks. More than simply
following actors and their associations, a practice analysis entails the
possibility to address how practices such as managing or accounting and so
on are organized in a certain manner to make associations and social relations
possible between actors and entities. Particularly, the possibility to zoom in to
make a detailed analysis of practice-organization gives the means to do so.
The sort of ignoring of what managing and accounting are as practices that an
approach such as ANT suggests is perhaps a too radical step for those who
might be particularly interested in the role of rules, understandings, and arrays
of ends that a practice theoretical approach lifts forth as relevant. It is perhaps
difficult to touch upon this point without wading into discussions about site
ontology vs. post-human individualism, and which position that is at all
justified in social investigation. Nonetheless, the very point is that ANT is
more radical in its opposition to Organization than what a practice analysis
needs to be. This is perhaps particularly obvious in regard to entities such as
artifacts and the like, which ANT suggests ought to be accounted for with little
distinction from the human. Whether a specific study needs to entail the effort
to seek symmetry and dismantle the notion of human agency is something that
finally is up to the investigator. A practice analysis is a far more modest
approach to the question of the non-human.

While admittedly the choice to value practice and the materiality it bundles
with, as well as the inclusion of teleoaffection and so forth, is dependent on
the aims and purposes of students of organization, the illustration of a way of
speaking of practices here in its own way provides a form of response to the
harsh criticism organizational studies has faced as a discipline in regard to its
tendency to ignore work (Orr, 2006, p. 1818) and contemporary practical
considerations of organizing (Barley and Kunda, 2001; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011), as well its limited theoretical attention to technology (e.g. Orlikowski, 2007, 2010).

A practice analysis might not solely serve as a means to amend what is lacking in established literature. One could also consider such analysis, and its broad approach to what is argued to be relevant in social life, as an invitation to a form of guided empirical inductionism. If one, before a study, does not know what a certain practice entails, why and how it is performed, and whether affects, ideas of work, materiality and the like might matter, one has the means here to structure an analysis to catch what treads forth. The guided empirical inductionism here is also such that one would have to show what rules, what understandings, and so on are present in actual practices rather than making overly sweeping claims about topics such as coordination or commonalities held. While arguably other kinds of analysis similarly provide means to guide analysis, e.g. through ‘empty concepts’ Czarniawska (2004), arguably the direction is less loose and more theoretically driven in a practice analysis. It is in part this guided aspect that provides a means to abide the urge of organizational analysis that heavily empirical efforts have been deemed to not satisfy (Orr, 1996, 2006). While one could imagine alternate forms of practice analyses, such as those which invoke the work of Bourdieu or Giddens, a central aspect here is the very treatment of practice itself and not simply the theoretical role of practice. Past thinking on practices does not in itself present means to analyze practices and their organizations. Moreover, a practice analysis is fitting for the study of change, understood here by attending to what treads forth as point of departure for an inquiry. In doing so, one is attentive to activities and the way they differ, not taking these as strange exceptions that are antithetical to the reality of organizing (e.g. Orlikowski, 1996; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). If one is interested in the study of change, and seeks a practice-bound approach, a practice analysis is a viable option.

Much of what is proposed here indicates that a practice analysis is not a tool to solve every kind of problem but rather one more fitting to a certain kind of research interest. Admittedly, the fit between a supposed research concern or problem and the analytical tool used is more problematic in research than what our discussion here presents. The metaphor of analysis as ‘grid’ or ‘method’ suggests perhaps that a researcher chooses among interpretative lenses to use these exclusively and exhaustively. This need not be the case. I see, as an example, little reason one could not combine a practice analysis with ethnomethodological forms of analyses (e.g. conversation analysis). While one could make the case that the theoretical underpinnings might not comply to such a combination, the actual analytical work itself needs perhaps not imply anything more than an ironic stance towards parts of the underpinnings. What is perhaps more problematic in this discussion, however, is that we miss that theories not only function as simple ‘grids’ to study phenomena. Theories present different understandings of the social, with their own definitions of the
CONTRIBUTIONS

This thesis provides an assessment of contemporary practice theory for the purpose of analysis, and by doing so contributes to several areas. 

First, the effort here specifically contributes to an understanding of the practice theory that underlies effort, by assessing it as analytical tool and interpretative lens. In having done so, questions of a fitting methodology have been examined and many of those concepts that have hitherto been left unassessed for empirical use have been treated. As such, many of Schatzki’s ideas have been further developed for the sake of empirical use. This thesis then presents a way to assess what supposedly ominous concepts entail analytically, and how central claims of practice theory can actually inform analysis. In presenting contemporary practice theory in this sense, this thesis has re-imagined such theory, imagining practice theory outside of its standard meta-theoretical discourse. Considering the influence of Schatzki’s work in practice theoretical research, this thesis then has implications for work that draws from such work as well as the debates concerning its use.

Secondly, the thesis contributes to practice theoretical research in a broad sense. Aspects treated here reach into alternate practice theoretical understandings (e.g. Reckwitz, 2002, 2008; Shove et al., 2012) that in part share the interpretative challenges treated here. While we have been keen on noting the dissimilarities across practice theories, there are some considerable commonalities in regard to such tasks as grasping forms of understandings as tied to practices and the like. Discussions here concerning ways of tracing elements of practice and ways of demarcating practices, as well as strategies for regarding artifacts and the interlinking between practices, inform alternate theories too. Although other views contend with differently conceptualized elements of practice, and define materiality differently and so on, there are points of convergence both in terms of the epistemological and particularly the methodological assessment regarding what it means to see and speak about practices. Considering the generally few discussions on practice theoretical
research and its undertaking, the thesis contributes to a widely neglected area: practice methodology. As previously stated, practice theorists quite generally have been motivated by an effort to present interesting ideas but leave such ideas unassessed for use. If central work such as that of Schatzki’s can be demonstrated to be used, this bodes well for simpler renditions of practice theory. It is then in a wider sense that this thesis provides an assessment of the possibility to undertake practice theoretical research rather than assessing practice theories as theories alone.

Third, the thesis provides insights that can be useful for empirical practice-oriented work. This stretches into the general call to attend to practice in organizational studies, such as that found in inquiries of technology, knowledge and specific kinds of activity, e.g. strategy-as-practice, and so forth. Although the meaning of practice might diverge considerably, particularly in regard to whether it is theoretically understood or simply an empirical phenomenon (e.g. Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011), much of the methodological discussions in this thesis are of relevance. There is little reason to assume that some of the empirical strategies, the kind of directedness towards the empirical, and discussions here might not suit those with less theoretically motivated agendas of inquiry or with an eclectic attitude towards theory. Our task here relates to the very practice of studying practice, with the possibility of overlaps with other ways of speaking about practices.

Fourth, the thesis contributes to an understanding of contextual sensitivities in organizational inquiry, and as such presents an alternate rendition of organizational topics ranging from roles to technological artifacts. The increased sensitivity to matters of practices and their organization gives a far more specific notion of ‘context’ than past work using alternate practice theory (e.g. Orlikowski, 2000) or eclectic work that covers over the different ways practices can be understood to constitute a form of context (e.g. Nicolini and Monteiro, 2017). This contribution rests upon a presentation of a site ontological view of Organization, and how such a view can be used. A common expression is to state that things “depend on the context” with a very vague idea of what context is supposed to refer to. Rather than a radical, post-humanist tearing apart of contextual thinking as ANT suggests, this thesis presents a different way of thinking about it. Rather than simply eschewing discussions about ways one can imagine order or find contexts in social life, the thesis presents two means to do so: to find organization in practices and to discuss how practice-arrangement bundles are interlinked. To regard organization in such a sense, the thinking provides a different and more specific way of assessing the very idea of ‘placing’ and ‘seeing’ phenomena and features of the organizational in their context.

Fifth, and related to the arguments for choosing to undertake a practice analysis, the thesis presents means to direct organizational inquiry into directions that it arguably has failed to assess thus far. This includes both the topic of materiality, a concern that cannot be removed from any interest in
practices, and the issue of forgoing a grasp of the actual activity and work of Organizations. To not only seek the ‘brute facts’ of the practices that constitute Organization but to also trace the ‘spirit of practice,’ a practice analysis cannot help but see the work that makes organizational behemoths possible. What is presented here joins extant debates concerning the flaws of organizational inquiry but also presents a means to correct such flaws that does not simply advocate the undertaking of more descriptive ethnographies. When Barley (1996) suggested further examination of work and activities in Organizations, this was also to re-direct theorizing about Organization. A means to re-direct organizational studies is provided by practice theoretical research as a whole – a claim most students of practice would agree with – and this thesis contributes to the general stream of thinking that strives for such a re-direction or re-conceptualization.

Sixth, a means of combining processual and practice theoretical thinking has been presented in the use of ‘events of change.’ An insight derived in this thesis is the means in which such events assist in the uncovering of practices. Because of this, the thesis cannot help but engage with processual thinking and in part presents some means to assess the intersection between processes and practices. This is particularly clear in the presentation of the analysis of bundling as a three-folded process, which is a moderately processual approach that engages with the question of change with a certain structure in mind. Considering the prevalence of so-called process thinking and practice theory, this thesis presents a means to find a fruitful methodological affinity between these.

Seventh, the thesis also presents some empirical insights. The narratives presented highlight the range of expressions of change that even simpler forms of technology can have when imposed in settings where one would expect strict obedience such as public administration. Despite the aim to alter tasks of a mundane sort, revolving work distribution and the accessing of work, a variety of topics and issues are raised covering concerns of autonomy, the (in)compatibilities of and between artifacts, perceptions of resistance as just, and so on. In a modest way, the thesis contributes to literature on technological implementation in work settings in which some of these themes might be familiar. Most notably, the case hints at the range of effects that the effort of modeling what could be understood as trivial aspects of a work practice through technological means can lead to, not only altering the projects undertaken in a targeted work practice (e.g. possibilities to plan work and work in teams) but also those of interlinked practices. A common aspect of the call to attend to materiality has often been the introduction of novel, extravagant forms of technology that are assumed to have significant effects (e.g. Orlikowski, 2007). As presented here, there was no need for extravagant forms of technologies to explore aspects of practices treading forth nor to make the case for the importance of attending to materiality in practices in Organizations.
And eight, the thesis presents a comparison of forms of analysis pursued in organizational inquiry. Doing so was necessary to present the actual worth and merit of practice theory in use in the sense of examining what it could bestow that other approaches could and could not. This thesis then contributes to an understanding of the dissimilarities between theories and forms of analysis that stretches beyond a consideration of conceptual incompatibilities alone. An added benefit in providing a comparison is that the thesis also targets the muddled, blurred understanding of practice theory that often happens to cover over essential theoretical and analytical dimensions. In doing so, a clearer view of the analytical consequences is presented here that helps organize the analytical toolkit of students of organization and gives some form of awareness of the relative worth and potential purposes of their tools. This stretches also beyond organizational inquiry alone, helping to give students of practice a greater appreciation of how their research orientation differs from alternate ones.

8.4. On what remains to be done

There are a couple of limitations that point to further possibilities of research. To begin, we could perhaps discuss the possibility of further empirical work. I have here primarily engaged with the effort of showing a practice analysis in response to some of the criticism facing contemporary practice theory (e.g. Gherardi, 2015; Nicolini, 2012, p. 180) with the idea of treating both the theory and its use in transparent manner. While one could imagine an effort that largely eschews the kind of theoretical discussion presented here, and simply provides extensive empirical work to show some of the insights presented here in implicit fashion, such an alternative means to assess practice theory would have entailed the understating of the interpretative work and the jump from ontology to analysis. Instead, a kind of middle path has been taken here, as some empirical material has been used to accomplish my illustration of the analysis. However, since the empirical material was not a central concern in itself, one could pose that the material here is lacking in terms of the amount of material, the approach utilized to gather said material, and in the shape and purpose of the collection of material. A consequence of the choice to walk this middle path is that one could deem the empirical aspect here to be limited. Further dialogue between theory and empirical material is possible to extend what has been done here, and perhaps also to show alternate merits.

It is also significant that the aim to illustrate certain concepts has been steered into aspects relating to socio-technical change among interrelated practices whereas one could imagine other orientations could direct a practice analysis quite differently. Imaginable alternatives would have been different levels of detail sought after or alternative ‘events of change’ (e.g.
Organizational mergers/acquisitions, economic/political crises etc.). Such alternative directions would presumably entail a different reasoning for choice of appropriate concepts to discuss and other empirical orientation. One could state that we have perhaps here only partially tackled the question of practice theory in practice, and that this is only a modest first step towards its assessment. Of course, the question of its use as practice analysis ought not simply be taken for granted but explored in terms of what it provides if it is deemed to be of any worth quite generally. One possible venue for such exploration would be the examination of the kinds of concerns that seemingly fit the moderate processual approach, the materialism, and the contextual sensitivity of a practice analysis, such as forms of organizing that are not yet institutionalized and where use of artifacts is presumed to alter the range of possibilities across practices. In other words, if further explorations of the methodology of practice theoretical research are to be undertaken, they would do best to engage with topics that potentially fit research agendas that stand to gain from the use of practice theory.

Beyond the topic of further empirical exploration one could also point out an aspect concerning the theoretical frame that was engaged with in this thesis. My intent to primarily utilize one kind of theoretical source as point of departure has some implications. In the empirical examination, some aspects are brought up which are not extensively touched upon although they could seem relevant. One concept that comes to mind is ‘power.’ The way coordination has been captured in the sense of discussing that certain practices were organized in such and such a way makes it easy to invoke such a notion. Practices have been envisioned as organized in a manner that allowed for the performances of another practice to affect them. Because of this, one could assume that certain practitioners, in light of their practice, held the power that made coordination even possible. We have, however, been sparse with invoking such a notion in our account of coordinated events. The case is perhaps that power is too alluring as an ‘occult quality’ (Latour, 1986), and draws forth a conflicting myriad of connotations. For some, power is an essence that is there before the act, bringing the mind to questions of those who have powers and are obeyed and those who do not have it and are resisted. For others (such as Latour), power is the performances of transformation writ large. One could, as does Watson (2017), think that any account that does not account for power is lacking if it wants to inform on social processes in a meaningful manner (not the very least for intellectual reasons). If one is inclined to find power of interest, it would be necessary to go into alternate theory such as that of Giddens (1979, 1984), Foucault (e.g. 1979) or ANT (e.g. Law, 1986; Latour, 1986), particularly to determine whether a contemporary practice analysis would be preferable from an established understanding of power (or not) and how it could contribute to the understanding of such a notion.
Yet another concept is that of ‘learning.’ In Chapter 5, the case of view administrators and how they learned to work with ‘views’ brings such a concept to mind. Our treatment of learning reflects on how practical understanding of a practice came to alter over time. Whether such treatment is sufficient and not more could be said is arguable. While it has not been tended to in depth in order to avoid diluting the analytical illustration, more could be said. There are some practice theoretical arguments that have not been attended to here (cf. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Schatzki, 2017d) as well as alternative thinking on the acquisition of skill (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1984). Hence, there is a possibility of expanding what a seeing and speaking about practices might contain by venturing outside of our selected practice theoretical vocabulary.

Rather than discussing the expansion of vocabulary, one could also argue for the possibility of reducing the seeing and speaking about practices to make them less convoluted. Such a different kind of effort needs to determine the purpose of one’s reduction and address what one loses and gains through an effort to simplify. Not the least, such a discussion is imperative to ensure that one does not forgo the general theoretical insights that made scholars turn to practice to begin with. A less convoluted way of speaking about practices need not necessarily compromise on what practices are understood to be but rather provide even further means to assess these in a wider sense. Such an effort would be a different one than that undertaken here, but one that stands to gain from what has been explored here.

On several occasions we have touched upon the everyday seeing and speaking about practices as a point of comparison. While we have set upon ourselves a kind of standard and direction so as to guide our performance of the task of seeing and speaking about practice, we are aware of the possibility of doing so in a less constrained manner if not attempting to uphold an academic standard. In the same manner that we could imagine the use of the word theory in everyday life, among non-academics, to denote folk understanding and explanations, we could imagine a folk seeing and speaking about practice. It would be a mistake not to acknowledge some form of family resemblance between the folk task and our more directed/constrained one and see an opportunity here.

At the risk of being naïve, I believe and hope there might be a possibility of mutual intelligibility across these two versions of practices. Hence, it might be possible that our academically convoluted speaking about practices could be made intelligible with some modification in the language in order to cross such a boundary of intelligibility. If this were to happen, the social analysis of practices could go beyond the purposes of academic research, tearing down the conceptions of theory and practice as discrete realms where the former is for the purpose for a select group who contemplates. One could perhaps imagine a modest form of ‘public sociology’ for non-academic audiences (Burawoy, 2005). Why I see a potential benefit in a reduced practice analysis
of sorts is that I believe the possibility of providing anything like reflexivity to practitioners or producing accounts that might be of relevance to the non-academic (e.g. Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011) is perhaps more likely when the point of departure is that which we all participate in, see, and speak about: practices. While we could convince someone that we live in ‘systems’ or are structured by ‘discourses,’ such notions are – I wager – further away from common sense than practices are (even if these are defined as we have here).

One could of course retort here that if one seeks to simply speak in simpler terms, one would perhaps not engage with practice theory at all but simply avoid theoretical reasoning altogether, and especially disregard the philosophical heritage. In light of such a position, what I believe to be imperative is to ensure that one is not only simply talking about what people do or that one solely engages with the ‘brute facts’ of practice. Otherwise one risks providing minimal insights to practitioners who already know what they do, or at least are convinced they do. Rather, it is exactly to treat more than the ‘brute facts’ alone that I regard as favorable so that it would be possible to speak of the ‘spirit’ and organization of practice in a more accessible manner. If possible, any speaking about bundling as three-folded, teleaffective structures and the like could simply provide a sense of direction for seeing/speaking.

What could this mean for practitioners? Beyond means to simply reflect on one’s own practice (Geiger, 2009), I believe that if we generally cared enough to see the practices of others, knowing that our speaking about these is uncertain in some sense, perhaps one could imagine a humbler attitude towards the idea of telling others how it really is and why it is so. In the very least, one could perhaps be more attuned to what certain work entails in organizational settings (cf. Barley, 1996). As such, a task to see and speak about practices can be a way to assess what one knows about practices. Furthermore, the possibility for non-academic practitioners to structure an analysis implies that the dialogue between theory and empirical material can turn to one between fellow practitioners (among academics and non-academics). A common perception is that the academic ought to bear the burden of interpretative work, but perhaps the possibility to structure a speaking about practices could entail a sharing of this burden in conversations, interviews and so on.

What is modestly proposed here is a different way to imagine the potential worth of practice theory. As I see it, there are further ways to explore its use that involve more than simply holding onto abstract reasoning alone. As long as one sees less of the need to evoke practice theory in a detached manner, bringing in jargon with little regard to what it means in use and analysis, some kind of progress has been made. How any of my suggestions are to be accomplished is largely up to those who have been inspired to explore the use of practice theory and are willing to pick up the baton.
Appendix

Letters A, B, C etc. are used to differentiate among those present in each setting. Interactions 5-7, 16 and 18 were not audio-recorded (see p. 114).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Implem. group</td>
<td>09 Oct. 2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interview (phone)</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>24 Nov. 2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Coordinator &amp; 2 consultants</td>
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<td>03 Jun. 2015</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>Group &amp; Activity Support unit</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Coordinator &amp; consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23 Sep. 2015</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>Group &amp; Health Insurance unit</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Meeting/Interview</td>
<td>Group &amp; IT technician</td>
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<tr>
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<td>27 Apr. 2015 –</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 May 2015</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Caseworker B</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Meeting/Interview</td>
<td>2 Caseworkers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Meeting/Interview</td>
<td>5 Caseworkers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Caseworker C</td>
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<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Unit manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Centre</td>
<td>21 May 2015</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Unit manager, specialist &amp; caseworker</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Caseworker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Unit manager &amp; caseworker</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Unit manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<td>Type</td>
<td>Respondent</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Unit manager A</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Meeting</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Unit managers A &amp; B</td>
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<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Unit manager A</td>
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<td>23 Mar. 2016</td>
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<td>Unit manager A</td>
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<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Caseworker B</td>
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<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Adm. assistant</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Caseworker C</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
<td>Caseworker D</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Caseworker E</td>
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<td></td>
<td>25 May 2016</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>Adm. assistant &amp; caseworkers (&gt;10)</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Caseworker F</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Caseworker G</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Unit manager A</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Interview</td>
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<td>25 Aug. 2017</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>Caseworker I</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Caseworker J &amp; K</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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