



Practice Theory, Work, and Organization: An Introduction

By Davide Nicolini

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Practice Theory, Work, and Organization: An Introduction By Davide Nicolini

What is practice theory? Where do practice theories come from? What do they say? Do they really offer something new to the study of work and organization?

In setting out to answer these questions, this book provides a rigorous yet accessible introduction to contemporary theories of practice, discussing their distinctive contribution to work and organization studies. Practice theories are a set of conceptual tools and methodologies for investigating, analysing, and representing everyday practice through written text, language, images, and behaviour. Drawing on a variety of theoretical traditions, they have explored the idea that phenomena such as knowledge, meaning, science, power, organized activity, sociality, and institutions are rooted in practice. The book first examines the origins of the idea of practice. Recognizing that a unified theory of practice does not exist, the central chapters of the book then discuss the theory and concepts of the main scholarly traditions that have, collectively, contributed to the 'practice turn' in social and organization studies. Each of the central chapters concludes with a fully worked example of the theory in application.

Practice theories have become of increasing interest for management and organizational scholars in recent years, and this book is an advanced introduction to the complexities of the area for academics, researchers, and graduate students in organization studies, management, and across the social sciences.

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Editorial Review

Review

The book is an extremely impressive accomplishment in terms of clarification of a body of heavy weight theoretical work. By not glossing over differences in an effort to produce a synthesis, a degree of clarity is given to the multivocality of practice theory. As a result, the book provides a lucid guide through the philosophical landscape. Andrew M. Cox, University of Sheffield, *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* The book is well written and is a good 'one stop shop' that accurately portrays the practicalities of this paradigm while making it accessible to the beginning and seasoned researcher ... Over, Nicolini has done a fantastic job pulling together a great resource that I only wish was available while finishing my doctoral studies. It enables others to learn and apply theoretically and methodically the delicate intricacies of practice theories in organization studies. David Schreiber, Belmont University (USA), *Management Learning* The book is an extremely impressive accomplishment in terms of clarification of a body of heavy weight theoretical work. By not glossing over differences in an effort to produce a synthesis, a degree of clarity is given to the multivocality of practice theory. As a result, the book provides a lucid guide through the philosophical landscape. Andrew M. Cox, *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* The book is well written and is a good one stop shop that accurately portrays the practicalities of this paradigm while making it accessible to the beginning and seasoned researcher. ... Nicolini has done a fantastic job pulling together a great resource that I only wish was available while finishing my doctoral studies. It will enable others to learn and apply theoretically and methodically the delicate intricacies of practice theories in organization studies. I would suggest it to be a key reading for any individual interested in the social behaviour of actors or applying practice theories to their work. David Schreiber, *Management Learning* Nicolini's superb overview of practice theory offers original descriptions of different practice approaches and deftly sorts out this tangled theoretical terrain. The book innovates methodologically in illustrating the different approaches with the same case study, thereby nicely substantiating his thesis that empirical researchers best draw on practice theory by using different practice approaches in combination. The text is highly recommended to curious social scientists at large and not just to scholars of work and organization. Theodore Schatzki, University of Kentucky This book has all the marks of Davide Nicolini's scholarship: theoretical depth and empirical subtlety. Several speak or write about the relevance of practice theory for the study of organizations, but few attempt to creatively link practice theory to particular philosophical traditions and social theory at large, and work out its theoretical-cum-methodological implications for organization studies. Nicolini is one of those few. If you are looking for a single book to do both things for you, namely to provide a sophisticated guide to practice theory and show how to conduct empirical research from a practice theory perspective, this is the book to read. Nicolini does a masterful job: he tells us what practice theory is, where it comes from, and how to put it to work in organization studies. It is a brilliant achievement. Haridimos Tsoukas, University of Cyprus and University of Warwick Practice Theory, Work, and Organization is a major contribution to the resources available for scholars who want to understand or use practice theory. By providing clear discussions of the multiple strands of social theory underlying practice theory and utilizing these in his rolling case, Nicolini demystifies practice theory and illustrates its potential as a way of studying work and organizations. The final chapter provides a thoughtful discussion of a methodological approach involving zooming in and zooming out that Nicolini advocates as a way of engaging these multiple perspectives on studying practice. The book's breadth makes it valuable both for newcomers to the field and for those who have been in this field for some time. Martha S. Feldman, University of California, Irvine Deep and broad, argumentative and pluralistic, theoretical and methodological, this is a landmark book. For the growing community of practice-orientated scholars in organization studies, Davide Nicolini provides the go-to resource. Richard Whittington, Professor of

Strategic Management at Said Business School and Millman Fellow in Management at New College, Oxford

About the Author

Davide Nicolini is Professor of Organization Studies at Warwick Business School. He co-directs the IKON Research Centre at Warwick Business School and the Warwick Institute of Health. Prior to joining the University of Warwick he held positions at The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London and the University of Trento and Bergamo in Italy. His work has appeared in journals such as *Organization Science*, *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Human Relations*, *Management Learning*, and *Social Science and Medicine*. From 2009 he has been Editor of *Management Learning*.

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