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## Entrepreneurship as practice: grounding contemporary practice theory into entrepreneurship studies

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### Background

With this special issue we aim at furthering the entrepreneurship as practice perspective by grounding the broader and contemporary ‘practice turn’ in social science (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and von Savigny 2001) into entrepreneurship studies. The number of studies highlighting the significance of a practice perspective within entrepreneurship research is on the rise. Entrepreneurship practices have been studied through their enactments of improvisation and bricolage (Baker and Nelson 2005; Johannisson 2011; Imas, Wilson, and Weston 2012; Watson 2013), new venture legitimation (De Clercq and Voronov 2009), gendered entrepreneurship (Garcia and Welter 2013) entrepreneurial networking (Anderson, Dodd, and Jack 2010; Johannisson 2011; Keating, Geiger, and Mcloughlin 2013) and entrepreneurs’ understanding of context (Chalmers and Shaw 2015). Convincingly, Johannisson (2011, 138) and Watson (2013) call upon us, entrepreneurship researchers to decode the process of entrepreneuring with the help of social practice theory. Recently, Neck, Green and Brush (2014) refer to the practice theorist Rouse in defining a practice based approach for teaching entrepreneurship. Also, Gross, Carson, and Jones (2014) argue for re-thinking entrepreneurial marketing from a practice perspective.

Social practice theory studies the relationship between individuals and their greater environment. While traditional practice approaches focussed on the habits and tacit knowledge of actors to understand repetition in field structures and in field structuring of actors (e.g. Bourdieu, Giddens, Ortner), more recent social research focuses on ‘how actors get things done in complex settings’ (Orr 1996). In its contemporary iteration within organization research, the practice instinct studies the interrelation between organizations, the actual practices of organizing and those practitioners enacting them (Whittington 2006).

Practice theory is now gaining popularity as a valid means to understand how people do things on an individual level, a collective level and the actions that navigate the space in between these two. To better understand the ‘how’ in human actions, practice theory breaks down several elements in social activities. Rather than a trivial action, a ‘practice’ is a routinized type of human performance consisting of several elements interconnected to one another. These are forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘tools’ and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding and know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.

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A practice forms so to speak a 'block or bundle' of 'ways of doing' such as cooking consists of e.g. consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc. In essence, the existence of a practice necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of the elements which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements. Likewise, a practice represents a pattern which can be filled out by a multitude of single and often unique actions (re)producing the practice. The single individual practitioner – as a bodily and mental agent – then acts as the 'carrier' of a practice – and, in fact of many different practices which need not be coordinated with one another.

In entrepreneurship as practice, an entrepreneurship practitioner carries patterns of bodily behaviour, but also of certain routinized ways of understanding, knowing how and desiring, for and about, entrepreneurship. These conventionalized 'mental' activities of understanding, knowing how and desiring are necessary elements and qualities of entrepreneurship practices in which the single entrepreneur participates, and not necessarily qualities of an entrepreneur.

Moreover, the practice as a 'nexus of doings and sayings' (Schatzki 2001) is not solemnly understandable to the agent or the agents who carry it out, it is likewise understandable to potential observers (at least within the same culture). Entrepreneurship practices are thus routinized ways in which entrepreneurship practitioners move bodies, handle objects, treat subjects, describe things and understand the world. Schatzki (2001) summarizes these elements within the umbrella term of 'field of practices', comprising of knowledge, meaning, human activity, science, power, language, social institutions, and historical transformation.

## Objective and scope

Through this call, we aim to unite, exhibit and bring to the fore, the principal social practice argument in entrepreneurship studies. We adopt the view that entrepreneurship practices are habitually, socially situated and organized human activities for which entrepreneurship practitioners use specific skills and tools (Bourdieu 1990; Schatzki 2001, 2). Following the suggestions of the promising application of practice theory as an area for entrepreneurship research (Steyaert 2007; Johannisson 2011; Watson 2013), a contemporary practice understanding of entrepreneurship is in the making.

We invite authors to clarify and emphasize on, the question of how individual entrepreneurship practices relate to (the) 'organizing context' and capture those mechanisms by which collective support for entrepreneurship may be mobilized (Johannisson 2011). By integrating practice theory into entrepreneurship studies we intend to further the influential 'who' and 'what' questions (Gartner 1988) into the largely unresolved questions of 'how', 'where' and 'why' questions in entrepreneurship.

Crucially, with this special issue we intend to broaden the entrepreneurship research domain by grounding practice theory into our field of research and vice versa. We specifically look for typical practice studies which concomitantly (1) identify the every-day and socially situated nature of entrepreneurship; (2) recognize entrepreneurship practice, tools and methods used and (3) relate and integrate these with the cognitions, behaviours, and/or skills of entrepreneurship practitioners.

## Subject coverage

Specific topics that would be of interest to this Special Issue's editors include, but not exclusively so, the following

- What is the nature of entrepreneurship practices and how do they come about?
- How do entrepreneurship practices evolve over time?
- What (f)actors influence the (re)configuration of entrepreneurship practices?
- How do entrepreneurship practices relate to entrepreneurial behaviour and skills?
- How and why do practices relate to entrepreneurship practitioners' functioning and performativity?
- How and why do entrepreneurship practitioners (individual and/or collective) enact decision-making, timing, work strategies and behaviors in, and across, practices?
- How and why do specific contexts influence the shaping and enacting of entrepreneurship practices?
- Which are the theoretical and/or methodological implications in studying entrepreneurship through a contemporary practice lens?

## Submission guidelines

We will consider both empirical and conceptual papers. Submitted papers must be original and not be under consideration by any other publication. Full papers must be in a word-compatible format and e-mailed to Eveline Stam ([a.m.c.e.stam@vu.nl](mailto:a.m.c.e.stam@vu.nl)) and Neil Thompson ([n.a.thompson@vu.nl](mailto:n.a.thompson@vu.nl)) (not to manuscript central). The first page must contain the title, author(s) and contact information for the corresponding author. No reference to the identity of the author(s) should be made throughout the manuscript. Papers suitable for publication in the Special Issue will be double-blind reviewed following the ERD's review process guidelines.

For additional guidelines, please consult the sections on Instructions for Authors and Manuscript Preparation for *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* at: <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/authors/tepnauth.asp>

## Timetable

The Special Issue is scheduled to be published in 2018 or early 2019. The following timetable/ deadline dates are given for your information: (1) Submission of the full papers – by September 15, 2017. (2) First feedback from reviewers – by December 15, 2017. (3) Submission of the revised papers – by April 15, 2018. (4) Expected delivery date to ERD – by July 30, 2018.

## Contact information

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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