

The Social Complexity of Organizational Learning: Dynamics of Micro-Practices,  
Processes and Routines

**Induction practice as both individual and organizational learning**

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**Introduction:**

Most people will agree that some kind of learning takes place when new employees are inducted into an organization. The newcomer must learn to perform the tasks specific to the organization, might have to learn new systems, new computer programs, or how to operate new machine. In addition the newcomer must learn 'the drill' and the daily and implicit ways of behaving in the specific organization. Induction thus seems to hold a requirement for learning. In a competitive and global knowledge economy, knowledge intensive firms survive by selecting and recruiting highly qualified and specialized personnel. In other words people, whose knowledge and skills are distinct and highly valuable to the organization, and people whose competencies are supposedly beneficial to the organization. Induction can thus be viewed as an opportunity for the organization to learn. However, the question is how and to what extent organizations are able to benefit from this learning and to 'make use' of the induction process. One crucial aspect relates to whether induction is seen as a reproductive strategy concerned primarily with replacement, or whether induction is used as an innovative strategy and a way for the organization to incorporate new competencies and skills into the organization. In other words; how is the organization able to learn from inducting newcomers?

In this paper we argue that induction is a management practice in which it is possible to detect both individual learning as well as organizational learning. We argue that

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<sup>1</sup> Working paper. Not to be cited without the authors' permission.

socialization and knowledge acquisition is important and common parts of induction practice, as newcomers learn new skills upon entry as well as are socialized into the organization through participation in everyday routines. However, this notion of induction is not enough to encompass all the processes of learning appearing in induction. But if there lies a wish to benefit from a diverse professional backgrounds and personal profiles behind recruitment and induction in organizations and if players in the global competitive economy use newcomers as ways to incorporate new competencies into the organization, how then, to understand the induction process in terms of organizational learning?

We have chosen the headline *Induction practice as both individual and organizational learning* to frame our exploration of this multiple learning potential and challenge the understanding of induction as primarily concerned with knowledge acquisition and socializing the individual into the organization. We believe that induction practice must be equally understood in terms of organizational learning, as the organization inevitably, intentional or incidental, change upon the entry of a newcomer. A better understanding of the totality of the learning processes inherent in induction holds a key for continuous organizational and individual development.

A more elaborated view on induction can help us understand the continuous reconfiguration of practice<sup>2</sup>, e.g. how the practices in a company changes on a continuous basis (see also Antonacopoulou, 2006), i.e. we do not only want to focus upon individuals' adaptive learning but also on the potentials for organizational innovative learning.

We begin with a presentation of the definitions of the concepts that shapes our understanding of learning and organizational learning. Then we outline how induction is traditionally concerned with the socialization of newcomers into the organization. We then continue by sketching out the empirical base of our research; the induction of

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newcomers in two branches of the same major Danish retail bank. To get a varied picture on induction from several organizational “observation posts”, we have interviewed three branch managers, four colleagues and four newcomers (three “externally recruited” and one apprentice). The final part of the paper is devoted to the exploration and discussion of induction as inherently dynamic and constantly emerging through an organizational routine perspective (Feldman, 2000; Feldman & Rafaeli, 2002; Pentland & Feldman, 2005) and a pragmatic view informed by the thinking of John Dewey (Elkjaer, 2003).

### **Learning and organizational learning.**

The concept of organizational learning can be said to be highly contested. It is ambiguous in nature pointing to the potential internal contradiction that lies within the concept (Clegg *et al.*, 2005). Despite its centrality to the debates around management and change processes in organizations, there seems to be little agreement on the precise definition of the terms. Several scholars have tried to map the field of organizational learning either by its sociological foundation (Gherardi & Nicolini, 2001), the different disciplines contributing to the field (Easterby-Smith, 1997), the distinction to workplace learning (Elkjaer & Wahlgren, 2006) or by the historic development (Dodgson, 1993; Fear, 2001).

Another way to address and approach the field of organizational learning is by way of learning theory (see e.g. Fenwick & Rubenson, 2005). Educational institutions like schools and universities are organized around knowledge acquisition, and here learning is closely connected to teaching. The understanding of learning as connected to teaching and knowledge acquisition has shaped our general understanding of what it means to learn. This understanding of learning has also until quite recently been the predominant theory of learning at work and in organizations (Hager, 2004). This means that the creation of a learning organization as well as organizational learning is often associated with the question of how to most efficiently disseminate, manage and understand organizational knowledge and knowing (see e.g. Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003; Gherardi & Nicolini, 2006; Nicolini *et al.*, 2003b; Scarbrough & Swan, 2003).

The understanding of learning as the acquisition of knowledge may be understandable when we look at the questions that organizational learning has derived from. Taking a point of departure in the early works by Cyert and March one may see their contribution to the field of organizational learning as answering a question, which could have been formulated like the following: “How to make efficient decisions in organizations when we no longer can rely on rational models because human behaviour tells us something else?” (Cyert & March, 1963). The background was the coining of the concept of “bounded rationality” as an explanation for the impossibilities of the economic model thinking, i.e. humans (read: managers) were simply not able to compute all the information needed to make a decision based upon full information but had to rely on satisfactory information (Simon, 1996 [1991]). Decision-making in organizations came to be viewed as a process that can be improved by individuals’ acquisition of relevant information and knowledge, which in turn can guide the organizational behaviour of individuals. Learning became in other words an issue of organizational members’ knowledge acquisition.

Later, when Argyris and Schön wrote their seminal book on organizational learning, one can see the question that they were grappling with as the following: “How to avoid defensive reasoning leading to unproductive learning?” (Argyris & Schön, 1978, 1996). Their understanding of learning takes a point of departure in how humans in organizations communicate, and in their understanding this happens with a point of departure in our theories of action – our mental models. And Argyris and Schön claim on the basis of their research that we all make use of defensive reasoning when we find ourselves in threatening or embarrassing situations. This will inevitably lead to unproductive learning, as it is not based upon a testing of the basic assumptions and attributions that we ascribe to others, and as such take a point of departure in invalidated knowledge and information. So in Argyris and Schön’s understanding, the task is to acquire these communicative skills that make it possible for us to enter into non-defensive reasoning and pave the way for productive organizational learning.

Again, we find that learning is about some form of acquisition of knowledge and skills – often with the help of external consultants (e.g. teachers, facilitators, coaches).

Organizational learning became a mirror of the kind of learning that is found in educational institutions.

But workplaces and organizations do not exist in order for teaching to take place but to produce goods or deliver services, and learning here is a side-effect of working (Marsick, 1997). Also, in educational institutions the primary focus is upon the individual learners whereas work in organizations should be understood as “coordinated, collective endeavours” making the relationship between the organization, individuals and work a prime focus (Clarke, 1991). This means that to focus on learning in a work setting should include learning as part of the everyday life of an organization – of the organizational practice, and view learning as a relational endeavour rather than an issue of individual knowledge acquisition.

Before entering this idea of learning it is timely to look at what we earlier have coined as the counterpart of learning as (individual) knowledge acquisition, namely learning as participation in communities of practice – or practice-based learning. A seminal paper within the practice-based understanding of organizational learning is written by Gherardi, Nicolini and Odella, and can be framed as based upon the following question: “What if learning is neither attached to teaching activities nor about individuals but rather about the organizational contexts of unfolding organizational learning – how should we then understand learning?” (Gherardi *et al.*, 1998).<sup>3</sup> In the participation or practice-based understanding of organizational learning, learning is regarded as a part of human activity – learning can, in other words, not be avoided. Learning is an integrated part of the organizational everyday life and its work practice (for an overview, see Nicolini *et al.*, 2003a). This view of organizational learning changed the learning process from taking place in the minds of individuals as acquisition of knowledge and skills to being part of the access and participation patterns of the organizational members. Learning is about the construction of communities of practice and membership and becoming competent practitioners (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Richter,

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<sup>3</sup> Note that it is us who have formulated these questions in order to create the line of reasoning that we pursue. The questions reflect the way we read the contributions and might not be congruent with the authors’ view.

1998). Learning is a practical, rather than a cognitive process that cannot be separated from the creation of (professional) identity.

Learning as participation brings learning into the social world of organizing and organization; organizational learning becomes a social activity. It is, however, not possible to see how learning comes about through participation. Also, the concept of knowledge (the learning content) as deriving from practice makes it difficult to understand how it is possible to include thinking or reasoning in order to conduct theoretically informed actions. In the following, we show that it is possible to expand this understanding of learning to include a concept of knowledge that includes acting and thinking, as well as body, emotion and intuition. This is to acknowledge that learning is also about skills and knowledge acquisition *whilst* happening through participation. The development of a third position of organizational learning is done by way of John Dewey's pragmatic understanding of learning and a pragmatic theory of organizations understood as arenas consisting of social worlds held together by commitments (both necessities and wishes, have to and want to) to action and interaction around work and organizational life (Elkjaer, 2004; Strauss, 1978, 1993).

Learning as emerging or as growth is an understanding inspired by pragmatism. In the Deweyan universe, there are no universal cognitive structures that shape human experience of reality. Also, knowledge – or in Dewey's own words: “warranted assertibilities” – always refer directly to human experience and the origin of knowledge is the lived and living experience. This does, however, not mean that pragmatism rejects cognition as “(...) thinking is a process of inquiry, of looking into things, of investigating. *Acquiring* is always secondary, and instrumental to the act of *inquiry*. It is seeking, a quest, for something that is not at hand” (Dewey, 1916 [1980]:148).

In pragmatism, different forms of thinking and abstraction, such as ideas, theories, and concepts, function as instruments for actions. Not by way of an innate mental model, but as tools for defining and solving specific problematic situations. Dewey's development of logic as a theory of inquiry takes its point of departure in experiences as

inquiry is anchored in everyday life.<sup>4</sup> It is part of life to inquire, turn things around intellectually, come to conclusions and make evaluations. This is how people learn and become cognizant human beings.

Inquiry is a process that starts with an emotionally sense that something is wrong. But when the problem gets defined, inquiry moves into an intellectual field of reasoning and thinking. In other words, inquirer(s) use their previous experiences from similar situations to define the felt uncertainty. According to Dewey, the inquirer(s) try to solve the problem by applying different working hypotheses and conclude by testing a model of solution. The initial feeling of uncertainty that started the inquiry process must disappear before a problem has been solved. If the inquiry is to lead to new experiences, to learning, it requires thinking or reflection over the relation between the problem's definition and its solution. Not all inquiry results in learning in the sense that one can verbally reproduce an outcome. Dewey emphasises the aesthetics of experiences and the sensation that they perfect or complete, and any delight and comfort in a situation is also an experience – and knowing is just one way of experiencing (McDermott, 1973 [1981]). We find that we need a term like “experience” to be able to include the learning that is not knowing but not by denigrating experience and refer it to something before knowing but as a term to label the process of humans at work with their environment and for which knowledge may or may not occur in the sense that it can be shared verbally.

In sum, pragmatism is a reminder of human agency but this agency is grounded in and part of context, work as well as individual capacities. Reasoning is useful as it can act as guidelines for actions by way of working hypotheses, and reflection is necessary in order to produce learning. The organizational member and the organization are weaved together in social worlds in which acting and thinking goes on as a continuous process.

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the pragmatic term “experience” is not the same as our everyday understanding of the term. Experience is both the process of becoming experienced as well as the outcome of experiencing. Experience is not to be equated with the past as it is oriented towards the future, to anticipating what is coming. Also, experience is not just what comes out of doings, of practising but is also informed by reasoning (Dewey, 1917 [1980]).

It is not possible to separate the individual and the social, the context and/or the organization in pragmatism. The two are mutually constituted as human beings and human knowing, and as such they are products and producers of history and culture. This is why we propose a situation – or “a practice” as the unit of analysis and it is to this practice we now turn our attention.

### **Induction as individual learning.**

We use induction as a unit of analysis as several processes in play in induction may be labelled learning, development, change and/or knowing. Before entering the analysis of the possibilities for learning in induction, a brief outline of the aspects of induction can serve as a starting point for further theoretical development. Induction is said to contain aspects of both knowledge acquisition and socialization. Most research on organizational socialization is concerned with organizational newcomers (Chao *et al.*, 1994), as the survival of traditions and culture of an organization is dependent on the transfer of social skills and knowledge to the new member of the organization (Maanen & Schein, 1979). Induction can thus be divided into 2 phases: pre-entry and post-entry. Pre-entry can again be divided into selection and recruitment, and post-entry can be divided into “orientation” and “socialisation” (see also Riordan *et al.*, 2001; Wanous, 1992). In this study we are exclusively focussing on the learning potential of the post-entry phase. Wanous emphasises the importance of splitting the post-entry phase up into two separate processes, because of the major differences in the content and purpose of the two. The aim of orientation is to help newcomers cope with stress experienced upon entering an organization. Orientation refers to specific programmes aimed at providing competence and information on a preliminary level in order to start working, and is often planned to last for a short period of time. The people involved, such as HR professionals, trainers, and external consultants, are not necessarily part of the newcomer’s work team, peer group or management. In addition, introduction courses, videos, handbooks, e-learning programs etc. are widely used to orient the newcomers towards the organization. Learning is about acquiring specific skills and knowledge.

In contrast to this, socialization is seen as a long term process, involving a totality of the surrounding colleagues, the organization, the informal structures and implicit

knowledge in practice. Socialization processes do not contain specific programs and are not goal directed, but requires participation in the work practices in order to adjust to the norms and values, as well as to the routines of the organization (Wanous, 1992). Other researchers divide the studies on organization socialization into; the process, the content, and the outcome of socialization, as well as the behaviour of the newcomer, the tactics that allow the organization to steer socialization, and finally the concrete practices and instruments that the organization applies in the process (Ardts *et al.*, 2001). However, the premise of organization socialization is that the more effective and smooth the socialization process is, the faster the newcomer becomes productive for the organization and the lower the turnover of staff (Ardts *et al.*, 2001; Riordan *et al.*, 2001). Learning is primarily concerned with reproducing things as they are.

In their seminal paper, van Maanen and Schein (1979) describe organizational socialization as a process by which the individual "...acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role." (Maanen & Schein, 1979:211) either by training, education, self-guided learning processes or apprenticeships. Socialization processes results, according to van Maanen and Schein, in certain responses by the individual; a custodial response, a role innovation or an innovative response, which depend on the tactics selected by the management. Socialization can in other words also lead to innovative learning but this is dependent upon the combination of management practices, or tactics, selected.

What is only indirectly touched upon by both Wanous or Van Maanen and Schein is that socialization processes are also about identity building and identity transformation, through what Lave and Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991) call 'legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice', which is also described by as the process by which newcomers becomes included in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Lave's research on tailor apprentices in Liberia describes how becoming a tailor encompasses much more than learning to sew (knowledge acquisition) and learning to reproduce social structures among the masters (participation). The apprentices also learn to make a life, to make a living, to grow up and to mature in order to become accepted and respected as masters of their trade (Lave, 1997). Identity formation is, accordingly,

a very important aspect of the socialization process that takes place in induction (see also Clegg et al., 2005).

However, what is prevalent in the above theoretical approaches to induction is that they are primarily concerned with the newcomer and his or her process of becoming part of the organization or community of practice, while making sure that the organization is susceptible to as little disturbance as possible. We want to challenge this assumption in two parts as induction is also about the constant reconfiguration of practice, which we label organizational learning. First, none of the above views account for the induction practice *itself*, and how this practice is under constant re-configuration. The organization is not only reproducing itself through the learning processes inherent in daily routines of induction. Reproduction is not just a matter of repetition, as organizational routines hold a potential for change (see e.g. Feldman, 2000). Second, informed by pragmatism we do not just see the individual versus the organization, but individuals as part of the organization – and as such as mutually emerging. It is not possible to separate the individual and the social, the context and/or the organization in pragmatism. The two are mutually constituted as human beings and human knowing, and as such they are products and producers of history and culture. The same view is found in Pentland and Feldman (2005) where the organizational routine serves as the unit of analysis. This is why we propose an organizational routine – or “a practice” as the unit of analysis (Elkjaer, 2005), e.g. induction practice. Subsequently, this paper is guided by the following working definition of induction: The practice and practising around a newcomer’s entry in an organization (see also Antonacopoulou, 2006). What we try to capture with this definition is that induction is not only a practice or a routine that is described in handbooks, standard operating procedures etc. and applied when a newcomer arrives (a passive part). Induction is also ”practised” in organizations, e.g. interpreted, carried out by different people, affecting different people, changed and understood differently by the people involved (an active part), and as such susceptible to continuous reconfiguration. This means that induction in one way is well defined and well known, and in other ways is constantly developing. Some of the implications of our understanding of the reconfiguration process addressed in this paper are based on the hypothesis that induction processes holds several potentials for learning. Induction

is viewed as individual learning (process and result) – the individual adapts to the organization on a continuous basis. But we find it equally important to also view induction as a potential trigger for organizational learning, which means that the organization is able to benefit and learn from the skills, knowledge and identity the newcomer brings into the organization. This view will be further developed in the paper through the theoretical lens of pragmatism.

### **Setting the scene for the unit of analysis**

The case study company, Major Bank (a fictive name), was founded in the late 1800'es and has more than 3.5 million customers in Scandinavia, Great Britain and Ireland. In Denmark, Major Bank has almost 300 branches nationally and several corporate banking centres. In 1990 Major Bank merged with two other Danish banks in what was the largest merger in Danish history (Hansen & Mørch, 1997), and from 1995 also insurance companies were incorporated in the corporation. Major Bank now offers a wide range of financial services and products: insurance, mortgage finance, asset management, real estate and brokerage.

Since the early 1990'es the bank sector has experienced major changes. The changes are traced from two interrelated pressures, external pressures such as increased competition, and internal pressures, such as changed organizational structures and bad debts provisions (Andersen, 1996; Finansrådet, 2005). One of the consequences of the changes in the early 1990'es and of new legislative measures has been “trade gliding”, which is described as the emergence of cross-sectional corporations, allowing banks to run insurance and mortgage finance etc. (Andersen, 1996). Today bank employees therefore must perform tasks that traditionally were placed in other financial institutions, such as insurance sales, pension schemes and real estate.

Also an increase in competition has sketched out the development in the last decade. New and specialized discount banks have emerged, internet banking is increasing, and foreign banks are entering the Danish market and are foreseen to play an increasing role in the future (Andersen, 1996; Finansrådet, 2005). Combined with a growing ability and tendency amongst customers to compare prices and chose between different products,

focus is now laid on the personal relationship and the experience of personal service (Pedersen & Aagaard, 2005).

11 semi structured interviews were carried out in two branches of Major Bank.<sup>5</sup> The branches have within the last years experienced changing recruitment patterns and have begun to look for employees who did not get their initial training in a bank. This is a fairly new practice, as the bank sector has a strong tradition for only employing people with a financial background primarily from within the corporation, or has recruited apprentices with a mercantile upper secondary education to follow a structured financial training.

The need to rethink recruitment and induction policies can be seen as a consequence of some serious challenges to both branches. One is home-banking, which is increasingly used by customers resulting in a decrease in the number of face to face transactions. Another related challenge is to keep the customers in the branch. There is a fierce competition on interest rates, products and services, and both branches operate in cities where several other banks are present. Thirdly, Major Bank struggles with a conservative, elitist and exclusive image (Hansen & Mørch, 1997), which presumably makes it difficult to attract new customers, especially the younger ones.

In order to obtain a more customer oriented approach, the branch management seeks to employ personnel with a more service minded approach to certain functions in the bank, which is reflected in two recruitment strategies carried out in the bank. One strategy is to recruit people with alternative backgrounds in other parts of the service sector in order to have a diverse selection of staff that is able to relate to all types of customers. Another is to recruit younger people with an outgoing profile in order to change the image and attract younger customers. The branches still recruit and train new employees through apprenticeships, but a growing number of employees are recruited with no prior bank experience. It is no longer regarded as necessary for employees to have a financial background when working at the teller, taking in or out smaller deposits, or working at

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<sup>5</sup> 3 branch managers (IP-BM), 4 older colleagues (IP-CO) and 4 newcomers (IP-NC) (3 “externally recruited” and 1 apprentice)

the front desk helping with more complex issues such as opening new accounts, looking through budgets, booking meetings with the financial advisor, or tracking transactions. The purpose is to employ staff that is able to communicate with all kinds of people and who can create a personal relation to the customers.

### **Induction as an organizational routine**

Despite the fact that there has been ‘little progress so far in reaching agreement on what routines are – and therefore on how and why social scientists should study them’ (Cohen et. al., 1996 cited from Becker, 2001:3), and that ‘we need to exercise caution’ when studying routines (Pentland & Feldman, 2005:810), we jump right in by characterizing induction in Major Bank as an organizational routine. Following Feldman and Rafaelis (2002) definition on routines, induction in the branches is a ‘recurrent pattern[s] of behaviour of multiple organizational members involved in performing organizational tasks’ (Feldman & Rafaeli, 2002:311). Several employees and managers are involved in the induction process either as newcomer, manager/planner or colleague, and induction is a recurrent organizational event that is initiated every time the branch has employed a new staff member. The respondents had no difficulties in talking about induction, although there were divergent stories and descriptions about content, length and the nature of involvement. This supports the idea of routines as being dynamic and constantly changing (Feldman, 2000). Since induction is not a stable entity, it encompasses a potential, or trigger, for learning. Drawing on Pentland and Feldman (2005) and Feldman (2000) induction as a routine in the branches of Major Bank contains ostensive aspects, e.g. the abstract idea of how induction is carried out, a kind of script that the multiple actors can act from. One example of this is one of the managers noting that they have considered that the newcomer needs a person or informal mentor, as personal guide in the beginning. Also offering e-learning courses and large ‘information days’, where newcomers from the whole region was assembled, could be signs of the abstract script containing the necessities in an induction process. But a routine also contains performative aspects, e.g. the specific actions carried out by the specific individuals engaged in the induction process at specific times. And the performative aspects are not always congruent with the script that the actors act from. As one of the newcomers note:

IP – NC 2: There weren't any one assigned to take care of me. I didn't really know where I should sit when I met every day (...) I had to learn 700 little things, but you can't. But I sat the first 14 days and was introduced to thing little by little. And it was done by, when I met in the morning, I was placed at a free seat (...) – 'and what am I supposed to do today?', and nobody knew. And 'hey are anyone going to help me?', and no, nobody knew about that either.

IN: Was that your first 14 days?

IP – NC 2: Yes, that was very confusing.

(Newcomer, DB2)

In addition to these two mutually constituting aspects (the ostensive and the performative aspects), artefacts serve as the physical manifestations and codifications of the routine, e.g. handbooks, written standard operation procedures, physical objects used etc., which constantly mediates the ostensive and performative aspects. It is important to note, however, that they are not the same as either the ostensive aspects or performative aspects of the routine, as different artefacts are always interpreted differently by the multiple actors, as well as used differently in the different situation.

As described earlier, the branches offer e-learning courses to newcomers. The courses contain introductions to different actions and procedures as well as exercises in how to perform them, and the aim is to prepare the newcomer for the variety of tasks he or she need to perform when working in the bank. However, the time spent on the e-learning courses and the ways they are used vary greatly across the newcomers, and none of the newcomers seem to benefit adequately from the e-learning courses. This is illustrated by the following quote.

IN: I have heard that you have some e-learning courses.  
Have you taken any of those?

IP-NC 4: The ones at the computer? Yes, I have gone  
through some of them

IN: How has the benefit been?

IP-NC4: Limited

IN: What are they about?

IP-NC4: Everything from how the system works to how  
you set up an account, a general store.

IN: How long time do they take?

IP-NC4: I have spent a few hours, but I haven't even been  
through all of them. Because some of them required  
sound on the computer so I couldn't sit at the front end,  
and there were no free seats at the back, so some of them I  
haven't taken yet, and I don't think they are so important.  
I think it is very different from person to person what you  
get out of them.

IN: Why don't you think they are important – hasn't it  
been possible to relate them to your work?

IP-NC4: Yes, but, I think they are very basic.

(Newcomer, DB1)

Offering e-learning courses as a way of learning the adequate banking skills can be viewed an ostensive aspect of the induction routine. Due to the newcomer's prior knowledge and computer skills, as well as some practical difficulties with the sound on the computer, physical placement of his desk etc. (the mediating artefacts), the newcomer carries out the routine differently than anticipated by the branch (the performative aspect).

In Major Bank, the two case branches have a tradition of welcoming new employees, either externally recruited employees or apprentices, with a social gathering where the branch provides breakfast and the manager give a short welcoming speech. This is done to make the newcomer feel welcome and part of the branch. Using the analytical lens of Pentland and Feldman (2005) the ostensive aspects of the routine would be that such a gathering makes the newcomer feel welcome. However, one of the newcomers experienced a very confusing welcoming, as 40-50 guest from different branches in the area were visiting at the same time, thus inviting for reconsideration and reinterpretation of whether or not the newcomer feel welcome at all. Usually the new employer is given a bucket of flowers at the social gathering, but when the young apprentice were welcomed, he got some fine Belgium beers instead. This change in the way the routine is performed points to the importance of agency and reflecting upon the routine, as a way to transform and modify the structures of the organizational routine. According to Feldman (2000) people engaged in routines sometimes change them. If the actions do not produce an anticipated outcome, or if the outcome is undesired, participants might try to *repair* the routine. Participants might also try to *expand* the routine, if the outcomes of certain actions enable new opportunities. Finally, if outcomes produce the intended outcomes, but still are open to improvements, participants might respond by trying to change the routine so it allows them to meet these ideals. This is described as *striving*. As described by Feldman (2000) this new type of welcoming gift could be a sign of that the people involved in the routine *strive* to make the routine better, by attempting to match the preferences of the young apprentice. That they apparently succeed is illustrated by the following quote:

IN: Were there any special things arranged? Did you get flowers or something?

IP-NC 4: No, I skipped the flowers. They asked me what I drink when I go out, and instead of flowers they bought me some special beers, some Belgium beers. It was fun instead; they knew that it would probably fit my taste better [both laugh].

(Newcomer, DB1)

This example illustrates how artefacts, such as beers or flowers, mediate both the ostensive aspects of the routine (the idea of what makes people feel welcome) and the performative aspects (now we do something differently or the same). It also illustrates the dynamic and ever changing nature of routines as people ‘will tend to breathe life into the routines they engage in because of their behavior and plans and ideals’ (Feldman, 2000:627).

### **Induction as a potential trigger for learning.**

Our interviews show that several processes that can be labelled learning are in play in induction. First of all; learning can be understood as individual learning in epistemological terms. Basic skills are acquired through e-learning courses, by trial-and-error, and by looking “over the shoulder” of a colleague. Questions to situations and performances that do not immediately make sense to the newcomer are asked and answers are given. In other words; the newcomer learns something he or she did not know prior to the situation.

Second, coming to a bank from different work fields also seem to affect the identity of the newcomer, as they participate in, learn or carry out the every day life routines (the ontological aspect). The identity is affected either by positive identification by adhering to informal dress codes, by accepting routines without questioning or just by feeling part of the branch, or by negative identification by actively trying to avoid to become a banker, because of the image associated with it.

Third, the organization is affected by the entrance of newcomers. The newcomers have for example brought about altered smoking routines, new ways of counting money, and new places for gifts and merchandise. The latter two are direct results of newcomers questioning the routines and then suggesting other ways of doing things. These changes are very evident and are noted as visible signs of the changes effected by the newcomers.

IN: Do you have any examples that a routine has been changed after a newcomer has arrived?

IP-CO4: Yes (laughing), it affected me. We don't have any decide smoking policy in the branch. But we were, until the last arrivals, a couple of smokers, including myself. And we have always... there has been no policy about what we were aloud to or not, and we have always been aloud to smoke until the branch opened at 10, and after we closed. But when we got a new manager, it was nice and easily instructed through the back door, or agreed to, that you shouldn't smoke before 10. And we, the smokers, had to accept that. So yes, new things have happened.

(Colleague with no formal induction responsibility, DB1)

Changes as such are welcomed and anticipated by the branch management. The managers report that newcomers are recruited to bring "smiles and positive attitudes" into the branch, and are expected to contribute to the overall strategy by providing a more lively atmosphere, and thus keep their non-banking attitude and his or her knowledge of service and customer relations. The externally recruited newcomers also share the impression that they are employed because of their prior experiences, and that the branch expects to benefit from that by integrating their prior knowledge and skills into the organization. However, not only strategic and strictly bank related knowledge is integrated into the bank practice. One of the newcomers reports that she has used her prior knowledge from working with mentally ill people to avoid that a situation with a mentally very unstable customer came out of hand, as it had previous done. After the incident, she and her colleagues talked the incident through, but no measures were taken to codify any of this knowledge.

In general the newcomers wish to and are expected to contribute to the organization by integrating their knowledge and transform it and feed it back to the organization, but no

formal or informal procedures have been established in order to “brain drain” the newcomer, and nothing is done to create and secure knowledge transfer from the newcomer to the organization. And the colleagues do not expect to learn anything from the newcomers and they do not seek to change their routines as a consequence of their new colleagues.

As illustrated in the following quote by one of the colleagues, the newcomer’s ability to see routines from the outside and question practice are noticed and valued, but what the organization exactly gain from the newcomer is difficult to pinpoint.

IN: You mentioned earlier, that the newcomers have contributed with knowledge and ideas that have changed routines. Are there other things that have changed due to the newcomers?

IP-CO 2: No, I don’t think so. It is always nice to get new impulses (...) I think it is good that someone who has not only been in the bank comes, actually, I think.

IN: Why is that good?

IP-CO 2: Yes, but often if you sit, people who have only been in the bank, you sit and do the same things the same way over again – in stead of someone from outside comes and say: why don’t you do it this way, and then you think, yes, why don’t we do it this way?

(Colleague with no formal induction responsibility, DB2)

Fourth; as the above quotation suggests, the organization is gaining from the newcomers’ mere presence in more subtle ways. One example of this is expressed in the following quote by a manager:

IP-BM 1: I think that it affects them [the older colleagues] positively, because it might cause them to – that if

someone with high spirits, just the way they move is faster than many of those who have been sitting her for 30 years – it hopefully cause them, I believe, and that might be naïve, to think that: they should not believe that they are anybody, those youngsters, so we will make an effort (...) I really think that the young people create dynamics in the branch.

(Branch Manager, DB1)

The manager feels that he experiences a more dynamic culture and that the pace of service has fastened. Also the newcomers note that they ‘feel like a breath of fresh air’ (IP –NC 1) and ‘I think I come with a positive attitude’ (IP-NC4), suggesting that they as individuals contribute to organizational culture by way of *being themselves*. It is supported by another of the branch managers:

IP-BM 2: I think it has been pleasantly refreshing. You can say that we bankers in one way or another are one track minded. At least the ones who have been in the banks for years. Sometimes we call ourselves the boring and dusty bankers. We sometimes wear blinkers. We are often very black and white, and creativity is not something you relate to that of being a banker. And thus, you can say that with people like XX and YY, that enters and comes as a fresh breeze, has been very positive.

(Branch Manager, DB2)

These changes can be seen as a reconfiguration of bank practice. By inducting new people into the branch, an observable, yet subtle change is noted. This can be described as changes in the “organizational rhythm” (see also Boje, 2006). The concept of rhythm connotes the dynamics and pace of everyday practice which is affected and changed in subtle ways upon a newcomer’s arrival. The concept of rhythm is related to a music

metaphor where the employees all play a different instrument. When a new “instrument” starts to play, the other musicians automatically “tune in” and the tune changes, even though it can be very difficult to track exactly where and how the changes appears (see also Cook & Yanow, 1993). The branches are still performing their core tasks, but the way this is done is reconfigured through new impulses and questions, through new types of employees and new views on things. The old-timers are challenged in their way of thinking and acting, and they are forced to “tune in”. Practice changes due to the new line up of musicians, which is made explicit in this case by the perception of more dynamic branches, livelier atmospheres, faster service and a faster pace in general.

We label the four examples described above as learning. Doing so allow us to describe induction as a situation or practice in which tension between the habitual thinking and acting is disturbed and as such may act as a trigger for learning. When we say that we view change as learning, it is in order to understand the underlying dynamics of the relation between doing/thinking differently or same (stay stable, not think/do differently) in the flow of induction practice. An underlying premise is that the process of change is embedded in the organization, the profession, the culture, nation, etc., and that there is also agency (the power to act or not to act) embedded here. Induction is viewed as individual learning (process and result) – the individual adapts to the organization on a continuous basis. But we find it equally important to also view induction as a potential trigger for changes in the organizational practice; in other words organizational learning. Our interview shows that the organization is able to benefit and learn from the skills, knowledge and identity the newcomer brings into the organization. This view also reflects the third position of learning inspired by pragmatism in which both the individual and the organization is taken into account and in which they are mutual constituents and where the methodological answer becomes to analyse induction as a problematic situation rather than to focus upon either individuals’ learning or the contextual conditions for learning.

## **Conclusion**

In the introduction we ask how and to what extent organizations are able to “make use” of the induction process. By that we tap into the ongoing discussion about organizational learning vs. individual learning, but situate the discussion in a certain frame, namely the induction process in two branches of the same retail bank. In order to pursue answers to our question we set out to challenge the notion that induction is only about individual knowledge acquisition and socialization by participation in the daily life of the workplace. We began by discussing two different approaches to learning at work and in organizations. We then presented a third position inspired by John Dewey and pragmatism, by which learning is understood as emerging, and as constantly triggered by an uncertain situation, for both individual and organization. The underlying ontological assumption derived from pragmatism is that individual and organization are weaved together in social worlds.

Because we find it impossible to separate individual and organizational learning as they are mutually emerging, we also claimed that instead of focusing on either the individual or the organization as the object of learning, we need to use the induction practice as the unit of analysis. We offered a working definition of induction that tries to capture the induction as an organizational routine. Seeing induction as an organizational routine containing both ostensive and performative aspects as well as mediating artefacts helped us understand how induction in the two branches is dynamic and constantly changing due to different agent’s interpretation of and participation in induction.

The examples we draw out of our empirical studies include a description of the divergence between the performative and ostensive aspects and how they are mutually constituted and mediated by artefacts as illustrated by the example with the e-learning courses, where the benefits from the courses do not live up to the expectations, among other things because the artefacts involved influenced the outcome. The dynamics and potential for continuous change inherent in organizational routines are illuminated through the description of the *striving* to make the welcoming routine better by giving the young male newcomer beers instead of flowers on the first day. These examples, we claim, are one way of describing the reconfiguration of induction practice itself as organizational learning.

Our preliminary findings suggest that the branches do perceive recruitment and induction as means to creating change in the organization. We were able to detect in our empirical data another sign of organizational learning, through the reconfiguration of practice as a consequence of induction. Because newcomers are inducted into the organization, routines and habits are questioned by the newcomers, a process which triggers changes in organizational practice, as illustrated by the examples of counting money, and altered smoking routines. The organization thus is affected by the newcomer, and changes its rhythm, adapts to the newcomer and learns from the newcomer, in the same way as the newcomer is affected by and learns from the organization. This learning is triggered by induction practice, and the analysis of the role induction has to play in reconfiguring practice thus becomes yet another way of understanding organizational learning.

What seems to be the answer to the question of how and to what extent the organization “make use” of the induction process, is that induction does create organizational learning through the development of the induction practice itself, and through inducting new employees that by mere presence or questions to the daily life of the branches, explicitly or in more subtle ways change the organization. However, our interviews show that the newcomers feel they qua their former background can contribute even more to organizational functioning, but also that the branches have severe difficulties in detecting this possibility for learning, and thus make use of it for the benefit of organizational development. This inherent dilemma needs future research attention, but lies beyond the immediate scope of this paper. Another interesting discussion that arises out of our empirical data is the relationship between the reconfiguration of induction practice itself, e. g. organizational learning through development of routines and the reconfiguration of bank practice, e. g. organizational learning through inducting new employees.

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