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Thompson, Neil A.; Verduijn, Karen; Gartner, William B.

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Entrepreneurship-as-practice: grounding contemporary theories of practice into entrepreneurship studies

Neil A. Thompson [a], Karen Verduijn [a] and William B. Gartner [b]

aDepartment of Management and Organization, Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; bEntrepreneurship Division, Babson College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, USA and Department of Organization and Entrepreneurship, Linnaeus University, Vaxjo, Sweden

ABSTRACT

In this article, we contend that entrepreneurship studies would greatly benefit from engagement with contemporary theorizations of practice. The practice tradition conceives of the process of entrepreneuring as the enactment and entanglement of multiple practices. Appreciating entrepreneurial phenomena as the enactment and entanglement of practices orients researchers to an ontological understanding of entrepreneuring as relational, material and processual. Therefore, practice theories direct scholars towards observing and explaining the real-time practices of entrepreneuring practitioners. Articles in this special issue on 'entrepreneurship-as-practice' are discussed and suggestions for future research and scholarship that utilize contemporary theorizations of practice are offered.

Introduction

The practice tradition (also known as practice-based studies, the practice approach or the practice lens) in the social sciences forefronts the notion that practices and their connections are fundamental to the ontology of *all* social phenomena (Rouse 2006; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and Savigny 2001). Ventures, firms or startups, in this view, are not ontologically separate phenomena from the performance of everyday, materially accomplished and ordered practices (Chalmers and Shaw 2017; Hill 2018; Johannisson 2011; Vincent and Pagan, 2019). This is to say that no description or explanation of features of entrepreneurial life – such as, recognizing, evaluating and exploiting opportunities – is possible without the 'alternate' description and explanation of how entrepreneurial life is actually lived in and through practices (Gross, Carson, and Jones 2014; Keating, Geiger, and Mcloughlin 2013). The term 'practice', therefore, does not refer to an 'empty' conceptual category of 'what entrepreneurs think and do' (as Sklaveniti and Steyaert point out in this issue), but encompasses the meaning-making, identity-forming and order-producing actions (Chia and Holt 2006; Nicolini 2009) enacted by multiple entrepreneurial practitioners and situated in specific historical conditions. Therefore, practice theories orient entrepreneurship scholars to take seriously the practices of entrepreneuring as they unfold and are experienced in real-time rather than as they are remembered. Simply put, practice scholars are concerned with the 'nitty-gritty' work of entrepreneuring – all the meetings, the talking, the selling, the form-filling and the number-crunching by which opportunities actually get formulated and implemented (Matthews, Chalmers, and Fraser 2018; Whittington 1996).

CONTACT Neil A. Thompson ✉ n.a.thompson@vu.nl 🖂 Department of Management and Organization, Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Despite its intuitive appeal and popularity in leadership, management, strategy and organization studies (Corradi, Gherardi, and Verzelloni 2010; Golsorkhi et al. 2010; Raelin 2016; Simpson 2009), the practice tradition's influence in entrepreneurship studies remains peripheral. For example, while debates of ontology in entrepreneurship theory have surfaced (Dodd and Anderson 2007; Hjorth, Holt, and Steyaert 2015), ontological individualism remains taken-for-granted and dominant: entrepreneurial activities are conceptually equated with the behavior of one practitioner type – the entrepreneur – which leads scholars to investigate the entrepreneur's cognitive antecedents, emotions, contextual conditions and causal relations (Davidsson 2015; McMullen and Shepherd 2006). The practice tradition challenges assumptions of ontological individualism. In this view, entrepreneurship is not a unique individual behavior, substance, state or event that can be *a priori* fully specified, uniformly observed and homogenously theorized. We see that 'grand' theories – in which entrepreneurial behavior is defined as 'searching', 'perceiving', 'creating' or 'selecting' 'opportunities' – are made up of concepts that need to be explained rather than verbs used to do the explaining. In other words, while such words as 'searching', 'perceiving', etc. can be helpful in terms of metonymy, they are problematic when they are taken to signify causal mechanisms because these words offer a purely semantic or linguistic connection in place of what should be an empirical connection (Shorter 2005). Hence, contemporary entrepreneurship scholars suffer from 'the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language' (Wittgenstein 1953, 109) in which much of the empirical research describes and explains a world that does not bear up under close scrutiny. Consequently, current academic discourse continues to reify entrepreneurial phenomena into taxonomies and models of generalized yet empirically unspecified concepts, which leaves us unfamiliar with the ordinary, everyday ways in which we (entrepreneurs as well as researchers) relate to ourselves and to the others around us (Welter et al. 2016).

In this article, we consider the potential of the practice 'turn' as a new route for studying, researching and practicing entrepreneurship. Our stated aim is to ground theories of practice into entrepreneurship studies by tackling these questions: What is the practice 'turn'? Why take it? And, what does it mean to 'take' the practice turn? Following our responses to these three questions, we explore articles selected for the *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* Special Issue on 'Entrepreneurship-as-practice,' and use these articles as illustrations of important issues germane to the practice approach. Finally, we offer suggestions for ways that scholars pursuing the practice tradition might insure that their research is embedded in the practice approach espoused here.

What is the practice 'turn'?

The practice 'turn' has been well under way across the social sciences for at least three decades (Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks, and Yanow 2010). Theories of practice have their foundation in post-Cartesian philosophies of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein, and more recently, Dreyfus, Taylor, Bourdieu, Giddens, Foucault, Garfinkel, Lyotard, Pickering, Scollon, Rouse, Schatzki and many others (for more details about these philosophies see Nicolini 2012; Reckwitz 2002; Rouse 2006; Schatzki 2012; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and Savigny 2001). Although varying in their origins and details, all theories of practice aim to overcome longstanding and problematic assumptions of both ontological *individualism* and *societism* in the social sciences (succintly explained by Janssens and Steyaert 2018).

In individualism, scholars assume that entrepreneurship is 'a social phenomenon [that] can be explained by properties of individual people or of their relations' (Schatzki 2005, 466), which underpins mainstream entrepreneurship theories, such as effectuation theory, bricolage theory, social identity theory and many other social psychology frameworks. These typically highlight behaviors, cognition, motivation, knowledge and traits such that entrepreneurship is to be seen as resulting from intra- and interpersonal behavioral and cognitive processes. This ontological stance leads to an understanding that theory implies the formulation of abstract propositions and a methodological focus on data collection through surveys, experiments and interviews. However,

the downside of ontological individualism is that social phenomena are reduced to personal properties such that, for instance, entrepreneurial action is takes a form of *mentalism* – something located in the individual mind – without attending to other central components of social reality such as body, things, discourse and structure (Reckwitz 2002; Sandberg and Dall'Alba 2009).

Societism, on the other hand, argues one needs to attend to historically determined, socially structured discourse, structures, narratives and institutions – using the call to contextualize – in which socio-demographic groups (e.g. family, rural, women, high-tech, novice, etc. entrepreneurs) are embedded (cf. Welter 2011). These entrepreneurship scholars have primarily taken 'discourse' and 'narratives' – structured collections of texts that infuse actions with particular kinds of meanings and constitute particular subject positions – as the unit of analysis in order to understand how entrepreneurial phenomena is influenced by (hegemonic) structural features. And yet, analyzing publicly available texts and interview transcripts means that societism very often takes the form of *textualism*, where social orders exist and influence entrepreneurs from the 'outside' via texts and symbols.

In the practice tradition, the center of analysis is no longer extra-mental or extra-corporal – such as in individualism (persons) or societism (structures) – but practices and their connections. As we explain later, practice theories recognize and do away with common dualities of agency/structure, mind/body, action/thought and individual/collective that individualism and societism maintain. Theories of practice put forward an alternative ontological position in which social phenomena, whether it be knowledge, meaning, entrepreneurship, leadership, organizations, strategy, power, science, language or institutions, occur within and are aspects or components of the *nexus of practices* (Hui, Schatzki, and Shove 2016). The term 'turn' is a descriptor for the abundance of philosophers, anthropologists, linguistics, sociologists, cultural theorists and historians that adopt or develop this ontological position when studying phenomena of interest.

What constitutes a 'practice', however, is not agreed upon, and as advocated by Nicolini (2017), scholars should indeed try to avoid out-right defining them due to the risk of reifying them (cf., ways of pitching are very different than ways of resourcing). That said, most practice theorists loosely conceive of a 'practice' as an array of sequentially ordered activity – 'doings' and 'sayings' – that are (a) relational, (b) embodied, (c) mediated and (d) organized around shared practical understanding. Practices are relational in that the actions that compose them are enacted by multiple practitioners but are organized and connected through their sequence. By 'embodied', practice scholars argue that practices are entwined with the character of the human body, such that practices provide the setting within which the bodily properties crucial to social life are formed (Best and Hindmarsh 2018; Hindmarsh and Pilnick 2007; Reckwitz 2002). 'Mediated' means that practices are entangled with or are carried out among material artefacts, tools and technologies (Barad 2007; Engeström 2001; Scollon 2001). This draws attention to the fact 'the social' and 'the material or technological' are inseparable and they do not have inherently determinate boundaries and properties; rather, they are constituted as relational effects performed in a nexus of natureculture practices (Gherardi 2016; Haraway 1991). 'Practical understanding' (aka phronesis, practical know-how, practical skills, relational knowledge or embodied knowledge) denotes the proposition that the carrying out of practices rests centrally on the successful inculcation of shared, embodied know-how that sets it apart from referential-representational knowledge (Johannisson 2011; Sandberg and Tsoukas 2011; Schatzki 2006). Practical understanding, in short, includes knowing how to carry out practices without being able to fully articulate it, such as 'a self-taught skier who is unable to provide a word of helpful instruction, a skillful bicyclist whose sincere claims about how to balance and turn are all false' (Glick 2011, 427). Hence, people ill-equipped with practical understanding as it relates to a particular practice often find it hard to decode meanings and participate with others (cf., being able to speak a language).

It follows that the practice 'turn' in entrepreneurship studies conceives of *all* entrepreneurial phenomena as taking place within, and are aspects or components of, *the nexus of practices* – practices link up to form wider complexes and constellations – and this nexus forms the basic domain of study for entrepreneurship (following Giddens 1984, 2). Again, this stands in contrast to

scholarship that ontologically conceives of entrepreneurship as individual behavior and/or cognition that is embedded within networks, institutions, discourse, institutions, or social structures. Entrepreneurship studies from a practice tradition treats the *nexus of practices* as the site to study: the nature of entrepreneurship, the diversity of its occurrences, its transformations and its (unintended) effects. This may include commonly reproduced practices, for example, *ways of* pitching practices, networking practices, selling practices, resourcing practices, mentoring practices, decision making practices, strategizing practices, accounting practices, hiring practices and many others (see Anderson, Dodd, and Jack 2010; Keating, Geiger, and Mcloughlin 2013; Matthews, Chalmers, and Fraser 2018). But it is also important to not immediately 'separate out' these practices from those through which practitioners collectively seek to achieve their aims (see Jarzabkowski et al. 2016), or to assume that the labels we often ascribe to practices (e.g. selling, pitching, resourcing, etc.) are inherently immutable categories. Practicing entrepreneurship, in other words, occurs in association with 'other' practices, which may include, or intersect with, for example, *ways of* software programming, farming, producing energy, private investigating, digitally communicating, transporting, yoga practices, day-care practices and so on.

Why take the practice 'turn'?

The implications for taking the practice turn are numerous and varied, which we will discuss later, but why 'take' the 'turn' in the first place? In this section we outline three main arguments for doing so (noting, cautiously, that there may be others as well).

   The first argument for taking the practice turn is that it provides an activity-oriented perspective of entrepreneurship that goes beyond residual agency/structure, mind/body, action/thought and individual/collective dualisms originating from ontological individualism and societism (see Tatli et al. 2014 for an elaboration). In contrast, the practice tradition views entrepreneurship as an unfolding process – 'entrepreneuring' – that *emerges* in and through the nexus of practices. Hence, the practice tradition views (the nexus of) practices as *constitutive of* entrepreneurial identities, structures, power, organizations and actors. The 'entrepreneur', 'investor' and 'client' identities, for example, become inconceivable without first considering the enactment and entanglement of various practices. Additionally, the practice tradition materially grounds entrepreneurial phenomena – practicing is facilitated through and constitutive of corporeal bodies and matter. The practice tradition opens the door for a more-than-human view of entrepreneurship; one in which people and their actions are but just one part of the reproduction and/or transformation of (the nexus of) practices. By positing entrepreneurship as the result of an enactment of practices, entangled within a broader nexus of practices, the practice turn promotes a 'site' ontology (Schatzki 2005). This is to say that the nexus of practices within which entrepreneurship occurs are situated and take place on a single plane, which contrasts with that assumption that entrepreneurship can be sliced into individual/collective levels or along agency/structure, mind/body or action/thought dualisms (Sarason, Dean, and Dillard 2006; Sarason, Dillard, and Dean 2010).

   The second argument is that the practice tradition provides a unit of empirical analysis that has thus far been overlooked or marginalized, which enables scholars to illuminate the vast diversity of entrepreneurial phenomena (Gartner 1985, 2016; Welter et al. 2016). Because entrepreneurship is commonly regarded by scholars as either an individual-level or organizational-level phenomenon, research questions, empirical studies and theories are rooted in either individuals (i.e. their behaviors, their emotions, their intentions, their sensemaking, their thinking, etc.) or organizations (i.e. strategies, venture creation, orientations, management, etc.). In both of these perspectives, however, the actual work of entrepreneurship, the practices through which opportunities are discovered, are created, are altered, are transformed, or are reproduced, fade into the background. The practice tradition, alternatively, forefronts these everyday practices. Ethnomethodology, in particular, investigates the production and transformation of 'ordinary practical reasoning' by trying to describe and explain practices (Garfinkel 1986; Rawls 2008). Therefore, another way to conceive and empirically research the vast diversity of entrepreneurial phenomena is to observe,

explain and compare the dynamics of an entanglement of practices: the ways in which practices move and circulate, how they are composed and transformed, how they intersect and overlap with other practices and how they persist, continue or die out (Nicolini 2017).

Finally, taking the practice turn helps to rethink the nature and role of language in entrepreneurship research. In the practice tradition, the use of language by practitioners and researchers is not as much as a way to represent the world, as much as ways to intervene and act on it. Drawing on Butler and Foucault, Nicolini (2012) explains that discursive-material practices carry meaning and intentionality onto the scene of action and provide participants with ways of influencing each other and the situation (for example, by introducing new forms of intentionality or new meanings). Conceiving of pitches, meetings, phone calls, interviews, blogging, writing or advertising in terms of discursive-material practices is to recognize that the meaning of these spoken or written words are derived from their material connections and references to entanglements among practices in question. Thus, the practice tradition argues against the 'pulling out' and prioritizing of narratives and discourse in order to achieve representationalist and generalization aims. Consequently, the practice tradition contrasts with *individual* interpretative-based entrepreneurship research that analyses interviews, texts, signs, and communication (i.e. arguments, pitches, stories, etc.) in order to develop and further advance theories of entrepreneurial cognition, identity and sensemaking.

What does it mean to 'take' the practice turn?

'Taking' the practice turn in entrepreneurship studies means to take seriously the practices of practitioners in the present moment of their acting. And yet, taking the practice turn is not quite as simple as this. As we explain below, making a contribution to entrepreneurship-as-practice means to adopt and deploy an internally coherent 'package' (Nicolini 2017). This is to say that when studying entrepreneurial phenomena one must ensure complementarity between ontological, epistemological and methodological choices. Moreover, the value of empirical research – what constitutes a 'theoretical contribution' – sits uneasily alongside traditional criteria in entrepreneurship studies.

As Nicolini (2017) describes, deploying and contributing to entrepreneurship-as-practice means to adopt the ontology as just described, or more specifically, by selecting and working within a certain theory of practice, such as Bourdieu's theory of practice, Giddens structuration theory, Scollon's mediated discourse theory, Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, Schatzki's practice ontology or others (for further reading about each of these theories of practice see Nicolini 2012). Generally speaking, taking the practice turn means to commit to the notion that entrepreneurial life exists within and as an aspect of the broader nexus of practices. Prioritizing practice also means to 'let go' of thinking of entrepreneurial phenomena as singular and substantially rooted in a particular category, such as cognition, behaviors, networks, structures or systems. Adopting the logic of practice means to marry the notion that the nexuses of practices are related to more enduring social orders (ventures or startups, markets, sectors, institutions, culture, gender, etc.) with the observation that entrepreneurial agency is a relational, embodied and improvisational struggle for intelligibility (cf. Chalmers and Shaw 2017; Gross and Geiger 2017; Keating, Geiger, and Mcloughlin 2013).

Taking the practice turn also means to follow this new ontology down the road, so to speak, to a different epistemology and its methodological implications. A practice tradition forefronts neither positivist nor interpretivist views on knowledge, broadly speaking, but a relational one. In particular, a relational-materialist epistemology views knowledge not as an inert 'entity' or 'resource' nor as individual subjective experience, but articulated in the flow of nexuses of practices (Gherardi 2000; Nicolini 2011). Knowledge and practice thus have a mutual constitution, and are not separate phenomena – remove the 'knowing-how' of playing chess from the practice, and we no longer have anything recognizable as chess-playing practice (Orlikowski 2002, 251). To view knowledge in this way means to understand entrepreneurial phenomena, scholars are entangling themselves and their own practices (that is, the practices of 'research') in the nexus of practices. Hence, adopting the practice tradition is a challenging but achievable methodological task (Gherardi 2012), as becomes evident in the articles of this special issue.

Finally, adopting the practice tradition sits uneasily alongside academic publishing custom in which articles are valued for their 'theoretical contributions'. Theories of practice are not explanatory 'theories', i.e. a set of terms that explain causal relations of specified entities, and cannot be tested in the positivist sense. As practice theorists suggest, a contribution to the entrepreneurship-as-practice research project is rather achieved when one provides a rigorous and convincing *accounts* by 'zooming in' to examine and explain the enactment of practices, and then 'zooming out' to grasp the nexus of practices that constitute larger social phenomena (i.e. ventures, fields, sector, and industries)(Nicolini 2009). Practices can become associated with one another, since the outcome of one practice can be a 'resource', or starting place, for another. Hence, the practice tradition sensitizes scholars to consider practices as not only the 'doing' of entrepreneurship, but also its 'doing' of society – reproductions, updates, alterations and transformations of practices have real intended and unintended effects on the nexuses of practices in which they are entangled. To achieve this, scholars must acquire familiarity with real practices and build fluency in the use of technical concepts to name and convey what is salient, essential, synoptic, and typical of the complex action-chains that constitute practices and their associations. In other words, the objective of this research is not to describe a given practice, but to develop empirically derived and convincing *accounts* of entrepreneurial phenomena: theory-informed and succinct delineations and explanations of how things work or came about, are perpetuated or transformed in particular associations of practices, and the consequences for the nexus of practices. In sum, the ambition and hope of entrepreneurship-as-practice is to increase our understanding of the diverse, fragmented, distributed and fast-moving reality of entrepreneurial life around the globe, and the complex role of entrepreneuring in shaping and being shaped by a contingent and ever-changing nexus of practices.

Inevitably, a criticism that is likely to emerge is that entrepreneurship-as-practice studies are not theoretically insightful as they are limited to particular practices. In other words, empirical accounts may help to explain small, local instances of entrepreneurial phenomena (i.e. instances of a particular practice), but are limited in their power to abstractly explain nonlocal and large outcomes (i.e. typically, venture creation, industry dynamism, etc.). Such a criticism can be overcome, not by striving for abstraction, essentialism and generalization, but by recognizing that practices and associations can be pervasive and their effects cumulative over time and space. In studying these practices and their associations, we come to terms with diversity of effects that practicing entrepreneurship may have on the nexus of practices, which opening up new and varied ways to understand the situated political, environmental, economic and social consequences of practicing entrepreneurship. This makes methodologies and explanations no less complicated, insightful or rigorous than we are accustomed to, given that the creation and reproduction of 'small' and 'large' entrepreneurial phenomena is increasingly complex. A contribution in this tradition, therefore, requires giving explanations of entrepreneurial phenomena by way of fashioning accounts of this complexity by paying attention to the practices and entanglements that compose observable phenomena. As a consequence, however, the practice tradition necessitates departing from certain kinds of expectations of what constitutes a 'theoretical contribution' in contemporary entrepreneurship scholarship.

Articles in this special issue

The articles in this special issue attest to a broad range of approaches (both theoretically and empirically) that take a practice turn in entrepreneurship studies.

Champenois, Lefebvre and Ronteau (in this issue) offer a systematic review of academic journal articles from 2002 to 2018 that should sensitize the reader to the difficulties of identifying scholarship that represents a practice approach. The article provides a methodology for identifying practice approach articles, sorting through articles that use the word 'practice' but do not emphasize a practice tradition, as well as articles that are both central and peripheral to the practice ideas espoused in the practice tradition. For example, George and Bock (2011) article, 'The business model in practice and its implications for entrepreneurship research' is not an article adopting practice theory, yet it focuses on an entrepreneurial practice. This article is not representative of practice-based

scholarship and is not included under the 'entrepreneurship-as-practice' umbrella. Articles that assume a practice based tradition, are also, to varying degrees, more or less concerned with ideas central to practice theory. As a way to sort through issues of whether an entrepreneurship article is central to the practice turn, Champenois et al. (in this issue) offer readers ways of clustering articles by methodology (e.g. ethnography, quasi-ethnography, participant observation, interventionist, etc.) data (e.g. interviews, observations, field notes, videos, etc.) and practice perspective (e.g. structuration, social practice theory, etc.). These tables show that the 'entrepreneurship-as-practice' field is, now, loosely organized across a wide variety of ideas and methods. In addition, they offer insights into ways that entrepreneurship-as-practice research might address a variety of theoretical, methodological and site concerns as entrepreneurship scholars engage in practice based studies.

Antonacopoulou and Fuller (in this issue) provide insights into the nature of entrepreneurship-as-practice by developing an argument for *emplacement* – the idea that the body, mind, materiality and environment are transformed and transfigured 'as they go' in movement. This article suggest that the performance and transformation of practices are embodied and linked to *sensations*, that is, senses of touch, sight, smell, taste and sound. Such sensuousness is central to 'anticipation' that defines what is deemed as a suitable response in the moment. The authors' understanding of emplacement defines it as any action that is part of everyday life that marks a leap of faith when navigating the unknown. In this respect, the authors extend our understanding of novelty and its emergence, through an analysis of the unfolding of entrepreneuring as reflected in both regularity and deviation which co-create the tensions and extensions within and across different connections of practices. They also contribute to practice theory more generally by drawing attention to the refinements and adjustments that shape (entrepreneurial) action as 'emplaced' by social actors through constellations and entanglements of different aspects of practice to reveal the intra and inter-practice dynamics intertwining body, mind, materiality and environment.

Using Nicolini (2011) as both a theoretical and methodological frame of reference, Teague, Gorton, & Liu (in this issue) explore the practices of 'pitching' at the site of an angel investor group in Spokane, Washington. The intriguing aspects of this paper involve the authors' efforts to reframe previous scholarship on pitching (typically theorized as a transactional presentation between individuals seeking funding and support for their opportunities and investors with funding and support) by presenting pitching through the lens of practice scholarship and, then, using the practice approach to dialogue with current scholarship about pitching behaviors. They identify four different pitching practices – developmental, pre-investment, investment, and update – that correspond to constellations of different purposes, relationships, and contexts that constitute why and when individuals would be involved in pitching. The article shows how the practice approach can reveal new insights into this phenomenon, as well as entice scholars to consider a wider variety of situations in which individuals are in dialogue about their futures (see Antonacopoulou and Fuller in this issue).

Sklaveniti and Steyaert (in this issue) offer a prescient warning, a critical assessment and a path forward as the practice turn in entrepreneurship studies gains traction and opens up new ways to conduct research, theorize and write about entrepreneurial phenomena. The authors use Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, which has been dominant in existing entrepreneurship-as-practice research (see Champenois, Lefebvre and Ronteau in this issue), to point out that concepts like 'doxa,' 'illusio' and 'reflexivity' are regularly forgotten or downplayed in favour of more well-known concepts such as 'field', 'capital' and 'habitus'. In particular, the authors focus on 'reflexivity' – a concept at the core of Bourdieu's theoretical, personal and political work – to argue that 'reflexivity' makes salient the problematic assumption that a constructed theoretical model of what presumably happens in practice is the practice itself. The authors point out that, as researchers, 'we tend to habituate and enact the mindset of the field in which we are working', but reflexivity 'allows getting out of the dispositions and values of the field, breaking with the "logic of theory" and turning to the "logic of practice"'. Thus, the value of reflexivity connects theory and practice, and without it, practice-based research will maintain the status quo of the field (i.e. a search for grand theory) instead of realizing the promise of practice theories.

Conclusion: the practice of entrepreneurship-as-practice

We conclude this article with some suggestions for how scholars can place their research within the entrepreneurship-as-practice research domain. In the process of developing this special issue, there was for us, a significant amount of learning about how 'entrepreneurship-as-practice' was perceived and engaged with in the academic field. When this special issue in *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* was first discussed after the first 'Entrepreneurship-as-Practice' workshop in February 2016, our goal was to surface current scholarly work in the entrepreneurship-as-practice domain, as well as alert scholars who were not familiar with the practice turn in entrepreneurship to what we hoped would be a growing community of practice oriented scholars. As this introduction suggests, there are significant advantages for using a practice-based approach to studying entrepreneurship, and, we believe, it (along with the many articles previously cited), makes a strong argument for encouraging scholars to join the entrepreneurship-as-practice community. As those arguments and advantages have been offered earlier, we provide some tangible insights into our sensibilities for a publishable entrepreneurship-as-practice article. For us, the important question has been: **is this manuscript based on practice theory and are the methods used practice oriented?** A number of manuscripts that were submitted seemed to be opportunistic hybrids that painted a patina of practice-based citations but were not themselves, inherently, practice based. For example, we can safely specify that deploying only individual survey methodologies would rarely qualify for a practice-based study. Information from survey questionnaires does not do justice to the day-to-day practices of practitioners in a specific social and material world. And, to re-emphasize the point made earlier in this introduction, empirical practice studies focus on practice as the unit of analysis, and not on individual entrepreneurs, networks, narratives, institutions or situations, etc. Practices are not, merely, behaviors. Be-that-as-it-may, a practice orientation tends towards observational field work of a particular situation over time typically requiring an involvement of the researcher in the site where practices occur. Insights into practices will not come about through asking for retrospective interpretations about previous experiences. Basing an empirical study on individual responses to interview questions or a questionnaire is thus not practice oriented research. Unfortunately, many of the manuscripts submitted did not recognize that adopting the practice tradition would necessitate practice-oriented methods. While this may appear obvious to many readers who are knowledgeable of the literature in practice tradition, the number of papers submitted to this special issue that followed those two guidelines was less than 50%. Our suggestions for research in the entrepreneurship-as practice domain are not that onerous to follow, but, more of an issue of scholars not being aware of what entrepreneurship-as-practice research is, and, how it is conducted.

We believe that this introduction, and the articles in this special issue, offer new insights into the nature of entrepreneurship-as-practice scholarship, and we hope that more scholars will see the value of engaging in this approach. And, note, then, that parallel to this special issue is an on-going workshop sequence and other events on entrepreneurship as practice (see https://www.entrepreneurshipaspractice.com where the entrepreneurship-as-practice community meets to discuss work in progress and current theory and methods in this area).

Disclosure statement

ORCID

Neil A. Thompson   http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8689-5287
Karen Verduijn   http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9388-0654
William B. Gartner   http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5863-9988

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