

Chia, R. (2017) A process-philosophical understanding of organizational learning as 'wayfinding': process, practices and sensitivity to environmental affordances. *Learning Organization*, 24(2), pp. 107-118. (doi:[10.1108/TLO-11-2016-0083](https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-11-2016-0083))

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Deposited on: 30 November 2016

# **A Process-Philosophical Understanding of Organizational Learning as “Wayfinding”: Process, Practices and Sensitivity to Environmental Affordances**

## **Abstract:**

**Purpose** – The paper articulates a practice-based, non-cognitivist approach to Organizational Learning.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Explores the potential contribution of a process-based “practice turn” in social theory for understanding Organizational Learning.

**Findings:** In complex, turbulent environments, robust organizations recur more to cultivated sensitivities and predispositions rather than rely on elaborate plans and strategies to guide their action; they “Wayfind” their way to sustainable success.

**Originality/Value:** Develops the understanding of Organizational Learning as a process of everyday practical coping guided by internalized sensitivities and predispositions.

**Keywords:** *Becoming*, social practices, habitus, empirical sensitivity, environmental affordances, Wayfinding

**Paper Type:** Viewpoint

## **Introduction**

Discussions surrounding the literature on Organizational Learning are underpinned by two contrasting emphasis regarding the nature of learning and action; one essentially cognitivist (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Hedberg, 1981; Fiol and Lyles, 1985), the other essentially behaviourist (Cyert and March, 1963; Nelson and Winter, 1982; Levitt and March, 1988). More recent conceptual interventions emphasizing the “distributed”, socially-constructed, and/or contextually-situated nature of learning (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Cook and Yanow, 1993) point towards unresolved tensions between these two emphases. More conceptual untangling is needed. In the first instance Organizational Learning (OL) is differentiated from “mere” behavioural change/adaptation and defined as a “higher level” cognitive activity involving the “development of shared understanding and

conceptual schemes among members of the organization” (Fiol and Lyles, 1985, p. 806; see also Hedberg, 1981; Örténblad, 2001). In the second, OL is viewed as “routine based, history-dependent and target-oriented” (Levitt and March, 1988, p. 319). One emphasises learning as the “storing” and “sharing” of knowledge and understanding through elaborate communication systems, standard operating procedures, mental models, documents...etc. (Örténblad, 2004, p. 133), the other emphasises the importance of learning through direct practical engagement; bodily *hexis*, routines and habit-driven actions describes this kind of learning. One presumes that learning and action are driven by a rational-calculative “logic of consequentiality”, the other a “logic of appropriateness” (March, 2003, p. 205) whereby behaviour involves simply “matching procedures to situations” (Levitt and March, 1988, p. 320). In essence, therefore there is a relatively unacknowledged conceptual tension existing in the extant literature that has been insufficiently addressed; that between a behavioural and a cognitivist understanding of learning. This has important implications for research and theorizing in Organizational Learning.

In this paper, I take sides with Cyert and March’s (1963) more behavioural approach which emphasises learning through direct engagement and adaptive action. This has some resonances with “action learning” (Revans, 1980; Pedler, 1997; Raelin, 1997) but crucially, the social dimension of such experience-based learning is missing from the latter and insufficiently developed in Cyert and March’s own work and in the work of others who are aware of the social aspects of learning (see, for instance, Gherardi *et al.*, 1998). I argue here that, what is presently undertheorized in the OL literature is the key role that socially-learned practices play in shaping an organization’s *disposition* and *modus operandi* and hence the kind of strategic actions taken. It is an organization’s repertoire of established social practices and the sensitivities and dispositions they instil, and not so much pre-specified plans, goals or articulated “rules” and “routines” that gives coherence and consistency to its actions when faced with environmental challenges. End-goals, plans and mental models or schemas are not a prerequisite for actions to be coherent, consistent and effective. Intelligent action can happen without the prior need for cognition and mental representation.

The recent process-based “practice turn” in social theory (Bourdieu, 1977/2002; Dreyfus, 1991; Schatzki, 2001) offers an alternative way of understanding how organizations are able to learn and respond to environmental demands without overly relying on conscious cognition. By conscious cognition I mean the deliberate processing of abstract mental images and representations in the mind as the basis of learning. Much of OL as a collective endeavour can be adequately explained as the silent transmission and absorption of social

practices by members of the collective that occurs non-deliberately and unconsciously. This is not to suggest that cognitive learning does not happen or that it is not important, but that *it can only take place because prior unconscious adaptive and improvisatory learning has already taken place; social practices provide the necessary substrate for cognitive learning to be possible.*

I maintain that in turbulent times where change is perpetual and relentless, OL that over-relies on cognitively-articulated plans, detailed execution strategies and clear road maps for “navigating” the uncertain waters of environmental changes, can be a hindrance more than a help. Instead, under such relentlessly changing circumstances effective organizational responses often recur to internalised predispositions that involve a heightened sensitivity to environmental perturbations. In the face of uncertainty, organizations learn to respond more by sensing, improvising and adapting as they go; they rely more on practice-acquired sensitivities and dispositions to help them cope, adjust and adapt effectively. In contrast to “navigation” which presupposes the existence of pre-established goals and route maps, and which assumes that we must know “*before* we go”, this alternative practice-based form of OL entails learning and “knowing as we go”. I call this learning process “Wayfinding”.

Wayfinding as a practice-based understanding of social behaviour can only be properly understood through a worldview that takes emergence and *Becoming* as a fundamental feature of everyday reality. From this process-philosophical worldview, the social entities, categories and distinctions that we find so familiar, are not “ready-made” or objectively given “out there”. Instead, they only emerge and *become* what they are as the aggregative effects of social actions. Everyday coping actions contribute towards generating social and organizational orders and the learnings associated with them. This basic form of learning, that I call Wayfinding, depends upon a refined empirical sensitivity to ongoing environmental changes and the constant discovery of appropriate responses needed to deal with such changes.

Wayfinding better describes how successful organizations cope effectively in the face of uncertainty. It entails constantly sensing, adapting and effectively responding to environmental solicitations and taking advantage of their affordances to meet the organization’s evolving needs. Much of this happens prior to mental cognition and retrospective rationalization. Superior organizational performance, as such, depends on how successfully an organization is able to detect and “bending” the grain of the world’s becoming to aid its own survival and growth. This is what gives an organization its competitive edge. But this practice-based understanding of OL as Wayfinding is best

understood from a process-philosophical worldview and it is to this consideration that I now turn.

### **From *Being* to *Becoming*: Towards a Process-Philosophical Worldview**

Western philosophical outlooks have been shaped by two contrasting and competing worldviews; one inspired by the Heraclitean emphasis on the ever-fluxing and changing nature of ultimate reality, the other by a Parmenidean insistence on its permanent and unchanging nature (Mansley-Robinson, 1968). It pits a metaphysics of *Becoming* against a metaphysics of *Being* (Chia, 1999; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). The history of western thought has been dominated by subsequent ceaseless attempts to reconcile these two opposing tendencies. In the event, Aristotle's influential insistence that reality comprises a multitude of discrete objects and things, led to the metaphysics of *Being* becoming dominant in western thought (Whitehead, 1926/1985).

According to this *Being* worldview, the real world comprises "a succession of instantaneous configurations of matter" (Whitehead, 1926/1985, p. 63); stable entities, objects, things and events populate the universe of our senses. As such, reality readily lends itself to accurate naming, classification, and categorization. We say "*what* each part of the sensible continuum is, and all these abstract *whats* are concepts" (James, 1911/1996, p. 50). Learning from this resultant cognitivist viewpoint is an information-processing mental activity; the more abstract and generalizable the concepts the "higher" the levels of learning attained. Mental cognition and representation overrides practical nous and *in situ* adaptive capabilities. Aristotelian "episteme" is privileged over "techne", "metis" and "phronesis" (Dunne, 1996; Chia and Holt, 2009, pp. 105-108). This penchant for the abstract over the concrete remains ubiquitous in Western thought. Thus, "a revolutionary designs the model for the city that must be built; a soldier sets out the plan of war to be followed; an economist decides on the growth curve to target" (Jullien, 2004, p. 3). Each projects upon the world an "ideal" that must then be properly "executed" in order for a concrete outcome to be realised. But this prioritising of the abstract over the concrete, that thought must always precede action, has been challenged by James March.

March (1972, p. 419) points out that our dominant theories of learning and action assume that "thinking should precede action; that action should serve a purpose; that purpose should be defined in terms of a consistent set of pre-existent goals". But he argues, there are many practical circumstances where people "act before they think" (March, 1972, p. 423) and yet this is hardly ever acknowledged in the social sciences and in the OL literature. This idea

that one can act intelligently and effectively without the prior need for conscious cognition and representation has been forcefully argued by the philosopher Hubert Dreyfus (1988; 1991; 2002) who drew on the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, amongst others, to show that the two most basic forms of intelligent behavior, learning, and action, can be described and explained without recourse to mind or brain representations. Dreyfus shows that even at the level of skill mastery, an expert chess player, for instance, is highly attuned to recognizing subtle evolving differences in situations and acts spontaneously upon them without relying on mental images or conscious assessments whatsoever (Dreyfus, 2002, pp. 371-372). For him, true skill and mastery is all about the ability to make “refined discriminations” (Dreyfus, 2005, p. 8); to note the subtle “differences that make a difference” (Bateson, 1972, p. 453) and then to react accordingly. As such, skilled “know-how” consists of the ability to make “finer and finer discriminations of situations paired with the appropriate response to each” (Dreyfus, 2002, p. 367). All this “assessment” occurs almost spontaneously and relies simply on finely-honed sensitivities and nurtured predispositions to guide responses. Such a practice-based understanding of skill mastery is predicated upon a process-philosophical worldview.

From a process-philosophical worldview, reality is perpetually fluxing, changing and *Becoming* and this means that it is virtually impossible to accurately represent and describe this fluid reality using language and symbols. Cognitively-based forms of knowledge, therefore, are “forever inadequate to the fullness of reality” (James, 1911/1996, p. 78); they “falsify as well as omit” (James, 1911/1996, p. 78). Therefore, to unquestioningly accept that formal knowledge accurately represent reality is to “mistake the map for the territory” and to commit a “Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness” (Whitehead, 1926/1985, p. 64). Mental representations regularly fail us. We do know more than we can tell (Polanyi, 1966); our observations and perceptions are far more fine-grained and sensuously-detailed than what language and cognition is able to capture and articulate. Despite this inadequacy, we are nevertheless still able to respond effectively to unexpected situations we may face. This is simply because we have acquired socially-transmitted sensitivities and predispositions (often unthinkingly) that enable us to do so. It is, therefore, this nurtured sensitivity to environmental solicitations, and the unconsciously-learned responses shaped by a collective’s repertoire of practices, that enable members of a community or organization to respond effectively in their day-to-day engagements.

Practices, as such are the “building blocks” of social life. Just as collectively-learned productive practices and “know how” help us to skilfully extract iron ore from the mountains

and to transform them into steel girders, clay and shale into bricks, and sand, soda, ash and limestone into glass, so that we are able to construct relatively permanent structural edifices to live in, so also established social practices help us to sensitively transform the “blooming, buzzing confusion” (James, 1911/1996, p. 50) of our lived experiences, into a more liveable social reality. We do this by selectively parsing, stabilizing and fixing aspects of it to enable us to forge productive relationships and to generate the social configurations that we subsequently find so necessary and familiar. Societies, institutions and organizations, as such, are tangible manifestations of our success at transforming the otherwise “wild” forces of change into a manageable form in order to aid social progress. Practices, therefore, are our human “tools” for creating and sustaining islands of social order in a relentless churning sea of change. They create the necessary ordering substrate upon which conscious cognition and representation can subsequently take place. This understanding of the social construction of reality is predicated upon a recent “practice turn” in social theory

### **The Practice Turn in Social Theory**

Central to the recent “practice turn” in social theory (Schatzki, 2001) is the attempt to explain learning and behaviour by overcoming the dichotomy between objective “structures” and subjective “agency”, between the “macro” and the “micro” and between cognitivism and behaviourism. It attempts to create a middle ground between structural determinism and agentic voluntarism (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 30-51). For practice theorists, it is actions and practices that produce the individual and the collective and not the other way around. Structure and agency, and consciousness and intentionality are secondary effects of practices. The individual, as such, is not some isolatable, ready-made, autonomous unit but rather emerges “as a locus of development” within a web of social relations and practices (Ingold, 2000, p. 3). Nor is the collective itself a discrete entity either since collectivism is “just a more capacious form of individualism” (Schatzki, 2005, p. 466). Thus, actors (both individual and collective) are not isolated pre-existing entities, but temporarily stabilized relational “bundles of practices”, sensitivities and predispositions (Schatzki, 2005).

Practices interactively help shape, compose and configure relationships, identities, entities and outcomes. Much like a flock of migrating wild geese instinctively sensing the movement of others fly in formation through spontaneous coordination, practices do not arise from any conscious orchestration but emerge spontaneously from the linking of “a profound mutual susceptibility” by members “who constantly modify their habitual individual responses as they interact with each other” in order to achieve a collectively satisfactory

outcome (Barnes, 2001, pp. 23-24). This kind of “primitive” sensory-based learning and adapting is reminiscent of how children often learn to behave, not by learning abstract rules or instructions, but by close observation and imitation. In such immersive learning “Body *hexis* speaks directly to motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic...children are particularly attentive to the gestures and postures, which in their eyes, express everything that goes to make an accomplished adult – a way of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and of using implements, always associated with a tone of voice, a style of speech” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 17). They develop sensitivities, predispositions and mannerisms unconsciously and interactively and this non-deliberate learning happens by observing closely what other skilled practitioners are doing (Barnes, 2001, p. 26). Practices, therefore, are collective “accomplishments” (Barnes, 2001, pp. 24-25). They serve as a repository of sensitivities, skills and “know how” that guide, but do not determine, a member’s responses to situations encountered. Each member of a collective invariably exhibits behaviour that is *homologous* with that of other members because what binds them are these nurtured sensitivities and dispositions more than any explicit set of rules, procedures or even shared visions, or pre-established goals.

Bourdieu (1990, p. 54) calls this set of acquired sensitivities and dispositions “habitus”. He writes: “The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices...It ensures the active presence of past experiences...(that) tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms”. Habitus describe non-cognitively how capabilities can be learnt and how effective actions can flow unthinkingly from a “durable transposable set of dispositions”; how true mastery of a skill does not presuppose a reliance on conscious intention and goal-orientation (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53); and how strategic “moves” can be made “without being the product of a genuine strategic intention” (Bourdieu, 1977/2002, p. 73). According to Bourdieu, such practical nous is mostly passed on silently from body to body without ever passing through consciousness. As a consequence human activity “can be *purposive* (in the sense of being adaptively effective) without the actor having in mind a *purpose* (i.e., a pre-established goal)” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 93). In both Bourdieu’s and Dreyfus’s account, therefore, what unifies and renders coherent a set of behavioural responses is a practice-based habitus comprising a set of sensitivities and dispositions that generate a *modus operandi* that is unique to a particular collective.

To summarize, habitus govern how “things, situations and people show up and matter to us” (Spinoza *et al.*, 1997, p. 20). Through habitus, actions are “regulated” and orchestrated



without there being any need for explicit goals, plans, routines, rules or even heuristics to guide such action. Yet, the habitus is by no means a deterministic structure. Instead, it comprises a generative “art of inventing” that makes possible “an infinite number of practices that are relatively unpredictable...but (that are) also limited in their diversity” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 55). So whilst there is clearly coherence and consistency in responses taken, there is also often ingenuity displayed in each response to a specific set of circumstances faced. It allows for novelty and surprises when thus deployed. Additionally, each such adaptive action undertaken in response to environmental demands helps to further refine our discriminative capabilities, sensitizes us to environmental affordances, and thus contributes towards extending the repertoire of already-established social practices to draw from in future encounters. In this way a community learns, grows and knows “as it goes”; in other words it *Wayfinds* its way towards an ever-widening capacity for coping with the unknown and the not-yet-known. It is this collectively learnt capacity that describes Organizational Learning as Wayfinding.

### **Organizational Learning as Wayfinding: Refining Empirical Sensitivity**

In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1971) distinguishes between two modes of existence and engagement that he calls *building* and *dwelling*. Building is characterized by individuals distancing themselves from their lifeworld and relying on cognition and abstract representation to guide their actions. Thus, it is often assumed that we design and build before we dwell. Heidegger, however, argues convincingly that, “only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 148). Dwelling is our primary mode of existence and engagement; it precedes building. In the primary dwelling mode, the world does not appear pre-ordered or “ready-made” but comes into being through our actions and practices.

Ingold (2011) draws on this Heideggerian distinction between building and dwelling to show how differently a *designer/producer* and a *weaver* approach their work. In the first instance, the designer/producer designs, plans and acts consciously and *purposefully* to achieve his/her pre-conceived end-goals. On the other hand, the weaver is situated “in amongst a world of materials, which he literally draws out in bringing forth a piece of work” (Ingold, 2011, p. 10). The weaver acts *purposively* by drawing on what is immediately available to deal effectively with the predicaments and obstacles he/she immediately faces from within the specific set of circumstances he/she finds him/herself in. This intimate link between dwelling and *purposive* action provides us with a clue as to how effective learning

and action can take place within an immersed situation without cognition and abstract representation. It enables us to better appreciate how skilled practitioners become so through the intimate coupling of stimulus with response when immersed in the situations they find themselves in. The key to this kind of pre-cognitive learning is the nurturing of an empirical sensitivity to what a specific environment affords.

### *Perception and Environmental Affordances*

Contrary to the principles of environmental determinism, individuals and organizations respond to their environment not by passively adapting to the demands of the latter, but by actively selecting aspects of it that provide opportunities for incorporation into their own need for survival and growth (Bateson, 1972; Gibson, 1979; Ingold, 2000). Through historically-tested practices they pro-actively fashion the environment to meet their own specific needs and requirements. This active appropriating happens “not because there is no reality outside our heads....but because we select and edit the reality” (Bateson, 1972, p. vii) to suit our evolving needs. Perception, as such is not the mere passive “registering” of externally existing phenomena, but the active construction of a liveable reality (Gibson, 1979). In so doing, we produce what Von Uexküll (1933) calls our own *Umwelt* (experienced environmental surroundings); an environment containing significant markers or “carriers of significance” specific to us.

This emphasis on the active role of sensory perception in shaping our specific environment forms the backbone of an alternative practice-based approach to understanding how learning happens at its most rudimentary level. It provides an ecologically-based explanation of how, in human societies, skilled practical coping is developed, refined, grown, and socially-transmitted within a collective without necessarily implying conscious cognition (Gibson, 1979; Dreyfus, 1991). According to these ecologically-based explanations, environmental *excitations* attract our attention to the affordances proffered and this then trigger our responses. The “environment”, therefore, comprises “*organism-indexed faces of the world*” (Sanders, 1993, p. 290, my emphasis); what is perceived to afford an organism such as an organization is inextricable from the organization’s own character and immediate preoccupations. Active sensing, perception and selection plays a crucial role in the organisation/environment nexus and this explains how an organization succeeds by sensitively seeking out and exploiting environmental opportunities.

Affordances are the milieu of possibilities an environment proffers or furnishes for an active participant sensitized to it. In this regard, affordances have an objective quality about

them but only in relation to a participant's perceived needs. There is a "demand character" or an "invitation character" (Kurt Lewin, in J. F. Brown, 1929, p. 203) about the environment. Thus a fruit says "Eat me", water says "Drink me" and thunder says "Fear me" (Koffka, 1935, p. 7). But nothing is richer and more elaborate in terms of environmental affordances than those provided us in our social engagements and interactions; in human communities the possibilities are infinite. Importantly, the act of perceiving an affordance in the environment (whether material or social) does not imply an act of classification; it does not mean cognitively representing it as a mental object prior to acting on it. Rather the perceiving of an affordance depends on the capacity to make increasingly finer and finer discriminations regarding the significance of aspects of the social and material environment that holds value for the participating actor. For instance, members of an Inuit community are clearly able to finely differentiate between many different types of snow and to respond accordingly even if they cannot explain why they are able to do so. Their understanding derives simply from a constant exposure and prolonged immersion in snow conditions (Krupnik *et al.*, 2010); for them the ability to sense, discriminate and respond appropriately in different snow conditions is a matter of life and death. Such sensitivity to environmental affordances vary from culture to culture, from society to society and most certainly from organization to organization. This helps explain why there is an irreducible idiosyncrasy unique to each society and organization.

### *Learning as Refining Empirical Sensitivity*

Whilst learning is more often understood in cognitivist terms as the acquisition, storing and manipulation of mental images and the subsequent establishment of causal relationships, such an emphasis underestimates the primacy of sensory-based learning through concrete experiencing and its transmission through practices. In his highly acclaimed book *Science and the Modern World*, the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1926/1985) warned that the educational world had become overly-preoccupied with abstract models and formulations in their teaching curriculum. For him, preoccupation with such "formularised information" leads to a "neglect to strengthen habits of concrete appreciation of the individual facts in their full interplay" (Whitehead, 1926/1985, p. 246). So much so that even when "you understand all about the sun and all about the atmosphere and all about the rotation of the earth, you may still miss the radiance of the sunset" (Whitehead, 1926/1985, p. 248). For Whitehead, what is increasingly missing in the learning agenda is the need to cultivate an "aesthetic appreciation" for the concreteness of lived experience; a refined empirical sensitivity to real

goings-on in the world. This idea of learning as the relentless refining of the senses to environmental affordances and not as the acquisition and accumulation of knowledge or information is missing in the OL literature.

Empirical sensitivity is a pre-requisite for the practice of successfully crafting, weaving and “bending” environmental affordances productively to meet our evolving needs. Learning in this more concrete sense is about refining the capacity to make ever-finer differentiations in our observations; an approach William James (1912/1996, p. 42) calls “radical empiricism”. It is about rigorously striving to attain an “uncompromising democracy of vision” (Ehrenzweig, 1967, p. 29) and allowing ourselves to see more naively and pristinely what is really going on in the world around us and then to act accordingly. It emphasizes attaining fidelity in our observations through discriminative attunement. The importance of nurturing this “aesthetic appreciation” is well understood in the arts and humanities and is variously alluded to in the social critic John Ruskin’s (1927, Vol. 4, p. 27) notion of the “innocence of the eye” and in the art theorist Anton Ehrenzweig (1967) notion of “artistic rigor”. It is even appreciated in the Japanese industrialist Konusuke Matsushita’s (1978/1986, p. 63-65) insistence on the need to cultivate a “meek, tractable and un-trapped *sunao* mind” to enables us to see more clearly what is going on to aid our decision-making.

This idea of learning, not as the acquisition of abstract knowledge but as the refining of empirical sensitivity is vital for sustainable organizational success. It resonates with what Teece (2012, p. 1396) alludes to but does not elaborate upon sufficiently in his discussion of the notion of “dynamic capabilities” as an organization’s ability to “sense”, “seize” and “transform” opportunities detected in its operating environment. This empirical “sensing” and the associated resourcefulness, I maintain, derives from an organization’s cultivated sensitivities and predispositions, but this practice-view of what “sensing” entails is not well understood in the strategy literature. As a consequence, there have been various conflicting attempts to define “dynamic capabilities” in the strategy literature (Teece *et al.*, 1997; Eisthardt and Martin, 2000; Peteraf *et al.*, 2013) without much consensus. What is missing is an understanding of empirical sensitivity as a crucial element of organizational success; it enables organizations to learn and respond through the process of Wayfinding.

### *Organizational Learning as Wayfinding*

The act of “navigation”, as we have alluded to, entails a reliance on pre-set goals and pre-charted maps. It presupposes the detached ability to survey the terrain to be navigated *in advance*. In the actual world of organizational realities, however, such detach surveying is

unrealisable; the organization is inextricably immersed and intertwined with its environment and both are perpetually shifting and changing. What is more appropriate for guiding response, therefore, is a practice-driven, sensory-based form of learning that allows for constant searching, adjustments, reconfiguration of responses and re-education of attention to emergent issues at hand. Ingold (2000, pp. 230-235) terms this collective responsive search for ever-newer pathways to negotiate and overcome the challenges faced, “wayfinding”. Wayfinding entails learning and knowing through iterative practical coping actions taken *in situ* and *sponte sua*. It presumes that in rapidly evolving and changing circumstances we can only “know as we go” (Ingold, 2000, p. 229). The wayfinding organization, as such, relies primarily on its repertoire of practices generated from past experiences, its refined sensitivities, and on habituated ways of responding to tentatively negotiate its way through an as-yet uncharted terrain.

Wayfinding better describes the reality faced by many organizations when confronted with unprecedented changes and are therefore forced to path-find their way towards sustainable existence and growth. It is about “reaching out into the unknown and developing an incomplete but practically sufficient comprehension of the situation in order to cope effectively with it” (Chia and Holt, 2009, p. 159). Surprise, uncertainty and novelty are the natural order of the day in such practical coping circumstances. OL as Wayfinding presupposes organizational actors to be immersed in the immediacy and mobility of their changing circumstances so that they have no choice but to rely on their empirical sensitivities and to draw on their repository of socially-acquired practices to respond appropriately and effectively to situations encountered.

This view of organizational life as immersed, ongoing practical coping, is one familiar to many experienced managers even though it conflicts with much of managerial talk that emphasises decisiveness, certainty, and clarity of action. For real organizational actors, however, the world “imposes its presence...its urgencies, its things to be done and said” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 52) without ever unfolding dramatically as a spectacle for an external observer. Coherence in actions taken therefore emerges inadvertently, not from any grand plan, but from acquired sensitivities and dispositions. Wayfinding implies the real possibility of surprises, fortuitous discoveries and the uncovering of hidden potentialities that are associated with an opportunity-seeking orientation. It prepares an organization for dealing with the unexpected, the unthought and the unthinkable in ways that are ultimately beneficial. OL as Wayfinding is what engenders organizational resilience and inventiveness.

## Conclusion

The literature on OL is underpinned by two contrasting learning emphases; one cognitivist, the other behaviourist. The “practice turn” in social theory provides a “third way” of understanding how organizations are able to learn and respond to environmental circumstances without overly relying on conscious cognition. Much of OL, as a collective endeavour, can be adequately explained non-cognitively as the silent transmission and absorption of social practices by organizational members; it occurs non-deliberately and unconsciously.

This practice view is underpinned by a process-philosophical understanding of reality. Practices, as such, are the primary “tools” that we rely upon to construct our social orders. Practices account for the finely-honed organizational capacity to detect environmental affordances and to respond effectively to such solicitations. Practices help sharpen empirical sensitivities and ensure the development of appropriate disposition to respond accordingly. Organizations as such learn continuously and unconsciously through their practical engagements. In the face of uncertainty, organizations succeed more by sensing, improvising and adapting as they go. In contrast to “navigation” which relies on pre-established maps and which assumes that we must know cognitively “*before* we go”, organizations in practice often non-deliberately “Wayfind” their way towards eventual success

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