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Track J: Practice of Strategy
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Theoretical Perspective of Practice: The A Practice Approach

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Overview

- **What is practice?**

- **Why does it matter?**

- **Example from AIM Research studying practices**

- **Advancing Practice Relevant Scholarship**

- **Rethinking the way we study the *Practice* of Strategy**

What is Practice and Why does it matter?

The Questions We Ask…

➤ **What is the added value of the concept of practice in understanding organization?**

➤ **What aspects of organization does the practice concept reveal that other concepts fail to bring to our attention?**
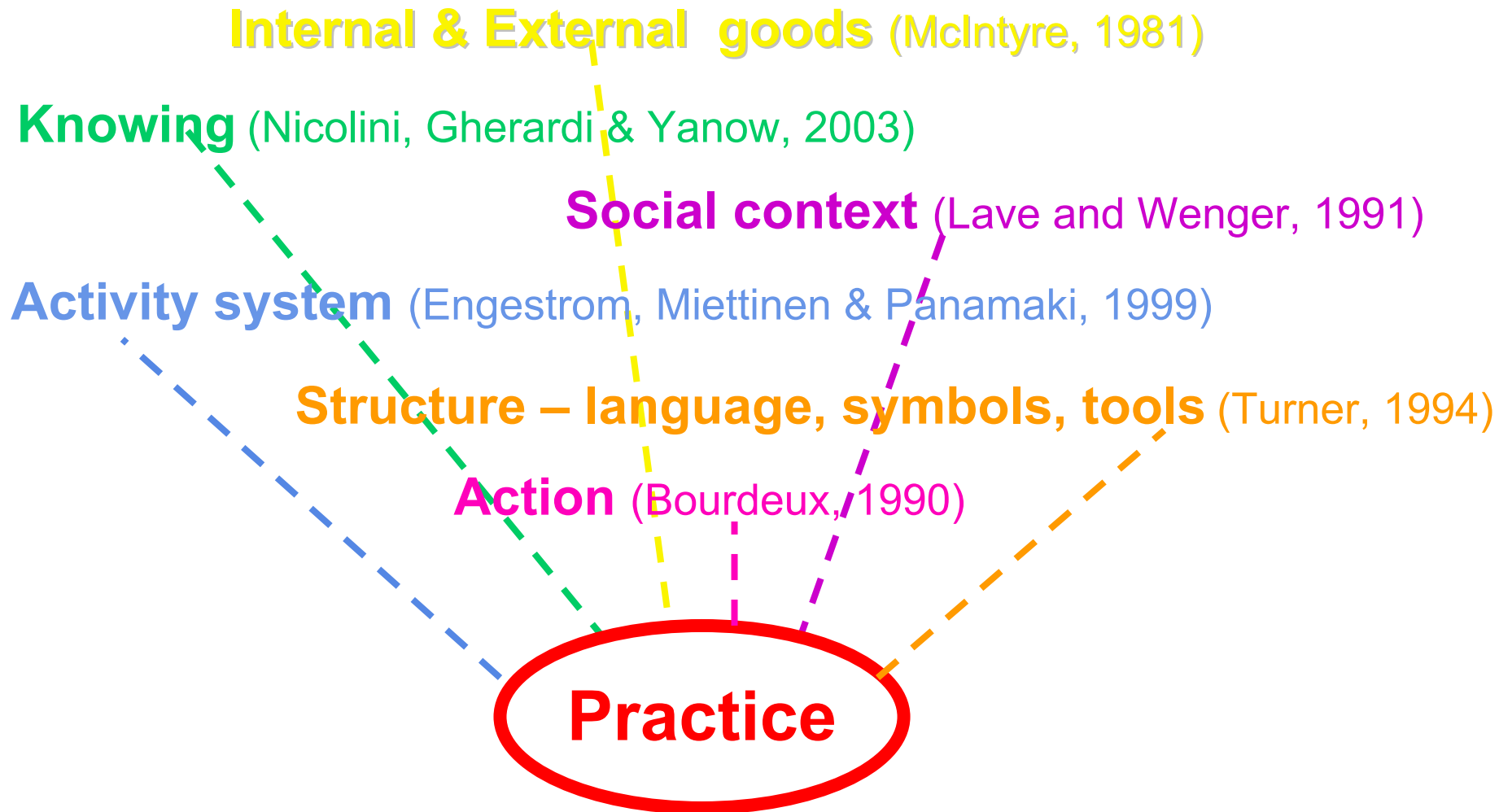
Issues in Management Scholarship

➤ **The need to understand practice**

    ➤ Beyond Co-production…

➤ **The rigour, relevance and impact debate**

    ➤ The existential crisis in management research

➤ **The opportunity to advance practice-relevant research**

    ➤ From accounting for implications to making a difference

➤ **Rediscovering the virtues of scholarship**

    ➤ Taking some of our own medicine

My Orientation

- **Practice concept provides a new lens for engaging with the *fluidity* of organizing.**

- **Focusing on interconnectivity – *tensions* – transactionality**

- **Seek to understand the *conditions* underlying social complexity.**

- **Rethinking practice by revealing neglected aspects e.g. *practise*.**

- ***Re-searching* the emergence of practices with a focus on the dynamics of organizing.**

Images of Practice

Internal & External goods (McIntyre, 1981)

Knowing (Nicolini, Gherardi & Yanow, 2003)

Social context (Lave and Wenger, 1991)

Activity system (Engestrom, Miettinen & Panamaki, 1999)

Structure – language, symbols, tools (Turner, 1994)

Action (Bourdeux, 1990)
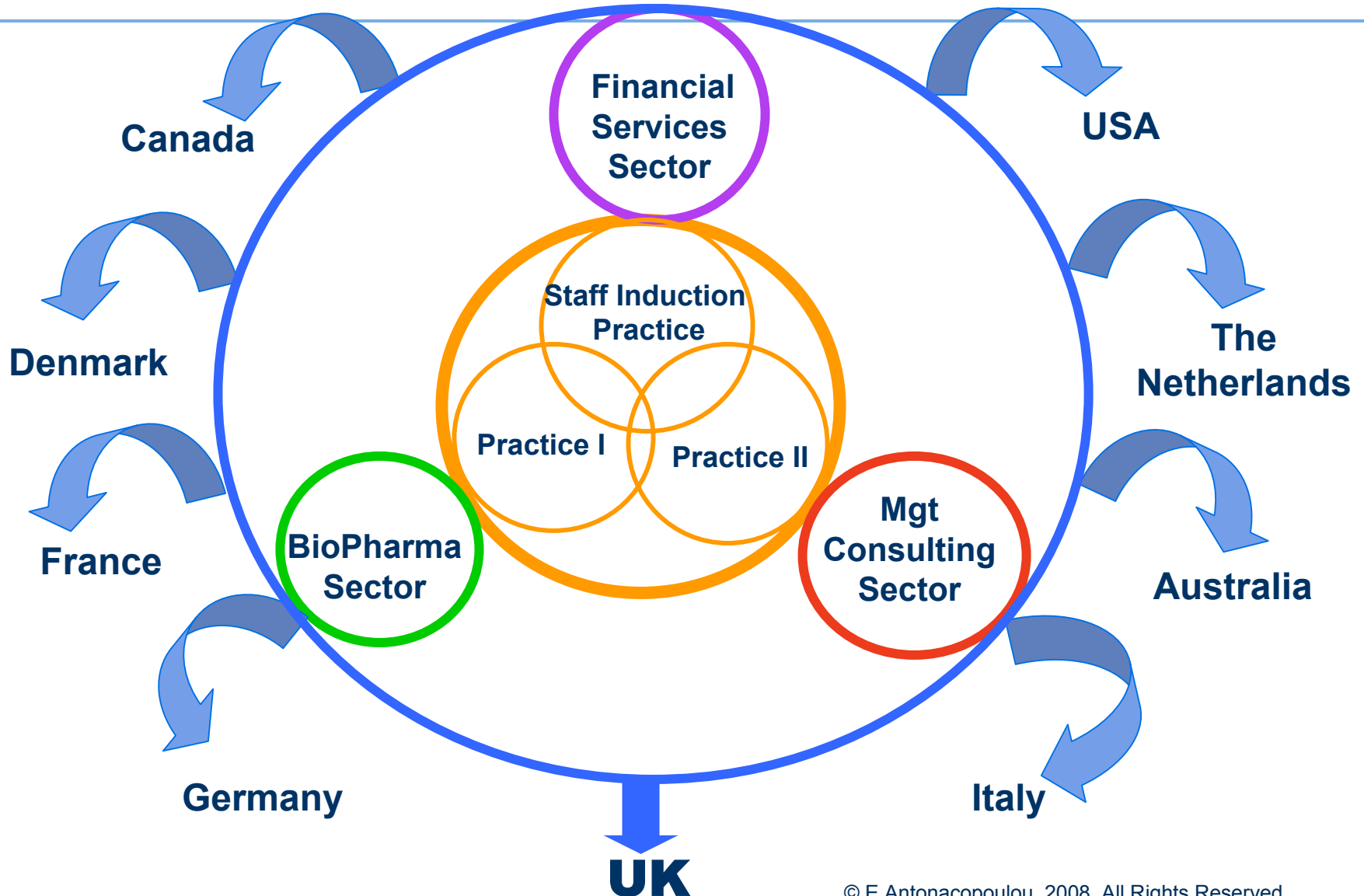
Practice

Current Trends in Practice Research

1. The temporal nature of practice and its role in supporting institutional structures in CoPs.

2. Favouring the observable and reportable aspects of practice (activities, ordering principles, procedures, discourse).

3. A range of epistemological and ontological assumptions.

4. Practice in relation to rules and routines.

Example of AIM Research

Research Questions

➤ **What is the nature of practices in organisations?** How do organisational practices become dynamic/inert?

➤ **How do organisational practices evolve over time?** What factors influence the re-configuration of practices?

➤ **How do practices contribute to organisational functioning?** What influence does the specific sector have in shaping organisational practices?

International Comparative Practices

AIM International Research Project Design

- **30 + Research team – International/Interdisciplinary**
- **9 Countries**
- **3 Sectors**
- **30 Organizations**
- **60 Management and Organisational Practices**

AIM Research (II)
International & Interdisciplinary Research Team

International Visiting Fellows – Replicators

- Stewart Clegg (AUSTRALIA)
- Mary Crossan (CANADA)
- Bente Elkjaer (DENMARK)
- Silvia Gherardi (ITALY)
- Yvon Pesqueux (FRANCE)
- Georges Rommes (THE NETHERLANDS)
- Georg Schreyögg (GERMANY)
- Susan Taylor (USA)

International Visiting Fellows – Advisors

- Linda Argote (USA)
- Martha Feldman (USA)
- Tara Fenwick (CANADA),
- Maurizio Zollo (FRANCE)

Other Advisors

- Chris Argyris (USA)
- Regina Bento (USA)
- Tom Cummings (USA)
- Olav Eikeland (NORWAY)
- Anne Huff (GERMANY)
- Denise Rousseau (USA)

AIM Research (III)
Practices Studied

➤ Staff Induction

➤ Customer Relationship Management

➤ New Business Development

➤ Knowledge/Information Management

➤ Project / Programme Management

➤ Staff Retention

➤ Staff Commitment

➤ Strategic Planning

➤ Organisational Change

➤ Performance Measurement

➤ Collaboration

AIM Research (V)
Findings - The Nature of Practices

➤ **Aspects of practice** – *Purpose* (most significant), *Procedures, Principles, Place, Practitioner, Phronesis, Past and Present*

➤ **Patterns of practice** – collective accepted ways of doing things repeatedly enacted and socially visible

➤ **Dynamism of practice** – shaped by *Practitioners* across hierarchical levels and their *Phronesis* in performing a practice

➤ **Boundaries of practice** – distributed and fluid yet in some instances fixed in relation to time span

➤ **Field of practices** – a bundle of practices sharing a common purpose – interwoven/interconnected

AIM Research (VI)
Findings - The Nature of Practices

➤ **Management Practices** – **e.g. strategic role – client relationship management, staff retention**

➤ **Organization Practices** – **e.g. operational role - project management**

➤ **Innovation (Promising) Practices** – **e.g. Coordination of other practices, departments - knowledge sharing**

➤ **Central & Peripheral practices** – **hierarchy exists some are at the heart of the business others have a supportive role**

➤ **Sub-practices** – **same purpose but different procedures**

AIM Research (VII)
Findings - The Evolution of Practices

- Patterns of Stability and Change
  - **Social sustainability, institutionalisation**
  - **Degrees of reflection, reflexivity and learning**
  - **Small scale change – more frequent and ad-hoc**
  - **Large scale change – more infrequent and a response to a window of opportunity**

- Conditions for Stability and Change
  - **History**
  - **Culture (informal procedures and values)**
  - **Practitioners (distributed leadership?)**
  - **Hybris (positive feedback)**
  - **Regulations (compliance)**
  - **Growth and competitiveness**
  - **Technology**

AIM Research (VIII)
Findings - The Contribution to Organisational Functioning

- Degrees of connectivity

  - **Within a practice** (Intra-practice dynamics)

  - **Between practices** (Inter-practice dynamics)

- Degrees of significance

- Modes of interpretation

  - **Regulation**

  - **Competition**

What is a Practice?

- Embodiment – *Praxis*, *Phronesis*, *Telos*

  - *Power of Practitioners: their practical judgements, passion and personality*

- Internal and External Goods of a practice

  - *Procedures and Principles*

- Integrity, Intensity, Intentionality

  - *Purpose of practice: Past, Present and future orientation*

- Tensions

 - *Patterns of connections, Pace of emergence (stability and change)*

The 12Ps of Re-configuring Practice

➤ ***Practitioners** and their **Phronesis***

➤ ***Procedures,** rules, routines, resources, actions*

➤ ***Principles**, values and assumptions*

➤ ***Purpose**, intensions, competing priorities, internal conflict, telos*

➤ ***Place**, context, cultural and social conditions*

The 12Ps of Re-configuring Practice

➤ *Past, Present,* time boundaries, history and future projections

➤ *Patterns* of connecting different aspects of a practice as this is performed

➤ *Pace,* momentum and rhythm

➤ *Practise and practising* attempts

➤ *Promise* of a practice emerging/becoming/ organizing

Dynamics of Practice

WHERE

WHEN

WHO

Past Present

Place

Practitioners Phronesis

Procedures

Principles

HOW

WHY

Purpose
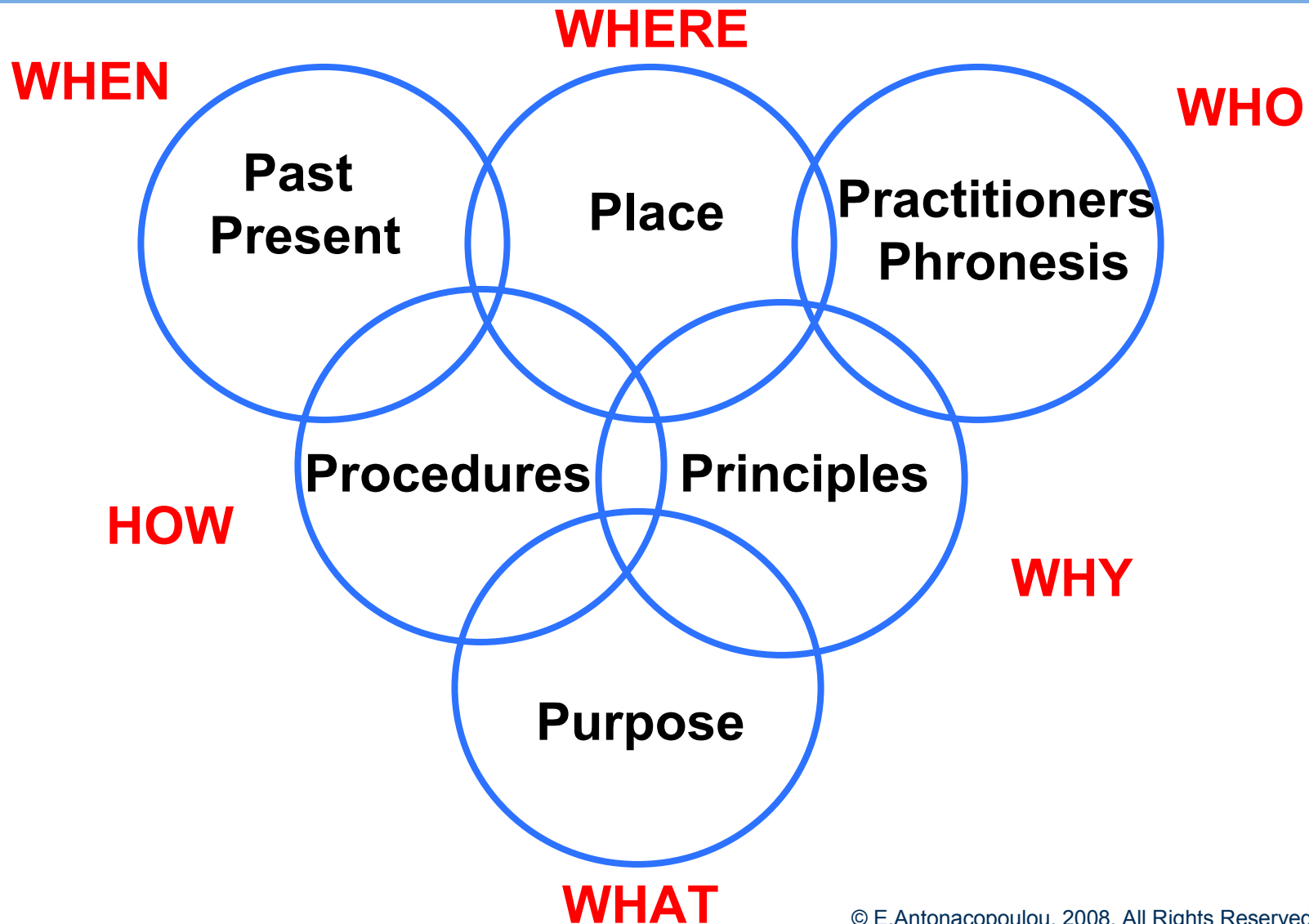
WHAT

What is Practice?

What is NOT a practice?

- The opposite of theory
- A best way of acting
- Another word for culture - '*the way we do things around here*'
- An institution forcing institutionalisation & isomorphism

What could practice be?

- A means of integrating ideology and action (rhetoric and reality)

- A force supporting powerful connections in social interaction

- The ongoing experiences *formed*, *performed* and *transformed* as agents and structures <u>trans-act</u>

Practice (re)Defined

Practice is

the inter-connectivity between endogenous (intra-practice) and exogenous (inter-practice) forces, with *in*-tentionality to expand the space of possibility in the emerging internal and external goods

(Antonacopoulou, 2007a; 2008a)

The PractiSe of PractiCe

- **Practise**

  - The process of repetition where deliberate, habitual or spontaneous performances of a practice enable different dimensions of a practice to emerge. **(Antonacopoulou, 2008b).**

- **Practising**

  - Forming, Performing and Transforming practice **-rehearsing, refining, improving, changing elements of one's practice and one's self** (Antonacopoulou, 2004; 2008a).

  - Repetition **(transgression, perfection, integration, critique)** (Deleuze, 1994)

  - Replication **(institutionalisation, reproduction, representation).**

Practise-centred Re-search

➤ **Inter-connections as the focus of attention and the conditions that underpin the interrelationships between different forces or actants the core of the inquiry** (Antonacopoulou, 2007c).

    ➤ **Tensions – Elasticity – *ex-tensions***

        ➤ **From inter-actions to trans-actions within and between practices across time and space.**

    ➤ **Connections across levels of analysis.**

    ➤ **Generative dance between micro and macro perspectives.**

Future Practice Re-search

- **Accounting for all aspects of practice and the flow of connections in their dynamic inter-relationships.**
- **Recognising the different degrees of significance different aspects of practice have at different points in time in the configuration and re-configuration of practice.**
- **Ontology of connectivity and epistemology of embeddedness**
- **Immediacy, intimacy and engagement with multiple social worlds of practitioners. Re-search as a common practice.**
- **The dynamics of dynamic practice and the methodological tools**
  - Auto-ethnographic, autobiographical diaries
  - Videos
  - Re-play, Re-action, Re-search, Re-turn.

Advancing Practice- Relevant Scholarship

Advancing Practice Relevant Scholarship for IMPACT
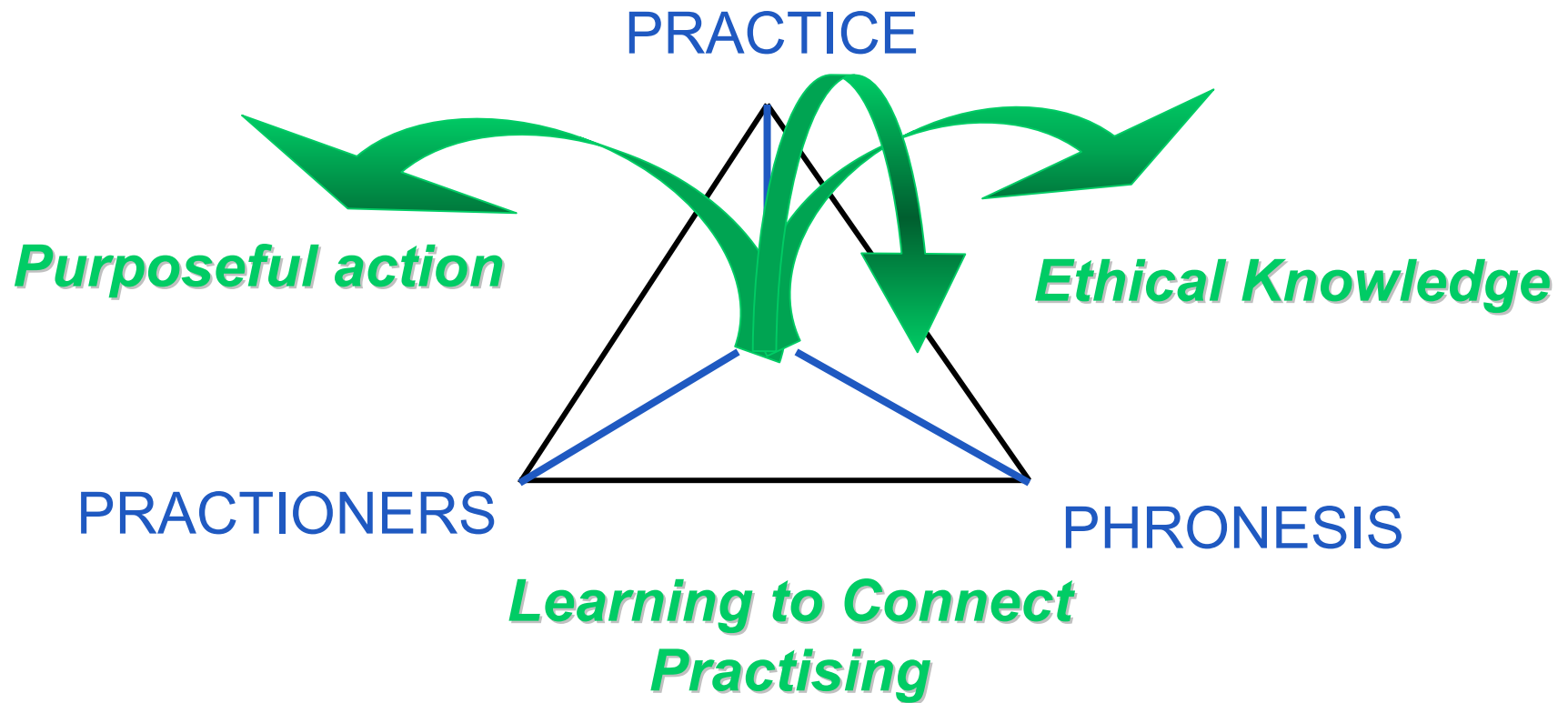
(Antonacopoulou, 2009a forthcoming)

The Virtues of Scholarship

➤ *Integrity*

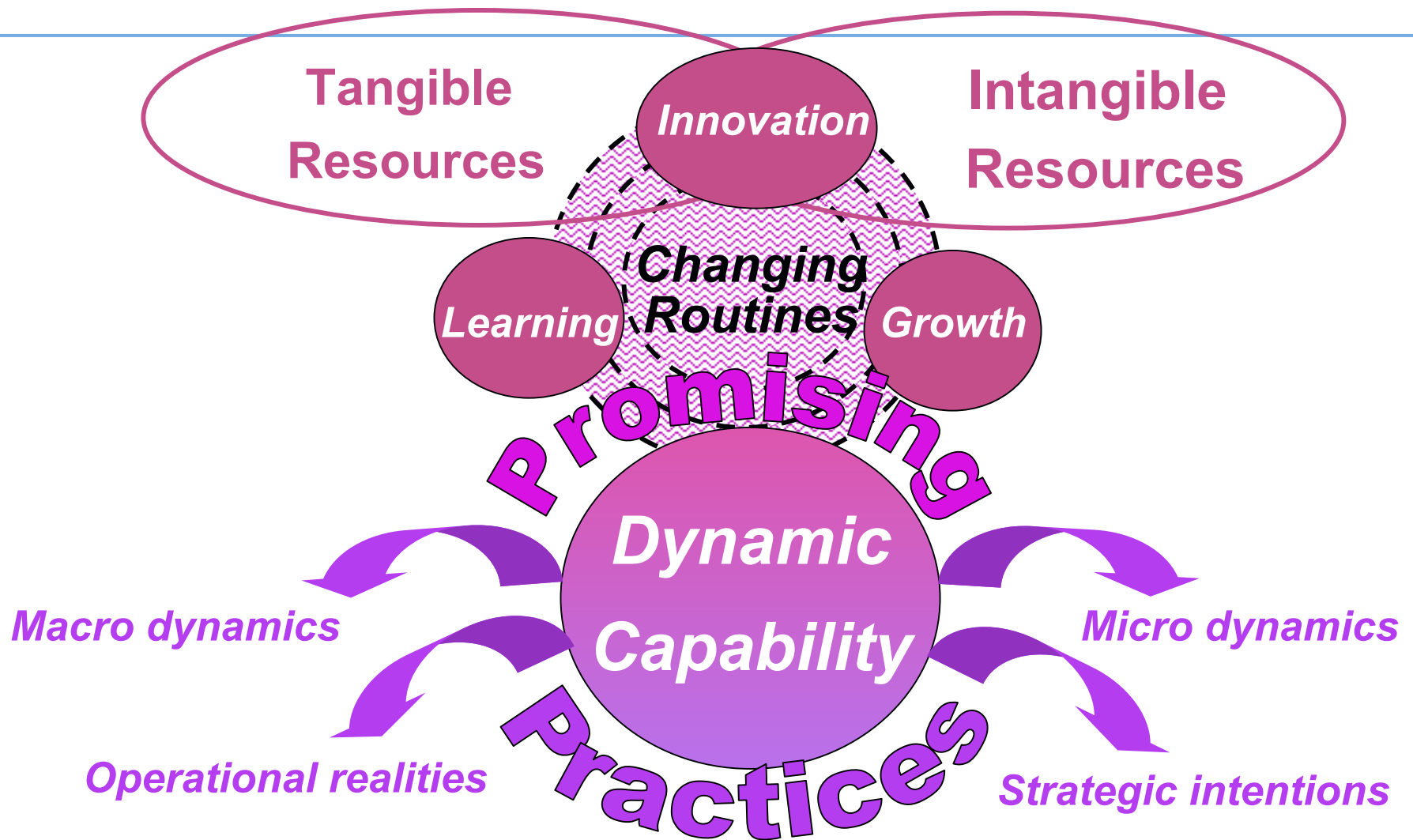 ➤ Honesty and Respect

➤ *Courage*

  ➤ Strength and Perseverance

➤ *Humility*

  ➤ Caring, Help and Support

(Antonacopoulou, 2004)

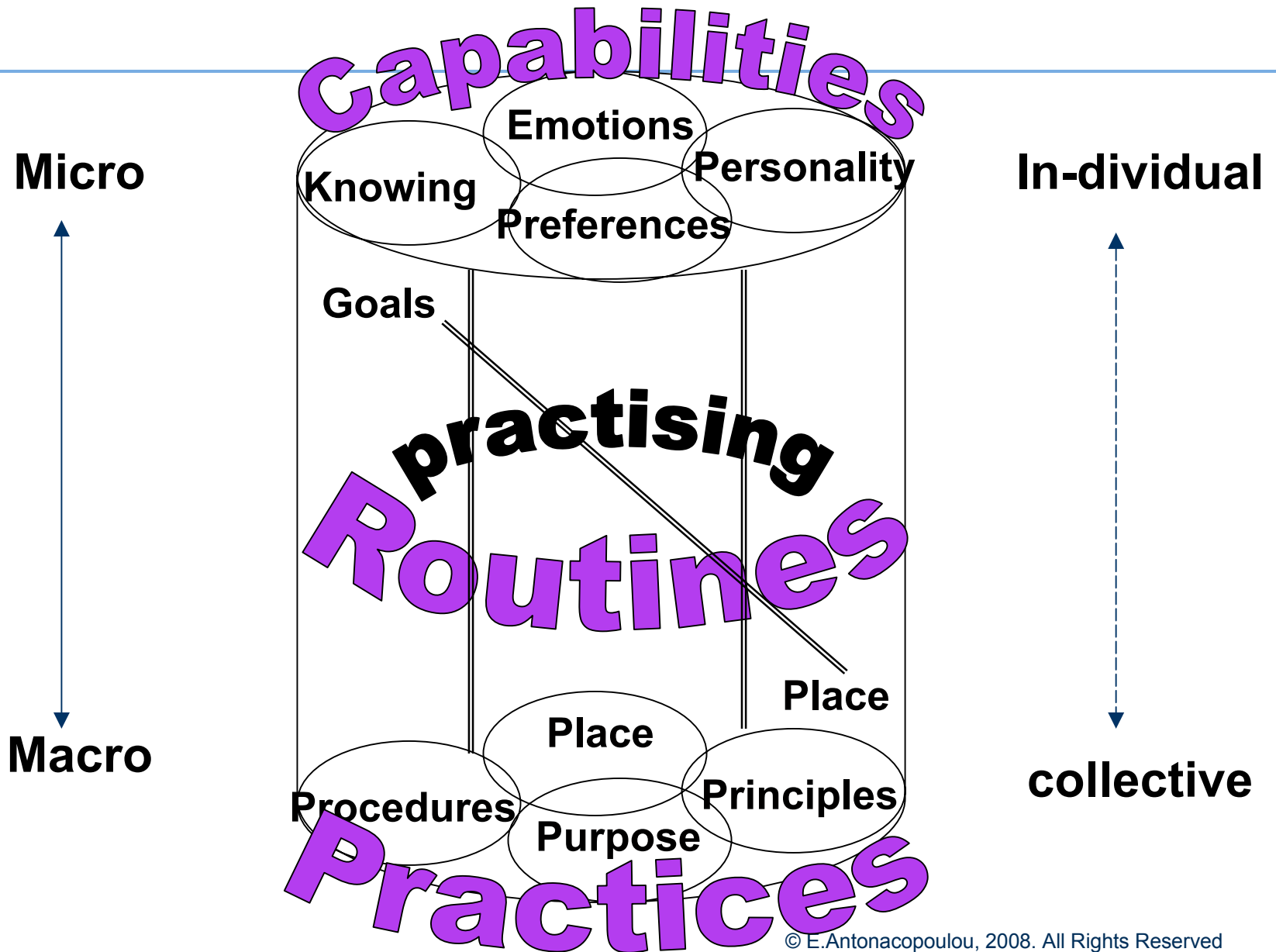# Rethinking the *Practice* of Strategy

Strategizing as practising

Dynamics of Dynamic Capabilities

➤ **Interactions between macro and micro practices.**

    ➤ Macro – process of organizing

    ➤ Micro – practice of organizing

➤ **Degrees of interconnectivity – in-*tension***

➤ **Self organizing mechanisms in the dynamics between endogenous and exogenous forces.**

➤ **Socio-political tensions**

The micro in the macro

Micro

Macro

Capabilities

Emotions

Knowing

Personality

Preferences

Goals

practising

Routines

In-dividual

collective

Place

Place

Procedures

Principles

Purpose

Practices

The Practice of Strategy

- ➤ **The same practice can be performed by the same practitioner very differently at different times and across space.**

- ➤ **Different practitioners in the same context perform the same practice very differently.**

- ➤ **These variations in practice and its delivery (in the way it is performed) may be explained by the *learning dynamics* embedded in practice.**

- ➤ **Being mindful of strategizing practice and the *practising of strategizing*.**

(Antonacopoulou, 2009b forthcoming)

Rethinking Strategic Learning

- **Strategic learning conceptualised as a strategizing practise**

  - Local learning practices are reflexively engaged with, maximizing their capacity to provide internal goods in the form of new capabilities

- **Strategic learning as a**

  - *cause for strategizing practice*

  - *consequence of strategizing practise*

  - *strategizing practice*

- **Inherent quality/power of learning to connect**

(Antonacopoulou, 2009b forthcoming)

Future *Re-search* Paths

➤ **Focusing on the relationships binding multiple actors, multiple practices and multiple performances together in a complex social system that dynamically unfolds in time and across space.**

➤ **Strategizing as an unfolding practice is in flow when in *practise* .**

➤ **Enactment and embodiment of strategy in the way strategy is performed.**

➤ **Practice not a metaphor for strategy (*strategy as practice*) but a building block enabling strategy to happen (*strategy is a practice*)**

Some useful sources

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