FROM EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE TO ENGAGED INQUIRY:

CULTIVATING COMMUNICATIVE PRAXIS IN COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANIZING

by

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Abstract

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Restorative justice (RJ) is increasingly being used as a policy solution in juvenile and

criminal justice, which means it must be "programmatized," implemented, and evaluated. The

paradox inherent in transforming human interaction into reliable, replicable, and assessable

practices constitutes a key challenge in human services in the era of evidence-based practice.

This study describes efforts to ensure the quality of RJ programming and explores what

effectiveness, fidelity, and successful implementation mean to RJ practitioners. The study has

broader implications for how we think about practical knowledge and the scientific improvement

of communication practices in community service settings. Evidence-based practice conceives

of communicative action as *intervention,* but communication theory offers other ways of

understanding how communication shapes experience. The author advocates for an expanded

schema of the role of research in practice, one in which inquiry addresses questions of what is

desirable as well as what is effective. The author discusses practical implications of reframing

evidence-based practice as engaged inquiry.

Using a large body of qualitative data collected with RJ implementers across multiple

sites over a 5-year period, the author assesses local and statewide efforts to uphold the quality

and integrity of RJ as it scales, focusing on questions of fidelity and evaluation. The findings

reveal varied conceptualizations of fidelity among RJ implementers, with different

understandings of fidelity implicating different practical choices. The analysis also illuminates discrepancies among situated learning needs, understandings of value, and evaluative assumptions and strategies centered on questions of effectiveness. The author advocates for an expanded understanding of the research-practice relationship, moving beyond viewing communicative action as intervention to enrich practical knowledge in human service fields.

The major contributions of the study include 1) pragmatist relationality, a metatheoretical and analytic framework enhancing the practical utility of relational ontology as a resource for mission-drive inquiry in organizations, and 2) inquiry-engaged practice, a related mode of practical inquiry that works with the Active Implementation Frameworks (NIRN, 2005) to enrich communicative praxis (Craig, 1989) in community service contexts.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the restorative justice implementers who so generously donated their time and energy to this research. Your thoughtful, reflective, and relentless efforts make our communities stronger, safer, more connected.

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This project has been a journey, and I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the many people who have supported, inspired, and encouraged me along the way.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Restorative justice (RJ) seeks the most fundamental of human goods: To help us live together in peace, to repair and reconnect when relationships are torn, to acknowledge harm, understand each other's needs and contribute to one another's wellbeing. Ultimately, RJ practices seek to make manifest in our communities the fundamental ethical truth (as articulated by Emmanuel Levinas) that to be human is to be responsible to the Other. When harm occurs, RJ practices call us back into relationship, reinforce our responsibility to one another, and provide an expectation and a means to repair harm and rebuild respect for self and other.

In broad strokes, RJ is a normative theory of justice that calls for acknowledgement and repair of harm rather than determination of guilt and imposition of punishment. RJ is often defined in contrast to retributive justice. According to Zehr (2002), both approaches share in the basic notion that crime upsets a balance such that the victim is owed something but they differ in their determination of what is needed to right that balance. Retributive theory "believes that pain will vindicate," while restorative theory "argues that what truly vindicates is acknowledgement of victims' harms and needs, combined with an active effort to encourage offenders to take responsibility, make right the wrongs, and address the causes of their behavior" (Zehr, 2002, p. 59).

RJ is difficult to define precisely, although Zehr's (2002) description is widely accepted: RJ is "a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense to collectively identify and address harms, needs and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible" (p. 40). In the criminal justice context, it often involves an encounter between victim and offender (and sometimes community members). Conferencing or "circle" models, for example, bring these parties together for a facilitated discussion. Often, though not always, the

participants conclude the circle by agreeing on actions the offender will complete to repair harm to victim, community, and self. However, RJ is not any one practice or program; to understand it as such would be to fail to understand it, and to reduce it to such could even smack of colonial violence and erasure. Practitioners interviewed for this dissertation frequently described RJ in the following terms: It is a way of being, a way of life, a way of relating to each other, a way of seeing the world. It is a set of values and principles, a sensibility, a living practice. It is an ancient, indigenous tradition that seems to have arisen independently in many cultures.

Dialogue is the heart of RJ. The "5 R's" of restorative justice—relationship, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration (Title, 2011)—materialize, largely, in the space of communication. As a communication practice, RJ is dependent on the inherent fragility and non-reproducibility of human interaction—as one practitioner put it, "each circle is unique; that space—that unique group of people coming together to create something—will never exist again." Those unfamiliar with the practice are told that one must participate in it to really "get it."

Thanks to growing recognition of its power and potential, restorative justice is increasingly being sought out as a policy solution for juvenile and criminal justice. For example, the Colorado state legislature passed a bill in 2015 that mandated that RJ be made available as an option for all juvenile diversion cases and convened a State Council on Restorative Justice. Since then, statutory support for RJ has continued to grow in Colorado and many other states (see Sliva & Lambert, 2015).

In practical terms, making RJ a more widely available and normalized part of the US criminal justice system has meant implementing RJ practices and programs in the human

services[1]-adjacent areas of that system, including diversion, probation, and victim services. Growth of this nature presents some interesting challenges for RJ. First, it has required that the restorative justice "way of being" be "programmatized" to some extent—at least enough to be replicated, scaled, and evaluated. Second, it has rendered RJ accountable to the evaluative norms and cultural/organizational logics of the public sector, which are strongly influenced by fiscal constraint, value-for-money rationalism, and evidence-based practice. In line with broader social trends over the last half century, public service organizing has come to be defined by discourses of risk-management, audit, transparency, accountability, consumerism and managerialism (Trinder, 2006). In this context, responsible intervention means doing "what works," and organizations tasked with mitigating public problems must pursue and demonstrate *effectiveness*. In the criminal justice context, "effectiveness" of a practice generally denotes a negative impact on recidivism rates.

Some tension arises around applying instrumental logic to a practice that some people regard as a moral imperative. For example, as one influential RJ leader in my community used to insist, "We don't do RJ because it reduces recidivism, although it may. We do it because it is the right thing to do. Victims *should* have a chance to be heard. And offenders *should* have an opportunity to listen and take responsibility." Similarly, some critics question the applicability of evidence-based practice to community services in general and point to problems with using effectiveness as the sole or primary criterion of value. For example, in an article provocatively

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[1] Human services "refers to the full spectrum of services in which one human being (e.g., therapist, teacher, medical provider, community health worker) interacts with another (e.g., patient, student, neighborhood resident) in a way that is intended to be helpful. Human service domains include behavioral health, child welfare, community development, corrections, education, global health, health, mental health, public health, social services, substance abuse treatment, and others" (Fixsen et al., 2019, p. 21).

titled, 'Why What Works Won't Work,' Biesta (2007) argued that evidence-based practice problematically restricts public participation in education policy by "reducing the scope of decision making to questions about effectivity and effectiveness" (p. 1). Ultimately, he insisted, "we must expand our views about the interrelations among research, policy, and practice to keep in view education as a thoroughly moral and political practice that requires continuous democratic contestation and deliberation" (p. 1).

Critiques of what might be called regimes of efficacy are vital to conversations about organizational management of public problems. However, I do not anticipate that such critiques will exempt RJ from the cost-benefit rationality that dominates human services today. Nor, in my view, should any practice be exempt from evaluation and critical scrutiny on grounds of efficacy. At the same time, expanded frameworks of valuation are needed, along with vigilance against the tendency for evaluation of strategies to continually supplant (re-)evaluation of end goals. In short, effectiveness is an important consideration and measuring it creates accountability but focusing too narrowly on it can deleteriously restrict political, public deliberation about goals and values.

These concerns, along with other challenges that arise when using RJ as a policy solution, are not unique to RJ. Rather, RJ implementation taps into some of the core problematics of public service organizing more broadly. In human services, interventions[2] are generally "interaction-based," meaning, they consist of inherently indeterminate processes of relating and

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[2] *Innovation* and *intervention* are sometimes used interchangeably in Implementation Science literature, and I use them interchangeably in this dissertation as well. *Innovations* has become more common, however, likely to avoid potential confusion based on the juxtaposition of prevention vs. intervention. Innovations/interventions may be aimed at prevention.

communicating. Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) contrast interaction-based interventions to "atom-based" ones. Whereas atom-based interventions, such as vaccines, are centrally produced and their delivery depends only on proper storage and administration, interaction-based interventions, such as RJ, must be created anew, *in situ,* each time.

The ephemeral nature of interaction-based interventions complicates the prospect of reproducing them and studying their effectiveness through scientific methods. To even speak of "their" impact is to bound a heterogenous flow of events and relations into a single pronoun. This kind of *entification*—which turns a process (verb) into an entity/participant (noun)—is a practical, linguistic, and epistemic necessity. But boundaries that package communication into discrete practices are inherently unstable, which explains the common experience of trying to replicate or evaluate a practice only to find that—humor me—there is no "their" there.

Recognizing that entification and evaluation are inherently challenging but consequential endeavors, this study assesses strengths and limitations of current strategies and asks how best to approach these tasks in the context of communication practices like RJ. Insight on these topics comes from investigation of the following empirical questions:

- How do RJ practitioners work to ensure the quality of RJ as it is scaled as a policy solution, and how do practices of fidelity and evaluation factor into these efforts?

- In what ways can existing frameworks and resources support successful RJ implementation? What unmet needs remain?

In approaching the second empirical question, I investigate the encounter between research and practice in human service work, rather than simply *applying* research to practice.

Issues in RJ implementation attach to evergreen questions about how science can or should inform policy and practice in human services and how to consistently, accountably, and

effectively fulfill public needs in alignment with shared values through public service organizing. Tied up in those questions are assumptions about how communicative action transforms experience and what is possible and desirable for the research–practice relationship in the context of community service organizing. To engage with theoretical issues surrounding how best to programmatize, learn about, and improve communication practices, it is important to start with the key source of scholarly reflection on implementation of human service innovations: Implementation Science.

Evidence-based Practice and Implementation Science

Defining, (e)valuating, and scaling communication practices are central tasks of human services organizing. Each of these tasks can be understood in terms of the questions it addresses. The first task, definition (which I also refer to as *entification*), asks: How do we turn values, principles, research findings, and modes of (inter)action into discrete, replicable practices? The second task, (e)valuation, asks, How can we best assess whether a given practice is working as intended, given that we have limited public resources and policy choices always entail trade-offs? How can we judge if a practice is meeting our needs, decide that one practice is better than another, and adapt and improve practices? The third task, scaling, asks, How can we extend the benefits of effective practices to more people? All three of these interlocking topics fall under the umbrella of implementation: How can we recreate effective practices in new settings with fidelity and good outcomes? Crucially, in order to evaluate whether an intervention "worked" in a given setting, it is necessary, first, to know if or to what extent the intervention was actually used. To ask that second question—did the intervention actually exist—is to adopt an "implementation mindset" (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005).

The most influential research on the aforementioned questions comes from the movement for evidence-based practice and the growing field of Implementation Science, which advocate using scientific methods to (a) figure out what works and (b) get what works into practice. Over the past thirty years, these two developments have had a profound impact on the research–practice relationship in community-based service fields. The movement for evidence-based practice emerged in medicine in the 1990s relaying "a devastatingly effective and simple message: […] practice should be based on the most up-to-date, valid, and reliable research findings" (Trinder, 2006, p. 3). Intuitively appealing, portable, and responsive to major contemporary issues and concerns (e.g., risk and audit), evidence-based practice spread rapidly to other disciplines such as mental health, nursing, education, probation, social work, and public health.

As originally conceived, evidence-based medicine described a process of inquiry designed to help physicians ask clinical questions, then efficiently find, evaluate, and apply evidence, and, finally, to assess the outcomes of their interventions. As the concept spread to other fields and took on the generic title of "evidence-based practice," its meaning and usage changed such that it often refers to discrete interventions shown to be effective in research studies. As Bertram and Kerns (2019) point out, these dual meanings of evidence-based practice—as a process of inquiry and a label applied to specific practices—need not be viewed as conflicting positions, although they sometimes have been. In both cases, practitioners are encouraged to consider the strength of evidence when selecting interventions, based on the well-known hierarchy that situates high-quality metanalyses at the top, followed by randomized control trials, then case studies, and expert opinions at the bottom. As the research base has expanded, efforts have been made to designate and catalogue specific evidence-based practices

and programs (e.g., National Registry of Evidence-based Practices and Programs, Colorado Blueprints for Violence Prevention).

The second important development, Implementation Science, emerged in response to the apparent failure of this "evidence-base" to translate into actual service provision and good outcomes for consumers. Several major reports around the turn-of-the-century echoed the idea that "we know much about interventions that are effective but make little use of them" (Fixsen et al., 2005, p. 2). Others voiced concern that, even when interventions found to be effective in research studies are "used," there is no guarantee that they will produce their intended outcomes consistently across multiple contexts (Damschroder et al., 2009). In fact, some estimates indicated that implementation efforts fail more often than not (Burnes, 2004).

These observations inspired a meta-science aimed at developing methods for integrating research findings into practice with fidelity and good results, and a spurred a broader accompanying movement promoting "the science, practice, and policy of getting science into practice and policy" (Fixsen, 2015). Using a now-popular metaphor, Fixsen at al. (2010) explained that having effective interventions without careful implementation strategies is like having "a serum without a syringe; the cure is available but the delivery mechanism is not" (p. 448). Importantly, "doing more research on a serum will not produce a better syringe; doing more research on an innovation will not produce better implementation methods" (Blase & Fixsen, 2013, para. 4). Thus, they explained, a specific science of implementation is needed.

Implementation science is now a highly engaged, interdisciplinary field that encompasses a diverse network of practitioners, researchers, and consultants and has its own open-access journal (*Implementation Science,* started in 2006). One of the field's most notable accomplishments has been the creation of the National Implementation Research Network's

(NIRN) "Active Implementation Hub," a free online learning environment that translates research findings into accessible lessons and tools for practitioners.

Viewed in historical context, evidence-based practice and Implementation Science are sites of work on the ongoing enlightenment project of bringing scientific rationality to bear on organizational responses to public needs. While defining implementation problems and positing solutions, implementation specialists engage implicit and explicit philosophies of knowledge and organization (i.e., ontoepistemological assumptions). In this dissertation, I explore those implicit and explicit philosophies and consider the different ontoepistemological perspectives at play in critiques and debates of evidence-based practice and Implementation Science.

Implementation Science and Restorative Justice

Implementation science has attracted much interest in Colorado's RJ community and has been the focus of numerous trainings and conference presentations in recent years. However, RJ does not fit perfectly into the purview of Implementation Science. For example, NIRN describes implementation as "a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions" (Fixsen, 2015). While RJ's "dimensions" are known in a broad sense, it is typically—sometimes intentionally—not defined as precisely as the innovations featured in Implementation Science research tend to be. Additionally, the textbook case of intentional or "active" implementation depicts a process where innovations that have already been studied and "manualized" (i.e., described and operationalized in texts/manuals) are selected and then installed in a new setting (see, e.g., Fixsen et al., 2005). RJ, on the other hand, has typically evolved locally and is not owned by any one purveyor. Although RJ is not a prototypical human service intervention, Implementation Science still provides relevant input and resources.

Like scholars, RJ practitioners and policy makers have varied perspectives on how best to define, evaluate, and scale their practice, and they experience a range of challenges in each area. Some of these challenges relate to incongruities between RJ and the frameworks and methods of evidence-based practice and Implementation Science, and some likely could be ameliorated by the latter. To identify critical issues in RJ implementation and note opportunities and limitations in the resources currently available, this dissertation presents a communicative-relational analysis of Implementation Science literature in addition to reporting findings from fieldwork with RJ practitioners. The analysis of Implementation Science literature is guided by the questions:

- How does Implementation Science approach the scientific improvement of communication practices in human services?
- How does Implementation Science practice inquiry and entification?

In addressing the second question, I compare the practice of inquiry in Implementation Science with ideals for inquiry that undergird pragmatist and relational approaches to communication theory. This analysis fuels consideration of what kind of epistemology is appropriate for cultivating practical knowledge of communication practices. Overall, the encounter between RJ and Implementation Science attaches issues of broad public concern around how best to replicate, evaluate, and scale communication practices to effectively meet public needs. Philosophies of science, and ideas about its application to human organizing, are strongly implicated in these concerns.

In addition to raising questions of broad social significance, issues at the intersection of RJ and evidence-based practice attach to long-standing theoretical questions in organizational

communication. Scholars in that field will find, in RJ implementation, a case study in the becoming of practice that calls for contemplation of communicative-relational ontologies and persistent epistemological quandaries about the theory–practice relationship and the nature of knowledge in our discipline.

Communication Theory and Relational Ontology

Communication theory can both contribute and gain perspective by engaging with the tangle of questions that arise around implementation of relational practices like RJ. Ontological perspectives in organizational communication (including, e.g., new materialisms, communicative relationality, and practice theorizing—often abridged as "relationality") are particularly relevant because of their interest in practice as a mode of organizational becoming.

Ontological literature in organizational communication differs dramatically from the postpositivist tradition undergirding evidence-based practice and Implementation Science. Typically, the latter seeks to identify and proliferate practices that reliably produce good results by situating patterns of action as independent variables, so practice-entities serve as explanations for outcomes. In contrast, ontological perspectives call for explanations for the appearance of stability that would allow action to be concretized into a practice-entity. Typically, relational researchers refrain from taking presumed categories for granted and instead explore the processes and relations that make those "things" what they are (Kuhn, Ashcraft, & Cooren, 2017). These ideas will come into sharper focus in the next chapter.

Relationality arose largely in response to knowledge problems in science. As I will later explain, it philosophically resolves some important incongruities in experience and has generated novelty across diverse fields of inquiry. However, its methodological implications and relevance

to practical problems remain open questions. Through engagement with the aforementioned empirical questions, this dissertation also investigates the following theoretical questions:

- (How) can relational approaches enrich mission-driven inquiry in organizational settings where, to quote Fixsen et al. (2019), "barriers must be removed rather than documented and lamented"?

- What does relational ontology require at the level of methodological practice?

A good theory, according to Craig (2013), is both *interesting* and *plausible*. It is interesting to the extent that it challenges commonplace ideas, and plausible insofar as it resonates with real life experience. Relationality can be improved on both measures through engagement with contemporary pragmatism, as I will demonstrate in this dissertation.

Overall, for scholars of organizational communication, this dissertation provides a window into an important, influential literature that has scarcely been engaged in our field, despite its relevance. By studying this literature as a practice, I challenge communication scholars to rethink assumptions about the relationship between relational and postpositivist research paradigms. For practitioners and researchers interested in implementation, this dissertation articulates new possibilities for supporting Active Implementation and holistic evaluation in the context of restorative justice and other complex, communication-based innovations. Inquiry-engaged practice is offered as a way to understand and address implementation and evaluation challenges by enriching collective inquiry and supporting practical reasoning about normative priorities. These resources can be built into the existing Active Implementation frameworks and can address critiques and concerns about evidence-based practice.

The dissertation's key contribution to communication theory is *pragmatist relationality,* a philosophical perspective with methodological implications. This approach engages relationality as metatheory and embraces a pragmatist "correspondence theory of truth," which locates the "correspondent" to an ontological representation or truth claim in the interest, need, or experiential difficulty it addresses. In elevating relational ontoepistemology to the metatheoretical level, pragmatist relationality replaces the substantialism-relationalism bifurcation with a processual understanding of entification as a practice that is essential to inquiry and semiosis. As a hermeneutic sensibility, pragmatist relationality guides analysts in connecting ontological representations with their experiential origins and axiological significance.

The dissertation's key practical and cross-disciplinary contribution is *inquiry-engaged practice*, a paradigm for implementation and evaluation of communication-based innovations in human service contexts. Inquiry-engaged Practice pursues *cultivated ethical intelligence* as an ideal for scientific rationality in human service systems. This approach prioritizes the holistic development and practice of method, going beyond importing scientific findings into practice to build capacity for organizational inquiry. Inquiry-engaged practice seeks to expand knowledge practices to encompass broader swaths of experience, in line with the ideal of collective inquiry. It aims to surface experiential inconsistencies and felt difficulties associated with the in-situ use of innovations, prioritizing the development of a shared problem definition and a willingness to study how the innovation, used with fidelity, impacts various goals and interests. The goal is not to seek complete philosophical and cultural alignment or a unified ranking of priorities, but to facilitate transparency and conscientious discussion about the relative desirability of various visions for the future.

The Road Ahead

In this dissertation, I argue that pragmatism—and particularly the complex notion of experience that underwrites its relational ontology—can bolster the usefulness, plausibility, and philosophical cogency of relational approaches. Accordingly, I describe and advocate for pragmatist relationality as an approach to theorizing organizational communication. Bringing pragmatist relationality to bear on RJ's unaddressed implementation challenges, I propose Inquiry-engaged Practice as an ideal for cultivating communication practices in human services. This expanded framework for inquiry is meant to encompass both scientific principles and normative/axiological questions and provide a structuring logic for conversations about implementation.

To make this case, the remaining chapters proceed as follows: In chapter 2, I explore the enduring ontological and epistemological quandaries in organizational communication and social inquiry that intersect with the problems of defining, evaluating, and scaling communication-based innovations. Two key quandaries involve understanding how communication organizes through dialectics of stability and flux and how to develop rigorous knowledge claims when the knower and the objects of study coevolve. Both topics relate to issues of boundary drawing (i.e., entification) in inquiry and organization. I review three interconnected literatures that deal with these issues—practice theory, relational ontology, and contemporary pragmatism—to contextualize the dissertation's contribution and my approach to entification. I examine various conceptualizations of practice, discuss the evolution and challenges of relational ontology, and argue that pragmatism is an essential but underutilized resource for empirically engaged relational communication research. I highlight pragmatism's processual ontology, transactional

realism, and expanded vision of inquiry as valuable assets for post-postmodern communication research.

In chapter 3, I describe my research design and methodology. This study uses textual analysis and ethnographic methods to study the "practical becoming" of implementation across three interrelated sites: scholarly metadiscourse, practitioner metadiscourse, and a situated practice of fidelity in the field of Restorative Justice. Engaging a relational perspective, I study Implementation Science literature is a site of practical becoming in its own right (an entification of entification, as it were). To gain insight into the becoming of Active Implementation through inquiry and praxis in Implementation Science, I develop a unique pragmatist relational approach to textual analysis. This approach integrates the methodologically innovative potential of the relational turn with vetted methods of practical theorizing (Barge & Craig, 2009) to produce a novel relational hermeneutic. This analysis provides an epistemologically and experientially contextualized understanding of contemporary approaches to evidence-based practice and implementation, which, in turn, allows me to assess the fit between current frameworks and needs in the RJ field. To understand the experiences of RJ implementers engaged in defining, scaling, and evaluating their practice, I collected data through interviews and participant observation. I used analytic sensibilities of Grounded Practical Theory (Craig & Tracy, 1995) to analyze this data, identifying challenges, strategies, and philosophies associated with RJ implementation. Cross-site analysis and reflexive study of this endeavor in relational qualitative research produces insight into the theoretical questions posed in the previous section of this chapter.

Chapters 4 and 5 present findings from the analyses just described. In chapter 4, I argue that, although Implementation Science epitomizes the "variable-analytic approach" so widely

regarded as relationality's antithesis (Emirbayer, 1997), it is nonetheless responsive to the concerns relationality seeks to address. Using relationality as a metatheoretical lens, I depict variable-analytic methods as part of a spectrum of strategies for understanding a profoundly relational world. Additionally, I sympathetically note that the ontological literature has sometimes enacted the naïve realism and easy bifurcations it sets out to critique. In chapter 5, I present findings from fieldwork with RJ implementers. I describe how participants conceive of problems and solutions, and compare practitioner needs and situated logics with the logics and strategies supplied by Implementation Science. I find that RJ's unaddressed implementation challenges invite an expanded framework of inquiry.

In chapter 6, I conclude the dissertation by highlighting contributions to communication theory and making practical recommendations. Specifically, I describe and advocate for pragmatist relationality as an approach to theorizing organizational communication. I argue that the key to unlocking relationality's potential as a resource for engaged research lies in pragmatism's complex notion of *experience*. By realigning with this core aspect of Dewey's transactionalism, we get a version of relationality that respects commonsense realism and appropriately values the scientific method while meeting critiques of scientism and adopting a genuinely relational ontoepistemology. In addition to ironing out philosophical wrinkles, pragmatist relationality has practical implications. Using pragmatist-relational insights, I propose Inquiry-engaged Practice as an ideal for implementing, evaluating, and cultivating communication-based innovations such as RJ. Inquiry-engaged Practice incorporates normative and empirical concerns into a shared framework of inquiry, adapting evidence-based principles and Implementation Science to better address the challenges of organizing complex, communication-based practices.

In the next chapter, I situate this dissertation's contributions in relation to existing literature and identify the scholarly conversations in which it intervenes. To provide context and conceptual foundations for my subsequent arguments, I review key moments in the development of relational ontology and summarize relevant communicative-relational approaches to theorizing practice and organization.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Any given claim about how best to define, evaluate, or scale communication-based innovations in human services necessarily rests on philosophical assumptions about knowledge and the nature of organization. In fact, these practical issues cut to the heart of enduring ontological and epistemological quandaries in organizational communication and social inquiry more broadly. These quandaries include: (1) how communication organizes through dialectics of stability and flux, and (2) how to develop rigorous knowledge claims about organization and communication when we as knowing subjects are coevolving with our objects of study. Both topics relate to how we punctuate experience for purposes of understanding and shaping it, and how communication figures in as both the medium and object of that punctuation. Succinctly, these are issues of boundary drawing (i.e., entification) in inquiry and organization.

To orient the present study, I draw on three connected literatures that deal with the issues just described: practice theory, relational ontology, and contemporary pragmatism. This chapter works through key concepts and debates in these literatures to contextualize the dissertation's contribution and my approach to entification. I begin by surveying several approaches to conceptualizing and studying practice. I highlight practice theorizing as an important site of work on ontologies of organization while noting that it provides little guidance on how to shape practices on purpose. I also align my project with Craig's (1995) vision of practical theorizing (as distinct from practice theory). Next, I discuss relational ontology and critiques thereof. In particular, I trace the evolution of relational ontology from Neils Bohr to John Dewey to Karen Barad, discussing how it arose as an answer to knowledge problems in theoretical physics and later gained traction in fields of social inquiry. I then discuss challenges associated with applying relationality to real-world problems and highlight key critiques and alternative

perspectives. In response to these challenges and critiques, I argue that pragmatism is an indispensable yet underleveraged resource for empirically-engaged relational communication research. Although pragmatism's anti-foundationalism is sometimes misread as a refusal to take a stance on big philosophical questions, this is a misunderstanding. Pragmatism is not a mere patch for epistemic cracks; rather, it offers a thoroughgoing relational ontoepistemology that can enrich contemporary relational communication research. To its credit, pragmatism rejects the "spectator view" of knowledge without disabling inquiry or dismissing the practical functionality of commonsense realism. For this reason, it enables empirical engagement while remaining grounded in a relational perspective.

I conclude the chapter with a review of some of pragmatism's most important offerings, which inform my methodological approach and underwrite my eventual argument that relational ontology is less methodologically restrictive than has generally been assumed. In particular, I call attention to pragmatism's processual ontology, transactional realism, and expanded vision of inquiry. By conceiving of knowledge as a mode of participation, and highlighting the role of anticipations of possible futures in shaping present experiences, pragmatism provides a promising path for post-postmodern communication research.

Perspectives on Practice

Practice is omnipresent in both everyday and scholarly metadiscourses of organizing. It is both a verb and a noun. It is both abstract and particular, as in, evidence-based practice as a way of approaching work, and *an* evidence-based practice as a well-defined sequence of activities. It is both fixed and malleable, serving as a reservoir of shared meaning. It makes action speakable, allowing us to characterize, evaluate, and (re)shape *how things are done.* Clearly, practice is central to *knowing* and *doing* organization. But, what is practice, how can we

develop knowledge about it, and what is the point of studying it? In what follows, I characterize

two broad approaches to practice in terms of how each one answers these questions.

Human Services and Implementation Science Perspectives on Practice

In the professional lexicon of human service organizations, when people talk about *a*

practice, they are often referring to a more or less clearly defined skill, technique, or process to

be used when interacting directly with clients. An *evidence-based* practice, obviously, is one

that has been studied for efficacy. Motivational Interviewing (MI)—a counseling strategy to

support clients in making behavior changes—is a prime example. It includes a theory of

behavior change (i.e., change happens in stages and different kinds of support are needed at each

stage) and a "toolbox" of communication skills and strategies. MI can be taught, learned, and

evaluated, and it is defined clearly enough that practitioners' performances can be assessed for

fidelity. MI is a practice rather than a program because it is (or aims to be) an integral and

ongoing part of everyday work. A program, according to NIRN, is "a coherent set of clearly

described activities and specified linkages among activities designed to produce a set of desired

outcomes" (https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/learn-implementation/glossary). Programs are multifaceted

and include organizational supports for practices (e.g., training, coaching, and evaluation).

Considering the example of MI, we can see that this particular practice is also a "unit" of

purposeful action—it is a way of interacting with clients meant to support their positive behavior

change. In fact, "unit of purposeful action" is my preferred definition for practice in the context

of implementation and efficacy research because it summarizes what I see as the two most

germane aspects of practice in said context: purpose and unit. These are more relevant than

other possible descriptors of practice (such as the ones reviewed in the following section)

because the key concern in these research areas is whether a given practice serves its intended

purpose. As a case in point, *innovations*, rather than practices per se, are the target objects of

implementation as described in Implementation Science literature. While innovations often are

practices (in the sense that they are ways of interacting with clients), the operative aspect of the

definition is that an innovation is *new* in a given setting (Blase, Fixsen, & Van Dyke, 2019).

The precise boundaries or characteristics defining what the thing is, in this context, are

less important than the fact of their existence.

Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) explain,

Implementation always is in service to doing something (the innovation). The question is "what is the something?" and "how will we know if we have done it or not?" Implementation Specialists may ask, "what is the what?" or "what is your it?" or "what are you trying to do?" If there are ten people in the room, will all ten have the same answer? […] If "it" can be anything anyone says it is, then there is no need to bother with purposeful implementation supports.   (p. 22)

Thus, bounding practice as an "it" is crucial for linking intentions to outcomes. Clearly

defined innovations, in other words, serve as variables that figure the relationship between

actions and consequences.

There is a second kind of practice at the center of Implementation Science—

implementation practices—which are designed to support the use of innovations. Fixsen, Blase,

and Van Dyke (2019) characterize implementation practices as postulated independent

variables—the "if" in the if-then formulation. They note that implementation is a normative

science in which the independent variable (i.e., high functioning implementation teams) is

created rather than discovered.

Overall, implementation and efficacy researchers study practice for the purpose of

identifying cause-effect relationships and using that knowledge to help organizations reliably

produce good outcomes. The traditional scientific paradigm defines standards of rigor in these

research traditions. For example, the strength of an efficacy study's findings can be evaluated by

considering factors such as control, randomization, and sample size (with the double-blind randomized control study being the gold standard). Finally, implementation and efficacy researchers typically define theory as a testable (falsifiable) hypothesis.

In contrast to the functionalist approaches of implementation and efficacy research, there is a strong current in the study of organizational communication pulling toward processual, relational, and new materialist renderings of practice. Suspicious interrogation of the treatment of practice as a knowable and durable thing is a hallmark of such approaches. The contrast between these paradigms makes for a productive and mutually provocative theoretical engagement later in this dissertation. Practice theorizing is one such strand of thought.

Practice Theorizing

Practice takes on a broader meaning in scholarly literature in organizational communication and related fields, where interest in *work practices* stems from an ontological interest in organizational reality as an ongoing production that emerges in everyday activity (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011).   In this kind of theorizing, practice is viewed as a mode of organizational (re)production; it is simultaneously an ordering principle that solidifies ways of doing things, and a disordering principle, because practice must be continually reenacted and can change (Gherardi, 2012). As such, practices both reduce uncertainty and introduce indeterminacy (Gherardi, 2012). Scholars of organizational communication often use practice as a unit of analysis when developing claims about how communication produces (rather than merely transmits) meaning and therefore constitutes various features of social and organizational life (Deetz, 1992, 1994).

With the goal of developing communicative and ontological claims, practice theorists in organizational communication and related fields generally use interpretive, postmodern, or

relational research paradigms. Their empirical work often includes highly detailed descriptions

of practice (see Lindlof & Taylor [2017] for a summary of these paradigms and Gherardi [2012]

for examples). Such approaches help analysts to see practices "from the inside" (i.e., as

practitioners see them), and to appreciate "the fine details of how people use the resources

available to them to accomplish intelligent actions, and how they give those actions sense and

meaning" (Gherardi, 2012, p. 2). Practice theorists often draw attention to the ways in which

actual practice exceeds explicit articulations, noting that practice is contingency-bound and relies

on implicit knowledge and judgements that cannot be fully captured in descriptions.

Notably, some of the defining features of practice (according to practice theorists) are

the basis of implementation problems. Stated differently, implementation is challenging because

practice is, by nature, difficult to control. In the following summary of how practice theories

define working practices, I highlight how aspects of working practices give rise to, or help

explain, implementation challenges and provide a baseline for understanding RJ and

implementation as practices.

Working Practices

In his review of this diverse literature, Leonardi (2015) identified five common

characteristics of work practices. First, work practices are materially bound, meaning, they

cannot be fully explained in terms of human agency and intentionality. Instead, the "agency" (as

in, action or influence but not intentionality) of various materials intermingles with human

agency to shape how and why people work as they do. Second, work practices are "recurrently

enacted over time" (Leonardi, 2015, p. 241) and often occur in patterns, thereby significantly

shaping the process of organizing. This recurrent enactment creates a sense of stability and

fixedness, making work practices stabilizing forces (Berg, 1997; Hård, 1994; Kaghan & Bowker,

2001; Knorr-Cetina, 1999; Putnam & Nicotera, 2010) that take on social structural properties (Collins, 1981; Giddens, 1984; McPhee & Poole, 2001; Strauss, 1978). Because they are both ephemeral (they can cease and change) and enduring (through recurrent enactment), work practices are key to Giddens's (1984) structuration process and are a central site for empirical study of the communicative constitution of organization (CCO). The chief argument, with regard to the latter, is that the apparently structural features of occupations and organizations (i.e., that which makes them recognizable as such) are constituted through the recurrent performance of work practices. For example, in their famous study of an endocrinology laboratory, Latour and Woolgar (1979) showed how the perceived objectivity of scientific facts depended on the ongoing performance of certain rhetorical practices of persuasion in research articles. As a consequence of recurrent enactment over time, work practices "may become reified and institutionalized, at which point they become treated as predetermined and firm prescriptions for social action, and as such, may impede change" (Orlikowski, 2000, p. 411). Nonetheless, work practices can and do change—often in response to exogenous shocks or new technologies (Leonardi, 2009). Overall, recurrent enactment is a defining characteristic of work practices that makes them both "mediators and outcomes of social action" (Leonardi, 2015, p. 241).

Third, work practices are temporally emergent, meaning that, "although certain actions toward organizational goals can be planned in advance, the patterns of resistance and accommodation to the demands of a changing world can only be, as Knorr-Cetina (1995) has suggested, unfolded in practice" (Leonardi, 2015, pp. 242-3). In other words, work practices take shape as they encounter the constraints and affordances of "the real world." Orlikowski (1996) described this phenomenon in her study of a newly implemented information

technology. She observed that changes to practice brought about by the new technology "occurred through the ongoing, gradual, and reciprocal adjustments, accommodations, and improvisations enacted by the [organization] members" and that "their action subtly and significantly altered the organizing practices and structures of [the] workplace over time, transforming the texture of work, nature of knowledge, patterns of interaction, distribution of work, forms of accountability and control, and mechanisms of coordination" (Orlikowski, 1996, p. 69). The key takeaway is that these dramatic changes were not directly caused by the new technology but emerged over time in the implementation process, implying that "the functionality of a technology— its ability to be used to accomplish a particular task—does not exist outside of a situated context of use" (Leonardi, 2015, p. 243).

The concept of temporal emergence shows up in lay understandings of practice and definitions of evidence-based practice as a problem of context dependence. Evidence-based practices are, by definition, meant to be packaged and portable but extracting them from the contexts in which they were developed is a puzzling figure vs. ground problem: what features of the practice are core to the observed success, and what is incidental or insignificant? When we move from simply studying work practices to trying to manipulate and control them in pursuit of improved outcomes, temporal emergence becomes a problem rather than merely a characteristic of work practices. Broadly speaking, advocates of evidence-based practice and Implementation Science acknowledge the issue of context dependence but regard it as a problem to be managed and ideally minimized through control. Implementation science provides resources for disciplining and formalizing the learning and adjustment that happens in temporal emergence, with the goal of maximizing fidelity.

Fourth, work practices are historically influenced. Past experiences are the basis for the cognitive schemata we use to make sense of, interpret, and evaluate new experiences (Garfinkel, 1967), and in like manner, "work practices carry with them the history of previous work practices that have proven successful in the accomplishment of organizational life" (Leonardi, 2015, p. 245). According to both Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1998), past actions are reproduced but not unreflexively. For Giddens, "Continuity of practices presumes reflexivity, but reflexivity in turn is possible only because of the continuity of practices that makes them distinctively 'the same' across space and time" (p. 3). Without continuity, practices would not be intelligible or recognizable enough to attach value or justification to (e.g., as being effective), and practices that do not carry some positive evaluation are unlikely to persist through time (via re-enactment), because, in Giddens's view, humans have agency and monitor the flow of social life. It is worth pausing here to notice the unspoken role of entification in Giddens's observation. We can see that continuity of practice—through recurrent enactment and historical momentum—is necessary for entification (understanding action as a "thing"), and entification in turn appears necessary for reflection and evaluation, which enable a practice's continuity.

Clearly, Giddens and Bourdieu did not advocate a deterministic view of historical influence. However, their respect for human agency and reflexivity should not be taken as an endorsement of rational action. A number of studies have shown how the historical influence of practice can create an unfortunate inertia, preventing people from adopting promising new practices. For example, Edmondson and colleagues (2001) documented how existing work practices tied to historical values of expertise and prestige endured at the expense of a new, safer surgical practice in a number of cardiology departments at large hospitals. Interestingly, a similar case study—which shows that medical practitioners overwhelmingly have not

incorporated questions about adverse childhood experiences into medical evaluations despite persuasive evidence that doing so could improve patient outcomes—has served as a galvanizing narrative for Implementation Science (see Felitti et al., 1998).

Finally, the fifth characteristic of work practices is that they are goal oriented and are carried out within the context of organizations committed to their own survival. As evolutionary theory would suggest, work practices that are counterproductive to the survival of the organization will be selected against. The temporal emergence of work practices, involving adjustments to material constraints and affordances, is oriented toward some purpose or end. Human services organizations, in a historical era characterized by managerialism, audit, and "the appliance of science" (Trinder, 2006), are oriented toward carrying out their public mandates and producing desired outcomes such as student learning (perhaps measured by standardized testing), reduced recidivism, or fewer deaths from substance abuse. Of course, individual goals may be more immediate, including things like "stay safe at work," "maintain employment," "be liked by my co-workers," or "get a good performance evaluation." The implementation of evidence-based practices may falter when strategies for achieving organizational goals are perceived as conflicting with strategies for achieving individual goals. For example, a correctional officer who believes using Motivational Interviewing will make her appear weak and vulnerable to inmates is unlikely to practice it with fidelity. Thus, understanding goal orientation can be useful for diagnosing implementation problems.

While working practices share the characteristics just outlined, scholars developing practice ontologies have carved organizational life into units of practice in various ways. As Leonardi (2015) observed, some have focused in on very minute aspects of social interaction such as the *gesture* (Murphy, 1998) and the *speech act* (Collins, 1981), while others have looked

at aggregates of these practices, such as the *negotiation* (Strauss, 1978), the *interaction* (Barley, 1986), and the *move* (Pentland, 1992), or even larger aggregates such as *performances* (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983), *routines* (Feldman & Pentland, 2003), and *patterns* (Perlow, Gittell, & Katz, 2004; Stohl, 2001). Regardless of how lines are drawn, practice theorists take routinized, sociomaterial patterns of activity as their units of analysis to study organization. In contrast, implementation and efficacy researchers define practice largely as an independent variable of interest because of the socially significant consequences it may engender. Practice theory can add depth to implementation research, while implementation research can ground practice theory and connect it to pressing practical needs in human services organizing.

Practice, Knowledge, and Communication

Having outlined the defining characteristics of work practices, it is now useful to step back from the context of work and organizing to look more broadly at practice "as a primary building block of the social" (Hager, Lee, & Reich, 2012, p. 2) so as to examine its relationship to communication, knowledge and theorizing. Practices of entification and fidelity are inextricably bound up with concerns for effectiveness and rationality. And science—and the application thereof—is central to those concerns. Thus, the theory–practice relationship is central to the present inquiry. Pragmatist philosophies of practice ground my approach to this topic.

Craig's (1989, 1996, 2006) influential work on communication theory and practice translates a pragmatist view of praxis into a cogent framework for communication research. Craig (2006) defined a social practice as "a coherent set of activities that are commonly engaged in, and meaningful in particular ways, among people familiar with a certain

culture" (p. 38). He further explained that practices are more than activities; they are activities that people think and talk about in reflective, evaluative, and specialized ways. As practices develop, specialized vocabularies and normative discourses develop along with them. By engaging in evaluative talk, people negotiate norms and develop common beliefs about how the practice should be done.

Following Craig, we can count something as a practice if we can answer three questions about it affirmatively: (1) Can it be named and recognized as a "thing"? (2) Is there a normative discourse surrounding it? (To put it more simply: Are there special words for talking about it and can people be criticized or praised depending on how they perform it?) and (3) Are there problems or puzzles related to the practice? I want to highlight three implications of this definition of practice. First, entification is fundamental to defining a practice as such: An "it" must be named so that it can be discussed, evaluated, and pondered. Second, and related, the constitutive role of normative discourse implies that there can be no "practice" without (human) communication. Third, knowledge-seeking activities, such as scientific experimentation, theorizing, and scholarly writing, are practices.

To elaborate, communication is both constitutive of practice and a feature of it but the two are not synonymous. Communication is constitutive in two ways. First, many work practices *are* communication practices, as in, they are enacted solely or primarily through the activities that laypeople would recognize as communication (e.g., speaking, listening, writing, meeting). For example, Motivational Interviewing is accomplished by listening/interpreting and speaking in particular ways. Second, normative discourse that regulates practices and renders them meaningful constitutes them as such. So even practices that are not enacted primarily *as* communication—for example, parking at work—are still constituted as practices because

normative discourse makes them meaningful (e.g., social consequences for parking in the wrong spot, parking privileges being granted on the basis of status or seniority). Much can be learned about practices by studying the (meta)discourses that surround and constitute them. Lastly, communication is an outcome or feature of work practices in the sense described by Leonardi (2015): By engaging in work practices (e.g., not parking in the boss's spot), people communicate to each other that they are competent cultural members (or not). Thus, even practices that do not appear to be "doings of communication" are still communicative. However, to facilitate reflection on these nuances, I do not collapse the concepts of practice and communication.

The third implication is that knowledge-seeking activities, such as scientific experimentation, theorizing, and scholarly writing, are practices. Building from the view of practice outlined above and incorporating ideas from American pragmatism and Aristotelian practical philosophy, Craig (1989) theorized communication as a *practical discipline*—that is, a discipline whose purpose is to cultivate a social practice, and in which inquiry contributes to deliberation on practical choices. Communication, he argued, is a practice that is made meaningful (e.g., as a way of framing problems) and regulated by metadiscourse, which is, itself, a communication practice. Communication theory is simply a sophisticated, *disciplined* kind of metadiscourse that "now plays an active role in cultivating the practice of communication in society" (Craig, 2006, p. 41). In addition to being a practice itself, theory provides ways of interpreting practical knowledge, and, according to Craig, is fundamentally normative.

Craig's (1989) integrated view of the theory–practice relationship is rooted in a Deweyan understanding of knowledge as a process of inquiry. For Dewey, the purpose of inquiry is to contribute to discourse about what to do. Thus, Dewey assumes not only that philosophical understandings shape how we perform practice but also that knowledge comes from our

engagement with practice.[3] The pragmatist view of the theory–practice relationship, as we shall

see later, is a key thread feeding into relational ontoepistemology. This alternative to the

spectator view of knowledge has been elaborated in various ways in relational ontology

literature. I will highlight key developments in the following section, after providing some

historical context that is useful for understanding relational thinking.

Relational Ontologies

By the end of this dissertation, I hope the reader will agree that the nature of any situated

practice is co-constituted with the situated problems to which the practice answers. By this

logic, one's understanding of any given practice is greatly enriched by knowledge of the felt

difficulties it addresses. I find this to be true of relational theorizing, so in this section I

historicize relational thinking before summarizing its ontological premises.

Relational ontology--at least the streams feeding into contemporary communication

literature—arose largely in response to knowledge problems in science. In particular, the

particle-wave paradox, which had become an established quandary in theoretical physics by the

1920s, was important for the development of relational thinking. The paradox is that light

appears as a particle when observed with one apparatus, and as a wave when observed with

another, and the two apparatuses are mutually exclusive and cannot be engaged simultaneously;

thus, the nature of matter apparently changes depending on the experimental

apparatus. Heisenberg conceptualized the paradox as an epistemological problem and explained

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[3] In contrast, some communication scholars have conceived of theory and practice as incommensurable (Sandelands, 1990) or parallel (Thomas & Tymon, 1982; Miner, 1984), however, these views are not widely shared in the discipline.

it with the uncertainty principle, positing that we cannot accurately attain the value due to measurement limitations, although a value does exist independent of our measurement.

In contrast, Bohr explained the paradox with the complementarity principle, which carries ontological implications. He posited that "particle" and "wave" are descriptors that refer to mutually exclusive *phenomena* (i.e., whole experimental set-ups, including the observer) and not to light itself or any other independent object. Phenomena are "particular instances of wholeness" that incorporate, without any given separation, objects and agencies of observation (Barad, 2007, p. 170). Empirical observations, then, refer to a phenomenon rather than to objects. It follows that properties or measurement values cannot be attributed to an observer-independent object, nor are they "created" by the measurement; instead, properties pertain to phenomena. According to this *relational properties* theory, observations can be objective though not absolute; they are objective because the phenomena they reference are intersubjectively valid (i.e., they don't depend on a particular observer) and can be reproduced.

The ontological turn Bohr took in his solution to the particle–wave paradox distinguished him from Einstein and Heisenberg and became a launch pad for relational ontology. While Bohr's concept of phenomena focused on laboratory apparatuses, scientific experimentation, and the physical–conceptual relation, later thinkers applied it more generally. I turn now to how these ideas have been adopted and adapted in fields of social inquiry, while foregrounding, once again, the felt difficulties that motivated the development of relational thinking in these areas.

Relational Ontologies in Fields of Social Inquiry

Relationality is, as Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) put it, "a radical continuation of long-nurtured seeds of thought" (p. 29). It has been developed by diverse thinkers, including, for example, American Pragmatists, students of Hegel (e.g., Levinas, Heidegger), and feminists

(e.g., Barad, Butler, Haraway). Dewey, in particular, explored the broader implications of Bohr's ontological move, developing a transactional ontology that influenced later thinkers like Barad, Deleuze, and Latour.

As a reminder, the traditional correspondence theory of truth assumes a radical separation of knower and known and says the basic epistemic problem is whether or to what extent our knowledge corresponds to a presumptively external reality. In this view, knowledge (e.g., coming from sense data or experimentation) provides a window to truth, but that window is imperfect. Problematically, language, culture, values, history, and the knower's subject position all mediate our access to truth.

In contrast to this view, Dewey's transactional ontology folds the subject/object and fact/value distinctions into a single, complex category of *experience*. This view posits that "we" are not separate from the world we seek to know, and that knowledge claims refer to experience, not something that lies "beyond." For the pragmatist, there is no knowledge detached from experience. The knower, the known, and the "window" that supposedly relates the two, are all emergent and fluid aspects of experience.[4] *Transaction* describes how such entities (i.e., the subject and object of knowledge) transiently emerge in experience and relate (transact) across unfixed boundaries.

In transaction, "systems of description and naming are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to 'elements' or other presumptively detachable or

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[4] This view is underwritten by Peirce's triadic semiotics, which considers signs as involving not just a signifier and something signified, but also an implied embodied interpreter shaped by sociocultural habits of recognition and response.

independent 'entities,' 'essences,' or 'realities,' and without isolation of presumptively detachable 'relations' from such detachable 'elements'" (Dewey & Bentley 1949, p. 108). Dewey and Bentley (1949) contrasted *transaction* with the antique substantialist view of *self-action* and the classical mechanistic notion of *interaction*, which respectively envision preformed entities exerting action on their own or being balanced in causal relationships with one another but remaining essentially separate. Building on Bohr, transaction takes systems,' 'phenomena,' or 'situations' as the unit of analysis so as to consider the 'organism-in-environment' as a whole; the identities of participants in a situation emerge and change according to their functions in a transaction.

About half a century later, there was a surge of interest in transactional ontology, motivated by critiques of the "linguistic turn." The linguistic turn marked a departure from structuralist thought and the Cartesian worldview, which posits a subject/object split and conceives of knowledge projects as attempts to reconcile internal, subjective experiences with an external, objective or intersubjective world. Attempting to transcend this dualism, scholars of the linguistic turn argued that language is *performative*, meaning, to paraphrase Foucault, it creates the objects about which it speaks. In this view, rather than merely *reflecting* or describing the world, discourse *constitutes* social realities. It is worth noting, for our purposes, that the linguistic turn was underwritten by Saussure's dyadic semiotic, which depicts language as a veil that separates us from the reality we are attempting to represent.

Positioning language as the prime mover of social reality had major consequences for the conduct of social science: Efforts to discover explanatory factors appeared naïve and suspicious in light of more hermeneutic sensibilities and meaning-making processes became objects of study in their own right. The linguistic turn landed us in a postmodern world marked by an

expansive—even boundless—sense of textuality and rhetoricality, in which everything of interest emerges in and through communication, and—in the extreme—life appears to be all text without margins. This is a world in which, in William James' phrase, the mark of the human serpent is over all.

As interpretation and meaning took center stage, materiality became a mere backdrop for human dramas, according to a now common account of intellectual history. In organization studies, for example, "objects typically were understood as abstractions, as attributes of either individual or collective actors, or as relevant only to the extent that they entered humans' conversations (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Barad, 2003; Fleetwood, 2005)" (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 31). In this way, the linguistic turn ended up subordinating the material to the discursive. This perceived over-correction fueled interest in relational ontology in the social sciences and humanities in the early 21st Century.

Barad (2007), notably, extended Bohr's concept of *phenomena* and the pragmatist notion of *experience* to address concerns about linguistic performativity and the relative reality-shaping power of discourse and materiality. Similar to how Dewey understood experience, Barad described phenomena as "the open-ended and dynamic material-discursive practices through which specific 'concepts' and 'things' are articulated." They used the term *agential cuts* to refer to the process through which entities are delineated and differentiated within a particular frame of observation or analysis. Rather than being passive observations or representations of pre-existing entities, agential cuts actively participate in the production of those entities. They are performative acts that materialize and differentiate entities, making them recognizable and intelligible within a given context.

Barad (2007) argued that problems stemming from the excesses of the linguistic turn (e.g., skepticism about objectivity giving rise to a postmodern free-for-all) could be solved by "getting the referent right;" that is, by understanding that objectivity is a quality of phenomena and not of particular characterizations of things (Barad, 2007, p. 334). Changing the "referent" in this way arguably allows for reliable knowledge through reproducible phenomena without supposing that science provides knowledge of independent/external realities. Barad (2007) called this ontology agential realism. It is very similar to the ontology Dewey developed in his later works, which has since been labeled transactional realism.

Overall, this basic ontological move disrupts many assumptions that go along with substantialism as it suggests that the "things" we perceive to be interacting actually emerge and are constituted ("articulated") through *transaction* (Dewey) or *intra-action* (Barad). By extension, it implies that the boundaries between subject and object, observer and observed are contingent upon the specific practices and contexts in which they emerge. It also challenges traditional dualistic frameworks and emphasizes the inseparability of human and non-human actors and the entanglement of discursive and material dimensions in the production of knowledge and reality. The next section takes a closer look at these implications.

Understanding Relational Ontology: Five Premises

The relational turn hosts numerous theoretical frameworks that differ in their foci and assumptions but most approaches share some common threads. Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) described five guiding principles for understanding the world in a relational way. A short review of these premises will help readers understand the alternative relationality offers to both modernist and postmodernist sensibilities.

Entities. The first premise will sound familiar by now. It challenges the idea of pre-existing entities and emphasizes that things emerge and exist through ongoing relations. Beginning as far back as Aristotle, Western thinking has been characterized by a preoccupation with the nature and behavior of *things* (i.e., substances and entities); it has been "more interested in their essential properties than their conditions of possibility" (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 31). Relationality flips Aristotelian substantialist ontology on its head by rejecting the idea that entities preexist anything else and instead positing that relations are either ontologically prior to substance—because relationships between perceived entities are what define them as such—or that relations and entities are co-emergent or co-primal (Emirbayer, 1997).[5] Along with this inversion, *materiality* is granted the double meaning it has in everyday usage: "Matter" as substance or physicality (e.g., "grey matter") *and* matter as relevance/significance (e.g., grey matter *matters* for nervous system function) (see Barad, 2003). Thus, the definition of materiality in new materialism already begins to transcend the separation between mechanistic and meaning-centered ontologies. Thanks to the second meaning of "matter," it makes sense to say that the ontological status of an object, substance, or entity changes when its relations change.

Ontological Multiplicity, Enactment, and Flatness. The second premise asserts that relations are dynamic and ever-evolving. They are not steady states or fixed structures but ongoing performances or enactments. Relations are characterized by unpredictability, volatility, and excess. The nature of things is multiple, and they can be done in many ways, resulting in

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[5] Most scholars who apply relational ontologies to the study of communication and organizing adopt the co-primacy perspective (see Putnam's [2015] call for a dialectic view of discourse and materiality).

diverse enactments of the real. This premise challenges deep ontological explanations and promotes a "flat" ontology that focuses on the surfaces of practice rather than searching for underlying explanatory properties or mechanisms.

*Sociomateriality***.** This premise rejects taken-for-granted divisions between social and material, human and nonhuman, and culture and nature. It argues that these divisions are relational productions that shape the world in partial ways. A relational ontology considers the material as an integral participant in performing the relations that constitute the world. It challenges the primacy of social and cultural realms over the material and emphasizes the inseparability of the social and material in understanding the diverse players in practices of the real.

*Agency***.** The fourth premise addresses the implications of sociomateriality for notions of agency and the human subject. Specifically, it challenges humanist notions of agency and intentionality, which view agency as inhering in a human subject, whether *a priori* or as an effect of social processes. It replaces this with images of dispersed and flowing difference-making potentialities, where agency is a hybrid and distributed phenomenon and nonhuman elements are mutually dependent. No single element possesses agency; rather, agency emerges from the collaboration of multiple elements in the relational generation of action. This shifts the focus away from human consciousness and meaning-making as primary concerns, instead emphasizing their embeddedness within practice. The human subject is repositioned as a "sociomaterial vessel for agency," constantly shaped through interactions with other entities (Kuhn, et al., 2017, p. 37).

Causality. To sustain a relational model of agency, causality needs to be reconceptualized. Thus, the final premise challenges traditional notions of causality in which the

latter is understood as a linear sequence where motivated human agents are the primary actors, while effects are passive outcomes. Instead, relationality argues that action is reciprocal such that effects can act back on their constitutive relations. It calls for simultaneous, indeterminate, and organic links between cause and effect, rather than deterministic and mechanistic ones. It strives to articulate causality as a continuous process of action, where agency is constantly formed through interaction and not confined to stable, predefined entities. Alternative causalities emphasize practices and networks of activity rather than discrete agents and forces.

To recap, these premises challenge traditional conceptions of entities, emphasize the dynamic and multiple nature of the real, question binary divisions between social and material, focus on the performative role of practices, downgrade the importance of human agency, and reject linear notions of causality. They provide loose operating principles for those engaged in relational analyses. Bringing these ideas to bear on questions of work and organizing, Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) explored several possibilities for extending relational thinking via communication theorizing. Two versions of "communicative relationality" (their term for these possibilities) have proven fruitful for theorizing issues related to the entification of communicative practices.

Communicative Relationality

Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) conceived of communicative relationality as a range of possibilities for extending relational thinking through communication theory, rather than as a singular or fixed construct. In what follows, I draw on two of their versions of communicative relationality to sketch a relational picture of entification and fidelity as relevant to human service practices. This helps to demonstrate what it looks like to think relationally about

implementation, while also introducing the reader to vocabulary that will be used in my subsequent analysis.

The two views of communication elaborated below share a common thread that distinguishes them from more conventional understandings of communication. Communication's reality-making potential is not owed entirely to its capacity to drive meaning and human understanding, for example, through discourse and rhetoric. It also occupies a more fundamental ontological position in which it shapes reality by doing the work of *arranging*. From an undifferentiated whole of experience, language designates *things;* it differentiates and (dis)organizes, pieces together and pulls apart, creating and revising the divisions that make "things" what they are, consequentially affixing properties to those things and making it seem as if those properties were somehow always already fundamental to the thing (Kuhn et al., 2017). [JE6]

Communication Entifies Practices by Relating, Linking, and Connecting. Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren's (2017) first version of communicative relationality advances a sociomaterial conception of communication that raises the analytic possibility of tracing the becoming (materialization) of a practice through communication. In this view, communication "refers to any phenomenon by which a first entity gets related/linked/connected to a second entity through a third entity that will produce, perform and 'materialize' this relation/link/connection (Cooren, Bencherki, Chaput, & Vasquez, 2015)" (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 70). In other words, communication is what materializes to make a relation, link, or connection possible; for example, a doorway that connects two rooms brings them into communication, a request brings two people into a particular kind of relationship.[4]

Various kinds of "beings" can do the work of relating/linking/connecting: signs of all kinds (i.e., icons, indices, and symbols; see Peirce, 1991), objects (e.g., a paycheck that links an employee to an organization), and people. People act as intermediaries, *media*, or *phonation devices* (Latour, 2004) when they speak on behalf of something else (e.g., the law, or restorative principles, or science) or make some concern, interest, or preoccupation present. Media that do the work of relating/linking/connecting do not just represent something else that is not present, they make that thing present, often in a way that makes a difference. Put differently, signs and other media that "stand in" for something else are also themselves "things," or, in William James's (1912) words, are "'experienced relations,' which must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system" (p. 22). In this way, what links is also performative. Therefore, Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) explain, "the conversational world should…not be considered separate from the world in which it emerges. *It is part of this world—that is, it allows this world to express/materialize/embody itself in a specific way*" (p. 76, emphasis in original).

The work of relating/linking/connecting is key to entification and fidelity because all attributes, traits, and properties are expressions of relations; it is connection with other beings that makes things (and people) what they (we) are—a phenomenon Latour (2013) called *being-as-other*. In this world where being is relational, *materialization* is the process of establishing and breaking links such that things acquire and change properties. Note, it is not the case that materialization makes something supposedly immaterial become embodied or incarnated for the first time. Rather, Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) explain, "[materialization] consists of offering to something that already has a material dimension another way to materialize, embody or incarnate itself for another next first time, as Garfinkel (2002) would say" (p. 97).

Being-as-other raises an interesting paradox: "what appears to be proper (as in "property") to someone or something is, to some extent, also always already improper (Derrida, 1993), precisely because the property always expresses/materializes itself through a relation, a link or a connection with something or someone else" (Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren, 2017, p. 74). Derrida (1988) called this *exappropriation.* Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) elaborated a case of exappropriation in their study of "the becoming of an idea" in a creative process. They observed that the idea materialized over time "through all the properties it progressively acquired," yet those acquired properties were "the result of *appropriations*" (p. 132)—that is, "additions/alterations/discontinuities" that "have to be paradoxically identified as participating in the continuity of [the idea's] expressions" (p. 116). For a project, idea, or practice to persist and materialize, "appropriation has to be performed in such a way that it still appears sufficiently proper to what was projected" (p. 132). They concluded that management of this paradox, and the tension between continuity and discontinuity, are key to the becoming of any idea or project. Thus, "each materialization can be seen as a discontinuity creating effects of continuity" (p. 127). It can similarly be said that each time a program or practice is implemented in a new place, that practice further materializes through an appropriation that appears (and strives) to be sufficiently proper to some model.

In the world of restorative justice, we can see the paradox of appropriation playing out in anxieties that institutionalization may popularize RJ but at the price of its integrity and fidelity to its philosophical core. Burke (1937) used the term "bureaucratization of the imaginative" to "name the vexing things that happen when men [sic] try to translate some pure aim or vision in terms of its corresponding material embodiment, thus necessarily involving elements alien to the original, 'spiritual' ('imaginative') motive" (introduction, n.p.). While Burke conceived of this

phenomenon as arising from a material/ideational split, relational scholars like Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) would describe the difference between a "pure vision" and its "material embodiment" as a matter of *degrees* of materiality—something can be more or less material depending on the quantity and strength of the links that sustain it. An idea that exists only as signals transmitted through neurons is less material (i.e., exists less) than an idea vocalized, which is in turn less material than an idea written, published, read, implemented, and so on.

Immateriality, in this view, "becomes a relative/pragmatist/relational notion, as it describes the state of something whose existence is only sustained by a few other beings, and that therefore appears as (relatively) immaterial" (Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren, 2017, p. 131). For me, the key point here is that seeing in shades of (socio)materiality enables a focus on the *process* of mattering. Things materialize (come to matter more and more) by acquiring relations/links/connections, and as they do so, they become ontologically multiple, existing in more and more places simultaneously and across time through the various "beings" that represent and extend them—and then and only then does fidelity become an issue. In a manner of speaking, materialization creates a crowd. The more something exists, the less "proper" are its properties and the more propriety matters—at least, in the case of human services practices— to those with an interest in legitimation, evaluation and quality control.

Viewed through the lens of communicative relationality, implementation is a process of making and breaking links, which evolves through a tension between continuity (that makes the intervention recognizable as a thing, and particularly as a scientifically sanctioned, legitimate thing) and discontinuity (in the form of inevitable adaptations and infidelities). The example Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) provide of this version of communicative relationality highlights the divergent aspect of materialization—an idea materializes as it acquires more

properties through appropriation. But fidelity, as an implementation practice, is all about

convergence and creating effects of continuity, even (and especially) in the context of

expansion. It is fairly easy to see how divergence and infidelity can threaten a practice, while it

is less obvious that infidelity is also integral to the practice's materialization. Reading

Implementation Science literature with this in mind can generate novelty in discussions of

fidelity and adaptation, for example, by helping to unpack the processes of identifying an

intervention's essential core and adaptable periphery.

In sum, Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren's (2017) vision of communicative relationality as

relating/linking/connecting introduces new analytic possibilities for studying entification and

fidelity. Using this frame, entification can be construed as materialization, which suggests that

establishing and rejecting affiliations is foundational to the process of extracting a proper "big P"

Practice from a diffuse cloud of principles, values, routines, actions, etc.—a "small p"

practice. In exploring this topic, it is important to account for the political struggle often

involved in negotiating affiliations, consider the consequences of different

configurations/arrangements for the trajectory of a practice, identify other present potentialities,

and look closely at valuation. Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren's (2017) second version of

communicative relationality provides additional theoretical resources and vocabulary to aid in

such analysis.

Communication as a (Dis)organizing Force. To better understand communication's

capacity to arrange and (dis)organize, we need some concept of communicative

performativity. However, per Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017), a purely social constructionist

version of performativity risks overstating the significance of human intentionality in organizing

processes. To maintain fidelity to relationality's posthumanist leaning, they build their second

version of communicative relationality on a relational notion of performativity combined with insights from communication theory. Specifically, they draw on economic performativity thinking (Callon, 1986, 1998, 2008; Muniesa, Millo, & Callon, 2007), which is rooted in Actor-Network Theory (see Latour, 2005).

Economic performativity proposes that economic theories, like self-fulfilling prophecies, play an active role in constructing the economic phenomena they purport to merely describe. However, this is not based simply on the vintage sociological proposition that situations believed to be real are real in their consequences. Rather, according to Callon (1998), realities emerge in/from complex networks of human and nonhuman agencies, which he describes as *agencements*.

Agencement (a term borrowed from Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) can be roughly translated from French as an assemblage or arrangement, however, the verb form (*agencer*) "implies a consideration of organizing practices that create, and simultaneously depend upon, particular configurations of human and nonhuman elements" (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 45). Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) explain, "an agencement—as both verb and noun simultaneously—is the site from and through which conjunctions of agencies become configured into (what is considered to be) an agent." Thus, an agencement is a *practice* (as opposed to an entity) that brings together various (human and nonhuman) elements, and it is the practice, or web of relationships between participants, that is understood to be acting. Agency, then, is "a feature of the distribution of participants" (p. 46). Simply put, whole arrangements/configurations act to make a difference. Even when a single element (say, a person) within the configuration acts, that action is only possible and intelligible because of the web of relationships surrounding and sustaining it.

So, following this logic, to understand why things go the way they do, we ought to take agencements as our unit of analysis, rather than more conventional units like people, teams, organizations, or policies. This is because using those conventional units can lead the analyst to over-emphasize the impact of whatever factor is isolated for analytic purposes, and to ascribe undue autonomy to that factor. The analyst is then liable to forget that impact happens through combinations of multiple and hybrid agencies and that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Consequently, what may have actually been a sociomaterial "group accomplishment" (e.g., a change brought about by some human-machine-policy hybrid) is credited to a single actor. Using agencements as a unit of analysis can hopefully reduce this kind of attribution error.

Building on Callon's notion of agencement, Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) position articulation theorizing (the work of Ernesto Laclau and Stuart Hall) as a communicative supplement to economic performativity thinking. Specifically, they draw on two key concepts. The first is *articulation*, which describes how links are forged and broken among elements of a social practice through "the fixing of signs' meanings by placing them in (contingent and non-predetermined) relation to one another" (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 79). Signs have multiple potential meanings (they are polysemous), and articulations temporarily and partially fix their meanings by configuring their relationships to one another (Kuhn et al., 2017). Some signs are especially powerful and serve as "nodal points," to which other signs attach and derive meaning. On my reading, an articulation is to social practice as an experimental apparatus is to science: both are temporary and partial resolutions of wholeness.

The second idea is that articulations both constitute and arise from a totality, or an ever-shifting relational complex. Conflict, contingency, and contradiction characterize the relational complex. Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) explain, "Every nodal point, every agency

participating in a practice, is the site of multiple and conflicting relations—relations that are always contingent and antagonistic, and which respond to something rendered 'outside' the practice" (p. 80). The omnipresence of contingency and contradiction is important because it means the relational complex is always brimming with possibility, and that articulation is often political. The temporary fixing of meaning is an accomplishment often born of struggle, and analysts studying the relational matrix ought to consider how particular articulations could fail and what other potentialities are present.

In this version of communicative relationality, communication "refers to the creation of meanings that configure a temporary and contingent arrangement of agencies in the pursuit of materially embedded practices" (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 81). In other words, communication is the process of "articulating meaningful relationships between elements that realize a practice and guide its trajectory" (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 80). Articulations fix meanings by forging and breaking associations, which explains why meanings can be both fleeting and durable—signs' meanings sway with their affiliations but continuity of their meaning keeps them salient and intelligible as they shift around in the relational matrix.

Analyzing a practice entails exploring the emergence of a "logic," or account of, the practice and its trajectory. A *logic of practice* is a depiction or narrative that is agentic in that it is "bound up with the idea of a trajectory, a directionality or movement away from somewhere, even if the toward-which it moves is obscure or even absent" (Bennett, 2010, p. 32). However, that logic or narrative is also "shot through with contradictions and contestations" (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 80). The analyst's task is to describe "*how* relations are made" and to "highlight meaning not as the contents of individual minds, but as the logics characterizing the always-shifting relational complex" (Kuhn et al., 2017, pp. 80–81, emphasis in original).

The purpose of identifying a logic of practice is to explore why the elements hang together as they do and consider implications for future action and movement. In addition to identifying logics of practice, the analyst should describe the communicative activities that sustain particular articulations and render the practice intelligible and apparently stable. To facilitate reflection on struggles over the trajectory of a practice, the analyst may ask, "what does the practice fear, and what does it desire" (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 83)? Logics of practice is a useful concept for thinking about the trajectory of RJ within the broader context of human services organizing in the era of evidence-based practice. We will see that in restorative justice, the logic of effectiveness mixes, merges, and clashes with other logics of practice. And, I will later argue, identifying a logic of practice is a potentially valuable implementation practice. That is, when profiling a practice, perhaps the definition should emphasize the logic of the practice, and the desired trajectory for the practice, so that the definition itself participates in bringing about that desired trajectory (and here we see that strange relational notion of causality at play).

Applied to the focal issues of this dissertation, this version of communicative relationality depicts entification as a wholly communicative phenomenon (using an expansive, sociomaterial definition of communication), that is, as a kind of articulation. To me, this implicates an expansive and inclusive view of the action that entifies practices like RJ. Meaning, we should not limit our view to entification to the activities of formally defining or describing a practice, for example, in training manuals, legislative documents, and research papers. Rather, we should also consider how various kinds of non-human 'nodes'—for example, evaluation metrics, forms, software, community factors or conditions considered to be outside the practice—participate in defining the practice. This highlights how, what RJ "is" at any given time or in a given context necessarily exceeds any particular textual account. And, because of that excess—because the

relational matrix is brimming with multiple potentialities for the trajectory of practice—practicing fidelity might mean trying to foreclose some of those potential trajectories. In Chapter 4, we will see how Implementation Science does this.

Already, I have suggested some advantages of approaching the foregoing analysis of implementation from a relational perspective. Relationality emerged and grew in response to epistemic challenges at the intersections of scientific inquiry and social practice, and the nature and becoming of entities are its central problematic. Thus, it is hard to ignore relational literature in a project focused on entification and evaluation of communication-based practice. Because relationality raises salient critique of functionalist research paradigms while promising not to sacrifice rigor or objectivity, I bring it to bear on the present investigation in hopes of providing novel and useful ways of theorizing and practicing implementation of communication practices.

Beyond this broad point of relevance, I see some specific benefits of thinking relationally about communication and organization. First, By breaking from the mold of conventional units of analysis, relational ontology disrupts the cognitive schemata that might otherwise corral research along lines of pregiven categories and prematurely eliminate meaningful complexity. Additionally, exploring the relational becoming of entities facilitates meta-inquiry and analysis of what matters in practice—not just what *should* matter but what *does* matter—literally, what materializes and how. Finally, communicative relationality encourages contextualization of knowledge projects and consideration of other present potentialities for organizational action. For my purposes, this provides a framework for contemplating how entification bears on evaluation, which ultimately informs consequential decisions about how to define and meet community needs. At the same time, there are problems with how relational ontology has unfolded that make it unwieldy and in some ways dysfunctional.

Critiques of Relational Ontology

There are some problems with how relationality has unfolded that make it difficult to find its practical utility, even as it offers a compelling vision in response to major entoepistemological quandaries. First, it is hard to figure out what it means to "apply" relationality to real-world problems, let alone identify tangible, real-world consequences that might stem from a relational turn in the academy. The process of resolving epistemic issues through an ontological shift, generalizing the resulting ontology, and then seeking practical problems that can be solved by this ontology its not the ideal form of inquiry, as suggested by pragmatists. Furthermore, it is easy to read the premises of relationality as being as either absurd or trivial, adding to the difficulty of discerning its utility and significance. Naturally, there are a range of opinions about the scope and profundity of the ontological turn's implications and the extent to which it negates or revises other paradigms, and it can be hard to find the right balance between overstating and understating the implications.

As an example, let's consider the mattering of a material artifact in organizational life: an employee's ID badge that allows selective building access. For new materialists, what this object *is* comes from its relations. Thus, its *substance* is more than plastic and ink, so when its relations change, it changes. Without the employee or the building, or the organization, the badge is not the same thing. And the same is true of the employee.

One reading of relationality's "ontological reversal" (Kuhn et al., 2017) implies a kind of spooky literalism, as if the badge's literal substance—its very physicality—would change if its relations changed. We can get this thinking by overgeneralizing the ontological answer to the particle-wave duality. By and large, though, the new materialist assertion that matter exceeds physicality discourages this kind of literal reading.

On the other hand, one could argue, after rejecting absurd and animistic readings, what remains is the modest claim that badge is not *meaningfully* the same thing because it does not have the same significance, role, or functionality. So, essentially, we have changed our definition of "is." After redefining *substance*, then, the ultimate takeaway—that the practical significance of things is is relationally-bound—is far from earth-shattering. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the claims resulting from relational analyses are not radically different from those coming from cultural, constructivist, or interpretive research, even though they use different vocabulary. Such a reading does not suggest relationality is not useful or interesting, but one might reasonably wonder if the juice is worth the squeeze.

Another major critique argues that relational ontology can be disabling, and particularly that it is counterproductive to the goal of purposefully improving systems. Leonardi and Rodriguez-Lluesma (2013) raise this concern in relation to holistic views sociomateriality, such as those advanced by Barad (2007) and Orlikowski (2010). Amplifying Bratteteig and Verne (2012), they call for an ontology that respects the interrelationship between social and material agencies without conflating them. To improve human and technological systems (a design orientation), they argue, we need the capacity to isolate individual pieces of a problem because "if things cannot be broken apart, they cannot be reassembled in different and perhaps better ways" (Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2013, p. 81). They argue that the metaphor of entanglement, which suggests an inseparable connection between social and material, hinders the ability to redesign systems. They advocate instead for the metaphor of imbrication, which allows for the separation and reconfiguration of social and material agencies. Notably, the authors do not advance any realist claims; that is, they do not argue that imbrication is a more accurate representation of reality. Instead, they argue from a pragmatic perspective by emphasizing the

consequences of using each metaphor. Bratteteig and Verne (2012) summarize the concern thusly: "If you see a problem as an entanglement, your only options are to accept or not accept: There is no space in between for negotiation and improvement." Leonardi (2012) also argued that an agential realist perspective on sociomateriality, while philosophically appealing, is at odds with how organizational actors view the social and the material, which becomes problematic when researchers try to view a scene from the perspectives of the actors involved (as recommended by Van Maanen, 1988).

Mutch (2013) critiqued agential realism on similar grounds, identifying several practical problems that arise when trying to describe empirical phenomena from an agential realist perspective. He notes, for example, that agential realism leads to an empirical focus on what *is* to the exclusion of how things *become*. As a result, empirical studies using this lens tend to be descriptive and not explanatory. Additionally, he argues that agential realism lacks a concept of time, which makes it difficult to empirically describe the persistence of phenomena that cannot be reduced to current actions. Leonardi (2013) went a step further with this critique and argued that *critical realism* results in fewer problems when used as an underpinning for sociomateriality than does relationality.

Briefly, critical realism originated from the work of Roy Bhaskar in the 1970s as a response to the limitations of positivism and interpretivism (see also Reed, 2005 for an argument for using this new in organization studies). It represents the empirical path taken by Einstein rather than the ontological turn taken by Bohr. Critical realists maintain that reality exists independently of our perceptions while emphasizing that our knowledge of reality is mediated by social structures, human agency, and interpretations. In stark contrast to relational ontology, critical realism attributes social phenomena to underlying structures and seeks to identify causal

mechanisms. At the same time, it responds to critiques of positivism and structuralism by rejecting deterministic thinking, calling for critical examination of knowledge claims and the social conditions that shape them, and emphasizing the dynamic nature of reality. In the context of organization studies, critical realism considers structure and action to be separate but interdependent forces that fuel the ongoing process of organizing and the constitution of organizations over time.

According to Leonardi (2013), the use of critical realism offers some valuable analytic affordances. For example, he suggests that having distinct concepts of structure and action— while not philosophically superior to viewing them as inseparable—makes it easier to describe persistence and change in organizational life. Similarly, he argues that the critical realist depiction of sociomateriality as an imbrication that occurs over time calls upon researchers to describe how and why sociomateriality emerges. For this reason, it is actually easier to account for the role of the material in perpetuating practice. To reiterate, Leonardi's preference for critical realism over agential realism is based on his evaluation of the practical and methodological implications of each framework for studying sociomateriality, rather than "simple meditations on [their] ontological bases…alone" (2013, p. 74). Leonardi's (2013) pragmatic/consequentialist approach to critique advances an argument for critical realism that is actually fully compatible with a pragmatist relational ontology, when the latter is employed at the metatheoretical level (more on this later).

These critiques point to a basic point that needs to be acknowledged and addressed. That is, commonsense notions of realism, substantialism, and causality are profoundly functional worldviews, regardless of the extent to which they are regarded as "actually" true. And, on the topic of "actual" truth, it is important to note that one cannot maintain the inferiority of critical

realism on grounds of inaccuracy without paradoxically relying on a realist assumption. Not all treatments of relationality do this, however. For example, Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) used an experimental mindset when investigating implications of new materialisms for understanding work and organizing under contemporary capitalism, asking what kind of *novelty* can be generated by taking relational ontology seriously. This, too, resonates with pragmatist consequentialism.

Nonetheless, I find myself unsatisfied with the format of many critiques made by relationally-inclined authors about other approaches. Specifically, I take issue with "critiques" that amount to observations that the research in question relies on non-relational ontological assumptions, but which do not locate an actual issue with the research findings that relates back to an experienced difficulty. For example, to say that such-and-such perspective is "problematically humanistic" without elaborating the specific problems that stem from the use of humanist assumptions in that particular case is, in my view, ironically misaligned with the premises of relational ontology. This is because it seemingly takes as an article of faith that humanism has been broadly discredited, and thus that its application is fundamentally "problematic" (to use one of my least favorite words). Instead I think critics are trying to say "what if this is giving humans too much credit?" Or "what if we looked at the problem differently?" But they need to answer that question. What if it is? Then what? What is the alternative?

To engage in an ontological debate without implicitly using a realist notion of truth as the basic evaluative criterion is, of course, possible, even if it is not the path of least intellectual resistance. Part of the trouble here is that the genre of critique is a blunt instrument that makes it

easy to think in terms of trade-offs and representational accuracy (i.e., realism), even when we do not mean to.

Another challenge is that, when applying relational ontology to empirical analysis, the premises of relationality inform the analyst's sense of what is problematic. This, of course, is the point of a sensitizing concept (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017), and in this regard is a feature and not a bug. But, like all etics, it is vulnerable to the rule of the hammer (that makes every problem look like a nail) and can result in truncated and implicitly realist critiques. Showcasing the practical implications of philosophical premises, as Leonardi (2013) has done, and generating novel perspectives through experimental application of philosophical premises, as Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017) have done, are examples of approaches that avoid these pitfalls.

However, a valuable resource for relational theorizing has been left on the table. To more productively frame debates about critical and agential realism, and to address problems with how relationality has unfolded that leave it disconnected from practical problems, I would suggest that authors revisit pragmatism, one of the original sources of relational ontology. Pragmatism is philosophically aligned with the ontological turn and also addresses the critiques discussed above. Specifically, contemporary pragmatism offers a relational ontology that respects commonsense realism and facilitates diverse kinds of empirical engagement.

Pragmatism is sometimes described as anti-philosophy that lacks—or has no need for—metaphysics and epistemology. Rorty (1979), for example, emphasized pragmatism's antifoundationalism as a resource for postmodern democratic theorizing and politics. Perhaps the influence of postmodern thinkers like Rorty and Foucault on pragmatism's revival has contributed to the notion that pragmatism merely dodges ontoepistemological questions around truth and reality. Notably, critical realists such as Elder-Vass (2022) and Porpora (in Zotzmann

et al., 2022) have described pragmatism in this way. It is true that pragmatism engages in "bracketing," or suspension of assumptions around realism. However, to view pragmatism as a kind of philosophical duct tape—a patch for epistemic cracks that enables continued, functional scientific inquiry—is incomplete and outdated. This limited view of pragmatism, I suspect, contributes to its underutilization.

Contrary to this limited view, pragmatism does not sidestep epistemic debates, nor is it a defeatist argument for accepting limited scientific knowledge as "the best we can do for now." Rather, it offers a thoroughgoing relational ontoepistemology. This argument finds plenty of support in the work of classical pragmatists (Dewey and Peirce, in particular). But the status and richness of pragmatism as a relational ontology appears in even sharper relief in light of contemporary extensions and revisions of the canon.

Scholars such as Hill-Collins (2009), West (1989) , Seigfried (1996, 2010), Sullivan (2001), Sullivan and Tarver (2011), Pratt (2002, 2004), McKenna and Pratt (2015), Butler (2000, 2004), and others have expanded the historical pragmatist canon to include the influence of early feminist philosophers, Harlem renaissance intellectuals, Native American philosophers, and civil rights and environmental activists (J. L. Rosiek, 2013). Other contemporary philosophers such as Foucault (1980; see also Koopman, 2011), Barad (2003, 2007), Latour (2005), Deleuze and Guattari (2004), Misak (2002, 2005, 2007), and Rorty (1989) have reread classical pragmatists in connection with developments late 20th Century philosophy. Altogether, this revision and rereading of the canon has aligned pragmatism with ontological theorizing, as well as emancipatory projects and political action (Rosiek, 2013).

Along with these developments has come a renewed interest in the relevance of pragmatist philosophy for contemporary social inquiry (see, e.g., Abbot, 2010; Barone, 2001;

Cornish & Gillespie, 2009; Giacobbi Jr, 2005; Hill-Collins, 2009; Kahlil, 2004; McKenna & Pratt, 2015; Patrick, 2005; J. Rosiek, 2003; J. L. Rosiek, 2013). The following section discusses this relevance to post-postmodern social inquiry and highlights some offerings from contemporary pragmatism that resonate with new materialisms and make it a valuable resource for relational communication research.

Pragmatism

Clearly, pragmatist thought has been central to the unfolding of relational ontologies in social inquiry. Yet, important features of pragmatist ontoepistemology—which could solve problems for relational thinkers in organizational communication—seem to have faded from view. In subsequent chapters, I detail what I think is missing and why, and explore possibilities for pragmatist relational engagement with communication research. In preparation for that, this section highlights some offerings from pragmatism[6] that are relevant to the focal topics of entification and inquiry in human service organizing, and that can enrich the connection between relational philosophy and empirical research in organizational communication.

The first important offering is the pragmatist understanding of knowledge as a process. The process of knowing, which Dewey called inquiry, is a transaction that enfolds—and articulates—the subject and object of knowledge. Having been moved by Darwin's work, both Dewey and Pierce viewed humans as animals that are of the world, not separate from or above it, and knowledge as the mode by which that animal operates (Dewey, LW:7; Peirce, 1935).

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[6] I am indebted to Jerry Rosiek (2013) for his insightful analysis of contemporary pragmatism as a resource for methodological innovation in social inquiry, which has significantly informed my thinking on this topic and my discussion of reflexive realism and future-oriented ontology presented in this section.

Accordingly, pragmatists view knowledge not as a facsimile of nature, but as a process of participation and active manipulation of a material-symbolic world (which includes the organism itself). As Dewey explained, "If the living, experiencing being is an intimate participant in the activities of the world to which it belongs, then knowledge is a mode of participation, valuable in the degree in which it is effective" (LW:9, p. 347).

Because Dewey rejected the modernist "spectator view" of knowledge, which likens knowing to an act of "seeing" or apprehension, his primary epistemic concern was not closing a supposed gap between mind and world. Rather, he explained, "For empirical method the problem is...to note how and why the whole is distinguished into subject and object, nature and mental operations" (LW:1, p. 20). Here, Dewey effects the "ontological reversal" (Kuhn et al., 2017) that comes to characterize relational ontology; that is, he regards subject/object distinctions as ontological cuts rather than natural phenomena, and essentially flips the explanans and the explanandum. Dewey continued, "Having done this, it is in a position to see to what effect the distinction is made: how the distinguished factors function in the further control and enrichment of the subject-matters of crude but total experience" (LW:1, p. 20). Thus, knowledge concerns the usefulness of such cuts, rather than their accuracy per se, which is technically unknowable.

For the pragmatist, knowledge bridges the gap between an unsatisfactory situation and a more satisfactory one. Although this gap is only ever closed imperfectly or temporarily, this knowledge problem is at least theoretically surmountable, unlike the mind–world gap. Per Dewey, "once we see that knowledge is not the act of an outside spectator but of a participator inside the natural and social scene, then the true object of knowledge resides in the consequences of directed action" (LW:4, p. 157). Later, in response to criticism from Bertram Russell, Dewey

asserted that his was the only type of theory "entitled to be called a correspondence theory of truth" (LW:14, p. 180). The modernist notion of correspondence locates the referent of truth outside of experience, marking what Dewey called "*the* epistemological miracle" (LW:14, p. 179, emphasis original). That is, for a proposition to be regarded as *true* in modernist epistemological doctrine, it would have to correspond to something outside of experience—something that cannot be known except through the proposition itself.

In contrast, Dewey explained,

> my own view takes correspondence in the operational sense…of answering, as a key answers to conditions imposed by a lock, or as two correspondents "answer" each other; or, in general, as a reply is an adequate answer to a question or a criticism—as, in short, a solution answers the requirements of a problem. On this view, both partners in "correspondence" are open and above board, instead of one of them being forever out of experience and the other in it by way of a "percept" or whatever. (LW:14, p. 179)

When, in later chapters, I advocate adopting a "pragmatist correspondence theory of truth," this passage from Dewey is the inspiration.

As we've established, new materialists of all stripes treat subject–object distinctions as cuts that are made within the stream of experience rather than as given. But pragmatists go further in their insistence that the ultimate criteria for judging ontological acts (i.e., agential cuts) are the consequences they have on our ongoing experience. And experiential consequences are broadly conceived, encompassing both "material" and "subject" effects of our actions and interpretations (Rosiek, 2013). This has important implications for contemporary relational scholars. Namely, by locating the warrant for assertions in the consequences of acting on them, pragmatism accommodates commonsense realism and substantialism even as it rejects their naïve forms. While pragmatists object to the naturalization of categories like subject–object, nature–culture, etc., they acknowledge that such distinctions might be serviceable constructs that are useful for navigating experience, if they are engaged provisionally.

Another important outgrowth of consequentialism is pragmatism's ontology of the future (Rosiek, 2013), that is, its view of how our anticipations of possible futures participate in present experience. According to Dewey, "We do not use the present to control the future. We use the foresight of the future to refine and expand present activity" (MW:14, p. 215). Of course, whatever we do in the present does shape the future. But by letting go of the spectator view and conceiving of knowledge as bridging a gap between actual and potential conditions, we become more aware of the performative nature of descriptions. And thus, part of inquiry is asking how inquiry transforms the relationship between the present and the future. Rosiek (2013) described this as a hermeneutics of possibility rather than a hermeneutics of suspicion, insofar as the latter implies suspicion that reality has been misrepresented. Cornell West's (1989) work on social inquiry advances a pragmatist anticipatory ontology. He described rhetoric and analysis as having prophetic qualities—not because these activities are about predicting the future, but because they create categories in the present that anticipate and participate in bringing about a transformed future.

When we recognize the subject- and object-constituting nature of inquiry, we more fully appreciate the normative nature of inquiry. This point alone does nothing to distinguish pragmatism from postmodern and critical epistemologies. What does distinguish pragmatism is its characteristic non-dualistic treatment of empirical and normative concerns, and its processual (future-oriented) ontology. So, for example, while critical theory ties inquiry to a singular emancipatory value criterion, pragmatism calls for ongoing and contingent evaluation of both normative and empirical findings (recognizing that the distinction is tenuous to begin with).

Dewey famously touted experimentalism as the epitome of inquiry and had great reverence for the scientific method (see especially LW:4). Also famously, he called for the

integration of empirical and philosophical inquiry. Consistent with transactional ontology, he located our habits of perception, valuation, and interpretation within experience. Thus, he argued, like any other aspect of experience these things ought to be subjected to scrutiny and potential transformation through experimental manipulation.   And he believed we could test our cultural values against their practical consequences.

Crucially, Dewey's reverence for science was focused on method—that is, the process of inquiry—rather than on particular scientific findings. Dewey was a fallibilist who regarded knowledge as a work-in-progress, so his appreciation for controlled inquiry should not be simplified as rote scientism. Similarly, Dewey's suggestion that scientific methods be used to solve social problems should not be misconstrued as technocratic or utopian, because he was advocating for the use of careful, controlled inquiry to address public problems, rather than application of particular findings. Furthermore, both classical and contemporary pragmatists emphasize that inquiry must be an open, inclusive, public activity. Otherwise, it is impossible to know the consequences of beliefs and actions.

Broadly, pragmatism expands the boundaries of inquiry beyond the familiar activities of selecting methods to answer research questions. In *How We Think* (LW:8), Dewey identified the following activities as phases of inquiry: conceiving of an indeterminate situation that motivates inquiry, using creative and critical thinking to formulate questions, and—after collecting and analyzing data—anticipating and assessing how the products of inquiry will affect the ongoing flow of experience (Rosiek, 2013). Transactional ontology underwrites this expanded view of inquiry, which distinguished pragmatism from other 20th century philosophies of science.

Although inquiry does not follow a fixed pattern and individual steps can be skipped, combined, or conducted in any order, Dewey (LW:12), described the basic structure of inquiry as

follows. First, antecedent conditions, or felt difficulties, are the impetus for inquiry. Dewey described felt difficulties as existential rather than cognitive, in the sense that they arise from an imbalance between the organism and the environment. Because of some discomfort or disturbance, the organism is motivated toward inquiry; thus, inquiry is basically driven by a sense of incongruence. Next, the institution of a problem occurs when the inquirer recognizes the existence of a problematic situation, without necessarily identifying its specific nature. Determination of a problem-solution involves formulating ideas—that is, possible solutions—based on the discerned constituent aspects of the situation. Reasoning involves connecting relevant facts, meanings, and ideas. This process, which Peirce (1935) called abductive reasoning, involves using logical, creative, and critical thinking to formulate questions and hypotheses. Facts and ideas co-operate in this process to shape the trajectory of inquiry by leading the inquirer toward or away from other facts and ideas. Finally, the consummation of an inquiry occurs when the problematic situation is resolved through action. The move from "wonder" to "no wonder"[7] results in a warranted assertion that sums up the new state of knowledge. The warranted assertion guides future inquiry but should not be mistaken for the actual consummation of inquiry, which occurs when the felt difficulty that motivated the inquiry dissipates. Overall, Dewey describes inquiry as "the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is as determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified subject" (LW:12, pp. 104-5).

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[7] Wootton (2015, p. 299) cites the Dutch philosopher Isaac Beeckman (1626): "One must always proceed from wonder to no wonder; that is, one should continue one's investigation until that which we thought strange no longer seems strange to us" (cited in Fixsen, et al., 2019).

On my reading, Dewey suggests that the breakdown of experience into entities and relations is integral and instrumental to the process of inquiry. In other words, the parsing up of experience is a technology that enables knowledge and fuels its progression. Contemporary relational literature would leave casual readers with the impression that substantialism is a false idol or a stumbling block to truer or better knowledge. However, if entification is a basic feature of language and inquiry (as I am suggesting), then substantialism must be rendered with nuance. While the *naturalization* of entities and categories can cause problems, substantialism is not fundamentally dysfunctional. Rather, it is a habit that is at time functional and at times dysfunctional, and our knowledge can be enriched by considering how we parse experience and with what effects on the trajectory of practice.

The linguistic concept of nominalization (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Martin, 1993) further sharpens this vision of entification as a process and brings some of its affordances (both enabling and problematic) into focus. It also provides a useful analogy for entification of practices, and I will build on it throughout the dissertation to develop a pragmatist-relational understanding of substantialist habits. Nominalization occurs in language when a process or quality is realized as a participant (i.e., as a noun). As Goatly (1996) explains, re-coding types of processes as nouns "suggests that they have a kind of permanence, a reified existence outside time" (p. 553).

Nominalization is a type of grammatical metaphor, or an incongruent realization of meaning achieved by substituting one grammatical class for another (Halliday & Martin, 1993). The congruent structure is the simplest and most conventional way of saying something; it prevails in ordinary speech. In English, for example, nouns are typically persons, places, or things, and verbs are processes or states of being. So, to borrow an example from Ravelli

(1988), "she sailed out of the room" is a congruent construction. It contains a lexical metaphor (that likens "her" to a boat) but not a grammatical one. However, a grammatical metaphor appears in the incongruent construction, "her sailing out of the room caught us by surprise," where the action is nominalized, such that it becomes a participant in another process (p. 134). In other words, one process becomes tokenized and can now go on to act in another. Despite their similar content, she sailed out and her sailing out accomplish different communicative tasks (Ravelli, 1988).

Grammatical metaphor in general, and nominalization in particular, vastly expands the lexicogrammatical resources of a language, allowing for more complex and sophisticated formulations. Nominalization also allows a lot of information to be packed into a single sentence (information density). For these reasons, nominalization is very common in technical, scientific, and scholarly writing. As Martin (2008, p. 808) explains, nominalization allows for the coining of technical terms (e.g., condensation, transpiration), which "lighten the discourse-processing demands of a technical discipline." Also, crucially, nominalization makes it possible to relate one process to another, and to discuss the nature of those relations. For this reason, nominalization helps with knowledge building.

At the same time, relational and postmodern scholars have extensively documented how categorizations (and scientific notions in particular) become black boxes; how they become agentic, ideological, and reified. Critical discourse analysts (e. g., Billig, 2008; Fairclough, 1989, 2008a, 2008b; Martin, 1985, 1986, 1992, 1993) have worried that, by allowing speakers to erase agent-participants, nominalization also hides responsibility and the human causes of problems. In this way, nominalization is a feature of language that can obscure, and thus protect, instigators of harm while construing unjust circumstances as natural or inevitable.

I will argue that, just as nominalization expands the resources of a language, entification expands resources for organizational action and inquiry. For example, entified practices enable the normative metadiscourse that, as Craig (2006) explained, steers the trajectory of practice. They vastly expand possibilities for shared learning. Entification is also integral to how communication constitutes organization through practices described by CCO scholars, such as ventriloquism (Cooren, 2012, 2016; Cooren et al., 2013) and presentification (Benoit-Barne & Cooren, 2009). At the same time, just as nominalization may increase the ideological potential of language by hiding actor-participants, entification may similarly allow situated interests in organizations to be portrayed as neutral. This possibility underscores the importance of theorizing entification an organizational process, so that its operation in evaluation, and broadly in the communicative constitution of organization, can be critically examined. I will explore this issue in more depth in Chapter 4, drawing on the pragmatist philosophy just discussed to frame a productive conversation about what is at stake in the material-discursive practice of entification.

Clearly, pragmatism's transactional realism and processual ontology have numerous implications for how inquiry and entification are theorized and practiced. For our purposes, the most significant takeaways are, first, that inquiry is fundamentally normative, and we necessarily adjudicate values along with other kinds of assertions. Second, the incitement to inquiry (i.e., the felt difficulty and problematic situation) plays a constitutive role in the punctuation of experience, including in the designation of subject and object in the process of inquiry. These ideas figure prominently into my later discussion of the rendering practices into entities, and they animate my eventual recommendations for theorizing and practicing implementation. Additionally, I will argue that revisiting these insights from pragmatism can strengthen the connection between relational ontology and practical, empirical engagement.

Finally, pragmatism's experimental approach informs how I engage with theory in this dissertation. Specifically, I engage with relational ontology in the design spirit described by Jackson and Aakhus (2014), in which communication theories are evaluated in terms of their generativity of design ideas. The theoretical innovation or design hypothesis embedded in relational ontology is the possibility that the boundaries that have defined our understanding of communication—both empirically and in terms of its possibilities—can or should be redrawn. They can be redrawn without violating reasonable assumptions about what is true, or the should be redrawn to better align with truth (the realist bent of relational ontology). While I think many relational scholars outside pragmatism implicitly adopt the truth perspective, the design potential comes from a rethinking of how the world is, which means rethinking what is possible. Thus, in the spirit of pragmatist inquiry, the foregoing study is an exercise of learning about relational ontology by seeing what it can do and judging it by its fruits.

Research Questions

This dissertation engages the rich and diverse literatures just discussed to investigate how we go about punctuating experience into discreet practices, concepts, and categories as we strive to address public problems in human service organizations and continually improve our efforts. This chapter has explored the enduring ontological and epistemological issues implicated by questions about how to entify, replicate, and evaluate communication practices. Scholarship on practice theorizing, relational ontology, and pragmatism inform my approach to these issues.

To situate this study's approach and contribution to existing literature, I began with a discussion of practice theorizing—a literature aligned with the ontological turn, which positions practice as the key unit of analysis for social inquiry (Gherardi, 2012). From this literature, we learned that practice is key to *how* communication constitutes organization and other

phenomena. We saw that some of the basic characteristics of working practices (as summarized

by P. M. Leonardi, 2015), such as emergence, make purposeful control and replication difficult.

Thus, practice theory underscores the complexity of the problems this dissertation explores, as

well as their practical and theoretical significance. While practice theory usefully frames some

of the problems Implementation Science and evidence-based practice seek to solve, it provides

little guidance for those interested in purposeful control or replication of practices. An

abundance of resources for admiring complexity compared with a dearth of tools for purpose-

driven empirical engagement, is, we learned, a feature of the broader ontological literature as

well, and the main reason for its critics' discontent.

Distinct from practice theory writ large, practical theorizing as advanced by Robert Craig

and Karen Tracy (Craig, 1989, 2001; Craig & Tracy, 1995) was identified as this study's home

paradigm for communication research. In alignment with Craig's (1989) understanding of the

theory–practice relationship and the role of theorizing in a practical discipline, this study

emphasizes the importance of metadiscourse as a site for both studying and improving the

practices under investigation—that is, defining, replicating, and evaluating communication-based

innovations. Details about how practical theorizing informs my methodological approach are

discussed in the next chapter.

After addressing key perspectives on practice, I introduced the diverse and vibrant

literature dedicated to relational ontology. We learned that this literature, which has roots in

knowledge problems of 20th Century theoretical physics, identifies problems with substantialist

ontology and seeks viable ways to describe experience as a processual, relational becoming.

Given this emphasis on processual becoming, relational literature aptly informs the present

project, which explores the "becoming of practice" through scholarly metadiscourse, practitioner

metadiscourse, and a situated practice of fidelity in the field of Restorative Justice. Relational literature is also an intriguing point for engagement between the empirical site and communication theory because of the apparent contrast in philosophical assumptions. Prevailing wisdom in the relational literature holds that entification and variable analysis—the two ontological hallmarks of current approaches to the scientific improvement of human services— are problematic habits that distort or limit the potential of social inquiry. Thus, I engage this literature to discover what novel insights it may bring to this study of literal practices of entification. The engagement, as I have explained, is a two-way street in which relationality itself becomes an object of study through reflexive application.

In anticipation of studying entification and evaluation of communication-based innovations through a relational lens, this chapter has also explored critiques of relational ontology and proposed alternatives. Specifically, I highlighted the perspectives of critical realists such as Mutch (2013) and Leonardi (2013), who argue that agential realism (a version of relational ontology) is a cumbersome framework with limited or even counterproductive utility for studying sociomateriality. This is particularly true, it is argued, when the goal of research is design (P. M. Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2013). These perspectives, I argued, highlight what I see as important needs within relational literature. Specifically, relational literature can and should acknowledge that commonsense realism is often a profoundly functional worldview. Moreover, it should provide more compelling and empirically grounded justification for restricting the scope of relational methodologies and should continue developing accessible pathways for relationally oriented empirical engagement. These arguments come into sharper focus through the ensuing analysis, while the critiques discussed in this chapter frame the agenda for theory development in this dissertation.

Building the foundation for my response to the concerns raised by critical realists, I discussed pragmatism as a seminal text in relational ontology that merits greater attention in the current ontological turn. Pragmatism respects commonsense realism and meets the needs I just mentioned, but, unlike critical realism, it does so within a fully transactional ontology, which is appealing for its philosophical cogency. I highlighted pragmatism's expanded view of inquiry, its transactional realism, and its processual ontology (see Rosiek, 2013) as important and underleveraged resources for inquiry in organizational communication and related fields. In the following chapters, these concepts will be extended to inform my methodology, explored through empirical engagement, and crystallized in my proposed pragmatist relational framework for metatheory and analysis.

This study includes a substantial amount of theoretical work to articulate new possibilities for empirical communication research rooted in relational perspectives. The theoretical contributions are generated through a pragmatic-relational analysis of the processes and products of inquiry in the field of Implementation Science (Fixsen et al., 2019), guided by the following questions:

RQ1. How does scholarly literature on implementation address and practice entification and scientific improvement of human service practices?

RQ2. How does the practice of inquiry in Implementation Science compare with ideals for inquiry articulated in relational and pragmatist literature? What implications for relational ontology and/or methodology can be gleaned from this comparison?

This study also engages more traditional ethnographic methods to study how restorative justice practitioners approach the tasks of defining, evaluating, and scaling their communication-based innovation. This portion of the research is guided by the following questions:

RQ3. What challenges do restorative justice practitioners face related to defining, scaling, and evaluating their practice? What strategies do they use to meet those challenges?

RQ4. In what ways can existing frameworks and resources support RJ implementation? What unmet needs remain?

RQ5. What are the implications of the previous analysis for how best to approach entification, evaluation, and scaling of relational practices like RJ?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

As discussed in the opening chapter, contemporary approaches to evidence-based improvement of human services revolve around practices of *encapsulating* communication into discrete interventions and *assessing* the effectiveness of those innovations for achieving desired outcomes. So, practices of entification and evaluation are central to how human service organizations fulfill—or fail to fulfill—their missions. Furthermore, because these practices are deeply connected to communication's transformative potential, their exploration is relevant to enduring theoretical questions related to communicative ontologies of organizing and the relationship between communication research and practice. To cultivate communicative praxis (see Craig, 1989) on this important topic, I investigated entification and evaluation from multiple angles. Specifically, I explored the "becoming" of these practices through scholarly metadiscourse, RJ practitioner metadiscourse, and a situated practice of fidelity in the field of Restorative Justice. This chapter explains my methodological approach to answering the research questions outlined in the previous chapter.

RQ1 and RQ2 seek to understand prevailing approaches to entification and evaluation in terms of their assumptions, consequences, and resonance RJ experiences, as well as with relational and pragmatic strands of communication theory. To investigate these matters, I analyzed Implementation Science as a site of scholarly metadiscourse that is constitutive of Active Implementation practices. My methodological approach to this task included developing pragmatist relationality as a novel analytic tool. This chapter explains how I grounded my approach in Communication-as-Design (CAD) and Grounded Practical Theory (GPT), while also leveraging the innovative potential of new materialisms.

To investigate RQ3, which relates to the experiences, problems, and perspectives of RJ implementers, I collected data in two RJ-related sites. First, I generated practitioner metadiscourse through interviews. Second, I was a participant-observer in a situated process of establishing fidelity benchmarks. These data sets also allowed me to answer RQ4, which asks how to support RJ implementation within and/or beyond existing frameworks. Interviews were important because, to understand challenges and assess needs (RQ4), I needed insight into participants' experiences, opinions, and concerns on specific topics that would not necessarily come up in natural discourse. Participant observation data provided a valuable supplement and informed my ethnographic understanding of the scene. This data was also critical for identifying practitioners' challenges and strategies for defining fidelity in the context of RJ (RQ3).

Finally, to answer RQ4 and RQ5, it was necessary to synthesize findings across sites. Thus, this chapter also describes how I leveraged multisite research design and conducted cross-site analysis. RQ5 asks what normative ideals and strategies can best support entification and evaluation of communication-based innovations. Inquiry-engaged practice, my answer to this question, emerges in the final chapter as the practical upshot of the multifaceted study outlined here.

The remainder of the chapter is organized as follows. First, I discuss how pragmatist ontoepistemological assumptions inform my methodological choices. Next, I identify my project with the *engaged reflection* approach to practical theorizing (Barge & Craig, 2014), and explain how this approach serves my research goals and aligns with my theoretical commitments. Then I provide a narrative account of the experiential context of the inquiry. Finally, I outline the research design, specifically detailing the site selection, data collection, and analytic methods used to address the research questions.

Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

My research practice is grounded in pragmatist ontological and epistemological assumptions. Accordingly, pragmatism's transactional realism and processual ontology shape my methodological approach. Below, I discuss how these perspectives inform the present project and their implications for qualitative communication research more broadly.

Transactional Realism

By expanding the scope of inquiry, pragmatist ontology—particularly transactional realism—calls for greater attention to the "why" and "whence" of research than do other traditions. At the very least, experiences of indeterminacy that motivated a research project, and the choices made in framing the inquiry, should be available for consideration and critique. This relates to transactional realism because, in a manner of speaking, experiential enticements to inquiry need to be visible so that the proper referent of ensuing claims can be located by readers.

In contrast to Saussure's dyadic semiotic, which underwrites postmodernism's hermeneutics of suspicion, pragmatism is rooted in Pierce's triadic semiotic, which engenders a material and embodied kind of reflexivity (Rosiek, 2013). Peirce's semiotic includes not just the signifier and the signified, but also an anticipated, embodied interpreter conditioned by historically- and culturally-bound habits of recognition and response. Following from pragmatism's material semiotic, language and cultural histories are habits that arise in and are part of experience. As such, they are subjected to scrutiny and transformation through ongoing inquiry, but they are not, in themselves, barriers to some kind of pure or ahistorical knowledge. This pragmatist version of reflexivity, which Rosiek (2013) calls reflexive realism, affirms culturally contingent assumptions and commitments while demanding that they remain available for critique and transformation.

For this reason, I begin my methods section with a narrative account of this project's motivating indeterminacies (i.e. the felt difficulties to which the project responds) and the process of framing research questions. The purpose of this narrative is to provide a transparent rendering of the co-emergence of knower and known in the process of inquiry. I use a first-person, autoethnographic-style narrative (see., e.g., Ellis, 2008), the likes of which has been advocated by Polkinghorn (1988, 2004), Rosiek (2013), and Clandinin and Connelly (2000). I return to this narrative style throughout the chapter to shed light on the practical origins and relational becoming of various aspects of the inquiry.

For pragmatists, the researcher's normative and ontological commitments are aspects of inquiry—fallible, certainly, but not stumbling blocks to "Truth." To treat them as such is to reinforce the representationalist notion of objectivity (see, e.g., Barad, 2003; Mazzei, 2013). Thus, the narrative approach I take differs from the traditional way reflexivity is practiced in qualitative research. Rather than focusing on my individual subject position as a researcher, I aim to provide a broader account of the project's past and future, and how it is situated culturally and historically.

To serve its intended purpose, the narrative necessarily prioritizes transparency over justification. This means resisting post-hoc justifications that may inflate the scope and significance of the research or make the research questions and framing choices seem natural or obvious. To best interpret and apply research findings, people need information not only about methods used to answer research questions but also about the experiential context that motivated the research and the choices made in framing questions. Moreover, the motivating purpose and framing need to be accessible for critique and revision. I will suggest a couple of evaluative criteria the reader might use when judging these aspects of research design.

Rosiek (2013) distilled from contemporary pragmatism two standards of quality that can be used to judge whether an inquiry is well conceived. First, the research should address "an actual experience of indeterminacy" rather than being "the product of speciously manufactured intellectual conflict of the sort generated too often by academics and rhetoricians simply to refine conceptual distinctions" (Rosiek, 2013, p. 69). While I am more sympathetic than Rosiek to the project of refining conceptual distinctions, I certainly endorse the importance of not inflating the stakes of such projects. Second, problems that are peculiar to one area of experience—or perhaps niche intellectual problems—should not be transposed onto another area of experience. To illustrate this point, Rosiek offered the following example:

> a careful experiential tracing of the current emphasis on standardized assessments of learning might find its motivating impetus does not lie in classroom experiences where the measurement is taking place. Instead, it lies in the experience of political and educational leaders struggling to mediate conflicting political pressures. In this case, the incitement to inquiry arises in one set of experiences, but the site of inquiry and action is displaced onto other experiences. (p. 69)

Thus, it is important to ask whether or to what extent in situ problems motivated the inquiry and shaped its conceptualization.

Processual Ontology as Metatheory and Method

Next, pragmatism's processual ontology underwrites my assumptions about the theory-practice relationship and my approach to data analysis. With regard to the former, I share Craig's (1989) vision of communication as a practical discipline. According to Craig, the purpose of research in a practical discipline is to inform reflective thinking and normative deliberation, and ultimately to assist people in making wise decisions about how to engage in particular communication practices (see also Craig & Tracy, 2014). This project, of course, focuses on cultivating the practices of defining, implementing, and evaluating restorative justice. To do so, it uses the *engaged reflection* approach to practical theorizing (Barge & Craig, 2009).

Practical theorizing as engaged reflection envisions a reciprocal relationship between theory and practice, where theory emerges from a systematic reflection on communication problems and is grounded in practice. In line with transactional realism, it emphasizes that theories contribute to the social construction of the practices they conceptualize, by making their way into practical discourse and shaping how people understand, critique, and conduct the practice. From this perspective, the metaphors of "maps" and "lenses" used by some other practical theorists are inapt because the theoretical "map" potentially shapes the terrain, and the theoretical "lens" is situated within the scene it observes (Barge & Craig, 2009). While Barge and Craig (2009) used a social construction metaphor, the vision of praxis they lay out is clearly resonant with new materialist sensibilities, particularly economic performativity theorizing, transactional ontology, and Barad's agential realism. Craig's (1989) notion of *practical discipline* is, after all, rooted in Aristotelian practical philosophy and Dewey's view of inquiry. All these views conceive of theorizing is an engagement with experience.

Processual ontology also informs my practice of data analysis. Broadly speaking, I investigate practices of boundary-drawing by using what I will later describe as a pragmatist notion of correspondence. That is, I look for correspondence between entities (e.g., constructs in Implementation Science, practices to be regulated or evaluated) and the needs or felt difficulties that hail them as such. This means, to use Barad's (2007) language, that I consider felt difficulties to be the most sensible referent for the "agency" in agential cuts.

Given the constitutive role of felt difficulties the ontology just described, I have found Grounded Practical Theory (GPT; Craig & Tracy, 1995) and Communication as Design (CAD; Aakhus & Jackson, 2005) to be useful methodological resources. GPT studies communication practices by reconstructing them at three levels: the problem level, technical level, and

philosophical level. Situated ideals, which are beliefs about how a practice ought to be done, are reconstructed in the analytic process. Since these ideals are rooted in the complex experiences and difficulties of participants, they provide a useful starting point for the theorist's reflection and formulation of a normative ideal (Craig & Tracy, 2014). Although GPT was designed for use with discourse analysis, it has also been used with ethnographic methods (e.g., Ashcraft, 2005; Dempey, 2007).

CAD studies communication as both a product and process of design. Design, as Aakhus (2007) explains, "is an activity of transforming something given into something preferred through intervention and invention" (p. 112). Intentional communication design involves the creation and use of interaction-shaping techniques, devices, procedures, and formats. Every communication design carries assumptions about how communication works or ought to work, and CAD research develops communication theory by evaluating the practical consequences of a design and its assumptions. As Aakhus & Jackson (2005) put it, "any designed object embodies a hypothesis [about communication] that may be tested by its consequences for practice" (p. 414). In addition to being resonant with pragmatism's future-oriented ontology, CAD is useful for studying Active Implementation and RJ because both are sites of explicit and paradigmatic engagement in communication design work.

My analytic practice resonates with design theory insofar as it gleans insights by studying "puzzles and the solutions designed to solve these puzzles" (Aakhus & Jackson, 2005, p. 417). Aakhus and Jackson (2005) explained that design theory is "built up through the development of the concepts and rationales used in judging what counts as a problem to be solved, what counts as an appropriate solution, and the justificatory link between problem and solution" (p. 417). I use a similar sensibility but sort of reverse engineer it by treating entities metaphorically as

communication designs. In this metaphor, entities (i.e., products of agential cuts) are solutions to puzzles, although the puzzles may be long forgotten or seldom regarded. The analytic task, then, is to identify the problems that are potentially solved or avoided by drawing boundaries in a particular way. I have emphasized that this is metaphorical because I do not assume that entities are *intentional* communication designs, or that boundaries have been drawn deliberately, exclusively, or reflexively by human actors. Rather, the emphasis is on what a given boundary affords or forbids.

Overall, GPT and CAD are compatible with relational ontology and facilitate productive engagement with the latter, while also grounding the study in trusted canons of qualitative research. Having explained my epistemological assumptions and the communication research traditions that inform my analytic approach, I turn now to a discussion of the experiential basis and framing of the research, followed by discussion of research sites, data selection, and analysis. As I outline my research design in the following sections, I further discuss how specific choices relate to the theoretical and methodological foundations I have just discussed.

Experiential Incitements to Inquiry

As previously discussed, research questions have a past and a future, and a "gap in the literature" is not, by itself, a compelling incitement to inquiry. In this section, I describe the practical origins of this research project and the various felt difficulties that shaped its becoming. My engagement in RJ as a researcher-practitioner spans more than a decade and has included professional, volunteer, researcher, and participant roles.

An experience early in my career motivated a broad intellectual interest in how to successfully integrate RJ practices into systems. I experienced this as problematic after having worked on a pilot program that sought to implement RJ practices as an alternative to suspension

and expulsion in a school district. The intended benefits of this program were many, including, for example, mitigating the school-to-prison pipeline, improving school safety, and better addressing needs that contributed to student behavior problems. However, the pilot program struggled with low referrals. In trying to figure out why, I developed an appreciation for the complexity of integrating RJ and other novel practices into existing systems. Years later, as a master's student in Organizational Communication, I conducted a qualitative study of the RJ referral practices of police officers. That research further refined my understanding of the problems and practices associated with using RJ in systems—this time, the criminal justice system.

I was later hired to the role of RJ Implementation Specialist in a probation department, where I had previously been working as a Victim Assistance Coordinator. That role included conventional RJ program management, along with exploration of new ways of using restorative practices. For example, I developed training curricula and guidelines to support probation officers in having "Restorative Conversations" with clients during supervision meetings, and otherwise integrating restorative principles into probation supervision. I also supported the department in implementing a community-based reintegration model called Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA; see Wilson et al., 2009). I considered Restorative Conversations and CoSA to be part of a broader category that came to be called "restorative justice practices"— meaning, practices that used restorative principles but were not RJ per se. I felt that, although CoSA shared many of RJ's values, it should not be called RJ because, in CoSA, victim engagement is possible but is not an essential feature of the model. While rehabilitative, reintegrative, and restorative justice practices overlap, I wanted to avoid further collapse of these categories in the public eye. In particular, I wanted to avoid having RJ be seen only or primarily

as an offender service. My colleagues and I had conversations about the line between RJ and other restorative practices. While I think we shared a vague sense that something was at stake in the distinction, those stakes were not fully articulated. In the day-to-day, fidelity questions were not a pressing concern, but the topic came up with some frequency in broader policy discussions and at conferences. At the state level, the policymaking process made definitional questions more salient.

Around the same time, a colleague of mine convened a group of RJ program leaders to discuss sharing resources for training RJ facilitators and potentially developing a web portal to provide guidelines and examples of what should be included in a facilitator training. Over the course of two years, we authored a document outlining training standards and guidelines, which were later adopted by the State RJ Council.[8] Although we did not use Implementation Science language to describe what we were doing at the time, the work centered on issues of fidelity and scaling. Two key experiences of indeterminacy stand out.

First, in figuring out the document's purpose, we needed to balance multiple and sometimes conflicting aims including fidelity, quality assurance, support, guidance, and flexibility. Seemingly "in the weeds" questions about the document's structure and language brought up consequential questions about what the document was supposed to do. For example, should it primarily be a resource? Or more of a guardrail? How could we make the standards enabling and instructive but not overly restrictive? And (why) was it worth having a statewide

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[8] The Council was formed within the State Court Administrator's Office in 2007 by legislative mandate. Their charge is "to provide training, technical assistance and education related to restorative justice in the state of Colorado, support the development of restorative justice programs, serve as a repository of information for those programs" (rjcolorado.org).

standard for RJ facilitator training? Second, identifying necessary elements of an RJ training involved deliberation about the heart and soul of the practice, and how the practice could be taught and learned. We asked ourselves: What truly defines RJ? What kinds of pedagogy would support the development of practical wisdom and sound judgement? And as we looked ahead, we pondered on the futures we envisioned for RJ practice and those we hoped to prevent.

These are the practical experiences of indeterminacy that animate this dissertation, and they will surely be familiar to practitioners and scholars in various areas of practice. Clearly, then, the present inquiry grounded in practical problems that can easily be classified as an "actual experience of indeterminacy" (Rosiek, 2013). At the same time, the whole study, including its conceptualization, emphasis, and problem framing, is equally grounded in the practical problem of writing and defending a dissertation in a particular graduate program at a particular moment in intellectual history. I state the obvious here as it relevant to the second test of a well-conceptualized study, as described by Rosiek. That is, whether the study imposes problems from one area of practice onto another.

Framing felt difficulties in RJ as problems of entification, fidelity, and implementation, is, I argue, justified. But it is not natural or inevitable. While Implementation Science is involved with RJ practice in situ, relationality has been applied as an etic. The notion of entification, in particular, provided a bridge between RJ and the ontological turn that was gaining attention in organizational communication and other academic fields. So, there is a risk here of inappropriately transposing onto RJ the niche intellectual problems of communicative relationality that happen to be popular in my academic lifeworld.

I have sought to address this risk in a few ways. First, I engage relationality in the design spirit described by Aakhus and Jackson (2005). That is, I explore whether or to what extent

relationality can generate useful ideas to help people talk about, think about, act, and intervene within the ongoing stream of experience. By engaging in multiple rounds of coding, I was able to play with relational analysis while holding its usefulness to situated problems in RJ implementation as an open question.

Additionally, this dissertation is a dialogue between communicative relationality and a problem domain in human service organizing rather than a straightforward application of the former to the latter. While I do use a relational ontological perspective to advance our understanding of practices of scientific inquiry in human services, I am equally interested in how engagement with the empirical site can enhance relational scholarship as a practice. Consistent with this dialogic metatheory of praxis, my methodology involved iterative cycles of empirical analysis and theory development, and my findings speak to both areas of practice.

I have sought to mitigate the risk of provincialism and increase the relevance of my research by actively engaging with scholar and practitioner communities in Implementation Science and Restorative Justice when identifying and framing research questions, and throughout the project. I have participated in the Colorado Implementation Collaborative (CIC), an implementation community of practice, since 2014. This community includes academic researchers, implementation specialists, and practitioners in multiple fields of human services. While conceptualizing and conducting this research, I attended more than a dozen meetings, which allowed me to learn about the myriad challenges, strategies, and philosophies involved in Implementation Science and practice. I also shared my ideas and received feedback. This professional community provided context and ethnographic understanding that informed my conceptualization of implementation as a communication practice in the way described by Craig

and Tracy (2021). Details on how members of the RJ community participated in the research are provided in a later section.

Finally, although the pragmatist version of reflexivity discussed at the beginning of this chapter challenges the notion that the researcher's subject position is, prima facie, a liability that distorts objective knowledge, it does not remove the need for reflexivity. I recognize that my deep familiarity and long-standing involvement within the RJ community comes with both benefits and liabilities for my research.

When collecting and analyzing interview and participant observation data, I took steps to reflexively navigate my dual roles as both a researcher and participant in the RJ field. As a researcher, my aim was to critically observe, document, and interpret the behaviors, interactions, and dynamics within the RJ community. At the same time, my role as a participant stemmed from my deep familiarity and pre-existing relationships within the field. This involvement granted me access to insights and nuances that might remain elusive to an external observer. However, it was imperative to remain vigilant in ensuring that my personal experiences and affiliations as a practitioner did not unduly influence the observational data.

To navigate these complexities, I engaged in continuous self-reflection, particularly aiming to distinguish my observations made in a research capacity from those influenced by personal involvement. Such reflection was instrumental in recognizing instances where my personal viewpoints on RJ facilitation practices potentially colored my judgments. Notably, this process led me to identify and subsequently omit a potential recommendation from my research, as I realized it was more driven by personal experience than by substantial data. In sum, although I reject the spectator view of knowledge implicit in traditional notions of reflexivity, methodical self-reflection was a cornerstone of my research practice. This kind of reflexivity is

key to ensuring the integrity and rigor of research, especially in communities where one is deeply embedded.

Research Design and Methods

To investigate the research questions outlined in the previous chapter, I collected data in three primary sites. First, I analyzed scholarly discourse and resources in Implementation Science. Second, I generated metadiscourse about RJ practice and implementation by eliciting practitioner reflections in interviews. Third, I was a participant-observer in a situated process of establishing fidelity benchmarks. Each of these is a site of work on fidelity and implementation, and together, they provide insight into the becoming of practice in interconnected contexts. My choice of these three sites—including my somewhat unconventional study of a scholarly literature as a practice—finds its warrant in pragmatism's processual ontology. That is, it makes scholarly and situated reconstructions of practice available for analysis. The analysis, in turn, adopts a future-oriented ontology to consider how these representations intervene in the ongoing stream of experience. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to discussion of the data, methods, and analytic approaches I have used in each of the three sites.

Implementation Science Literature

There has, unfortunately, not been much cross-pollination between organizational communication and Implementation Science literatures (see Manojlovich et al., 2015 for a notable exception). I first encountered Implementation Science when working at a probation department, where a coworker described it as "the new shiny object next to evidence-based practice." My chief, who valued evidence-based approaches to probation supervision (e.g., Bonta & Andrews, 2007), was enthusiastic about "an actual science of how to make programs work." I attended two trainings on the topic, one of which was designed specifically for RJ

practitioners, and joined a community of practice. I also served on the department's implementation team and used Implementation Science concepts in my work and training curricula. Implementation Science is not just a relevant scholarly reflection of implementation practice but is an active participant in practice. In other words, it is a key site of entification that shapes the trajectory of implementation practice in human services.

For this reason, I treat Implementation Science as a site of practice to be analyzed rather than as a literature to be conventionally reviewed. Grounding for this kind of inquiry can be found in the facets of pragmatist ontology previously discussed, along with economic performativity thinking, and practical theorizing. The difference between a literature review and treating a literature is a practice is that the former presumes, or takes as a given, the object it is characterizing, and describes the qualities of that object. When studying a literature as a practice, the researcher traces the relational emergence of the "it" (i.e., an object of study or a category or concept), asking questions like, *how does "it" become in this literature? What kind of "it" is it, and what does "it" do?* This approach explores the practical effects of theoretical constructs.

I selected the following texts for analysis, as these are key contributions to Implementation Science:

1. A synthesis of the literature that informed development of the now widely used frameworks and resources hosted on the Active Implementation Hub (Fixsen et al., 2005)

2. NIRN's Active Implementation Hub (https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/ai-hub), which provides a wealth of research-based resources for practitioners

3. *Implementation Practice and Science*, a book by key founders of NIRN, which summarizes current knowledge in the field (Fixsen et al., 2019)

4. A practical program guide for selecting and implementing evidence-based practice (Bertram & Kerns, 2019)

These resources because reflect the most up-to-date findings and mainstream perspectives from global leaders in the field. NIRN's resources are highly influential and authoritative in both scholarly and practitioner circles. I included the fourth resource because it highlights some key debates in the field and incorporates broader consideration of evidence-based practice. After an initial close reading of these texts, I decided to focus my analysis on the third resource (Fixsen, Blase, & Van Dyke, 2019) because it distills the other sources and provides a clear, comprehensive, action-oriented guide to Implementation Science and practice. I then coded this text using iterative analysis (Tracy, 2019; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009) and constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006). Overall, my analysis explored how the "things" of Implementation Science (e.g., concepts, constructs, stages, typologies) came to be, and to what effect or for what purpose.

I started with open coding. As I advanced through primary-cycle coding, I noted the cuts being made in experience, specifically coding for practices and products of entification. Practices of entification included codes such as *differentiating, comparing, contrasting, creating sorting criteria, typologizing, quantifying, stating purposes, staging, gatekeeping*. Products of entification included codes as *professional roles, levels, stages, placeholders, variables, outcomes, metrics, sensibilities, problems/situations.* I labeled binary oppositions, such as *modifiable vs. non-modifiable, strong vs. weak variables, more vs. less important, discovery vs. creation, cause vs. effect.* I noted when things were taken for granted, when they were explained, when assumptions were explicit, and when they were implicit.

In secondary-cycle coding, made extensive analytic memos, refined my codes, and coded my codes. This included, for example, noting the affordances and limitations of various entification practices, or what was made possible or easier or more difficult by enacting

particular cuts in experience. *Marking quantitative cutoffs*, for example, answers the need for consistency in cross-site comparison. The categories created by those cut-offs, in turn, relate current experiences to past experience and accumulated knowledge in a way that implicates action. I played around with different ways of categorizing entification practices, for example, into types and stages, and reflected on what such choices made possible. I paid close attention to boundary work in areas of ambiguity, and coded for strategies for dealing with ambiguity. For example, while quantitative cutoffs are a strategy for reducing ambiguity, they do so by privileging a quantifiable aspect of experience. That aspect of experience then determines subsequent action, and thus is empowered to shape the trajectory of practice. At some point, these cutoffs are necessarily arbitrary, and in the grey zones, the juxtaposition of their arbitrariness with their consequentiality is more strongly felt. This is the type of thing I would code as a problem of ambiguity in boundary work.

Drawing on GPT, CAD, and pragmatist philosophy, I iteratively refined an approach that I came to call *pragmatist relational analysis*. The GPT categories of *problem, strategy, and philosophy* were important in my analysis. In broad strokes, when I encountered an agential cut—where a choice was made about how to punctuate and/or represent experience—I considered what problems or needs the cut answered, what problems it potentially created, what futures it made possible, and what futures it tried to forbid. As previously discussed, I regarded entities and entification practices as *strategies* or *designs* and looked for corresponding problems

and affordances.[9] Metaphorically viewing implementation entities (e.g., constructs, categories) as solutions to situated needs and problems made it easier to conceive of entities relationally.

At the philosophical level of reconstruction, I examined the assumptions that would make a given entity "work" as a solution, as well as the implicit philosophies and principles that made some aspect of experience problematic in the first place. Thinking with Aakus and Jackson (2005), I sought to articulate design hypotheses for implementation constructs. That is, in addition to asking what a given implementation design enabled or constrained, I asked what it presupposed about communication and public service organizing.

Another way to describe this kind of reconstruction is to say it surfaced implicit logics of practice (see Kuhn et al., 2017). Explicating otherwise implicit logics and assumptions allowed me to compare the logics of different areas of practice, including RJ, Implementation Science, and human services. This, in turn, helped me to anticipate challenges with applying solutions devised in one context to a different context with different logics and problems.

In the final phase of analysis, I used pragmatist relational analysis as a metatheoretical lens to examine relational scholarship in organizational communication. As previously discussed, I conceived of this project as a dialogue of theoretical perspectives rather than a one-way analytical street. In practical terms, I applied the same types of analytic questions to relationality as I did to Implementation Science literature: What problems do relational

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[9] Although the term *strategies* implies intentionality or rational choice, I do not assume that agential cuts and resulting entities were made deliberately or reflexively (although they sometimes are). Rather, I contemplated the affordances of a given representational choice.

constructs address? What does their use accomplish or impede? What are the design hypothesis

of relational ontology? In short, I asked what relationality can learn from its own engagement.

To recap, I used a pragmatist-relational version of textual analysis to explore the

conceptual becoming of Active Implementation in Implementation Science literature. In this

process, I interrogated relationality's analytic value. The second research site provides insight

into the process of constituting a particular practice—restorative justice—as an intervention and

implementing it in various criminal justice contexts.

Restorative Justice Implementation

The study of RJ implementation presented in this dissertation draws on multiple forms of

data to gain insight into the practices of defining, evaluating, and scaling RJ across numerous

sites and perspectives. Interviews with RJ implementers supplied the most significant source of

data presented in the study. While data collected through document analysis and participant

observation of a collaborative process of creating RJ training standards also deeply informed the

study, its detailed discussion is notably absent in the analysis chapter. This omission is

intentional and stems from the specific analytical focus of the study.

The investigation concentrates on the interface between RJ and the effective intervention

paradigm, encompassing evidence-based practice and Implementation Science. The project is

large in scope, aiming to address broad questions surrounding the research–practice relationship

in community service organizing. To maintain this epistemic focus, findings from an extensive

body of ethnographic research in the RJ field have been condensed and are presented succinctly

in a single chapter. Consequently, Chapter 5 reports on themes, prioritizing information density

over the provision of thick description and ethnographic detail. The specific roles of each data

set in the analytical process, and the rationale behind foregrounding interview data while also

including but not extensively detailing participant observation data, are further elucidated in the following sections.

Interviews: Practitioner Reflections on Implementation and Evaluation

Given that implementation is a multifaceted, multisite, multi-year phenomenon, direct observation provides valuable but partial insight. Moreover, practitioners' ideas about how fidelity ought to be defined and practiced in RJ are a key data point needed to answer my research questions. Thus, interviews were an ideal method for learning about the breadth and diversity of viewpoints, needs, and experiences in the Colorado RJ community.

Research Site and Context. The data used for this portion of the study were collected at a particularly opportune time and place—that is, in Colorado from 2015 to 2019—to provide insight into the expansion and development of RJ as a policy solution. Colorado has emerged as a national leader in RJ policy; its criminal code has 37 separate statutes that provide structural support for the use of RJ as a juvenile diversion and intermediate sanctioning practice (Sliva & Lambert, 2015). In 2013, Colorado expanded its legislation to establish RJ pilot programs in the juvenile diversion offices of four judicial districts. The pilots officially sunsetted in 2015 but RJ programming has been sustained to varying extents in three of the four districts, and new programs are being developed in other districts and other contexts (e.g., in probation offices and Department of Corrections). The pilots and other, ongoing RJ activities are overseen by the Colorado State RJ Coordinating Council (henceforth, the Council).[1] The Council supported and participated in this project by helping me connect with RJ implementers around the state, providing information, and participating in interviews.

Interview Type and Stance. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 individuals involved in RJ implementation or referrals. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours in

length, with most lasting about an hour. I used ethnographic and respondent modes of

interviewing (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017), entering the interviews with a basic set of questions, and

improvising to explore emergent issues. Interviews were centered on exploring participants'

experiences, opinions, and concerns regarding how RJ is defined, implemented, evaluated, and

scaled. The questioning was initially broad, focusing on implementation strategies and

challenges, and then progressively narrowed down to concentrate on fidelity and evaluation.

Interview questions were designed to obtain descriptive and evaluative accounts of practices and

developments in the RJ field. Participants were prompted to engage in philosophical reflection

on taken-for-granted practices and to offer examples of praise and blameworthy behavior.

Drawing inspiration from Kuhn's version of communicative relationality, the analytical questions

"what does the practice fear?" and "what does the practice desire?" informed the interview

questions and the analysis (Kuhn et al., 2017).

It is important to note that interviews are not simply a data collection strategy; rather,

they are interactive occasions in which interviewer and interviewee co-create the data (Lindlof &

Taylor, 2017). As Tracy and Robles (2010) point out, interviews are "accounting moments"

where both parties have desired images of self they want to uphold and negative images they

wish to avoid. Thus, to make compelling claims from interview data, researchers need to use

sophisticated interpretive procedures that take account of institutional positionings and face

concerns.

I was particularly attentive to these issues when conducting and interpreting interviews

because of my immersion in the scene. Because most of my interviewees recognized me as a

member of the professional RJ community, I anticipated that some might be more willing to talk

openly about challenges and problems with RJ practice, knowing that I was overall a proponent

of RJ. On the other hand, some individuals might hesitate to say something negative about RJ because of my institutional positioning.

I was also aware of the possibility that I might come across as being aligned with the movement for evidence-based practice, or having a favorable stance toward quantifying or evaluating RJ in particular way simply because this was the topic of my research. I was sensitive to these issues when designing my interview schedule and interpreting my data. For example, on a couple of occasions, interviewees hesitated or made frequent discourse repairs when approaching a critical statement about measurement or fidelity practices. When this occurred, I did discursive work to validate and encourage the person during the interview. When interpreting the data, I noted that such cases of interactional trouble pointed to an assumption on the part of the interviewee that pro-measurement or pro-fidelity stances were institutionally or interactionally preferred. When asked my opinion on interview topics, I mentioned a few pros and cons of adopting one stance or another and emphasized the importance of learning from on-the-ground experiences as a way to help the RJ community think through these complex questions (which was an authentic expression of my opinion).

I partnered with a subcommittee from the RJ Council to ensure that the data collected for this study would be relevant and useful for the RJ community as well. As a result, I added several questions to my interview schedule, the original version of which can be found in Appendix A with the Council's additions in Appendix B. This collaborative process was a valuable part of the inquiry, as it shed light on the experiences of indeterminacy that motivated council members' participation in inquiry.

In reporting the interview findings of this study, I chose not to include the titles or institutional roles of participants. This decision was informed by a careful consideration of the

trade-off between providing contextual depth to their statements through their roles and ensuring their anonymity. Given that the participants belong to a relatively intimate professional community, incorporating titles could potentially compromise their anonymity, making them easily recognizable to those familiar with the field. My foremost priority was to uphold the candidness of participants' contributions. I sought to create an environment where they felt uninhibited in sharing the challenges they faced, and where there was an increased possibility of obtaining views that might otherwise remain concealed. To counterbalance the potential limitations of omitting titles, my analytical approach actively sought to identify themes and patterns based on institutional roles and other interviewee characteristics, such as their tenure in the field. A notable trend emerged, indicating that newer practitioners exhibited a stronger inclination towards fidelity standards, while their seasoned counterparts expressed reservations. This pattern, among others, is extensively discussed in Chapter 5.

Sampling Strategy. My sampling strategy was based on maximum variation and theoretical construct (see Tracy, 2019). Specifically, I sought to maximize the variation in roles and experience of participants, to include new and veteran practitioners, as well as judges, probation and juvenile diversion officers, district attorneys, victim assistance professionals, RJ Council members, policy makers, and RJ practitioners in the public and independent sectors. Their time working with RJ ranged from less than two years to more than 3 decades.

This broad sample was important for understanding how implementation experiences, needs, and problems both varied and overlapped across contexts. I intentionally oversampled the professional roles most directly involved in carrying out RJ programming—namely, RJ program directors and coordinators. I identified participants based on existing RJ programs and through the Council. I recruited primarily through targeted requests, sometimes facilitated by

introductions from RJ Council members. I also posted an open invitation on the RJ Colorado website.

While this is a robust sample compared to the population of potential participants, there are some limitations. First, the voices of RJ skeptics are not well represented. I sought to interview individuals with negative experiences and/or skeptical attitudes toward RJ. I used a snowball strategy to identify potential participants in this category, which generated only one lead and no willing participants. Second, the sample includes participants from all four districts involved in the pilot program but oversamples the district where programming has been sustained and expanded intentionally through use of Implementation Science. While this oversample is justified by the research focus, the findings should be interpreted with this in mind.

Interviews resulted in 28 hours of recorded audio. Qualitative coding was performed in an adaptive audio format using a combination of specialized software and assistive technologies for visual impairment. Data were analyzed using an iterative approach (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009; S. J. Tracy, 2019) that alternated between emic and etic engagement. I used thematic analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017) and constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 2017) to characterize participant understandings of focal topics, including fidelity, implementation, evaluation, and scaling. As with the previously described analysis of Implementation Science literature, I used Grounded Practical Theory, design thinking, and logics of practice (Kuhn et al., 2017) as sensitizing concepts. Specifically, I reconstructed fidelity and evaluation practices (separately) at three levels: problem (participants' challenges, dilemmas), technical (strategies and practices), and philosophical (implicit and explicit philosophies). I engaged the concept of design hypothesis to identify tacit assumptions about what kind of

"thing" RJ is, based on implicit and explicit premises about how it ought—and ought not—be measured and regulated. I also probed (in interviews) and contemplated (in analysis) the practical and political stakes associated with various ways of defining and measuring RJ. Finally, thinking with Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren (2017), I coded for distinctions upon which the perpetuation of restorative justice as a practice relies, and contemplated how and why the practice gives rise to those distinctions.

Overall, interviews were the most significant source of data for this study and are the source of most of the findings reported in Chapter 5. Practitioner accounts of what makes RJ RJ were key to developing a theoretical reconstruction of fidelity. Equally, practitioner metadiscourse and reflections on their needs, strategies, and ideals provided crucial insight into implementation and evaluation in this unique field of practice.

Participant Observation: A Situated Practice of Fidelity

The third source of data was participant observation of the collaborative development of training standards for RJ facilitators in the state of Colorado. This site provided insight into the actual *doing* of fidelity, as the observed process involved defining necessary characteristics of a practice and then preserving them in the amber of institutional guidelines. The group that undertook this project convened ad hoc, originally for the purpose of sharing training materials, and consisted initially of 7 and finally of 5 RJ program leaders, including myself. The group's purpose quickly evolved from sharing materials to authoring a document that would serve dually as a resource and regulator of RJ training practices across the state. The group came to be known as the RJ Training Collaboration (RJTC). The training guidelines we developed were adopted by the RJ Council in 2016 and are now hosted on the official website, RJColorado.org.

I was a full participant in the group through my professional role in the RJ unit of a

probation department. Our task was to identify the essential elements of an RJ facilitator

training, in other words, to articulate what an adequate training would need to include in order to

support an RJ practice that would be aligned with key values and principles, which had been

previously written up during the legislative process. Training facilitators is perhaps *the* key site

of (re)production of restorative justice as a practice. Facilitators are volunteers or professionals

who conduct the core activities of restorative justice—conferences in which victims and/or

community members meet with offenders to discuss the impact of an offense and identify what is

needed to repair harm and set things as right as possible.

In large part, the work undertaken in RJTC meetings consisted of linking seemingly

minute details of RJ practice to higher-stakes questions about what RJ is, who it is for, and what

it can or should do. Thus, the meetings were a rich site of metadiscourse about RJ

practice. More importantly, though, they were a site of doing fidelity. In the meetings, we often

described our own training practices, used cases as allegories or examples, and debated the

minutia of document formatting and word choices, considering potential consequences of

seemingly small choices.

Identifying the basic content for a quality facilitator training required considerable

deliberation about how RJ conferencing ought to look. That is, it required identification of

indispensable features of RJ practice. Once identified, those elements needed to be

operationalized as learning objectives, resources, or descriptions in the text. For example, if it is

essential that RJ facilitators be *impartial,* how exactly should *impartiality* be defined in the

training standards? How much room should the text leave for interpretation? In short, this data

proved to be a rich resource for studying entification and fidelity in action, *in situ.*

RJTC met approximately 25 times between 2013 and 2016, and, with the informed consent of all participants and IRB approval, I recorded all but a few of those meetings. This resulted in approximately 54 hours of recorded audio data and about 40 typed pages of field notes. This data set broadly enhanced my ethnographic understanding of the RJ scene and provided insight into fidelity as a situated communicative activity, which in turn enabled cross-site analysis. Qualitative coding was again performed in an adaptive audio format using iterative analysis (S. Tracy, 2019). Primary cycle coding focused on situated dilemmas, choices that had to be made when defining a RJ as a practice, and metadiscourse around the consequences of those choices and the evolving purpose of the work. Subsequent rounds of coding and analytic memoing focused on reconstructing fidelity as a situated practice of authoring guidelines, at the levels of problems, strategies, and situated philosophies (a la GPT; see Craig & Tracy, 2021). Although findings from this analysis are not presented in detail in this dissertation, they informed the normative claims developed.

As I previously mentioned, this data set is not discussed directly in the analysis chapter, as I have reported my RJ findings in a condensed and summative format to enable an analytical focus on larger epistemic questions arising from the interplay between RJ and the effective intervention paradigm. For this reason, I contemplated excluding reference the participant observation data altogether. However, many of the insights reported in Chapter 5 and elaborated in Chapter 6 would not have been possible without this fieldwork. My exploration of tradeoffs and dilemmas in RJ practice, for instance, is informed by the conversations I was part of and observed as a member of RJTC. Additionally, being able to cross-reference participant observation with interview data was pivotal for comprehending the historical evolution towards emphasizing victim self-determination as a core RJ value. For this reason, and for the sake of

transparency regarding my role as both a researcher and participant in the scene, I have included this data set within my discussion of methodology.

Lastly, to increase the breadth of insight into RJ implementation across the state, interview and participant observation data were complemented with document review. Reviewed documents included program-specific policies, procedures, and forms, working drafts of cross-organizational documents articulating essential points of RJ practice, training manuals, and publicly available reports and evaluation data. Documents that were not in the public domain were provided with informed consent. These documents allowed me to incorporate work on fidelity, evaluation, and implementation that I could not directly observe. It also allowed for cross-referencing with accounts provided in interviews.

Data Synthesis and Cross-site Analysis

Using textual analysis, interviews, and participant observation in combination was particularly advantageous for answering the questions to which this dissertation is addressed. Using participant observation and interview data together maximized insight into the second research question (i.e., what challenges, strategies, and philosophies characterize the practices of defining, evaluating, and scaling RJ?). While interviews generated self-conscious accounts of the *what, why, if,* and *how* of fidelity in RJ, participant observation let me see and experience the actual *doing* of fidelity up close and in minute, discursive detail. This allowed me see the situated dilemmas and choices that had to be made when defining a practice and the metadiscourse around the consequences of those choices.

Because interviews took place a couple years after the adoption of the Training Standards, I gained some insight into the impact of the latter. Although my interview questions made no reference to the Training Standards, participants sometimes brought them up (face

considerations and whether the interviewee knew I had coauthored them factored into my interpretation of reports of their usefulness). Having intimate knowledge of the process and conversations that birthed that document, then glimpsing in interview discourse how the text went on to act and make a difference, provided considerable insight into the materialization of fidelity and RJ as a practice.

Next, comparing all sources of ethnographic data on RJ implementation with textual analysis of Implementation Science literature allowed me to answer the question: *In what ways can Implementation Science support RJ implementation and what unmet needs remain?* An in-depth ethnographic understanding of RJ implementation—gleaned from longitudinal, multisite, and multiform engagement—grounded my assessment of the usefulness and applicability of research-based implementation frameworks in RJ. Rather than being a simple application of research-based constructs to a situated practice, this aspect of the analysis included a theoretical reconstruction of the felt difficulties, design hypotheses, and logics characterizing each area of implementation practice. Using sensitizing concepts from CAD, GPT, and communicative relationality to structure the analysis contributed to the depth, rigor, and novelty of the study and its ensuing normative claims.

To recap, pragmatist philosophy underwrites my view of relationality's methodological implications. In particular, pragmatism's processual ontology and reflexive realism informed my research design by shaping my interpretation and application of existing resources and constructs from CAD, GPT, and communicative relationality. The resulting analytic sensibility I adopted differs from its intellectual influencers in that it emphasizes the value of attending to situated *needs and interests* when reconstructing complex organizational communication practices.

Overall, I characterize this analytic approach as *pragmatist relational analysis.* The features of the latter are detailed and demonstrated in the following chapter, which presents key takeaways from my analysis of Implementation Science literature. The fruitfulness of the approach is further tested in Chapter 5, where ethnographic findings are discussed. Further methodological and epistemic implications for qualitative communication research are discussed in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 4: A PRAGMATIST RELATIONAL ANALYSIS OF IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE

This chapter examines Implementation Science literature as a practice of inquiry. Specifically, I study how, and with what effects, Implementation Science makes ontological cuts to define salient categories and research-based best practices. The analysis provokes reflections on the philosophy of science with relevance to conversations in the ontological literature. It also supports practical reflections on the applicability of Implementation Science to restorative justice. The chapter is structured in two parts, accordingly.

Part one is focused on philosophical arguments and theory development as it answers my first two research questions:

RQ1. How does scholarly literature on implementation practice entification and scientific improvement of human service practices? What implications for relational ontology and/or methodology can be gleaned from this comparison?

RQ2. How does the practice of inquiry in Implementation Science compare with ideals articulated in relational and pragmatist literature? What does relational ontology require at the level of methodological practice?

As a result of the analysis, I challenge the dilemmatic view established by Emirbayer (1997), in which social inquiry can be *either* relational or substantialist. As an alternative, I propose that entification be understood as a process, fully analogous to semiosis. I arrive at this argument by reading Implementation Science literature through relational ontology, first contemplating obvious critiques the latter might raise about the former, then engaging a pragmatist relational lens, which challenges the easy critique. I show how Implementation Science grounds its findings in experience (rather than in an external reality per se), locates the warrant for ontological cuts in both past and future experience, uses categorical labels

pragmatically and provisionally, and depicts knowledge as a process of intervention grounded in a normative imperative. In these ways, Implementation Science exemplifies many ideals of pragmatist inquiry. To further develop the processual view of entification I propose, I return to the analogy I introduced in Chapter 2 that compares entification in inquiry to nominalization in linguistics.

Altogether, the analysis shows how seemingly substantialist habits facilitate inquiry while remaining compatible with relational ontology. Recognizing entification as a process--and practicing it under the guidance of pragmatist epistemic principles—expands the scope of possibility for relational methodologies. Thus, through this reflexive engagement with relationality, a path emerges that can better connect ontological scholarship with the pressing problems of the world.

In part 2, I push this theoretical work toward practical application as I zoom in on key constructs in Active Implementation to consider applicability to RJ. The analysis is guided by my fourth research question:

RQ4. In what ways can existing frameworks and resources support RJ implementation? What unmet needs remain?

I focus on the *usable innovations* framework for defining practices and reflect on the reference points that materialize practices through this framework. I consider what the prescribed practices look like—or could look like—in the context of RJ. The analysis explores implicit and explicit assumptions, logics of practice, and normative priorities inscribed in the Usable Innovations framework, and considers implications for RJ implementation. A key point is that the fidelity assessment practices recommended in the Usable Innovations framework tether the in-situ becoming of innovations to outcome measures. I address the strengths and

limitations of this approach for RJ. Together, the philosophical and applied work presented in this chapter inform the normative ideal I propose in Chapter 6, which answers RQ5: What are the implications of the previous analysis for how best to approach entification, evaluation, and scaling of relational practices like RJ?

Part I: Unraveling Strawmen and Generating New Possibilities for Relational Social Inquiry

An Ontological Critique of Implementation Science

Implementation Science primarily uses variable-analytic methods to generate causal inferences and improve prediction and control. It appears to embody all the hallmarks of substantialist thought that have served as the counterpoint against which relational approaches have been defined in the past few decades (see, e.g., Emirbayer, 1997). Blase, Van Dyke, Fixsen, and Bailey (2012) define Implementation Science as "the study of factors that influence the full and effective use of innovations in practice. The goal of Implementation Science is not to answer factual questions about what is, but to determine what is required (mission driven)" (p. 10). Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) regard prediction, observation, and replication as the cornerstones of good science. Their definition of *theory* requires causal explanations and falsifiability, and they emphasize the value of identifying strong and weak variables to form and test causal hypotheses. And Implementation Science broadly is premised on the idea that "variability is the enemy of quality" (p. 213).

The metaphor mentioned in the introductory chapter, which likens implementation to a syringe and innovations to a serum, is a proverbial fish in a barrel for a student of organizational communication looking to critique something. The metaphor—and Implementation Science, by extension—appears to do precisely what relationality rejects. It turns phases of action into

elements that are presumptively detachable from their relations and takes one of those elements (the syringe) as its object of study, wagering that it can be analyzed and understood in isolation from the rest of the transaction. It also attaches characteristics to individual innovations, such as "effective when used as intended." Even with the "when used as intended" qualifier, effectiveness is construed as an indwelling quality of the innovation that can be transported along with it.

For example, a widely cited and rhetorically powerful finding in Implementation Science states that a well-implemented intervention of a less inherently efficacious nature can outperform a poorly implemented intervention of an inherently more efficacious nature (Fixsen et al., 2005). Clearly, in articulating this distinction and its significance, effectiveness gets nominalized as a quality of practices. A literal interpretation of relational ontology renders the idea of 'inherent' efficacy unintelligible. Indeed, characterizing efficacy (or any other fundamentally relational phenomenon) as an enduring quality of an entity—as if efficacy could exist outside of a specific relational context— is the basic substantialist error, according to many authors of the ontological turn. Here, things, rather than phenomena, are mistaken as being the referents of truth claims. Enacting sharp, a priori distinctions between intervention and implementation, one might argue, erases important ontological complexity and makes it difficult to conceive of a mutually constitutive relationship.

To the further invigorate of our hypothetical critic, when Implementation Science does address relations, it apparently does so in an interactional (I.e., variable analytic), rather than transactional way. For example, in their influential synthesis of Implementation Science literature, Fixsen et al. (2005) presented this formula for social impact:

[Effective Innovations] x [Enabling Contexts] x [Effective Implementation] = Socially Significant Outcomes

The relationship between these elements is described as multiplicative to make the point that if any variable is equal to zero, the whole equation amounts to zero. Even though this does bring the situated and contextually dependent nature of effectiveness back to the fore somewhat, it still presents the process of social impact in quintessentially interactional (i.e., substantialist) terms. Here, not only do entities appear to be detachable from relations, but a fixed relation that is detached from specific entities is portrayed, creating functional roles that entities can occupy interchangeably.

This represents a categorical approach insofar as it depicts categories as being ontologically prior to, or determinative of, behavior. As Somers and Gibson (1994, bk. 65) explain, a "categorical approach presumes internally stable concepts, such that under normal conditions entities within that category will act predictably." In contrast, they explain, "the [relational, transactional] approach embeds the actor within relationships and stories that shift over time and space and thus precludes categorical stability in action…The classification of an actor divorced from analytic relationality is neither ontologically intelligible nor meaningful" (Somers & Gibson, 1994, pp. 65, 69, as quoted in Emirbayer, 1997). In a similar vein, Bearman (1993, pp. 9-10, quoted in Emirbayer, 1997) described a "tortuous debate" among historians regarding the classification of the gentry in Renaissance-era England. Historians recognized that the gentry did not act uniformly or coherently in terms of their interests, and thus attempted to reclassify and subclassify them in ways that would allow the classifications to explain their actions. Bearman essentially rejected that idea that, if gentry could only be categorized based on the "right" set of attributes, then their membership in a category could have explanatory power vis a vis their behavior. He concluded that "Categorical models alone rarely partition people in a way that conforms with observed action, because individual activity in the world is organized

through and motivated not by categorical affiliations but by the structure of tangible social relations in which persons are embedded." Again, we are reminded of the limitations of predicting or describing behavior by reference to what a thing "is." So even though relations are foregrounded in the social impact formula, it is arguably interactional rather than genuinely transactional.

Offering up another easy target for critique from a relational communication perspective, Implementation Science predominantly relies on a linear and mechanistic understanding of causality. This view of cause-effect relationships tends to reduce complex phenomena to isolated variables and discrete factors. When structured around the interaction of discrete, presumably detachable factors, inquiry aims at deciphering the causal potential of various factors, which is ruled in or out by statistical correlation. For Emirbayer (1997, p. 288) this kind of variable-based analysis is unviable as a relational methodology because it "detaches elements (substances with variable attributes) from their spatiotemporal contexts, analyzing them apart from their relations with other elements within fields of mutual determination and flux." Such a reductionist approach fails to capture the interdependencies and dynamic and intra-active flow of experience. A relational approach, at the very least, would encourage interrogation of the boundaries drawn around the presumed interactants

In harmony with a linear view of causality, Implementation Science tends to view implementation outcomes as discrete and measurable endpoints. This approach may ignore or undersell the importance of the ongoing relational effects and consequences that emerge from implementation processes. Relational ontology highlights the reciprocal and reflexive nature of action, where effects act back on their constitutive relations. This perspective encourages a

deeper understanding of the relational consequences and transformations that occur during implementation, going beyond simple outcome measures.

One could argue that Implementation Science promotes a static and predetermined view of interventions. In the extreme, one could even reject as naive the assumption, implicit in the mission of Implementation Science, that it is possible for practices to be implemented uniformly across different contexts. Relationality takes as a given that entities (in this case, interventions) become within each new context, with stability and continuity being effects of continuous enactment (to use language from practice theory). This view would justify an analytic focus on how apparent stability is achieved through, for example, communicative practice. For example, a relational communication perspective might highlight how (in)fidelity is integral to the materialization of interventions and explore how the "it"—that is, the ideal form of the intervention to which implementers are supposed to be faithful—emerges, evolves, and moves in conversations about (in)fidelity.[10]

Applying these perspectives, we might assume that such an entified depiction of social impact—in which innovation, implementation, and context are represented as discrete factors that interact to produce socially significant outcomes—is contraindicated for thinkers committed to relational ontology. Instead, a relational analysis must focus on how each "factor" gains its meaning and identity within the transaction.

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[10] This line of interrogation is actually quite aligned with Implementation Science with the key difference being the normative imperative of maintaining fidelity, which drives inquiry in Implementation Science.

From Critique to Analysis: Pragmatist Relationality as a Hermeneutic

While line of critique sketched above is interesting, it could be applied equally to any scientific project rooted in the Cartesian worldview. Using relationality to critique any particular practice solely because of the latter's substantialist assumptions does little more than demonstrate relationality's own premises. Relational critique of this kind too often neglects to elucidate if or how said assumptions hinder progress toward the stated goals of the critiqued practice.

Moreover, this basic, ontological critique[11] focuses on issues of representation, typically with implicit realist assumptions. For example, Somers (1995) stated that, in relational methodologies, "concepts cannot be defined on their own as single ontological entities; rather, the meaning of one concept can be deciphered only in terms of its 'place' in relation to the other concepts in its web. What appear to be autonomous categories defined by their attributes are reconceived *more accurately* as historically shifting sets of relationships that are contingently stabilized" (Somers 1995, p. 136; emphasis mine). Thus, conceiving of the world as "autonomous categories defined by their attributes" is problematic because it is representationally inaccurate.

In line with this tendency toward stealth realism, many critiques of categorical and entity-based methodologies seem to regard entities primarily as representations of past experiences, or possibly as representations of figments of a naive positivist's imagination. For example, to say

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[11] I am aware of the risk of creating and attacking a strawman here; by referring to the "basic" or "easy" critique, I mean to characterize a tendency that shows up in the relational literature—and in my own thinking—rather than describing any one person's work. I am arguing against an inclination I have experienced in my own struggle to think relationally about empirical matters. If it seems I have created a caricature, please think of that caricature as a voice or a stance rather than as a whole person or literature.

that the idea of an "inherently efficacious innovation" is ontologically unintelligible—because

efficacy is an effect of relational becoming and thus cannot be an attribute of a thing—fixates on

the literal, representational meaning of the signifier. But this representational aspect of entities is

only one dimension of the lifeworld of entities; it is one phase of punctuation in an ongoing and

dynamic process of knowing. What the charge of "ontological unintelligibility" misses is that

the very reason efficacy is being nominalized as a quality of an innovation is so that a process

can be related to other processes in a different transaction. So, when judging of ontological acts,

we need to consider both the representational and performative significance of nominalizations

like "inherently efficacious innovation." Doing so would also suggest a switch from focusing on

intelligibility to focusing on serviceability.

As a result of these limitations, the basic ontological critique removes serviceable

analytic tools like commonsense realism and causality—sometimes stealthily on the basis of

realist assumptions (i.e., these misconstrue the 'true' relational nature of the world)—without

replacing them with equally serviceable constructs.[12]

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[12] By "equally serviceable," I mean serviceable for inquiry driven by normative imperatives and the goals of prediction and control. I do find a notable exception in Kuhn, Ashcraft, and Cooren's (2017) work, and particularly their second version of communicative relationality, in which materiality is understood as a spectrum. As I will discuss later, this perspective is useful for thinking about fidelity in implementation and, I believe, opens a door to more ecumenical approaches to relational methodologies. Recall, Cooren reimagined the discourse-materiality dichotomy as a spectrum of existence, where something as seemingly immaterial as an idea has a material existence (in this case, as neurons firing) but comes to exist more and more as it gains more relations, links, and connections. In his example, materialization of an idea occurs in a dialectic of propriety and impropriety, where appropriations of the idea are depicted, paradoxically, as always having been proper to the idea. With this in mind, it is (relationally) ontologically intelligible to say that effective innovations exist beyond the specific contexts of their use, but they come to *matter*, in both senses, in transaction with each new implementation. I find this approach productive because it replaces old metaphors (e.g., discourse vs. materiality) with new ones (materialization through relating/linking/connecting). The new metaphor provides a different way to talk about an aspect of lived experience, which critical realists have called "the real but not actual," instead of just leaving that "thing" unnamable because it seems to contradict a premise of relational ontology (namely, "flat" ontology).

Of course, relational approaches vary in their stances toward substantialist constructs. Some are more adversarial and fundamentalist while others adopt an if-then sensibility, asking, if we take relational ontology seriously, what are the implications for how to pursue and relate to knowledge claims? What must be done to accommodate this relational worldview? This kind of bracketing of the question of ultimate truth is aligned with pragmatism. Notably, the felt difficulty that gives rise to this kind of relational inquiry is an inconsistency in epistemic experience. Specifically, the particle-wave paradox forced scientists to question what they thought they knew about knowledge and nature. The paradox, and Bohr's ontological move to resolve it, were incompatible with a whole host of ontoespistemological assumptions that had driven inquiry up to that point.

Perhaps it is because relationality stems from a philosophical inconsistency that its unfolding has often felt disconnected from the pressing problems of the world. If science is, as the Dutch philosopher and scientist Isaac Beeckman (1626) put it, about moving from "wonder to no wonder," the "wonder" driving relationality is quite removed from the sites of its practical application. For example, a school administrator trying to implement a new mandate is unlikely to experience "substantialist assumptions" as a pressing concern. This is not to say that ontoepistemological assumptions do not have practical consequences—they do, and offering more serviceable narratives, metaphors, and constructs is a valuable contribution. But, when employed solely or primarily as a critique, relationality seems to show up at practical problem sites offering to move things from "no wonder" to "wonder." Indeed, this is the role of critique, and it is an important one (e.g., the goal, often, is explicitly deconstruction). But it is no wonder that practitioners and researchers mired in the urgency of community problems have often commented with annoyance on the academic penchant for admiring problems rather than solving

them. The question upon which relationality's practical usefulness hinges is whether it can address the felt difficulties of others, and not just its own felt difficulties around internal consistency in ontoepistemology. As Dewey put it, "philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men" ("The Need for Recovery in Philosophy" 1917).

But if a relational approach "precludes categorical stability," or perhaps more accurately, if its use is limited to explaining/describing the appearance of categorical stability, can it be useful for normative inquiry that aims to replicate desirable results by scaling "effective" practices? Or is relationality relegated to the role of skeptical observer, pointing to the folly of thinking that a fundamentally emergent phenomenon (such as a human service practice) can be meaningfully controlled and reproduced? Surely not. After all, a key premise of the material turn—propelled largely by Barad and echoing classical pragmatists—is that we can have something like scientific objectivity through reproducible phenomena. To rethink what relational methodologies require and explore possibilities for relationally oriented empirical engagement, I propose that relationality can learn from its own engagement when applied as a metatheoretical lens.

As detailed in the previous chapter, using relationality as a metatheoretical lens involves two key moves. First, I study entification as a practice, looking at how boundary work and movement between actions and things creates resources for organizing and inquiry. For the present study, the boundary work in question is that which gives shape to Active Implementation by establishing frameworks, drivers, constructs, categories, variables, and practices. The focus on movement between actions and entities (verbs and nouns) is inspired by the linguistic concept

of grammatical metaphor, discussed at the end of Chapter Two, and the observation that nominalization expands the meaning-making capacity of language.

Second, I use a pragmatist correspondence theory of truth, which is to say, I view and evaluate scientific findings (or categories, concepts, or assertions) as answers to particular needs, problems, or questions, rather than evaluating their representational accuracy or correspondence with reality (including correspondence with "a world that is ontologically relational"). Guiding questions include: How do representational choices shape the trajectory of inquiry and practice? Toward what goals do entities materialize? In relation to what? Guided by what logics? And with what affordances? Thus, in this approach, the analytic spotlight shines on the possibilities and risks engendered and the needs answered by particular representational choices, as well as consideration of what each construct or representation presupposes about communication and public service organizing.

As I see it, relational analysis is as much a hermeneutic as it is a writing practice. It entails recognizing that "naming is employed to deal with aspects or phases of action without final attribution to presumably detachable elements" (to quote Dewey's description of transaction). It is not just about presenting experience in particular way but is a practice of listening and perceiving. To practice this hermeneutic, the reader needs to notice how naming is used while holding final attributions and realist/naturalizing assumptions at bay. At the same time, it is best not to assume that the text being interpreted is engaging in "final attribution" or naive realism unless specific evidence of that is found. It helps to err on the side of interpretive generosity, not taking other people's simplifications as evidence of ontological naivety.

Glancing back at the syringe metaphor through this lens, we see an ontological act that answers a need, not necessarily an all-purpose depiction of the nature of organizing. In the

context of its use, the syringe metaphor dramatizes a relationship rather than purporting to describe the nature of the entities it puts into relation per se. It is not, for example, used to suggest that implementation is so simple, it is like depressing a syringe. Nor are human service interventions broadly likened to sera in the literature. On the contrary, Fixsen et al. (2019) specifically contrast "interaction-based innovations" to "atom-based innovations" to explain why Active Implementation is necessary in human services.[13]

The metaphor answers a need; namely, it orients readers toward a problem—efficacy research has not created the expected outcomes—and articulates an idea (in the Dewey sense) about how that problem can be resolved. That idea is *the implementation gap*, which is a diagnosis and a hypothesis at once; it is a formulation of a problem-solution, as Dewey would say. As such, it carries inquiry forward on the assumption that it is both feasible (in practice and research) and productive to differentiate between *innovations that are effective* and *effective use of innovations*. This is a basic design hypothesis (Aakhus & Jackson, 2005) of Implementation Science as a field. By coding processes as things, the gap and syringe metaphors generate new possibilities for understanding and intervening in a problem space, in part by making a relationship between two processes thinkable and potentially configurable. Oversimplification is a feature, not a bug, because separating one process from another *is* a key intervention Implementation Science makes in service of its goal.

Having explained how metarelational analysis works, I can now delve into my examination of the Implementation Science literature through this lens. To begin, I outline some

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[13] This is not to say that only intended meanings matter in communication. Perhaps this simplification might lead to unintended side effects, but I do not see evidence of that.

overarching ways in which Implementation Science demonstrates a pragmatic understanding of science. Subsequently, I examine how Implementation Science punctuates experience using variables and frameworks to organize the pursuit of social impact. Finally, I take a close look at how Implementation Science tells us to define specific innovations, and highlight how the prescribed definitional practices make innovations become and evolve in relation to the requirements of replication and evaluation.

Pragmatist Inquiry and Implementation Science

Complicating the easy critique sketched above, a metarelational analysis reveals many ways in which Implementation Science exemplifies ideals of pragmatist inquiry. From the outset, the narrative Implementation Science tells about itself[14] embraces the hypothetic-deductive scientific method while also acknowledging the mutual becoming of the subject and object of knowledge.   These sensibilities show up in the mission-driven nature of IS and in subtle recognition that inquiry and intervention are inseparable.

Implementation Science is explicitly defined as a response to a specific experiential problem, namely, that the movement for evidence-based practice had yielded a substantial knowledge base but had failed to produce expected real-world outcomes. In other words, it is based in the problem of failing to realize expected benefits from inquiry thus far, and from the *idea* (using that term in the Deweyan sense) that an implementation gap is to blame. Further contextualizing the frameworks and constructs they present within a specific experiential

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[14] For ease of reading and writing, I have at times personified Implementation Science like this. Unless otherwise stated, assertions about what Implementation Science "says" or "means" or "does" are based on Fixen, Blase, and Van Dyke's (2019) book, *Implementation Science and Practice,* which is a state-of-the-art tome by the field's top scholars and founders.

context, Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) present a chapter-length narrative about their experience with implementing and studying the Teaching Family Model for supporting youth in residential settings.

Together, these introductory narratives surface the enticements to inquiry, the formulation of a problem-solution (i.e., existence of an "implementation gap"), and the specific experiential context (i.e., the Teaching Family Model) that most profoundly shaped the becoming of Implementation Science as a field of inquiry and practice. Inclusion of these narratives indicates that experiential problems and contexts are relevant to categorical assertions and necessary for proper interpretation of the findings presented in the book, which clearly aligns with Dewey's vision of inquiry.

Further resonating with pragmatist epistemology, Implementation Science depicts inquiry as a process of intervention in experience. At the metatheoretical level, Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) distinguish Implementation Science from the "hard sciences" by pointing out that "implementation scientists…need to be able to produce high-functioning implementation teams if they want to study implementation teams. The independent variable is not already there waiting to be observed" (p. 15). Moreover, they note that the independent variable is also a dependent variable because the characteristics of "high functioning implementation teams" have to be arrived at through inquiry. This move locates the warrant for ontological acts (e.g., designations like "key driver" or "high functioning team") in the past (consistent with representational ontology) and the future (consistent with pragmatist relational ontology) simultaneously. Broadly, broadly, Implementation Science recognizes their frameworks as research-based interventions, and proposes that the impact of these interventions be studied and adjusted in perpetual cycles of inquiry. In Deweyan terms, findings in Implementation Science

are not just *beliefs* (i.e., the result of scientific inquiry); they are simultaneously *propositions* (hypotheses to be tested). Clearly, this resonates with a processual view of knowledge.

Similarly, in pragmatist inquiry, categories are held in a probationary status so that their consequences and assumptions are available for critique and transformation. If we look at the writing practices in Implementation Science literature, we find pragmatic and non-essentializing engagement with enacted categories. Throughout the text, concepts and constructs are defined in terms of their purpose and are linked back to the mission using phrases like this one: "To produce socially significant outcomes, a Usable Innovation meets four criteria" (p. 70). The effect of this practice is to continually ground matter (i.e., descriptions of what is) in mattering (the rationale and use value of the "what" being described). Said differently, ontological cuts are made relative to axiology.

Finally, Implementation Science is explicitly normative, or goal driven. Blase, Van Dyke, Fixsen, and Bailey (2012) defined Implementation Science as "the study of factors that influence the full and effective use of innovations in practice. The goal of Implementation Science is not to answer factual questions about what is, but to determine what is required (mission driven)." The goal, in other words, is not to close a mind-world gap but "to 'proceed from wonder to no wonder' as implementation knowledge is developed" (p. 10). In this way, Implementation Science practices hypothetico-deductive scientific methods without adopting a spectator view of knowledge—a reminder that these things should not be collapsed in epistemic debates. Moreover, as the quotation makes clear, Implementation Science embraces the pragmatist view that inquiry is a process of active intervention and not a purely representational enterprise. The basic aim of a mission-driven field is not to be ontologically intelligible per se, but to solve a problem. Thus, a worthwhile critique of such an enterprise would target its

problem-solving capacities, not its ontological assumptions, unless the latter can be shown to have clear relevance to the former.

At a high level, the way Implementation Science is presented in its canonical texts resonates with the basic relational premise that holds conceptual distinctions as relational actions in, rather than representations of, the world. A fair reading of this literature thus complicates the notion that variable analytic approaches are fundamentally at odds with relational ontology. By being explicitly normative and interventional, and grounding ontological acts in problems and purpose, Implementation Science shows how this is possible.

Having broadly considered the epistemic premises and overarching narratives that define the field, I turn now to examine the boundary work that gives shape to Active Implementation by establishing frameworks, drivers, constructs, categories, variables, and practices. Considering inquiry as "an analysis and rhetoric that seeks to constitute new subjects in the present who can participate in the creation of a transformed future" (Rosiek, 2013, p. 699, paraphrasing West, 1989), the remainder of Part 1 of this chapter explores some key "subjects" in Implementation Science that shape the trajectory of practice. I begin with the basic distinction between innovations and implementation that animates Implementation Science.

The Implementation Gap. In pragmatist parlance, *the implementation gap* is a product of abduction, which takes place early in the process of inquiry and involves formulation of a problem-solution. It does so by punctuating experience differently—compared to efficacy research—and thus making different questions and information relevant to the newly-understood problem at hand. By describing social impact as a product of effective innovations, effective implementation, and enabling contexts, Implementation Science "zoomed out" the conversation about how to achieve socially significant outcomes in human services. This new problem

definition presents three levers for change and proposes an interaction effect between them.

Consequently, more sweeping and enduring systemic change efforts are justified (and appear

necessary) within the scope of evidence-based practice.

In efficacy research, controlled replication of findings provides the warrant for causal

inferences, which in turn guide the retrospective determination of what the efficacious practice

is. The constitutive metadiscourse (i.e., talk that constitutes the practice as a thing) in efficacy

research focuses on the strength of causal claims, which is largely a function of experimental

control (i.e., where double blind randomized control is the gold standard). The need to replicate

results in a real-world setting is not the main problem guiding the inquiry, and thus the

ontological representations made in inquiry do not answer to that need (at least, not well).

As a result, efficacy research has not generally produced what implementation scientists

call *usable* innovations. Making a case for the importance of Implementation Science in clinical

oncology, Mitchell and Chambers (2017) explain that efficacy research typically concludes

> when efficacy of an intervention has been confirmed and accumulated knowledge has
> been synthesized across a body of evidence. Efficacy studies do not usually provide
> information about the barriers and enablers of implementation or the effects of individual
> and organizational context on intervention efficacy. Moreover, studies of efficacy are
> generally not designed to manualize an intervention for use in routine practice, confirm
> the nature and extent of intervention adaptation that is permissible while preserving
> efficacy, or address sustainability of the intervention in routine practice settings. (p. 523)

Consequently, they argue, it is difficult for readers of efficacy studies to critically

appraise the generalizability of the findings, and examples abound "where despite the

preponderance of evidence of benefit, there are gaps in care delivery" (p. 523). However, they

conclude, integration of implementation questions into research design can mitigate such

problems. This highlights an epistemic point that is well developed in pragmatist literature,

which is that the felt difficulties that inspire inquiry play a constitutive role in inquiry. In this

case, we see that the products of efficacy studies answer a much narrower question than "how can we create population-level impact?"

If evidence of causal efficacy is the "end" of inquiry, then knowledge remains stuck in the trap of trying to represent something abstract, hypothetical, and technically unknowable. Per Dewey, inquiry ends when the felt difficulty that inspired it dissolves—knowledge begins and ends in experience; experience is the only anchor we have for knowledge claims. From this perspective, the innovations that materialize in efficacy research are well-supported and sophisticated hypotheses. As such, the evidence-based practices developed in efficacy studies are subjects that will participate in transforming the relationship between present and future experience. But in order to judge their effectiveness, we need to judge the quality of change they bring to experience. And to do that, we need to impose some categorical stability by controlling for variables.

More to the point, though, what good does it do to have knowledge of "efficacious interventions" if those interventions do not transform clinical oncology? Implementation science solves this problem by punctuating experience differently (compared to efficacy research). So knowledge and transformation of clinical experience are made possible by redrawing the lines that punctuate the experimental apparatus. In this case, the solution is not to get rid of entities or transcend dualisms, but to reconfigure ontological cuts in relation to a different problem. That is, to rearrange ontological representations to answer questions about social impact rather than (or in addition to) questions about causal efficacy.

Effective Innovations. The modernist scientific paradigm locates the warrant for ontological representations in nature (where a good representation is a mirror of nature). In a post-positivist and pragmatic frame, the warrant is located in the past; that is, a signifier—in this

case, "efficacious innovations"—consolidates warranted assertions thus far. In a fully pragmatist frame, the warrant for "efficacious innovations" as an ontological representation is (also) located in the future. Engaging a pragmatist relational lens, I want to reconsider the backward-looking (representational) meaning of "effective innovations" and consider the forward-looking (performative) aspect as well.

As a representation, "effective innovation" is not necessarily referring to some kind of positivist chimera. It can be said to refer to what classical pragmatists called a justified true belief. When taken from its verb form—X affects Y—to its adjectival form, *effective* takes us from observation to belief. It translates a regularity in experience into an expectation and defines an entity in terms of the quality of change "it" is thought capable of bringing to experience. I think it is fair read "inherently efficacious innovation" as shorthand for the rather impractical expression, "practice that has been dubbed effective based on careful analysis and interpretation of prior experiences." In this sense, the "true referent," to borrow Barad's (2005) language, is a whole phenomenon or research assemblage.

But discourse that nominalizes effectiveness as a quality does not just describe a regularity in experience but becomes a resource for regulating experience. The nominalization "efficacious innovation" abridges a justified true belief and ushers that belief along, metaphorically granting it an "embodied" existence that makes it a participant in the unfolding of experience. The significance/mattering of previous research findings is then placed in a contingent relationship with localized and ongoing flows of experience when the "effective innovation" is placed into the social impact formula.

One affordance of representing experience in this way is that it revises the previously-dominant diagnostic schema and, in so doing, arguably increases the sophistication of

constitutive metadiscourse around evidence-based practice. In particular, when it is time to

assign blame or credit for failures and successes, it changes the line-up of usual suspects. If a

practice has been established as evidence-based but is not producing expected results in situ, then

perhaps that is because it is not being used as intended, or the context in which it is being used is

not similar enough to the context where its efficacy was previously demonstrated. In any case,

the idea that an innovation can fail for reasons that have little or nothing to do with the

effectiveness of the innovation "itself" is more readily thinkable and speakable.

     Strong Implementation Variables. Having distinguished innovation from

implementation, the next step for Implementation Science as a mission-driven field of inquiry is

to identify strong implementation variables. Fixsen et al. (2019) explain, "To achieve socially

significant outcomes for whole populations, small effects will not be sufficient. Thus, the search

is for implementation variables that *produce large effects* and that *can be reproduced on purpose*

using implementation best practices" (p. 53, emphasis mine). Note how this locates the warrant

for the designation "strong implementation variable" in both the past and the future. These two

criteria articulate the objects of inquiry.

     Fixsen et al. (2019, p. 53) note that many factors have been identified as potential

influences on successful use of innovations; these include, for example, factors related to

"organization culture, implementation climate, self-efficacy, self-confidence, attitudes regarding

innovations, fit with staff values, psychological readiness, strategies, and so on (Aarons,

Hurlburt, & Horwitz, 2011; Damschroder et al., 2009; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; K. J. Klein &

Sorra, 1996; Proctor, Powell, & McMillen, 2013)."   However, Fixsen et al. (2019) explain,

     these are the outcomes (not the inputs) of the Active Implementation Frameworks done

     well. For example, practitioners who meet the staff selection criteria, have the benefit of

training and coaching done well, and receive constructive feedback from regular fidelity

assessments feel efficacious, confident, respected, supported, and ready to do the work of

providing innovation-based services to others. (p. 54)

Thus, they explain, while these studies provide a starting place for further testing, the aim of

Implementation Science is to identify "actual determinants of outcomes" (p. 54), not just strong

correlations. Moreover, the point of implementation inquiry is to identify methods that can be

used on purpose and replicated.

Fixsen et al. (2019) state, "The Active Implementation Frameworks have evolved from

practice where barriers must be overcome and not just documented and lamented" (p. 54). In

Implementation Science, we can see how the motivation for inquiry—in this case, an imperative

to act—shapes the products of inquiry. To reiterate, there are two criteria (or needs) that

articulate implementation strong variables: consequential validity and reproducibility (i.e., the

implementation frameworks must be "teachable, learnable, doable, and assessable in practice").

These criteria, which materialize the Implementation Frameworks, arise from the incitement to

inquiry and articulate how inquiry is supposed to transform experience. This illustrates the

ontological significance of the incitement to inquiry.

The way that Implementation Science identifies strong implementation variables shows

us why it is important to conceive of felt difficulty and formulation of a problem-situation as

being phases of inquiry, as Dewey did. Moreover, this illustrates how description follows from

purpose. Emirbayer said that search for "third variables" in statistical analysis does not make

variable analytic approaches relational in the true sense—they are still interactional. But I am

proposing greater attention to the constitutive significance of a different kind of "third", which is

the normative dimension of inquiry (purpose). The ontoepistemic implication is this: it is not

just that the subject and object of inquiry emerge transactionally in the process of inquiry. But more precisely, the boundaries that produce subject and object have everything to do with the felt difficulty or needs that inspire inquiry. More succinctly, ontological acts follow from, and anchor experience to, needs/interests. I am certainly not claiming that this is a new idea, but I think its significance is underappreciated in the ontological literature in organizational communication.

The practical and analytical significance of the idea that description follows purpose (axiology is prior to ontology, in a sense) comes into focus when we consider that there are logics that mediate the relationship between needs/interests (purpose) and ontological representations (descriptions). Linguistics and discourse analysis can help us understand this. The way that we represent experience as communicators depends on why we are representing it to begin with. For example, if I say, "there is pizza in the break room" and you say, "what kind?" It would be very odd if I said, "round." There are many qualities I could use to describe pizza, and the ones I choose are based on my assumptions about your interests and why you are asking. I would probably assume you are asking in the interest of deciding whether you want to go eat some, and thus that you might like to know what kind of toppings it has. If I knew you were a vegetarian or had Celiac disease, I would tailor my description to focus on the meat or gluten content. In short, how we answer the question "what is" depends on who is asking and why.

This principle is one of Grice's (1975) 4 maxims of conversation, which are rules that guide our inferences and thus allow communication to achieve shared meaning. One of those maxims is the *relevance* criterion, which is that people interpret other people's utterances through the expectation that they are relevant to the conversation. When they are not apparently

relevant, inferences are generated. For example, if I answered your query about what type of pizza is available with "edible pizza," you might infer that I am implying your question is inappropriate and that you should just be grateful for free pizza.

The point is, we cannot achieve shared meaning in ordinary communication without reference to the needs/interests of our interlocutors, so why would we assume we can meaningfully represent and transform experience through inquiry without reference to the "why"? Reading ontoepistemological debates through Grice's relevance criterion brings new meaning—or at least a new emphasis—to analytic relationality. In this view, accounting for analytic relationality means identifying the questions to which an ontological act answers. Let's go back to the pizza for a moment. Say I was to describe the pizza to you as vegan and gluten free. Let's regard that description as an ontological representation (so now the description of the pizza is a metaphor for a research finding that purports to describe some aspect of experience). Someone could evaluate whether my description is literally accurate or could critique it because is so partial. That person could (especially if they had been reading Derrida) reflect on how my representation does violence to experience, how it totalizes the pizza or reduces it to only two qualities. But that person could not evaluate the usefulness or appropriateness of the description without understanding the questions to which it answers. And the question it answers is not just the literal question "you" asked in this example: "what kind [of pizza]?" But, more fully understood, my answer reflects my assumptions about your interests—the interests that motivated your inquiry. And, my answer reflects my implicit knowledge of the relevance criterion in communication, which allowed me to interpret your question, "what kind?" as a request for relevant information to inform your lunch decision rather than as an idle expression of curiosity. In this way, my ontological representation also corresponds to a kind of logic of

practice, or an interpretive logic. So, accounting for analytic relationality involves identifying

the interests/needs, as well as the logics, that make the correspondence of question and answer

make sense.

Recall Sommers's statement, "The classification of an actor *divorced* from analytic

relationality is neither ontologically intelligible nor meaningful." Sommers was talking about

social identity as a way of explaining/understanding sociological action. Her point, I believe,

was that the ways we classify social actors—say in terms of race, gender, or class—are

relationally emergent phenomena rather than meaningful traits on their own; for example, an

individual truly isolated from society would have no race, gender, or class in any meaningful

experiential sense. I am emphasizing a slightly different kind of relationality now. I am

suggesting that, to understand an actor (or an ontological representation) relationally, one must

ask, *for what purpose, or toward what end, is this actor being understood*?

Often, the meaning of "things" derives from what they are doing in a transaction and not

their actual substance. For example, a "projectile" could be any kind of substance. But by

describing something as a projectile, we are naming what makes it relevant, that is, the fact that it

has been launched through the air. I would like to point out that the word "variable" is this type

of word. Variables *matter* because they represent opportunities to manipulate and control

experience in the course of inquiry. The "nature" of a variable—its relevant feature in inquiry—

is that it is an aspect of experience that is available for manipulation and testing; it can be held

constant or it can be varied. Variable analysis often seeks to explain action by reference to

categorical membership, defined by variable qualities, and it has been heavily critiqued by

relational thinkers for this reason. But there is also a forward-looking ontology involved in

variable analysis. To identify variables is to identify places where experience branches off into

different anticipated trajectories. These points mark opportunities for intervention, places where choices were made and could be made differently in the future.

Returning to the Implementation Science text, we have seen that the need to "remove barriers rather than documenting and lamenting them" shifts the criteria for identifying variables as relevant to inquiry. For example, strong correlation with outcomes is not sufficient to qualify some potential influence as a strong implementational variable. Rather, strong variables answer to the need for effective, purposeful strategies for change, so determinant validity and replicability are the criteria that drive the becoming of Implementation Frameworks. Identifying the implicit and explicit normative imperatives that determine the serviceability of different ways of punctuating and representing experience should be a key function of analyses that seek to effect an "ontological reversal."

Addressing the Ideological Potential of Entification

One of the most compelling critiques of substantialism, which relationality seeks to address, is that it tends to reify or naturalize ontological representations. Reification occurs when categories, scientific findings, representations, entities and the like, which, properly understood, result from agential cuts, are regarded as naturally occurring, waiting to be discovered and described by the analyst. Implementation science's conceptual labels and frameworks, like any construct, have the potential to be reified and treated with more reverence than the strength of the scientific findings warrant, or to advance particular interests while purporting to provide value-neutral reflections of reality. For example, discourse that black-boxes "evidence-based practices" can obscure the ends to which the practice is considered effective, or make it seem like a foregone conclusion that everyone equally values the outcomes

being measured. Indeed, evidence-based practice has been critiques for this reason (see, e.g.,

Biesta, 2010).

Relational thinking aims to counteract the impulse toward naturalizing and totalizing

narratives, as Emirbayer (1997) explains:

> Transactional thinking contests the intrinsically reified nature of *all* categories: it shows how they "totalize" identities that are in fact often multidimensional and contradictory; prescribe modes of thought and action against which alternatives can only be labeled "deviant"; naturalize rigid distinctions that suppress possibilities for creative (self-) transformation; and, most generally, accept rather than contest the historically variable relational matrices that serve to constitute invidious distinctions and categorizations in the first place (Somers and Gibson 1994, pp. 55–57).

In a similar vein, as discussed in Chapter 2, critical discourse analysts (e.g., Billig, 2008;

Fairclough, 1990; Martin, 1985) have argued that nominalization has several detrimental effects.

Foremost, it obfuscates agency and responsibility by depersonalizing actions.   This

depersonalization can be advantageous for those in power who wish to evade responsibility or

accountability. Additionally, by converting dynamic processes or events into static concepts, it

can lead to a loss of clarity and specificity and contribute to the construction of abstract and

impersonal language. This abstraction can create a sense of detachment, making it easier to

overlook or dismiss the actual human experiences and emotions associated with particular

actions or events.

On the other hand, Goatly (1996) offered a fascinating alternative perspective and

normative assessment of nominalization. His inquiry was motivated by questions about how

grammar might shape our views on the interdependence of humans and our environment, with

implications for the likelihood of preventing ecological catastrophe. He argued that

nominalization is actually a powerful resource for "green grammar" because it allows us to relate

one process to another and to speak a "world of happenings." As Goatly (1996) points out,

nominalization increases the prominence of processes, and decreases the profile of actor-participants. Creating a sense of primacy of process can be a good thing because it embeds humans and environment within processual flows, thus counteracting the sense that humans are separate from the natural environment. Of course, primacy of process is also resonant with relational ontology.

So, somewhat counterintuitively, packaging processes as things provides speakers with more options for ignoring or diminishing the role of participant-things. Of course, hiding participant-things is precisely the problem with highly abstract language, according to the critical discourse analysts cited above. But Goatly (1996) elevates Bohm's (1980) perspective: "Abstraction for Bohm represents something wholly different from what Martin and Halliday (1993) mean by it: for them abstraction involves the deliberate hiding of participant Things. For Bohm it means the invention of participant Things" (p. 546).

As a metaphor for entification in organizing and inquiry, I find Bohm's perspective to be more apt. The idea that abstraction *creates* new actors resonates with the view of communication that recognizes both the representational and performative nature of signs. Bohm's view also resonates with pragmatism's future-oriented ontology and the idea that inquiry constitutes subjects in the present that participate in bringing about a transformed future.

Considering both of these perspectives, we are left with a nuanced view of nominalization. It clearly increases the communicative resources of a language, and in doing so, it seems to increase both the violent and the transformative capacities of language. Paradoxically, entifying processes—thus creating new participants—can make it easier to think and speak a world of happenings. In this way, nominalization is consonant with relational ontology. At the same time, nominalization has ideological potential, just as categorical thinking lends itself to reductionism and totalization.

Rejecting categorical reasoning and other substantialist habits altogether is not a satisfactory response to this conundrum because it removes lexicogrammatical resources that (a) are not clearly at odds with a relational understanding of the world, (b) answer to legitimate meaning-making needs, and (c) are essential to inquiry. This leads to a trap of trying to say and unsay at the same time; of trying to name without naming. And this is not necessary. Dewey's often quoted description of transaction states that, "in transaction, systems of description and naming are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to 'elements'…" So the challenge for relational thinkers is to employ those systems of naming while keeping the transactional view close at hand. There are several practices that can support this. As we consider these in the next section, it is useful to envision substantialism and relationalism as a spectrum of abstraction. As we move back and forth along this spectrum, we develop knowledge and transact with experience; this back-and-forth movement expands possibilities for purposeful, transformative action through the development of practice(s).

Nominalizing without Totalizing: Promising Practices

Because movement back and forth on the spectrum of abstraction is crucial to intelligent action, we need to avoid getting stuck on the substantialist end, which is to say, we need to avoid tricking ourselves into thinking our categories and frameworks are a mirror of nature. How can we maintain fluidity? Some promising practices can be gleaned from looking at *how* Implementation Science practices entification. These include putting ontological representations in historical context, showing how ontology (what is) follows from axiology (values, desires, and interests), and prioritizing method over particular findings.

Providing Historical Context. As I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, transparency is vital to inquiry. For pragmatists, it is crucial that people are able to see how inquiry arises from

experience and thus interpret findings in their historical context. Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) exemplify this practice by beginning their book with a chapter-length narrative on their experience implementing the Teaching Family Model in the 1970s.

In that chapter, they show the problem-situation that inspired and shaped the solutions they offer in the book. To appreciate the ontoepistemic significance of this practice, think of scientific abstraction as a communicative process akin to taking a mold of an object then dumping the object out. The mold then becomes an actor in its own right.[15] Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) frequently present concepts by describing the mold, then the process of creating it and the object the mold was cast from, and then giving examples of appropriate applications of the mold, whether past, present, or hypothetical.

The pedagogical value of examples is obvious and well-documented, and it is easy to see why—they animate concepts that have been hollowed out in abstraction, rendering them more sense-able. From a pragmatist relational perspective, examples work in the text to establish a correspondence between practices and problems. Narratives that recount the human-environment transactions that occur when people try to solve problems serve to more fully constitute practice-entities as strategies or solutions and clarify the conditions to which the latter answer. In relational terms, example-giving is a communication practice that materializes entities through back and forth movement along the spectrum of abstraction. This movement between entities and phenomena/assemblages is an important organizational resource.

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[15] See Peirce's concept of infinite semiosis for a fascinating elaboration of this concept.

Foregrounding Axiology. Fixsen et al. (2019) continually justify their representational choices in terms of how those choices advance the mission of Implementation Science. The text consistently supplies a 'why' for every agential cut it makes, that is, it specifies what that cut is supposed to be doing. The effect of this practice is to continually ground matter (i.e., descriptions of what is) in mattering (the rationale and use value of the "what" being described). Continually and explicitly defining entities in terms of their purpose(s) is an exemplary practice for pragmatist inquiry because it contextualizes its scientific claims within a relational assemblage of becoming, where the 'becoming' is happening toward a goal or purpose. Thus, this variable-analytic literature aligns with and arguably advances a relational notion of mattering, wherein things are made to matter in relation to needs, goals, and values. While mattering (significance) is, by definition, relative to needs, goals, and values, the latter are not always transparent or agreed upon. When this happens, we end up arguing about strategies when we should be arguing about consequences and how they connect to values and need.

Practicing Method and Resisting Reification of Findings. Finally, Fixsen el al. (2019) supplement the practice of keeping axiology front-and-center with rhetoric that emphasizes scientific process and resists deification of any one finding. As the following statement of purpose indicates, labels and constructs are used to create shared meaning and facilitate collective inquiry:

> To advance implementation practice and science, we need common language, common concepts, and common measures in order to promote clear communication among practitioners, researchers, and policy leaders. With these in hand, Implementation Science can be crowdsourced with many simultaneous experiences and experiments that test theory contributing to shared learning and adding to sharable data globally and across domains. (Fixsen, Blase, & Van Dyke, 2019, p. 19)

In line with pragmatist epistemology, the text does not imply any natural or necessary boundaries around the constructs it erects. This sensibility echoes the text's treatment of fidelity

as a means of control in service of science and impact, rather than as a marker of any essential

boundary.

Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) also present boundaries and categories as tentative,

mutable, and always rooted in specific interventional goals. For example, consider this

explanation for how they created the Active Implementation Frameworks:

> The authors of this book did not set out to develop implementation frameworks. We
> were attempting to understand how to replicate and scale effective innovations, and that
> still is our goal. Since the 1970s Dean Fixsen and Karen Blase have reviewed practices,
> read the literature, and accumulated increasingly long lists of "things that apparently
> matter" when success is achieved. Since 2004 the authors have tried to make sense of the
> lists by sorting the things that apparently matter under conceptual headings. The
> frameworks emerged as these conceptual labels were organized into groupings. The long
> lists remained and became ways to operationalize (put into practice) the conceptual
> labels.

Passages like this invite a lay audiences to take a nuanced view of scientific fallibility and

proceed with pragmatist epistemological assumptions.

Overall, the practices reviewed here show how Implementation Science uses

substantialist tropes without embracing naive substantialist assumptions or a spectator view of

knowledge. Thus, even though it uses interactional (i.e., substantialist)

vocabulary/representations, I am not convinced that the heavily nominalized discourse of

Implementation Science impedes a transactional understanding of organization, or that it is

fundamentally ill-suited for practicing inquiry in and with a relational world. Moreover, I have

provided examples of how Implementation Science resists totalizing narratives and scientistic

reification of categories. Nonetheless, those risks remain. The main risks, as I see it, are

producing a technocratic discourse that obscures normative choices, and developing logics that

materialize practices toward unintended criteria. The remainder of the chapter will explore the

becoming of practice through one of the Active Implementation Frameworks, highlighting how

explicit and implicit criteria participate in shaping the trajectory of practice.

Part II: Materializing Practices through the Usable Innovations Framework

So far, we have seen how Implementation Science grounds its descriptive claims in specific needs and problems. I turn now to the prescriptive claims of implementation scientists, as summarized in the *Active Implementation Frameworks* presented by Fixsen, Blase, Van Dyke, and their colleagues at NIRN. From a relational perspective, Active Implementation can be understood as a communication technology that guides the materialization of practices in a way that makes them responsive to particular felt difficulties. Recall Cooren's (2017) vision of how ideas materialize through a dialectic of propriety and appropriation, whereby novel iterations of a given idea are presented as always already having been "proper" to it. Cooren's account is based on his observation of a low-stakes creative art project. However, when it comes to using public resources to address pressing community needs, the materialization of interventions takes on a stronger normative valence and it becomes clear that appropriations can undermine effectiveness and impact. Thus, rather than simply observing the materialization process, Implementation Science asks how best to ground that process in science.

The Active Implementation Frameworks intervene in the materialization process by creating structures for metadiscourse. To assess the usefulness of those metadiscursive tools for RJ, I lean on the pragmatist notion of correspondence to highlight the need—strategy relationships at play. The remainder of this chapter explores the implicit and explicit felt difficulties that anchor the transactional becoming of innovations through Active Implementation and related practices in RJ.

Usable Innovations

NIRN's advice for how to entify communication practices to produce socially significant outcomes is summarized in the *Usable Innovations* (UI) framework. Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) explain that most efficacy studies do not include operational definitions of the practices they assess, and the evidence-based practice movement has typically focused on the internal validity of these studies. However, if practices are to be replicated so as to produce social impact, they must be "operationalized so they are teachable, learnable, doable, and assessable in practice," there must be a way to detect their presence in a given setting, and they must be "effective when used as intended" (p. 69). To assist researcher-practitioners in defining practices to meet these aims, NIRN identifies four criteria of usable innovations.

The first criterion is a "clear *description* of the innovation," which includes two elements (Fixsen, Blase & Van Dyke, 2019. p. 70, emphasis original). The first is an articulation of the principles, values, and philosophies upon which the innovation is based, which provides guidance in the face of ambiguity and a reference point for decisions. The second is inclusion and exclusion criteria that define the population of intended beneficiaries based on who is likely to benefit from the innovation and who is not. Feldstein and Glasgow (2008) suggest that multiple dimensions be considered when defining a target population, such as "age, gender, socioeconomic status, literacy, native language, and culture" (Fixsen, Blase & Van Dyke, 2019, p. 71).

The second criterion for usable innovations is a "clear description of the essential functions that define the innovation" (Fixsen, Blase & Van Dyke, 2019, p. 71, emphasis original). Also known as essential elements, core components, or active ingredients, these are the features without which an innovation cannot be said to exist in a given setting. Detailed

descriptions of essential elements help with diagnosing and solving problems that arise when using an innovation and provide a clear referent for fidelity. Indispensable elements constitute the innovation's "hard core," while adaptable elements make up the "soft periphery" (Greenhalgh, Robert, MacFarlane, et al., 2004). This dual boundary makes adaptation meaningful by maintaining a core entity. As Kilbourne, Neumann, Pincus, Bauer, and Stall (2007) explained, "Having the core elements detailed, while also providing options for implementing these core elements, is vital for optimizing both fidelity to the intervention and flexibility in its implementation" (quoted in Fixsen et al., 2019b, p. 71). Essential elements are typically norms, practices, qualities, or sensibilities, for example: "community locus, assertive engagement, high intensity, small caseload, continuous responsibility, staff continuity, team approach, multidisciplinary staff, and close work with support systems" (Fixsen, Blase & Van Dyke, 2019, p. 71).

The third criterion for usable innovations stipulates that essential functions are operationalized as sets of activities elaborated in instructive detail. Operational definitions, written up in *practice profiles* (Hall, 1974; Tilly III, 2008) "allow an innovation to be teachable, learnable, doable, and assessable in practice, and promote consistency across practitioners at the level of actual service delivery" (Fixsen, Blase & Van Dyke, 2019, pp. 71-72).

Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) provide a sample operational definition of "teaching appropriate alternative behavior," an essential function of Teaching-Family Model (Braukmann et al., 1973; Phillips et al., 1974). The definition lists qualitative and behavioral components of a teaching interaction. Qualitative components include, for example: "Use a calm, caring speaking voice; be enthusiastic and positive when praising; be calm and matter of fact when offering corrective feedback; and use polite and pleasant requests (please…, would you…)" (Fixsen,

Blase, and Van Dyke, 2019, p. 72). With these qualitative specifications for communication, the practice profile aims to get practitioners to construct the desired relational metamessage and thus produce a particular therapeutic quality of relationship with the youth with whom they are interacting.

Behavioral components operationalize the teaching interaction as an ordered list of speech tasks with some references to specialized vocabulary. These include, for example, "begin with a statement of praise," "name the skill (use a concept label)," "describe the inappropriate behavior (reactive teaching only)," "link skill label, behaviors, and outcomes," "request acknowledgement," and set up then act out the "practice 'scene'" (p. 72). In this case, the innovation is described, with great procedural specificity, as a stepwise progression of work activities and communicative tasks, often broken down to the level of the utterance. In discourse analytic terms, these instructions direct both message content and relational metamessages such as positive stance.

Finally, Usable Innovations must include "a practical assessment of fidelity," or a way to measure the innovation's presence in a given setting (Fixsen, Blase & Van Dyke, 2019, p. 73). A fidelity assessment translates the elements of the practice profile (i.e., philosophies, principles, core components, and activities) into performance standards that can be scored or measured, practically and repeatedly, in human service settings. Fidelity assessments may incorporate various kinds of data, such as simple observations (e.g., whether a practitioner asks a particular question), client and other stakeholder surveys, and interpretive assessments (e.g., coding of recorded therapy sessions). Importantly, per Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019), a fidelity assessment does not just provide evidence that an innovation is in use but also demonstrates that the latter "is effective when used as intended (Fixsen, Blase & Van Dyke,

2019, p. 73). Ideally, a fidelity measure will correlate with intended outcomes at 0.70 or above, indicating that "use of the innovation as intended explains about 50% of the variance in outcomes" (p. 76).

Fidelity assessments serve as the basis for coaching and designating "high fidelity practitioners." That designation, in turn, is used as a benchmark for implementation stages. "Full implementation" is reached "when at least 50% of the practitioners in an organization meet fidelity criteria on a given day" (Fixsen, Blase, & Van Dyke, 2019). Both labels are action-implicative: High fidelity practitioners are eligible to serve as coaches, and organizational priorities, as well as interpretation of outcome data, vary based on implementation stage. Thus, categorizing practitioners as high-fidelity practitioners indicates the stage of implementation, and the stage indicates what types of activities should be prioritized. In this way, punctuation of experience makes implementation best practices replicable by directing the flow of action.

Reading the Usable Innovations Framework Through Communicative Relationality

From a relational communication perspective, the Usable Innovations criteria shape the trajectory of practice (Kuhn et al., 2017) by identifying the 'parties' to the transactional becoming of the innovation. Some of those participants were explicitly invited into the transaction (the ones that make the innovation answer to stated intentions and desired outcomes), and some sort of sneak in the back door and make the practice answer to unspoken (though not necessarily unimportant or illegitimate) needs and interests. A relational communication perspective also invites us to view UI criteria, practice profiles, and fidelity measures as consequential forms of metadiscourse; they are authoritative texts (cooren?) that regulate the process of appropriation that materializes practice (Kuhn et al., 2017). As such, they are profoundly constitutive of the practices they describe and measure. Ultimately, from an applied

perspective, noticing these relational-communicative phenomena is worthwhile to the extent that it furthers the goal of "doing what you intend to do." Looking closely at the felt difficulties these entification practices answer to can do that, while also encouraging transparent discussion and valuation of the various, sometimes competing intentions at play.

Implicit and Explicit Ideals in the Usable Innovations Criteria

As an example of how various interests and needs participate in materializing innovations through the UI framework, let us consider the *clear descriptions* criterion. Inclusion and exclusion criteria are expressed as characteristics of a population, thus *what* the innovation is for (what problem it solves, e.g.), is operationalized as *who* it is for. Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) offer as examples demographic characteristics (e.g., age), evaluations (e.g., imminent risk of incarceration), and circumstances (e.g., living with at least one parent). Realizing a set of circumstances as a list of attributes (a kind of grammatical metaphor) fits with the treatment model logic that is prominent in human services, enhancing usability in these settings (more on this later).

At the same time, decisions about which characteristics are relevant involve tradeoffs and often carry implicit logics. This applies to both inclusion/exclusion criteria and designations of "core" vs. "peripheral" elements of an innovation. With regard to the former, for example, Fixsen, Blase, and VanDyke (2019) explain that "relevant aspects of intended recipients" are part of the definition of an innovation because "pre-existing health conditions or family or work demands may make it physically challenging to follow through with encouraged actions" (p. 71). Ability to follow through could be operationalized in various ways, such as a self-report (clients opt-in if they believe they can carry out program recommendations), or a list of qualities in which pre-existing conditions are an exclusion criterion.

The second option makes it easier to determine program eligibility by using simple data points, but it also imperfectly makes health status a proxy for ability to comply. At stake in this decision is the relative value placed on goods such as efficacy (which may be boosted by tighter selection), risk tolerance (resources wasted due to non-compliance vs. possibility of broader population benefit), and accessibility (not summarily excluding people with disabilities). Thus, valuative work is done in the seemingly basic task of criteria selection. Thoughtfully weighing priorities is surely preferable to allowing unintended "ghost interests" to influence the trajectory of practice.

Another important potential hiding place for ghost interests is in the (meta)criteria used to determine if a characteristic is relevant, if an element is essential, or if a fidelity measure is a good one. Possible criteria include implementation and policy (i.e., usability) needs, correlation with desired outcomes, and values and principles. The first two items on this list (outcome data and usability), receive most attention in Implementation Science and warrant careful consideration.

From the outset, we can see that the need for *usability* in human service settings is the felt difficulty that calls the innovation into being. That is, the framework explicitly makes the innovation answer to the needs for teaching, learning, scaling, assessment, and scientific control. Fixsen, Blase, and Van Dyke (2019) define human services as settings where one person (a professional, usually) interacts with another (client) in a way intended to be helpful. This emphasis on the client-practitioner dyad can be understood as a logic of practice (Kuhn, 2017) that characterizes human services. Naturally, the usable innovations framework materializes practices to be congruent with that logic. For example, expressing inclusion and exclusion criteria as population characteristics (rather than, say, starting with a problem definition) makes

the innovation intelligible to a case management system. To use a simple metaphor, if the human services logic of practice were a software application, the usability criteria in the UI framework materializes innovations to be in a file format readable by that app. In this way, the system logic acts back on the practice. This is not a problem with Active Implementation per se—usability is a condition for social impact—but it is important to be aware of how system usability needs, and not just social problems, materialize innovations. This awareness is important for diagnosing implementation challenges and navigating conflicts between system integration needs and philosophical commitments.

For example, while RJ does involve one person interacting with another in a way intended to be helpful, its fit within the human service paradigm is contested, as discussed in the introductory chapter. RJ's networked approach to justice seeks to repair relationships and address victim, community, and offender needs simultaneously. Thus, we might aptly describe the practitioner's role as *coordinating an intervention within a system of relationships, with the goal of expanding possibilities for people to get their needs met.* In contrast, the metaphor of "one person helping another" centers the client-practitioner dyad in a way that justifies an interventional focus on facilitation practice and an evaluative focus on the client (usually an offender) as the unit of analysis.

RJ practitioners I interviewed described some difficulties attributable to this mismatch in logics of practice. Notably, one person objected to the use of case numbers as a evaluation tool and proposed instead that total number of participants be used. She implied that the evaluative focus on offenders misconstrues the purpose of RJ as being about mostly about reforming offenders. Several other practitioners expressed concern that practices aimed at professionalizing RJ as a field might undermine *community* justice, which they saw as essential

to RJ. That is, instead of empowering the community to solve its own problems, a professionalized version of RJ might accept the traditional role of the state in administering justice. In short, the prevailing organizing logic of human services participates in how practice becomes in transaction with the need for usability. Other system needs and logics, such as managerialism, audit, and value-for-money rationalism, also shape the trajectory of practice in his way.

How the Usable Innovations Criteria Articulate Normative Priorities

As a final consideration, I want to point out how outcome measures participate in the entification of innovations through fidelity assessment criterion. Fidelity assessments are constitutive of the innovations whose presence they measure. A strong correlation between outcomes and fidelity scores indicates a good fidelity assessment. Thus, fidelity measures shape the trajectory of practice by making action responsive to outcome measures, or, in essence, by defining the parties to the innovation's transactional becoming. If a fidelity assessment is tried, and it is discovered that higher fidelity does not correlate with better outcomes, then it can be said that the assessment does not accurately reflect "the intended innovation," because the intended innovation is "the" one that produces good outcomes. Changes in fidelity measures arguably change what the innovation-used-with-fidelity is, until the latter correlates with desired outcomes.

This arrangement sets the practice up to co-evolve with whatever needs and interests the outcome measures reflect. Thus, correspondence between "intended outcomes" and outcome measures is a key question on which the broader usefulness of Active Implementation depends. Too much emphasis on outcome data in Active Implementation can make an innovation answer

to the wrong problem while allowing it to appear very successful. For example, imagine a scenario where, when making a practice profile, *relevant* aspects of intended recipients are selected by looking at a collection of variables in efficacy data and choosing the strongest predictors of good outcomes. Here, predictive strength is the relevance criterion. If the other relevance criteria do not link the practice back to the felt difficulty that inspired its creation, then we have a situation where scientism undermines scientific rationality (more on this later). In particular, populations that are "likely to benefit" may be collapsed with "likely to succeed." This very issue has come up in RJ. Elsewhere (Esch, 2015) I have documented cases of law enforcement officers using likelihood of success as an implicit referral criterion, resulting in RJ being used on a very low-risk, low-needs population.

If correlation with outcomes were the *only* fidelity criterion, then fidelity would be meaningless. To offer a deliberately absurd example, if recidivism rates (a potential RJ outcome measure) were the only point of reference for defining RJ-with-fidelity, then the latter could morph such that executing all criminal defendants counts as RJ because it is linked with a recidivism rate of zero. In reality, the in-situ emergence of the practice-used-with-fidelity is regulated by other fidelity criteria that link to the practice profile and principles and philosophies. But Implementation Science provides less guidance for how to use principles and philosophies as anchors for fidelity assessment.

The metadiscursive practices of Active Implementation create a strong link between fidelity measures and outcome measures. If other critical links in the assemblage are allowed to atrophy, the goal of aligning intentions with impact may be undermined. In addition to closely scrutinizing the relationship between outcome measures and the resolution of problems,

implementers must take care to identify the various needs and interests to which fidelity measures answer.

Overall, it is important that implementers ensure that links to the philosophies and principles of an innovation are not neglected in favor of what is most measurable. For example, in RJ, if victim satisfaction were the sole anchor for inquiry and iterative adjustment, the practice could hypothetically grow increasingly punitive by satisfying retributive impulses rather than engaging them in the often-vulnerable process of acknowledging deeper needs. Additional challenges with outcome measures in RJ will be explored in the next chapter. The key takeaway for now is that outcome measures provide an easily digestible form of feedback from the environment, which can give them an outsized (and sometimes counterproductive) impact on the transactional becoming of practice. Clearly, these should not be the only anchor for pragmatist inquiry into intentions and impact.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we looked closely at how Implementation Science approaches evidence-based improvement of human services (RQ1). Applying a pragmatist relational hermeneutic, I have described Implementation Science as a response to an experiential problem. That problem is conceived within Implementation Science as an implementation gap. The gap is attributed in part to a shortcoming of efficacy research, namely, that the latter fails to define and operationalize the interventions (Y variables) it assesses. In line with this hypothesis (or idea, in Dewey's parlance) about the implementation gap, entification becomes a key problematic for inquiry in Implementation Science.

Thus, in brief, the answer to the RQ1 is Implementation Science approaches scientific improvement by encapsulating communication into discrete interventions that can be assessed

for both *fidelity* and *effectiveness* against fidelity criteria and outcome metrics. Furthermore, Implementation Science pursues quality and scientific rigor by reducing variability and identifying strong implementation variables. It advances a clear ideal for entification: Innovations should be *usable*, which is to say, teachable, learnable, doable, and assessable in practice. To achieve this aim, communication innovations must meet the four criteria outlined in the Usable Innovations Framework.

Of course, the aim of this chapter was not to review Implementation Science literature, but to interpret it as a site of becoming. Thus, how the Usable Innovations criteria shape the becoming of innovations in practice was discussed at length. We noted that the Framework grants varying degrees of constitutive power to the various criteria of practice; for example, fidelity assessments are poised to have more constitutive power than principles and philosophies. Further, we learned that the Framework ties appropriate use of innovations to populations—operationalized as a collection of characteristics—rather than using, for example, problem definitions. Finally, we saw that the fidelity assessment criterion tethers the in-situ becoming of practice to outcome metrics by making strong correlation with good outcomes definitive of good fidelity assessments. In this way, outcome measures at least partially shape the innovation-used-with-fidelity. These observations are highlighted because of their likely implications for RQ4: To what extent can existing frameworks contribute to the successful implementation of restorative justice? What are the outstanding needs and gaps?

This chapter shed light on that research question by applying CAD (Aakhus, 2007) and contemplating logics of practice (Kuhn et al., 2017) in Implementation Science. Specifically, the analysis pointed out that there is a strong but generally implicit emphasis on the practitioner–client relationship within Implementation Science, which is consistent with a broader logic of

human service practice. Consequently, the Usable Innovations Framework *corresponds* (in pragmatist relational sense) to communication problems emerging largely in the context of this dyad. The contrast between the practitioner–client logic of human services and the community-based ethos of restorative justice was flagged as relevant to questions of fit between RJ and Implementation Science, as well as between RJ and human services more broadly.

Next, this chapter addressed RQ2: (a) How does the practice of inquiry in Implementation Science compare with ideals for inquiry articulated in relational and pragmatist literature? (b) What implications for relational ontology and/or methodology can be gleaned from this comparison? My reading of Implementation Science through a pragmatist relational lens yielded a surprising answer to the first question. Although Implementation Science embodies all the hallmarks of the substantialist paradigm, it also exemplifies many ideals of pragmatist inquiry. Further, it employs variable analytic methods without necessarily embracing a spectator view of knowledge. Moreover, its mission-driven and interventional approach to inquiry is deeply resonant with transactional ontology because it depicts knowledge as an intra-active process rather than as a solely or primarily representational enterprise. Not only do these findings usefully surface strategies for practicing relational pragmatist inquiry within diverse research paradigms, but they also inspire a rethinking of what relational ontology requires and enables at the level of methodological practice (RQ2b). Specifically, we see that variable analytic and experimental methods can be compatible with relational ontology when practiced within a pragmatist metatheoretical framework. Such a framework discourages scientistic reductionism and emphasizes the contingency of ontological representations by situating them as "answers" to experiential difficulties. By transparently and reflexively linking ontological choices to the experiential contexts to which they correspond, pragmatist relational analysis

helps ensure that normative and ontological commitments are available for scrutiny and potential transformation.

The very exercise of applying pragmatist relationality as a metatheoretical and analytical lens generated further insight into RQ2b. Subjecting relationality to reflexive scrutiny has led me to challenge the presumed limits of relational methodologies and rethink the relationalism–substantialism duality as it is presented in seminal texts of the contemporary ontological turn, most notably Emirbayer (1997). Instead, I have proposed that entification operates as a communicative technology, akin to nominalization, which shapes the relational becoming of social impact in Implementation Science. I have argued that artifacts of substantialism, such as categories, variable attributes, levels, entities and the like, are integral to how Active Implementation transforms the relationship between present and future experience.

By analogy to nominalization and in harmony with Cooren's (Kuhn et al., 2017) spectral view of materiality, I have suggested that practice(s) materialize(s) in a dialectic of fidelity and infidelity, and through movement along a spectrum of abstraction. Beyond simply noticing that this is happening, I have sought to uncover logics of practice (Kuhn et al., 2017) that regulate this process of becoming, and to identify implicit and explicit criteria that materialize practices in the Implementation Frameworks. Implementation Science provided an ideal case study because its frameworks explicitly aim to control the process of appropriation. The Implementation Frameworks shape the trajectory of practice by (re)drawing boundaries, configuring outcomes and inputs, punctuating experience in new ways, and creating new "subjects" (i.e, ontological representations) that intervene in present experience on behalf of an imagined and desired future. Relational thinking, used as a metatheoretical lens, encourages us to observe how boundary work shapes the trajectory of knowledge and experience.

Finally, this chapter has demonstrated a novel approach to relational analysis, with broad and promising potential for further empirical engagement. Using pragmatist relationality as a hermeneutic sensibility, analysists explore how axiology anchors the relational emergence of subject and object and fuels the constitution of "things" as such. At the level of empirical engagement, this might involve exploring how practices materialize *toward* and according to particular needs and values—as I have just done. Pragmatist relational analysis can help to surface implicit logics and ideals, and in so doing, contribute to a richer metadiscourse that addresses normative and empirical questions together. This is particularly important in the movement for evidence-based practice, where debates about public values and politics are liable to be reduced to questions of efficacy.

In sum, through this chapter, we have come to understand how Implementation Science frames the problems that fuel this dissertation, and, more specifically, how it addresses and practices entification and inquiry (RQ1). We have contemplated the implications of the Usable Innovations Framework for how practices take shape in situ and have anticipated some possible challenges the framework portends for application to the RJ context (RQ4). These affordances and limitations come into sharper relief in Chapter 5, where we discover the experiential problems, strategies, and philosophies of RJ practitioners practicing fidelity and evaluation. This chapter has also developed pragmatist relationality as an answer to the research questions pertaining to relational ontology and methodology, and how relational approaches might support mission-driven inquiry (RQ2). The contours and significance of these findings will be further solidified in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5: PRACTITIONER EXPERIENCES OF DEFINING, EVALUATING, AND SCALING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

The preceding chapter shed light on contemporary ideals and strategies concerning the application of scientific rationality in human services. It delved into how Implementation Science and the evidence-based practice movement aim to ensure community service organizations fulfill their mandates effectively and accountably, thereby delivering benefits to the populations they serve. Notably, we gleaned that the prevailing paradigm identifies *achievement of socially significant outcomes* as the primary test of value in human services. To achieve socially significant outcomes, the Active Implementation Frameworks aim to minimize variability, in part by ensuring that effective practices are operationally defined and used with fidelity. Within this framework, outcome measurement and fidelity assessment are pivotal for ensuring accountability, effective action, learning, and continual improvement.

In this chapter, we return to the experiential context that motivated this research— restorative justice implementation—to gain insight into situated practices of fidelity and evaluation in that field. Drawing on a large body of qualitative data, the chapter explores how RJ implementers work to make RJ reliable, replicable, and empirically validated while stiving to protect the practice's integrity and responsiveness to situated needs. RJ is not a prototypical innovation for Active Implementation and it is difficult to assess its effectiveness within the canons of traditional efficacy research. Given these challenges, how can RJ implementers best support ethical, effective, and accountable practice as RJ proliferates within and beyond the criminal justice system? In pursuit of an answer to this larger question, this chapter addresses RQ3 and RQ4.

A summary of findings comprises the bulk of the chapter. These findings answer RQ3, which asks how RJ practitioners conceptualize and practice fidelity and evaluation. The analysis

surfaces a tangle of challenges, strategies, and situated philosophies that illustrate the complexity of entifying and evaluating communication-based innovations. We learn that practitioners value consistency, accountability, and quality control but hold differing opinions about whether or how current practices of fidelity and evaluation support these aims. For example, we discover that implementers across institutional contexts agree that RJ produces socially significant outcomes but many of them have doubts about whether that value can be made intelligible within the paradigm of evidence-based practice. Moreover, we see that few of them regard current outcome metrics as meaningful indicators of RJ's value or fulfillment of its purpose, even though evaluation is widely regarded as imperative for RJ's success. Similar themes arise around fidelity; implementers want to ensure that practices called "RJ" meet basic criteria, but they point out that no one "owns" RJ and fear negative consequences if fidelity is too restrictive.

The remainder of the chapter addresses RQ4, which asks about the benefits and limitations of existing frameworks as supports for successful RJ implementation. Here, I synthesize findings from chapters 4 and 5 to explore how Implementation Science and evidence-based practice do and do not resonate with practitioners' needs and experiences. I first discuss how Implementation Science can usefully inform RJ, highlighting several concepts that I believe would add value to current discussions. I point out that Implementation Science is less restrictive in its concept of fidelity than some practitioners may fear. For example, Fixsen and colleagues describe innovations as "rule-generated and contingency-shaped" and present implementation drivers as integrated and compensatory. Next, I highlight areas of incongruence where current frameworks for implementation and evaluation meet resistance, contribute to confusion, or leave unmet needs in the RJ field. In the end, I argue that adopting a problem orientation and expanding evaluation practices to better adjudicate between competing visions of

the future can improve the implementation of communicative practices such as RJ. Here, the

chapter lays groundwork for the case I make in Chapter 6 for inquiry-engaged practice as an

ideal for implementing communication-based innovations such as RJ (RQ5).

I turn now to the world of RJ implementation. The first question an implementation

specialist might ask if tasked with analyzing RJ implementation is, *if I ask ten people what RJ is,*

will I get ten different answers? Thus, I began my interviews by asking practitioners to define

RJ. Their definitions varied slightly but all cohered around the importance of repair harm and

often juxtaposed RJ to punitive or retributive justice. Variation was seen in whether RJ was

described as a process, a set of practices, a program, or a way of life. The "process" and "set of

practices" answers were most common, while the "program" definition was offered by relative

newcomers to the field. The "way of life" definition was typically offered by veteran

practitioners.

In addition to identifying harm repair as RJ's purpose, practitioners overwhelmingly

pointed to principles and values as the defining features of RJ. Specifically, the "5 Rs"—

relationship, responsibility, respect, repair, reintegration—were almost universally cited RJ's

core values. When asked to define these terms, people generally referred to the training

standards drafted by RJTC (a committee described in the previous chapter) and approved by the

RJ council. RJTC had adopted Beverly Title's (2011) definitions of the 5 Rs, which are also

commonly found in facilitator training manuals and are now available on rjcolorado.org under

the tab "RJ Defined."[16] These definitions are not operational, at least not by the standards of

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[16] Rjcolorado.org also cites 5 defining principles outlined by Howard Zehr; this was added to the site after the data for this project was collected.

Implementation Science, but their expansiveness and flexibility may add to their use value and prolificity rather than detract. Clearly, the 5 Rs are an important text that organizes RJ in Colorado. The extent to which practitioners recalled and referenced each "R" in interviews suggested that some are more salient than others in everyday practice. Responsibility and respect were the most frequently identified and discussed, while reintegration was the most often forgotten.

In addition to stating its purpose (harm repair) and values (5 Rs), practitioners also defined RJ by its applications—when it is appropriate to use. There was wide agreement, particularly among those practicing in the independent sector, that RJ should not be limited to certain kinds of crimes. Specifically, veteran practitioners rejected the idea that it is only for low-level offenses or juvenile offenders even though those types of cases are likeliest to be referred to RJ. Instead, they identified the offender's willingness to take responsibility as the key criterion for determining if a case is suitable.

Lastly, many, though not all, practitioners emphasized that RJ is a form of community justice, and as such, should be controlled by stakeholders in an offense rather than professionals and/or the state. Some people saw this as integral to RJ's definition—that those with a stake in an offense should decide what is needed to set things right (a paraphrase of Howard Zehr's definition). Some people extended this concept to include participant self-determination as a key value, and most people remarked that RJ participation must be voluntary. Philosophical disagreements about stakeholder control and self-determination were not evident; however, there were divergent ideas about what was required to fulfill these principles in practice.

Not surprisingly, ambiguity arises around what counts as taking responsibility and when leeway is appropriate, as well as how to allow for stakeholder control while also

professionalizing RJ and pursuing consistency and quality control. Practitioners must exercise

practical wisdom to balance competing needs. As we will see in the next section, principles that

guide action in ambiguous situations are central to practitioner conceptualizations of fidelity.

Fidelity

Although the practitioners interviewed for this study did not all find the term fidelity

resonant or compelling (and the word elicited an occasional eyeroll), they almost always

expressed some concern about "seeing things called RJ that are not RJ." The basic worry was

that inexperienced practitioners and/or poorly implemented programs would harm people and/or

discredit the practice. Such concerns were heightened by the rapid expansion of RJ in a context

where, as one participant put it, "anyone can hang a shingle and call themselves an RJ

practitioner."

According to many interview participants, inexperienced or poorly trained practitioners

claiming to provide RJ could expose vulnerable people—particularly victims—to manipulation,

false promises, and negative or even retraumatizing experiences. Poor implementation can also

harm community safety. For example, one practitioner relayed a story about a school that

claimed to be doing RJ but "it was overly permissive, and they didn't understand [RJ] because

they didn't have that gradual implementation over three to five years." Instead, they

immediately replaced traditional discipline practices with RJ. "It was like, boom, no more

suspension, and the teachers are like, 'what the f do we do with these kids.'" Beyond creating

chaos for the school, experiences like this one feed the public perception that RJ is permissive

and ineffective—a classic cautionary tale about implementation.

Another practitioner underscored how RJ as a field is harmed when the label "RJ" is

applied too liberally:

> There are practices that are restorative that aren't restorative justice. For the integrity of the field and for us to be taken seriously as professionals we need consistency and professionalism in our practice. It's important that we are allowing people to decide for themselves. Because that's what we're saying that we're doing.

Similar sentiments are echoed in other data sources. For example, in 2014, focus groups were conducted around the state to identify legislative priorities for RJ (130 participants). Top priorities that reflect the need for fidelity emerged across groups and included "consistency and quality in service delivery" and ensuring conformity of practice to guiding principles, standards, and code of ethics. In short, the consensus in the field is that fidelity matters. However, views on what fidelity means and how it should be achieved vary considerably, and the risks of infidelity are balanced against dangers of rigid, exclusionary versions of fidelity.

Defining Fidelity

Three working definitions of fidelity emerged from the data: fidelity as structure, as consistency, and as integrity to values. These definitions are not mutually exclusive. Notably, how practitioners defined fidelity depended on the problems they wanted it to solve or feared it would create. Quality assurance is a theme that runs through all three definitions.

Fidelity as Structure, Support, and Gatekeeping. Drawing on experiences in other human service fields, particularly mental health, some practitioners defined fidelity as a set of specific institutional arrangements designed to scale practices while also regulating them. In this case, fidelity practices include training, coaching, supervision, monitoring, licensure, and, often, fees to become a practitioner. This definition aligns with the prototypical case of implementation described in Implementation Science and evidence-base practice literatures in which innovations are controlled by a governing body (e.g., professional association or government entity) or owned (literally as IP) by purveyors (e.g., the innovation's developers).

Those who defined fidelity in this way recognized pros and cons associated with it. Pros included a lot of support and clarity about how to do a practice, which is particularly useful when an organization is starting from scratch. Whereas many RJ practitioners expressed concern about central control, tight regulation, and inappropriate homogenization of RJ that might occur from packaging and scaling it in this way, the ones who offered this definition of fidelity instead emphasized the enabling aspects of rules and regulations. They noted, for example, how helpful it would be to be supplied with training materials and coaches, and described challenges they faced with starting their programs that would have been alleviated if the guidance they received had contained more procedural specificity. The major downside of fidelity mentioned by those who described it in this way was expense, which they said would likely be prohibitive. Overall, this version of fidelity depicts innovations as rule generated.

Fidelity as Consistency. Far more common than the institutional definition just described was the idea that fidelity means consistency. Consistency was prized for supporting system integration, equity of access, learning, and quality assurance. Consistency in case management practices (from referral through completion) was particularly important to referring agencies (e.g., diversion, probation, law enforcement and DA's offices). In these contexts, large caseloads make efficiency and predictability of outcomes desirable. As one officer[17] explained, "when I know what I'm going to get, I'm more likely to refer."

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[17] I use the generic "officer" to indicate that a participant was employed in the criminal justice system. To protect anonymity, I have avoided more specific labels. "Officer" refers to both law enforcement and officers of the court—including judges, probation officers, diversion officers, and district attorneys.

Another officer detailed how RJ can run amok of the procedural clarity to which criminal

justice professionals are accustomed, and how referring cases to external RJ service providers

can feel like subjecting public safety to a trust fall. Typically, she explained, "you know, if this

kid does this, they're gonna go to probation and do this, this, and this, and if they screw up,

they're going back to court and then this, and if they screw up again, then this." Such a norm

contrasts quite starkly with the proposition, "they're gonna go to RJ and talk about how they feel.

And they're all gonna come together, and you have no say in what they come up with as their

consequence." Discomfort with this squishiness and lack of control motivated her agency to be

more involved with processing RJ cases internally rather than referring to external providers, at

least initially. "How do I know that we're maintaining community safety if they're gonna go out

there, and… for example, they're gonna cook dinner together…and that's their consequence, that

doesn't seem right," she explained, referring to sample RJ contract item. She continued, "even

though from RJ we know that they're building community and that is the community safety

piece… it's very different from what we're used to in the traditional system."

When defined as consistency, fidelity can be a tool for coping with the dissonance many

justice professionals feel about RJ's seeming departure from the principle of equal justice under

the law. As one officer explained,

> There's a huge thing of treating similar cases similarly. From a human perspective, we
> can appreciate that they are in different places and need different things and that's why
> their circles came out differently. But from a DA perspective, you're going "those are the
> exact same kid, they're both 14, they both got caught shoplifting a snickers bar, why
> would we do something different for each kid.

In a context where fairness is understood as receiving the same consequence[18] for the same type of violation, allowing RJ participants to craft unique contracts—some of which are more time consuming, intensive, or challenging than others—can be, as the officer just quoted put it, "scary." She defined fidelity as knowing that each person she refers is "gonna get something similar," meaning, "each kid is gonna have an equal experience in terms of equal impact, not necessarily the same content or agreement items. I wanna know that the same thing is happening for each of my kids, but that might not look the same way." The idea that consistency in process and quality can alleviate discomfort about ceding control of precise content to RJ participants was echoed in many interviews. For example, a service provider aimed for "consistent offerings, not consistent outcomes," explaining, "we can control the inputs, not the outputs." However, he noted it is important to look for evidence of systemic bias in contract length and intensity. Given that a stakeholder-controlled process is a core tenant of RJ, consistency must be achieved in how the RJ circle is convened and facilitated rather than in precise content or contract items. Thus, two important targets areas for "controlling the inputs" are: (1) referral and case management processes and (2) facilitator behavior.

Consistency in the first target area implicates issues of equity and quality. For example, a few practitioners noted that how professionals describe RJ opportunities to potential participants (i.e., victims and offenders) influences their choices about engagement. Victim assistance

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[18] It bears noting that RJ contract items are not supposed to be "consequences" per se (a term RJ people tend to regard as a euphemism for punishment); they are supposed to be agreements about action needed to repair harm. The dissonance described here reflects the persistence of traditional system logics, according to which justice is administered by an impartial authority. (When justice is an authority imposing consequences, treating similar cases similarly is foundational to the legitimacy of that system. When justice is resolution of harm to the satisfaction of those involved, equal treatment may be less relevant.) In short, the dissonance described here has deep roots in philosophical differences.

coordinators, defense attorneys, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers who are responsible for informing people that RJ is an option serve—often unwittingly—as the first gatekeepers of RJ. Examples were offered where these professionals had framed RJ as a rehabilitative exercise for the offender (telling victims their participation would help the offender learn) or as a "program where they write you an apology letter and maybe do some community service." Additionally, for various reasons, these professionals may not inform all eligible parties that RJ is an option. Thus, accurate and consistent communication about RJ to potential participants is crucial for ensuring consistent and equal access to RJ as a resource.

The second target area, facilitator behavior, is managed through training, coaching, and volunteer recruitment. When asked what supports or impedes consistency, interviewees frequently emphasized the importance of facilitator attitudes, practices, and skills. In fact, facilitation practice is a major target of fidelity efforts that is viewed as consequential for both consistency and integrity to RJ principles. Referring officers who prized consistency wanted to ensure that facilitators were "doing the same thing across the board," which they said was a challenge with multiple, volunteer facilitators. Other interviewees were less concerned with similarity but nonetheless wanted to see consistent quality. Nobody interviewed suggested there is only one right way to facilitate, but there were a lot of anecdotes about "bad" facilitation (and "bad facilitators"). The noted transgressions included: inserting one's own opinions into the process, controlling the process too much, not controlling the process enough, expressing punitive attitudes, being "too soft," being "offender-focused," "having an ax to grind," and "trying to do therapy" instead of RJ. Clearly, there is a rich normative metadiscourse about facilitation. Inferring a coherent set of fidelity benchmarks for facilitation from the interview data alone would have been difficult because of differing opinions and priorities, as well as lack

of specificity about the discursive practices that would, for example, constitute the appropriate amount of control. However, the training standards (which were adopted before the interviews took place) served as a common reference point and practitioners often defined fidelity as consistent adherence to the same.

Lastly, one practitioner's take on fidelity-as-consistency stood out because it reflected a learning orientation. This person explained, "consistency allows for learning because if there's a norm, you can see if something is outside that norm and might've caused a bad outcome." From this perspective, fidelity to a standard is prized not so much as a shortcut to, or guarantee of, good outcomes, but as a tool for productive diagnostic conversations. Accordingly, fidelity is in service of knowledge, and—crucially—knowledge is situated in experience. Overall, two meanings of fidelity-as-consistency are represented in the data: one that emphasizes adherence to best practice in the service of good outcomes, and one that likens fidelity to control in the scientific process. These non-mutually exclusive versions map onto distinctions drawn within evidence-based practice (i.e., EBP as a verb vs. noun) and Implementation Science, and their significance will be discussed in the concluding chapter. I turn my attention to the third theme in how practitioners defined fidelity.

Fidelity as Integrity to Values and Principles. The third definition emphasizes alignment between principles, goals, and intentions, on the one hand, and practices on the other. For example, one practitioner said fidelity is "doing what we say we are doing" rather than following any one set of observable practices and procedures. This definition allows for multiple ways of practicing "with fidelity" and eases the concerns some practitioners had about issuing universal statements about what counts as RJ. For example, one person worried that strict universal

standards might prevent communities from taking steps toward restorative justice, essentially making the perfect the enemy of the good.

Several participants said that fidelity describes a relationship between a specific program's practices and needs. As one person explained, "Fidelity is about aligning with your principles and making sure you have a procedure that will help you get restorative outcomes in light of your program goals. It's not necessarily about deciding what is and is not restorative justice for all people and all times." Most interviewees stopped short of this program-specific view but agreed that fidelity should refer to principles/values rather than specific procedures. The most often-cited principles were the 5 Rs plus voluntariness and self-determination. Defining fidelity as integrity to these values leaves it up to programs and practitioners to decide what communicative practices will best materialize the principles in a specific situation.

The integrity-based definition reflected a widespread view that fidelity standards should not over-manage practice by, for example, requiring use of a "talking piece" (i.e., a turn-taking tool). Short of this clear example, however, the line between micromanagement and management was drawn differently by different people. Notably, a looser, values-based definition was favored by veteran practitioners and service providers—those most familiar with complexity and generally comfortable with their competence in RJ. In contrast, people starting new programs and working most closely with the criminal justice system wanted more procedural specificity. This group prioritized consistency when defining fidelity.

Though not mutually exclusive, the integrity- and consistency-based definitions reflect different perspectives on what fidelity is supposed to do and what problems it solves. When defined as consistency, fidelity serves to make RJ more reliable, effective, and usable; it is a means to learn and ensure quality through alignment with standards. When defined as integrity,

fidelity is an end in itself, such that conversations about fidelity focus on how to materialize values in practice. Moreover, the integrity definition seeks to balance fidelity with flexibility and responsiveness to local needs. It erects guardrails while allowing maneuverability in the face practical dilemmas and trade-offs. Next, I will take a closer look at how fidelity is practiced, exploring the ideal's encounters with the tensions and tangles of real-world work.

Practicing Fidelity

Clearly, aligning with core values is central to practitioners' visions of fidelity. Of course, core values can compete with each other and with practical exigencies. This section highlights some of these complexities and provides examples of how practitioners balance competing needs as they frame and navigate fidelity in everyday practice. More specifically, I look at how principles anchor practice and how fidelity practices shape principles. Through this analysis I suggest that, rather than simply bringing principles from the ideational realm into the practical realm, fidelity is an ongoing negotiation of needs. In this process, values and procedures/practices coevolve in experience.

I begin with some examples of everyday tensions and ambiguities, which illustrate one interview participant's observation that, in practice, "fidelity boils down to judgement calls, usually between two competing values." The first set of examples relate to consequential designations that are part of the RJ process, including decisions about suitability for, and

completion of, diversionary[19] RJ. *Responsibility* and *stakeholder control*, respectively, are the key principles implicated these decisions.

Case Acceptance Criteria and the Materialization of Responsibility. Responsibility[20] was considered central to the definition of RJ because it speaks to what—and who—RJ is for. As such, some interview participants also described it as a fidelity criterion. Responsibility marks the boundary between appropriate and inappropriate cases primarily because RJ does not determine guilt or innocence; that is the job of the courts. Basically, an offender who fully maintains her innocence should not be invited to learn about and repair the harm she has (not) caused. The criterion is easy to apply in cut-and-dried instances.

In practice, there is a large gray area around what counts as taking responsibility. For example, offenders may take responsibility for some misjudgment but maintain that the criminal charge was unjust. Or they may allege police misconduct but not pursue official recourse. Or they may insist that their actions were justified by the other party's conduct, or that they failed to intervene but did not author the harm. Within this gray area, RJ practitioners must decide on a case-by-case basis whether to move forward or refer the case back for traditional adjudication. Such decisions are consequential for defendants (whose criminal records are at stake in pre-sentencing contexts), for victims (who may either miss out on or have a bad experience with RJ),

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[19] As discussed earlier, diversionary RJ involves diverting individuals, typically offenders involved in minor or non-violent offenses, away from the traditional criminal justice system and into restorative justice programs as an alternative to prosecution or incarceration.

[20] Responsibility is also one of the 5 Rs, and, as such, is an ideal for how people should behave when they have caused harm. RJ's other values enable responsibility-taking by providing a path back to one's standing in the community (e.g., reintegration). Retributive justice, in contrast, discourages responsibility-taking by coding it as an admission of guilt. This aspect of responsibility did not come up in the interview data, however.

and for RJ programs, that may damage their partnerships by referring back too many cases.[21]

RJ's impact on social in/equity is also at stake, as I have argued elsewhere (Esch, 2015), because

bias in subjective judgements about offenders' intents/attitudes (and thus, suitability) can result

in RJ becoming an "escape hatch" for privileged individuals. Yet, there is no set of fidelity

criteria that could anticipate every scenario or eliminate the need for practical judgement (even if

that were desirable, which I am not suggesting).

Given this complexity, how does responsibility, as a principle, anchor the practice of

determining if a case is suitable for RJ? As we explore my findings on this topic, it is useful to

think of responsibility as a strategy rather than an end-in-itself (which is how we usually think

about principles/values); in other words, as a link that makes RJ communicate with various other

interests (see Kuhn, Ashcraft, & Cooren, 2017). I begin with an example of how an interest in

authenticity influences interpretations of responsibility-taking.

Practitioners widely agree that authentic, honest engagement by offenders (and other

participants) is key to a meaningful process. Thus, demanding full and unambiguous acceptance

of responsibility might make the facilitator's decision easier but at the cost of authentic, honest

engagement. Moreover, fuller acceptance of responsibility can be an outcome of a process that

provides insight into harm, so it may be unreasonable also make it a precondition. Additionally,

a strict interpretation of what counts as responsibility-taking might incentivize an inauthentic

performance of remorse, or simply be unrealistic because life is complicated. The latter points to

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[21] Program structure and context have significant bearing on how offender attitudes about responsibility interact with RJ opportunities. For example, in post-sentencing contexts such as probation and Department of Justice, responsibility-taking does not have to be determined at only one point in time. Rather, the offender's readiness or appropriateness for RJ may evolve over time or even be cultivated through interactions with a probation or diversion officer, so when an offender does not initially meet criteria, RJ may still become possible months or years later.

bigger and more vexing issue, which is that the justice system holds individuals accountable for actions attributable to complex, multiple, systemic factors, which it is not designed to deal with. Both traditional and restorative justice professionals can and often do demonstrate sensitivity to the realities of systemic injustice and inequity. This is seen, for example, in judicial discourse around "mitigating circumstances" and "criminogenic needs." Nonetheless, RJ is limited in its capacity to address social inequality, it tends to be aligned with law enforcement, and it arguably legitimates the criminal justice system—a major source of oppression. Moreover, the term "restoration" implies a return to right relations, which often do not exist in the first place. For all these reasons, *transformative justice* (see, e.g., Coker, 2002; Kim, 2018; Morris, 2000) has been advanced as an alternative or as a necessary supplement to RJ. While these issues cannot be resolved at the level of everyday practice in RJ programs, practitioner appreciation of them can shape interpretations of the responsibility criterion. For example, practitioners might maintain greater agnosticism about the facts of a case (e.g., rather than unquestioningly adopting the account in the police report) and be willing to work with more modest levels of responsibility-taking.

I turn now to a second set of principles and interests—victim-centeredness and doing no harm—that undergirds the practice of defining appropriate cases in terms of responsibility. These principles inform the responsibility criterion because doing RJ with an offender who denies responsibility (or is otherwise "inappropriate) might result in a revictimizing experience for the victim. This consideration inspires a somewhat more nuanced treatment of the responsibility criterion; the line must be drawn with different stakes in mind.

Importantly, how one interprets victim-centeredness (or care for victims) in turn shapes how the responsibility criterion is applied in case acceptance decisions. A shift in the local

discourse and practices around case acceptance provides insight into the evolving needs and interests that shape what it means to practice "with fidelity." I draw here on autoethnographic data. Historically, the practitioner community at the center of this study prioritized doing no harm and emphasized the importance of protecting victims from harm by vetting offenders and not moving forward with a case if, in the practitioner's judgement, there was a risk of revictimization due to the offender's attitude or behavior pattern in the preconferencing process. Accordingly, potential for revictimization was a key consideration in decisions to move forward, and the offender's acceptance of responsibility was considered highly relevant to potential for revictimization. Through this lens, we could say (to borrow Kuhn's (2019) frame) that the practice of RJ "desired protection and feared revictimization."

In the course of conducting interviews for this study, I noted a shift toward the concept of victim self-determination. The latter prioritizes transparency, informed choice, and victim empowerment over protection. Through this lens, RJ desires victim empowerment and fears paternalism. Victim self-determination was identified in interviews and documents as a key principle of RJ, and I learned through interviews that I played a role in bringing this about. I had advocated for this shift during the process of creating training standards with RJTC, and subsequent conversations and development of RJ texts carried those conversations forward. My advocacy of the victim empowerment/self-determination lens stemmed from my personal experience participating in a high-risk victim-offender dialogue as a victim of a violent crime several years earlier. The RJ practitioner who facilitated my case broke with standard practice in the field and received some criticism for accepting an "inappropriate" case. Applying the criteria of responsibility-taking and revictimization risk, in line with standard practice at the time, would have resulted in my case being deemed inappropriate and rejected. Being an RJ practitioner,

however, I advocated for myself, saying that I understood the offender did not accept

responsibility and had a generally hostile attitude but nonetheless wanted to proceed. I wanted

the offender to simply look me in the eye, and said if that happened, the experience would be

worthwhile. The facilitator determined that the offender could meet that low bar and allowed me

to decide what risk of revictimization was acceptable to me.

This narrative, along with considerations of "the victim empowerment model" in victim

advocacy and the pitfalls of paternalism, met a receptive audience in the RJTC. The training

standards created by RJTC and adopted by the state council call attention to both the principle of

victim self-determination and risk of revictimization. A subsequent document outlining

"Essential Points of Restorative Justice Practices in Colorado" incorporates victim empowerment

themes: "Offer to those harmed the option for a response that provides meaningful opportunities

for choice, voice, and engagement, including opportunities to identify harm, state needs, and

request repair."

This example sheds light on how core principles—a foundation of practice that may seem

immutable, philosophical, and, in some sense *prior* to practice—evolve in experience.

Moreover, it shows how two key fidelity texts (the training standards and essential points) reflect

a process of negotiation—a rich normative metadiscourse—in which the practice becomes a site

where various needs and interests communicate. In other words, the texts that inform what it

means to practice "with fidelity" are themselves snapshots of an ongoing conversation about how

the practice can or should serve various ends or materialize various principles. Having examined

one kind of consequential designation in RJ—that is, using responsibility as a criterion for

accepting or rejecting cases—I turn now to another.

Contract Completion and the Materialization of Stakeholder Control. In addition to deciding whether to move forward with an RJ case, practitioners must make judgement calls within a zone of ambiguity around contract completion. If an offender does not complete all items outlined in the reparative contract, there are a few options. For example, the RJ program can "fail" them and refer the case back to the courts, renegotiate the deadline, offer additional chances, and/or evaluate obstacles that prevented completion and provide support. Program staff or volunteers can (depending on program policy) make these decisions themselves or contact circle participants and allow them to decide. Even deciding what counts as contract completion requires judgement calls. For example, if a contract includes doing an art project and the offender turns in a print-out of some clip art to "fulfill" that item, how should a practitioner respond?

What does fidelity look like in these gray areas? Procedure/rule-based fidelity could be practiced by *always* having circle participants review contracts upon (in)completion—this practice exists and is known as a reintegration circle. This fidelity strategy supports consistency (of procedure if not outcomes). However, most programs do not routinely reconvene reintegration circles (and doing so would be resource-intensive). Thus, practitioners typically do need to decide when participant input is called for, making principle-guided fidelity more salient. Most interview participants activated the principle of stakeholder autonomy when contemplating such scenarios: When in doubt, allow participants to decide. This aligns with the strategy of controlling inputs rather than outputs, discussed earlier as a way to resolve dilemmas around consistency vs. stakeholder control. While this again provides procedural clarity, it does not eliminate tension and the need for practitioner discretion.

Honoring stakeholder control leaves the fate of the offender up to victims and community members whose priorities and perceptions may or may not align with those of professionals—or with other restorative values. Professionals, for example, may base their decisions on a research-based understanding of criminogenic needs and risk factors, as well as relevant but confidential information about the case. Bias is also at issue here, raising the question of whether complete discretion about giving second chances—either by circle participants or professionals—will undermine equity.

In a similar vein, some practitioners identified facilitator communication practices as a pivot point where the principle of stakeholder control can be realized or undermined. Specifically, they wanted facilitators to avoid "inserting themselves or their opinions into the process." Pursuing fidelity, accordingly, involved identifying and observing discursive practices that signal a neutral stance. This concern signals recognition of the power of framing. For example, even when stakeholders are deciding, facilitators necessarily provide a frame for participants to interpret incomplete contracts (e.g., by mentioning extenuating circumstances or asking, "does this show a good faith effort?"). Some interviewees thought it important to minimize facilitator influence because it would undermine the autonomy of the circle. It is worth noting, however, that most discourse analysts would agree that framing is inevitable. From this perspective, stakeholder control does not eliminate facilitator discretion and need for practical wisdom. Believing that facilitation can be contentless or unobtrusive may limit reflection on decisions.

So far, this examination of responsibility and stakeholder control depicts a more complex relationship between principles and practice than the term "fidelity" implies. While fidelity suggests duplication of another entity (or perhaps approximation of a platonic ideal), we see here

that the principles discussed act not just as guiding reference points or ideals to be approximated, but also as strategies for resolving tensions. Moreover, as strategies, they always and only provide guidance in relation to some other interest, need, or principal (e.g., protection, self-determination, or consistency). We have seen how practical decisions in zones of ambiguity are fraught with tension between discretion, practical wisdom, and responsivity to situated needs, on the one hand, and consistency, mitigation of bias, and fairness, on the other. A final example will show how the principle of fidelity itself—and how it is practiced—depends on the ends (or goals/purpose) toward which fidelity is oriented.

As previously mentioned, consistency in RJ as a quality "product" was central to many interviewees' visions of fidelity. This was particularly true for government employees who needed to trust that referrals to RJ would result in successful resolution/case processing, at least most of the time. Problematically, however, successful resolution of cases is not entirely within the control of service providers, and some actions they might take to maintain a strict fidelity standard—such as referring back cases deemed inappropriate for RJ or "failing" them due to inadequate contract completion—can damage relationships with referral agencies and even threaten the program's existence. Thus, we see that two versions of fidelity can come into conflict. Referring agencies need consistency in the form of a reliable, relatively predictable product. But service providers risk undermining their own fidelity standards—for example, by compromising values such as stakeholder control or standards of responsibility—to achieve reliability and predictability for their partner agencies.

To balance these two fidelity needs, one practitioner used strategic, careful infidelity. That is, he temporarily loosened fidelity to increase institutional trust. Specifically, he began accepting cases that were not a perfect fit and avoided referring failed cases back to the court in

order to make the program more responsive to the needs of referral agencies in the short term.

Once trust was established and referral processes solidly in place, he gradually retightened

fidelity. The keys to this strategy's success were transparency and tracking, which maintained

control from the perspective of inquiry about effectiveness. That is, program outcomes during

that period were properly attributed to a revised/compromised version of the practice. This

example was offered by the same practitioner who, when reflecting on the meaning and purpose

of fidelity, remarked that consistency enables learning. That is, that it is important to have norms

so that deviations can be marked. Fidelity defines norms and therefore provides a reference

point for interpreting outcomes and diagnosing problems. This view makes fidelity a tool of

inquiry—a way of systematizing practice to enable learning from experience. Fidelity, then, is

practiced in service of the goals of learning and building up systems drivers (to borrow a term

from Implementation Science). Defined in relation to these ends, fidelity can successfully

operate on a different metaphor—transparency and intentionality, for example, rather than

integrity per se.

Evaluation

I turn now to evaluation, with the primary purpose of exploring practitioner reflections on

if, how, and why RJ should be assessed. To contextualize their reflections, I first provide an

overview of the metrics and data collection strategies used in the programs studied. The

summary of metrics is based on interview data and documents provided by research participants

(e.g., data collection spreadsheets, surveys, and reporting templates), as well as an independent

evaluation of the pilot programs conducted by OMNI (2015).

How is RJ Evaluated?

The most long-standing metric of RJ processes is participant satisfaction, measured with surveys of circle participants (offenders, victims, and community members) using Likert rating scales and open-ended questions. Historically, most programs have used a single survey given after the circle process, however pre-post surveys were used in the pilot study and are increasingly common. In research studies, longer-term follow-up surveys have been conducted using psychometric tools. Sliva (forthcomingforthcomingforthcomingforthcomingforthcomingforthcomingforthcomingforthcomingforthcomingforthcomingforthcomingforthcoming), for example, uses such an approach to study the impact of RJ participation on victims' wellbeing.

The primary outcomes evaluated vary depending on process type and program goals. For example, diversion and probation programs may assess supervision goals (e.g., increased self-efficacy) along with RJ goals. The basic outcome goals assessed on surveys are victim satisfaction, perceptions of harm repair, and changes in offender attitudes such as increased empathy and/or accountability. As an example of the latter, the pilot measured changes in offender accountability using pre-post questions about harm and remorse. OMNI (2015) proposed that additional "outcomes of interest might include connection to community or family and measures of youths' beliefs or attitudes that are targeted through restorative justice practices and are predictive of reduced delinquency" (p. 18). Fidelity to the principle of voluntary participation is assessed with questions such as "it was my choice to participate in this process." Alongside these short-term outcome measures, recidivism is the key long-term outcome assessed in and beyond the pilot. Colorado's RJ legislation specifically called for examination of

subsequent arrests or filings within one year of RJ for youth who participated in the pilot, and this continues to be an important metric used in both pre- and post-sentencing RJ processes.

Finally, several implementation and process metrics are regularly collected. These include, for example, number of individuals and cases referred, referral source, offense type/level, offender demographics, victim participation, and process type (e.g., family group conference, circle). For the pilot, victim participation metrics included number of victims contacted compared to number who participated and "reason for not participating if applicable" (OMNI, 2015, p. 3).

Purposes of Evaluation

I used interviews and document analysis to assess how RJ evaluation is used and what makes it a worthwhile practice (or not) in the eyes of research participants. The two main reasons identified were learning and legitimization. That data collection supports learning may seem trivially obvious, as that is generally the explicit purpose of program evaluation. However, practitioner discourse more often constructed evaluation as a required activity for reporting to funders (with important consequences for program survival) than as a strategy to learn about and revise their practice, with some exceptions. It is not that learning and iterating were unimportant to them. Rather, reported data was often not considered relevant or useful for informing practice. The major exception to this is participant experience data, which practitioners reported using in two main (non-mutually exclusive) ways. First, some said if, hypothetically, they received a lot of negative feedback in surveys, they would, as one person put it, "rethink how we were doing things." The other way was to incorporate review of surveys into facilitator debriefs, so that participant feedback is part of the conversation about how a process went, what the facilitators did well, and what they might want to do differently. Tellingly, the examples practitioners

offered of changes they had made to practices or policies were typically not motivated by evaluation data. Rather, facilitator/staff debriefs, conversations in the broader RJ field, and feedback from community partners were the most common sources of reflexivity and revision of practices. Lastly, tracking demographic data to look for evidence of systemic bias is a very important function of quantitative data, as two interviewees noted.

The second and more prominent theme of legitimization focuses on the persuasive function of data, or, in other words, the view that evaluation is critical for demonstrating to others that RJ is valid, effective, or worthwhile. Some interviewees specifically called out the importance of "numbers" for elevating the status of RJ, particularly within the criminal justice system. For example, "showing numbers" was key to appealing to (often skeptical) "system people." Whether implicitly or explicitly, the idea that "*we* know it works" but need to convince others, and others demand numbers, often accompanied these discussions. In a half-dozen interviews, I noted eye rolls and other non-verbal behavior that signaled, on my interpretation, a stance that such reverence for numbers was perhaps a bit silly but nonetheless was a game that needed to be played. However, a smaller number of interviewees noted the importance of using data to legitimize and elevate the status of RJ without expressing any skepticism about whether this data was a reliable indicator of RJ's value.

To probe the range of views on this, I posed the question, "would it still be worth doing RJ even if it could never be shown to be 'effective'?" This question engendered much thoughtful reflection by participants on the meaning of effectiveness and the proper role of (e)valuation. Less than half of interviewees said that it would not still be worth it, signaling their agreement that current metrics provide meaningful insight into RJ's value. The rest indicated either that it would be worth it, that RJ could not be shown to be ineffective with the types of

metrics being discussed (or perhaps at all), or they rejected effectiveness as a way of framing RJ's value altogether. Next, I explore this second group of responses and the unmet needs they reflect.

Practitioner Reflections on Evaluation

Responses to the interview question posed above revealed a widely shared view among practitioners that RJ's value exceeds what can be captured through evaluation as we know it. This view showed up in variations on the idea that RJ has "intrinsic value" and that evaluation practices organized around questions of effectiveness *reduce* RJ to a tactic. Notably, this view does not simply suggest that the wrong outcomes are being evaluated but takes issue with evaluative practices that subject RJ to instrumental rationality altogether. For several participants, current evaluative discourses take an instrumental view of RJ (e.g., seeing it as a diversionary strategy or a tactic to reduce recidivism) that cheapens or does violence to something that is better understood as a way of life. The fullest version of this view reflects a deep reverence for "restorative" (a term that abridges restorative philosophy, principles, and practices) that I would describe as "restorative doesn't have to explain itself to you; you have to explain yourself to it" (my phrase). Other variations on this theme emphasize that RJ's value can be grasped (only) experientially, and thus, metrics, outcomes, and intellectual arguments are not wrong but are incomplete. For this reason, metrics cannot really invalidate the practice. In one participant's words, "there is a magic of the process; you have to see it to understand it." This sentiment was widely echoed, although not always in those terms (some of the folks interviewed have publicly advised other practitioners that "magic" is a poor rhetorical choice when talking to DAs or law enforcement about RJ). One person offered this reflection:

Would it be worth it to keep doing RJ even if we didn't have evidence of its efficacy? I think so because witnessing the process, you see that this mindset could change the world. To experience looking at harm in a restorative way rather than a punitive way is of value to the world. So I think it's worth it, if we weren't having the outcomes that the DA's office wanted. There's a philosophical component that is difficult or impossible to quantify with evidence.

The idea of an unquantifiable philosophical component dovetails with the next set of findings I wish to examine. By coding the interview data for implicit and explicit theories about why RJ works and/or is great, I identified two prized aspects of RJ that are not (or cannot be, depending on who you ask) evaluated. The first relates to individual psychology. It is that RJ shifts how participants—mostly offenders—understand their actions and relationships. For example, reorienting toward harm (rather than focusing on, e.g., avoiding punishment or feeling persecuted) motivates people to behave differently in the future. Numerous practitioners described a palpable "mental shift" or "lightbulb moment" that can be observed in RJ processes, indicating that, for example, "the kid 'gets it.'" As previously noted, there are efforts to measure changes in offender attitudes using pre-post surveys. However, interviewees who emphasized the importance of this shift generally felt that such metrics did not capture it. For this reason, according to several practitioners, the best (or only) way for people to understand the impact of RJ is for them to sit in a circle and experience it themselves. Thus, diversion, probation, and law enforcement officers who are unfamiliar with RJ but are asked to make referrals are sometimes invited to participate as community members. For many observers and practitioners, this "shift" helps explain why RJ is associated with lower recidivism. Diversion and probation officers who reported having observed a shift in their clients' attitudes or thinking through RJ were particularly enthusiastic about this aspect.

The second prized aspect of RJ not captured in evaluation is broadly cultural rather than individual. That is, RJ represents what a culture *would do* if it valued the 5 Rs. In other words, RJ behaves as if individuals matter to communities and are not disposable, and as if we need each other and are deeply interdependent, and as if each of us is fundamentally caring and capable of empathy. Doing what people would do if these things were true, in some sense makes them truer. Thus, there is a performative[22] value of RJ that, as some people see it, is outside of instrumental reasoning or questions of effectiveness. For example, one practitioner described how RJ processes carry a logic that both posits and brings about a particular way of relating to each other:

We are a web of people intricately connected. This isn't just an idea, it's real. That's what the circle is about. RJ acknowledges this; it out of that space of believing that when the right hand is hurt the left hand feels the pain, out of believing that when one person hurts another, rather than being punished, they should be given the opportunity to offer or contribute something of value.

The following quotation from a long-time practitioner brings both the individual and cultural change themes together:

To give something meaningful requires that one be viewed as someone of value, someone who has value, who has integrity, who has intrinsic value. And that is shifting the consciousness of the person who has created the harm. This is key to where that transformation comes from. If you hurt me and I just get angry and punish you or try to hurt you back, it doesn't do anything to

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[22] I use the word *performative* in the way that Judith Butler and feminist theorists use it, to mean RJ enacts a reality; not in the way it is used in ordinary language to denote inauthenticity.

jog you into a different consciousness. But if I look at you, truly respecting you as someone of value and worth, and engage you, collaborate with you about you hurting me, that changes you. That changes people.

This excerpt suggests that a logic of relationship is baked into the practice. By telling people who have caused harm that we need something from them, we communicate that they have something valuable to give. This is a radically different message about an offender's value/standing in a community compared to the one implied by processes that punish, isolate, or exclude the guilty. For this reason, the practitioner insisted, "it [RJ] isn't just this alternative, this tactic, this thing over there. It is a way of life, a way of looking at the world."

Overall, many interviewees regarded evaluation as a necessary and important practice for both legitimating and testing the effectiveness of RJ. At the same time, many worried that RJ's intrinsic value is undermined by a focus on outcomes. My interpretation of this theme is as follows. Measuring what can be measured, because it is measurable, (even if it is not a perfect indicator of value) is a common phenomenon not unique to RJ. In fact, recognition that metrics are not perfect is central to the evidence-based practice movement in its original form. But defining effectiveness in terms of an outcome like recidivism carries a risk, even when the limitations of measurement are acknowledged. Specifically, it can shape public discourse such that "effective" is taken as synonymous with "worthwhile," so impact on recidivism becomes the exam of RJ's worth. Meanwhile, there is not a consensus that RJ's worth should depend on its impact on recidivism, although impact on recidivism is an important question for government entities wondering whether RJ will help them further their mandates. The overarching concern is that a particular question of instrumental value supplants a general question of worth.

Discussion

As this summary of findings shows, RJ practitioners have diverse views on the meaning and usefulness of fidelity and evaluation practices. These views are rooted in diverse needs, priorities, and positions within and outside of the justice system. They reflect thoughtful engagement with complex epistemological, axiological, and practical quandaries, as well as recognition of multiple competing needs and values. Navigating this complex landscape requires practical wisdom and adaptive leadership, and the data provides compelling examples of both. Having surveyed the challenges, strategies, and philosophies that shape the terrain of RJ practice, I return now to discourses of evidence-based practice and Implementation Science, as influential sites of work on the science-practice relationship in human services.

I begin with a brief look at how the frameworks of evidence-based practice and Implementation Science can usefully inform RJ, and how they can speak to some of the issues and concerns practitioners relayed in the data. First, applying the most basic insight of Implementation Science, we need a way to answer the question, "are we doing RJ" that does not depend upon demonstrating particular outcomes. Separating implementation metrics from outcome metrics will help with the dual goals legitimizing and improving RJ practice. It will help with legitimization by ensuring that failures are properly diagnosed and attributed. For example, many RJ practitioners are familiar with the dilemma of not receiving enough referrals and therefore accepting cases that are not a good fit for RJ because they need to both do what they have set out to do and justify the program to funders. Case numbers are important as an indicator of the scope of a program's impact (e.g., how many people benefited). However, this needs to be understood as an implementation metric. When brought to bear on conversations about value-for-money, this data doesn't answer the question "Is RJ delivering" but rather "Is RJ

being delivered." Explicitly, deliberately, and repeatedly emphasizing this distinction when engaging in valuative discourse will support better attributions and better practical responses. For example, low case numbers and questionable cases should trigger conversations with referring agencies. That said, separating implementation and outcome metrics does not go far enough toward clarifying the various valuative conversations happening simultaneously—more on this in the next section.

Next, Implementation Science provides more resources for balancing needs for fidelity and flexibility than most practitioners realize. I will highlight a few useful concepts. First is the notion that innovations are rule-generated and contingency shaped. This means that rules are needed to get practitioners started with a practice but as they develop practical wisdom through experience they can practice with fidelity without relying on rules; thus, the need for flexibility can co-exist with rules. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that new programs wanted clearer rules while established programs feared rigidity. But practitioners and policy makers who understand that rules can be enabling (rather than just constraining) can better support new programs.

Also useful is how Implementation Science depicts implementation drivers as integrated and compensatory. Specifically, by positing that organization, competency, and leadership drivers are "integrated and compensatory," Fixsen and Blase (2021) provide a commonsense causal model without any single relationship of causal necessity. A deficit in leadership, for example, can be compensated by exceptionally competent practitioners and vice versa. Wisdom about how to make strategic sacrifices is already evident in the RJ community—recall the example of the leader who strategically compromised fidelity to improve systems drivers (build institutional trust to increase referrals) before ramping fidelity back up. Strict fidelity can undercut adaptive leadership, while adaptive leadership can include careful, tracked, above-

board infidelity. Understanding this can help practitioners see, once again, how fidelity can be enabling, not just constraining.

Although Implementation Science and evidence-based practice provide valuable (and underleveraged) tools and insights, which go beyond what I can cover in this space, these frameworks leave some important challenges unaddressed. The central issue is not one that either framework purports to address but rather is a side-effect of the way evidence-based practice has been taken up in broader discourse. The result is a collapsing of valuation and evaluation, in which the latter mostly supplants the former. Evaluation deals with questions of effectiveness—whether the practice is producing specific outcomes. Valuation encompasses evaluation as well as the larger question of whether the practice is worth doing, factoring in considerations such as effectiveness, cost (including opportunity cost), and less tangible issues that I will expand upon below. The theme of valuation vs. evaluation runs through several specific challenges.

First, we have seen that there are prized aspects of RJ that are not captured in evaluation. Chief among these is the practice's constitutive potentialities: its capacity to constitute cultural realities and its status as both reflector and propeller of restorative ideals and norms of interaction. In other words, part of RJ's value as a theory of justice is that theory's performative potential (i.e., its potential to bring about the realities it purports to describe). To understand performative value, we must understand cause and effect as mutually constitutive, which is a bit different from our everyday, commonsense notion of causality.

As one example of performative value, consider how behaving *as if* the 5 Rs matter makes them matter. This is why the 5 Rs are relevant both to fidelity and outcomes. RJ makes sense as a strategy if we live in a world where consequences for actions are felt and addressed

relationally, not by recourse to authority. A world where humanity is punished by its sins, not for its sins, so to speak. We can understand RJ, and other communicative practices, as both an assertion about human existence and a hypothesis: We *are* responsible to each other. We are interdependent. And, when we behave *as if* these things are true, we make them truer.

As another example, consider the evaluative question, "Is RJ meeting victims' needs [better than other options]?" A basic understanding of this question would assume "victims' needs" are independent from the justice system. However, the judicial options available can shape victims' understandings of their needs (as can the professionals who interact with them). Consider the following example from my experience practicing RJ. When asked about his needs, a victim told me, "I need him [the offender] to get at least five years." Judging this as a strategy rather than a need, and believing a five-year sentence to be highly unlikely, I guessed what needs a five-year sentence might address for the victim: "That would be really validating. It would mean the court at least understood the gravity of this—how badly you were hurt and how not ok it is." The victim responded—affirming what felt true, correcting what I got wrong, and elaborating—and I continued reflecting/guessing at his feelings and needs. Through this conversation, a narrative took shape, and he articulated his needs without attaching them to a particular strategy. For example, he needed fairness, recovered dignity, public acknowledgement and support, a way to feel safe again. From there, we could explore various ways to meet his needs, and their fulfillment became less dependent on a judicial decision outside either of our control. Being able to offer the possibility of meeting face-to-face with the offender (along with other restorative and traditional options) meant he could think about what he needed in a different way—for example, what he wanted from the offender, from his support people, and from the community, not just what he wanted to happen to the offender.

Similarly, the availability of RJ can make it more possible for offenders to accept responsibility for their crimes. Adversarial justice discourages or disallows acknowledgement of harm or offering of apologies by coding these as an admission of guilt. In a system where guilt or innocence is the main (or only) question that matters, there is little space for responsibility to materialize. Moreover, viewing RJ as an intervention in the cultural narrative around wrongdoing and harm raises the possibility of a broader performative impact. For example, if school children experience RJ as the norm, then their impulse, upon learning they have caused harm, may be to acknowledge and repair it rather than deny it.

As these examples show, the culturally and institutionally available narratives and remedies can shape victims' experiences of their needs and desires, and offenders' ideas about what is possible. The adage about the hammer applies here: If my option is a hammer, I suppose my problem is a nail. In short, the availability of RJ can change a person's experience of the justice system, even if RJ is not used, by expanding culturally available narratives, identities, and remedies. And this represents a key motivation for doing RJ that some practitioners see as external to evaluation.

Following from this idea are three valuative questions: What world does RJ envision? Why do we want that world? And, to what extent are specific instances of RJ practice helping us get there? The concerns practitioners raised in interviews about evaluations suggest that the first two questions need more attention. Currently, evaluation is focused on the third question, and there are numerous ways of defining the "there" the practice seeks.

This brings us to the second challenge, which is that relevant professionals widely share the same definition of RJ but not the same understanding of what problems RJ is meant to solve, and what problems RJ would need to solve to be deemed worthwhile. Current implementation

and evaluation frameworks are not designed to address that last question. Meanwhile, the lack of

agreement on criteria of worthwhileness is obscured by evaluative discourses centered around

efficacy. In short, more attention is needed to the issue of having a shared problem definition.

In this study, RJ implementation floundered when professionals did not see RJ as a

strategy to address any felt difficulties they were experiencing. In these cases, they either did not

perceive problems with their current practice or did not see RJ as a solution to those problems, so

being asked to use RJ *was* the problem. The broader implication is that implementation and

evaluation difficulties arise when innovations show up as *solutions in search of a problem*. This

can happen when an innovation is used in a new setting and it is not clear to implementers that

the newly prescribed strategy is solving the problems they care about.[23]

The solution-in-search-of-a-problem phenomenon is perhaps symptomatic of a larger

mismatch between RJ and evidence-based practice/Implementation Science. That is, these

frameworks generally aim for *uptake* of innovations by organizations rather than broader reform

of systems. Getting a system to *adopt* an innovation is a lighter lift than getting a system to

reform or transform itself through (adoption of) an innovation. And RJ proponents have varied

ambitions and visions about the relationship between RJ and the existing system—whether

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[23] Differences in problem perceptions occur between organizations (e.g., probation, law enforcement, nonprofit) and between professionals in the same organization. Problem definitions vary across organizations along with basic mandates, cultures, logics of practice, and incentive structures (to name a few relevant dimensions). Naturally, different professions are oriented toward different problems and interests, victim advocacy and public defenders being two obvious examples. So, victim advocates may wonder how restitution works with RJ and public defenders may ask if it can reduce their client's sentence. I found in past interviews with police officers that those who expressed strong support for RJ described their experiences with arresting someone, only to find them back out on the street committing another crime a short while later. They viewed RJ as a promising alternative to a system that, in their direct experience, failed to restrain or reform offenders. Problem definitions also vary within organizations, for example, between leadership, management, and individuals, and within each category. These problems run the gamut from managing one's workload, to getting the boss off one's back, to protecting personal safety, to improving clients' lives.

additive, reformative, or transformative, for example. All these views were reflected in the interview data.

This issue undergirds the concern some practitioners raised about making impact on recidivism an exam of RJ's value. Certainly, to bring RJ into the criminal justice system, it is reasonable to expect that this new strategy should be able to address the problems the justice system seeks to address (e.g., recidivism). At the same time, part of the point of RJ—part of what is innovative about it—is that, as a strategy for repair of relationships, it asks that problems be defined differently.

Additionally, current frameworks do not acknowledge the rhetorical purposes of measurement and doing so might be regarded as nonscientific. However, it should not be dismissed as nonscientific, and measurement practices "speak" whether we acknowledge it or not. To elaborate, measurement practices make RJ communicate with various needs, particularly system needs. Measuring recidivism is a prime example, as it addresses the question of whether RJ can help the justice system carry out its mandate. To assert that impact on recidivism should not be a test of RJ's value, then, might be better expressed as an argument that the justice system should prize other goals more highly (e.g., a victim's right to confront an offender).

As alternative practices seek to reform an existing system, the practice can communicate with that system using different messages: one is, I can help you solve your problems (accommodating). The other is, you aren't solving the right problem. You need to define your problem differently so that it aligns with the problem I'm here to solve (radical/transformative). The data a program collects is an important way these messages are communicated. Of course, the third possible message—and likely the most practical and popular one—is a blend of accommodation and transformation. "I can help you solve your problems, plus I can help with

these other goals that you should really care about" or "we have the same goals but have been approaching them differently. Try this new way, you'll like it."

Lastly, objections to viewing RJ as a "mere" strategy, as well as difficulty separating fidelity and outcome data,[24] point to a third perceived mismatch between current evaluative frameworks and RJ. The mismatch is not that evaluation (particularly in the vein of evidence-based practice) reduces intrinsic to instrumental value but rather that the stakes of evaluation are obscured when the conversation focuses narrowly on efficacy. The question of instrumental value vs. intrinsic value is something of a red herring. As Dewey (LW:14) pointed out, means can be prized "in themselves" while still being instrumental (i.e., serving as means) to further ends. We will never reach the end of inquiry, so the status of an object as a means or an end is never fixed. Rather, the problematic situation is what constitutes something as a means or an end. In short, concerns about RJ being viewed instrumentally point to a disagreement about relative valuations of desired ends for criminal justice.

In addition to describing situated ideals and practices in the field of RJ, this chapter's exploration of fidelity and evaluation has generated several practical and theoretical insights. Broadly, the analysis points to two concepts that might improve implementation of communicative practices such as RJ (RQ5), that currently are missing from discourses of fidelity and evaluation (RQ4). The first is a problem orientation. We have seen in this chapter that the contours of any one "entity"—be it a principle, like responsibility, an innovation, like RJ, or a

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[24] This was evident in interviews and meetings, where, for example, the 5 Rs were talked about as both definitive of RJ and as outcomes. Separating fidelity and outcome data is difficult when many of RJ's valued "ends" (e.g., harm repair) also define the innovation.

concept, like fidelity—take shape in relation to particular problems and interests. By extension, we cannot clearly understand the practices of definition, fidelity, or evaluation without considering the situated problems and range of felt difficulties that animate each practice. Analyzing this data with Grounded Practical Theory yielded an interesting discovery. Typically, in GPT, problems and strategies are readily apparent, while implicit philosophies must be inferred by the analyst. I found that problems were often more obscure than philosophies, and that the manner in which principles were applied to guide practice made the practice responsive to an interest or felt difficulty that was not always named.

The second useful concept is valuation. The data presented here shows that current evaluative practices and frameworks leave important valuative questions out of frame. In particular, the issue of what problems RJ would need to solve to be deemed worthwhile is glossed over in favor of more readily answerable empirical questions about effectiveness for achieving various outcomes. Additionally, the performative potential of RJ is central to its value proposition, based on my interpretation of a prominent theme in the data. A broader valuative framework might better account for this factor.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we learned that RJ practitioners understand fidelity and evaluation in diverse ways (RQ3). Regarding the former, three main definitions emerged from the data: fidelity as structure, as consistency, and as integrity to values. Some practitioners view fidelity as a set of specific institutional arrangements and regulations designed to scale and control RJ practices, including training, coaching, supervision, and monitoring. Others emphasize the importance of consistency and adherence to established norms and practices. Most prominently, fidelity is seen as maintaining integrity to the values and principles of RJ. However,

practitioners note that upholding one principle often means compromising another. Thus, practicing fidelity to core principles is not only a matter of replicating abstract ideals but also of weighing priorities in the face of inevitable trade-offs. For this reason, the relative importance of RJ principles must be determined in context.

Fidelity is important for RJ practitioners because it serves as a tool for quality assurance, learning, and building trust and credibility. At the same time, practitioners worry about the potential for inappropriate homogenization of RJ practices and lack of responsivity to local circumstances. Similarly, they worry that formal fidelity practices may hinder progress and prevent communities from taking steps towards restorative justice. They face challenges in balancing structure and flexibility, navigating contextual complexities, interpreting and adapting fidelity, and accessing adequate training and support for implementing RJ practices with fidelity.

RJ practitioners navigate the challenges of fidelity by adopting strategies that prioritize learning, transparency, and responsiveness to stakeholder needs. They use RJ principles as resources for navigating ambiguities, making sense of competing needs, and resolving tensions in practice. Overall, this chapter depicts a complex relationship between fidelity and the goals, values, and principles of RJ practitioners. RJ practitioners value fidelity while also acknowledging the challenges and tensions associated with it.

In terms of evaluation, RJ practitioners held varying opinions about the usefulness of current practices for purposes of learning and legitimation (RQ3). Formal data collection was typically valued more as a tool for legitimation than learning, although participant surveys were widely regarded as a useful for practice improvement. The interviews surfaced conflicting views about the appropriateness of current metrics, most notably recidivism, as indicators of RJ's value. Most practitioners felt that evaluation practices focus on measurable outcomes and

instrumental value while failing to capture the intrinsic, experiential, cultural, and performative value of RJ. These findings suggest that there is an important distinction to be made between evaluation (assessing effectiveness) and valuation (assessing worth and value).

This chapter has surfaced several RJ implementation challenges that are not addressed by current frameworks (RQ4). The findings suggest that the current paradigm of evaluation, with its focus on outcome-determined effectiveness, is insufficient for informing decisions about whether RJ is worthwhile and how it can be improved. Further, we see that practicing fidelity to core principles is not only a matter of replicating abstract ideals but also of weighing priorities in the face of inevitable trade-offs.

Recognizing RJ's multifaceted and evolving ideals and claims to value, we need to expand our schema for how to make practice accountable through inquiry. Current approaches to evaluation and fidelity, rooted in evidence-based practice and Implementation Science, are heavily dependent on outcome metrics as the source of accountability. Differently stated, outcome metrics are carrying a lot of weight when it comes to making human service practices accountable to the public interest. This is suboptimal, given the limitations of measurable outcomes when it comes to both value assessment and iterative improvement of RJ practice.

To better meet the learning and assessment needs of RJ, we need an evaluative metadiscourse that increases sensitivity to multiple and evolving claims to value, and which facilitates discovery of new problems, priorities, and visions of an ideal future that arise in implementation. We can move in that direction by tweaking how we frame the basic problem of implementation. Specifically, a broader problem definition is needed, which makes intentions (i.e., ends, goals) an object of inquiry and iterative improvement, instead of focusing exclusively on questions of efficacy and strategies for fulfilling pre-given intentions. This more expansive

framing is captured in the question: How can we scale communicative innovations on purpose to align impact with intentions *and adaptively improve our intentions, goals and strategies along the way*? This question acknowledges that our ideals for a practice can and should evolve through inquiry and that empirical data can and should inform that evolution.

In the next chapter, I address the all-important question of how we might address that question at the level of practice in fidelity and evaluation. I propose Inquiry-engaged Practice (IEP) as a normative ideal for implementation and evaluation of communication-based innovations like RJ. In addition to articulating the purpose and aims of IEP in greater detail, I offer tangible examples and possibilities for how to cultivate practices of evaluation and fidelity to better embody the ideal of engaged inquiry.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This dissertation has unfolded as an extensive exploration into the realm of restorative justice implementation and its interplay with evidence-based practice and Implementation Science. Through the lens of RJ implementation, the dissertation addressed questions of how best to define, replicate, and evaluate communication-based innovations. It discussed challenges arising from the dual status of RJ as both a social movement and a social service. The complexity of reconciling RJ's foundational relational ethos, diverse manifestations, and multiple claims to value with policy and evaluation requirements emerged as a central theme, echoing broader challenges in human service organizing. Empirical exploration of efforts to entify and evaluate communication practices—both in Implementation Science and RJ—implicated major ontological and epistemological quandaries in communication studies and fueled the development of a pragmatist approach to relational ontology and methodology.

Insights gleaned from fieldwork with RJ practitioners and an analysis of Implementation Science literature illuminated a variety of challenges, strategies, and philosophical underpinnings in these fields. This analysis spurred deeper reflection on the use of scientific inquiry to address public problems in human service contexts. Communicative-relational ontologies came to the forefront through a relational analysis of Implementation Science literature. The notion of pragmatist relationality emerged as a metatheoretical perspective that reimagined the relationship between substantialist and relational ontologies.

This final chapter unfolds as follows. First, I flesh out pragmatist relationality and discuss its implications for relational communication scholarship. Specifically, I discuss how applying relationality as a metatheoretical lens on Implementation Science revealed some interesting strawpeople in the ontological literature and led me to view entification as a *process*

analogous to semiosis. Next, I summarize pragmatist relationality before moving on to present the practical upshot of this theoretical work.

Synthesizing the empirical findings and theoretical work of the dissertation, I discuss the limitations of *effective intervention* as a paradigm for understanding communicative action and the research–practice relationship in community service organizing. I argue that an expanded framework of inquiry is more appropriate for cultivating communicative praxis in human services, and I present *engaged inquiry* as a normative ideal to fill that gap. To make the concept tangible, I explore implications and possibilities for how inquiry-engaged practice might shape practices of evaluation and fidelity. I recommend several practical tools, which include the use of implementation narratives in evaluation, novel conversation prompts and problem frames for discussion of fidelity, and strategies for linking actions to intentions when writing practice profiles, fidelity criteria, and training materials. In the remainder of the chapter, I present recommendations for supporting successful RJ implementation, summarize this study's contributions to communication theory, and outline directions for future research.

Implications for Relational Scholarship

Over the past 30+ years, scholars of the ontological turn have sought to transcend Cartesian dualisms and replace substantialist thought with novel analytic approaches that "depict social reality instead in dynamic, continuous, and processual terms" (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 281). What relational ontology requires at the level of methodology, and just how sweeping or radical its implications are, remain open topics of debate. Can relational perspectives provide constructive tools for engaged research? Can they usefully inform mission-driven inquiry to improve outcomes in community service organizing? Based on the existing body of relational literature in Organizational Communication, I find it difficult to defend affirmative answers to

these questions. What stands in the way, as I see it, is an enduring focus on questions of representation, a relative neglect of the ontological significance of experiential problems, and an overzealous dismissal of all things "substantialist."

As relational perspectives have evolved in recent decades, a critical feature of early transactional ontology—the idea that inquiry begins and ends in experience—has become attenuated. As a result, relational ontology essentially continues in the tradition of Saussure's dyadic, postmodern semiotic, which is characterized by a preoccupation with questions of representation. Thus, amid much (justified) ado over the subject-object relationship in recent ontological literature, the experiential difficulties that constitute subject and object as such are too often left in obscurity. What has been lost, in other words, is the *why*, or the motivating purpose, the incitement to inquiry as an anchor, driver, participant, constituent in the unfolding of experience—the agency in agential cuts.

Additionally, a dilemmatic framing of social inquiry as *either* relational *or* substantialist has unnecessarily taken away serviceable analytic resources and restricted the scope of relational methodologies. At the beginning of his influential *Manifesto for a Relational Sociology*, Emirbayer (1997, p. 281) declared, "Sociologists today are faced with a fundamental dilemma: whether to conceive of the social world as consisting primarily in substances or processes, in static 'things' or in dynamic, unfolding relations" (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 281). However, the analysis presented in the preceding chapters suggests that this stark framing is unnecessary and unhelpful. It contributes to a sense of being stuck in binaries and makes it harder to address practical problems with relational inquiry.

The remedy, I argue, lies in pragmatism's complex notion of experience. By realigning with its pragmatist roots, relational ontology can interface more smoothly with empirical data

and other research traditions without losing integrity. In service of this vision, I have presented pragmatist relationality as a metatheoretical sensibility and analytic approach for communication research.

<div align="center">**Pragmatist Relationality**</div>

Pragmatist relationality is characterized by two key features. First, it replaces the dilemmatic view of relational and variable analytic approaches with a processual view, in which entities and relations are viewed as a spectrum of abstraction. In this view, we move back and forth along this spectrum of abstraction as we transact with our environment in a process of inquiry. Just as the meaning-making potential of a language expands through movement between grammatical classes, our capacity for intelligent action expands as we punctuate and repunctuate experience, moving back and forth between nominal and verbal depictions of practice. As part of this perspective, relational analysis is characterized as a shift to a metatheoretical perspective—where we see frames within frames and study the process of framing—rather than as a dramatic reversal per se.

Within a pragmatist relational frame, epistemology can be likened to a semiotic. However, in lieu of a dyadic semiotic consisting of a signifier (categories) and a thing signified, pragmatist relationality adopts a triadic semiotic (a la Peirce). In this view, a "third" component, similar to Pierce's implied, embodied interpreter, but which I will re-cast as the problem driving inquiry, anchors the coevolution of subject and object. Ontological acts, the acts of describing and representing reality, are influenced by and anchored to the needs and interests of the inquiry. This aligns with the idea that description follows purpose, and axiology (the study of values) is prior to ontology (the study of reality). It does not make sense to think of variable analysis as the antithesis of relational epistemology. Instead, there is a spectrum of abstraction, in which

categories mark analytic areas that must be held stable for the sake of further inquiry. These categories are not arbitrary—agential cuts are made for a reason, for the sake of inquiry—but, as relationality points out, nor are they 'essential.' They are not essential, as in, they are not the only way to carve up reality. The thing that makes them non-arbitrary is the source/reason for the inquiry.

The second defining feature of pragmatist relationality is the use of a new correspondence theory of truth. Critiquing substantialist assumptions without identifying experiential consequences of using those assumptions in the given instance perpetuates an implicitly realist debate and contributes to an enduring treatment of knowledge as a primarily representational enterprise. In contrast, when we fully embracing the idea that inquiry begins and ends in experience, we come to see knowledge claims as answers to specific problematic situations. Accordingly, we evaluate knowledge claims as answers to problems rather than as mirrors of nature (to borrow Rorty's phrase).

As an analytic approach, pragmatist relationality focuses on finding the "correspondent" to a truth claim (or an entity), which is to say, the interest, need, or experiential difficulty the truth claim or entity answers to. The analyst asks, what problems is this strategy answering? The strategy could be a metric, a practice, a framework, a communication event.

An embrace of pragmatist relationality as presented above carries several broader implications for ontological theorizing. First, pragmatist relationality sits somewhat uneasily with the commitment to posthumanism that characterizes the contemporary material turn (see Kuhn et al., 2017). Perhaps this is why the pragmatist emphasis on experience has not been fully retained as transactional ontology has gained steam. Although Dewey was an unabashed humanist, contemporary pragmatism can and should develop a more nuanced stance. To do so,

we can start by discussing the problems posthumanism addresses and reevaluating the philosophical commitments that are required to ameliorate those problems. Furthermore, we need to rethink the compatibility of more stringent versions of posthumanism with the other relational premises. For the pragmatist, our knowledge *is* our intervention in experience; knowledge is a transaction with experience. This gives the human inquirer an irreducible significance, but it does not imply that humans are the center of the universe or the most important unit of analysis. At the metatheoretical level, humanism is unavoidable because humans are the ones asking the questions and engaging in inquiry. If knowledge is transactional, as Dewey's proposes, then it is necessarily tied to human difficulties and agency. Relational theorists can embrace this version of humanism while still appreciating the complexities of non-human agency the limitations of human intentionality. A deeper exploration of this issue is beyond my scope but the implication is worth noting.

Another important implication of pragmatist relationality, which I have already touched on, is the possibility of a more ecumenical approach to relational methodology. I argued in Chapter 4 that the more adversarial versions of relationality unnecessarily remove serviceable analytic tools. Their removal is unnecessary because relational ontology does not warrant or require a sweeping rejection of the methods associated with postpositivism. Dewey, notably, rejected positivism's realist assumptions as untenable but embraced its experimentalism wholeheartedly. And we saw an example in Chapter 4 of how variable analytic science can be practiced within a pragmatist relational paradigm.

Furthermore, relational ontology can entertain substantialist metaphors without contradicting itself by conceiving of "mattering" as a process that involves slippage between states of being and activity. Cooren's (Kuhn et al., 2017) depiction of materiality as a spectrum

lends itself to this kind of thinking. The notion of ontological multiplicity (Mol, 2002) is also serviceable here, as we can understand substantive and actual/practical/relational mattering as a kind of ontological multiplicity.

Finally, pragmatist relationality has implications for the practice of scholarly critique. In a pragmatist relational paradigm, it is important that critiques go beyond *challenging* assumptions and instead identify a specific problem or consequence. For this reason, the genre of critique may not be the best vehicle for advancing relational perspectives. Critique, of course, is indispensable to the advancement of collective intelligence. Deconstructing, problematizing, and challenging prevailing understandings is how we test ideas and improve experience through inquiry. But productive critiques do more than point out that models are simplistic while reality is complex and nuanced. (The point of models is to reduce complexity.) Productive critiques identify the specific interest that is ill-served by a model, ideally an interest that is relevant to the experiential problem to which the model answers. And pragmatist relationality underscores the importance of this point.

In conclusion, to develop useful theoretical reconstructions and normative claims (Craig & Tracy, 1995) about organization as process of becoming, relational thinkers should pay more attention to the axiological dimension of ontological representations. By embracing pragmatism, we can let go of preoccupation with representational questions—*Does nature have "kinds" of things? Can categorical affiliations explain social action? How can we speak of a world of happenings?*—and instead (or in addition) focus on the criteria that regulate the becoming of practices. We can productively contemplate these criteria as designs for inquiry and practice. Trying to identify the relevance criterion that underwrites ontological acts can help with this, as can looking for the correspondence between representational choices and experiential problems.

Next, we'll look at how these ideas can expand current frameworks of implementation and evaluation in human services, and address some of the challenges of implementing communication practices.

Limitations of *Effective Intervention* as a Paradigm for Communicative Action

Evidence-based practice and Implementation Science focus, respectively, on (1) identifying effective interventions capable of producing good results, and (2) identifying effective strategies for implementing interventions with fidelity. The role of efficacy research, in other words, is to figure out "what works" and the role of implementation research is to figure out what works for getting "what works" into practice. Clearly, this paradigm revolves around the idea of *effective intervention*. As others, most notably Biesta (2007) and Trinder (2012) have pointed out, evidence-based practice rests on assumptions about the nature of professional practice and the role of research that were developed in the context of medicine and have since been imported into other fields. Biesta argued that *intervention* is not an appropriate way to conceptualize professional action in the field of education, and that the role of education research should not be restricted to "questions of efficacy and effectivity" (p. 1). I will echo some of Biesta's arguments as I highlight the limitations of *effective intervention* as a paradigm for restorative justice and, more broadly, as an epistemology for cultivating communication practices in community service contexts.

There are two main assumptions of the *effective intervention* paradigm that cause trouble when not contextualized within a larger framework of practical inquiry. First, in focusing narrowly on effectiveness, the paradigm positions intentions and desired ends as a given, presumably already known and decided before inquiry begins. This leaves knowledge projects to focus on the empirical work of getting from intention to impact and limits the role of inquiry

to answering technical questions. Second, and relatedly, the paradigm depicts knowledgeable practice largely as adherence to research-based strategies, suggesting that research influences practical decision making primarily by providing information about what works.

Assumptions about Intentions, Strategies, and Impact

In line with the effective intervention paradigm, Implementation Science provides strategies for aligning intentions with impact, while leaving questions about intentions and desired impact out of scope.[25] However, there is a complicated relationship between intentions, strategies, and impact—the kind of relationship that communication scholars are keen to call "mutually constitutive"—and tangible problems arise when inquiry begins and ends with sharp distinctions between actions–outcomes and facts–values. Some *un*safe assumptions we ought to be cautious about include: Intentions are straightforward; there is consensus about the nature of problems and the meaning of success; and desired ends are coextensive with measurable outcomes.

This study's findings challenge all of these assumptions, introducing wrinkles in the notion that intentions are necessarily clear, consistent, and measurable. Intentions are not necessarily straightforward and static, in part because the survival of innovations often depends on their ability to evolve and answer to multiple and sometimes competing needs and interests. For example, as RJ grows, it gains more stakeholders with diverse interests, ranging from the defense bar to prosecutors to victim advocacy organizations. Thus, RJ must be responsive to a

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[25] To be clear, leaving some questions out of scope is more than fair; it would not be reasonable to expect Implementation Science or efficacy research to address everything. The problem, as I see, is not the effective intervention paradigm itself but rather the absence of a broader framework that situates questions of effectiveness within a bigger ecosystem of practical inquiry.

wide range of needs without becoming alienated from its own essence, however defined. This reality underscores the importance of separating questions of fidelity from questions of effectiveness toward specific outcomes, as emphasized in Implementation Science. However, additional considerations for fidelity arise when we consider that an innovation can address multiple problems simultaneously and can appropriately be used in multiple contexts. The context-specific problems that the innovation addresses naturally shape the local practice and render some elements of the practice more relevant than others.

Additionally, the relative importance of different outcomes naturally shifts as knowledge develops and we learn about—and create—new needs and problems. For this reason, according to Dewey, evaluation is creative, even when it takes certain valuings (i.e., ends-in-view) as given because a novel situation may require that those values be prioritized or weighted differently. Previously established priorities may not fit in a new context, so we cannot assume prior weightings will endure over time (LW:13; LW:14). Thus, valuation is part of inquiry, not something that should be considered separate or external. Simply put, the work of aligning actions with intentions is complicated when intentions are varied and evolving, as they always are to varying degrees. Thus, especially in fields like restorative justice, it is important to understand that implementation is not just about aligning impact with intentions but also managing the fundamentally dynamic nature of intentions.

Another wrinkle in the intervention paradigm arises from the weight placed on outcome measures. Sometimes desired ends are widely agreed upon and easy to operationalize.[26] As we

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[26] For example, sobriety is a straightforward outcome for substance abuse treatment and it can be measured easily with urinalysis testing.

have discussed, valued outcomes are not always easily operationalized and there is a risk of biasing our understanding of what is desirable to conform with what is most measurable. By the same token, measurable outcomes might not meaningfully signify fulfillment of needs and desires associated with the practice.

This possibility is particularly concerning given that outcome measurement influences how the practice is carried out, thus shaping what the practice is. In Chapter 4, I described how outcome measures participate in materializing innovations through fidelity assessment in Active Implementation. This example grants substance to the perplexing notion in pragmatist and relational ontology that strategies (means) and outcomes (ends) are mutually constituted. And the importance of paying attention to this phenomenon came into focus in Chapter 5 when discussing practitioner concerns about evaluation measures misconstruing the purpose of RJ. We learned that, if fidelity (as a practice) tethers an innovation to outcome measures that are alienated in some meaningful way from what many view as the purpose of the practice, then the concept of fidelity may reasonably be regarded with suspicion, as it is by some RJ practitioners interviewed for this study.

Not only are intentions dynamic and often evasive when it comes to measurement, but they are also bound up with strategies in a mutual relationship. In Chapter 5, we saw some examples of how RJ, as communication, performatively shapes experience. This performative aspect of RJ accounts for the finding that RJ is valued for reasons not intelligible within the paradigm of intervention. Aside from possibly being an effective solution for issues like recidivism, RJ reshapes our understanding of justice's purpose; that is, it paints a different picture of how crime hurts and how justice heals, enabling participants to comprehend their needs and experiences differently. RJ promotes a shift in how participants see justice,

themselves, and their community ties. From this perspective, the transformative potential of RJ lies in the way it fosters a distinct participant subjectivity compared to retributive communication.

For further consideration, recall the person quoted in Chapter 5 who, prior to participating in an RJ process, said, "I need him [the offender] to get at least 5 years [of jail time]." I used this example to highlight how culturally- and institutionally available options shape our desires and understandings of our needs, much as the lexicogrammatical structures of language shape our options for expression. After the RJ process, this person ended up submitting a victim impact statement in which he stated a preference for a sentence containing no jail time. Clearly, our goals are often refined within communication processes, even if we initially have clear expectations. While it is useful to investigate specific outcomes, a fuller understanding of value requires acknowledgement of how objectives and methods evolve together.

Differently stated, the relationship between communicative action in RJ and outcomes such as reintegration and respect, is, in some sense, internal (see Biesta, 2007, for a discussion about action and outcomes in education being internally related). For this reason, if we were to conceive of restorative communication as an independent variable and reintegration as a dependent variable, it would be hard to establish that the X and Y variables represent different "things." Not theoretically impossible, depending on how the variables are operationalized, but also not clearly epistemically productive.

When research about the serviceability of communication practices begins and ends with questions of efficacy toward predefined outcomes, we miss out on the fuller potential of inquiry to develop practical knowledge about communication. Research can shape policy and practice in

multiple ways, including by providing new ways of framing problems. New understandings of problems bring new ideas and insights about possible solutions. In this way, research can play a cultural role and not just a technical role (Biesta, 2007).

Limiting inquiry to a technical role is not only unfortunate because it results in missed opportunities; it is dangerous because it can result in stealth normativity and thus undermine open discussion about what is wrong, desirable, and possible. Normative and political decisions are often made unreflexively or by default. This can happen in subtle ways. For example, as we saw in Chapter 4, valuative work is done—implicitly and explicitly—through implementation practices such as selecting inclusion and exclusion criteria, identifying essential elements, and creating fidelity assessments. Unintended priorities and outcomes are more likely to occur when normative and empirical questions are thought to belong in separate spheres of inquiry and action. The tendency for questions about what is desirable to be obscured amid a focus on what is effective brings us to the second problem with understanding communicative action solely or primarily as intervention.

Assumptions about Knowledge in Practice

A recurring concern among RJ practitioners interviewed for this study was that fidelity practices could diminish the quality of RJ by reducing it to a rigid formula or script. This concern resonates with a broader critique of evidence-based practice, voiced by critics from various disciplines, who argue that excessive efforts to minimize variability in practice for the sake of scientific control can stifle practical wisdom. Broadly, critics have pointed out that evidence-based practice, if approached in a reductionist manner, can undermine *phronesis* (i.e., practical wisdom) and reduce the art and science of a vocation to mere *techne* (technical skill). This reductionist approach overlooks the nuanced and contextual understanding required for

effective decision-making and hampers the ability of practitioners to engage meaningfully with their craft.

The need for discretion around how to do one's job well—the ability to engage in inquiry on a small scale—is nontrivial. In fact, Dewey's critique of capitalism centered on his observation that capitalism alienates people from inquiry about how to do their work well. Echoing this sentiment, the economist Fred Hirsch opined, "the more that is written in contracts, the less that can be expected without them" (quoted in Schwartz & Sharpe, 2011, p. 198). And management scholars have long recognized autonomy as an important engagement need for workers, meaning, it is difficult to be engaged—that is, emotionally involved and motivated to exert discretionary effort—in the absence of autonomy (see, e.g., Fernet et al., 2012; Hakanen et al., 2008; Hu et al., 2011; Nikolova et al., 2019). In short, alienation from inquiry about how to practice one's craft well is antithetical to the development of practical wisdom. This risk needs to be taken seriously within the movement for evidence-based practice.

The consequences of undermining practical wisdom through excessive or inappropriate data-driven managerialism are explored at length in Schwartz and Sharpe's (2011) book, *Practical Wisdom*. In one memorable example, they recount changes to classroom teaching following the passage of No Child Left Behind. Faced with pressure to increase standardized test scores or lose funding, grade school teachers are advised to categorize their students into three tiers of performance, and focus their efforts on helping students who fall in a middle category. This strategy, teachers are told, yields maximum payoff because students in the middle category are closer to the cut-off point that defines proficiency; thus, a minor increase in their test scores translates into a consequential difference in the school's overall performance score, compared to even a larger difference of score for students falling further from the cut-off. So,

under threat of losing school funding, teachers ignore the students who need the most help—a tragic irony, especially considering the name of the legislation that incentivized this practice.

Notably, regimes of standardized testing are cited by Rosiek (2013) as an example of the kind of poorly-conceived inquiry pragmatists wish to avoid. This is because the inquiry is designed and carried out at a remove from the experiential context it is supposed to improve. In this case, the performance imperative and evaluation methods used dictate normative priorities and prevent teachers from exercising practical judgement about how to help students learn. Furthermore, questions about how to prioritize finite resources, which should be made consciously and with opportunities for public input, are rendered opaque as metrics that were supposed to make the system accountable to the public make the system accountable to the metrics. This is precisely why Biesta (2007) argued that "what works won't work in education."

Clearly, both within the realm of restorative justice and across various disciplines, concerns persist regarding the erosion of practical wisdom through systems of procedure, measurement, and surveillance. Human service organizations address thoroughly moral and political concerns such as justice, education, and health (see Biesta, 2007). Judgements about what is desirable are integral to everyday practice in these fields, making it critical to ensure that practical wisdom is not sacrificed at the altar of scientific management.

To recap, evidence-based practice and Implementation Science broadly conceive of communicative action as effective intervention. This paradigm comes with some important limitations and risks. To enhance evidence-based practice in the realm of public service organizing, we need to mitigate the technocratic and ideological potential of scientific discourse while embracing the scientific method and enriching democratic forms of inquiry. The original, process-based definition of evidence-based practice supports an emphasis on method. And,

compared to evidence-based practice alone, Implementation Science powerfully moves human service organizing in the direction of engaged inquiry by supporting the development of implementation capacity. [27] Active Implementation, with its emphasis on Implementation Teams that "move the production unit [for the innovation] on site" (Fixsen et al., 2019), can potentially reduce concerns about evidence-based practice alienating practitioners from inquiry and meaningful engagement with their craft. Still, challenges remain.

When questions of causal efficacy toward known outcomes dominate projects of knowledge and valuation, we increase the risk of stealth normativity and miss opportunities for practical knowledge. Instead, we ought to recognize a wider range of questions—including questions about what is desirable, what success looks like from various perspectives, and how to assess value—as relevant and worthy topics for research and discussion during implementation. Meaningful, informed discussion of these questions requires broad participation and an inclusive, collective practice of inquiry.

In service of this vision, the next section describes *engaged inquiry* (or inquiry-engaged practice) as an ideal for practical knowledge in human services. This paradigm adopts a nuanced understanding of how communication makes a difference and presents and expanded schema for the role of science in human services. Inquiry-engaged practice is not a competing framework, nor is it intended to be another "thing" to go along with evidence-based practice or

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[27] Discussing how to scale effective practices, Fixsen et al. (2019) tout the advantages of a system-centric approach to building implementation capacity. In contrast to an innovation-centric approach, which builds capacity to implement a specific innovation, system-centric capacity-building efforts lay the groundwork for reflexive action and controlled experimentation, which can support the use of any innovation. Creating high-functioning implementation teams is the focus of implementation capacity buiding.

Implementation Science. Rather, it is an inclusive paradigm for cultivating ethical and intelligent communication practices, which recognizes both the value of effective intervention and the need for holistic inquiry.

From Evidence-based Practice to Engaged Inquiry: Reframing Practical Knowledge

Drawing from pragmatist relationality, inquiry-engaged practice reframes what Trinder (2006) called "the appliance of science" to prioritize the holistic development and practice of *method* in a Deweyan sense. Dewey insisted that science should not be dogmatic in its conclusions, but stable in its methodologies (LW:4). This approach to practicing scientific rationality in human service organizing seeks to mitigate the potential for technocratic alienation, opaque biases, and irrationalities stemming from metricization. It does so by engaging interested parties in careful, coordinated inquiry and reflexive design work to address normative and empirical questions that arise in practice. This endeavor can be viewed as an effort to make *systems* practically wise.

Although practical wisdom has conventionally been understood as an individual trait relevant to personal decision-making, it can be usefully adapted as an ideal for rationality in systems, and particularly for navigating organizational challenges that arise from the paradoxical need for both control and adaptability. In this reimagining, rational systems are those that facilitate *collective ethical intelligence*. As discussed in the first chapter, practical wisdom refers to the ability to make sound judgments guided by ethical considerations and responsiveness to context. As a kind of cultivated ethical character, practical wisdom cannot be reduced to a set of rules or procedures but must be developed through experience and reflection.

Adapting practical wisdom as an ideal for systems means understanding evidence-based practice as a process, such that "getting science into practice and policy" (Fixsen, et al. 2005)

means getting scientific method—not just specific scientific findings—into organizational practice. Again, to optimize scientific rationality in systems, we must go beyond importing evidence-based practices into organizations and invigorate our efforts to build capacity for organizational inquiry.[28]

Within this framework for practical knowledge, inquiry is expanded along two dimensions. *Depth* is added by cultivating metadiscursive practices that increase transparency and deliberation around normative valuation. And *breadth* is enhanced by adding more voices and experiences to the inquiry process.

Adding Depth: Addressing Normative and Empirical Questions

Drawing inspiration from Craig's (1999) metamodel for communication theory, inquiry-engaged practice can be described and distinguished from prevailing evidence-based paradigms in terms of how it conceptualizes communication problems. The key problem for current paradigms is alignment between intentions and impact, while the inquiry-engaged paradigm calls more attention to problems of alignment among varied and evolving intentions (i.e., desired futures). Differently stated, the gap between ideal and actual conditions is the focal problem for Implementation Science. The inquiry-engaged approach increases attention to the problem of knowing (or imagining) the ideal. It is important to make this problem more thinkable and speakable so that differing and evolving interests, priorities, and visions for the future can be addressed in deliberative inquiry without compromising fidelity and the controlled study of

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[28] This is not to say that it is inappropriate to import evidence-based practices into organizations, but rather that these efforts are more prone to produce unintended consequences if implementation capacity is not also improved. Moreover, implementation capacity must be enriched in the direction of the ideal of ethical intelligence by enriching practices of normative deliberation.

impact it makes possible. Otherwise, technical and procedural matters tend to become (poor) proxies for working out philosophical and political questions.

As previously discussed, pragmatism provides justification and guidance for a holistic practice of inquiry in which the "things" of experimentation are not just propositions about the efficacy of means, but also value propositions about cultural ideals, theories, and philosophies. Per Dewey, we can use observation, postulation, experimentation, and judgement based on cultivated experience to test ideas about what is good and right, much like we can test ideas about what works for getting from point A to point B. We do this, for example, by taking an idea and trying to introduce counter examples and wrinkles in it, trying to show that it is not serviceable, and trying to find something more serviceable. Echoing Dewey, a culture where normative theories and ideas are subjected to experimentation is key if we are to have an adaptive and intellectually dynamic society.

It is important to note, however, that uniting normative and empirical questions within a holistic framework of inquiry does not mean we cannot temporarily "freeze" normative questions to develop empirical knowledge in the form of "if this-then that" propositions. Instead, it means expanding the scope of evaluative practice to include ongoing assessment of the serviceability of different ends-in-view (visions of the future) and outcome metrics in addition to assessments of strategic efficacy.

Adding Breadth: Engaging Practitioners and Pursuing Collective Inquiry

For holistic evaluation of means and ends to work in any meaningful sense, inquiry must be collective and collaborative. Dewey (1980) argued that something akin of practical wisdom is possible on a broader scale through democratic norms and structures, including free and open communication, that enable experimental inquiry to be undertaken collectively. This requires a

"conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 1980, p. 93) in which diverse interests can come into conversation regulated by principles of careful inquiry. In the context of evaluation and implementation, collective inquiry requires a commitment to understanding and addressing the needs and experiences of diverse stakeholders. This is a broad topic, and my space is limited, so my consideration will focus on engaging human service practitioners.

The imperative of collective inquiry has implications for Active Implementation practices, including the design of decision-support data systems and policy-practice feedback loops (see Fixsen et al., 2019). In general, the goal is to learn from diverse perspectives about how the innovation impacts upon a wide range of problems of ordinary experience. The following questions can provide guidance for decision-making about what types of data to collect and how to use that data to inform practice: How are different constituencies defining problems? What new or different problems are arising as the practice is implemented? (How) can those problems be solved while maintaining fidelity? Overall, we want to reduce distance and prevent a disconnect between the practices of inquiry (such as data collection and other aspects of evaluation) and the experiential context where findings are applied. At the same time, it is important to get a sense of the multitudes contained in that experiential context, that is, to understand the range of problems that shape the situated use of an innovation. Another way to think about this is that identifying problems is as important for evaluators as measuring fidelity and outcomes.

How practitioners influence and participate in the design of fidelity and evaluation systems is another important consideration for improving collective inquiry. To cultivate practical wisdom, practitioners need to be able to experiment with strategies and engage in their own in-the-moment evaluations of what is most important. If management decides on the best

procedure for achieving outcomes and front-line workers are treated like machines for carrying out prescribed actions, not only are workers alienated, but critical information about the serviceability of practices is lost, and opportunities to accumulate collective practice-based evidence and insights are missed. When discussing buy-in, it is important to recognize that some resistance to implementing new practices may relate the kind of alienation Dewey described.[29] Alienation can be reduced, and practice improved, by engaging practitioners as co-inquirers.

Clearly, expanding the breadth and depth of inquiry in the ways just described is a lofty goal, and admittedly rather abstract. Nonetheless, it has implications for practical activities like using data to inform decision making and defining fidelity criteria.[30] To make the concept more tangible, the remainder of this section explores practical implications and possibilities for fostering engaged inquiry in practice, specifically in the context of evaluation activities and fidelity guidelines. Inquiry-engaged practice is a normative ideal, not a precise blueprint. Thus, the possibilities discussed here are not exhaustive and more research is needed to develop these strategies. The proposed strategies can be built into the Active Implementation Frameworks (again, inquiry-engaged practice is a normative ideal to strive for when building implementation capacity and designing evaluation strategies, not a competing or separate framework).

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[29] This is not to say all resistance to adopting new practices is rooted in concern for the public interest and an earnest respect for practical wisdom. Clearly, we should avoid empowering obstructionists or slowing change efforts to a crawl in the name of collective inquiry. But there is a balance to be found between empowering obstructionists and writing all resisters off as curmudgeons or Luddites.

[30] As Craig (1998) explained, communication practices are constituted and cultivated through normative metadiscourses, or metaconversations about communication practices. In these metadiscursive spaces, people sort out issues such as what counts as good and proper conduct of the practice, why the practice is or is not worth doing, what the purpose of the practice is, and what criteria should be used to judge the practice. Clearly, these are the very issues that define practices of evaluation and fidelity. Thus, the (meta)metadiscourses that shape practices of evaluation and fidelity are good targets for efforts to enrich collective inquiry.

Implications for Data and Evaluation Practices

Below, I describe two practical strategies for promoting engaged inquiry in the context of decision-support data systems and evaluation: collecting implementation narratives (Volpe, 2014) and adopting a problem orientation.

Collect Implementation Narratives. The use of implementation narratives, as described by implementation researcher and consultant Lane Volpe, is an example of how data collection and use can be expanded in support of inquiry-engaged practice. Volpe (2014) identified misalignment of implementation narratives among key stakeholders as a significant barrier to the uptake of effective practices, and demonstrated how implementation narratives can be an effective tool for diagnosing problems and informing practice-improvement cycles. Implementation narratives are simply stories about people's experiences using an innovation, solicited from those on the front lines of implementation. Tellingly, the alternative title for Volpe's (2014) workshop on the topic was "Let's Just Ask People What They Really Think and Feel."

In one of Volpe's (2014) examples, a narrative approach successfully diagnosed an implementation problem where traditional assessment measures had failed. In this case, high turnover among staff delivering an in-home therapeutic intervention had become a major financial burden for the implementing agency. Policy makers had attempted to solve the problem by requiring staff to reimburse training costs if they left their positions within a specified time frame. This approach saw limited success. Then, through narrative work, policy makers learned that the problem had an unexpectedly simple explanation: bedbugs. Infestations were prevalent in homes where the intervention was provided, and bedbugs travel easily on clothes and shoes. An effective policy response was developed, and staff retention improved.

Shocking as it may be that simply asking people why they were quitting was not the first step taken in response to high turnover, policy–practice disconnects are common in complex systems. This case illustrates two important problems that inquiry-engaged practice seeks to ameliorate. First, it validates the pragmatist argument that a well-conceived inquiry is conducted within the experiential context that motivated it and not at a significant remove. Inquiry is a living process in which assumptions, problem definitions, and hypotheses need to be continually refined. This means assumptions and research questions are crafted, abductively, with relevant experiential data, and that they are available for critique, scrutiny, and revision.

Second, this case speaks to a basic dilemma of bureaucratization wherein standard, formalized procedures and metrics can operate like black boxes, taking on their own logics and producing unintended and often irrational results (see, e.g., Ashcraft, 2001, 2006; for a discussion of this issue in the RJ context, see Esch, 2015). The concept of *explainability* (or *interpretability*) of Artificial Intelligence (AI) models provides an apt analogy. As AI models become increasingly complex, they grow opaque such that humans cannot explain how input data is transformed into outputs. Being able to interpret how models produce their results is crucial for informed decision-making, improvability, and accountability of models to ethical standards. In short, interpretability is both critically important and impossibly challenging.

More familiar models—the kinds that prescribe practices in complex systems of human organizing—have their own challenges with explainability. As complexity theorists have long pointed out, non-linearity and emergent phenomena characterize human organization and complicate our ability to understand, predict, and control the relationship between inputs and outputs. Thus, how a system will react to policy changes cannot be fully anticipated, and unforeseen effects are to be expected. The example mentioned earlier, in which data and

accountability practices of No Child Left Behind result in high-needs students receiving less help, is a case in point.

In the context of evidence-based practice and implementation, interpretability is relevant to the relationship between normative priorities, on the one hand, and apparently value-neutral criteria, metrics, and procedures, on the other. The holistic vision of evaluation in inquiry-engaged practice, in which normative and empirical matters are addressed in a shared framework, is meant to increase transparency around how criteria and metrics can transform or reinforce normative priorities. In a manner of speaking, this is accomplished by designing systems, via communication practices, with interpretability in mind. Another point of relevance is that, given that models have agentic effects, they should not be designed to have more power than they need. For evaluation, this implies that collecting metrics simply because they can be collected, or measuring what can be measured for the sake of measurement, is not advisable. As discussed in Chapter 5, for example, collecting recidivism data makes RJ accountable to an outcome that should not be the test of its value, in the view of some proponents.

Returning to how implementation narratives can support inquiry-engaged practice, another example from Volpe (2014) is illustrative. To demonstrate the utility of a narrative approach, Volpe (2014) used data from an initiative to get corrections officers to use Motivational Interviewing (MI) in their interactions with incarcerated individuals. For example, a misalignment of narratives is evident in these excerpts:

> I also hate the phrase "the spirit of MI." That might be appropriate for mental health professionals, but it is not appropriate for us. The goal of MI is fine, but the culture around it doesn't work. We have an adversarial relationship with the offenders, so both offenders and staff have a very hard time overcoming that. When you have the trainer come in and he has to follow a set lesson plan about the "spirit" of MI, that is absolutely brutal for us.

When I first heard of it, I honestly thought they just wanted me to be a counselor as well and that they were just trying to get a bigger bang for their buck.

These narratives bring life to the point that experiential contexts contain multiple, often conflicting needs and interests, and interventions are often designed in a context other than where they are being implemented. As a result, interventions may be responsive to one set of problems but viewed as counterproductive to another. Both excerpts, but especially the second one, are suggestive of alienation of corrections officers from decisions about evidence-based practice implementation. The first excerpt is clearly suggestive of a perceived cultural misalignment between the experiential context of MI's development and framing and the corrections context where it is being implemented. Similar challenges have been described in the RJ field; for example, talk about the "spirit" of RJ or use of terms like "harmed party" and "author of harm" in place of "victim" and "offender" have sometimes been poorly received in law enforcement and judicial contexts.

Adopt a Problem Orientation. Volpe (2014) explained, "the fact that narratives frequently conflict is a core reality of implementation processes. Until you can blend, adjust, redirect, or reconcile the governing narratives, quality implementation cannot be achieved." I agree and find the issue of narrative alignment particularly salient in cases where innovations are meant to reform or change a system in a deeper way, as with RJ. Building on Volpe's narrative approach, I suggest using a problem orientation to make sense of implementation narratives and productively address narrative conflicts withing the frame of inquiry-engaged practice. When using a problem orientation, efforts to "blend, adjust, redirect, or reconcile the governing narratives" begin by surfacing situated problems and priorities, which may or may not be addressed by the innovation (or may be exacerbated by it). After identifying needs and interests,

specific questions can be formulated about whether and how an innovation might respond to them.

Volpe (2014) observed, "Narratives may not be true, they may not be functional, and they may not be conscious, but they always serve a practical purpose." A problem orientation focuses on identifying that practical purpose by interpreting statements and behaviors as answers to needs or interests that may or may not be explicitly articulated. For example, consider the correction officer's remark about the "spirit of MI" and the adversarial relationship between staff and offenders. For context, MI aims to engage individuals in exploring and resolving ambivalence toward behavior change while facilitating their intrinsic motivation and enhancing their self-efficacy. Its core principles include expressing empathy, developing discrepancy, rolling with resistance, and respecting autonomy.

MI is an evidence-based practice that proceeds on the assumption that supportive and non-confrontational environments, wherein individuals are empowered to articulate their own motivations and goals for change, are more conducive to successful and lasting behavior modification than other, more control-based approaches. Thus, from a research and policy perspective, adversarial relationships between staff and offenders constitute a barrier to the development of prosocial behavior in incarcerated populations. In other words, adversarial relationships are a problem and implementing MI is a solution. When using a problem orientation to interpret the narrative, the first step is to assume that adversarial relationships are a solution (or a strategy) and ask what problem(s) they might solve or what interests they advance. From there, the work of aligning narratives focuses on incorporating those underlying needs/interests into the problem definition that informs implementation and evaluation of the innovation.

Continuing with Volpe's (2014) example, the following excerpts provide additional

insight into the narrative conflict between the "spirit of MI" and the experiential context where it

is being applied:

> It's a reality that some offenders are of the type to see any amount of conversational approach as a weakness among staff.

> Sometimes I talk to some inmates differently and they perceive it as an opening for them to manipulate me. Others just see that I've changed the way I do business. I am still uncomfortable with MI once in a while because I want to go in like Godzilla and tear the unit up. And I know I can't. It's out of our comfort zone to talk to people and hold a conversation with someone who is a bad person. That's a hard concept to get. It's hard to understand that someone may still be able to make good choices even when they are someone who has done horrendous things.

Reading this from a problem-oriented perspective, it would be reasonable to assume that

corrections officers have a need for personal safety and that their narratives about, and stances

toward, inmates have developed at least partially as a response to that need. As Volpe pointed

out, officers cannot reasonably be expected to embrace a practice that they believe might

increase their chance of being injured or killed at work. Further, Volpe pointed to a dearth of

data on the impact of MI use on officer safety. While data was being collected on behavioral

outcomes for incarcerated individuals, the correlation between use of MI and incidence of assault

on staff members was not being explicitly studied. Thus, Volpe recommended incorporating

measures of officer safety into the data collection and evaluation system. This example shows

how evaluation practices communicate normative priorities, often without awareness or

intention, and underscores the importance of cultivating an open, inclusive, and responsive

practice of inquiry. Clearly, this inclusivity must also extend to the voices, needs, and interests

of incarcerated individuals and their advocates.

It is instructive to also note the paths *not* taken in the problem-oriented approach to

resolving conflicting narratives. The "bad person" remark highlights a point of potential

philosophical difference, as proponents of the "spirit of MI" (or of RJ, for that matter) may object to characterizing people rather than behaviors as bad. This is not the target of efforts to align narratives, however, because it is not necessary to have a shared belief about human nature. Rather, the goal is to engage implementers in inquiry about the serviceability of acting on the assumptions that behavior change is possible and that is more likely to occur in the context of non-adversarial relationships.

In the quoted narrative, the corrections officer reflects on what it is like not only to use the prescribed process of MI but also how it feels to try on the assumption that people who have done bad things can still make good choices. He observes his discomfort metacognitively without rendering a judgement on whether MI is worthwhile, and the account offers a glimpse into the process of working out ideas about prudent use of MI in specific circumstances. This practice of curiosity and reflection is the foundation upon which practical wisdom develops.

Implementation science identifies high-quality coaching as a key driver of fidelity and implementation success. Coaching meetings are a good place to build in inquiry-engaged practice. In addition to standard coaching activities, coaching meetings can include conversations where practitioners process felt difficulties into into investigable questions and are encouraged to engage in experimentation within the scope of fidelity. In the previous example, this could include probing concerns around manipulation, considering various responses to perceived manipulation, and identifying aspects of MI and circumstances of use in which concerns about appearing weak are most salient and apparently risky. Practitioners' felt difficulties, qualitative experiences, and observations are then fed back into the larger inquiry, informing research/evaluation questions and contributing to a body of qualitative experiential data.

Overall, a narrative approach combined with a problem orientation can be used to support inquiry-engaged practices of fidelity and evaluation. Specifically, this approach pursues fidelity practices that foster the development of practical wisdom, and it pursues evaluation practices that increase transparency and thoughtful choice around the setting of normative priorities expand knowledge practices to encompass broader swaths of experience, in line with the ideal of collective inquiry. In this approach, experiential inconsistencies and felt difficulties associated with in-situ use of an innovation are surfaced through implementation narratives. These narratives are interpreted by asking what needs and interests constitute experiences as problematic. From there, consideration is given to what needs and interests are prioritized by both the innovation itself and the evaluative questions being asked about its use. Efforts to align, blend, or otherwise resolve conflicting narratives focus on creating a shared problem definition and a willingness to study how the innovation-used-with-fidelity impacts goals within and beyond the scope of that problem definition. It is not necessary or practically feasible to seek complete philosophical and cultural alignment of governing narratives, or a unified ranking of priorities. This process does not directly resolve differing visions of the future and normative priorities, However, a focus on needs and interests facilitates transparency around how current or potential practices connect with ideals and values. Transparency, in turn, makes possible conscientious discussion about the relative desirability of various visions for the future. In another manner of speaking, this makes models more fully explainable.

It is important to bear in mind that valuation of differing visions of the future is always at play in implementation and evaluation but it often happens implicitly. For example, when Volpe's study participant wondered if MI was an effort by leadership to "get bigger bang for their buck" by adding a counseling function to her job, she draws attention to the question of

what vision of the corrections officer role is being pursued through MI. This question scratches the surface of a larger tension that many human service professionals in residential settings must manage, where they are asked to serve as both enforcers and counselors. Clearly, there is no easy answer, but it is preferable to create a shared understanding between implementers and policymakers about how a role is being (re)envisioned, rather than leaving people to draw their own conclusions. And, when the tension MI introduces into the corrections officer role is made available for discussion, conscientious experimentation and collective inquiry can be applied to improve the management of the problem.

Given that tools and metrics can set normative priorities in intended and unintended ways, communication designs that support open and reflective valuation processes should be incorporated into evaluation practices and the Active Implementation Frameworks. Even simple steps can increase transparency and opportunities for thoughtful choice. For example, high functioning implementation teams have a shared vocabulary and understanding of implementation drivers. Adding concepts such as "ghost criteria" (as described in Chapter 4) to this vocabulary and using discussion guides to prompt conversations about how metrics shape practice would at least increase vigilance against inappropriate metricization. A more thorough approach would call for purveyors, funders, and evaluators to anticipate vulnerabilities when designing data systems and incorporate metaevaluative questions into these systems to accumulate evidence about the serviceability of specific outcome measures and data collection practices.

Overall, inquiry-engaged evaluation practices increase the capacity for using inquiry to adjudicate between alternate visions for the future and promote transparency around how strategies connect to those visions. Implementation narratives (Volpe, 2014) and use of a

problem orientation are promising strategies toward these goals. Next, I consider some possibilities for aligning fidelity practices with inquiry-engaged ideals.

Implications for Fidelity Practices

As discussed in the preceding chapters, metadiscourses of fidelity[31] are consequential for how communication practices materialize and make a difference in human service contexts. Fidelity also enables evaluation and learning about how communication innovations transform experience; thus, fidelity is an important site for inquiry-engaged practice. Ideally, fidelity practices should provide structure and accountability while empowering collective inquiry and fostering the development of practical wisdom.

To elaborate, when defining practices for replication, the need for procedural detail is indisputable. This much is clear from implementation research and is echoed in the findings presented in Chapter 5. At the same time, successful, ethical, and accountable human service practice cannot be automated; it requires prudent judgement and cultivated wisdom.[32] Thus, the basic challenge for defining and practicing fidelity to communication-based innovations lies in balancing consistency and control, on the one hand, with autonomy and responsivity to context, on the other. Innovations must be carefully defined without being overly defined, which means focusing on the *right* criteria.

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[31] Here, I am including practices of definition within the scope of fidelity practices. These include activities described in the Usable Innovations Framework (as described by Fixsen et al., 2019, and discussed in Chapter 4), such as identifying principles and philosophies, defining essential elements, operationalizing essential elements, creating fidelity assessments, identifying fidelity criteria, and writing practice profiles. Similarly, activities associated with "manualizing" innovations (recall: literally creating manuals) and creating training materials also count as fidelity practices for our purposes. Fidelity assessment and coaching are also clearly fidelity practices.

[32] In harmony with this point, Fixsen et al. (2019) describe innovations as "rule-generated and contingency-shaped" and recommend a "get started, then get better" approach.

We have discussed several methods for identifying "essential elements," including variable analytic approaches that link aspects of practice to outcomes via fidelity assessment. This approach does anchor practice definitions to their purpose *if* outcome measures adequately represent the fulfillment of that purpose. Considering the complexities of valuation and the limitations of this approach, other strategies for anchoring fidelity to purpose are discussed below. These include leveraging design thinking and logics of practice. These recommendations can be realized in practice through integration with existing practices described in the Teams and Usable Innovations frameworks (Fixsen et al., 2019).

How practices are described in training manuals, Practice Profiles, and other fidelity texts has implications for the development of collective inquiry and practical wisdom later on. Following a basic principle when defining innovations can foster inquiry-engaged practice: provide clear strategies that are contextualized with statements about what they are supposed to accomplish. In practical terms, this means that operational definitions—which might include specific utterances, lists of questions, scripts, etc.—are presented in connection with the aims or purposes they are meant to serve. This way, practitioners have recourse to a shared vision when navigating dilemmas in practice and can tune their practical judgements toward the fulfillment of that vision.

To explore the links between activities and intentions, it is useful to compare communication practices to technologies or languages in terms of how they shape experience. Like communication practices, technologies and languages are lively, enacted, and evolving but also structured and persistent. Moreover, language and technology can shape experience unobtrusively, directing our choices without our conscious awareness or intent. Many languages, for example, oblige speakers to specify gender (in binary terms) with nouns and or

pronouns. Similarly, Microsoft Word prompts writers to substitute concise language for wordier phrases—suggesting, for example, that "provided that" be replaced with "if"—sometimes subtly changing the meaning and likely contributing to stylistic isomorphism across writers. And, of course, a normative ideal (i.e., good writing is concise) is inscribed in the software. These examples speak to the power of design[33] to shape the trajectory of practice.

By analogy, when defining communication practices, it can be useful to think about how they design experience by making some choices easy or obvious and others difficult and impossible, and how those designs link the practice to a desired future. Broadly, this would involve asking what the practice makes possible, what it assumes, and, per Kuhn et al.'s (2017) suggestion, what the practice desires and what it fears. Logics of practice can usefully complement design thinking in this context. According to Kuhn et al. (2017), using logics of practice as an analytical frame entails describing "*how* relations are made" and "highlight[ing] meaning not as the contents of individual minds, but as the logics characterizing the always-shifting relational complex" (pp. 80–81, emphasis in original). Extending this idea, we can think of communication-based innovations as having logics that link practice to a set of assumptions or ideals. Articulating these logics when describing an innovation's defining principles and philosophies (as in the Usable Innovations criteria) may help purveyors and implementers to re-create the performative value of innovations (as described in Chapter 5) on purpose.

For example, recall the practitioner quoted in Chapter 5 who pointed out that asking a person to contribute something implies they have something of value to contribute. This

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[33] Design need not imply intentionality; as Aakhus and Jackson (2005) explained, design thinking can apply to "naturally occurring" designs.

implication of value, she said, can transform how people view themselves and their role in a community. In this way, a speech act that is core to the RJ process—asking someone to repair harm—communicates a reality where people are interdependent and each person is recognized as valuable to the community. Interestingly, the relationship between the speech act (asking to contribute) and the implied/constituted reality (person has something of value to contribute) is *logical* rather than causal.

To surface logics of practice and leverage design thinking when defining innovations and fidelity criteria, the following conversation prompts may be helpful: If the practice were a software or a language, what would it afford, oblige, and disallow? If the practice were a word processor, for example, what grammatical constructions would it flag as incorrect and what replacements would it suggest? And, crucially, what ideal or interest makes the replacement better than the original? Which words are excluded and included in the dictionary, and would it allow users to add new ones? What shortcuts would be possible? How could the user customize it? How might the software be hacked or jail broken—what are its vulnerabilities? How can the practice be appropriated, weaponized, or misused? How might someone follow the letter of the law while undermining its spirit, and vice versa? Is it possible to go through the motions of the communication practice without accomplishing what the practice is supposed to accomplish? If we enact this practice as intended, what difference do we think it will make? These kinds of questions can support implementation teams in defining practices and fidelity criteria with reference to experiential consequences rather than to categories qua categories.

Non-violent Communication™ (NVC; Rosenberg, 1999, 2005) provides a good example of how communication innovations can be made teachable, learnable, assessable, and doable in practice (Fixsen et al., 2019). NVC was developed by Marshall Rosenberg, a clinical

psychologist and student of Carl Rogers, who felt that the diagnostic language of psychology was not helping to alleviate his patients' suffering. Rosenberg turned to communication as he sought to explain "what happens to disconnect us from our compassionate nature, leading us to behave violently and exploitatively…[a]nd conversely, what allows some people to stay connected to their compassionate nature under even the most trying circumstances" (2015, p. 1).

Rosenberg (2005a) described NVC as a "language of life" rather than as, say, a strategy or practice, and his work helps illustrate why, when turning communication into a replicable thing, language is an apt metaphor the type of thing it is (as odd as it may be to say that language is a *metaphor* for communication). It is instructive to see how NVC translates a philosophy into a teachable process and transforms experience essentially by revising the lexicogrammatical resources of language. NVC is also directly relevant to fidelity questions in RJ because the two share a logic of practice that is distinct from the logic and grammar of legal practice.[34] In this regard, the logic of RJ is not just *like* NVC; it *is* NVC.

Philosophically, Rosenberg (2005) argued that violent and exploitative behavior stems from "a destructive mythology… that comes complete with a language that dehumanizes people and turns them into objects" (Rosenberg, 2005b, p. 6). That destructive mythology is based on moralistic judgement and justice-as-desert, that is, "if you do bad things, you deserve to be punished; if you do good things you deserve to be rewarded" (Rosenberg, 2005, p. 18). The

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[34] When we speak in a way that anticipates how a judge would rule, we are using legalistic discourse (see Latour, 2010). Legalistic discourse operates on implicit threats or promises of rewards. Control and persuasion are accomplished by aligning people and actions with categories of right or wrong that are defined by an authority (such as law). In contrast, restorative and nonviolent discourse compels by invitations to make life better and to contribute to the wellbeing of others, society, and oneself.

corresponding structure of language encourages categorization, judgement, and diagnosis, which in turn justify punishment, reward, domination, and subjugation.[35]

According to Rosenberg (2005), violence and relations of domination can be transformed by cultivating a "language of compassion" in which evaluations are based on what needs are served rather than on moralistic judgement. In his words, "Most people have been trained to say to other people, 'the problem with you is…,' and they have a wide vocabulary for telling people what's wrong with them" (Mendizza, 2009, para. 3). NVC provides a different set of linguistic resources, which includes a rich vocabulary of needs and feelings and a basic sequence of speech acts.

The practice of NVC proceeds in four stages: observations, feelings, needs, and requests. The first three answer the question, "what's alive in us?" and the last one answers the question, "what would make life more wonderful?" In brief, the first step is to voice an observation that is not mixed with evaluation. The second step is to state a feeling related to the observation. The third step is to identify the need(s) related to that feeling, and the last step is to make a clear request. The other aspect of NVC is to listen for the same information from others, regardless of how it is communicated; thus, accusations, criticisms, and judgements are translated into observations, feelings, needs and requests.

By following this process, people are obliged to separate observations from judgements (e.g., "she doesn't care about me" becomes "I called three times and she didn't call back"), to relate feelings to their own met or unmet needs rather than directly to the actions of others, and

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[35] Rosenberg drew inspiration from the theologian Walter Winks, who argued that this kind of language reflects and serves the interests of the ruling class because it justifies relations of domination.

to distinguish between needs and strategies. In this way, NVC enacts a logic of connection by configuring lexicogrammatical resources. Importantly, people need not share Rosenberg's views on human nature or his belief that violence stems from the myth of justice-as-desert to use NVC effectively.

If an implementation team wanted to define fidelity to NVC, they could use some of the conversation prompts offered above. If NVC were a software, it might prompt people to input observations, feelings, needs, and requests. The input, "I feel like you don't care about me" would be flagged as a "fidelity error" because it is an accusation rather than a feeling. Proper feelings, such as "scared," "worried," or "lonely" might be offered as alternatives. Similarly, "he has a big mouth" would be rejected as an observation unless it was meant in a strictly literal sense (to borrow from an anecdote in Rosenberg, 2015). The user might be prompted with questions such as, "what is the person doing that is not meeting your needs" until a specific behavior was identified. It would also be important to consider how the "software" should and should not be used. For example, pointing out all the ways one's interlocutor is violating NVC does not count as using NVC.

This exercise can facilitate thought and conversation about how a practice organizes experience, and what categories or distinctions it uses to organize experience. In this example, we can identify distinctions such as need vs. strategy, observation vs. judgement, demand vs. request, and feeling vs. assessment as central to the practice of NVC. These distinctions are important to the normative metadiscourse that gatekeeps the practice, so it would be useful to have some meta-rules that can support productive conversations when navigating grey areas. Using the software metaphor, we could get at this by asking what rules (or logics) govern the relationship between the inputs and outputs.

Ideally, meta-rules would foreground the reason for having a concept of fidelity in the first place, so that fidelity assurance does not become a pedantic exercise in categorical thinking. For example, there are intellectually stimulating debates to be had about whether words like "disrespected," "rejected," and "insecure" should be counted as feelings (Rosenberg would say no), but the designations themselves are less practically relevant than the criteria that makes the question of their designation consequential. In this case, the criteria would be something like, is the whole utterance serving to make a case that other person wrong, immoral, or otherwise blameworthy? Is it answering the question, "what is alive in me?" rather than "what is happening to me?"

These kinds of criteria—meta-rules or tests, so to speak—can be integrated into Practice Profiles, training and coaching materials, or fidelity assessments. Formulated as questions or statements about what communication practices are meant to *do*, these criteria bridge the Usable Innovations categories of core principles and operational definitions of essential elements. In RJ, tests of whether specific instances of discourse align with restorative philosophy might include, for example: Does the utterance anticipate how a judge might rule? Does it move to justify exclusion of someone from the community? Does it ground requests, recommendations, or persuasive pleas in the fulfillment of specific needs or desires?

Such criteria are not meant to replace the highly detailed instructions called for in Fixen et al.'s (2019) Usable Innovations criteria, but to clarify the purpose for including each of the recommended strategies. This addition can increase fidelity to the spirit of the innovation while supporting the development practical wisdom. In some cases, it may be desirable to emphasize purpose-focused criteria and provide several examples of utterances that would realize the stated goals, to show the breadth discursive options for meeting communication goals.

Another way to clarify the connection between prescribed strategies and desired ends when profiling practices is to use a Theory of Change (see, e.g., Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007; Christie & Alkin, 2003; Dahler-Larsen, 2018; DuBow & Litzler, 2019; Weitzman et al., 2002). Theories of Change (ToCs) have been used in program implementation and evaluation dating back to the 1930s (Coryn et al., 2011). The purpose of a ToC to provide a shared understanding of the logic behind program activities and expected outcomes. It helps purveyors, implementers, and evaluators gain conceptual clarity, craft meaningful evaluations, and foster adaptive learning. ToCs can increase transparency, intentionality, and clarity around the assumptions that makes strategies correspond to problems. Moreover, ToCs are a familiar and well-described approach in human service fields, making for easier integration into existing practices. For example, within the Usable Innovations framework, a ToC could be used to explicate the rationale for including each "essential element" in a practice profile.

Overall, practice profiles and fidelity criteria for communication-based innovations must provide structure and procedural clarity while supporting ongoing inquiry and the development of practical wisdom. I have highlighted design thinking and logics of practice as resources for crafting purpose-driven practice definitions. Proposed strategies for leveraging these resources include using the suggested prompts and metaphors to guide fidelity discussions, explicitly linking actions with intentions in practice profiles, and employing Theories of Change.

Differentiating strategies from the needs they address enriches evaluative metadiscourse, inviting experiential insights that promote ongoing inquiry and development. This approach acknowledges that adhering to a practice's spirit might occasionally require deviation from standard procedures, that intentions evolve, and that the relative value of ends can shift contextually. Furthermore, valued outcomes are not always measurable, in which case, tethering

fidelity criteria to outcomes may ironically stretch the practice beyond recognition. Thus, other options for linking fidelity criteria to intentions are needed. The discussion of Non-violent Communication™ underscores the feasibility of making communication innovations both instructive and accountable to underlying philosophies and logics.

Supporting Successful RJ Implementation

Thus far, this chapter has identified important incongruities between evidence-based practice, which conceptualizes communicative action as effective intervention, and situated understandings of how RJ makes a difference and why it is worth doing (RQ4). Given these incongruities, I have argued that an expanded schema of practical knowledge, along with fidelity practices that are attentive to the performative dimension of communication, will enhance the cultivation of communication practices in human service settings (RQ5). While the recommendations offered in the previous section for enriching evaluation and fidelity practices are broadly informative for RJ, this section offers additional, and more specific suggestions for supporting successful RJ implementation both through and beyond the framework of effective intervention. Thus, this section rounds out my answer to RQ4, *how can existing resources and frameworks support successful RJ implementation, and what unmet needs remain?* I begin by clarifying and contextualizing the role of *effective intervention* in RJ. Then, I offer specific recommendations for defining fidelity and cultivating practical knowledge in the field.

Despite its limitations, the effective intervention paradigm has a vital role to play in ensuring the success and quality of RJ in the criminal justice system. It useful and important for answering questions about how RJ relates to the range of needs and imperatives in human service and criminal justice contexts. Creating a shared understanding of what effectiveness and

fidelity refer to is the first step to gaining clarity and alignment, and ultimately ensuring success in these settings.

RJ programs in the criminal justice system live at the nexus of institutional practice and sociocultural transformation—a complicated and exciting place to be. As the applications of RJ grow, so does the diversity of its stakeholders and the range of challenges, interests, and priorities it must address. This underscores the importance of distinguishing between adherence to RJ's core principles and achieving system outcomes which may be auxiliary or external, in some sense, to RJ. It is crucial to understand that measures of effectiveness are tied to specific issues, and RJ is assessed in various contexts with differing objectives. Some of these issues might not directly align with what practitioners perceive as RJ's primary purpose. For instance, while one practitioner stated that "the point of RJ is not to reduce recidivism," in a probationary context, the goal may be precisely that. Hence, the critical question becomes: (how) does RJ align with and enhance other strategies in pursuit of specific goals, like reducing recidivism?

While the value or potential of RJ might be considered broadly, it is vital to differentiate that from its effectiveness in specific contexts. Although it may seem obvious when stated, the precise meaning of "effectiveness" (i.e., effective for what?) often gets obscured, especially given the 'halo effect' around the term, which can make it synonymous with 'good' or 'worthwhile.' We must consistently remind ourselves that when evaluating effectiveness, we are assessing RJ **program models** in relation to specific policy or organizational mandates. This means that the evaluation findings pertain to RJ-in-use, *as integrated with other organizational activities*, and not to RJ as an abstract concept. Therefore, in the context of Active Implementation, fidelity should be defined and assessed at the program level, that is, in relation to specific to program models.

It is widely acknowledged that RJ does not represent a singular program or practice. Yet, this understanding has not dispelled the ambiguity surrounding the term fidelity. While some stakeholders interpret fidelity as being attributed to a specific RJ program model, others use the term to reflect the broader principles and values that RJ embodies. Despite recognizing RJ's multifaceted nature, there remains a lack of agreement or consistency about whether fidelity can or should refer to a specific program model. This duality in understanding and usage is both valid and essential, but there is a pressing need for clarity to ensure effective implementation and adherence to RJ's core principles.

In the context of Active Implementation, particularly when referring to the Usable Innovations Framework, the concept of fidelity is more specifically aligned with program models. What this means is that activities detailed within the Usable Innovations Framework, including the creation of fidelity assessments, necessitate exact and operational definitions. In this context, the term fidelity is best applied to program elements, such as the nuances of case management and referral processes.

However, there is another layer to fidelity that should not be overlooked: fidelity to RJ's core values and principles. This kind of fidelity is particularly essential in two specific scenarios: Development of RJ program models and cultivation of facilitation practice.

Development of RJ Program Models

When constructing program models, it is vital that these models not only adhere to procedural or operational standards but also resonate with the foundational values and principles of RJ. It ensures that the spirit of RJ is integrated into its structural manifestations. To ensure this kind of fidelity, is important to specify how RJ fits with other activities that are core to fulfilling organizational or policy mandates. For example, when integrating RJ with probation

supervision, it is necessary to distinguish between what RJ accomplishes and what supervision accomplishes. Otherwise, RJ's fidelity could be compromised, and the organization overall could suffer "scope drift."

Clearly, current evaluative frameworks are not fully congruent with situated understandings of how and why RJ creates value for participants and their communities. However, the criminal justice system does not operate under a broad mandate to create value for the community. Rather, each area of the system has a narrower mandate relating to safety and justice. For example, probation and diversion offices operate under a mandate to limit recidivism and contribute to long-term community safety (with some responsibility to also serve victims under the Victim Rights Act). The gold standard research-based approach to offender supervision involves assessing criminogenic needs and tailoring interventions to focus on reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors. If RJ is not thoughtfully integrated, scope drift might undermine these goals, for example, by directing resources toward needs that have not been shown in research to be criminogenic. Similarly, RJ fidelity could be compromised if the onus of reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors fall on RJ processes, which may help with risk reduction but are primarily designed for harm repair.

Cultivation of RJ Facilitation Practices

When RJ facilitation is viewed as a practice—a series of speech acts and utterances— fidelity to RJ's relational ethos is the most relevant kind of fidelity. In this context, fidelity is more closely intertwined with practical judgement and valuation. A rich practice of fidelity in this arena helps facilitators to develop practical judgement so they can grow to embody philosophy and ethos of restorative justice in their work, not just the technical aspects. This practice of fidelity depends on the quality of the metadiscourse in staffing and facilitator debrief

meetings. The approaches discussed earlier in the chapter, in which design thinking is used in

fidelity conversations, are the type of strategies that would apply in this context. Finally, using a

dual boundary to define fidelity, as suggested by various implementation researchers (e.g.,

Damschroder et al., 2009; Greenhalgh, Robert, Macfarlane, et al., 2004; Kilbourne et al., 2007)

is a promising approach that can be leveraged to balance fidelity needs with conditions that

support practical wisdom. Establishing a "hard core" and "soft periphery" (Greenhalgh, Robert,

Macfarlane, et al., 2004) when defining an innovation can allow for structured experimentation

without sacrificing fidelity.

In summary, while programmatic fidelity provides a structured, operational lens, fidelity

to values ensures that the heart and essence of RJ are consistently upheld, whether in program

development or in the practice of facilitation.

Summary

This chapter has synthesized findings from Chapters 4 and 5 to identify limitations of

effective intervention as a framework for understanding and improving communicative action in

community service organizing. Examples from the RJ field highlighted the need for a paradigm

of practical knowledge that better accounts for the nuanced ways communication transforms

experience and renders multiple valued aspects of the practice legible within evaluative

frameworks (RQ4). Furthermore, I identified stealth normativity and technocratic alienation as

risks associated with the view of the research-practice relationship embedded in the *effective*

intervention paradigm—a view in which research informs practice solely or primarily by

answering questions about efficacy.

Clearly, recognizing that communication shapes reality in performative and not only

directly causal ways has implications for how we understand the relationship between science

and communication practice in human services (RQ5). Specifically, this recognition underscores the value of what Biesta (2007) termed the "cultural role" of research, and the importance of situated practices of knowledge that foster collective, transparent, informed discussion of problem definitions and the desirability of various visions of the future. I sketched a picture of such a revised paradigm for practical knowledge, labeling this ideal *inquiry-engaged practice.*

However, I clarified that engaged inquiry, like pragmatist relationality, is an inclusive paradigm that contextualizes *effective intervention* approaches—including evidence-based practice and Active Implementation—within a broader project of practical knowledge. This nuance is important because, as we saw in Chapter 4, a sweeping dismissal of *effective intervention* based on a dilemmatic view of relational and substantialist ontology is untenable. Such a facile critique fails to recognize the ways in which entification—as a process within inquiry—enables a nuanced and indeed processual understanding of organizational action. By studying Implementation Science as a practice of knowledge (RQ2), I revealed an affinity between relational ontology and the mission-driven, interventional approach to inquiry embodied by Implementation Science. Pragmatism, and specifically the complex notion of experience it brings to relational ontology, provided the building materials for this bridge.

Contributions to Communication Theory

The practical and methodological implications of relational ontology for communication theory and research are key questions for the current material turn. This study has generated insight into both issues by exploring articulations of fidelity in scholarly and practitioner metadiscourses as well in situated efforts to ensure the quality of RJ as it scales. This study's exploration of Implementation Science through the lens of pragmatist relationality has been particularly fruitful exploring the intersection of relational ontology, empirical research, and

practical problems (RQ2).

Broadly, the empirical and theoretical work presented in this study supports a more ecumenical paradigm for relational research. Relational ontology has profound implications for the practice of social inquiry and invites methodological innovation. However, this study challenges the idea that relationality necessitates sweeping or radical transformation of the entire methodological canon. Instead, I have echoed Craig's (1989) metamodel approach to communication theory by arguing that relational ontology is best situated as a metatheory which contextualizes rather than negates variable analytic research traditions.

This perspective is supported by several key findings gleaned from this study's pragmatist relational reading of Implementation Science. Namely, Implementation Science embodies many ideals of pragmatist inquiry and embraces postpositivist methods without losing intelligibility from the perspective of transactional ontology (RQ3). And, importantly, Implementation Science practices knowledge *as* intervention. This processual view of knowledge is central to transactional ontology and is key to its viability as an epistemic project. Certainly, this view is retained in contemporary relational communication literature, as demonstrated, for example, by a prolific emphasis on performativity theorizing. However, contemporary explorations of relational ontology as a resource for social inquiry have too often collapsed postpositivist epistemology with postpositivist methods. As a result, the latter have often been summarily dismissed when they could have been revised or recontextualized.

Insofar as (post)positivist epistemology anchors the validity of truth claims to an extra-experiential reality, it is incompatible with transaction ontology. Indeed, Dewey's rejection of that assumption—which he once called "*the* epistemological miracle"—fueled the development of his transactional "correspondence" theory of truth (LW:14, p. 179, emphasis original).

However, it is not the case that relational ontology invalidates methods associated with (post)positivism, namely, experimentalism and variable analysis. By losing sight of this important distinction, we also miss the opportunity to explore *how* experimental and variable analytic methods can and cannot be practiced in harmony with transactional ontoepistemology. Moreover, we miss an opportunity to potentially combine the practical serviceability of postpositivist methods with the insights and philosophical rigor of relational ontology.

Having decoupled methods from epistemology, we can draw some conclusions about what relational ontology does *not* require at the level of methodological practice, as well as what it *allows.* It does not require a sweeping rejection of variable analytic or experimental methods. And, *qua* pragmatist relationality, it allows us to entertain commonsense notions of realism and causality as potentially serviceable worldviews when engaged provisionally. While experiential consequences are ultimately our only recourse to "truth" in inquiry, recognition of this epistemic premise can reside at the metatheoretical level. Adopting pragmatist relationality as a metatheory allows us to play with realism and various versions of causality in the sandbox of theory while resisting reification and preventing science from succumbing to what feminists called "the God move."

When used as a metatheoretical perspective, then, relational ontology does not *require* sweeping revisions to causality, but it certainly invites methodological innovation in this area. Ultimately, *reification* of our ontological and normative commitments—substantialist or otherwise—is what the practice of pragmatist relational inquiry "fears" (to borrow Kuhn et al.'s,

2017, phrase).[36] That is, reification of those commitments, rather than contingent use of them, is the fear. Marred and provincial as they may be, we still must act on/with a set of historically and culturally derived ontological and normative assumptions. An analysis that focuses on the problematics of representation does exempt us from needing to act on assumptions, nor does it provide us with an alternate, non-problematic set of assumptions on which to act.

On the flip side, what (pragmatist) relationality *does* require methodologically—or, what it "desires," to keep with Kuhn's framing—is a practice of inquiry that subjects ontological and normative commitments to scrutiny and potential transformation through contingent, reflexive action on said commitments and observation of experiential consequences. Such a practice requires transparency around the experiential origins and consequences of ontological and normative representations, and an emphasis within inquiry on the links between experience and representations.

Having addressed, in broad strokes, the question of what relational ontology does and does not require, I can now replace my original question with a new one: What does (pragmatist) relational ontology *enable* at the level of methodological practice? Pragmatist relational analysis, as developed in the preceding chapters, represents an in-depth exploration of one possibility. I have shown how relationality can be employed as a hermeneutic to assist analysists in "reading" ontological representations as answers to specific experiential interests and/or difficulties.

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[36] And, at the risk of beating a dead horse, relational scholars frequently use commonsense realism in their own arguments for relational ontology.

Framing the analytic task in this way enables two practically useful activities. First, analysts identify experiential problems to which the "things" of their analysis answer. This is useful because, as we saw in my analysis, the same "thing" might be trying to answer to many different and perhaps competing needs simultaneously. Moreover, an analytic practice that links ontological choices to experiential difficulties is aligned with feminist and critical epistemology because it promotes transparency and resists universalization of parochial interests. Second, it becomes possible to evaluate those "things"—be they models, assertions, categories, practices, frameworks, etc.—in terms of *how well* they answer to the various problems or interests identified. In this second activity, we come to understand truth as a kind of correspondence, not between experience and some reality that lies beyond, but between problems and answers within experience.

Finally, recognizing that relational ontology can be compatible with experimental and variable analytic methods raises the question of how such methods might be contextualized or practiced differently within a relational frame. Relatedly, I replaced a dilemmatic view, in which we can see the world *either* as consisting primarily of entities *or* relations, with a view of inquiry as a process of entification and de-entification. This shift in perspective raises the question of how to ensure fluid movement and avoid the pitfalls of totalization and reductionism that come with entification. Chapter 4 offered preliminary answers to both questions. Specifically, I argued that a relationally resonant, yet methodologically functionalist, research enterprise is possible if it elucidates the experiential origins and purposes of representational choices and priorities. In technical terms, Fixsen et al. (2019) achieved this by providing historical context and examples, clearly stating the ontological and normative commitments that determined their criteria for selecting "strong implementation variables," emphasizing the mutability of their

categories, practicing knowledge as intervention, and prioritizing method over findings. In addition to supporting the idea that a methodologically ecumenical paradigm for relational research is possible, these examples demonstrate how relational sensibilities can shape specific research practices such as conceptualization, writing, and analysis.

Overall, a pragmatist relational lens opens the door to cultivating relational approaches to a wide range of methodological practices. Grounding inquiry in experience is at the heart of this epistemic enterprise. By reviving the central concept of experience in transactional ontology, relational thinkers can add to their methodological toolbox. This, in turn, can ameliorate the disconnect between, on the one hand, the types of experiential problems that motivate inquiry in organizational settings, and, on the other, the current methods and affordances of relational inquiry. As a result, relational approaches can more easily inform mission-driven inquiry in organizational settings.

Directions for Future Research

This dissertation has created two new frameworks with implications for communication theory, research, and practice: pragmatist relationality and inquiry-engaged practice. These ideas are ripe for further development, application, empirical exploration, and critique. To further elaborate pragmatist relationality as a philosophical perspective with deep relevance to social inquiry, I would begin by developing my ideas about the ontological significance of axiology and addressing the need for metaethics within pragmatism. Specifically, I would position Levinas's (1979) metaethics as a necessary supplement to pragmatism, and as a corrective to Dewey's empiricism. As Emirbayer (1997) pointed out, pragmatism and relationality do not fully address ethical questions. Dewey's empirical approach to social philosophy basically assumes that ethics will follow naturally from an ideal process of inquiry. Levinas (1979)

advanced a metaethics that places ethics prior to ontology. In addition to addressing a shortcoming of pragmatist philosophy, Levinas's work is a rich source of relational theorizing that largely absent from the current ontological literature in communication and related disciplines. Thus, drawing on Levinas to enrich relational perspectives in general and pragmatist relationality in particular represents a fruitful avenue for future scholarship.

Additionally, in developing pragmatist relationality, I conceptualized and tested a novel analytic strategy tailored for qualitative communication research grounded in relational perspectives. This approach beckons for exploration by fellow researchers. While I applied to textual analysis, its adaptability to diverse data types and research methodologies holds intriguing potential. I am particularly curious about its applicability to ethnographic data, as well as its potential to use in discourse analysis.

Inquiry-engaged practice is an incipient idea that raises many empirical and theoretical questions and presents ample opportunity for future research. I have articulated a normative ideal for the "appliance of science" in human services and have outlined several possibilities for cultivating engaged inquiry in implementation and evaluation practices. However, inquiry-engaged practice needs further development to make it instructive, accessible, and actionable. Future research should focus on developing and testing designs for communication to operationalize inquiry-engaged practice. The strategies proposed in the previous section provide a starting point for a design enterprise of this nature. For example, the usefulness of the suggested conversation prompts for discussions of fidelity could be evaluated empirically and iteratively improved. Similarly, it would be illuminating to study an effort to develop a purpose-driven practice definition using Fixsen et al.'s (2019) Usable Innovations criteria with the

addition of a Theory of Change and/or explicit links between prescribed actions and logics of practice.

Finally, in this concluding chapter, I have scratched the surface of what could become an expansive research agenda situated at the intersection of discourse analysis and Implementation Science. Discourse analytic concepts and methods can add rigor and sophistication to how we define Usable Innovations. Specifically, these tools would facilitate careful translation of essential elements into operational definitions, along with reflection on how prescribed discourse practices might advance or undermine the stated goals. Methods of discourse and conversation analysis can also greatly enrich practices of fidelity assessment and the development of assessment instruments.

More broadly, the absence of communication perspectives from scholarship about fidelity and evaluation of communicative innovations constitutes a genuine, proverbial gap in the literature. The complex and consequential topics of entification and evaluation implicate enduring quandaries in communication. How can we make communication practices accountable and responsive to evolving community needs and values? How can we replicate good results through purposeful communication design? Missing from the current conversation is recognition of what is wild and alive in communication: The medium is message. Communication constitutes organization. Means and ends are mutually constitutive. Identity emerges in a dialectic of rhetoric and discourse. Subject and object are both *of* experience. Myriad expressions—some catchier than other—through centuries of literature get at a basic paradox: We write the text, and the text writes *us.* Thus, as we seek to transform experience in desired ways through communication practice, communicative practice transforms our desires. How can we make communication into some*thing* we can use, study, and improve? This

question cuts to the heart of the communication discipline. Craig (1989, 2001) frames the

question to resonate with the relational, constitutive nature of inquiry in our field: How can we

cultivate communication praxis? Inquiry-engaged Practice endeavors to bring communicative

praxis to life in human service organizations, where interaction-based innovations are the bridge

between a troubled present and a better future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

HRP 17-0086

1. What is your job? How long have you been doing this?

2. How would you describe the overarching goals and principles that guide your work as a [job title]? What is your main charge and what are your key responsibilities?
   a. [What specific activities have you been engaged in that bring these core principles to life?]

3. Describe your involvement in RJ. What is/was your role in restorative justice (RJ)?
   a. How did you learn about the RJ (pilot, or other) program?
   b. How did you end up getting involved?

4. What is your personal definition of RJ? What are the most essential elements of RJ? (In other words, what are the defining features that you would point to and say, if you don't have that, you don't have RJ?)

5. When and how did you first learn about RJ? (What was your first encounter with it?)
   a. What were your first impressions of RJ? What were your hopes and/or concerns about it?
   b. What initially appealed to you about RJ? What doubts or concerns did you have?

6. Where is your organization at with RJ now? What do you currently offer? [note: I will have familiarized myself with the program ahead of time, so I will ask this question in a more tailored way]

7. How would you describe the overarching goals and principles that guide the particular restorative justice program that you are involved with?
   a. What are your priorities with regard to RJ?
   b. How do those relate to your job in general (refer to principles described in question 2)?
   c. How does RJ fit with or come into tension with other aspects of your job / the overall aims of your job / other goals or responsibilities?

8. If applicable: How does/has the RJ program affected your job? Does it change what you do on a regular basis? How? How are those changes working for you? [e.g., new or different responsibilities? Different procedures? Workload changes? Changes in who you interface with?]
   a. If applicable: How does RJ affect your interactions with clients?
   b. What is RJ doing for you?
   c. What is difficult about RJ?

9. If applicable: Can you explain the relationship between RJ and juvenile diversion? Are they the same thing [in your district]? (here I'm trying to clarify for the following questions that we are on the same page in talking about RJ vs. juvenile diversion).

10. What are the most important things you want to achieve with RJ?
    a. How do you define success for your program?
    b. Who or what does the success of your RJ program depend on? What do you need and from whom? (e.g., referrals from DDAs?)

11. How do you gauge how well it is working?
    a. What, if anything, are you evaluating? How? What are you measuring and how?
    b. How do you gather information? What kind of information? How do you use that information? (*getting at what kind of data systems are in place, what kinds of information are counted as 'data')
    c. What did you learn/have you learned from the evaluation you've done?
    d. [For council members only: what did you learn from the OMNI report?]
    e. Overall, what is working well and what is challenging with regard to evaluation?
    f. When do you start measuring outcomes?

12. If applicable: Describe your implementation process. (*listen here for any Implementation Science jargon and ask follow-up questions to probe their engagement with IS, e.g., if they mention the "exploration stage," ask what that involved)
    a. Why did you decide to participate in the RJ (pilot) program? (Only applicable if interviewee was in this kind of decision-making role) How did you decide if the pilot (or other program) was a good fit, and if [your organization, e.g., the DA's office] was ready for it?
    b. How do you get people involved and up to speed? Do you do training? If so, who do you train and how? What comes after the training?
        i. How is that working? Have you encountered challenges/obstacles related to training [and/or coaching]? How have you dealt with those? Have you changed or adjusted your approach over time?
    c. Have you used any particular tools or resources for implementation (e.g., consultants, worksheets from AI Hub)? Explain. Have you ever done anything like that before?
    d. Do you have experience with implementing other types of programs or practices? If so, is RJ implementation different? How?

13. What issues have you faced with getting RJ up and running? Can you give me an example of a challenge or obstacle you've encountered? How did you address that? What has worked well or been helpful?

14. [For DA's and practitioners] There are some issues that seem to keep coming up with RJ, like confidentiality. I'm trying to get a sense for the range of issues and the contexts that these issues come up in. What issues have come up for you around confidentiality (and in what contexts)? Examples? (e.g., Have you run into cases where clients have refused to do it, or lawyers feel like they can't do it? Or issues with facilitators sharing

information, or being subpoenaed?) How have you dealt with that? Have you found workarounds?

15. What do you think might prevent other [DA's offices] from doing RJ? (not from implementing their own programs per se, but, e.g., from making referrals to service providers)

16. What differences of opinion have come up around RJ? How have those differences been talked about/addressed? Where are you at with that now? (Conflicts? Disagreements?)

17. How has the program changed over time? What kind of changes have happened in the department/organization in general since you started RJ? (E.g., Staff turnover? Policy changes?) How did those changes affect the program? (Was it able to weather those changes well?) What creates sustainability, in your experience?

18. Can you give me an example of some tweaks or changes (minor or major) that you've made over time? What led to those changes? [how has the program been adjusted/adapted, and in response to what needs or difficulties]
    a. If you've come up against barriers, What are some ways you've found to work around them?
    b. What lessons have you learned as you've gone along?
    c. What challenges are ongoing?

19. What do other people you work with seem to think about RJ? What types of things have you heard other people say about the RJ program? (Are people generally on the same page about what RJ is and if/how it should be done?)

20. How have you interfaced with the council or other policy makers?
    a. What has your communication with them been like? E.g., do you mostly get resources and/or directives? What kinds of information do you share with them?
    b. What policies or requirements are you working with from the state or other agencies? Related challenges or benefits?
    c. (try to get at the extent and type of communication that might support practice-informed-policy and/or policy-enabled-practice)

Note: interviews with council members will only include questions 1 through 7, as the other questions do not apply to them.

Appendix B: Questions from the RJ Council

1. What are people's personal definitions of RJ, and what do they consider to be the essential elements of RJ practice? How much variation is there in people's answers to these questions?

2. How are people implementing programs? What tools or strategies are they using?

3. What issues have people encountered with regard to change, stability, and sustainability? What creates sustainability?

4. What are the barriers to more widespread implementation of RJ?

5. What issues have people encountered around confidentiality, and in what contexts? How have they dealt with those issues?