

# ***RE-MAKING JOBS: ENACTING AND LEARNING WORK PRACTICES***

**Oriana Price<sup>#</sup>, Hermine Scheeres, David Boud**  
**University of Technology, Sydney**  
**Australia**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper takes up Schatzki (2005; 2006) understandings of organisations as ‘bundles of practices’ –work practices, and thus organisations, are both perpetuated and varied through employees’ enactments of work. Using a practice lens and drawing data from two Australian organisations, we consider the ways workers simultaneously maintain and alter practices in their workplace. We characterise this as *re-making* one’s job. We suggest that workers at various levels of responsibility contribute more to the formation of organisational practices than is often assumed by managers. The processes of *re-making* jobs and *re-making* organisational practices create tensions that we posit as sites for learning.

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<sup>#</sup> Oriana Price, Faculty of Education, University of Technology Sydney, PO Box 123 Broadway NSW 2007 Australia. Tel: 61 2 9514 3713 Fax: 61 2 9514 3737  
[oriana.price@uts.edu.au](mailto:oriana.price@uts.edu.au)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we explore what happens to particular kinds of organisational practices when new workers are employed to enact them. We draw attention to the kinds of things new workers do to work out what their jobs entail. In considering this working out we highlight points of tension between the workers' enactments of their jobs and existing organisational practices. We propose these points of tension as potential sites for individual and organisational learning. The paper presents empirical data from a current Australian Research Council funded project conducted in four Australian organisations using and extending Schatzki's (2005; 2006) notions of practice.

In working out how to do their jobs, the new workers in our research are, we maintain, engaged in *re-making* their jobs. We characterise this working out as *re-making* because the jobs that these new workers were appointed to had been formally described and represented in organisational documents including job descriptions and organisational charts. Thus, these jobs had been established and defined within the possibilities of already existing organisational practices and understandings.

The ways in which the new workers in our research have talked about the impact of self-generated job construction on organisational practices, suggests that this *re-making* of jobs contributes to the *re-making* of organisational practices. We understand this *re-making* of jobs to be the site where the simultaneous perpetuation and *re-making* of organisational practices occurs. We suggest that our empirical data supports and extends the 'practice' frame developed by Schatzki (2005; 2006). We say 'supports' because the phenomenon of perpetuation and variance of organisational practices Schatzki discusses emerged in our empirical data. We say 'extend', because we illustrate one way that this simultaneous perpetuation and variance of organisational practices occurs – we characterise this as workers *re-making* their jobs.

The coming together and enmeshing of *re-made* jobs, *re-made* practices and already existing practices creates points of tension within the organisations we have researched. We understand these points of tension as sites of individual and organisational learning. In our research, new workers are learning about organisational practices and are reframing their existing knowledge and its application in their new organisational context. Existing workers are learning about the new approaches and how to enact these as practices. As old practices are being *re-made* into new ones and implemented by new and existing workers, new organisational learning is becoming embedded.

In the first section of this paper we consider the significance of taking up a practice approach for our current research. We begin by briefly discussing the 'practice turn' and then outline the work that this approach has enabled us to do. Next we take up Schatzki's (2005; 2006; 2001) understandings of practice and use these to frame the findings of our research. In the third section, we explore elements of the individual and organisational learning literature and relate these to a practice approach to learning. In the fourth section, we outline our methodology and our analysis. In the fifth section, we begin our discussion by first outlining two key practices that characterise the organisations we researched. We examine how these new practices have been taken up alongside other existing practices.

Through the experiences of new workers charged with the implementation of key organisational practices, we bring into focus ways in which workers come to workout and *re-make* their jobs. Finally, we describe the points of tension that have emerged as workers *re-made* their jobs. We suggest these intersections and tensions construct practices that can be sites for individual and organisational learning.

## **2. HOW IS A PRACTICE APPROACH USEFUL?**

The ‘practice-turn’ has been named to highlight a contemporary shift in theorizing about social phenomena, including organisations. It brings to the fore conceptions that all human activity including ‘knowledge, meaning, science, power, language and social institutions’ are part of and constitute the ‘field of practices’ (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina & von Savigny 2001, p. 11). In doing so the ‘practice turn’ steers clear of theoretical dualities (e.g. individual/social; structure/agency etc). It grounds theorising in practices as the ‘primary building block of social life and meaning’ (Boud & Lee 2006, p. 47; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina & von Savigny 2001). Within the ‘practice’ frame there is a general agreement that practices are ‘embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organised around shared practical understandings’ (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina & von Savigny 2001, p. 12).

The usefulness of a ‘practice’ frame to this research in particular and to organisational studies in general, is in providing a meso level of analysis—one that interconnects the individual and the social. In framing organisations as ‘bundles of practices and material arrangements’ (Schatzki 2006, p. 1863) or ‘systems of practices’ (Gherardi 2000, p. 215) the practice frame positions the worker and the social context of work (organisations) as mutually produced—where knowing and doing cannot be separated (Gherardi 2000). Using a practice frame has focused on the mutual production occurring in the organisations that we have researched. This has enabled us to uncover ways in which worker and organisational understandings of practices become shared, enmeshed, carried forward and at the same time *re-made*. In constituting learning as integral to practice, the practice frame has enabled us to understand this *re-making* of jobs and organisational practices as a site of individual and organisational learning. In the next section we take up Schatzki’s (2005; 2006; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina & von Savigny 2001) notions of ‘practice’ to frame our research findings.

## **3. ORGANISATIONS AS ‘PRACTICE-ARRANGEMENT BUNDLES’**

Schatzki (2006) understands organisations as ‘bundles of practices and material arrangements’ (p. 1863) that persist and frame past, present and future possibilities for organisations. Organisations are seen as encompassing existing and altered practices entwining people, technology and work spaces. Practices are described as consisting of elements of both structure and action. Structure includes understandings of the ‘how to’ of a practice, the rules, possible ends and goals. Action is about the carrying out of a practice, and is framed by existing practice structures. Practice structures frame and sustain a practice by impacting on its’ material arrangements as it exists in the organisation. Practices are understood to be carried forward within the practice memory of an

organisation and by workers enacting them (Schatzki 2005; 2006; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina & von Savigny 2001).

Organisational practice memory encompasses understandings, rules and ends as elements of practices that exist even when practices are not being carried out. These persisting rules and ends are often captured in organisational documents, history and infrastructure. In this way organisational practice memory is described as existing beyond the aggregate memories, interpretations and understandings of workers. In their enactment of organisational practices workers carry practices forward and at the same time vary those practices in some way. This is because, whether consciously or unconsciously, workers carry with them understandings of similar practices from other contexts (e.g. previous jobs, experiences and or knowledge). In enacting organisational practices, workers' understandings of those practices become enmeshed with previous understandings of similar practices from other contexts—in this way practices are perpetuated and at the same time varied (Schatzki 2006).

The idea that practices persist and frame organisational possibilities while at the same time become transformed is also discussed by other writers. For Kemmis (2007) practitioners' understandings of their practices are 'already shaped ... by ways of living that have already preceded them' (p. 5) – changes in practice not only requires changes in the actions of the practitioners but also in the contextual elements of a practice (2007, p. 8). Similarly, Habermas (2003a) drawing on the work of Heidegger, writes of people as always already in a linguistically structured lifeworld' (p. 10). Finally, for Gherardi (2000) practice is 'always a product of specific historical conditions resulting from previous practice and transformed into present practice' (p. 215). This transformation results from both the way our world is and has been constructed and experienced by ourselves and others, and our own present doings. In taking up the idea of practices having social and historical dimensions beyond the immediate context, practices can be considered as transcending any one worker or any one organisation.

The transcendence of practices beyond any one worker or organisation, suggests that practices may be the social 'thing' that connects organisations and helps us understand what organisations are. According to Schatzki (2005), organisations are interconnected with other organisations in 'nets of practice-arrangement bundles' (p. 479). These nets can include markets, governments, competitors and other entities that constitute an organisation's operating environment. Change in practices within any one element of these nets can have a rippling and often unpredictable effect across other interconnected parts. Following Schatzki (2005; 2006), we understand organisations as complex understandings and enactments that are not easily describable and often messy and unpredictable. We suggest that changes in organisational practices are mutually constituted by the organisation's contextual circumstances and workers' readings and enactments of those circumstances. This perspective on organisations challenges linear, rational and top driven descriptions of organisations, jobs and change often used by managers and presented in management manuals and textbooks. We suggest that views of organisations as described in documents such as organisational charts, job descriptions, performance management and procedural systems, though useful and probably necessary as starting points in modernist organisations, nevertheless construct work as too easily captured and described. Further, the learning involved in being a worker or an organisation implicated in linear and rational

models of jobs and organisational practices appears therefore also to be clear and definable. We propose that the enmeshments of practices and enactments that constitute organisations, present much more complex sites for individual and organisational learning. In the next section we provide a brief overview of how we understand learning.

#### 4. SITES FOR LEARNING

For Schatzki (2006), learning is viewed as a crucial element in the perpetuation of organisational practices. Practices are understood to impact what is learned, how it is learned and by whom. Through ‘teaching and transmitting’ (Schatzki 2006, p. 1868), by workers describing, examining and questioning, the contextual characteristics and interrelationships among practices embedded in organisational practice memory are learned from others in the organisation. This transmitted practice knowledge is not simply replicated – different workers attain different understandings about organisational practices. These different understandings occur ‘due to differences in [workers’] training, experiences, intelligence ... status’ (Schatzki 2005, p. 480). It is these different understandings that contribute to the simultaneous perpetuation and variance of practices (Schatzki 2005; 2006).

In a similar way to Schatzki, others understand learning as ‘co-present’ in everyday organisational practices (Gherardi 2000, p. 214). They suggest that it is through participation and co-construction of everyday work practices that workers learn. As workers interact to create shared meaning and understanding, they ‘acquire-knowledge in-action’ (Gherardi 2000, p. 214) and at the same time they re-produce and change that knowledge (Contu & Willmott 2003; Weick & Roberts 1993). Thus, not only are organisational practices perpetuated and at the same time varied or *re-made* through worker’s enactments, but also the knowledge embedded within them is re-formed.

In considering the individual learning/organisational learning relationship, Cook and Yanow (1993), maintain that learning moves from individual to collective through changes in organisational procedures, structures and routines. Others suggest that organisational learning occurs when ‘actors reflect on their practices ... to understand the connections between determinants, action and outcomes’ (Dragonetti *et al.* 2005, p. 6). In taking up ideas of practices being embedded in organisational practice memory and of knowledge being embedded in practices, it follows that changes in practices also change practice knowledge. As new practices (and practice knowledge) are embedded in organisational practice memory, organisational learning may be understood as occurring.

From the brief comments on learning presented above, we take up a number of ideas. First, workers co-construct organisational practices and create shared meaning and understandings of those practices – they learn the how-to, the contextual characteristics and interrelationships among practices. At the same time, organisational practices (embedded in organisational practice memory) play a role in framing what is learned, how it’s learned and by whom. Second, as workers acquire knowledge of organisational practices, they, at the same time, re-produce and change that knowledge in some ways. These re-productions and changes in knowledge occur because workers carry with them different understandings, knowledge and experiences from other contexts. These different understandings not only

contribute to the simultaneous perpetuation and variance of practices, but also to changes in the knowledge embedded in them (Schatzki 2005; 2006). As new knowledge about organisational practices becomes embedded in organisational practice memory, organisational learning ensues.

## **5. THE RESEARCH PROJECT, RESEARCH SITES AND METHODS**

Our interest in organisational practices is related to a current project – *Beyond Training: Integrated development practices (IDPs) in organisations*. Our focus in this project is on organisational practices that are: Independent from and not defined in terms of training or education; implemented by people whose primary job function is not training or education; deployed for purposes of achieving outcomes other than learning; but that carry within them learning of some sort. In this paper we explore a worker-generated IDP – *re-making one's job* – in the context of newly introduced organisational practices.

Our research sites discussed in this paper are two Australian workplaces in the public sector: a community education college (henceforth the *College*) and a local council (henceforth the *Council*). The *College* provides community adult education, ranging from literacy, business skills and computing to weekend hobby courses. It employs ten full time employees, ten casual employees and over three hundred sessional tutors. The management structure has few hierarchical levels. The Principal is responsible for the day-to-day management and reports to the *College* Board. Reporting to the Principal are three Faculty Managers, a Customer Service Manager, a Bursar and a Marketing and Promotions Manager. These managers lead small work teams comprising of both full time and casual employees.

The *Council* is a large metropolitan council responsible for service provision and governance at a local community level. *Council's* services included the library and community service, road maintenance, waste collection, recreation and regulatory services. Encompassing six hundred employees, its structure is hierarchical. The General Manager oversees all operations across four divisions with Group [Division] Managers reporting to him. Within each division the structure includes a Group Manager, business unit manager, team leaders and workers. The General Manager reports to the elected Council that comprises twelve politicians who are charged with making strategic policy decisions.

### **5.1. Research Methods**

Our research methods include semi-structured interviews, observations and analysis of organisational documents. Forty interviews were conducted (and recorded) with workers across hierarchical levels and functions of both organisations. As the *Council* was substantially larger than the *College* about thirty interviews were conducted within the *Council*. We carried out approximately fifteen hours of observation of work practices and took field notes. We analysed organisational documents including annual reports, business plans, policy and procedure documents and job descriptions from both organisations.

The interviews focused on the re-told experiences of workers as they enacted and extended newly introduced organisational practices. The document analysis enabled us to understand

the formalised descriptions of these organisations, the practices and the jobs within them. The data generated from these methods enable various accounts of practice and jobs to emerge. Observations of work were carried during site visits – this allowed us to further understand the work of the organisations and worker practices.

## 5.2. Analysis of Data

Document analysis enabled us to built-up our understanding of each organisational context. We ascertained the priorities for each organisation, the image each was attempting to portray to stakeholders, espoused values and ways of operating. We also examined specific documents pertaining to jobs and roles for employees including job descriptions, performance appraisal documents, promotions information and general descriptions of work practices. We combined these understandings with data generated from our observations.

The analysis of interview data involved a number of steps. First, all interview recordings were transcribed and read to identify emerging IDP-related themes. Next we drew together themes and described these in relation to IDPs. Third we re-read the transcripts while listening to the recorded interviews to “get a better feel” for our data. We re-confirmed the themes that emerged from each interview and identified new ones that extended our notions of IDPs. We worked throughout on representing the work of people and organisations as practices using the theoretical ideas we were developing. The discussion below features one IDP we have named ‘*re-making one’s job*’.

## 6. DISCUSSION

In this section we discuss what is emerging from our data in relation to how employees know and do their work in times of change. We begin by describing the operating contexts of the *College* and the *Council*, the drivers for cultural change, and how this change has been taken up within each organisation. Secondly, we discuss how a significant feature of this change – new practices of *customer service* and *commercialisation* – has been introduced alongside the existing practices of the *College* and the *Council*. In the third part of our discussion, we draw on the experiences of new workers charged with the implementation of customer service and commercialisation practices. We highlight how these new workers, in working out how to do their jobs, have been *re-making* their jobs and at the same time *re-making* the organisational customer service and commercialisation practices. We conclude by drawing attention to tensions that have occurred in the enmeshment of *re-made* jobs, perpetuated and *re-made* organisational practices. We describe these tensions as sites of individual and organisational learning.

### 6.1. The *College* and the *Council* as practice-arrangement bundles

Both the *College* and the *Council* have been subject to significant cultural change. In Schatzki’s (2005) terms these changes have occurred in the ‘nets of practice-arrangement bundles’ (p. 479) through which the *College* and the *Council* are interconnected. As a

result, understandings of what it is to be a contemporary public sector organisation have been reframed for both organisations.

Changes in Government funding, reporting and evaluation structures have meant that in order to continue operating, the *College* has had to develop new ways of working. These have included the implementation of an operating model built around quality accreditation, seeking sponsorships and offering marketable course to attract profits (Traynor 2004). Unlike other Australian community colleges, the *College* has been successful in the execution of these changes. This success has been demonstrated in two ways. First, in the *College*'s ability to continue operating in surplus, while other community colleges have been amalgamating or ceasing operations. Second, in its ability to generate sufficient profits to re-invest in the provision of community and equity programs.

In the context of the *Council*, the State Government's 'New Public Management' (NPM) reforms of Councils in the late 1990s significantly altered the parameters of operation for this sector. In response to the NPM agenda the *Council* chose a path of 'revolutionary and transformational' change (Jones 2002, p. 45). At the core of this reform has been a major restructure and the creation of a new division focused on for-profit service delivery. This has led to new modes of operation across the whole *Council*. Unlike other councils, the *Council* has been one of few to successfully implement major NPM reforms while at the same time strengthening its financial position and continuing to meet increasingly complex community expectations.

## **6.2. New practices at the *College* and the *Council***

New operating models around customer service and commercialisation have spawned new practices in both organisations and these have had an impact on all workers in some way. The application of these practices within both organisations has not simply reflected the private sector models from which they were drawn. Rather, they continue to be *re-made* by new and existing workers. At the same time this *re-making* is framed by the existing practices already embedded in the *College* and the *Council*. In discussing the introduction of customer service practices we draw from data from the *College*, while in discussing the introduction of commercialisation practices, we draw data from the *Council*.

In our initial interview with George the *College* Principal, there was much talk about changes that had been occurring within the community education sector. George understood these changes as driven by the Government's agenda, which sought to move community colleges towards a more self-funded operational structure. These changes in funding and reporting structures have had an impact on the ways in which education provision is understood within the adult community education sector and within the *College*. George described these new understandings as a shift from the:

*"...old authoritative approach to education ... to a customer approach ... a big change ... a challenge ... to make sure that we focus on the quality of what we do ... to meet the customer or student expectations"*



To facilitate a self-funded operational structure, the *College* has introduced a greater proportion of marketable courses and a number of operational changes. George described the operational changes as the application of a customer approach, the introduction of customer service practices and the establishment of a “... *complete customer service team*”.

Within the *Council*, the Government NPM agenda is reflected in the introduction of private sector commercial practices through the establishment of a for-profit service delivery (FPSD) division. Ron, the *Council*'s General Manager, described the division as:

“... *stand alone ... bidding for work outside ... [adding] \$1.25 million dollars on the bottom line ... so it is run very much as a commercial operation*”

The follow-on effect of the creation of the FPSD division has been major restructuring across *Council* resulting in the creation of the Commissioning and Contracts (CC), Governance and Sustainable Communities Division. The role of this Division has been to manage all contractual service purchasing, including contracts for the purchase of services from the now separate FPSD division.

The establishment of the Customer Service function at the *College* and the CC Division at the *Council* occurred through the drawing together of existing and new practices. These newly linked practices may be said to represent understandings of *customer service* and *commercialisation practices* at a point in time in the *College* and *Council* histories. In line with Schatzki (2005), these have been developed within the possibilities of the already existing practices and embedded in the *College* and *Council* organisational practice memories.

Ways in which old and newly introduced practices are combining have emerged from our initial analysis of the changing discourses in organisational documents. For example, in the *College* handbook course participants are referred to and named in different ways. These namings include ‘student,’ copying the term used in policy documents prior to the introduction of customer service practices, and ‘customers’ or ‘clients’ following the references in later documents such as the *College*'s customer service charter (Price *et al.* 2007). Similarly in successive *Council* operational planning documents we have noted a shift from more traditional community-focussed local government discourses to business-oriented discourses. In these documents, Directors have become Group Managers, departments have become business units and so on. These discourses both reflect and construct understandings of an organisation's work and employees' jobs.

One strategy that both the *College* and the *Council* have instigated to facilitate the shift towards new workplace practices has been through the recruitment of workers. When Emma joined the *College*, she had had extensive experience in customer service roles within the private sector. Emma described her work experience as corporate, and she saw this as having made her ‘*very business focussed*’. Ron joined the *Council* after having had more than twenty years experience as a marketing executive in the private sector. He described the *Council*'s expectations of him in his job as Group Manager of the CC division as:

*“...bring[ing] the commercial world into local government ... they were changing direction ... they weren’t going to do it with somebody that had steered similar ships in the past.”*

Both Emma and Ron were recruited from outside the industry sectors to which the *College* and the *Council* belonged. In the case of these new workers, it appears that a crucial determinant in their appointment had been their extensive work experience in the practices that their new organisation was initiating. They demonstrate their embodiment of these practices, and how they saw their jobs in their ‘business’ talk. These workers were seen to have the capacity to bring with them understandings and knowledge useful to the *College* and the *Council* in the application of customer service and commercialisation practices.

Below we explore in more detail how these new workers have worked out how to do their jobs. In particular, we draw attention to the ways in which they have perpetuated and at the same time varied the customer service and commercialisation practices of their organisations.

### **6.3. Perpetuation of practices, re-making jobs, re-making practices**

At the *College*, Emma was appointed to the Customer Service Team Leader position. Her duties and responsibilities were communicated to her in formalised organisational documents including her job description. In these documents, Emma was charged with the implementation of customer service practices. As Customer Service Team Leader, Emma was responsible for the day to day operations of a small team of workers who answered telephone enquiries and processed course enrolments. At the *Council*, Ron was appointed to the Group Manager CC position. Not unlike Emma, Ron’s duties and responsibilities were communicated to him in formalised organisational documents including his job description. Ron was expected to drive *Council’s* commercialisation practices throughout his division, by ‘*directing and controlling of Service Delivery Contracts*’ (CC Group Manager Job Description-1999).

In leading the customer service team Emma talked of how she took these organisational descriptions of her job as a starting point, but at the same time brought into the *College* understandings about customer service practices she had developed from other work contexts. In describing her initial period as Team Leader, Emma talked of how she reconciled the differences in what she understood to be customer service practices and the already existing customer service practices of the *College*.

*“...I saw a need for increasing the customer service ... [there wasn’t] a lot of customer service focus [within the College]”.*

She talked of how she saw opportunities for extending the *College’s* practices by: “... *looking at customer service from every angle*” and described one of the ways in which she achieved this was:

*“... I put together a package for [the Principal] to look at a role that managed the whole of Customer Service ... off-site staff ... casuals ... increasing the customer*

*service training ... pushing every limit ... the title of Customer Service Manager which I kind of made up myself because there wasn't that job before"*

'Put[ting] together a package' entailed drawing on fifteen years experience of customer service practices together with an appraisal of the organisational context – its current practices, new goals and so on. What Emma engages in is the perpetuation of existing practices, for example '*managing all the casuals*' while at the same time varying them by '*increasing the customer service training of staff*' in order to bring into being customer service practices that fit with the *College's* quality directions. The processes involve *re-making* her job – notably recognised as such in the job title Emma creates for herself.

At the *Council*, Ron talked of how he had permeated what he understood to be commercialisation practices within the CC division. Ron described the CC division as '*a totally new role in local government*', and, rather than simply focusing on '*directing and controlling service delivery contracts*', he took these formalised descriptions of his job as starting points. Ron told of how he took a marketing approach in his job as CC Group Manager:

*"... Here, nobody knew ... [what all of Council's services were] ... the first thing we did was put together a list of our products ... we came up with something like 126 ... the work silos was perfect for local government ... that's one of the things we've broken"*

Through his job, Ron introduced new understandings of the ways *Council's* products and services were to be managed. He shifted silo-based operational practices towards commercial service delivery practices. The existing practices of commercialisation became enmeshed with Ron's understandings (from other contexts) of commercial service delivery. Ron *re-made* his job and the practices of the *Council*. During our interview, he also described how he was continuing to *re-make* *Council's* practices to be more in line with those of a commercial enterprise. He described how he had been reconciling *Council's* financial management practices with those he understood to be the practices of a business. Drawing on his commercial experience, he redefined the parameters of his job to have direct control over financial management and *re-made* the budget process of *Council*. He talked of how as General Manager, he was:

*"very uneasy with Finance [as part of FPSD] ... if you're going to run an organization ... the CEO needs to have direct contact with [Finance] ... so I brought Finance back ... our budget process ... used to take 2 months ... it's now done in 3 weeks"*

What has been revealed by both Emma and Ron is that in perpetuating the practices of their organisations and enmeshing their already existing understandings of those practices, these new workers challenge the textualised descriptions and understandings of their jobs. In working out what their jobs are and how to do their jobs in enacting the practices of their new organisations, these workers have been *re-making* their jobs. We use the term *re-making* because the jobs that both Emma and Ron had been appointed to had been established within the possibilities of the already existing organisational practice memories and understandings of the *College* and the *Council* (Schatzki 2005).

In *re-making* their jobs and the practices of customer service and commercialisation, Emma and Ron have not had *carte blanche*. Rather, this *re-making* has been framed within the possibilities of already existing and persisting practices embedded in the organisational practice memories of the *College* and *Council* (Kemmis 2005; Schatzki 2005). Both Emma and Ron have been negotiating between their understanding of customer service and commercialisation and the organisationally embedded understandings of these new practices. These negotiations surfaced tensions between the potentially *re-made* jobs and *re-made* practices, and the already existing and persisting practices of the *College* and *Council*.

Emma described these tensions as things she encountered everyday in her work with others at the *College*:

*“...I am pushing it, continually pushing it ... sort it out ... I think that there’s a need [to question existing practices] ... but also a limit [to the questioning]”*.

Similarly at the *Council*, Ron described tensions he had experienced between existing and new practices when he attempted to enact a commercial approach in his dealings with the elected Councillors. In the new context of commercialisation, Councillors were expected to enact the practices of a private sector Board of Directors. These new practices required Councillors to shift from a micro focus to a corporate and strategic focus. Yet, when Ron attempted to work with the Councillors in these new ways — drawing on the ways he had previously worked with corporate boards — he found this new approach difficult and constrained because the elected Council was:

*“...disparate, less focussed on a corporate outcome ... not something that I ... or anyone else is going to change”*.

We found these kinds of tensions surfacing in the ways in which other workers talked about the *re-made* practices of customer service and commercialisation. At the *College*, one of the Faculty Managers described the tensions between the new practices characteristic of a business, including those of customer service, and the existing college practices of providing education. Fred understood these as:

*“... a competition between 2 discourses ... there are people who think we are a business ... they ignore the structural difference between the college and business ... see the community college as a small business ... they don’t understand education ... whereas other people understand that fully ... see that as being the [reason for] ...the organization ... equitable, accessible education ... because the College ... is made up of people with both views ... [there is] inevitable tension”*

Similarly, at the *Council* the tensions between the work practices of a local Council and a local Council competing in the commercial world were highlighted by Kirk the Group Manager of the FPSD division. Kirk told of how the application of commercial practices was constrained by the *Council’s* existing reward and remuneration practices:

*“... we have award conditions ... [our people have] ... good employment conditions ... often not reconcilable [with] ... the competitive environment.”*

We understand these tensions, produced by the coming together and enmeshing of *re-made* jobs, *re-made* practices and already existing practices as not necessarily destructive. Rather, what our data shows, is that these points of tension can be re-viewed as sites of individual and organisational learning.

#### **6.4. Tensions as sites of learning**

The tensions between *re-made* jobs, *re-made* practices and already existing practices that have emerged from this research implicate learning both on an individual and organisational level. We begin with individual learning that has been occurring at the *College* and the *Council*. For new workers like Emma and Ron much learning has been about context. Both Emma and Ron, in working out their jobs, questioned and examined the existing practices of their organisations. In *re-making* her job as Customer Service Manager, Emma told of how she had been learning to adopt known customer service strategies in response to the existing practices of her new work context:

*“...because I am corporate background and very business focussed ... I am very black and white with staff ... 3 strikes you're out ... here it's a lot more softly approach ... more community ... I am adapting”*

Similarly, coming from the private sector, Ron talked about how when he first joined the *Council* he *‘knew nothing about local government’*. Ron learned about this new work context and industry, and this learning enabled him to become the natural successor for the General Manager's position. As Group Manager of the CC division, Ron drew from his previous experiences of *‘running \$160,000,000 company’* but soon learned that with the context of the *Council*, commercial practices such as raising funds by increasing prices are constrained by Government legislation:

*“[Council] ... is not flush with money ... [it] can't put price[s] up other than the [Government] ... rate cap, which is 3% ... the award increase is 3% every year ... anything that comes in goes straight out ... [unlike business, Council] can't generate funds ... by adding new products ... by promoting ... exporting”*

We found that at the same time as new workers like Emma and Ron had been *re-making* their jobs and the practices of their organisations, existing workers had also been learning. The learning for existing workers has been about the new directions and practices and how to enact these as practices within their jobs.

At the *College*, in *re-making* her job to Customer Service Manager, Emma became responsible for a group of workers who were Site Coordinators at the *College's* geographically dispersed teaching venues. The Site Coordinators were an existing team of workers who attended leased venues while courses were being conducted there. In their original jobs these workers had been expected to: *“sit at the venue and open [prior to the classes commencing] and close it [at the end of the night]”*. In *re-making* the existing

practices of customer service to encompass the jobs of the Site Coordinators, Emma shifted the work practices of the Site Coordinators and re-defined these jobs to include a focus on customer service. Emma described this shift as creating tensions between old and new and required the Site Coordinators to learn about and become “*customer service ... representing the College*”. These tensions and new learning were highlighted by Zorro, a Senior Site Coordinator who demonstrates his struggle with competing discourses in his paradoxical statement:

*“I’m not the customer mentality ... I’m the community mentality ... people who pay money to do a course ... you’re not a customer ... you’re a student ... it’s a bit hairy ... because they are a customer and the customer is always right.”*

In learning new directions and how to enact them, Emma described Site Coordinators’ responses to the practices as mixed – some “*like it and some [not]*”. However, since the introduction of the approach to customer service practices, Emma was confident that learning was occurring within the Site Coordinator’s group. She could see evidence of the new *customer service practices* being “*slowly infiltrated [into existing] processes*”.

Similarly, in *re-making* the practices of *Council* to be more akin to the practices of commercial organisations, Ron described how existing workers had been learning through participation in teams. By working in teams, existing workers challenged the current work practices as they “*came back and said ... look ... if we’re going to be competing in the plumbing business [by doing what we do now,]... it’s not going to happen*”. Through examining the practices of other successful organisations and questioning *Council’s* organisational practices, these workers developed new understandings about what it meant to become commercial, and the kinds of practices that were necessary in a competitive environment.

Our data also suggests that learning has been occurring at an organisational level within both organisations. Within both the *College* and the *Council* new meanings and understandings have become embedded in the respective organisational practice memories of these organisations. Within the *College*, customer service practices were being understood as a necessary part of being competitive and attracting funding to the *College*. As an organisation, the *College* was learning to negotiate the tensions between the new practices of customer service with existing social justice beliefs and practices. Ann, a Faculty Manager at the *College* described this negotiation as a balancing act:

*“ ... the only way you can really do it [negotiate the tensions] ... is that you can say ... without the business side of things there wouldn’t be a community college ... and all those equity programs would disappear ... that’s the justification for going down that path”.*

Similarly, Kirk described the *Council* as an organisation that had learned about enacting commercialisation practices and the problems that failure to be competitive created. He told of how *Council*:

*“... closed up a business last year ... 10 people were made redundant ... after 6 years ... a continual battle ... getting the work, ... mak[ing] a profit ... getting the money in ...*

*there was \$1/2 million owed to us ... I had to go out there and heavy people ... my God is this what it comes to ... the organisation continually changes as a result of those learning experiences."*

We found the tensions between *re-made* jobs, *re-made* practices and already existing practices to be sites for both worker and organisational learning. New workers at the *College* and the *Council* participated in and co-constructed (and *re-made*) work practices, they learnt about the practices and context within which they worked. They learned the how-to, the contextual characteristics and interrelationships of practices embedded in the practice memories of their new organisation. As these new workers co-constructed organisational practices and created shared meaning and understandings alongside existing workers, the existing workers have also been learning.

These different understandings not only contribute to the simultaneous perpetuation and variance of practices but they also contribute to changes and re-production of the knowledge embedded in them (Schatzki 2005; 2006). As the *re-made* practices of customer service and commercialisation have shifted existing organisational practices and understandings, these have become embedded with the organisational practice memories of both the *College* and the *Council*. We understand these as constituting organisational practice memory as organisational learning.

## 7. CONCLUSION

We draw a number of tentative conclusions from the research presented in this paper. First, we have provided further empirical support for the organisational phenomenon theorised by Schatzki (2005; 2006) – the simultaneous perpetuation and variance of organisational practices. Further, we have extended understanding of this theoretical work in a small way by identifying and describing one way – workers *re-making* their jobs – through which this simultaneous perpetuation and variance of organisational practices occurs. Both at the *College* and the *Council* perpetuation and variance of organisational practices occurred simultaneously as workers enacted the practices encompassed in their jobs. In perpetuating these practices and enmeshing their already existing understandings of similar practices in other contexts, workers within both organisations have been *re-making* their jobs. In *re-making* their jobs these workers have also been *re-making* the practices of their organisations.

Secondly, in *re-making* their jobs and the practices of their organisations, new workers within the *College* and the *Council* have been negotiating tensions. These tensions are between the *re-made* jobs, the newly introduced practices and the already existing (and persisting) practices of their organisations. We found these tensions to be sites where both the workers and their organisations are engaged in learning. New workers have been learning organisational practices and reframing their existing knowledge in their new organisational context. Existing workers have been learning new approaches and how to enact these as practices. As old practices have been *re-made* into new ones and implemented by new and existing workers, new organisational learning is embedded in the organisational practice memories of the *College* and the *Council* – organisational learning has occurred within these organisations.

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