

Organizational Agility Capability, Structuration Theory, and Social Practices
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0. Introduction

This paper describes an approach to organizational change that takes as its unit of movement social practices and the social structures which they produce and the larger social systems which, in the actions taken, they reproduce. It is based on a pattern of consulting interventions which I have engaged in with a number of large software development organizations over the last five years. The intention of this paper is to discover what might be learned about my work by refracting many of its principles and practices through a couple of social theories.

The paper has the following flow. First, I briefly describe the nature of my consulting work, which is to help large software development organizations increase their capacity for 'agility'—the ability to effectively perform in the face of relentless change and equivocality. This often requires a fundamental alteration in how people think about their working processes. Standard process rationalities within the high tech industry emphasize what Weber would call a 'formal' rationality—an approach to managing the software development lifecycle (SDLC) which places great emphasis on prediction, planning, and measurement. During the last decade, the software industry has faced a number of crises which many have judged to be the result of over-formality of processes and organizational structures which frame the SDLC. Many high-tech managers have started to suspect that what is needed is less formality and more agility in terms of organizational processes. As a consultant, I endeavor to help organizations make the transition from the former to the latter.

In subsequent parts of the paper, I will discuss aspects of my consultation approach within the context of two social theories: Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984) and Theodore Schatzki's (Schatzki, 1996) social practice theory. In the second and third parts of the paper, I give a brief overview of Giddens' structuration theory and of Schatzki's notion of social practices, in order to orient for the reader (but really for myself) a way to begin thinking about the particular notion of change I find myself engaging in my consultations. My work is buoyed by an epistemological orientation which is suspicious of the *functionalist* approach to understanding organizations—an approach which views change exclusively as a linear process involving defining a mission, designing a strategy for change, "enrolling" staff and rallying the troops, and, finally, stepwise execution of the

strategy (Kotter, 1996). I have a creeping suspicion that social change, and by extension *organizational change*, is not a linear, teleological process, but is, rather, a non-linear, dynamic, emergent, and essentially *unmanageable* process. Giddens captures the particular flavor of what I'm thinking well:

The flow of action continually produces consequences which are unintended by actors, and these unintended consequences also may form unacknowledged conditions of action in a feedback fashion. Human history is created by intentional activities but is not an intended project; it persistently eludes efforts to bring it under conscious direction (Giddens, 1984: 27).

Along these lines, I want to develop a reading of Giddens' theory of structuration and Schatzki's practice theory as a way to possibly motivate a different way of thinking about the social processes that energize change in human organizations; a thinking that is oriented toward 'sensing' and 'responding' to change and equivocality rather than attempting to vanquish change and equivocality through intensification of prediction and planning. Such a thinking would provide a rational alternative to the teleological model of change, and what I regard as an overly-simplistic, homeostatic view of social systems on which such a model is founded. This discussion constitutes the final substantive part of the paper.

1. Description of Intervention Pattern

Most software companies follow heavy process methodologies and command-control management styles, both of which emphasize *predict-and-plan* capabilities. Predict-and-plan capabilities are organizational capabilities which stress analysis; up-front planning and decision-making; 'design' approaches to strategy (Mintzberg, 1990); repeatable processes; and a 'plug-and-play' notion of human resource allocation. These capabilities are embodied in particular social practices and structures, all of which are enshrined in a variety of certifications and educational achievements (e.g. Project Management Institute, MBAs, etc). Unfortunately for these stylists, software development organizations seem to not be very amenable to predict-and-plan approaches, especially in the highly dynamic, ever-changing internet world (Highsmith, 2004). Those predict-and-plan capabilities—and the

practices in which they are embodied—are the very source of the difficulty software companies have in delivering high quality software quickly.

In my consulting work, I help large IT-intensive organizations move beyond *predict-and-plan* capacities in order to develop what some people have referred to as *sense-and-respond* capabilities (Haeckel, 1999). In contrast to *predict-and-plan* approaches, *sense-and-respond* approaches recognize that the world is not predictable, and that change is something to be embraced rather than avoided. This is no mere *philosophical* stance; *sense-and-respond* in fact constitutes a set of principles and specific practices by which an organization's capacity to *sense* its world and *respond* effectively is developed. Organizations which have high levels of *sense-and-respond* capacity are more *agile*, are better able to respond effectively to change in technology and in its market, are better able to understand their customers and stakeholders, and are felt by their people to be far better places to work.

Over the last 10 years, a number of *sense-and-respond*, or 'agile,' approaches have emerged (Highsmith, 2002). These approaches emphasize lightweight, just-in-time processes to software delivery which in turn highlight iterative/incremental delivery, self-organizing teams, collaboration between business and engineering, and more participative and empowering management and leadership styles.

As a consultant and coach for such transitions, my work necessarily involves strategies for organizational change and transformation. An intervention of this sort has, in my view, at least two pieces. First, it involves the introduction of new practices for work performance and management. According to structuration theory, when we alter the practices we alter the larger social systems in which those practices are engendered (Baert, 1998; Giddens, 1984; Poole & McPhee, 2005). This notion that organizational systems can be altered through a shift in relatively small-scale social interaction and practices is among the rationales underlying action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). The second piece is that it orients a shift in dominant rationality, from one which is largely formal and bureaucratic to one which emphasizes collaboration and emergence. These two pieces are discussed in the following pages in terms of Giddens structuration theory, and Schatzki's theory of social practices.

2. Giddens' Theory of Structuration

One way to think about organizational change is that it is about altering organizational systems through alteration of day-to-day practices and the social structures by which they are governed, giving attention simultaneously to the individual parts and to the greater whole. Such an approach acknowledges that social practices activate social webs in which small actions can have large impacts. Structuration theory, in many ways, deepens our understanding of this phenomenon. According to structuration theory, social structure is both the medium *for*, and the result *of* social practices. In this context, structure is understood as the "rules and resources recursively implicated in social reproduction" (Twente, 2004). Social systems have institutional features, which, in turn, have structural properties in terms of relationships that stabilize over time and across space (Twente, 2004). In an IT organization, for instance, actions are given by enduring practices in which are embedded complex social structures. This relationship between action and structure can be depicted as a mutual feedback loop:

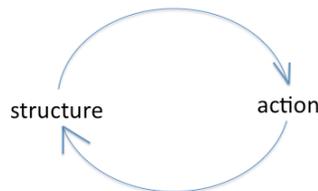


Figure 1

I'd like to take a moment to further unpack a couple of aspects of Giddens' theory. For one thing, Giddens defines *structure* as "recursively organized sets of rules and resources" which exist outside time and space "save in its instantiations and co-ordination as memory traces" (Giddens, 1984:25). Rules, in this context, are defined as "implicit techniques or 'generalizable procedures' that are implemented in the enactment or reproduction of social practices" (Baert, 1998:102). A rule is 'generalizable' "because it applies over a range of contexts and occasions"; a rule is a 'procedure' because "it allows for the methodological continuation of an established sequence" (Giddens, 1984:20-21). Rules, in Giddens' sense, are not of the class of rules which one must 'remember.' Rather, they are enacted in the very activity of engaging in social practices, and are embedded in the very actions taken

in every-day social practices. By showing up and doing what they do, people enact those rules.

This leads us to the observation that most of the knowledge leveraged in such activity is *practical* (Giddens, 1984:21-22). It is founded upon practical knowledge more than it is upon discursive knowledge. Giddens points out that “the knowledge [social actors] possess is not incidental to the persistent patterning of social life but is integral to it” (Giddens, 1984:26). Giddens further argues that “structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity” (Giddens, 1984:26). By this argument, Giddens erases the dualism by which agents and structures are more traditionally constituted. Instead, he proposes a *duality* of structure wherein “the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize” (Giddens, 1984:25). Another way of expressing this key idea of structuration is that every action and every interaction both *produces* the practices which they constitute and, at the same time, *reproduces* the social system and the structure of which they are a part. People don’t somehow ‘try’ to reproduce, or otherwise keep in existence, the social systems in which they work: the very actions they take in their day-to-day activities and social practices, without necessity of forethought, already reproduce those social systems.

This notion is of utmost relevance to the overall argument I am trying to make. For if social systems are reproduced in the very engaging in social practices, then a change in social practices could have as a consequence (intended or otherwise) the *transformation* of that system (Poole & McPhee, 2005:175). The transformed system would in turn generate an alteration of the systemic properties upon which the rules and resources of social structures are constituted. That is, the structures which govern social practices would provide an altered frame for those practices and, as such, orient an alteration in those practices. This loop could be depicted as follows:

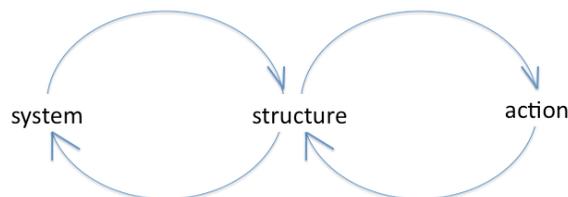


Figure 2

I should point out in passing that changes which may occur within the system sphere may or may not have a linear relation to alterations in the patterns of actions, as given by some new set of practices. As Perlow, Gittel & Katz (2004) note, structuration theory posits that actions either reinforce or undermine the structures by which they are constrained. Precisely how the reinforcement or undermining of structures may impact larger governing systems cannot be predicted. The power of unintended consequences of actions taken, and their capacity to shape social environments in which those actions are further taken, is a critical part of Giddens theory, to which I return later in the paper.

Having made an effort to explicate certain aspects of Giddens' theory of structuration, I now turn toward consideration of social practices. Once this is accomplished, I will have laid sufficient theoretical groundwork to return to the central matter of this paper, which is the refraction of practices associated with the development of organizational *sense-and-respond* capability through the lens of social theories.

3. Schatzki's Practice Theory

There are three foci related to practice theory (Schatzki, 1996) which I want to foreground. First, social practices engender particular 'understandings and intelligibilities' which are embodied by individuals and individuals in interaction. Second, practice theory understands social systems not as coherent, understandable, and *totalizing* wholes, but as a kind of 'hanging-togetherness' (*zusammenhang*). Third, individual selves are similarly indeterminate: they arise within the particular social practices in which individuals are engaged. I will now flesh each of these out in a little more detail.

Schatzki grounds much of his theory in Wittgenstein's 'language games. As mentioned in the depth paper, for Wittgenstein, as it is for Schatzki, *understanding* and *intelligibility* structure both the social realm *and* the realm of individual mind and action (Schatzki, 1996:12). Social practices can be understood as the "doings and sayings" (Schatzki, 1996:12) through which circuits and elements form within social webs. Practices form the activity frames which determine what mental states

humans can be in, and which actions are available (i.e. 'make sense') at a given moment. Embedded within practices are particular understandings and intelligibilities, by virtue of which "practices are where the realms of sociality and individual mentality/activity are at once organized and linked" (Schatzki, 1996:13). Understandings and intelligibilities arise from what we *do*, and from the social orders and structures which make what we do relevant within particular social worlds.

Understandings and intelligibilities foreground the micro dimension of social practice theory. From a macro perspective, Schatzki avoids the *totalizing* understanding of social wholes that characterize many social theories. For Schatzki, as it is for many postmodernists, social wholes are contingent, emergent; they constitute what Schatzki terms a 'hanging-togetherness' (Schatzki, 1996:13-4). Lives 'hang together' in a variety of ways. They hang together in the micro-situations of relationships and interactions. But they also hang together in macro-social associations and institutions, such as classical music performance, rules of boxing, and variety of judicial systems by which human activity is legally regulated. None of this is to suggest that social wholes are ad hoc and disorderly; quite the contrary. However, their stabilizing forces cannot be understood from the perspective of a teleological or centrifugal regulative stance.

This brings me to a final point of focus regarding practice theory, and that is its emphasis on the "in-the-world" character of mind and self. Individual mental states and intellectual attitudes occur, for Schatzki (and Wittgenstein) not 'inside one's head' but out in the world. They are in this sense aspects of "how things stand and are going in the world", to use one of Schatzki's characteristic phrases. An individual is no longer solely that which is situated as a 'substance' or 'inner kernel' (Schatzki, 1996:34). Rather, individuality is a "socially constructed and achieved status" (Schatzki, 1996:34). As Schatzki observes, "personhood is an effect of social practices, in that expressive bodies, life conditions, and ascriptions/comprehension of these conditions exist (for the most part) only within practices" (Schatzki, 1996:35).

4. Bringing the Pieces Together

As Giddens might observe, social practices—understood as “doings and sayings” (i.e., not merely ‘internalized structures’)—are the promulgators of structuration. From the perspective of structuration theory, understandings and intelligibilities are what link individual consciousness with social structures. Similarly, the contingent, “hanging-togetherness” of social wholes points out the malleable character of social systems and foregrounds the notion of social systems as that which both governs social behavior and is effected by it. Significantly, this view of social systems underscores Giddens’ notion of the *duality* of agency and structure, which gains further support from Schatzki’s notion that personhood and individuality are effects of social practices.

We can depict this organization by only slightly modifying the depiction given in Figure 2:

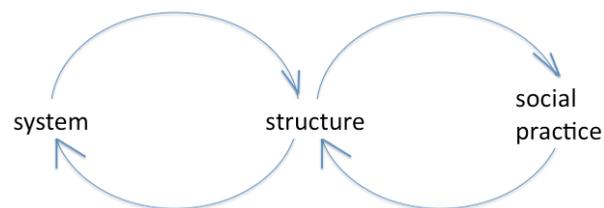


Figure 3

Social structures both orient and are produced through social practice. At the same time, social systems, which endure in time and space, both produce and are reproduced by its structural properties. It can be surmised, given this interpretive engagement of the two theories, that changes in social practices yield changes in the larger social systems within which they are engendered, and *through which* they are reproduced.

With this formulation in hand, I would like to begin to speculate its unfolding given a specific organizational intervention pattern, namely the organizational adoption of *Scrum* (Schwaber & Beedle, 2002), a small set of practices intended to aid in the development of agile, *sense-and-respond*, software development capabilities. In this discussion, it will be shown that while the practices themselves may be simple and straightforward, they are hard to actually do. Part of the reason for this, as I

will attempt to show, is due to organizational behaviors which can be explained by structuration theory. Nevertheless, I would also like to show that awareness of the implications of structuration theory can inform, and perhaps *improve*, the process by which an organization uses the practices proposed by *Scrum* to amplify its sense-and-respond capability.

Scrum Practices

Scrum (Schwaber & Beedle, 2002) is a lightweight Agile process framework designed to help software development teams improve their software delivery process. The criteria for 'improvement' are pretty clear: faster, better, cheaper, and more responsive to change. Here are several of the core practices of Scrum:

1. Iterative/incremental development: develop in small cycles of 2-4 weeks, at the end of which time selected features are rendered potentially shippable. This means, that for each feature, all of the work necessary to *complete* that feature—including design, coding, testing, documentation, etc.—is done. At the end of each 2-4 week iteration, features which the team committed to at the beginning of the iteration are potentially ready to be shipped. Three team 'events' frame each iteration: a planning meeting, a review meeting, and a team retrospective. The planning meeting occurs at the beginning of an iteration. Its purpose is for the team to plan the work for the next iteration. The review and retrospective meetings happen at the end of an iteration. The purpose of the review meeting is for the team to meet with business and other stakeholders at the end of the iteration to review the work completed. The review meeting allows stakeholders to see concretely (through demos, for instance) what was completed during the iteration and, on the basis of what they see, make new decisions and possibly adjust the priority of the feature set. Finally, the retrospective is an opportunity for the team to reflect upon its own working process after each iteration. Retrospectives become the means by which teams endeavor to continuously improve the way they work together.
2. Ongoing prioritization of product features: the development team only works on features that have been deemed by product management 'highest priority.' 'Highest priority' indicates those features which, if delivered and shipped, could realize the highest benefit, either for the customer or for the organization. Prioritization is ongoingly evaluated and adjusted based on what business and

product management learns regarding the market, and what team members and other technical leaders learn about technology. One of the bylines for this approach to working is that the customer has the right to change their minds.

3. Cross-functional, self-organizing teams: development teams include anyone needed to turn a product feature description into potentially shippable product increment. As much as possible, it is not individual team members working on their own isolated tasks (as is so often the case in traditional software development approaches), but it is the entire team working together to finish the work for a given iteration (the term 'scrum' refers to the action in rugby when an *entire* team together attempts to move the ball down the field). More than this, however, is that we want to see teams excel as teams; to become 'high-performing' teams. Such teams are not merely capable of delivering product increments quickly and with high quality; they are capable of high levels of innovation and creativity which can often lead to breakthrough levels of performance. Many of the ideas regarding 'self-organizing' teams comes from thinking about complex adaptive systems. The fundamental idea here is that if you leave a team alone, but also empower it with regular and ongoing coaching from product management, it will be capable of discovering its own *native* social/group organization and hence of discovering its own particular way of working effectively.
4. Teams work together in close physical proximity. Each team has its own work room. Team members agree on daily 'core hours' during which they all work together in that room. The room has everything the team needs to work effectively, including ample whiteboard space for ad hoc design and planning discussions. In the room are a variety of displays which the team uses to track its progress on a daily basis. These displays are designed so that management and other stakeholder could, upon entering the room, gain an accurate assessment of the state of the teams progress and any impediments it may have run into during the current iteration. One of the fundamental principles underwriting the importance of the team room is "osmotic communication" (Cockburn, 2002). Osmotic communication is the ambient communication which happens when people who know each other well sit together in room, each doing their own thing, but still fully aware of what others are doing and talking about. Osmotic communication are among the numerous phenomena which can support development of self-organizing and self-managing teams.

5. A single person 'owns' the product feature backlog. The name of the role of this person is 'product owner'. This person is responsible for helping the team understand the product they are developing and for making day-to-day, and iteration-to-iteration decisions as to what's important and what isn't. This doesn't mean that other stakeholders don't have input into the process; it simply means that there is one person who has the ultimate say. Among other things, this forces management to make difficult political decisions which otherwise tend to be avoided, hence obfuscating precisely what is to be delivered and when. By having frequent access to, and in fact being coached and educated by business and product management, team members gain profound knowledge, not just of the particular product(s) they may be building, but of the larger context which informs the business thinking behind those products. It is often found that, armed with such deep knowledge, software development teams become true partners, not only in building products, but in innovating them as well.
6. Maintain a list of 'impediments' and try to remove them as quickly as possible. Once teams begin going faster they will inevitably run into roadblocks and impediments—issues and challenges which impede the team's capacity to become highly productive. There is a role in Scrum, called 'Scrum Master', and part of the job of the Scrum Master is to either remove impediments as quickly as possible, or to escalate them to management so that they can learn about them and, when possible, get them removed.
7. Empiricism and transparency. 'Empiricism' here refers to the notion that nothing is 'real' until people can put their hands on it. In traditional approaches to software development, there is often excessive documentation which is intended to stand in for working software. In Scrum (as is the case in other Agile processes), actual working software is preferred, since documentation (and promos) are usually misleading and confusing, whereas actual working software—even if only partially done—tends to help stakeholders see things more clearly. The notions of empiricism and transparency inform a number of more detailed Scrum practices, including visual displays placed on the way which show daily project progress, and the ground rules which teams often adopt which emphasize open and transparent communication.

As I mentioned before, these practices are easy to understand, but usually difficult to achieve. From the perspective of practice theory, they involve adoption of small

level practices which quite literally affect the way people *are*, bodily, in their working. For one thing, these practices engender far higher degrees of interaction and collaboration than is common in software development environments. From a structuration perspective, this emphasis on collaboration alters the structures which govern how work gets done. The subtle rules which here-to-fore have governed interaction are substantially altered when there is greater collaboration.

Implications From a Structuration and Practice Theory Perspective

I'd like to take a moment to examine just one example of how this works. The example concerns what to do when a developer has a question regarding the code he or she is working on. Though seemingly trivial, this is actually a big problem in software organizations and can be the source of huge and very expensive errors. When a developer is sitting alone in a cube or an office, and a minor question arises, the ratio of effort to perceived importance of the problem typically induces the developer to resolve the question him- or herself. By contrast, in a more collaborative environment, in which team members work together in close proximity within the same physical space, it is easy enough to turn to another team member, or to the product owner to get the question answered.

Such behavior has the effect of reducing errors for a couple of reasons. First, the inquiring developer will, more often than not, avoid potentially introducing defects into the code by doing the wrong thing. Second, through repeatedly asking such seemingly trivial questions, the developer gains deeper insight and knowledge about the product and its technical issues. Third, asking the question becomes a form of casual knowledge sharing which, when replicated by other teams members can form a solid knowledge network. Knowledge sharing naturally and informally travels the path from tacit to explicit to tacit (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Such processes of informal knowledge sharing are means by which relationships get developed and by which group associations come to be built (Freud, 1959). Finally, the resultant reduction in defects gives both the team and product management greater confidence and builds increased levels of trust, particularly "competence trust" (Reina & Reina, 2006).

Tracing the Example in Detail

Let's trace this one example through practice theory and structuration theory. We begin with the three foci of practice theory considered above. Understanding and

intelligibility refers to the mental states individuals can be in as well as the kinds of actions that would be considered 'sensible' in a given situation. In this sense, understanding and intelligibility refer both to individual states and to the larger social realm. When a developer can turn immediately to a fellow team member to quickly resolve a question, that action—which previously would not have made sense since that fellow team member might have been in another building (or another country)—suddenly makes sense. When such an action is repeated a number of times, it points to new ways in which people can be with one another in a bodily sense. This in turn awakens new life conditions and "bodily doings and sayings" which constitute how things get done. It also conditions new ways in which individuals "show up" within their world, both for other and for themselves. Considering Schatzki's observation that "personhood is an effect of social practices" it isn't difficult to see why many people's sense of themselves is shifted in this more collaborative, and socially activated, work environment.

From a structuration perspective, we might begin with the notion of *structure* itself. As was observed a moment ago, structures are constituted in part by rules. Rules are defined as "generalizable procedures that are implemented in the enactment or reproduction of social practices" (Baert, 1992:102). As team interactions are characterized by closer proximity and higher degrees of collaboration, the 'generalizable procedures' which govern person-to-person interactions are altered. This alteration in turn generates a shift in the larger social systems by which those structures are constituted.

As it turns out, this latter phenomenon exemplifies one of the things that is hard about adopting Scrum practices. One of the most common problems in adopting Scrum practices is that they appear to 'break' the organization in some manner or another. New problems and challenges arise that never before manifested themselves. As a consequence, it often appears to managers as though these new practices "don't work after all." Given that management consciousness and practices are often still embedded within *predict-and-plan* management paradigms, the obvious answer is to go back to doing what used "to work."

Given a structuration perspective, however, a different picture might emerge. For one thing, we should not be surprised by the behaviors we are observing. In fact, we should expect the adoption of new social practices to reproduce social systems

in which are embedded inscrutable behaviors. This is especially so, given that one of the tenets of structuration is that human actions produce unintended consequences, which in turn engender the largely unacknowledged conditions in which further actions will take place. Given this insight, anomalies which result from the adoption of Scrum practices can be the subject of ongoing inquiry on the part of management, rather than being cause for alarm or concern or avoidance. Such inquiry can be carried out through any number of action research models (Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Torbert, 2004). If the assessment and resolution of such anomalies are conducted by representative cross-sections of the affected organization—as such research approaches advocate—it becomes possible to resolve issues in ways that are at once holistic, native, and relatively ‘non-invasive’ (Parker, 2006; Weisbord & Janoff, 2007). In the end, those observed anomalies in organizational behavior become occasions for larger constitutive social learning and improvement.

This cross-over from the micro-level of social practices into the macro-level of social systems are the beginnings of an approach to social change which is no longer predicated on the functionalist assumptions from which are derived teleologically oriented activities such as strategy design, mission statements, and the like. Taking a structuration and social practices perspective on the adoption of Scrum practices invites a *sense-and-respond* management approach, wherein, rather than trying to figure everything out ahead of time when reliable information and insight are relatively scarce, we “learn as we go”, inspecting and adjusting as we go. That is, rather than continuing to sharpen our skills and predicting and planning—which emphasize metrics, scalability, predictability, repeatability, etc.—we develop skills and practices for observation, disambiguation, and enactment in order to resolve equivocal situations. Moreover, we develop skills and practices for effectively responding to our enactments and for assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of our responses with speed and agility.¹

Among the kinds of skills and practices likely to be adopted at this level will be those which emphasize dialog, communication, emotional intelligence, brainstorming, and cross-functional and trans-hierarchical collaboration. Many of

¹ See Weick’s *enactment, selection and retention* process for how this *uber*-management process might be modeled (Weick, 1979).

these skills are the same as those employed in organization development. However, in this context, the philosophical and moral impetus will likely be different. In addition, senior leaders will need to continue to develop *themselves* and their capacity to lead in the face of ambiguity, uncertainty, and equivocality (French, 2001; Joiner & Josephs, 2007; Kegan, 1994).

5. Conclusions and Reflections

A process framework like Scrum is not by itself sufficient to engender organizational change; it also requires a collection of other social practices, including those just eluded to (e.g. dialog, communication, etc.), as well awareness of the kinds of distinctions provided by theories like those of Giddens and Schatzki. Nevertheless, Scrum provides a cogent set of practices which serve to engender the beginnings of a non-teleological approach to social change. With the proper management mindset, these practices are particularly adept at facilitating organizational shift toward an organizational *sense-and-respond* capability. Like any kind of transformative change, this kind of work is not easy to do, and managers must be patient in its pursuit.

In this paper I have attempted to understand the consulting work I do, and the particular biases and preferences which inform that work, through the lenses of structuration theory and practice theory. In reflecting on what I have written, it strikes me that in many ways it reminds me of how I work when I'm at my best. When at my best, what I'm doing is engaging people at a variety of levels within the client organization in conversations for change, and in the adoption of new practices for getting work done, for teams, and for management. In many ways—again, when I'm at my best—I observe many of the principles of structuration theory in as much as I work with systems in ways that are holistic, incremental, emergent and—perhaps most importantly—*native* to that system.

Where this work may differ from other organization consulting paradigms is its employment of specific, agile, practices. Nevertheless, my tendency is to treat such practices as a vehicle for broader change and improvement, rather than as practices in and of themselves.

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