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Language games – disciplining our managerial communication

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1 Introduction: The problem: Complexity and effective arguments

We have come a long way since Frederick Taylor (1911) spread the word about what makes management scientific. At that time the debate in society at large was driven by ideologies concerning how society should be organized. Socialists argued that resources should be under central control and distributed to the best benefit of the people. Market liberals believed in the blessings of competition. Inspired by Darwin¹ they argued that competition will sort out an elite that is best suited to manage our resources. Entrepreneurship and laws protecting private property will generate wealth for everybody². In the name of these ideologies the debate (often using fists and batons) raged in media and in the streets at the turn of the latest century. For example, in Wittgenstein's Vienna (Janik & Toulmin, 1974), arguments were crafted inside the ideological language and failed to persuade anyone in the opposite camp. What seemed to persuade those in no camp was the living conditions (situations) of individuals. The rhetoric could resonate with what they saw with their own eyes and that would make them willing to listen. The revolutionary socialists soon realized that they had to be "more professional" to secure a global revolution. Hobsbawm (2002) tells us that the solution was "democratic centralism", which meant that the central committee decides what is valid truth and then the party workers move out into the party organization to discuss – until locals realize what is valid truth. The currency to secure success in that approach is power. The problem with that is that it requires unconditional loyalty from underlings, who might feel that they are not rewarded well enough for serving the "public good". This in turn will unleash corruption and force the powerholder (principal!) to be more generous and reduce the inner circle to fewer cronies who bring good news. Truth will suffer and the community of the "common good" will disintegrate.

For those of us who long for a more civilized solution, where the good argument carries the day (Habermas, 1981) there seems to be a need for a "desire-independent" rationality (Searle, 2001) – a rationality that is based in something different than the desires and beliefs economists ascribe to individuals as controlling their behaviour. In arguing against this hegemony of "desires and beliefs" as the only acceptable basis for rational decisions Searle points out that most irrational action is based in such phenomena! (Economists of the Austrian school of micro-economics need it to prove that markets are in equilibrium when the marginal utility is zero for all participants in the market.)

Searle, who is schooled in speech act theory, starts from speech acts to show that at the core of a social conception of rationality is the commitment that we make when asserting that something is the case. If I say to my wife who is about to leave the house: "It is raining!" (You had better bring your umbrella.), I will lose face and trustworthiness if she steps out of the house with her umbrella into bright sunshine. My commitment to the truth of my assertion - made as I uttered it (the speech act) - will damage my credibility. (Well. It was an honest mistake; but what if it is repeated?). This was an assertion about the state of the world. Truth comes from the "direction-of-fit". My wife checks, and if her observation of the world fits my assertion (Word-to-world) I might be trusted with other assertions. The statement must fit the world.

¹ Who was, in turn, inspired by Adam Smith?

² It will "seep down" to the less fortunate. Piketty (2014) says it continues to "seep up". Milanovic (2019) claims that "it works" (we are all capitalists now) but it is a risky system.

But if I make a promise the direction of fit is the opposite. When I say “I will meet you outside the cinema at 19:00” it means that I make a commitment to change the world to fit the promise to be at the cinema – I must move there in good time before 19:00. Here the world must be changed to fit the promise (World-to-word). I had given my word (a commitment) that I will show up at the cinema.

This “commitment”, attached to all speech acts, makes them social. It also makes the individual care about her or his identity. These days Swedes like to think that it was neutrality that kept us out of the wars for 200 years. A more plausible explanation may be that Sweden is a small, remote country that is no threat to anyone, so why bother. But, when you care about your identity you must see to it that your actions are appropriate (March & Olsen, 2008). This is central to the social dimension of human life as Korsgaard (1996) points out. She defines “practical identity” as:

'a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking'
(Korsgaard, 1996, p. 101)

The problem the communicative view of action demonstrated by Korsgaard is that it brings in “value” in each deliberation. It is no longer “desire” or “belief” that controls human action but “worth” as determined by reason that is acceptable by other members of the team, i.e., “desire-independent” (Searle, 2001). Thereby, values (goals) and means (operations) must be considered at the same time. Not first determine goals and then chose the means, but concurrently. That means that coherence emerges as the appropriate criterion to be satisfied and “reflective equilibrium” (Scanlon, 2014, Rawls, 1971) becomes the indicator of that it is time to switch from thought to action – a great leap of faith. One wonders, how on earth a team of experts with their area of competence based in different knowledge systems (language games) can ever agree on a solution to a complex problem.

2 Complexity and teamwork

All managers I have ever interviewed agree that a team should be composed of people with differing competencies, but they also agree that teamwork is essential. When we were immersed in fieldwork where we video filmed meetings of the management team of a project to develop a new version of a car model (Jönsson, 2004) we were in contact with a team of psychologists who studied the creativity of teams of engineers. They had discovered a difference between the effects of the variables, “conflict” and “debate”, on creativity. The history of this discovery as we were told, is interesting; when using only “conflict” in questionnaires they found little of interest in the relation between “conflict” and the creativity of engineering teams, but when they divided the variable into “debate” (marking cooperation) and “conflict” (marking competition) they got interesting differences in effects on creativity. Within sociology as well (Bernard, 1983) there was a debate concerning what keeps society together - conflict or consensus. For the practicing engineers that we worked with for about 2,5 years in the development projects that issue was a complex one. Each of them was the representative of the team of engineers working on part of the project, like Engine, Electronics, Chassis, Interior design – they were “systems” engineers with several subordinates. They were supposed to defend the turf of their “system”. But they also dreamt of advancing to the role of Project Leader in a coming project, and therefore needed to show cooperative skills. Furthermore, the projects we studied were development on a shared technical platform with a Japanese manufacturer, which in itself required numerous meetings to agree on technical solutions. Both alliance partners would benefit from common solutions, but they also competed in the same market niche.

The project was highly structured - target costs and time restrictions for each component, lots of suppliers, and production planning to deal with. This was complexity in action – it took us about 6 months before we felt we could follow properly what went on in the project management meetings. But we had the videotapes from the meetings, and when we played “snippets” back to the participants it was clear that they understood what was said in the debate on solutions to design problems differently – they “explained” the differences of opinion differently. In feedback sessions with the team, I showed evidence of misunderstandings – or rather different understandings of the same exchange – and concluded that I didn’t understand how they can produce a car model that works with all these misunderstandings. The response was ‘we have to have better prepared meetings’ – by which they meant that a presenter of a proposal should talk to relevant colleagues before the meeting – relevant in the sense that the proposed design change would have effects on their part of the project. Somebody said: ‘this is a decision meeting, not a bloody seminar!’ It was true that these meetings always had a 2-hour time schedule but lasted double that time – all due to that “seminar” character of the proceedings.

With hindsight I believe that the “premium values” (Jönsson, 2004) that the projects sought, probably emerged, or at least were confirmed, in those “seminar” exchanges. It was a matter of the colleague making a surprising or important observation during the presentation. That observation needed an explanation and a “trace” to practical consequences of the proposed change to another area of responsibility. (‘If you do that, we risk overload on processor A, and we will have to redraw the cables!’). Can it be the case that team creativity finds its outflow in those confrontations between understandings/explanations based in different professional frames?

A Frame of Reference (frame, for short) generates “reality” (Boltanski, 2011) by habitual use of concepts, relations between facts, and vocabularies when we conduct our daily business in our area of competence. Reality is that part of the world we can manage rationally given that frame. It is within the frame of reference that we accumulate experience, which may coalesce into “principles” or “maxims” with successful use. Frames are not fixed but change as experience is gathered and surprises explained. Frames may have multiple “receptors” where surprises are registered and then processed. Goffman (1974) calls the communicational phenomena that “connect” with frames “keys” and illustrates how they may generate “frame shifts” by way of an anecdote about the child that sees a small otter attacking a bigger one and is told by the adult that they are just “playing”. This causes the child to understand the scene differently – “playing” providing the “key” to a different frame. Like when the Interior Design engineer in our car project wanted to put a fancier knob on the gear shift stick and thereby exceeded his target cost for that component and got caught by Cost Engineering in a “cost review” meeting. He got away with it arguing that it was 8 grams lighter than the original knob – top management had just issued a directive for projects to save weight to reduce fuel consumption. Bjursell (2007) analyses the integration of two confectionary firms across national borders by framing. The firms used various team building conferences, but, alas the merger was later dissolved.

The ability to note something beyond the ordinary – registering “keys” – is part of a frame. Something that does not “fit” but seems important generates a need for explanation. Kahneman (2011) calls this “fast thinking” and points to ‘associative coherence’ as the measure of an explanation that satisfies the agent and eliminates doubt. (Doubt being the prime mover of inquiry according to Peirce (1878)). For a team that is diversified in competence areas the only solution (if they want to avoid regress to a solution that is just above everybody’s tolerance level) seems to be to debate and search for the good arguments. But what kind of logic is useful in such debates?

3 Idealism, Realism or Pragmatism?

This is an age-old controversy that started with the revolt against (German) Idealism in Cambridge led by Russell and Moore towards the end of the 19th century and carried with it a hostility toward pragmatism (Misak, 2016: 94 ff). Inspired by Frege’s quantifiable logic Russell wanted an analytical philosophy with (well-formed) sentences, or rather, judgments that were either true or false. Philosophy proceeds by logical analysis that starts from “logical atoms.” The truth or falsity of those logical atoms is a matter of its relation to facts – a mind-independent reality.

James (1907) came to be the representative of American Pragmatism in the eyes of Russell – who did not read Peirce until about 1900. In his (James’) view a belief is true to the extent that the practical consequences of its adoption are good. Russell attacked; does James (in “The Will to Believe”) really mean that the belief that P is true is more important than P being true? James had written about religious experiences and their possible good consequences for some people. The issue seems to have been whether truth is based in our minds (our belief based on evidence) or in facts (based on measurements of Nature). James ignores the meaning commonly given to the word “true”, Russell claimed. James distinguished between “full belief” or “no belief” (so “The Will to Believe” means a drive to find the reasons for “full belief”). That is too crude, Russell claimed. We can have “partial” beliefs based in probabilities. (Keynes (1921) wrote about probabilities as “rational reasons to believe”).

Russell was now aware of Peirce’s choice to tie the meaning of belief to action but maintained that the pragmatists conflate acting based on a hypothesis with believing in it. (Scepticism lacking?)

At this stage the image appears in several texts of a country road crossing with no signpost and nobody to ask for directions (Misak, 2020). Left, or right? I must choose one of them to reach my destination. There are two hypotheses, and I can choose to go left, but that does not mean that I *believe* in left. Ramsey later solved the problem by arguing that the person could choose either road and walk on until he could see a man working in the fields at some distance and then walk across the fields to ask for direction. (Consequently: in the “world” there are always more “evidence” to consider than what a hypothetical situation offers.) One should remember that rules or maxims relate to hypothetical situations and require the agent to judge whether this - real - situation is one where a particular rule applies.

I believe that here lies the core of the problem between the representatives of analytical philosophy (realism) and those of pragmatics. The stress of “practical consequences” and hence of “action” forces Peirce to adopt the principle of bivalence – we do our inquiry to find an explanation to our (surprising) observation of C. We hope that our preliminary hypotheses A will explain C. Without that hope it would be senseless to expand efforts of gathering evidence by inquiry. But A either explains C or not (bivalence), so we are obliged to “suppose” that it does but we need not “assert” this.

So, this is the position of pragmatism according to Peirce (Misak, 2016: 41):

*“The surprising fact, C, is observed
But if A were true, C would be a matter of course
Hence there is reason to suspect that A is true”*

This has later been called “Inference to the Best Explanation” (McCain & Poston (eds.)³, 2017). If in doubt concerning A, we need to do further inquiry. So, it is doubt and hope that drives inquiry according to Peirce. We can never be sure, but we must sometimes act to change the world. When we do we should have good reasons to act.

At the same time in Cambridge there was a debate on what constituted good reasons to believe that something is true. This was caused by several important works on probability including Keynes’ (1921) *A Treatise on Probability* where he presented the Principle of Indifference. If there are several possible outcomes and no evidence to differentiate their probability, they should be treated as equally probable. The problem Keynes dealt with was to what extent we can have rational reasons to consider one outcome more probable than another. I will come back to this.

In 1911 Ludwig Wittgenstein came to Cambridge to study with Russell. He returned to Austria to serve in the army during WWI. He ended up as a prisoner of war in Italy, but was provided with writing material from Cambridge and wrote *Tractatus*, in prison in the same orientation as Russell - to design a language of philosophy that starts from elementary statements (atomism). Ogden, who also promoted Peirce’s pragmatism in the UK, asked a young mathematician, philosopher, economist called Frank Ramsey (Misak, 2020) to help translate the *Tractatus* (1922) into English. Ramsey was impressed and stimulated. He travelled to Wittgenstein in Austria for lengthy discussions on several issues particularly about the possibilities of direct relations between mind and matter via a transcendent, non-distorting language. When Wittgenstein later rejected his own earlier approach and wrote “*Philosophical Investigations*” (1951) he thanked Ramsey in the preface for setting him on the right track towards an inclusion of language and its use as part of the world we are dealing with.

Through Ogden, Ramsey also got in contact with Peirce’s writings on abduction, was inspired, and devised a method to measure “degree of belief” by way of subjective probabilities. This way of thinking has come to use in latter days’ modelling and algorithm training within Artificial Intelligence (Larson, 2021). Ramsey was inspired to posit that the degree of belief had a (kind of) causal effect on our will to inquire. Russell criticized James intensely for using the concept Will to Believe but now it seemed to be re-established by Ramsey. Ramsey also took note of Peirce’s claim that all sense-data come to the mind by interpretation. There are no “raw” data. There are “habits” of interpreting impressions from the world. Good habits are worth keeping because they lead to good consequences. We are inclined to rely on inductive inferences (only) because the world tends to be stable over time.

Good habits in drawing inferences are preserved as experiences; they are standardized into rules or principles. An interesting aspect of “belief” is presented by Russell (1921, p. 146) who claims that most of our beliefs are not present in our mind – they “display themselves when the expectations that they arouse fail in any way” – like the shock of surprise we feel when drinking a glass of what seemed like beer but turned out to be tea. (Belief: I thought it was beer!). This means that, with the surprising observation, that, according to Russell, the individual shifts attention from the “stability” of the world (induction) to the surprises of the mind (abduction, in a changing world). The surprising observation must be explained because it reveals a failure in current expectations. That “problem” needs to be resolved – by resort to other beliefs or creative leaps to new ideas. One is reminded of Myrdal’s (1931) *ex ante/ex post* concepts.

Over time Ramsey grew into a more articulated pragmatic. He started, being a mathematic, with Russell and Wittgenstein. He assisted Russell in preparing manuscripts and checking proofs, and he did the bulk of the translation of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. Both these philosophers focused on “facts” as the starting point for analysis. Every problem of any complexity can be broken down into elementary propositions that are obviously true. Deductive logic will preserve the premises in those propositions and lead to true conclusions. Ramsey argued against Russell that “It is true that Caesar was murdered” is equivalent to “Caesar was murdered”. Nothing is added by “It is true that”. That kind of additions have to do with “a linguistic muddle” that stems from the presumption of both Russell and early Wittgenstein of the possibility of a “transcendent” language (like mathematics) that preserves truth and does not add interpretive dimensions (like what a given word means in a particular situation).

Among Ramsey’s remarkable contributions (Misak, 2020) his treatment of “belief” sticks out. During his work with the translation of *Tractatus* he was not satisfied with its “mystical” elements – that things “showed” themselves and that one should remain silent about things one cannot talk about (that is complex issues). Both Russell and

³ One might add that this kind of inference is practiced by Poirot and Sherlock Holmes, and, for that matter, by the police (Motivation, ability and opportunity).

Wittgenstein worked with the reduction of propositions about the world to “elementary” ones (atomism). But, clearly, there are things that we believe that are more complex! (Russell’s solution at one point was that beliefs “point towards” something (a fact)). Ramsey proposed that there are two aspects to a belief 1) a feeling (the “pistic” aspect), and 2) a referential aspect. He illustrated with “I believe (pistic) that Caesar was murdered (referent)”. Further he argued that belief involves a habit or a disposition to behave. With this we have two aspects to consider in communication. Language may have different effects in those aspects – and between people.

“I do not believe other people are automata; for I use my experience to forecast their action, and to eliminate experience from this process of inference and recast it in terms of unknown bodily states would be too far-fetched”

(Quoted from Misak, 2016, p. 168)

It is a distinguishing aspect of Ramsey’s reasoning that he went a step further in loading beliefs with causal properties. He argues for a “general psychological theory” to justify this step, which he sums up in the following way:

“We seek things which we want, which may be our own or other people’s pleasure, or anything else whatever, and our actions are such as we think most likely to realize these goods”

(Quoted from Misak, 2016, p. 178)

Misak points, rightly, to the significance of “anything else whatever”. When we, for example, engage in scientific work we want “simplicity”, “explanatory power”, coherence” etc. It goes far beyond satisfying the egoistic desires of the individual. Ramsey also argues the case for “partial belief” by referring to the countryside crossing with no signpost and nobody to ask mentioned before. His protagonist decides to go to the left, but also to keep a lookout for somebody to ask while walking. These “partial beliefs” could be measured by comparing them to bets one would be willing to enter in the situation at hand. (Further developed into Bayesian Statistics).

Wittgenstein, more than Russell, was persuaded by Ramsey’s critique of the “mysticism” that followed from the ignorance of the effects that language has on communication and judgment. Beyond analytical definitions, which are too “thin”, use-conditions may have to be explained as well (Misak, 2016, p.186)). So, he started working on his revised version of philosophy, which was published posthumously, as “Philosophical Investigations” (1953) with the German version on opposite sides throughout.

Wittgenstein and Ramsey were friends and adversaries in philosophy, but Misak (2016: 240ff) shows that the disagreement seems to have been about the nature of “propositions” and “hypotheses” respectively. Wittgenstein sticks to his “direct experience” (things “show” themselves) and therefore only “propositions” made sense and could be verified (“the chair is over there!”), while Ramsey held that “hypotheses” were tentative explanations to direct observations. (The “hypotheses” construct expectations that can be expressed in propositions.)⁴ So, we can see that they, in a sense agreed that hypotheses (tentative explanations) are about the future (expectations) and that they “construct” expectations that, in turn, can be formulated as propositions, which, as they are verified, show that the hypotheses “work”. Wittgenstein claims that the “sense” of hypotheses is their “purpose”. Fair enough! Wittgenstein’s insistence that propositions relate to direct experience (facts), and those hypotheses are statements about the future (expectations) indicates that there was an opening for Wittgenstein to find dialogue with pragmatism already in 1930.

Misak (2016: 250f) refers to Peirce’s comment on the meaning of the word “know” which is related to “can”, or “is able to”, but also to “understand” (one might add “being acquainted with”, or “do you know the way to Santa Fe?”), to illustrate the depth of the conversion that Wittgenstein struggled with after 1930. Words have different meaning in different uses. Philosophers have “confiscated” certain words, turned them into ‘concepts by definition’, and then applied formal analyses to claim they have something to say about the world! It is here, concerning the relation between meaning and use, that Wittgenstein introduces his notion “language games” that stands for “the process of using words in particular situations”. The meaning of an expression is linked to the rules for its use.

“This is how one calculates. Calculating is this. What we learn at school, for example. Forget this transcendent certainty...”

⁴ Wittgenstein was present at the hospital where Ramsey was – ill with jaundice – on the evening of Saturday January 18. 1930, but had to leave for Cambridge to prepare for a lecture to be held on Monday. Ramsey died a few hours after Wittgenstein left. His notes from the day of the lecture (Misak, 2016: 240) show a beginning understanding of Ramsey’s position.

Philosophy, done properly, “just puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything” – it leaves everything as it is. The task of philosophy is elucidation. An explanation “throws light” on a phenomenon. Wittgenstein did not want to replace one theory with another one – he wanted to get rid of theory altogether (Misak, 2016: 254). “Language games” denote the set of rules a community of inquirers (“forms of life”) use for the opening positions of the game we play.

4 Summary

It is remarkable how these “pragmatists” from more than 100 years ago “talk” to us sophisticated, modern “inquirers” in our infinitely more complex and tempo-filled world! We do consider those old days “good” and regret, in passing, that Ramsey died at the age of 27 – one wonders what the world would look like today if his genius, not least in economics, could have been around for a little longer. The account given by Misak (2016, 2020) shows that he influenced Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and John M. Keynes profoundly. Not bad for a youngster like that! The heated debate then on truth, probability, degree of belief and the expectations beliefs give rise to, “talks” to us today. The way this “history” of pragmatism talks to me is:

- Our beliefs are not always accessible to our mind but are made visible as the expectations they give rise to fail in any way.
- That failure of expectations will generate a surprise which will be directly present since attention is heightened by the failed expectation.
- Surprising observations require explanations in terms of “rules”, hypotheses, or other facts.
- Doubt concerning present beliefs drives (causally) further inquiry.
- A satisfactory explanation (reflexive equilibrium (Scanlon, 2014), or associative coherence (Kahneman, 2011) may be developed in teams, which may also introduce creative new ideas.
- This satisfactory explanation may form the platform for “a leap of faith/passion” from thought to action.
- *So, what does it mean to make a surprising observation – in practical life?*

A pragmatic truth in the tradition of Peirce and Ramsey holds not for statements of matters of facts, but for our system of beliefs (Misak, 2016: 255). It is when an observation does not “fit” our “system of beliefs” that we are surprised.

The most pregnant example I have is the story told by one of my respondents in the 2020 interview series (Jönsson, 2021) with corporate executives. As relatively new CEO of a worldwide corporation, that traditionally had sold its machines through importers and distributors, Charlie was visiting a (family-owned) distributor somewhere in the Mid-West USA. He was invited to the owner’s home for dinner. It was a palace-like home! As the evening progressed Charlie could not help himself but asked ‘where does all this wealth come from?’ ‘From your company!’ was the answer. In the interview with me Charlie exclaimed with emphasis: “They were making more money than we did as producers!” He then told me how this initiated a process of setting up a service-division (which in turn made many acquisitions of importers and distributors necessary).

In the earlier series of interviews (1990) I was impressed by the legendary leader of SKF (ball bearings), Lennart Johansson, who, early in his career, was appointed to a position as rationalizer of the production process. That position came with a couple of assistant engineers and a draft room. Lennart told me (and Anders who was with me at this interview) that he did not much like working in the draft room. He wanted to be near the process in action to “see” improvement opportunities. He was talking about the time of WWII, when there were a lot of women in production, and how he watched some of them serve several machines at the same time. Then he could “see” that a mechanism was needed that would grip the piece in work at position A, turn it 90 degrees, and put it in position B. On that “vision” he could draft the technical solution.

Another Lennart was about to enter the room for a final summary of the policy implications of the discussion at the last day of a top management conference. He had some PowerPoint sheets prepared, but the HRM-manager suggested that he should speak directly from his heart. He threw the sheets and did just that. The positive response that he got from his management colleagues is a memory for life for Lennart. A new “habit” was born.

There were lots and lots of stories like this – about a “surprising” observation that needs to be explained and when the explanation is found it pushes the manager toward action to realize the good idea. Large and small “surprising observations” initiate inquiry into the way organizations are managed. New ideas may be integrated into good practices. The “rules of the game” of healthy organizations are in constant review.

So what? New ideas are integrated into current practices by way of surprising observations. How?

I believe it is a matter of attention direction. Bertrand Russell about to drink from a glass that presumably contained beer and discovering that it was tea illustrates this (Misak, 2016: 148f). The drinker becomes aware of a failed expectation - I thought it was beer! Then and there he realizes that he had held a false expectation/belief.

This is the problem when we “imagine”, “visualize”, make us “mental representations” of the problem, situation, or action we are deliberating. Intentionality refers, in traditional continental philosophy, to “the object we focus our attentions on”, while in the British tradition it refers to purpose or goal (Searle, 1983). In philosophy this has been a matter of debate since (at least) Aristotle, with different schools of thought coming and going. But one cannot avoid the issue if one wants to discuss how management perceives needs for improvement.

Speaking of beer, let me illustrate: 1) I feel a desire for beer, 2) there is beer in the refrigerator, 3) the refrigerator is in the kitchen, 4) I get up from the computer, walk to the kitchen to fetch the beer. ((And 5) at that moment my wife calls “Coffee is ready, come and get it!”)

What happens here? I feel a desire. I construct a mental representation of how that desire may be catered for and act accordingly. And – Voilà – there I stand with a beer in my hand! (.. When my wife interferes with coffee). It is difficult to imagine how that could have happened without “mental representation” – but I should have included the possibility of a coffee-break in my deliberation.

That illustration of intentionality related to “mental representation” includes “desire” – an economist cannot do without it (even if it is called “utility”). But Searle (2001) argues that the social sciences need a conception of “desire-independent” rationality. What does that mean (beside the obvious engineering skill of applying instrumental knowledge)? It always means, Searle claims (2001: xxf), that a person is *committed* to something. It means that the individual inserts his/her own identity (“practical identity”) as the communicating device between “thought” and “action”, and, consequently, accepts to be accountable, and responsible.

5 Conclusion

Management – getting things done – looks like an application of pragmatism chiefly because it has such a strong ingredient of attention direction, but also because it takes place in a changing world. If the world stood still as specified in our assumptions, there would be little need for management.

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