



# JOURNAL OF PRAGMATIC CONSTRUCTIVISM

## Editorial: The possibility to engage in co-authorship

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### 1 The content of this issue

It is with great pleasure that we present this issue. The issue contains four different papers that address different dimensions of pragmatic constructivism, and at the same time, the papers all revolve around the practice of co-authorship. Human beings can feel lonely, but we are never truly alone. Even if one did not actually have many friends, colleagues, family members, neighbours etc., we are always in some form of relationship with other people within the society and the environment we live in. However, what matters is the experience of individual actors and actor groups: can I/we interact with others in the social settings we are part of in a constructive manner, and if so, how, through which kinds of channels and with whom especially, and why so? Indeed, with a central presumption in pragmatic constructivism, people are intentional actors being able to influence their own lives through the possibility to engage in co-authoring practices (Nørreklit, 2017). This requires some form of rules or guidelines that shape the spaces for practicing co-authorship. Rules that protect people with the purpose of facilitating co-authorship. Rules that provide safety but do not set too many boundaries for people because sufficient experience of room for manoeuvre is central for creativity and openness for opportunities.

The first paper of this issue is by Frederik Koeppe, and it focuses on the fact dimension of reality integration. The paper provides us with an impressive framework that highlights epistemological challenges of data driven by digitisation. This framework is an ambitious attempt to enrich our understanding of what data is in the digital age. As we might easily fall into the caveat of talking about data in vague terms (data is data), Koeppe's in-depth examination of classifying different types of data enriches the conceptual bandwidth of this subject (based on e.g., origin, generation purpose, restrictiveness of the format, and fitness for certain analysis methods). With such profound classification, researchers can dig deeper into data value chains in practice (from signals to data generation methods, the data itself, accessing and using the data, and finally the data practices that ensue). More broadly speaking, the paper offers an attempt to further a sensible and productive data language with fewer ambiguities. More specifically, for the pragmatic constructivist audience, the paper serves as an inspiration about whether data is considered as a 'fact' or instead as 'evidence'. Such contemplation would be fruitful when appraising the quality of research: is one focusing on the ability of data to support making claims about factually valid matters?

The second paper, by Lars Bo Henriksen, emphasises the communication dimension of reality integration in a problem-based learning context. Borrowing from the ideas of Wittgenstein and Gadamer, Lars Bo Henriksen contributes to our understanding of language games and languages plays as concepts for grasping co-authorship in

action. This case presents interviews and quotes from students who are kind of forced into a co-authorship setting where they must produce a semester assignment with fellow students that do not necessarily share the same set of values.

The third paper contributes to our understanding of values. Morten Jakobsen investigates the origins of most mainstream management models and ideas. These are boiled into a common essence of a stimuli-response rationale, with a Taylorist management ideal of a person able to plan and control, where the actual execution of a job is made by another person that is not expected to think but only execute what they are told. These thoughts have roots in behaviourism that was initially developed by Pavlov who needed dogs to drool. Based on a counterfactual analysis that takes the situation that Pavlov needed his dogs to do a more advanced job than drooling it is examined how that might have influenced our design of management control systems, and how we generally would have practiced management in a different way. The paper concludes that this historical path could have led to a situation where management is a matter of facilitating valuable possibilities for people and thereby allowing them to become actors: skipping the simple plan and control cycle and instead entering a co-authoring process of doing.

The fourth paper by Prabhat Thakuri, Vesa Tiitola, Teemu Laine, and Tuomas Korhonen deals with possibilities. In their analysis of how ecological sustainability and business feasibility fit together, they reveal some of the dilemmas that decision makers face when they must make decision between what may be long-term ecological sustainability and short-term financial profit. Or between long-term financial investments and perhaps short-term ecological sustainable positioning and communication. In that sense, these authors add to the ongoing and important discussion of how to construct a good world not driven by consumption and destruction of resources. For the audience of this journal, the authors also contribute by addressing an important dilemma of how to communicate about values and possibilities when these are related but do not necessarily occur concurrently. Particularly, how can we form language plays that can lead to pro-active truths that we can act upon when the possibilities that we have to choose today will create value in the future, and these future values may conflict with the values of today.

## 2 The value of co-authoring through dialogue

Co-authoring is one of the central concepts of the pragmatic constructivism paradigm with the focus on individual actors and their interaction and communication. In other words, co-authoring is central because the main assumption about people is that they are actors, and an actor is someone who acts intentionally (Nørreklit, 2017). The four papers in this issue show the importance of co-authoring in general, but at the same time, they all show the fragility of enabling co-authoring. If one has the intention to monitor and control people, then it can be handy to construct data that are difficult to argue against, and hence you can set the fact agenda. In education, problem-based learning, for instance, can be time consuming and in times where “teach to test” appears to be the dominating pedagogical practice, co-authoring with an emphasis on problem-based learning, may be considered as a hindrance for effective reaching of desired exam results. In organizations, as a manager it can be considered troublesome to deal with such employees who want to debate all decisions instead of respecting the ‘right’ viewpoint of the management. Developing co-authoring in practice may thus face remarkable challenges. When radical changes of social constructs seem germane, it would be a bit more convenient for many actors, if we could choose a solution that is not too difficult, and sort of lowering the ambitions when it comes to real changes of our practices. Therefore, we must be prepared for situations where the room for being an actor is scarce and the will to co-author is under stress.

Julia Kristeva (2024) have brought up the concept of *abjection*, which is relevant for us to understand the limits of co-authoring among people as actors. Julia Kristeva sees abjection as a means of forming an identity for people – speaking beings, as she terms us people. This formation appears through discarding or negating people, things or actions that are radically different from oneself (Pournami, 2024). For instance, evading people you do not like, avoiding certain types of food, or being reluctant to engage fully in challenging forms of teaching. In her analysis, Kristeva argues that this creation of identity is made from our very early childhood, and as such, this process is central for the formation of who we become. We tend to take this strategy with us as we grow up, because the creation of our identity is an ongoing process where we constantly construct, reconstruct, and perhaps consolidate our identity. What is important to notice is that these ideas of creating identity are not necessarily based on cognition. More likely they are based on feelings that may tend to be negative ones, such as, in her analysis, horror and repulsion. For example, the identity may be formed through the following simplified examples: I do not understand this person, hence I do not like her; this food taste weird, it is probably bad for my health; what the teacher says does not fit with my existing worldview, it is therefore not relevant for me to learn. Again, the identity is formed via discarding matters or negating them – providing conscious and unconscious obstacles for the natural co-authoring processes to occur.

Furthermore, in our formation of social settings we tend to bring forms of abjective practices. For instance abjection is associated with late life frailty (Higgs and Gilleard, 2016), various social reactions to recent globally

disastrous events (Pfaller, 2020), critical responses to new public management in health services for instance (Rizq, 2013), career barriers for female leaders (Mavin and Grandy, 2016), and recognized challenges in the management of universities (Wright, 2016). Without further reflection, such practices can be found to comprise rather natural and somehow a fundamental premises of life, with no malicious intent, but trying to do things the best way we can. But at the same time that abjectionification can easily lead into positions where only the privileged can hold. If left unchallenged, practices of abjectionification can lead to violation of the rights of these people who are abjected and thereby become some groups that we do not need to listen to or assign the same privileges that we hold (e.g. Butler, 2004, Butler, 2021).

As brought up, abjection and abjectionification are clearly in opposition to the basic premises of pragmatic constructivism, and the idea of natural and fruitful co-authoring among actors. Rather than having the intention of achieving a productive and constructive dialogue in which each actor can become a co-author, we are overwhelmed by discourses about the 'other' we do not have to listen to. An abjected actor is not free to act according to their own values because it is often these values that have made the remaining society abject the precarised individual or group. Obviously, co-authoring is not an issue with abjected speaking beings, because that is the whole point – we do neither want to listen to nor speak with such beings.

Why then bring up this matter in an editorial in the *Journal of Pragmatic Constructivism*. Because it matters. Because abjection is a real problem in the real world. The ideas of pragmatic constructivism can be a way forward, overcoming the hindrances of abjection. Insisting on facts, understanding one's own and the other's values may be a constructive way for finding possibilities for the future. However, when we stop communicating with certain groups, reality integration becomes an illusion. So, this is the point raised, not with an answer, but by formulating this paradox. We can easily agree on the good in everyone being actors and find the benefits of co-authoring. But inside of us, we find mechanisms that form our identity, that make us actors, and yet these forms function out of abjecting things that we dislike (as well as those things we notice to like and value).

And indeed, it is a political debate. Powerful forces in our societies may want to exclude certain other groups, because the groups in power feel that these groups threaten the existence of those in power. We seldom hear about these fearful feelings, because they are often wrapped in a phantasm in which the feeling is justified by some form of quasi argument or a form of naturalisation without factual grounding. This makes it difficult to get in dialogue with the 'other', but unless we want to escalate violence and oppression then unionisation of oppressed groups and insistence on dialogue is the way forward (Butler, 2024). This is a nice idea raised by Judith Butler, but what will assure that unionised groups of marginalised speaking beings will be heard? Marginalised people may be able to speak up louder when united, but that does not change the fact that they have been muted. Subjectifying these marginalised groups must come from the rows of the privileged. But why should the privileged put their own position at stake? Because the phenomena of abjectionification exists, and because you never know when groups in power feel frightened of what you say, what you stand for, who you are, or how you live your life. It is only through a constant fight for universal rights for all, that we can be sure that we can become good actors contributing to a good world through co-authorship.

Finally, as implications to the pragmatic constructivist research community, recognizing the concept of abjection provides a set of important questions. In this struggle for what is basically about the good life (Nørreklit et al., 2024) and what is constructed on life-friendly language games (Nørreklit and Paulsen, 2023), the above analysis can be used in our analysis of reality integration by adding at least three questions that may reveal signs of abjectionification: 1) Who is not present in the analysis? 2) Who is present but not heard? And if it's the case, 3) why are they neither present nor heard? More broadly, we need to continuously develop our conception and tools in exploring and examining realities and the co-authoring within. With such questions, we ourselves do not become a part of the problem, but a part of the solution.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful for Jakob Liboriussen for kind comments on a draft version of this editorial. Moreover, we would like to extend our thanks to many colleagues the discussions with whom have inspired this though piece.

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