



# PROCEEDINGS OF PRAGMATIC CONSTRUCTIVISM

journal homepage: [www.ProPraCon.com](http://www.ProPraCon.com)

## Being and doing in organizations: agents, actors or persons?

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### Abstract

It is the aim of this article to understand what it means to be an agent, actor or person in an organization using theoretical arguments from Giddens and Archer.

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## Aim of the presentation

- To understanding what it means to be an agent , actor or person in an organization using theoretical arguments from Giddens and Archer. This is important because:
  - Most human purposes are achieved through human projects in organizations.
  - The constitution of the agent/actor/person is currently not well understood, usually being equated with a psychological perspective.
  - An alternative view of an organization is that it is an arena of the accomplishment of a multiplicity of human projects.



## What is an Agent?

- An agent is a perpetrator -person who does things. She does not necessarily intend to do them.
- An agent has the capability to pursue a project; agents organize to execute projects- as “being organized” with others has “emergent powers” to extend and/or increase their capabilities as agents.
- Giddens and Archer are agreed with respect to theoretical views on agents as people who do things and have projects



## What is an Actor?

- For Giddens, agent and actor are synonymous
- For Archer an actor is a person with a role (in an organization)
- Giddens and Archer disagree on actors in so far as Archer differentiates actors from agents- all actors are agents but not all agents are actors



## What is a Person?

- For Giddens, a person is someone who can articulate reasons for their conduct and is able to elaborate on them (including lying about them).
- For Archer, a person is someone who can personify a role rather than merely animating it.
- On personhood they do not disagree but stress different aspects of being a person

## Archer's View of the Agent/Actor/Person

- Dialectical life long account- captures the interplay between personal identity (self and primary agent) and social identity (corporate agent and actor).
- Primary agency is involuntary and primary agents lack any say in structural and cultural re-modelling
- Corporate agents are active and organized
- Not all corporate agents are actors



## Giddens' View of the Agent/Actor/Person

- Agents/actors/persons reflexively monitor self, others and the context of action.
- Agents/actors/persons can rationalize- i.e. articulate the theoretical grounds of their action
- Agents/actors/persons' motivation refers to the potential for action rather than the action itself
- The knowledgeable agent /actor/person exhibits three forms of consciousness: discursive, practical and unconscious.
- "Structure" is not external to agents/actors/persons- as memory traces and as instantiated in practices- it is part of their constitution.





## Archer and Giddens on Being and Doing

- ◉ Archer's focus is on being as in agential positioning and organizational role
- ◉ Corporate agent and corporate actor are close to organizational forms
- ◉ Better at the "being" question?
- ◉ Giddens is focussed on agential "powers"
- ◉ Gives an account of the knowledge and powers of agents
- ◉ Better at the "doing" question?



## Concluding Comments: the "Why is this important" Question

- ◉ Even those aspects of organization that appear the most deeply embedded in structures, e.g. rationalization, bureaucratization, globalization were once human projects
- ◉ Organization is about practical interventions in the world- we need accounts of "that which has to be done"- a purely subjective view of agents/actors/persons cannot suffice.

