

2014-6

## The Performativity of Objects: The Sociomaterial role of 'imaginal others'

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### Recommended Citation

Horan, C., Finch, J. and Reid, E. The performativity of objects:the sociomaterial role of 'imaginal others'. European Group for Organisation Studies (EGOS) Conference, Rotterdam, July 2014.

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# **The performativity of objects: The sociomaterial role of ‘imaginal others’.**

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## **Abstract**

## 1. Introduction

In this paper we assess how objects can provide us with a clearer understanding of performativity especially when these objects become accounted for and calculated among actors as they review relationships. We assert that objects carry with them, and are associated with generalized others, understood here as imaginal others which as a concept used in this paper also contributes to objects' performativity.

As such, we understand materiality to being sociomaterial in common with Orlikowski (2007). Recent contributions have incorporated this sociomaterial dimension such as Kaplan's (2011) examination of how consultancies develop, format and present strategy with powerpoint software, and of course Leonardi's (2010; 2012; 2012) extensive investigations into mediations and developments with a range of technologies that can alter competitive settings.

These empirical contributions also speak to our understanding of performativity. Following the argument developed by Cabantous and Gond (2011) our understanding relates specifically to objects in praxis. We emphasize the importance of the sociomaterial dimension of performativity.

Our contribution is to adopt and incorporate Tsoukas' (2009) concept of the 'imaginal other', drawn from the generalized other. We explore how objects embody theories and stories of their production and how the imaginal other, as labels and representations reflect how we theorize these relations of production and how imaginal others keep objects' details at bay. Using imaginal others as a starting point our contribution is to refocus our understanding of objects arguably as more social than technical. We highlight how imaginal others exist independently of objects but how objects can't exist without imaginal others which have informed their production. The production of objects is an attempt to embed the social e.g. imaginal others, to codify and make explicit and thus materialise performativity into a physical object. The literature review will thus address three questions; firstly, how we understand objects and their performativity?; secondly, what are the consequences of understanding the materiality of objects from a sociomaterial perspective?; and

thirdly, how can sociomaterial dimensions of materiality *and* performativity overlap and remain consistent in relation to objects?

This paper considers the role of imaginal others in the context of internships or work placements which occur between universities and employers across the theory-practice divide. The university-industry relationship is increasingly scrutinized as a context for knowledge transfer or exchange (Agrawal 2001; Gibbons, et al. 1994; Nowotny, et al. 2001). In this context performativity is of particular interest. Indeed the imaginal other and artifacts are understood to play significant roles, in their everyday mundane sense, in facilitating and the enacting of performances (D'Adderio 2011; H. Tsoukas 2009). How they enable performances, observed as actions, is understood as generative (Feldman and Pentland 2003; Pentland, et al. 2012). A second intertwined and related argument posits artifacts and imaginal others as integral to a dialogical theory of knowledge creation (Dionysiou and Tsoukas 2013; H. Tsoukas 2009).

## **2. Literature Review**

*2.1 The Role of Objects:* Taking a lead from actor network theory (Callon and Muniesa 2005; Latour 2005; Mol 2002), with its treatment of objects, we understand objects as strategy's objects in our empirical setting of university-industry internships and work placements. A crucial transformation of our focal strategizing agency was in capturing what might have been understood as mundane operational objects and developing them as strategy's objects. In this particular context these objects are argued to play significant roles in knowledge transfer and exchange and underpinned by their performativity. The real issue here in praxis as the objects involved are mundane, perceived as non-strategic everyday objects are arguably more 'strategic' in this particular context. So how these objects are developed, formatted and circulated in nuanced reveals their potential strategic role.

Here, we define objects as being cool entities without controversies and contests. Objects are stable things which are used in a way that helps in marking things happen in practice and without contestation i.e. in practice, no way of contesting what is

happening. We describe objects as institutions, financial instruments, technologies, decision making, design, service delivery, strategies and discourses. Objects can be formatted to become immutable, as shown in the singular and powerful agency by Kaplan (2011) with PowerPoint, and in a mundane way, as an assemblage pertaining to internships in our case. Objects are themselves made stable and can, similarly, be made unstable, but their tentacles spread and strategy research can trace these objects as they shape and format interactions across and between organizations.

Indeed objects should and need to be reconceptualised to illustrate how they participate in social practices. By conceptualising objects' performativities in practice we can understand how objects alone do not provide a complete picture of performativity. Materiality provides us with broader understanding in that the technical alone does not provide a complete picture of what is understood as material but that the social also provides insight. The differences in how we conceptualise the materiality of objects versus conceptualise non-material objects comes into focus here. We argue that while objects and imaginal others can be understood as separate we accept their complementarity, which has ontological and broader philosophical consequences (discussed in more detail below).

Initially, we argue that objects can be depicted in practice and stabilized with the presence of imaginal others. Secondly we illustrate the sociomaterial turn in practice, and the role materiality plays in understanding performativity. Thirdly, the combinations of imaginal others associated with objects is explored using three vignettes which illustrate the relationship of materiality and performativity. Our analysis and findings tackle the questions as to the sociomaterial implications of imaginal others and how they contribute to object's performativity.

*2.2 The Complementary Role of Imaginal Others:* The idea of the imaginal other can develop materiality as its production is codified as it is written into documents, procedures and websites. Imaginal others represent labels as short hand stories that were embodied in objects during their creation and subjective understanding of stories by actors who use these objects. We are using imaginal others here as labels to reflect the stories associated with objects, and the theories they inherently reflect as argued in the performativity literature (D'Adderio 2011). However, things do not need to be

material to be considered as an object, rather, things can have material agency (such as paper, microchips and wifi). How we define objects and their relations becomes more complex when these objects reflect the theories that were envisaged when the object was produced or created.

When understood within the dialogical theory for knowledge creation, imaginal others have been referred to as representing a “*hidden dialogicality*” (Dionysiou and Tsoukas 2013; H. Tsoukas 2009) in that new distinctions previously not articulated or revealed contribute in unseen ways to performativity. By failing to acknowledge their role leaves a significant part of the performativity jigsaw out.

The representation of objects in generic forms using imaginal others as labels such as ‘the employer’, ‘the career’ and ‘the CV’, for example reflection a form of relationalism and relationality which becomes complex if its performative nature is taken from an inter-subjective perspective which philosophically transcends the object-subject divide. This debate has developed beyond an understanding of humans are taking primacy. Indeed the idea that objects embody theories of their construction and production reveals how relationalism takes on a pragmatic tone within praxis.

**2.3 Materiality as Socio-Materiality:** By acknowledging imaginal others and objects and moving actors and objects away from being separate entities that work separately a complex relational nature of these entities is revealed. We take a sociomaterial perspective here to help explain the complex interconnectivities of these entities. Together through interactions and entangled agencies, reducing boundaries, we see the complex performative nature of these assemblages.

Put simply by Orlikowski and Scott (2008) “*a move away from focusing on how technologies influence humans to examining how materiality is intrinsic to everyday activities and relations.*” Sociomateriality focuses on “*how meanings and materialities are enacted together in everyday practices*” (Orlikowski 2010). Orlikowski and Scott (2008) explain that organisational work combines the physical work practices with forms of materiality. They express that “*a central idea entailed in sociomateriality is the notion of performativity technology, work and organizations*

*should be conceptualized separately, and advances the view that there is an inherent inseparable between the technical and the social*". Our contribution here suggests a new materialism using imaginal others as a basis for understanding an inextricably linked performativity. This complex relationalism of constructs is underpinned by a pragmatic ontology beyond that of object-subject divide as discussed below.

*2.4 The Sociomaterial Dimension of Performativity:* This section outlines our definition of performativity as we understand it from a sociomaterial perspective. Three dimensions of performativity have been acknowledged; firstly a discursive dimension of performativity; secondly a social-material dimension; and thirdly a practice-based dimension of performativity, all of which seem necessary so that a reality as described, utter or articulated can be brought into being in clear connection with those prior utterances. We focus on an overlapping approach to performativity informed by the socio-material dimension in a practice context. Performativity developed by Callon and Latour, is seen as a way of understanding the economy by looking at the connections between economic theory and the actual economy, whereby Callon (1998a) proposes that economics actually shapes and performs the economy, rather than being an observation of the economy.

Several studies have taken a performativity approach to gain an understanding of markets, for example adapting of theories to understanding financial markets (MacKenzie, et al. 2007). The knowledge gained becomes performative. As knowledge and ideas are performed they are exchanged (Callon 2006, 2008). There are some controversies in the literature, for example MacKenzie and Millo (2003) suggest that most of the empirical studies in Callon (1998) do not find their base in performativity theory. Callon, Millo and Muniesa (2007) recognise that markets are both "*the objects and the products of research.*" Mackenzie (2004) offers two categories of performativity; Austinan and generic. In Austinan performativity, MacKenzie suggests a strong connection between theory and the actual market. In generic however, the links between theory and practice in shaping markets are less specific. MacKenzie suggests that performativity can be restrictive for example though limited usage of models. Kjellberg and Heglessen (2006) see performativity as a means of translating ideas about the world and shaping practices in order to link together these ideas through the use of mundane tools to manage exchange. Muniesa

Millo and Callon (2007) consider the role of market devices and identify the role of performativity as a means of understanding the “*knowledge required to produce and stabilise*” those market devices. Finch and Acha (2008) describe performativity as “*a set of concepts, routines, habits or practices which are immediately submerged in shaping a social setting.*” Taking the work of MacKenzie (2006) they suggest that pricing equations can be seen as both mathematic and economic devices which help to understand markets.

Following the incorporation and focus on theories this paper examines the under-developed concept of the imaginal other and considers it through the lens of sociomateriality and performativity. The imaginal other and how it is performed, contested and/or interacted with the material that may have some advantages in helping it become an object. Our interest lies in the how our version of imaginal others becomes accepted, intersubjectively used and how it gains currency and usefulness for people, and in what circumstances it is used in calculations and is invoked.

*2.5 The Relationship between the Concept of Materiality and Performativity:* We use the concept of the imaginal other to highlight the socio-material role that can be informed by imaginal others. Imaginal others are often associated with objects. If we re-conceptualise the definition of objects to include imaginal others, we can use performativity to bring two views together under one umbrella. Immaterial and material discussion can be explained under the umbrella of performativity. The distinction becomes less relevant and performativity attributes qualities for enactment equally to both material and immaterial items. Our contribution is to understand how the imaginal others allow the objects to be performed. This depends on several factors, including how it is performed and understanding the role of the performance. The context around the imaginal other (e.g. the employer, the student, the project) helps to guide how far the role can be performed before the term moves away from this imaginal other (almost becoming a stereotype) and towards a specific person). This paper explores the concept of sociomateriality. We find little distinction between material and immateriality, rather we are interested in how imaginal others are shared and performed and the role that objects play in making things happen, within the limits of practice.



### 3. Research Approach

#### *3.1 The Internship / Work Placement Context*

We present the case of an internship programme, an inter-organisational collaborative context, capturing the development and use of varied strategic practices. Its main stakeholders include; academic staff at the Higher Education Institute (HEI), employers and students (Narayanan, et al. 2010). Here employers seek to screen, match and recruit students from the HEI into suitable internships/placements for periods of up to 16 weeks. The Placement Officer's role is perceived as an 'intermediary' and/or a 'recruitment organisation'. The HEI in question had dealings of varying degrees of partnerships with employers, some having long-term partnerships while others were newly formed reflecting different levels of resource allocation and commitment. These varied levels of partnerships formed the basis of how different documents, pro-forma, records, and procedures contribute to action, practices and the development of and using strategy. The fieldwork was carried out from July 2009 through to January 2012 and the data covered four internship cycles, commencing each year in September. Field notes accounted for over 100 pages of detailed outlines of conversations were supplemented with email communications ensuring rich accounts. Over 60 formal interviews were conducted with academic staff, employers and students. 19 Direct Observation 'preparatory classes', each over 1h 30 minutes, often with guest employers and career guidance counsellors, were observed and recorded. On-site interviews were conducted with employers and their interns. Follow-up interviews were conducted with students who also submitted extensive reflective logbooks with weekly entries supplementing student and employer accounts of day-to-day practices.

*3.2 A Pragmatic Philosophy – Practice & Process:* A processual approach to practice emphasises the distinction of being from becoming. This pragmatic assumption is used here as a basis for understanding how the performativity of objects have on practices and process studies. The term "becoming" is relevant within this paper as it refers to the idea of putting things into practice and with a greater focus on performativity. This raises the question as to where objects find themselves in practice and process thinking. The pragmatic and processual assumption of becoming

considers objects are associated with routine maintenance (Feldman and Pentland 2003). It is through production, construction of objects that we codify the assumed performative nature of practices. This is this performativity that is mediation by our understanding of materiality. This requires a pragmatic ontological view as firstly it accepts that concepts have import in praxis and secondly it accepts subjective and objective ontologies (Van de Ven 2007). Pragmatism implies a form of abduction in methodology and analysis.

Mol (2002) explains that *“ontology is not given in the order of things, but that, instead ontologies are brought into being , sustained or allowed to wither away in common, day to day sociomaterial practices.”* (p.6). Law extends this to describe ontology *“what there is, and what there could be.”* Reality may be objective or subjective. Objective referring to essences that fit together in some system, including an inter-subjective system or process for example. Here laws or truths are held regardless of who the observer is but this is a world away from an objective absolutist truth. The aim of ontology, therefore, is to discover what is there. As Mol explains reality doesn't precede practices but is a part of them. Absolute reality cannot itself be the standard by which practices are assessed. But mere pragmatism is no longer a good enough legitimization either, because each event, however pragmatically inspired, turns some “body” into a live reality (p.6).

Pragmatism allows for a subjective epistemology which encourages relationships between knowledge and action whereby it can guide action and is seen as an alternative to abstract thinking (Goldkuhl 2004). Pragmatism draws an approach consistent and similar with emerging understandings of performativity reflecting multiplicity. It is described as *“a philosophy that fully acknowledges this mutual permeation of knowledge and action.”* (Goldkuhl 2004). This understanding is gaining momentum in organisation studies literature as a means of studying practices (Goldkuhl 2004; Simpson 2009).

Pragmatism places practice as part of social experience over time and allows researchers to understand what is happening in real time, and to be able to see things from multiple perspectives. Meaning is made and remade from interactions between actions and the environment. *“The pragmatic theory of action puts forward the claim that language, meaning and action are recursively constituted and require the cooperation of human actors for their production”* (Overdevest 2011). Pragmatism, therefore can be seen as a *“commitment to the dynamic construction and*

*reconstruction of realities and a concomitant rejection of foundationalist assumptions, a recognition that truths are multiple and fallible and a holistic understanding of the self as social and actively engaged in experimental inquiry.*" (Elkjaer and Simpson 2011). Simpson, in relating pragmatism to practice, explains that *"living implied active and reflexive engagement in the transactions that constitute experience"*, and offers a definition of practice as *"the conduct of transactional life, which involves the temporally-unfolding, symbolically-mediated, interweaving of experience and action."* This definition of practice evokes a dynamic and emergent process that sustains routines while also admitting possibilities.

Simpson described this pragmatic perspective as a more fruitful approach not only to understanding but also to understand how practices can be co-constituted through process of meaning making between participants. However this meaning making also includes objects and that these understanding of knowledge and learning is social constructionist rather than constructivist in nature (Thayer 1973). From an epistemological perspective, pragmatism proposes that we are participants in worlds involving social interactions and action but that knowing does not take precedence over acting and that the two are inextricably intertwined (Elkjaer and Simpson 2011). Of particular importance here is that pragmatism provides a philosophical basis for understanding subjective or relativist perspectives that would be reflects in the concept of the imaginal other while also accepting more a more realist perspective through acknowledging the performative role of objects (Bechara and Van de Ven 2007). As new and different ontologies of objects emerge and new understanding of relations of objects our use of imaginal others fits to reflect the social in sociomaterial. We eclipsing the subject-object divide reflecting the rising interest in ontological problems across otherwise incompatible organisational research and methods. This is a philosophical basis for look past tradition subject-object distinctions and provides an new departure in reviewing materialism and its contribution to performativity.

**3.3 - Data Collection and Analysis - Analysing the Data:** We developed three vignettes, telling stories around objects which participants drew upon in daily practices to develop strategy. The vignettes were written up relying on extensive memo writing, which emerged alongside analytical categories during multiple cycles

of coding using NVivo (Bazeley and Jackson 2013; Saldaña 2009). Differing actor accounts in relation to similar objects, tools or resources were of particular interest so as to enrich the descriptive vignettes but also to facilitate theory building, grounded and supported by the data. Three vignettes focusing on the role of prominent objects within distinct stages of the internship/placement (Narayanan, et al. 2010; Sheridan and Linehan 2011) .

## **4. Findings**

*4.1 Vignette: The objects of recruitment:* Employers, through the Placement officer, engaged in a process of recruitment and selection of suitable candidates. In advance of this the programme's personnel ask employers to create 'job specs' outlining roles and responsibilities. Many employers also developed recruitment brochures reflecting their organisational values. In response to the job spec students develop their curriculum vitae (CV), which they submit, often through the programme's personnel, to employers in a manner similar to a recruitment processes. The programme's personnel as an intermediary circulating both job specs and CV between employers and students. No standardized pro-formas for the job specs, recruitment brochures or CVs existed and these ranged from a paragraph in an email to detailed brochures commonly created by larger organisations with established and resourced recruitment and selection processes. The programme's personnel explained that both limited and highly-detailed content served to under-sell or over-complicate expected roles and responsibilities influencing potential student interest and resultant action in the application process. The programme's manager attempted to find a balance when sourcing internship positions with employers, often setting aside the requirement for job specs let alone additional recruitment material.

Students' CVs outlined their values, interests, personality and skills. The CV's presence and quality would impact on progressing calls for interview and securing a position. The Careers Guidance Counsellor noted how students should interpret employers' job specs and materials as guides toward CV development. In addition, the programme's personnel would emphasised the need for students to think in the long term about employability and employer expectations when developing their CV. A poor CV subjectively assessed would most likely stymie calls for interview,

reflecting from an employer's perspective on both the student and internship programme as a source of quality interns. Without its presence and without it meeting a subjectively arrived quality standards, students would not progress in the programme.

4.2. *Vignette: The job bag tool:* Students make the transition to interns upon taking up their placement with employers. During the internship/placement at a pharmaceutical company, Pharma A, where interns were introduced to the job bag process, a project management tool mainly used in graphic design roles. The job bag process used in Pharma A, guided marketing initiatives in accordance with IPHA (Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association) marketing codes of practice and standards required in highly regulated pharmaceutical markets. The job bag folder contained two compartments for the conceptual and approval stages of the process. The conceptual compartment contained project briefs, supplier quotes, notes, mock-ups, proofs for packaging design and promotional materials. The approval compartment contained reviews of copy and various sign-off sheets across marketing, compliance and finance managers. Various other shared items of importance were placed in this physical folder to guide the actions of those working on the project ensuring transparency and accountability in practice, allowing for consultation by other staff members. Transparency was required by IPHA, and was reinforced in a hierarchical sign-off and approval process. IPHA could inspect the management of these projects and review the portfolio of tools and resources in the 'job bag'. Three quotes from suppliers were required at the beginning of the job bag process. This served to qualify what the employer expected of the interns and reflected management and IPHA expectations for compliance. Appropriate actions to obtain three quotes were regulated by industry standards and these needed to be documented. Without these the process could not proceed for compliance for IPHA marketing codes of practice purposes. This also focused analysis on different criteria for assessing suppliers altering what might be argued as 'lazy' analysis based purely on price.

4.3 *Vignette: The reflective logbook:* Students submitted reflective logbooks to the HEI on completion of their internships. Guidelines prompting students to reflect on their experiences informed weekly and monthly entries and included accounts of the day-to-day pattern of activities. On a weekly basis students shared logbook entries

with employers for sign-off. The programme's requirement for employers to sign off their intern's logbooks on a weekly basis ensured reflection on and engagement with the specific internship's objectives. The overall process ensured academic integrity and quality assurance for students in their degree programmes with the HEI. The logbook brought together the internship programme's partners, making space for reflection on the different goals and objectives guiding the actions of interns and employers during the internship. Without the logbook, the HEI could question the programme's academic quality, risking the award of academic credit to students. From interview data students discussed the issues of academic credit and illustrated how they might not engage with employers after the completion of the placement unless they were doing further dissertation research with that employer. This suggested that the need for academic credit is what prompted engagement rather than issues relating to employability.

## 5 Discussion

*5.1 Objects:* Through our vignettes, mundane but significant objects that are developed, used and shared are identified. CVs, job specs, the job bags and the reflective logbooks circulate operationally alongside many other objects. These objects emerge as strategic in terms of their presence and quality within successful stories of impact. We identified in the literature possible ways in which objects can be formatted, presenting these as particular and nuanced versions of objects, with different sociomaterial qualities understood through the lens of imaginal others. Among the review of objects presented across the vignettes, we can see varying degrees of material influences and performativity of mundane practices, which present themselves through actors' uses of imaginal others. This suggests the first finding that objects and imaginal others are inextricably linked.

The internship programme's personnel encourage students and companies to prepare documents that articulate, among other things, their personal and corporate values, respectively allowing matching of companies and interns establishing criteria as to what qualifies as effective CVs and job specs. This circulating helps to enhance chances of success, helps identify, stabilise and attribute commitment over time to

respective goals of students, companies and the HEI. The CV object must be created before subsequent action and in turn practice can be enacted i.e. screening of the CV, matching for interview and offering a internship. As objects are created and utilised by actors their qualities also become material. Employers assess the quality of CVs received. Similarly quotations, proposals and marketing copy are assessed in Pharma A for approval and compliance purposes before the project can proceed. Its absence preventing its circulation among associated actors and performativity.

The job bag folder as an object is perceived by the intern as embodying the compliance and accountability not only of Pharma A, but also of IPHA. Within both the conceptual and approval phases of the job bag process (made objective as two separate compartments in the physical folder).

The logbook embodies 'academic credit' and progression in ones studies. Thus, objects act to influence and mediate roles (Kaplan 2011) impacting on action and the materialising of strategy. Objects may well be present, however the subjective, and arguably the inter-subjective 'quality' of the now-shared artifact, as it is perceived using imaginal others by those acting upon it, and the meaning of quality of the object can determine performative actions. Differences between these objects appear to be related to situated practices and they are made stable and circulated.

*5.2 Imaginal Others:* Objects carry with them a sociomaterial significance, understood here through the lens of imaginal others, to developing strategy. How objects are developed shared and used in different ways, informed by imaginal others, brings new perspectives regarding objects strategic roles as artifacts and tools. But this can only be achieved through development and articulation of documents accompanied by the neglected imaginal other, evidenced though generalised others such as 'the employer', 'the student', 'the internship', 'the marketer', and 'the accountant' which support and guide their creation. In other words these commitments or similar versions, can be made and then directed at others at some later point in time, again emphasising durability, commitment and stability. The CV's material quality is brought about by students implementing their goals as imaginal others i.e. meeting what 'the employer' wants and ensuring 'employability', to achieve a position. Employers values reflect in job specs and recruitment material act

as a guiding imaginal others creating schematics as goals which prompting action i.e. bringing the CV object into being as an artifact meeting employer expectations. These as ‘generalised others’ (Haridimos Tsoukas 2009), guide day-to-day preparatory steps toward bringing a CV to an acceptable standard of quality. The imaginal other, in operational terms, informs the students and placement officer of the expectations of ‘the employer’ or ‘the profession’ or ‘the interviewer’ in terms of the strategic goal of ‘employability’, which is in the circulating objects.

The job bag folder as an object carried with it imaginal others within its conceptual compartment which served to a portfolio of objects related to the conceptual phase of project management. A number of imaginal others, appeared in the data, including engagement with ‘the three quotations system as compliance’, ‘the suppliers’ or ‘the marketing agencies expectations’ whereas in the approval phase ‘the interns’ engaged with expectations from different managers guided by these compliance issues.

The array of imaginal others linked, embodied and embedded with artifacts, tools and resources begs the question as to how their contribution to day-to-day action could be ignored? Their obvious material impact on goal development and action is argued here as key to materialising and making stable the operations of the internship programme across all parties involved (students, academics, university programme administrators and companies). These imaginal other contribute to schemas through day-to-day practice materialise so as to influence performativity (D’Adderio 2011).

We contend that without assessing the ‘imaginal other’ only a partial picture of how artifacts and tools guide the operations of an organization or multi-party programme and strategy development of the actors involved would be arrived at. By including the imaginal others we reveal plans that are attached and embodied in objects, often as tools, giving us a comprehensive understanding of how artifacts and tools qualify strategy’s overall practices as sociomaterial. If we take the argument one step further a full analysis cannot separate the imaginal other, which is through sharing made and remade as an object in itself, from its associated objects. This also results in patterns of activities, performativity and potential actions being carried that guide and clarify strategy’s practices.



*5.3 Object's Sociomateriality Informing Performativity:* As noted above everyday mundane objects carry with them imaginal others. Combined this informs our understanding of performativity. Across the three vignettes we illustrate how objects imply a durable quality, reflect their potential for sharing and how they can be adapted and applied in local settings practice to inform performances in different ways. In this discussion we focus on the objects referred to in the three vignettes (Section 2.1). We highlighted how imaginal others are inextricably linked to these objects (Section 2.2). Combined this reflects our understanding of materiality as sociomaterial (Section 2.3). In turn this discussion will explore how this influences and contributes to our understanding of performativity (Section 2.4).

## **6. Conclusion**

*6.1 Objects and Imaginal Others are Inextricably Linked:* An array of entities acquires stable, material qualities through practice and is in effect held in place and in relation to other objects. Artifacts exhibit cultural and situated qualities and histories deemed to be significant, tools seem to be more directed at a specific range of anticipated effects and particular futures, even where these prove difficult to achieve. Imaginal others play a role in keeping entities at bay, having identities in generic terms 'the employer', 'the student' or 'the intern'. Objects are inextricably linked to imaginal others. As objects they always carry with them the potential to become artifacts. Imaginal others are held inter-subjectively, are distributed and cannot always be accounted for. Interestingly, objects provide an anchored place for the attachment of imaginal other and imaginal others might well exist in the absence of objects. This highlights the novelty of a sociomaterial dimension of performativity. Previous ignored imaginal others can be seen here to contribute to performances in unforeseen ways. The focus on the material versus immaterial distinction, while helpful to understand performativity, falls short when we consider performativity in the foreground, as our primary problem solving concern, above and beyond materiality in the background. Objects should be reconceptualised to participate in social practices.

The critical advantage of imaginal others is their idealised form, which runs the risk of being functional or stereotypical. Imaginal others are ways of formatting particular

actors, of referring or labelling those actors categorically and of anticipating ways in which they can relate to one another over time and develop over time. A re-conceptualisation of performativity provides simplified but more accurate explanations. In other words, it traces through the effects of the simplifications made in action. The making of imaginal others is as an object in the sense of allowing for a working model, to plan, inform of expectations and to aid review. These are not so much a product of static organizing, but of ordering and guiding relationships. In action, the imaginal others provide some critical characteristics to allow people, or companies or cvs, or job plans to enter into a practical model. Hence, those involved in internships need to qualify and acquire a tag consistent with their imaginal other.

This paper highlights a need to re-conceptualise how we understand as a definition of objects incorporating what has previously been understood as immaterial parts [our conceptual contribution?] Distinguishing immaterial from material suggestions distinct treatments of these elements. We argue that the new conceptualisation of performativity, coupled with a holistic understanding of socio-materiality, allows us to purposefully conflate these and provide a more simplistic but accurate understanding of performativity. The internship programme's personnel enact a dominant pattern of transforming objects in the form of artifacts into objects and into the form of tools, though neither are ideal types nor mutually exclusive. Transformations encounter resistances. Ideal types are allies for the internship programme's personnel as they attempt these transformations. We identify a latent opportunity for the internship programme to further develop an operational object into one of strategy with the job bag. Required for compliance purposes, the job bag manifested as an entity with the qualities of an artifact, project or a task, to become a project management tool.

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