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Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity
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Communities of practice

Learning, meaning, and identity

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To Paula, Jad, Sheena, and Kehan

I will introduce issues of identity that progressively complexify the picture, including but also extending beyond communities of practice. Our identities, even in the context of a specific practice, are not just a matter internal to that practice but also a matter of our position and the position of our communities within broader social structures.

- *Identity in practice.* Chapter 6 shows the relation between identity and practice by rehearsing the argument of Part I. By revisiting the various characteristics of practice introduced in each chapter, I will show how they can be construed as characteristics of identity. The result will be a characterization of identity that inherits the richness and complexity of practice.
- *Identities of participation and non-participation.* Chapter 7 introduces non-participation as a central aspect of the formation of identity. I will argue that non-participation can take many forms – being an outsider, being a peripheral participant, or being marginalized – each with different implications for the resulting identities.
- *Modes of belonging.* Chapter 8 extends the notion of belonging beyond local communities of practice. I will distinguish between three modes of belonging: engagement (which is already familiar from Part I), imagination, and alignment. I will describe the basic features of each of these modes of belonging, the kind of work they require, and finally the various kinds of communities to which they give rise.
- *Identification and negotiability.* Chapter 9 discusses issues of belonging in terms of identification with certain communities and also in terms of negotiability – that is, in terms of our ability to shape the meanings produced in the context of these communities. I will argue that the formation of communities inherently gives rise to "economies of meaning" in which various participants have various degrees of "ownership" of the meanings that define their communities. The dual processes of identification and negotiability make the notion of belonging a basis for talking about both identity and power in social terms.
- *Learning communities.* Coda II summarizes Part II by describing some basic features of what I will call a learning community, whose practice it is to keep alive the tension between competence and experience.

Chapter 6

Identity in practice

There is a profound connection between identity and practice. Developing a practice requires the formation of a community whose members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants. As a consequence, practice entails the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context. This negotiation may be silent; participants may not necessarily talk directly about that issue. But whether or not they address the question directly, they deal with it through the way they engage in action with one another and relate to one another. Inevitably, our practices deal with the profound issue of how to be a human being. In this sense, the formation of a community of practice is also the negotiation of identities.

The parallels between practice and identity are summarized in Figure 6.1. To highlight them in this chapter, I will (as I did in Coda I) go through the themes of Part I, chapter by chapter, but recast them in terms of identity. This exercise will yield the following characterizations:

- Identity as *negotiated experience.* We define who we are by the ways we experience our selves through participation as well as by the ways we and others reify our selves.
- Identity as *community membership.* We define who we are by the familiar and the unfamiliar.
- Identity as *learning trajectory.* We define who we are by where we have been and where we are going.
- Identity as *nexus of multimembership.* We define who we are by the ways we reconcile our various forms of membership into one identity.
- Identity as *a relation between the local and the global.* We define who we are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and of manifesting broader styles and discourses.

These parallels constitute a level of analysis that presents identity and practice as mirror images of each other. This strategy is, however, a

practice as	identity as
• negotiation of meaning (in terms of participation and reification)	• negotiated experience of self (in terms of participation and reification)
• community	• membership
• shared history of learning	• learning trajectory
• boundary and landscape	• nexus of multimembership
• constellations	• belonging defined globally but experienced locally

Figure 6.1 Parallels between practice and identity

first approximation, which I will refine and expand in the following chapters.

Negotiated experience: participation and reification

In Vignette I, Ariel refers to herself as a "level 6." Alinsu has reified levels of claims processing – 4 through 8 – defined in terms of certain performance milestones. Correspondingly, there are official markers of transition. "Getting your level," as the transition from one level to another is called, is celebrated with a small ritual of both official decorum – delivery of a letter with encouraging remarks by an assistant director in front of the employee's unit – and sincere rejoicing – clapping and shouting. For claims processors, their level is a substantial aspect of their local identity. It represents the institution's view of their expertise and comes with certain responsibilities and privileges. But this institutional reification of competence hardly reflects the richness of the actual process of belonging to the community and contributing to its practice. The daily engagement of claims processors in their community of practice creates relations among them that constitute "who one is" in the office, who knows what, who is good at what, who is cool, who is funny, who is friendly, who is central, who is peripheral.

Engagement in practice gives us certain experiences of participation, and what our communities pay attention to reifies us as participants. Becoming a claims processor, for instance, is both taking on the label "claims processor" and giving this label specific meanings through engagement in practice. It is doing what claims processors do, being

treated the way they are treated, forming the community they form, entertaining certain relations with other practices, and – in the details of this process – giving a personal meaning to the category of claims processor. If, as mentioned in Vignette I, Ariel is treated rudely by a customer, her engagement in practice suddenly brings into focus the humble status of her position in a striking way. She is working the front line and can be yelled at without compunction. Events like these can jolt our experience of participation and bring our identity into focus. Our very participation becomes reified, so to speak, and the labels we use take on deeper meanings.

The experience of identity in practice is a way of being in the world. It is not equivalent to a self-image; it is not, in its essence, discursive or reflective. We often think about our identities as self-images because we talk about ourselves and each other – and even think about ourselves and each other – in words. These words are important, no doubt, but they are not the full, lived experience of engagement in practice. I am not trying to belittle the importance of categories, self-images, and narratives of the self as constitutive of identity, but neither do I want to equate identity with those reifications. Who we are lies in the way we live day to day, not just in what we think or say about ourselves, though that is of course part (but only part) of the way we live. Nor does identity consist solely of what others think or say about us, though that too is part of the way we live. Identity in practice is defined socially not merely because it is reified in a social discourse of the self and of social categories, but also because it is produced as a lived experience of participation in specific communities. What narratives, categories, roles, and positions come to mean as an experience of participation is something that must be worked out in practice.

An identity, then, is a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other. As we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others, these layers build upon each other to produce our identity as a very complex interweaving of participative experience and reificative projections. Bringing the two together through the negotiation of meaning, we construct who we are. In the same way that meaning exists in its negotiation, identity exists – not as an object in and of itself – but in the constant work of negotiating the self. It is in this cascading interplay of participation and reification that our experience of life becomes one of identity, and indeed of human existence and consciousness.

Community membership

I have argued that practice defines a community through three dimensions: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. Because a community of practice is not necessarily reified as such, our membership may not carry a label or other reified marker. But I have argued that our identity is formed through participation as well as reification. In this context, our membership constitutes our identity, not just through reified markers of membership but more fundamentally through the forms of competence that it entails. Identity in this sense is an experience and a display of competence that requires neither an explicit self-image nor self-identification with an ostensible community.

When we are with a community of practice of which we are a full member, we are in familiar territory. We can handle ourselves competently. We experience competence and we are recognized as competent. We know how to engage with others. We understand why they do what they do because we understand the enterprise to which participants are accountable. Moreover, we share the resources they use to communicate and go about their activities. These dimensions of competence, introduced in Chapter 2, become dimensions of identity.

- *Mutuality of engagement.* In a community of practice, we learn certain ways of engaging in action with other people. We develop certain expectations about how to interact, how people treat each other, and how to work together. We become who we are by being able to play a part in the relations of engagement that constitute our community. Our competence gains its value through its very partiality. As an identity, this translates into a form of individuality defined with respect to a community. It is a certain way of being part of a whole through mutual engagement. For instance, I have reported that among claims processors it is more important to give and receive help than to know everything oneself.[1] This results in a definition of individuality that differs from, say, forms of individuality in certain academic circles, where knowledge is a form of personal power and not knowing is largely construed as a personal deficit.[2]
- *Accountability to an enterprise.* As we invest ourselves in an enterprise, the forms of accountability through which we are able to contribute to that enterprise make us look at the world in certain ways. Being a claims processor, doctor, parent, social worker, salesperson, beggar, folk dancer, or photographer gives us a certain focus. It moves us to understand certain conditions and to consider certain possibilities. As an identity, this translates into a perspective. It does not mean that all members of a community look at the world in the same way. Nonetheless, an identity in this sense manifests as a tendency to come up with certain interpretations, to engage in certain actions, to make certain choices, to value certain experiences – all by virtue of participating in certain enterprises.
- *Negotiability of a repertoire.* Sustained engagement in practice yields an ability to interpret and make use of the repertoire of that practice. We recognize the history of a practice in the artifacts, actions, and language of the community. We can make use of that history because we have been part of it and it is now part of us; we do this through a personal history of participation. As an identity, this translates into a personal set of events, references, memories, and experiences that create individual relations of negotiability with respect to the repertoire of a practice.

This translation of dimensions of competence into dimensions of identity has its inverse. When we come in contact with new practices, we venture into unfamiliar territory. The boundaries of our communities manifest as a lack of competence along the three dimensions I just described. We do not quite know how to engage with others. We do not understand the subtleties of the enterprise as the community has defined it. We lack the shared references that participants use. Our nonmembership shapes our identities through our confrontation with the unfamiliar.

In sum, membership in a community of practice translates into an identity as a form of competence. An identity in this sense is relating to the world as a particular mix of the familiar and the foreign, the obvious and the mysterious, the transparent and the opaque. We experience and manifest our selves by what we recognize and what we don't, what we grasp immediately and what we can't interpret, what we can appropriate and what alienates us, what we can press into service and what we can't use, what we can negotiate and what remains out of reach. In practice, we know who we are by what is familiar, understandable, usable, negotiable; we know who we are not by what is foreign, opaque, unwieldy, unproductive.

Trajectories

I have argued that identity in practice arises out of an interplay of participation and reification. As such, it is not an object, but a

constant becoming. The work of identity is always going on. Identity is not some primordial core of personality that already exists. Nor is it something we acquire at some point in the same way that, at a certain age, we grow a set of permanent teeth. Even though issues of identity as a focus of overt concern may become more salient at certain times than at others, our identity is something we constantly renegotiate during the course of our lives.

As we go through a succession of forms of participation, our identities form trajectories, both within and across communities of practice. In this section, I will use the concept of trajectory to argue that:

1) identity is fundamentally temporal
2) the work of identity is ongoing
3) because it is constructed in social contexts, the temporality of identity is more complex than a linear notion of time
4) identities are defined with respect to the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories.

In using the term "trajectory" I do not want to imply a fixed course or a fixed destination. To me, the term trajectory suggests not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion – one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects the past, the present, and the future.[3]

In the context of communities of practice, there can be various types of trajectories.

- *Peripheral trajectories.* By choice or by necessity, some trajectories never lead to full participation. Yet they may well provide a kind of access to a community and its practice that becomes significant enough to contribute to one's identity.
- *Inbound trajectories.* Newcomers are joining the community with the prospect of becoming full participants in its practice. Their identities are invested in their future participation, even though their present participation may be peripheral.
- *Insider trajectories.* The formation of an identity does not end with full membership. The evolution of the practice continues – new events, new demands, new inventions, and new generations all create occasions for renegotiating one's identity.
- *Boundary trajectories.* Some trajectories find their value in spanning boundaries and linking communities of practice. Sustaining an identity across boundaries is one of the most delicate challenges of this kind of brokering work (see Chapter 4 and the next section in this chapter).

- *Outbound trajectories.* Some trajectories lead out of a community, as when children grow up. What matters then is how a form of participation enables what comes next. It seems perhaps more natural to think of identity formation in terms of all the learning involved in entering a community of practice. Yet being on the way out of such a community also involves developing new relationships, finding a different position with respect to a community, and seeing the world and oneself in new ways.

Learning as identity

The temporal dimension of identity is critical. Not only do we keep negotiating our identities, but they place our engagement in practice in this temporal context. We are always simultaneously dealing with specific situations, participating in the histories of certain practices, and involved in becoming certain persons. As trajectories, our identities incorporate the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present.[4] They give significance to events in relation to time construed as an extension of the self. They provide a context in which to determine what, among all the things that are potentially significant, actually becomes significant learning. A sense of trajectory gives us ways of sorting out what matters and what does not, what contributes to our identity and what remains marginal.

For claims processors, being on a trajectory is an important aspect of their job. They know that improvement in their performance will mean advancement, and they value the fact that advancement is automatic because it gives them some degree of control over their trajectory. Moreover, their sense of trajectory extends beyond claims processing. Some of them view the job as their profession, hoping to move on to technical or managerial positions in due time; some are just paying their way through college and have no interest in a professional career in claims processing. These different trajectories give them very different perspectives on their participation and identities at work. So for them, processing a claim is not just a self-contained activity. Understanding something new is not just a local act of learning. Rather, each is an event on a trajectory through which they give meaning to their engagement in practice in terms of the identity they are developing.

Learning events and forms of participation are thus defined by the current engagement they afford, as well as by their location on a trajectory. A very peripheral form of participation, for instance, may turn out to be central to one's identity because it leads to something significant

Paradigmatic trajectories

The progression of a career offered by the company is not the only way claims processors define their identity as a trajectory, even within the confines of their job. Their community, its history, and its evolution shape the trajectories they construct. More experienced peers are not merely a source of information about processing claims; they also represent the history of the practice as a way of life. They are living testimonies to what is possible, expected, desirable.

More generally, any community of practice provides a set of models for negotiating trajectories. These "paradigmatic" trajectories are not simply reified milestones, such as those provided by a career ladder or even by communal rituals. Rather, they embody the history of the community through the very participation and identities of practitioners. They include actual people as well as composite stories. Exposure to this field of paradigmatic trajectories is likely to be the most influential factor shaping the learning of newcomers. In the end, it is members – by their very participation – who create the set of possibilities to which newcomers are exposed as they negotiate their own trajectories. No matter what is said, taught, prescribed, recommended, or tested, newcomers are no fools: once they have actual access to the practice, they soon find out what counts.[5]

From this perspective, a community of practice is a field of possible trajectories and thus the proposal of an identity. It is a history and the promise of that history. It is a field of possible pasts and of possible futures, which are all there for participants, not only to witness, hear about, and contemplate, but to engage with. They can interact with old-timers, who offer living examples of possible trajectories. A community of practice is a history collapsed into a present that invites engagement. Newcomers can engage with their own future, as embodied by old-timers. As a community of practice, these old-timers deliver the past and offer the future, in the form of narratives and participation both. Each has a story to tell. In addition, the practice itself gives life to these stories, and the possibility of mutual engagement offers a way to enter these stories through one's own experience.

Of course, new trajectories do not necessarily align themselves with paradigmatic ones. Newcomers must find their own unique identities. And the relation goes both ways; newcomers also provide new models for different ways of participating. Whether adopted, modified, or rejected in specific instances, paradigmatic trajectories provide live material for negotiating and renegotiating identities.

Generational encounters

As a process of negotiating trajectories, the encounter between generations is much more complex than the mere transmission of a heritage. It is an interlocking of identities, with all the conflicts and mutual dependencies this entails; by this interlocking, individual trajectories incorporate in different ways the history of a practice. Different generations bring different perspectives to their encounter because their identities are invested in different moments of that history. With less past, there is less history to take into consideration. With less future, there is less urgency to reconsider history. Yet, the perspectives of old-timers and newcomers are not so simply delineated.

If learning in practice is negotiating an identity, and if that identity incorporates the past and the future, then it is in each other that old-timers and newcomers find their experience of history. Their perspectives on the generational encounter is not simply one of past versus future, of continuity versus discontinuity, or of old versus new.

- While newcomers are forging their own identities, they do not necessarily want to emphasize discontinuity more than continuity. They must find a place in relation to the past. In order to participate, they must gain some access – vicarious as it may be – to the history they want to contribute to; they must make it part of their own identities. As a result, newcomers are not necessarily more progressive than old-timers; they do not necessarily seek to change the practice more than established members do. They have an investment in continuity because it connects them to a history of which they are not a part. Their very fragility and their efforts to include some of that history in their own identity may push them toward seeking continuity.
- Conversely, old-timers have an investment in their practice, yet they do not necessarily seek continuity. Embroiled in the politics of their community and with the confidence derived from participation in a history they know too well, they may want to invest themselves in the future not so much to continue it as to give it new wings. They might thus welcome the new potentials afforded by new generations who are less hostage to the past.

Depending on how a community negotiates individuality, the generational encounter can have different effects – with different degrees of emphasis on continuity and discontinuity as old-timers and newcomers fashion their identities in their encounter. This encounter is always a complex meeting of the past and the future, one in which generations

attempt to define their identities by investing them in different moments of the history of a practice. The new will both continue and displace the old.[6] In each other, generations find the partiality as well as the connectedness of their personal trajectories, that is, new dimensions of finitude and extension of their identities.

The temporality of identity in practice is thus a subtle form of temporality. It is neither merely individual nor simply linear. The past, the present, and the future are not in a simple straight line, but embodied in interlocked trajectories. It is a social form of temporality, where the past and the future interact as the history of a community unfolds across generations.

In summary, the temporal notion of trajectory characterizes identity as:

1) a work in progress
2) shaped by efforts – both individual and collective – to create a coherence through time that threads together successive forms of participation in the definition of a person
3) incorporating the past and the future in the experience of the present
4) negotiated with respect to paradigmatic trajectories
5) invested in histories of practice and in generational politics.

Nexus of multimembership

As I mentioned, we all belong to many communities of practice: some past, some current; some as full members, some in more peripheral ways. Some may be central to our identities while others are more incidental. Whatever their nature, all these various forms of participation contribute in some way to the production of our identities. As a consequence, the very notion of identity entails

1) an experience of multimembership
2) the work of reconciliation necessary to maintain one identity across boundaries.

Identity as multimembership

Our membership in any community of practice is only a part of our identity. Claims processors do not form their identities entirely at work. They came to their jobs as adults or youths, having belonged to many communities of practice. Some have other jobs concurrently; some are students in community colleges; some are parents; some are church-goers; some are bar-goers; some have engrossing hobbies. In fact, for many of them, their work is a part of their identity that they tend to disparage.

Because our identities are not something we turn on and off, our various forms of participation are not merely sequences in time. Claims processors who are parents come to the office without their children, and they will return home at the end of the afternoon to be with them. Though there are sequential phases in their engagement in different locations, they certainly do not cease to be parents because they are at work. They talk about their kids; and, more generally, the tidbits of conversation they interweave with their exchanges of work-related information continually reflect their participation in other practices.

Our various forms of participation delineate pieces of a puzzle we put together rather than sharp boundaries between disconnected parts of ourselves.[7] An identity is thus more than just a single trajectory; instead, it should be viewed as a nexus of multimembership. As such a nexus, identity is not a unity but neither is it simply fragmented.

- On the one hand, we engage in different practices in each of the communities of practice to which we belong. We often behave rather differently in each of them, construct different aspects of ourselves, and gain different perspectives.
- On the other hand, considering a person as having multiple identities would miss all the subtle ways in which our various forms of participation, no matter how distinct, can interact, influence each other, and require coordination.

This notion of nexus adds multiplicity to the notion of trajectory. A nexus does not merge the specific trajectories we form in our various communities of practice into one; but neither does it decompose our identity into distinct trajectories in each community. In a nexus, multiple trajectories become part of each other, whether they clash or reinforce each other. They are, at the same time, one and multiple.

Identity as reconciliation

If a nexus of multimembership is more than just a fragmented identity, being one person requires some work to reconcile our different forms of membership. Different practices can make competing demands that are difficult to combine into an experience that corresponds to a single identity. In particular:

1) different ways of engaging in practice may reflect different forms of individuality
2) different forms of accountability may call for different responses to the same circumstances
3) elements of one repertoire may be quite inappropriate, incomprehensible, or even offensive in another community.

Reconciling these aspects of competence demands more than just learning the rules of what to do when. It requires the construction of an identity that can include these different meanings and forms of participation into one nexus. Understood as the negotiation of an identity, the process of reconciling different forms of membership is deeper than just discrete choices or beliefs. For a doctor working in a hospital, making decisions that do justice to both her professional standards and institutional bottom-line demands is not simply a matter of making discrete decisions; she must find an identity that can reconcile the demands of these forms of accountability into a way of being in the world.

The work of reconciliation may be the most significant challenge faced by learners who move from one community of practice to another. For instance, when a child moves from a family to a classroom, when an immigrant moves from one culture to another, or when an employee moves from the ranks to a management position, learning involves more than appropriating new pieces of information. Learners must often deal with conflicting forms of individuality and competence as defined in different communities.

The nexus resulting from reconciliation work is not necessarily harmonious, and the process is not done once and for all. Multimembership may involve ongoing tensions that are never resolved. But the very presence of tension implies that there is an effort at maintaining some kind of coexistence. By using the term "reconciliation" to describe this process of identity formation, I want to suggest that proceeding with life – with actions and interactions – entails finding ways to make our various forms of membership coexist, whether the process of reconciliation leads to successful resolutions or is a constant struggle. In other words, by including processes of reconciliation in the very definition of identity, I am suggesting that the maintenance of an identity across boundaries requires work and, moreover, that the work of integrating our various forms of participation is not just a secondary process. This work is not simply an additional concern for an independently defined identity viewed as a unitary object; rather, it is at the core of what it

means to be a person. Multimembership and the work of reconciliation are intrinsic to the very concept of identity.

Social bridges and private selves

Multimembership is the living experience of boundaries. This creates a dual relation between identities and the landscape of practice: they reflect each other and they shape each other. In weaving multiple trajectories together, our experience of multimembership replays in our identities the texture of the landscape of practice. But this replay is not a passive reflection. On the contrary, as the boundaries of practice become part of our personal experience of identity, the work of reconciliation is an active, creative process. As we engage our whole person in practice, our identities dynamically encompass multiple perspectives in the negotiation of new meanings. In these new meanings we negotiate our own activities and identities, and at the same time the histories of relations among our communities of practice. The creative negotiation of an identity always has the potential to rearrange these relations. In this regard, multimembership is not just a matter of personal identity. The work of reconciliation is a profoundly social kind of work. Through the creation of the person, it is constantly creating bridges – or at least potential bridges – across the landscape of practice.

And yet, the work of reconciliation can easily remain invisible because it may not be perceived as part of the enterprise of any community of practice. Across boundaries, the parallelism between histories of practice and personal trajectories no longer holds. The experience of multimembership can require the reconciliation of a nexus that is unique and thus very personal. Indeed, this nexus may not, in its entirety, be relevant to any practice or even to any relationship we have with anyone. Even though each element of the nexus may belong to a community, the nexus itself may not. The careful weaving of this nexus of multimembership into an identity can therefore be a very private achievement. By incorporating into the definition of the person the diversity of the social world, the social notion of a nexus of multimembership thus introduces into the concept of identity a deeply personal dimension of individuality.

Local–global interplay

An important aspect of the work of any community of practice is to create a picture of the broader context in which its practice is

located. In this process, much local energy is directed at global issues and relationships. For Ariel, belonging to the profession of claims processing or to an organization like Alinsu constitute relations whose meanings she negotiates through her participation in her community of practice. For instance, when one of her colleagues was fired for speaking against the company at a radio show, claims processors used each other as resources for making sense of this event. Their local community of practice became a productive context in which to discuss whether it was right for the claims processor to criticize her employer publicly or for the company to respond by firing her. Similarly, sports events and TV shows are the topics of frequent and animated conversations in the office. Although these conversations reflect outside interests and allegiances, they become part of the processors' participation in their local community. If the baseball fans or the television watchers worked among people for whom allegiance to a baseball team was a trivial concern and watching television a waste of time, their interests may well take on very different meanings for them.

More generally, what it means to be left-handed or right-handed, a woman or a man, good-looking or plain, a younger person or an older person, a high-school dropout or the holder of a doctorate, the owner of a BMW or of a beat-up subcompact, literate or illiterate, outcast or successful – these meanings are shaped by the practices where such categories are lived as engaged identities. Broader categories and institutions attract our attention because they are often more publicly reified than the communities of practice in which we experience them as part of a lived identity. Affiliation with a political party is more public than membership in a group that discusses politics over lunch, but the lunch discussions may have more impact on our thinking than the party's platform.

In the same way that a practice is not just local but connected to broader constellations, an identity – even in its aspects that are formed in a specific community of practice – is not just local to that community. In our communities of practice we come together not only to engage in pursuing some enterprise but also to figure out how our engagement fits in the broader scheme of things. Identity in practice is therefore always an interplay between the local and the global.

In summary, drawing a parallel between practice and identity has yielded a perspective on identity that inherits the texture of practice. Indeed, our identities are rich and complex because they are produced within the rich and complex set of relations of practice. The parallel has characterized identity in practice as follows.

1) *Lived.* Identity is not merely a category, a personality trait, a role, or a label; it is more fundamentally an experience that involves both participation and reification. Hence it is more diverse and more complex than categories, traits, roles, or labels would suggest.
2) *Negotiated.* Identity is a becoming; the work of identity is ongoing and pervasive. It is not confined to specific periods of life, like adolescence, or to specific settings, like the family.
3) *Social.* Community membership gives the formation of identity a fundamentally social character. Our membership manifests itself in the familiarity we experience with certain social contexts.
4) *A learning process.* An identity is a trajectory in time that incorporates both past and future into the meaning of the present.
5) *A nexus.* An identity combines multiple forms of membership through a process of reconciliation across boundaries of practice.
6) *A local–global interplay.* An identity is neither narrowly local to activities nor abstractly global. Like practice, it is an interplay of both.

Now that the link between individual engagement and the formation of communities of practice has produced a basic perspective on the concept of identity, I can start to explore further aspects of the concept that will shed further light on the link between practice and identity, as well as move beyond the confines of practice.