Explicating forms of negotiation through personal work and learning practice

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Abstract
This paper outlines a means of making more explicit some of the often taken for granted meanings and understandings of the concept of ‘negotiation’. Negotiation is often used in constructivist adult learning theory to describe and explain the nature of learning through the activities of engaging in work and vocational training. Too often, in work and learning research literature, the concept of negotiation remains generic and under-specified and so fails to sufficiently account for how workers and learners engage in the interactions and outcomes that constitute their learning practices. Drawing on ethnographic research undertaken with twelve workers from four different work places, this paper proposes that overcoming some of this lack of explication can be achieved by viewing negotiation as comprising four forms of joint activity that workers are engaged in through the enactment of their work and learning. These forms are realised, discovered, concealed and protracted negotiations. The research focused on workers’ self description and explanation of the particular ways they went about their work and the purposes and outcomes accomplished through their personal practice. With this strong focus on the personal enactment and accounting of work practice, the findings indicate that workers can be viewed as negotiating their participation in work. Further, negotiation can be used to conceptualise personal learning practices as social processes of engagement in joint activity when the four forms of negotiation are used to analyse and categorise workers’ personal practices. In this way, the value of research to make explicit what is often taken for granted, that is, workers’ active participation in vocational practice, and the voice of workers as those who enact work and learning practices are brought together as the evidence of how research impacts individual workers and learners to understand more fully the nature of their personal work and learning practices. Such understanding can be the basis of improving work and learning performance by developing individuals’ awareness of personal practice and its relational qualities as always negotiated accomplishment.

Work and learning: socio-personal practices

Learning theory based on researching workers’ learning in and for work, may be described as generative of a socio-personal participation and practice paradigm that seeks to “explicate the relationships between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional and historical situations in which this action occurs on the other” (Wertsch et al 1995:11). This paradigm and perspectives contributing to and emerging from it (e.g., Lave & Wenger 1991, Fuller & Unwin 2004, Engestrom 2008, Billett 2008, Illeris 2011) conceptualise individual workers’ learning as established in this relationship between action and context and enacted through personal interactive engagement or participation in socially derived practices that constitute this relationship. Exemplifying this paradigm, Illeris (2011:46) asserts learning through work is “an interaction between, on the one hand, workers and employees, with all their backgrounds, interests and life perspectives, and, on the other hand, work and all its dimensions, including environmental conditions and power relations”. Learning and work are interdependent and relational processes and accomplishments that simultaneously evidence and enable the cultural and situational press to specific work activity and the individual and personal aspects of this activity. In broader terms, learning and work are socio-personal practices that simultaneously drive and secure “both social reproduction and transformation and individual development and change” (Billett 2008: 1). Fundamental to the participation...
and practice paradigm is the need to account for what Lave and Wenger (1991: 50) describe as, “the interested, concerned character of the thought and action of persons-in-activity”, that is, the motivations, intentions and contributions of workers to and in the practices that constitute their work and learning. Such thought and action is always complex, always influenced by and influential of the activity underway (Wertsch 1995) and always multiply contingent on the integration of identity, meaning, knowing and transformation through activity. Conceptualising this complexity in the person of the worker-self, in ways that capture the dynamic and relational nature of their engagement, leads to acknowledging workers as co-participants (Billett 2006), collaborators (Engestrom 2008) and negotiators (Smith 2011), that is, as co-contributors in the collective, vocational-knowledge building and practice-defining activities of work and learning.

This paper focuses on workers as negotiators and the concept of negotiation as description and explanation of workers’ participative practices as learning. Drawing on ethnographic research with twelve workers from four different work places, the paper elaborates a framework that views negotiation, in part, as comprising four forms of joint activity that workers are engaged in through the enactment of their work and learning. These forms are referred to as i) realised, ii) discovered, iii) concealed and iv) protracted negotiations. The framework enables describing and explaining workers’ personal practices in terms of negotiation processes and outcomes that align with their personal purposes and understandings of their accomplishments. Through this, the concept of negotiation is elaborated beyond the often generic and, thereby, inaccurate and taken for granted meanings it conveys and workers are afforded some insight into the negotiated nature of their engagement in work. This insight can assist workers’ developing awareness of how and why they enact their work in the very personal ways they do. If, as Billett (2006: 8) asserts, learning can be described as “the negotiation between individuals, their experience and social experience encountered through work”, what worker practices identify and constitute this negotiation and so support using the concept of negotiation as description and explanation of the socio-personal practice of learning in and through work? Further, how can workers’ awareness of their personal practices as negotiation practices support and enhance their learning given their “participation is always based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world” (Lave & Wenger 1991: 51). Addressing and elaborating such issues is fundamental to the use of negotiation as a means of explicating the relational interdependencies that constitute workers’ learning in and through work and, particularly, how workers enact these relationships.

Negotiation – meanings and more meanings

Lave and Wenger (1991), Billett (2006) and other work-learning theorists (e.g., Sandlin & Cervero 2003, Engestrom 2008; Kamp, Lund & Hvid 2011, use the concept of negotiation to denote the kinds of interactions that constitute learning as socio-personal practice shaped by participation in the goal directed activity of work. However, in doing so, many of these theorists do not outline what ‘negotiation’ entails and requires as description and explanation of workers’ personal engagement in collective practice. Rather, they rely on generic understandings of the concept to carry their assertions that learning in and through work is the concomitant process of people, systems and artefacts being and coming together in interdependent joint activity. For example, when elaborating a social theory of learning as the negotiation of meaning, Wenger (1998: 53) captures some of this generic understanding when stating, “I intend the term negotiation to convey a flavour of continuous interaction, of gradual achievement, and of give-and-take”. Such a statement raises significant issues central
to the concept of negotiation within the participation and practice paradigm. Considerations of how continuous interaction is enacted, what work and learning practices constitute such an on-going process, the punctuation of this process by other processes, actions and events, the measurement of achievement as gradual and the recognition of what is given and taken in exchange are important aspects of these issues. Such considerations are central to identifying the kinds of worker practices that comprise negotiation in ways that can illustrate, describe and explain learning as co-participation in work.

Further issues arise from less defined uses of the term. For example, drawing on the lifeworld concepts (e.g., Heidegger 1962) to elaborate learning as a process of becoming through practice, Dall’Alba and Sandberg (2010: 107) state:

Through our lived experience in engaging with our world, we can come to know. For instance, as we move about our world, we encounter both physical objects and patterns of social behaviour, which we learn to negotiate as part of making our way in the world. Here, the term negotiation is not defined and so generic meanings such as navigating and bargaining need to be invoked to bring practice understandings to what is implied by individuals ‘making their way’ and ‘coming to know’ through their encounters. These invocations concern issues of what worker practices comprise such navigation, bargaining and making a way sufficient to constituting negotiation. Additionally, Billett and Smith (2006: 142) use negotiation in elaboration of the significance of individuals’ subjectivity as the basis of exercising personal agency in and for work. They state, “both the process and legacy [of learning] are shaped by negotiations, acts of recognition, mutuality and orientation between the personal and the social”. There is an implication here that acts of recognition, mutuality and orientation could be aspects of negotiation or they could be additional to it, the distinction is unclear. Issues of what worker practices constitute acts of recognition, mutuality and orientation and how such acts are to be understood as negotiation clearly arise.

These kinds of uses of the concept of negotiation are common within the work learning literature that emerges from the participation and practice paradigm. Through the lack of specific definition of the concept and how it is to be applied as description and explanation of the many and diverse interactions that characterise participation in work, the concept remains under theorised, under specified and thereby insufficient to the task of explicating work practices as learning practices. The concept remains vague and captive to broad and perhaps inappropriate sets of generic and taken for granted meanings that can include processes of bargaining and deal making, collusion and collaboration, contest and compromise, deceit, manoeuvring, mediation, strategising, planning and sharing. Equally, these meanings can include outcomes of agreements, settlements, control, division, exchange and partnerships that may or may not be constructive, destructive, robust or fragile and may or may not be welcomed by those involved. These kinds of generic meanings are common within the worlds of business, law and diplomacy, where specific practices and outcomes are planned and executed by participants who are highly conscious of their purposes and contexts (Raiffa 1990, Saner 2005). Such meanings support defining negotiation in terms of; securing strategic influence, the satisfaction of needs, overcoming the control of others, managing difference, seeking common solutions and distributing resources. Saner (2005: 17) summarises, “Negotiation is a process whereby two or more parties seek an agreement to establish what each shall give or take, or perform and receive in a transaction between them”.

Equally, such meanings are the foundation of perspectives that view all human interaction as negotiation because communication characterises all activity (Lewicki, Saunders and Barry 2006). However, as Strauss (1978: 2) warns, negotiation is only “one of the possible means of
‘getting things accomplished’ when parties need to deal with each other”. Therefore, the concept cannot be broadly applied as “characteristic only or primarily of a nowadays continuously changing world” (Strauss 1978: 2). So, what such multiple meanings (i.e., the process specific and the interaction generalisations) bring to illuminating and or clouding the participation and practice paradigm needs to be made clear. Failure to do so results in negotiation being little more than an ambiguous generality, an overly rich and ultimately sterile characterisation that is at best a synonym for interaction or co-participation and thus insufficient to the task of clearly explicating how the social and personal transformations and purposeful interconnections that characterise learning in work are enacted and experienced by its practitioners. It is to overcoming these generalities and the unhelpful ambiguities they carry that this paper is directed.

**Examining workers’ personal participative practices**

The research reported here is part of a broader interpretive and ethnographic examination of the personal work practices of twelve individual workers. The twelve, three from each of four different work places, comprised; an officer, a senior specialist fire fighter and a junior fire fighter from an inner city fire station; a manager, a personal trainer and a receptionist from a suburban fitness centre; a senior-partner/head-chef, a junior-partner/second-chef and a waitress from a suburban restaurant; and a senior team-leader, a senior team-member and a junior team-member of a computing support department at a city university. Over a period of 18 months, each of the twelve workers was interviewed five times for at least an hour or more. All these semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed. Additionally, each of the workers was observed in the conduct of their daily work at least three times. These observation times varied from one to two hours and most often occurred before or after the interviews. Some of the observation sessions enabled the researcher to simply watch the twelve participants in action while others enabled some researcher conversation with the participants.

All twelve workers became collaborators with the non-participant researcher in the analysis and conceptualisation of their work practices as negotiation practices. This collaboration stemmed from interviews proceeding to verify and review understandings and themes emergent in the previous interview and observation sessions. This on-going review and verification of data content and meaning, established a continuity of reflective examination of the workers’ regular and routine practices and generated a sharpened awareness of the kinds of changes, both personal and contextual, that punctuated and mediated their engagement in their work practices and their comprehension of and accounting for these practices. This strong focus on personal practices of work and the changes encountered, supported the twelve participants to become increasingly conscious of a differentiation between how they enacted their vocational practices, their accounts of the reasons for this enactment and how they perceived themselves through these enactments. This process, guided by the semi-structured interview schedules, enabled the interview and observation data to move from being own-account description of work and personal practice that could be witnessed in situ, to becoming own-account consideration and analysis of the purposes and accomplishments that characterised individual’s personal work practice.

Throughout the research, special attention was paid to worker-to-worker interactions, worker-to-client interactions and worker-to-equipment/systems interactions. The interviews and their transcriptions became the primary data source informing analysis as the twelve participants, all assured of confidentiality and anonymity, spoke at length about their work practices and
experiences in efforts to develop a stronger explicit awareness of themselves as learners in action at work. Prominent themes emerging from the qualitative content analysis included personal agency (in the sense of choosing and enacting personal values and priorities), learning through personal and team reflective practices and structural support and constraint (in the sense of the relationship between personal and organisational goals). Within the theme of personal agency, the relationship between personal purposes and intentions enacted and subsequent outcomes perceived as accomplished or not accomplished became important considerations in development of the four forms of negotiation framework. The framework is outlined below.

**Four forms of negotiation**

As Billett (2006) and Fuller and Unwin (2004) describe, all work is purposeful and goal directed. This sentiment is foundational in the participation and practice paradigm and was clearly demonstrated by the twelve participants in the research reported here. Each of them, in different ways, described and presented themselves as hard working and strong contributors to their organisations. The four forms of negotiation derive from individuals’ understanding their learning and work as more and less purposeful and goal directed activity that is more and less characterised by the resolution or realisation of its goals and purposes. The degree to which this is consciously and effort-fully enacted as individuals’ personal work practice can be mapped along a continuum of purpose that positions workers’ deliberate and highly intentional engagement in work at one end of the continuum and workers’ accidental and unplanned engagement at the other. This particular end of the continuum is not characterised by activity that is purposeless but rather by activity that is less specifically purposeful, less perceptibly directed to securing cognisant aims and objectives.

Similarly, the degree to which the goals of work activity can be understood as accomplished or as yet unaccomplished can be mapped along a continuum of resolution that positions workers’ perception of their continuing and or concluded engagement in efforts to secure their goals. At one end of the continuum, engagement is resolved; goals are either knowingly secured or not secured. This knowing marks the cessation of engagement and the conclusion of activity. At the other end, engagement in activity is unresolved and remains ongoing in the pursuit of overcoming and or resolving the issue or need that initiated activity. These two continuums of purpose and resolution can be understood as dimensions of co-participative practice and utilised as the horizontal and vertical axis of a matrix that can map workers’ personal work practices. This matrix is the Personal Work Negotiation Matrix (PWNM). Figure 1 below illustrates the PWNM formed using the two intersecting continuums of purpose and resolution and identifies the Four Contingent Forms of Negotiation that correspond to the four quadrants of the matrix.

The four contingent forms of negotiation represent a way of categorising workers participation as negotiation on the bases of their enactments and understandings of their personal work practices as they engage with all the resources that comprise and enable their work. Here, negotiation is defined as the purposeful bringing together of all the ideational and material resources necessary to the accomplishment of joint activity. Within the domain of individuals’ engagement in and perceptions of this joint activity, the negotiation enacted is qualified as contingent, that is, conditioned by how and in what ways individual workers view and understand their personal practices as but some of the many interdependent resources necessary to the activity. To illustrate this case and elaborate the four contingent forms of negotiation the paper draws on data specific to Robert, the junior-partner/second-
chef from the restaurant. Robert is typical of the twelve. His experience of work at the restaurant, dealing with clients, staff and the demands of his business and its particular cuisine, positions him, like all twelve participants, as an individual worker who is enacting his vocational practice in uniquely personal ways from equally personal subjective bases and yet doing so in ways that strongly accord with the normative practices of his occupation and the roles he enacts through this work.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1: The Personal Work Negotiation Matrix and the Four Contingent Forms of Negotiation**

**Realised negotiations (Quadrant 1)**
Robert is 26 years of age and has completed his chef apprenticeship, worked for a number of years as a sous chef and now owns a 25% share in a successful restaurant. His many duties and responsibilities befit what he notes as the “do anything and everything necessary” attitude of the small business owner-operator. Robert states:

> Well, my role changes ... I don’t really have a set position where - I don’t just cook, or I don’t just work on the floor, or all the corporate catering, or make sure all the staff are organised ...yeah, I would just say my work is diverse and also very flexible, that there’s no real end to the role that you play obviously being a part owner of a business

Within this diversity and necessity, Robert’s primary role is catering manager. He secures and facilitates clients’ private and off premises function requirements including birthday celebrations, weddings and corporate events. This work involves all the negotiations with clients and the various staff, equipment, food and ancillary supply companies necessary to the successful and profitable operation of an event. These negotiations are marked by processes of constant liaison, the to-ing and fro-ing of information through request, consideration, offers, further considerations, and comparisons among and selections from alternatives that finalise as agreements of menus, dates, number of guests, costs, contingencies and payments. For Robert these many communications and considerations are the bringing together of clients’ desires and expectations, the restaurant’s capacities and profit requirements,
suppliers’ schedules and his own skills as an experienced chef and business owner. Robert comments on his developing business and negotiation skills:

I have said no to business and it happens all the time – we’re too busy, haven’t got the resources. E.g., November and December we have to say no to catering customers because we’re fully booked up – they get angry but there is little I can do about that, especially as it’s their own fault for not being more organised.

And yes I have said yes to business and regretted it – but you get good at reading the warning signs and thus avoiding those situations. I keep asking questions, clarifying the customer’s needs and situation and don’t commit until I’m satisfied all is well and confident. My approach to assessing business has changed – I’ve become more negative, learned to think of the problems first, go in cautiously, think more … you do come at things negatively, starting from the worst case scenario and working back from there – that’s the planning process – prepare for the worst. The worst case scenario is not cancellation, client deposits cover that, It’s rain at the outdoor wedding when you don’t have a marquee because you didn’t push home to the bride and groom hard enough the need of such a contingency – they’ll blame you.

Enacting these negotiations is the routine practice of Robert’s work. Successful or not, as a contracted function that goes ahead or business lost to an agreement that could not be struck, such negotiations accomplish resolution. They are marked by purposeful and directed interactions and all those involved achieve, positively or negatively, some form of settlement or outcome from their deliberate efforts. The goals that initiated the activity are achieved or fail to be achieved and this is the resolution of that activity. In Robert’s work, such resolution is realised across many of his practices. The recipe does or does not meet expectations. The staffing arrangements do or do not prove satisfactory. The ordered supplies do or do not arrive on time. The client does or does not call back to confirm. And so the business of the restaurant is transacted as Robert’s personal work practices enact the many resolved negotiations that constitute his daily routines. In terms of the PWNM, these kinds of work practices correspond to the first quadrant. They are characterised by deliberate action that accomplishes some form of resolution directly associated with the goals and purposes guiding the negotiation. Such negotiations are here referred to as realised negotiations. Figure 2, below, illustrates the positioning of the catering contracts Robert negotiates with clients in Quadrant 1 of the matrix.

**Discovered negotiations (Quadrant 2)**

Robert is very aware of the relational correspondence between his work practices and learning practices. He comments throughout the research interviews about learning from the diversity of tasks he enacts and the different people his work brings him in contact with. He states:

The learning that is going on is the refining of every single thing you do. When ever you do something you’re always trying to make it quicker, or be more efficient, more organised about the way you do it – whether it’s structuring people or hours or whatever.

It’s a revolving thing with me where I’m basically trying to streamline things as I go. It’s all hands on, or strategising or planning in my head. Every moment at work, everything is a learning opportunity.

Robert notes that when it is deliberate, his learning practices are usually hands-on practice and experiment with food combinations and processes, costings comparisons, directed observation of what others are doing and purposeful conversations and debate with the senior partners at their weekly meetings. Equally, he acknowledges that not all his learning is so directed and is often based in unfocussed observation and incidental communication through
the familiar and routine tasks of the chef and manager. Discussing when his learning is not
deliberate, he states:

It’s something you don’t really think of … There’s a lot of broader learning where a lot of
the time you don’t know what you’re actually learning while you’re learning it … The idea
of not knowing what you’re learning for me comes from when you stop what you’re
doing. A lot of the time I don’t know what I’m learning and when something completely
jumps out, when your brain goes, hang on a minute, we’ve never seen anything like this
before or it looks strange – then you stop and actually observe what you’re looking at,
reading or whatever you’re doing – and if you don’t understand any part of it then you
really have to stop and go, huh, OK – then that’s when it’s obvious you’re learning
something.

What can result from such incidental and routine work and learning practices is the
unexpected resolution of unintentional activity: new knowings, unanticipated outcomes,
discovered realisations. Robert tells the story of his becoming a part owner in the business in
these terms of arriving at unexpected understandings of himself and his desires through the
new opportunities his unintentional actions generated. He relates how in casual conversation
with his previous employer he was expressing his feelings of boredom and complacency
about his work as the sous chef, not in the sense of wanting change but in the sense of “just
talking, as you do”. At that time, his relationship with his employer and his confidence in the
quality of his work were strong and he describes how friendly personal conversations were
often contextualised within work related discussions about new menu suggestions, possible
different seating plans and the general economic conditions in which the restaurant was
operating. During one such conversation, what Robert didn’t realise was that he was
unknowingly negotiating the offer and acceptance of a partnership in the business. He states,

That kind of not knowing learning became apparent for me very early on. I was a
qualified chef, I knew pretty much how to play the game and was pretty good at doing
service and the style of the restaurant and I got bored – I was bored. I was very fortunate
at that time. I knew the man who owned the restaurant very well, so I said that to him – I
was very open about it all – and suddenly I had an opportunity to broaden my horizon
and get more into the business. I suppose it was something I was interested in doing but I
didn’t want to go and do it – I’ve never really wanted to own my own restaurant – its not
something that I’ve really strived to do but … and that’s how I came to be a partner in
this restaurant.

Through the incidental actions of work related conversation that was punctuated by personal
disclosure of feelings, Robert found himself, quite unexpectedly and without forethought,
accepting an equally unplanned offer of partnership. The offer, the acceptance and the
subsequent arrangements were outcomes of unintentional actions enacted within the routine
interactions of work. Against the two axes of the PWNM, these actions and associated
outcomes are referred to as discovered negotiations, the unexpected resolution of incidental
activity. Figure 2 below positions Roberts partnership offer in Quadrant 2.

Concealed negotiations (Quadrant 3)
Robert had not planned on becoming a business man although he welcomed the opportunity
as possible solution to the lack of stimulation his very familiar work as chef was providing.
As a solution, that is, by broadening his range of duties and responsibilities and enabling new
challenges, the move into part-owner manager proved successful. Robert discussed his work
as having “no real end”. Throughout the interviews he listed many regular and unexpected
tasks that comprised his work. These included repairing broken down delivery vans,
attending to client’s electric circuit boards, adapting children’s play equipment for food
service, washing dishes, cleaning toilets, bouncing rowdy patrons and entertaining function guests with bad jokes. For Robert, work is unpredictable and, in relation to the work of his role as catering manager alone, well beyond the scope of his initial expectations when he accepted the partnership. What he imagined as an extension of his work as a chef, was proving to be a haphazard and intensely demanding test of his capacities to meet the requirements of whatever was needed at the time because the responsibility of ensuring functions went ahead and were successful for both client and business remained his work.

Enacting this work, despite increasing confidence to find creative and effective solutions to whatever problems arose, challenged Robert’s understanding of himself as a worker, his sense of his own vocational identity. He states,

I used to be a chef and I still am a chef, but now I’m a business man and I’m still not sure what that’s about – I guess you just have to improvise, I do - there’s always things that pop up at the eleventh hour that you don’t expect and, and its quite exciting sort of being on edge like that, that you actually have to perform under, quite a high level of stress and you still have to perform, you can’t just go, oh, this is too stressful and walk off, so you have to make things work, there’s no out.

In as much as Robert is discussing the unpredictable demands of his work in this account, he is also discussing the negotiation of his vocational identity as a businessman. This vocational identity negotiation, premised on the necessities of work, is ongoing and developmental, founded in the interactions and practices (e.g., with people, tasks, events, etc.) that constitute his work. These multiple tasks, roles and responsibilities of running a business, often accidental, often unresolved in any terms beyond being make-do solutions to temporary problems, constitute the negotiations of Robert’s vocational identity, that is, his coming to understand and define himself and his practice in work. This identity negotiation lacks the immediate purpose and realised intentionality of the task at hand. Robert illustrates, “sure I can jump in and wash dishes but it doesn’t change the fact we need a dish washer we haven’t got”. He has to perform, has to do what he has to do, yes, ultimately because he wants to, but more immediately, because failure and certain disappointment will follow if he does not act. Engaging in the immediacy of the realised negotiations that identify as problem solving, acts to mask the greater and seeming incidentally enacted and unresolved negotiation of vocational identity as businessman. Robert is, through his personal practice, no longer chef, not dishwasher and not yet businessman. These kinds of negotiations are referred to here as concealed negotiations. They are enacted accidentally and are characterised by a lack of resolution, a not knowing Robert identifies as being “not sure what that’s about”. Figure 2, below, positions Robert’s vocational identity negotiations in Quadrant 3.

Protracted negotiations (Quadrant 4)
One of Robert’s numerous responsibilities is staff training. The success of the restaurant and its catering business is partly dependent on having a pool of well-trained on-call casual staff. This need is supported by the restaurant’s proximity to a large university and the reasonably constant supply of students seeking casual work. Robert is appreciative of this labour source and works carefully and strategically to ensure his casual staff pool is as large as possible and that all within it secure enough work to want to remain on call. Robert describes staff training as the search for common interest and the enactment of trial and error learning in his efforts to find out how best his staff will learn and thereby what training practices he should employ. He states,

When we get new staff, you’ve got to try and analyse how they think, how they work, and you need to try and find a way in, you need to be able to find a common interest with them, or a way to stimulate them to a certain degree ... it’s obviously very different for

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each person, sort of probably along the lines of trial and error of what we are trying to achieve here, getting them trained.

This trial and error practice, this “trying to work people out”, evidences Robert’s deliberate actions of seeking to understand how his staff should best be trained. With some, he is direct and instructional, (e.g., do it like this) with others more friendly and supportive (e.g., how have you done this in the past) and with others more expectant of initiative (e.g., do it anyway you can). Throughout the interviews, Robert notes the “the more miss than hit” of his training efforts and how there are many occasions when his efforts prove futile, never achieving the outcomes he works towards. Robert summarises,

You can be telling someone how to do something until you’re black and blue in the face but if you’re not teaching them the right way or you’re not showing them all the easy procedures to get the job done, all that effort, that strong determination, is useless.

Some of Robert’s training efforts are clearly resolved as successful and suitable staff are both secured and retained. Some are resolved as unsuccessful and applicants told their services will not be required or newly appointed staff find themselves with fewer and eventually no phone calls for work. By contrast, sufficient of these training sessions result in some retained staff persisting in practices that Robert feels he has repeatedly tried to alter to bring them into line with what he instructs and expects. In this way, through repeated efforts in training that does not result in what Robert aims for, these negotiations remain unresolved, remain on-going, characterised by no realisation of the goals being pursued despite the deliberate actions taken. Indeed, these actions remain a source of frustration for Robert as he continues to remind staff of what is expected and continues to search for more effective ways of “getting the message through”. In terms of the PWNM, these repeated actions in efforts to secure resolutions as yet unrealised and more, proving difficult to resolve, are referred to here as protracted negotiations. They remain on-going, deliberately enacted and yet unresolved. Figure 2 below positions such staff training negotiations in Quadrant 4.

![Figure 2: Mapping Robert’s work practices across the matrix](attachment:image)
Negotiation: the description and explanation of learning in work

In conclusion and summary, the research set out to examine the very personal ways workers enacted their practice in the regular and routine activities of their work. This examination focused on personal practice as individuals’ engagement in the diverse range of interactions necessary to the processes and accomplishments of work as joint activity. That activity is always relational and interdependent, always established in the sets of relations that comprise the bringing together of all the personal and socio-cultural resources enacted in activity. Further, this examination focused on seeking ways to make clear and explicit how this activity and, particularly, individuals’ enactment of it, could be conceptualised as negotiation. As illustrated by data that reveals some of the purposes and accomplishments Robert enacts and experiences through his work, the four contingent forms of negotiation offer a means of categorising worker’s personal work and learning practices as negotiation. These categorisations go beyond defining negotiations on the basis of the parties involved, for example, as those between workers and managers, employers and employees, junior and senior staff or simply between different workers. Further, they go beyond definitions by aims and objectives such as seeking dispute resolution, solving problems or finding agreement. Equally, they go beyond categorisation and definition by process and product such as the offer and counter offer or consider and appraise strategies that mark what are referred to as value claiming (win-lose) or value creation (win-win) negotiations. These ways of categorising and defining negotiations are common in fields of business, legal and diplomatic domains where negotiation is viewed as a strategic process focussed on securing favourable outcomes when needs are contested and or resources limited (Greenhalgh 2001).

In moving beyond common categorisations and generic understandings of negotiation, the four contingent forms of realised, discovered, concealed and protracted negotiations enable a focus on what workers do and how they understand their personal work practices in terms of their perceptions of the efforts they make, their reasons for making them and the accomplishments they attain. Reflecting on personal practice in these terms of negotiation supported Robert, like all of the twelve participants, to articulate and explain work in terms of the necessary interactions by which it was constituted. This personal examination of work meant seeing personal purpose, effort and outcome as contingent accomplishments that could be simultaneously interpreted and accepted in different ways. Robert appreciated that his fixing the delivery van when it broke down was both the realised negotiation of an immediate problem and a concealed negotiation of his learning to be a businessman.

Negotiation, thereby, comes to be seen in terms beyond what Raiffa (1990) referred to as parties with identifiable objectives engaged in brokering eventual agreement through posturing and compromise. Rather, negotiation comes to be seen as workers’ engagement in the encounters that characterise their vocational practice. Objectives may not be known, posturing may be accidental, compromise may be ignorance, agreements may never eventuate and workers’ investment of themselves may be misdirected or non-existent in relation to the understandings their actions generate. Importantly however, such accident and ignorance, or purpose and realisation, as the case may be, is accounted and made explicit within the conception of negotiation as form offered here. The four contingent forms are both a qualified description and explanation of interactive practice and a method of categorising and distinguishing the kinds of negotiations in which workers are engaged. Equally, as the twelve workers differentiated their personal work practices across the matrix of the four forms of negotiation, their self-reported accounts of personal work practices evidenced a developing awareness of their learning as negotiated and contingent on the contributions of
others. This enhanced awareness supported them seeing themselves as negotiators who were highly influential in shaping the way their work and learning practices were enacted and interpreted.

The concept of negotiation cannot be simply accepted as some universal description and explanation of the nature of participation in work and learning. The meanings negotiation carries are too ambiguous and often too narrowly focused on notions of bargaining and securing advantage to simply translate as an overarching kind of interactive joint activity that captures the complexity of work and learning as both individual and social processes and accomplishments. The four contingent forms of negotiation presented here address these insufficiencies and ambiguities, and so offer a means of clarification and qualification of the concept of negotiation suitable to its becoming a more useful metaphor for describing and explaining the nature of work and learning as socio-personal practice. The four forms, realised, discovered, concealed and protracted negotiations are not offered as a complete classification system of negotiation types. Rather, they enable workers’ personal practices to be understood as purposeful and contributory at both personal and socially situated levels of and perspectives on, collective activity. Personal practice is always socially enacted as joint activity with others and with tools (Vygotsky 1978) and always personally enacted as joint activity with self and the legacies of engagement in previous activities (Billett, Fenwick & Somerville 2006). Distinguishing the negotiation forms workers enact goes some way to understanding individuals’ contributions, as purpose and accomplishment, to the joint activities in which they are always engaged.

References


