# Articles
## A Genre-Based Investigation of Workplace Communities

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RÉSUMÉ Cet article discute de divers concepts fondamentaux utilisés dans l'étude de la rhétorique des genres ainsi que quelques-uns des cadres théoriques appliqués fréquemment par les spécialistes de la rhétorique des genres, dans le but de montrer leur pertinence dans le domaine des archives et de la gestion de documents. En s'inspirant en particulier de la théorie de l'activité, de la cognition distribuée et de l'apprentissage situé (ou contextualisé), cet article explore les caractéristiques des pratiques de communication professionnelles, l'une des préoccupations principales de l'étude de la rhétorique des genres. Arriver à comprendre comment les acteurs organisationnels collaborent, comment ils construisent et reconstruisent leurs identités collectives, et comment ils donnent force aux genres, ou aux outils culturels (qui sont à la fois le résultat et les moyens de leurs activités), est essentiel afin de situer la création et l'utilisation de documents d'archives dans les pratiques courantes des communautés de travail. Une analyse basée sur le genre de l'écriture comme activité complexe, comprenant plusieurs fonctions et impliquant plusieurs voix, et une analyse de l'apprentissage comme un processus organisationnel continu inhérent à la participation active des communautés professionnelles révèleront l'étendue sous-estimée de la création de documents, contribuant ainsi à l'enrichissement de la théorie et de la pratique de la gestion de documents et des archives.

ABSTRACT This article discusses various key concepts involved in Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) and some of the theoretical frameworks frequently applied by RGS scholars, with the purpose of demonstrating their relevance to the archives and records management domain. By drawing on activity theory, distributed cognition, and situated learning in particular, the article explores the characteristics of professional communication practices, one of the central concerns of RGS. Understanding how organizational actors collaborate, how they construct and reconstruct their collective identities, and how they enact the genres, or cultural tools, that are the outcome and means of their activities is important to situate records creation and use within the actual practices of workplace communities. A genre-based investigation of writing as a complex, multi-functional, and multivocal activity and of learning as a continuous organizational process inherent in the active participation in professional communities will reveal underrated dimensions of record-making, thus contributing to the enrichment of the theory and practice of records management and archives.

**Introduction**

Understanding how organizations carry out their activities, how records come into being in the course of those activities, and how records, human actors, institutional functions, and structures influence one another is central to most archival endeavours, from records classification and retention to archival arrangement and description. Records and archives scholars and practitioners have been studying the functioning of organizations – especially in relation to how bureaucracies work and how they document their work – through various theories of administration and management, methods for the analysis of business systems, diplomatics, and, more recently, several sociological perspectives.[1] Like business analysts, records managers go about dissecting functions, activities, and transactions, and matching up workflows and document flows in their attempts to capture "what happened."[2] Archivists evaluate and rank records creators by analyzing their mandate, delegation of powers, functional responsibilities, and their relationships with internal and external stakeholders.[3]

However, most of these approaches tend to be rather mechanistic, prescriptive, and abstracted from real-world situations. In order to make manageable the complexity of the interactions taking place in organizations, records and archives specialists look at any records-related issues as "hard," measurable problems, and tend to privilege a-rhetorical, or anti-rhetorical, perspectives. In other words, little attention is usually paid to actual work practices or to the fact that organizational actors, even when they collaborate, have different goals. As a consequence, the records generated in the course of the "acting together"[4] of specific groups of records creators are shaped by unwritten, local rules of communication and embody conflicting motives – that is, they are

1    These lines of inquiry may be illustrated respectively by referring to: Peter J. Scott, C.D. Smith, and G. Finlay, "Archives and Administrative Change: Some Methods and Approaches (Part 4)," *Archives and Manuscripts* 8, no. 2 (December 1980): 51–69; International Council on Archives, *Principles and Functional Requirements for Records in Electronic Office Environments. Module 3: Guidelines and Functional Requirements for Records in Business Systems* (2008); Luciana Duranti, *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science* (Lanham, MD, and London: Scarecrow Press, 1998); and Frank Upward, "Structuring the Records Continuum. Part Two: Structuration Theory and Recordkeeping," *Archives and Manuscripts* 25, no. 1 (1997): 10–35.
2    Inge Alberts, Jen Schellinck, Craig Eby, and Yves Marleau, "Bridging Functions and Processes for Records Management," *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science* 34, no. 4 (December 2010): 365–90.
3    Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, ed. Barbara L. Craig (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 38–70.
4    The expression "acting together" is used by rhetorician Carolyn Miller (who, in turn, borrowed it from literary theorist Kenneth Burke) to describe the common experience and understanding shared by the members of any given social group or community. See Carolyn R. Miller, "Genre as Social Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70, no. 2 (1984), 159.

"rhetorical," in the sense of being persuasive, directed to produce some effects on the outside world, while at the same time being a product of that world.[5]

New theoretical and methodological tools need to be introduced in the archival domain so that the complexity inherent in the contexts in which organizational records are created and used – in this article, "workplace communities" – can be revealed, investigated, and comprehended.[6] I propose Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) as the field of scholarship and research that, being specifically interested in written and oral texts, human agents, and the situations in which texts are enacted in the course of social interactions, may provide the archives and records management discipline with a sound and applicable set of original ideas.[7] RGS draws on a number of theoretical frameworks that are shared by other areas of study. For the purposes of this article, I will refer specifically to activity theory, distributed cognition, and situated learning, as interpreted and used in the context of RGS. In the following paragraphs, key concepts involved in all these interrelated constructs will be laid out.

Traditional genre theory is concerned with regularities of form (i.e., language, style), content (i.e., substance, topic), and/or situation (i.e., time and place in which the genre is performed) as these may be observed in literary

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5    My critique of the a-rhetorical, engineering-like approach that seems to characterize a good portion of the records management and archival literature is fully developed in Fiorella Foscarini, "Understanding the Context of Records Creation and Use: 'Hard' Versus 'Soft' Approaches to Records Management," *Archival Science* 10, no. 4 (December 2010): 389–407.

6    In the last few years, a number of archival scholars have provided explorations of the "documentary reality" of organizations through innovative, interdisciplinary lenses. I would like to mention in particular the works by Kalpana Shankar, "Recordkeeping in the Production of Scientific Knowledge: An Ethnographic Study," *Archival Science* 4, no. 3–4 (December 2004): 367–82; Shankar, "Craft, Ambiguity, and Legitimate Peripheral Participation in Scientific Information Creation," *Journal of Documentation* 65, no. 1 (January 2009): 151–65; Ciaran B. Trace, "What Is Recorded Is Never Simply 'What Happened': Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (January 2002): 137–59; Trace, "Information Creation and the Notion of Membership," *Journal of Documentation* 63, no. 1 (January 2007): 142–63; Elizabeth Yakel, "The Social Construction of Accountability: Radiologists and Their Recordkeeping Practices," *Information Society* 17, no. 4 (2001): 233–45; Geoffrey Yeo, "Rising to the Level of a Record? Some Thoughts on Records and Documents," *Records Management Journal* 21, no. 1 (January 2011): 8–27.

7    While the Library and Information Science (LIS) domain has engaged with genre concepts for quite some time, especially in relation to areas such as knowledge organization, web design, digital communication, and information retrieval (for an overview of LIS genre-based research, see Jack Andersen, "The Concept of Genre in Information Studies," *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 42, no. 1 [2008]: 339–67), the potential of genre theory for archives was drawn to the attention of the archival community by Gillian Oliver, Yunhyong Kim, and Seamus Ross, "Documentary Genre and Digital Recordkeeping: Red Herring or a Way Forward?" *Archival Science* 8, no. 4 (December 2008): 295–305. Since then, the interest in the notion of genre has grown to the point that, in December 2012, *Archival Science* published a special issue (vol. 12, no. 4) dedicated to genre studies in archives.

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texts and classic types of rhetorical discourse. *Rhetorical Genre Studies*, which emerged in the mid-1980s in North America, explores non-literary, everyday forms of writing and speaking as a "dynamic … fusion"[8] of the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics of "texts" triggered by the situational demands perceived by the writer or speaker.[9] By identifying genres with "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations,"[10] Carolyn Miller shifted the focus of genre research to the "regularities in human spheres of activity."[11] These regularities, recognized as recurrent by the participants in a situation, occasion specific typified responses (e.g., regularly scheduled meetings, all kinds of business records having predictable forms and substance). Miller's idea of "genre as social action" emphasizes the centrality of the active construction of the "discourse practices" (i.e., socially sanctioned ways of writing, speaking, acting, thinking) that are current in any organization, and their situated, historically conditioned nature. From a philosophical viewpoint, the genre position may be categorized as **social constructivism in that it does not** celebrate the primacy of the "subject" over the "object" or vice versa; rather, it stresses that their continuous *interaction* constitutes our "reality."

Because of their attention on communicative actions and the ways in which human agents use existing social structures (i.e., any kinds of material and/or conceptual tools or artifacts, including texts) to accomplish their work, RGS scholars could not ignore the contributions offered by *activity theory*.[12] Activity theory emerged in the former Soviet Union at the beginning of the twentieth century as a psychological model centred on an understanding of human activities (activity theory's unit of analysis) as complex, socially situated phenomena.[13] In this framework, activities are seen as always being

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8    Miller, "Genre as Social Action," 152.
9    The expansion of the notion of genre to include everyday texts and settings prompted the development of two new streams of genre research: RGS, whose main ideas were first articulated by Carolyn Miller in her 1984 seminal paper "Genre as Social Action," and the so-called "Sydney School," which is characterized by a marked linguistic approach, following Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistics. For an overview of genre research, see Catherine F. Schryer, "Genre Theory and Research," in *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences*, 3rd ed., ed. Marcia J. Bates and Mary Niles Maack (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 1934–**42**.
10   Miller, "Genre as Social Action," 159.
11   Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway, eds., *Genre and the New Rhetoric* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 2.
12   Besides activity theory, another major theoretical framework favoured by RGS scholars is Giddens's theory of structuration. I explore the application of structuration theory to the notion of genre and the implications of this approach for our understanding of records in **Fiorella** Foscarini, "Diplomatics and Genre Theory as Complementary Approaches," *Archival Science* 12, no. 4 (December 2012): 389–**409**.
13   For a more detailed exposition of activity theory's roots and components, as well as an introduction to how activity theory and other social science theoretical and methodological frameworks are used by various research communities, including the RGS one, see Ciaran B. Trace, "Documenting Work and Working Documents: Perspectives from Workplace Studies,

mediated by cultural tools (i.e., written and non-written artifacts, or genres) that allow human agents to work collaboratively toward some shared purpose, despite the fact that each individual or group is driven by different motives. The mechanism of negotiation that underlies collaboration is involved in the notion of "intersubjectivity,"[14] which will be discussed in more detail later in this article. In particular, genre scholars embraced the notion of an *activity system* as a "historically- and culturally-situated sphere of goal-oriented collaborative endeavour, in which cognition – thinking, knowing, and learning – is diffused, or distributed, across a number of individuals … [and] mediated by culturally-constructed tools."[15] I posit that workplace communities – of which several usually coexist within any single organization – may be assimilated to activity systems. In fact, a number of diverse conceptualizations of the term "community" have been put forward, and some may appear controversial, as will be explained in the next section. For the time being, suffice it to say that in order to understand how workplace communities interact and how collaboration takes place within and among communities, distributed cognition provides a useful conceptual framework.

Developed by American cognitive psychologist and anthropologist Edwin Hutchins in the mid-1980s, the theory of *distributed cognition* is grounded on the idea that cognitive activity, rather than happening within the brain, is distributed across participants in social groups and involves internal individual minds as well as external artifacts and structures. Like activity systems, cognitive systems (the unit of analysis in distributed cognition theory) are goal-oriented "public spaces of cognition"[16] where thinking, knowing, and learning are diffused, or distributed, among participants.[17] In his study of how economists conduct their activities, genre scholar Graham Smart merged RGS and distributed cognition, and defined the latter as "knowledge that arises as

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CSCW, and Genre Studies," in *Proceedings of the 2011 44th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (IEEE Computer Society: Washington, DC, 2011), 1–10, accessed 12 June 2014, DOI 10.1109/HICSS.2011.170. An example of the application of activity theory to the archival domain is Anneli Sundqvist, "Search Processes, User Behaviour and Archival Representational Systems" (PhD diss., Mid Sweden University, 2009).

14  Graham Smart, *Writing the Economy: Activity, Genre and Technology in the World of Banking* (London and Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2006), 15.

15  Ibid., 14.

16  Genre scholar Bazerman distinguishes between "private spaces of cognition," where individuals, although conditioned by social structures, enjoy some freedom of thought, expression and action, and "public spaces of cognition," where large numbers of people negotiate understanding, perception, and orientation in order to carry out coordinated activities. Charles Bazerman, *Constructing Experience* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), 146–47, cited in Smart, *Writing the Economy*, 15 and 122.

17  Bonnie A. Nardi, "Studying Context: A Comparison of Activity Theory, Situated Action Models, and Distributed Cognition," in *Context and Consciousness: Activity Theory and Human–Computer Interaction*, ed. Bonnie A. Nardi (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 69–102.

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people collaborate, using shared cultural tools, in performing their work."[18]

Finally, *situated learning* is another conceptual construct that needs to be introduced here, as the process of learning is integral to the one of writing – and the latter is the most common way of performing and communicating activities in the workplace. Several models have been devised to describe organizational learning (which is fundamentally different from the learning involved in formal education, in spite of the efforts made by educators to provide internship opportunities or hands-on, experiential learning activities in the classroom).[19] A school of thought known as "social theory of learning"[20] recognizes that "learning is ubiquitous in ongoing activity,"[21] comes from individuals' participation in social practices, and has to do with the development of identities at both an individual and a group level. Within this framework, the theory of situated learning, first described by Lave and Wenger in 1991,[22] is based on the assumptions that all knowledge is context-specific, that learning is active, dynamic, and accomplished through co-participation, and that cognition is socially shared. When applied to workplace communities, or activity systems, these ideas shed light on several issues central to this article, including genre knowledge transmission, collaborative writing, and the development of professional identities.

One of the purposes of this article is to demonstrate that genre ideas and some of the theoretical frameworks typically applied in the context of RGS research have the potential of enriching the archives and records management discipline, especially by providing deeper insights into the writing, thinking, and acting (that is, the shared discourse practices) of records creators. Even when they take place unnoticeably, *collaboration* and *identity construction* – the two main themes of this paper – are central aspects of recordkeeping. Genre scholars look at both processes as ongoing interactions (or performances) that the members of workplace communities collectively enact (or stage)[23] to carry out their work, and which in turn shape the character of those communities and their cultural tools. Collaboration – which implies negotia-

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18  Smart, "Writing the Economy," 14.
19  Knud Illeris, ed., *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists … in Their Own Words* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).
20  Etienne Wenger, "A Social Theory of Learning," in *Contemporary Theories of Learning*, 209–18.
21  Jean Lave, "The Practice of Learning," in *Contemporary Theories of Learning*, 201.
22  Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
23  Linguist Ken Hyland discussed the idea of identity as performance at the Genre 2012 Conference, held in Ottawa on 26–29 June 2012. According to Hyland, "Identity is the ways that people display who they are to each other.… It does not exist within individuals, but between them, within social interactions." The video recordings taken at the Genre 2012 Conference, including Hyland's presentation, entitled "The ESP Version: Genre, Community and Identity," are available at http://carleton.ca/slals/cu-videos/ (accessed 6 October 2013).

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tion of meanings and, quite often, disagreement, and which appears to be an essential feature of what goes on in any workplace – is accomplished through the continuous use of written, oral, and other symbol-based tools or genres. Similarly, the development of professional identities is inextricably linked to participating in workplace genres and "*learning* one's professional location in the power relations of institutional life."[24]

Corporate records are very rarely the product of a single individual, and yet how writing is actually performed by organizational actors is not a subject commonly explored in records management. RGS brings new insights into *collaborative writing* as a process that occurs continuously and is inherent in all kinds of activities taking place in the workplace. Furthermore, the genre approach offers an innovative understanding of *social interactions* (which are the substance, form, and situated context of records) thanks to its focus on "texts" as shared cultural tools that allow individuals to "do" certain actions and to "be" what they are as members of specific communities. Before considering what RGS and its underlying theories bring to notions of collaboration, identity, learning, and writing in the workplace, and what implications all this may have for future research in the records and archives domain, it is necessary to discuss the idea of community in some detail.

## A Problematic Term: Community

When using a genre lens to look at the professional or occupational groups[25] existing within any organization (e.g., lawyers, economists, accountants, recordkeepers), one may identify several *communities* whose boundaries might not be clearly or durably defined, each sharing some discipline-specific knowledge (e.g., law, economics, accounting, archives and records management) and particular sets of values, work practices, social behaviours, and – to use activity theory terminology – "cultural tools" (e.g., legal codes, mathematical models, registers, classification systems) through which work is accomplished. These communities interact with one another, since most of the activities conducted in organizations require the joint effort of different groups of people. Some of the tools they use are collectively created and managed. However, as activity theory teaches us, each community ascribes distinctive

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24  Anthony Paré, "Genre and Identity: Individuals, Institutions and Ideology," in *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre: Strategies for Stability and Change*, ed. Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard, and Tatiana Teslenko (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2002), 69 [emphasis added].

25  This terminology comes from organizational research, with particular regard to studies of the cultural sub-groups (at the national, corporate, professional, or occupational level) that make up the culture of an organization. See Elena Karahanna, J. Roberto Evaristo, and Mark Srite, "Levels of Culture and Individual Behavior: An Integrative Perspective," *Journal of Global Information Management* 13, no. 3 (April–June 2005): 1–20.

meanings to its "tools-in-use" and enacts them with specific goals in mind. For example, within an organization, the records created by the community of lawyers (e.g., contracts) may be handed over to the recordkeepers community for their continuous management and preservation.

When exploring the various communities that constitute a workplace – how they function, how they interact, how they see their work world, and how they construct and reconstruct their professional identities through the conscious or routine use of "genres of organizational communication"[26] – RGS scholars tend to specify carefully how the notion of community should be interpreted in a particular context, thus explicitly or implicitly recognizing the problematic nature of the term "community." For many, "discourse community" is the notion that best captures the fact that genre research focuses primarily on the *discursive* practices that construct each workplace, as well as the idea that "genres belong to discourse *communities*, not to individuals."[27] However, other researchers have pointed out that "discourse community" is a "misleading term,"[28] because when the community is defined by its discourse – and vice versa – there is an assumption of homogeneity, or harmony, that is not likely to exist in any actual workplace, not even in the smallest unit within an organization. To account for the diversity and potential dissonance inherent in real-world situations – in other words, the "heteroglossia" or "multivocality" that, according to Bakhtin, characterizes all social exchanges[29] – Miller suggests the concept of a "rhetorical community" as "a virtual entity, a discursive projec-

26   Yates and Orlikowski include in this notion all kinds of written documents, but also oral discussions, meetings, drawings, and any other form of symbolic representation characterizing an organization's discourse practices. JoAnne Yates and Wanda J. Orlikowski, "Genres of Organizational Communication: A Structurational Approach to Studying Communication and Media," *Academy of Management Review* 17, no. 2 (April 1992): 299–326.

27   John Swales, *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9, cited in Carolyn R. Miller, "Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre," in *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, 62 [emphasis added].

28   Carl G. Herndl, Barbara A. Fennell, and Carolyn R. Miller, "Understanding Failures in Organizational Discourse: The Accident at Three Mile Island and the Shuttle Challenger Disaster," in *Textual Dynamics of the Professions: Historical and Contemporary Studies of Writing in Professional Communities*, ed. Charles Bazerman and James Paradis (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 281.

29   Russian semiotician Mikhail Bakhtin argued that all communicative acts, which he called "speech genres," are dialogic or intertextual in nature, because each speaker always appropriates the words of others to express his or her own intentions. Thus, the "polyphony" that Bakhtin, as a literary critic, recognized in the novel as a genre, in his linguistic essays becomes a characteristic of all kinds of written and oral utterances, which necessarily embed previous interactions and anticipate any future ones. See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981); Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist and trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), 60–102.

tion, a rhetorical construct … [that] includes 'the other.'"[30]

Miller's inclusive, dynamic, and contingent view of community may also be found in the expression "community of practice," coined by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. A community of practice is culturally and historically situated, in the sense that its constituent "set of relations among persons, activity and the world" always refers to some specific time and place, and is constantly "in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities."[31] As it appears to "cover activity beyond language," community of practice may be perceived to be more general than discourse or rhetorical community. By the same token, it may also be seen as a more precise term, because of its focus on "what groups of people *do*."[32] In an attempt to avoid the word "community" altogether – since it would be fraught with "warm overtones" that seem to exclude conflicting situations and tension – and to maintain the focus on "doing," other authors have suggested simply referring to "spheres of practice."[33] However, this wording does not convey as effectively the idea that such spheres of practice are "peopled."

The use of the expression "workplace community" in this article is meant to encompass all of the variations on the notion of community mentioned above, as well as to overcome any possible disagreements in interpretation.[34] By borrowing the term "community" from RGS research and merging it with the idea of workplace,[35] I intend to introduce a new, powerful notion to the study of the management of organizational records. This inclusive standpoint will allow me to analyze the workplace community's *discourse*, which, according to Smart, not only involves "[spoken and written] language, but also a way of thinking, believing and acting"[36] – that is, *practice*. I will also be able to consider how, from a *rhetorical* perspective, people draw on the available

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30   Miller, "Rhetorical Community," 73–74.

31   **Jean Lave**, *Cognition in Practice: Mind, Mathematics and Culture in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 98, cited in Patrick Dias, Anne Freedman, Peter Medway, and Anthony Paré, *Worlds Apart: Acting and Writing in Academic and Workplace Contexts* (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1999), 25.

32   Dias et al., *Worlds Apart*, 29 [italics in original].

33   Ibid., 25.

34   Although Wenger expressly stated that his idea of community of practice would have "a different ontological foundation" than activity theory, I follow the approach adopted by genre scholar Smart who assimilated workplace community, community of practice, and activity system. See Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 286. (I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for this citation.)

35   My approach does not draw directly on a sociological field of research known as Workplace Studies, although the latter shares some of the same theoretical perspectives that inform RGS (namely, distributed cognition and activity theory). See Trace, "Documenting Work and Working Documents," 1–4.

36   Smart, *Writing the Economy*, 10.

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"repertoire of shared symbolic resources,"[37] or genres, in order to construct their "reality." Discordant voices will inevitably be part of the picture, as they are essential to the very mechanism that enables discursive practices to construct workplaces as unique, continuously evolving, contested spaces where people, activities, and the structured world interact and, by doing so, shape one another.

## Discourse Practices and the Genre Approach

Organizational practices, together with the written, oral, and other symbol-based tools *routinely* used by workplace communities to perform activities, constitute the "discourse practices" of any given group. As maintained by Smart, "Discourse practices [enable the] members of professional organizations [to] collaborate in creating and applying the *specialized knowledge* they need for accomplishing their work."[38] The specialized knowledge Smart refers to includes both the *disciplinary knowledge* characteristic of each professional or occupational group – not as abstract understanding of subject matters (which is typical of school education), but as the "situated knowledge" that people develop through the negotiation of meanings continuously occurring in the workplace – and the *genre knowledge* embedded in the group's discourse practices, which may be seen as a form of "situated cognition."[39] The idea of genre knowledge, how it is acquired and maintained, or transformed, by organizational actors, will be examined again later. For the time being, I will just emphasize that since writing is an essential and pervasive activity for most workplace communities, the shared sets of values and attitudes that community members attach to the making and keeping of corporate records is an important aspect of their specialized, situated knowledge.

Discourse practices provide the framework for social interaction, knowledge creation, use, and dissemination to take place. They involve explicit and implicit norms that a community creates and repeatedly follows when interacting. These shared conventions are so embedded in the community's work and social practices, written and oral genres, technologies and built environments, that they are almost invisible to insiders (especially when the latter are experienced practitioners).

Each community defines its genres, that is, its typical ways of responding to situations that its members recognize as *recurrent*. "In examining the genre set of a community," Amy Devitt writes, "we are examining the community's

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37   Ibid., 9.
38   Ibid., 11 [emphasis added].
39   Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas N. Huckin, "Rethinking Genre from a Sociocognitive Perspective," *Written Communication* 10, no. 4 (October 1993): 475–509.

situations, its recurring activities and relationships."[40] Because RGS is not primarily concerned with textual regularities, but rather with the interrelationships between recurrent, typified forms of writing, speaking, and acting on the one hand, and the specific circumstances that condition (not determine), and are in turn influenced by, each "text" on the other hand, one may see continuity between the way a community communicates and its essential character or culture.[41]

Genre is both the text (whether written, oral, or otherwise manifested, having certain recognizable features of form and substance) *and* the context, or typified social and rhetorical action, that prompts the text and is in turn generated through its enactment. This perspective seems to be particularly useful to the archival discipline, where the record and its context are often seen as a dichotomy, or at least as discrete abstractions. Instead of considering the object (i.e., the content, made of material and immaterial elements of form and substance) and its surroundings, its wrapping (i.e., the container, made of processes, functions, people, institutions, etc.) as separate entities, RGS invites us to look at them as two interdependent genre components that continuously co-construct each other, as well as to focus on their dialectical, ongoing interplay as socially and culturally shaped constructs.[42]

**Communities as Activity Systems:**
**How Mediational Tools Structure Collaboration**

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, activity theory attracted genre scholars' attention by virtue of its way of looking at the tool-mediated interactions that occur when human agents take purposeful actions to carry out collaborative work. By enacting "physical, social, and symbolic" cultural tools (including written genres, face-to-face meetings, electronic systems, etc.), participants in workplace communities – equated with activity systems for the purposes of this article – both "extend and mediate" their discourse practices.[43] Visually, the conceptual model of an activity system may be represented as a triangle: the relationship between a *subject* (i.e., an individual or a group) and

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40  Amy J. Devitt, "Intertextuality in Tax Accounting: Generic, Referential, and Functional," in *Textual Dynamic of the Professions*, 340.

41  Natasha Artemeva and Aviva Freedman, eds., *Rhetorical Genre Studies and Beyond* (Winnipeg: Inkshed Publications, 2008).

42  I have discussed the relationship between text and context and other insights into the nature of a record provided by RGS in Fiorella Foscarini, "Record as Social Action: Understanding Organizational Records through the Lens of Genre Theory," *Information Research* 18, no. 3, paperC08 (September 2013), accessed 5 November 2013, http://InformationR.net/ir/18-3/colis/paperC08.html.

43  David R. Russell, "Rethinking Genre in School and Society: An Activity Theory Analysis," *Written Communication* 14, no. 4 (October 1997), 509–**10.**

an *object* or *motive* (i.e., the problem area to which the subject's activity is directed) produces some *outcome* (i.e., a transformation of the object) with the help of *mediational tools* (see Figure 1).
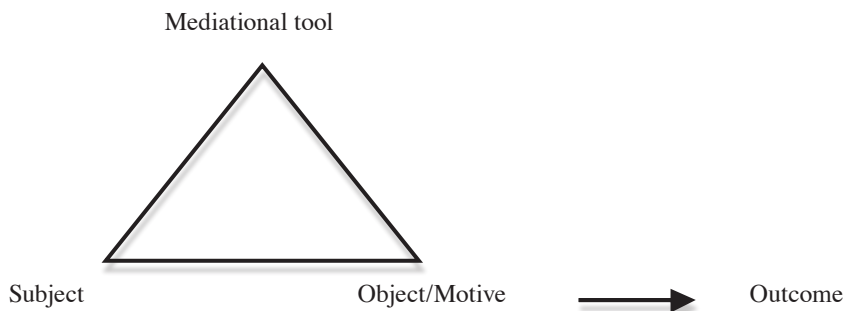
Mediational tool

Subject                          Object/Motive                          Outcome

**Figure 1.** An Activity System

As composition scholar David Russell explains, "A material thing is not a tool unless it has been put to some use," which is to say that, in an activity system, tools only exist as "tools-in-use."[44] From an archival perspective, this may be taken to signify that records, as culturally constructed tools that enable collaboration among community members by *mediating* their activities and *extending* the memory and effectiveness of such activities over time and across space, are historically and socially conditioned. Therefore, the meaning of records can only be understood when they are observed *in action* – in other words, when they are examined not in the abstract but in the actual circumstances in which they are used.[45]

Because individuals may bring different motives to collective action, the goals for which mediational tools are used are often contested. The division of labour that complex organizations necessarily adopt implies itself diversity and limited cognizance of the multiple affordances of any given tool. Owing to the coexistence of various activity systems (or "tangential and overlapping communities of practice,"[46] as Lave would say), each providing a specific meaning and a potentially different direction to tools that apparently are the same (thus producing the heteroglossia Bakhtin talks about), inevitably,

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44  Ibid., 511.
45  Existing studies of "records-in-action" include, among others, Erik Borglund, "Operational Use of Electronic Records in Police Work," *Information Research* 10, no. 4, paper 236 (July 2005), accessed 5 November 2013, http://InformationR.net/ir/10-4/paper236.html, and these already mentioned works: Shankar, "Recordkeeping in the Production of Scientific Knowledge"; Trace, "What Is Recorded Is Never Simply 'What Happened'"; and Yakel, "The Social Construction of Accountability." However, none of these studies applies activity theory or a genre perspective.
46  Lave, *Cognition in Practice*, 98.

Russell concludes, "dissensus, resistance, conflicts, and deep contradictions are constantly produced in activity systems," especially when the tools-in-use are "appropriated across boundaries."[47]

As an example of the tension existing in all activity systems, one may, for instance, refer to a mediational cultural tool that is well known within the records management community for being quite often contested – or, at least, misunderstood and sometimes misused – in organizations: functional classification.[48] Records classification tools are socially constructed according to specific disciplinary principles as the means to facilitate and constrain the management of active records. When they are developed based on an analysis of the functions of the records creator, their goal is to assist in the creation of files that reflect the development of organizational activities. Since the implementation and use of classification systems normally involves various professional communities, from IT specialists to a broad range of end-users, functional classification tools embed the world view of the community that designed them (records managers) and shape the social interactions of individuals who tend to have different affiliations. This generates contradictions and "psychological *double binds*," as is often the case when "activity systems and individuals in them are pulled between the object/motives of the multiple activity systems with which they interact."[49]

Appropriation of tools across boundaries is, of course, possible, and even desirable. However, what such a process produces may be better described as *knowledge transformation,* rather than *knowledge transfer*, because "dialectical changes"[50] – that is, changes that mutually affect all the components of the activity system (i.e., subjects, tools, and objects/motives) and the system itself – continuously occur. Thus, it is impossible to predict or to determine how a tool is going to be understood and used. To return to our example, each functional classification system as "tool-in-use" will have special characteristics and functionalities within every single community adopting it. The official, "right" way of applying it will always clash with unofficial, local interpretations. Furthermore, its content, structure, and features will constantly adapt to different circumstances of use. As Russell writes, "Ongoing social practices

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47   Russell, "Rethinking Genre," 511. The term "appropriation" is used here in the sense suggested by adaptive structuration theory, that is, the process by which groups adopt new tools (systems or technologies) and which always involves some form of judgment, interpretation, and adaptation of the features and meanings of the new tool. See Gerardine DeSanctis and Marshall S. Poole, "Capturing the Complexity in Advanced Technology Use: Adaptive Structuration Theory," *Organization Science* 5, no. 2 (May 1994): 121–47.
48   See Pekka Henttonen and Kimmo Kettunen, "Functional Classification of Records and Organizational Structure," *Records Management Journal* 21, no. 2 (January 2011): 86–103.
49   Russell, "Rethinking Genre," 519 [italics in original].
50   Ibid., 522.

constantly change,"[51] and the genres or tools involved are transformed by, and at the same time contribute to the shaping of, such practices. Taking a *situated approach* is the only way we can understand how any given tool is used at a specific time and in a specific place.

Another insight gleaned from the RGS interpretation of activity theory, which may be usefully applied to a recordkeeping context, is that each user can potentially change a tool. Yet some people have greater or lesser influence than others because of their position in activity systems and the amount and type of genre knowledge they possess. Again, owing to the division of labour that characterizes today's society, not everyone in an organization will master the community's genres in the same way or with the same rhetorical abilities. "To understand power in modern social practices," Russell explains, "one must follow the genres, written and otherwise."[52] By paying attention to intentional and unintentional changes, or deviations, in the form, substance, or function of a record, or in formal and informal work processes and behaviours, archivists and records managers would be able to evaluate power relations and to understand who skilfully masters specific organizational genres and for what purposes. This knowledge is essential to investigate the culture of a workplace, and is based on some special way of reading its records.

**Collaboration as a Form of Distributed Cognition**

The notion of distributed cognition is intrinsic to that of collaboration and to the idea of division of labour, which was discussed in the previous section. In organizations, as in other kinds of collective endeavours, such as ship navigation, people think in conjunction or partnership with others, and with the help of culturally provided tools. Hutchins offers the metaphor of the navigation of a large ship to illustrate the idea of distributed cognition. Many participants, with different tasks but all focused on one goal, work in tandem, and one or two individuals who are responsible for final decisions sit at the helm. All kinds of important judgments are constantly being made at the lower levels of the hierarchy and tunnelled up through intermediate layers to the top. In such a system, there is considerable "overlap" of knowledge, and there is "reciprocity," that is, a relationship of mutual need.[53]

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51  Ibid.
52  Ibid., 524.
53  Edwin Hutchins, "Learning to Navigate," in *Understanding Practice: Perspectives on Activity and Context*, ed. Seth Chaiklin and Jean Lave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 35–63. Researchers interested in writing and how this activity is performed in different contexts emphasize that one of the main discontinuities between academic and workplace writing is that, in the classroom, distributed cognition is replaced by "socially shared knowledge," a concept that excludes both knowledge overlap and reciprocity. See Dias et al., *Worlds Apart*, 119.

The genres that people create in order to perform their work (whether on a ship or in an office) are "knowledge-bearing tools."[54] The tools allow them to think and act together in ways that are significantly more powerful than would be possible without them. However, it is important to acknowledge that the distribution of tasks, responsibilities, and power among participants is continuously negotiated. Distributed cognition should therefore be understood as a dynamic and interactive process that necessarily involves tension and **conflict.**

The idea that **knowledge building is a highly rhetorical and controversial** activity becomes particularly evident in the meeting genre, a very common and versatile genre of organizational communication. In regularly scheduled meetings, written and spoken genres – both official and informal discourse practices – intermesh within a relatively stable structure of context-specific conventionalized interactions, or "rules of the game."[55] Anne Freadman, who talks about genres as "games," compares the explicit and implicit social codes of behaviour involved in a meeting to the "ceremonial" of a tennis match.[56] For meeting participants, just as for tennis players, any expectations with regard to time, place, hierarchy, and tools-in-use are established from the outset. It becomes progressively clear to participants what actions are considered appropriate or inappropriate, and which ones will give them an advantage. The minutes of the meeting do not reveal the actual decision-making process, nor do they properly account for the meeting's inherent multivocality. They might in fact tell a "story" that has little to do with what happened.

Traditional archival science, with its emphasis on neutrality and impartiality as immanent properties of its objects of study and of the custodians of such objects, tends to overlook the rhetorical dimension of records creation. In fact, all records as cultural tools are the product of ongoing negotiations among community members. Support, resistance, open acts of persuasion, and subliminal influences are part of the history of each instantiation of any given genre. Examining such history may bring to the surface an organization's "ideology," in the sense of its "shared world-view."[57] By acknowledging that a community's epistemology and values are produced and reproduced through its members' enactment of shared tools, and that the values are the outcome of

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54   Dias et al., *Worlds Apart*, 107.
55   **Anne Freadman, "Uptake," in** *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre*, 39–53.
56   **Anne Freadman, "Anyone for Tennis?" in** *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, 43–66. Freadman's use of the game metaphor explicitly draws on the concept of "language game" developed by Wittgenstein.
57   **Smart,** *Writing the Economy*, 133. In Smart's book, as in this article, the term "ideology" does not involve the negative connotations typically associated with it. Rather it is used according to the meaning suggested by Heilbroner, that is, "the frameworks of perception by which all social groups organize and interpret their experience." See Robert Heilbroner, "Economics as Ideology," in *Economics as Discourse: An Analysis of the Language of Economists*, ed. Warren J. Samuels (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1990), 103.

such a continuous process, we may be able to achieve a more holistic under-
standing of both the records – as social action[58] – and the community that
recognizes itself in those records.

**Intersubjectivity and Intertextuality in the Workplace**

Based on the above interpretation of genres as "knowledge-bearing tools,"
one explanation of how organizations advance in their work would be that
they "build achieved knowledge into their tools" and then use the latter to
"engender new knowledge."[59] In such a process, "public spaces of cognition"
(where the official discourse exercises its normalizing, *centripetal* influence)
and "private spaces of cognition" (where individual, *centrifugal* action is still
possible, despite any existing structural constraints) are negotiated through the
use of written and spoken genres and other symbolic representations.[60] This
generates what Smart and others call *intersubjectivity*, that is, "a domain of
shared focus, perception, and understanding that connects individuals intellec-
tually within an organization."[61] Intersubjectivity, or thinking in partnership, is
crucial for collaborative knowledge building. In activity theory terms, it may
be seen as the common, contested ground where multiple activity systems,
each driven by different motives, meet. Looking at the notion of *collective
identity* from this perspective means recognizing that identity at the profes-
sional or corporate level is a dialectic, tool-mediated, always-in-becoming
achievement to which individual "subjectivities" (each having distinctive
agency and power) contribute.

Conceiving the management of organizational records as an intersubjec-
tive phenomenon provides us with a new conceptual framework to analyze, for
instance, the structure and functioning of an electronic document and records
management system (EDRMS). The latter may be seen as a shared cultural
tool where competing views of what a record is, how records classification
should be designed, what retention and access rights should be assigned to
records, and any other processes, controls, and system functionalities converge.
As a "stabilized-for-now"[62] mediational tool, the EDRMS is permanently prone

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58   Foscarini, "Record as Social Action."
59   Smart, *Writing the Economy*, 107.
60   The distinction between public and private spaces of cognition comes from Charles Bazerman
     and is explained in note 16 in this paper. The idea of a continuing battle in organizations
     between centripetal and centrifugal forces has become a recurring trope in rhetorical genre
     studies thanks to Bakhtin. See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in
     the Novel: Notes Towards a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 84–258, cited
     in Clay Spinuzzi, *Tracing Genres Through Organizations: A Sociocultural Approach to
     Information Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 21–23.
61   Smart, *Writing the Economy*, 15.
62   Catherine F. Schryer, "Records as Genre," *Written Communication* 10, no. 2 (April 1993), 200;

to be re-discussed, dismantled, and reconstructed through its ongoing use and any newly arising interpretations of its meaning and features. If we look at the EDRMS as a "text," its dynamic nature becomes an aspect of the *intertextuality* inherent in all genres.

According to Devitt, "generic intertextuality" has to do with the fact that "each text draws on previous texts written in response to similar situations" and, by doing so, inherits some of their features and motives.[63] This continuity, or rhetorical regularity (which characterizes all genres and coexists with their transformative or evolutionary nature), justifies "the practice of sending newcomers to the files to look at previous examples of required documentation."[64] Russell, by applying activity theory concepts, suggests that "the ongoing use of certain material tools … in certain ways that worked once and might work again"[65] explains why individuals, when they recognize that they are facing recurring situations (which is often the case in professional contexts), invoke pre-existing genres rather than invent completely new ones.

In her analysis of the texts generated by tax accountants – a professional community well known for being highly "textual" (in the sense that the written word constitutes and defines the accountants' work world) – Devitt identifies two additional kinds of intertextuality. "Referential intertextuality," points to the numerous explicit and implicit quotations of other texts included in the tax accountants' own texts.[66] Mostly, the cited or referred-to texts are tax codes and other general tax publications. The pervasive reliance on such authoritative legal texts reveals an underlying epistemology of the profession or, in other words, a set of assumptions about the source of their knowledge and expertise, which Devitt epitomizes as "belief in the authority of the text."[67] Scrupulously documenting each client's situation and making reference to any relevant piece of information included in a client's file are again ways of manifesting intertextuality, in this case a third type known as "functional intertextuality."[68] In archival terms, the links existing among records participating in the same activity are referred to as the "archival bond," and they are indeed an expression of *functional* interrelationships.[69]

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Schryer, "The Lab vs. the Clinic: Sites of Competing Genres," in *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, 89. In these articles, Schryer provides a very successful definition of genres, emphasizing their dynamic nature, which is "stabilized-for-now or stabilized-enough sites of social and ideological action."

63  Devitt, "Intertextuality in Tax Accounting," 338.
64  Dias et al., *Worlds Apart*, 187.
65  Russell, "Rethinking Genre," 515.
66  Devitt, "Intertextuality in Tax Accounting," 342.
67  Ibid., 346.
68  Ibid., 350.
69  Luciana Duranti, "The Archival Bond," *Archives and Museum Informatics* 11, no. 3–4 (January 1997): 213–18.

I believe that the archival discipline, by embracing such a rich and multi-form notion of intertextuality, would gain powerful interpretive keys to access the rhetorical and epistemological dimensions of records and record aggregations. Tax accountants are obviously not the sole expert community that appears so profoundly dependent on texts. Devitt's conclusions may be extended to other "writing-intensive" communities, such as lawyers, economists, and academics. Recent research has actually shown that writing in the workplace has become increasingly important and pervasive, as "technologies have driven more recordkeeping and decision-making to those [blue-collar workers] who are directly involved in manufacturing, information processing, and caregiving activities."[70] This finding further reinforces my argument that the archival community would benefit greatly from developing a better understanding of the processes and practices that support workplace activities – particularly learning and writing – from the perspective of genre studies.

**Workplace Learning**

One aspect of the interactions taking place within workplace communities that is central to much genre research refers to how learning happens "on the job" (as opposed to "in the classroom") – that is, how novices become full, "legitimate participants" in the communities they belong to, as well as how both newcomers and old-timers develop "knowledgeably skilled identities."[71] As the introduction to this article anticipated, Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning posits that learning in the workplace is context-specific, informal, and continuous, and has little to do with explicit training measures. Genre knowledge, in particular, appears to be primarily transmitted through "enculturation"[72] or socialization into specific work practices. Because learning is an inherent, ongoing, mostly tacit aspect of participating in our communities and involves everyone, from novices to experts, it should not be considered a separate activity, as in conventional theories of learning, which tend to look at knowledge and learning as decontextualized phenomena. As Wenger puts it, "Learning … is not something we do when we do nothing else or stop doing when we do something else.… [It] is an integral part of our everyday lives."[73] From a researcher's perspective, "describing and analyzing people's involvement in practical action in the world … [means] in effect analyzing their engagement in learning."[74]

70   Anne Beaufort, "Writing in the Professions," in *Handbook of Research on Writing: History, Society, School, Individual, Text*, ed. Charles Bazerman (New York: Routledge, 2008), 221.
71   Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 55.
72   Dias et al., *Worlds Apart*, 200.
73   Wenger, "A Social Theory of Learning," 213–14.
74   Lave, "The Practice of Learning," 201.

Changes in knowledge and action are central to learning. Participation in the social world may indeed be thought of as "a process of changing understanding in practice, that is learning."[75] Thus, paying attention to "breaking points" in the life of an organization (such as when people appropriate new tools or new ways of using a tool, or when novices or insiders belonging to some community join a different one) may be particularly significant. In his study of the "social history"[76] of a new mathematical model for the analysis of economic trends, developed by the Bank of Canada's economists in the 1990s, Smart investigates the construction and implementation of new cultural tools (which inevitably embed characteristics of previous tools – by virtue of their generic intertextuality – and whose development tends to involve a "highly collaborative and rhetorical process"[77]) as a prime example of workplace learning. In Smart's words, "As an organization develops new cultural tools, building recently achieved knowledge into these shared tools, it is in effect *learning* to manage its activity and accomplish its collaborative work more effectively."[78]

The theory of situated learning suggests that a distinction be made between experts and novices in relation to their activities and cognitive behaviours, a distinction that becomes important when we are to examine workplace dynamics. While for experienced practitioners routine operations are usually unconscious, for newcomers to a community of practice new ways of using a tool necessarily happen at the level of conscious action. Through continuous interactions with others, within a specific socio-cultural context and in relation to "authentic"[79] tasks assigned to newcomers, the latter eventually learn the "rules of the game" and start adopting the new ways of using the tool routinely. This mechanism, known as **"legitimate peripheral participation," explains how** newcomers attend to workplace activities and, by doing so, "move towards full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community."[80]

However, there is no guarantee that repeated uses of a tool will always conform to the institutionalized, official ways. By appropriating (or learning to use) a tool, individuals may, or may not, also appropriate the objects/motives involved in the tool and the identity of the community using it. These insights come from activity theory, which predicates that any processes of appropriation – especially those occurring across boundaries – are dialectical and involve some tension between stability and change. The gradual movement of

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75   Ibid.
76   Smart, *Writing the Economy*, 94.
77   Ibid., 100.
78   Ibid., 107 [emphasis added].
79   For the role played by authenticity in situated learning, see Dias et al., *Worlds Apart*, 164–65.
80   Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 29.

newcomers "from peripheral to full participation,"[81] from conscious action to unconscious operation, typically leads them to develop an identity as members of a specific community. At the same time, because of the discontinuities it contains, this learning process contributes to both maintaining and transforming those communities as activity systems.

What does this excursion into organizational learning teach us that we may want to transfer to the archives and records management discipline? The theory of situated learning certainly offers a number of interesting pedagogical hints: from questioning the effectiveness of traditional records and archives management training methods for both specialists and non-specialists, to planning "authentic" activities that may help neophytes familiarize themselves with relevant organizational policies and practices, as well as internalize them to the point that managing records would become second nature. Most importantly, replacing traditional views of learning that ignore the lived-in world with theories that, on the contrary, accentuate social participation would help improve recordkeeping practices and ensure that they are aligned with the culture of each and every workplace.

**Workplace Writing**

One final aspect of workplace communities that needs to be addressed, because of the crucial role it plays in most organizational activities, including record-making, is writing. Writing is itself a complex, ubiquitous, and highly contextualized activity, both in school and outside school. Consequently, studies of school–work transition suggest that it is best to look at writing as "situated practice."[82] This approach reveals that writing in academia and writing in the workplace are in fact *worlds apart*, as the title of a book by Dias et al. reads, and that the complexity of workplace writing is much higher than that of school writing, as claimed by the same authors.[83]

Composition scholars[84] have identified specific rhetorical purposes that appear to be associated with writing in the workplace. First of all, while writing in school is primarily "epistemic, or knowledge-oriented,"[85] the social motives that workplace writing aims to fulfill are almost exclusively "instru-

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81   Ibid.
82   Dias et al., *Worlds Apart*, 6.
83   Ibid., 97.
84   Contemporary composition studies, as a discipline that formed around English as a Second Language (ESL) departments, only began to pay attention to professional communication practices – rather than focus exclusively on literary genres – at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s in the United States. RGS shares many connections with ESL (as well as with English for Specific Purposes [ESP] and other streams of applied linguistics). See Schryer, "Genre Theory and Research," 1937.
85   Dias et al., *Worlds Apart*, 38.

mental, or praxis-oriented."[86] Additionally, writing in workplace settings tends to be "in large part institutional rather than individual, plural and contradictory rather than singular and coherent, and ideological rather than merely communicative."[87] Every one of these characteristics would deserve to be investigated in depth, because of the impact each may have on the making of organizational records. However, for the purposes of this article, I focus primarily on those ideas that may provide a richer understanding of authorship, an issue that would seem to be especially relevant to records management and archives.

Diplomatics and the archival theory that developed from it emphasize the laws, regulations, and procedural rules that govern records creation, rather than paying attention to what happens "at the bottom," that is, how collaboration actually takes place among the actors involved in the making of a record. Such a top-down, prescriptive approach does not allow situated work practices to emerge and, with particular regard to the act of writing, makes the latter appear to be a neutral process, the outcome of pursuing mechanically some institutional mandate. If we are to understand the impact of collaborative writing on the relationship between the author or writer and the text, and on the writing process overall, we must turn to RGS.

The intertwining of different goals, motives, epistemologies, and areas of expertise – which, as seen above, is one of the hallmarks of distributed cognition and manifests itself as heteroglossia, intersubjective discourse, and various forms of intertextuality – is likely not only to cause friction and tension among the participants in the writing situation, but also to have other, more subtle, effects on writers. Writing scholar Anne Beaufort offers the example of city workers and engineers engaged in documenting construction activities and revising relevant technical documentation. Besides discussing how gestures and diagrams influence the composition process, Beaufort points to the "psychological adjustment" that this writing modality brings about. "Collaborative writing (sometimes also referred to as *document cycling*) …," she suggests, "lead[s] writers to feel less ownership of texts and less immediacy in terms of the rhetorical situation."[88] In other words, research in workplace writing shows that, by losing control over their texts, writers tend to experience situations of non-involvement with the written residues of their activities (and perhaps with their work overall). A weakened sense of authorship also affects writers' ability to "imagine the real audience of their texts,"[89] consequently reducing their effectiveness. It therefore appears important to investigate the implications of the multivocality and intertextuality one finds in most organ-

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86   Ibid., 97.
87   Ibid., 98. The term "ideological" should again be interpreted as described in note 57.
88   Anne Beaufort, "Writing in the Professions," 223 [italics in original].
89   Ibid.

izational records. This approach, which builds on RGS and other areas of study that focus on professional communication practices, may help answer questions such as why people's engagement with corporate records management systems seems to be qualitatively different from the kind of involvement they experience with personal information management tools (e.g., personal uses of social media).

As palaeographers know well in relation to ancient writing, the culture of a given social group, together with any available writing technologies, affects the way language, script, style, and other extrinsic elements of documentary form manifest themselves.[90] And writing practices in turn influence the way in which people perceive their world and their tools.[91] Examining writing in contemporary workplace settings by drawing on the conceptual frameworks of both older and more modern disciplines appears to be essential if we are to understand our world of words in all its complexity.

**Conclusion**

This article has discussed some of the interconnected key concepts and ideas that the latest generation of genre scholars relies on, with the aim of demonstrating their relevance to archives and records management, a discipline that, like RGS, focuses on texts and the practices surrounding the creation and use of texts, particularly in professional contexts. Berkenkotter and Huckin defined genres as "the intellectual scaffolds on which community-based knowledge is constructed."[92] Throughout this discussion, I have tried to "deconstruct" such intellectual scaffolds in order to bring to light some of the mechanisms through which knowledge is made and negotiated, transmitted and transformed during the social interactions taking place in workplace communities. The same mechanisms are involved in the making, managing, and keeping of records as culturally constructed tools that mediate and extend organizational activities.

My investigation into the notion of workplace community has shown that, in order to analyze and grasp the meaning of the recurring discourse practices that community members enact in order to accomplish their work, it is essential to understand how collaboration and identity are performed. "Learn[ing] … how to participate in the actions of a community"[93] appears to be central to our daily and professional lives. By engaging in the practices of our commu-

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90  See Armando Petrucci, "The Illusion of Authentic History: Documentary Evidence," in *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture*, ed. and trans. Charles M. Radding (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 236–50.

91  Berkenkotter and Huckin, "Rethinking Genre," 481.

92  Ibid., 501.

93  Miller, "Genre as Social Action," 165.

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nities through the use of shared tools, we are acquiring genre knowledge and gradually orienting ourselves in the complex jungle of rules and conventions that is our world, while at the same time contributing to shaping and continuously transforming those "ceremonies."[94] Our identities as community members get forged through this very same dynamic and situated process as "learning to do" coincides with "learning to be."

The highly collaborative, rhetorical, and dialectical nature of writing, thinking, and acting in the workplace is not always recognized in studies of records and archives. I believe that RGS offers a productive and innovative framework for exploring the unstable, complex, and contested realm in which records – the means and outcomes of our "acting together"[95] – are created and used. As such, RGS constitutes a powerful tool to strengthen archival research, both as a theoretical and as an empirical endeavour. With respect to the former, the conceptual constructs laid out in this paper provide original vantage points from which we can investigate the objects and situations that make up our recordkeeping world. Taking an interdisciplinary perspective is essential to enhancing understanding of that world. Perhaps more importantly, RGS introduces the notion of a *situated* approach, which suggests the importance of studying "records-in-use." Acknowledging that records and work processes do not "happen" in abstract, aseptic environments but rather in the messiness of specific socio-cultural circumstances is the first step to becoming field researchers in recordkeeping. Rather than analyzing formal business procedures or system requirements, this kind of on-site research involves observing how people interact with their communities, how they solve problems and disseminate solutions, and how their actions and decisions are instantiated in artifacts. Conducting studies of records-in-use may involve "examin[ing] how workers develop unofficial … work practices and genres, how they adapt old genres to new uses, and how they link their innovations to established, official genres."[96] The richness and complexity of our recordkeeping world can only emerge and be appreciated through an approach that emphasizes context-specificity and inclusivity, which are two of the core features of RGS.

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94  Freadman, "Uptake," 40.
95  Miller, "Genre as Social Action," 159.
96  Spinuzzi, *Tracing Genres*, 23.

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