**** **Activity Theory Summer School**

**Dates:** 9-12th June 2020

**Times:** to be confirmed

**Venue:** Training Suite**,** Charles Thackrah Building, University of Leeds





**Summer School overview:**

In the Activity Theory Summer School, PhD students and Early Career Researchers will learn to apply activity theory to undertake research and conduct interventions in the contexts of organisations and communities. Our instructors, each of whom have developed considerable expertise in the theory, will lead participants in exploring both core concepts and emergent views on activity theory. This will allow participants to access specialist advanced training, support the establishment of new research networks between institutions and strengthen existing networks.

The Summer School will take place over a four-day period during which the participants will have the opportunity to present their work and attend lectures, seminars and panel discussions on the application and use of activity theory for research.

Activity theory is a theoretical and methodological approach for understanding how people live and work together. Developed in the Soviet Union based on the works of Vygotsky and Leontiev, it was taken up in the West in the 1980s, where it has become important in disciplines and fields as diverse as cultural psychology, education, human-computer interaction, information systems, management and organization, and writing studies. In these fields and others, activity theory anchors interventionist studies in which researchers and participants come together to identify tensions in work activities and communities, then consensually design solutions.

An intensive Summer School on Activity Theory has been organized in the Center for Research on Activity, Development and Learning (CRADLE) in the University of Helsinki on an annual basis for several years. CRADLE is a hub of academics and practitioners pursuing ground-breaking interventionist research based on cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). Activity Theory cuts across disciplinary boundaries and focuses on transformations in collective activity systems, including educational institutions, work organizations, public-sector agencies, communities and social movements – and their coalitions. In June 2019 the Summer School took place in University West, Trollhättan in Sweden and will in future years will take place on an annual basis in different locations. In 2019 it attracted students and ECRs from China, North and South America and Europe (France, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and the UK). In June 2020 we would like to host the workshop in Leeds University Business School (LUBS) supported by staff from the AIMTech Research Centre.

The AIMTech Research Centre in LUBS is an interdisciplinary research center interested in the inter-relationship between new technologies, information systems, innovation, information management and organizational change. It is a center of excellence in the use of Activity Theory within the field of Information Systems and Information Management.

**The Instructors:**

[Yrjö Engeström](https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/persons/yrj%C3%B6-engestr%C3%B6m) is Professor Emeritus of Adult Education at University of Helsinki and Professor Emeritus of Communication at University of California, San Diego. He is Director of the Center for Research on Activity, Development and Learning (CRADLE), and serves as Visiting Professor at Rhodes University in South Africa and at University West in Sweden. In his work Engeström applies and develops cultural-historical activity theory as a framework for the study of transformations in organizations, communities and work activities. He is known for his theory of expansive learning and for the methodology of formative interventions, including the Change Laboratory method. Engeström’s most recent books are From Teams to Knots: Activity-Theoretical Studies of Collaboration and Learning at Work (2008), Learning by Expanding: An Activity-Theoretical Approach to Developmental Research, 2nd Edition (2015), Studies in Expansive Learning: Learning What Is Not Yet There (2016), and Expertise in Transition: Expansive Learning in Medical Work (2018).

[Clay Spinuzzi](https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/english/faculty/spinuzzi) is Professor of Rhetoric and Writing at University of Texas at Austin. Spinuzzi's interests include research methods and methodology, workplace research, and computer-mediated activity. He has written four books: *Tracing Genres through Organizations* (MIT Press, 2003); *Network* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); *Topsight* (via Amazon CreateSpace, 2013; second edition Urso Press, 2018); and *All Edge* (University of Chicago Press, 2015). Clay teaches graduate courses at the University of Texas in the Department of English, the School of Information, and the Human Dimensions of Organizations MA program.

[Annalisa Sannino](https://www.tuni.fi/en/annalisa-sannino) is Professor of Education at Tampere University. She holds visiting professorships at Rhodes University, South Africa and at University West, Sweden. In her work she combines resources from cultural-historical activity theory, pragmatic analyses of discourse and the methodology of formative interventions to explore the critical role scholarship on learning and organizing can play to support transformative agency for equity and sustainability. As well as authoring numerous journal articles, she has served as the leading editor of several special issues and edited volumes in management, education and psychology.

[Stan Karanasios](https://www.rmit.edu.au/contact/staff-contacts/academic-staff/k/karanasios-dr-stan) is an Associate Professor at the School of Business Information Technology and Logistics at RMIT University. He has published in leading information systems and management journals including MIS Quarterly, Information Systems Journal, European Journal on Information Systems and Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology. Stan is known for his work on Activity Theory in Information Systems research.

[Professor David Allen](https://business.leeds.ac.uk/divisions-management/staff/277/professor-david-k-allen-) is a Professor of Information Management in the Leeds University Business School and Director and Founder of the AIMTech Research Centre (www.aimtech.org). He has spent most of his academic life exploring information management practices and the influence of technology on organisational work. This has been facilitated by over 50 externally funded projects conducted with colleagues in the AIMTech Research Group. David acted as PI on over 43 of these projects. During this period he has explored the use of Activity Theory to design systems, theorise change and influence practice. He has worked with colleagues to produce frameworks to support the effective evaluation and implementation of information systems. His work has been published in leading information systems and management journals including the Management Information Systems Quarterly, the European Journal of Information Systems, the Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, the Information Systems Journal, and Information Research Journal, Information Research and elsewhere.

**Programme:**

Workshops will include:

**‘Analyzing qualitative data with activity theory-based models’**

Instructor: Clay Spinuzzi

Activity theory provides a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding how people work in organizations. This framework has been especially useful for guiding qualitative case studies, in which researchers explore an organization’s workings, mediational means, and systemic disruptions, then recommend solutions.

But how does one analyze qualitative data systematically? In this half-day seminar Spinuzzi draws from over 20 years of workplace studies to discuss a series of integrated models based on activity theory. Each model provides insights into systemic issues that haven’t yet been understood within the organization. Together, they provide a combined view of disruptions at macro, meso, and micro levels of activity, allowing researchers and participants to identify systemic disruptions and discuss potential solutions.

In this seminar, we will focus on the meso (action) level, but we will connect this level to others. Students are invited to bring their own data, but Prof. Spinuzzi will also bring actual data to analyze. Students will work in small groups to generate, test, and potentially improve on each model.

**‘Studying and understanding complex systems with activity theory’**

Instructor: Stan Karanasios

In this seminar students will focus on putting into use activity theory to study and represent complex systems. Building on the foundational concepts of activity theory, building activity models and examining contradictions and tensions the seminar will employ these concepts to study complex activities and networks of activities. It will do so with a simulated activity based on the concepts of systems thinking. Students will be placed into groups to complete the simulated activity. After the activity students will be asked to use the concepts they have learnt to represent the simulated activity. Students will be asked to present their activity theoretic understanding to the group. The presentations will be used as a basis for class discussion and learning.

**‘Co-producing and evaluating new work practices and technological tools’**

Instructor: David Allen

In this case based seminar, students will explore challenges related to the use of activity theory to co-produce and evaluate new work practices and technological tools. To do this, the participants in the seminar will critically appraise concepts and theoretical frames developed by a group of scholars associated with the AIMTech Research Centre in Leeds:

**‘Objects, expansive learning and transformative agency’**

Instructor: Yrjö Engeström

The seminar will open up and elaborate on three key concepts of activity theory, namely *object, expansive learning,* and *transformative agency*. Each one of the three concepts will be treated in four steps: (1) theoretical foundations of the concept and different interpretations/applications of it; (2) one or two examples of concrete studies in which the concept has been fruitfully used and developed; (3) methodological and practical implications of the concept for activity-theoretical research and interventions; (4) questions and discussion: How might this concept inform your own research?

**‘Activity Theory and its Methodology in Action: The Chronicle of a Change Laboratory’**

Instructor: Annalisa Sannino

The seminar focuses on how activity theory can serve as a resource to practically address acute societal challenges. The instructor will present an overview of three interconnected Change Laboratory formulative interventions ~~r~~ecently conducted in Finland within the national strategy for overcoming homelessness. Building on this concrete example, the students will work in small groups on an assignment meant to identify how the methodology of formative interventions and its epistemological principles (ascending from the abstract to the concrete and double stimulation) were implemented in practice in this particular case. After completing the assignment, the students and the instructor will discuss its outcomes to consolidate a clear understanding of the principles and ways they work in action. The students will then be asked to reflect in pairs on the seminar contents and to relate them for prospective use on acute challenges in settings of their interest and/or in their dissertation projects. The outcomes of the pair work will form a portfolio of possible implementations of the methodology in diverse settings and will serve as materials for a final discussion, questions and answers.

**How to register:**

Please complete the registration form below, ensuring that all fields are completed with as much detail as possible as this will be used to select participants.

It is advised that you do not make any travel arrangements until you have received confirmation of a place. We have a limited number of places available on this summer school and if at any time you need to withdraw your registration please inform us immediately so that we can offer the place to someone else.

It is expected that you participate for the full duration of the event and allow sufficient time for travelling to the venue.

NARTI in collaboration with Leeds University Business School and the AIMTech Research Centre will cover the cost of running the event and participants are asked to cover the cost of travel and any accommodation as required.

Students attending the course from within the EU can take an on-line module provided by University West: Registration for this module needs to be undertaken directly with University West <https://www.hv.se/en/education/third-cycle/activity-theory-in-practice-full-time-campus-atpf010/>

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| **Registration Form** |
| **Surname** |  |
| **Forename** |  |
| **University** |  |
| **Year of PhD study** |  |
| **Area of research** |  |
| **University e-mail address** |  |
| **Please include details of how the summer school will be beneficial for your research**  |  |
| **Please include details of any previous workshops attended** |  |
| **Please confirm you are able to attend for the full duration of the summer school** |  |
| **Please specify any dietary requirements** |  |
| **Please specify any disability requirements** |  |
| **Please return this booking form to Jo Garrick (****narti@lubs.leeds.ac.uk****) by no later than Friday 14th February 2020** |

**How to find the University of Leeds**

<https://www.leeds.ac.uk/info/5000/about/131/find_us>

The Charles Thackrah Building is number 15 on the downloadable campus map.

If you have any questions about this or any other NARTI training event, please contact Jo Garrick (narti@lubs.leeds.ac.uk).