Miriam McSweeney
University lecturer in the Business School at
Atlantic Technological University – Galway City Campus.
miriam.mcsweeney@atu.ie

Miriam McSweeney is a lecturer in the Business School at the Galway Campus of the Atlantic Technological University in Ireland. She completed a PhD at the then Centre for Socio-Cultural and Activity Theory (CSAT) at the University of Bath, UK. She attended the summer school held at the Centre for Research on Activity and Learning (CRADLE) at the University of Helsinki. Her research interests focus on the social and psychological impacts of learning environments in tertiary education. She has investigated how management might be supported to understand the use of learning technologies by academic staff.

It was a curiosity about the cultural context in which I work that brought me to activity theory. I came to higher education as a lecturer having worked in the information technology industry. Working in a multi-campus environment I noticed there was a low and slow uptake of teaching and learning technologies among lecturers across different schools and campuses where I worked. I believed that the technologies themselves were not the problem but that something about the lecturers' work context may have been contributing to the complex phenomenon I observed. In a bid to understand how the cultural context might have been impacting on human thinking and activity I undertook my PhD journey at the University of Bath under Professor Harry Daniels and Dr. Kyoko Murakami at the Centre for Sociocultural and Activity Theory. It was during this period that I was introduced to activity theory. I became interested in the work Professor Yrjö Engeström and particularly the practical application of activity theory through Developmental Work Research (DWR).

I am drawn to activity theory particularly noting its potential as a framework from which a broad range of social contexts can be understood. My interest is mainly in the context of higher education and more specifically the introduction of teaching and learning technologies to pedagogic practice. Activity theory encourages us to look at problems not only from an individual perspective but to also focus on the social and collective contexts where problems arise. I think that the commonly accepted separation of the cognitive and affective dimensions when examining lecturers' uptake of teaching technologies has not proved sufficient. I believe that an examination of the affective consequences of participating in particular contexts has the potential to add much to the understanding particularly of lecturers' uptake of technology in their pedagogic practice.

Recently I have worked as a co-editor on the recently published book entitled *Activity Theory: An Introduction* with Alex Levant and Kyoko Murakami. During this project I had the privilege of working with many leading scholars in the field of activity theory. As such I have deepened my understanding of the theory across a variety

of disciplines, and further developed my knowledge of the history, significance, and prospects of this theoretical tradition. My hope is that those who come to Activity Theory like I did, from a place of curiosity about human activity, will find here a collection of thought-provoking contributions. For new and seasoned scholars alike, I hope it will be a place where they can read about the historical roots, the many practical applications, along with thought provoking ideas for the future evolution of Activity Theory. If scholars are inspired to question and think more deeply about collective human activity, then that is a just reward. Today, I introduce my own students to Activity Theory as a conceptual framework in the fields of Business and Information Technology.

Mc Sweeney, M. (2015). Transforming Practice through Collaboration: A Developmental Work Research-based intervention perspective on Lecturers' Engagement with the VLE MOODLE. [Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Bath].

Murakami, K., & McSweeney, M. (2024). Tracking the object: a case of a small-scale Developmental Work Research-based intervention. In A. Levant, K. Murakami, & M. McSweeney (Eds.), *Activity Theory: An Introduction* (pp. 243-274). ibidem-Verlag.