

Chapter 3

Practicalists: The Technological Tool Users

I see my cell phone like a hammer. I take my hammer out of the toolbox when I need it. I don't carry my hammer around with me every day all the time. I use the cell when I need to make a call, just like I use my hammer to drive a nail. I don't walk around carrying my hammer for someone else to use it, it's mine [...]. These technologies they are just tools. (Boris)

Tools. Function. Purpose. Task.

When Practicalists speak about using an ICT, they focus on the technology's usefulness, function, and purpose. Practicalists do not stay up all night playing with a new gadget, exploring all the nifty new features. They will not be the first in line at the store to buy the newest technology or be well-versed in all the latest updates. Practicalists view ICTs as purposeful tools meant to get a job done or complete a task. They see individual technologies as fulfilling a specific purpose/function in their lives.

Practicalists often are (or were) involved in paid work that involves heavy ICT use. Work is an important point of introduction for Practicalists, as it is through work and its associated tasks that they most often encounter new functions and technologies. They place ICTs in their homes in specific functionally dedicated areas: computers belong in offices, televisions in dens, and landline phones are placed wherever they will get the most use. ICTs are seen as tools that serve a specific and distinct function in their lives, be they tools for family, leisure, work, or community.

Formative Experiences

Practicalists, as a group, do not share the fond childhood memories of ICT use that Enthusiasts speak about. Instead, Practicalists' foundational technological stories often begin with their work careers. As a group, Practicalists have a large diversity of career trajectories, with individuals involved in blue, white, or pink collared positions. Some older adult Practicalists are retired and some work full or part-time. They are also an educationally diverse group, ranging from high

school graduates to doctorate holders. This user type credits their early work lives for exposing them to technology, such as when Jack speaks about his career trajectory:

When I got out of high school, I went to work for a radio and TV repair place. I was in electronics repair. I went to a technical high school and then I went into the Army. When I got out of the Army Reserves, I went to work full time for Western Union. I was an electronics repairman. Then I went to work at the Air Force Base where we had a computer line for the Department of Defense. I worked there for 25 years and then I left there and retired and got a pension from them. I worked at The Mall as an electrician when they were building that in 1989. Then when that got built I was all set for full retirement, but my wife said they needed a plumber, an electrician, and a carpenter up at the Catholic Diocese, so I went to work there. I retired from there too. I can do just about anything, plumbing, electrical, carpentry [...] I'm mechanically inclined and electronically inclined. (Jack)

Despite the centrality of technology to his career, Jack lacks the passion for ICTs that Harry, Alice, or Fred (all Enthusiasts) exhibited. Though Jack's early working life (including technical experience and military service time) was similar to Enthusiast Harry's, his philosophy on ICTs is dramatically different. What resulted from Jack's early adulthood exposure was not a passion for ICTs as fun playthings, but rather a "practical" and "functional" perspective. Practicalists do not talk about a "love" for ICTs or share stories of how ICTs dramatically shaped (or saved) their lives as Enthusiasts do. They do not get excited about all the ways they use (or potentially could use) an ICT. Instead, they see ICTs in a very pragmatic, purposeful, and functional way: as tools.

Practicalists, unlike Enthusiasts, do not point to important technology mentors (family or friends that encouraged use) nor do they have fond memories of "tinkering" with technology (being encouraged to break down, rebuild, and play with ICTs). When asked about their childhood experiences and how these have shaped their relationship with technology, Practicalists often dismiss their childhood technology encounters as not being influential or memorable compared to their working careers.

Introduction to ICTs

It is through work tasks and processes that Practicalists are often introduced to new forms of ICTs. Practicalists' work often has a strong technology component. Belinda's former work as a library science educator and currently as a professor meant that she worked extensively with ICTs. Cleveland, who prior to his retirement worked as an executive for a paper sales company, traveled

frequently and used many earlier mobile technologies. Boris computerized his construction business billing and records in the early 1990s.

In their work, Practicalists take a functional approach to learning ICTs. Their learning is purposeful, and they see learning not only as a work task, but as work itself (as opposed to being play or fun). Belinda speaks about how she is constantly trying to learn to use new software and applications in her teaching:

I constantly am trying to push myself to use new tools. What I am really trying to do is to see how I can use these in the context of librarianship. I try to figure out how these new tools can be used for research assignments for kids. I don't go out and search for these technologies, but if someone lets me know they are out there I try to figure out how to use them. (Belinda)

Practicalists do not approach their ICT use with the pure, almost childlike, wonder and excitement of Enthusiasts. Instead, Practicalists approach ICT use as a focused and driven pursuit to find out how to use the technologies available for the task at hand; they do not play with them. Belinda's quote captures this driven and focused examination: she does not seek these technologies out, but fully explores their potential uses for the educational context when she is made aware of them.

While Enthusiasts tend to push their workplaces to use existing ICTs in new ways and to adopt new technologies, Practicalists are more likely to be encouraged by their workplace (be it their peers or supervisors) to begin using these same ICTs. Cleveland speaks about how his experience with cell phones evolved through his work exposure:

I first became aware of cell phones around 1990. The owner of the company got wind that this was the coming thing so he got a cell phone. The only way I can describe it is it looked like a WWII combat walkie-talkie. This thing was about 12 inches long and it weighed about 6 pounds. It had a keypad on it and you held it up and it was limited coverage. We used that for maybe a couple years and maybe he got another one. Maybe there was one or two that were being used, interchanged amongst the group in the office. But they were just terrible, erratic reception, etc. Then I went to Asia and I can remember spending a few days in Taiwan. It was a very crowded city, very, very busy; very, very hectic; very, very modern; very, very high tech. Everybody was walking along the street – I want to say almost everybody walking along the street was talking on a mobile phone. We were just flabbergasted that this technology that we thought was so difficult to get adjusted to was so common place in Asia. We felt like we were living out in the boondocks. So, we came back and cell phones became a little bit more common place, a little bit more

available, and a little bit better reception [...] So, the cell phone activity in Europe and Asia was very common place, but the phones that we were getting here in this country weren't usable there at all. You'd have to go over there and if you wanted to make a cell phone call you'd have to buy a phone, which I did a few times and that worked out fine. I realized after a while that we're way far behind in this country in terms of global phone technology. (Cleveland)

For Cleveland, his experience with the cell phone mirrored his use of many technologies: his first computer and later laptop were provided through his office. In his discussion of the cell phone, Cleveland speaks toward the practical use of this technology: its reception, functionality, and usefulness: important aspects of an ICT to any Practicalist. Comparing Cleveland's (a Practicalist) discussion of the cell phone with Fred's (an Enthusiast) discussion of the television (first introduced in the previous chapter), you will note that both discuss the limited functionality of the first models. Whereas Cleveland mostly focuses on usability, Fred mostly focuses on the fun:

I remember the first TV I saw [...] it was a little TV screen, in a big box. It was black and white. In the '50s there were only three channels in my city. After 11:30 at night the only thing on was a test pattern. That was the early '50s. It was amazing and so nobody on our street had a TV and then the one kid I hung around with on the street their family got a TV. We'd go down there and watch TV and they had the fights on Friday and that was about it. But it was amazing. Later they had movies on TV, you could watch the news [...] it was great! (Fred)

The meanings Cleveland and Fred ascribe to these ICTs are vastly different and reflect their different user types. Cleveland focuses almost solely on the functionality in his quote about cell phones, while Fred focuses on the wonder and excitement of television. Fred, as an Enthusiast, is amazed and excited by the "fun" of a new technology. His excitement nearly jumps off the page. Cleveland, on the other hand, is impressed by the functionality of the technology: its usability and ubiquity. While Practicalists are not eager to adopt new ICTs because they are "fun toys," they are eager to adopt new technologies that they believe will benefit them functionally: they are personally or professionally useful to them. For instance, Boris, who ran his own construction company, first adopted a computer to help with typing letters, billing, and general recordkeeping for his business:

The first computer I had was for the business — it was an inexpensive tool. You could do certain things with it, you could type

a letter and you could print from it. But it was at least that 20 or 30 years ago. (Boris)

As the sole proprietor of a small construction company, Boris was a relatively early adopter of computers in the 1990s for his home business. To him, the computer was a tool that would help him with inventory and other business work. Practicalists, like Boris, are neither overly impressed with nor intimidated by technology – they simply want to use the things that help them to “get stuff done” (Jack). This pragmatic view of ICTs as tools can impact Practicalists’ exposure levels. Because ICTs are so closely tied to work in Practicalists’ minds, their overall exposure is closely aligned to their workplace’s ICT status. Practicalists who are in workplaces that possess advanced ICTs, and are in positions where such use is required or expected, tend to be well versed in advanced ICTs. Those in workplace environments that lack ICTs or that are/were in positions where using such ICTs was discouraged tend to have much less exposure. This can be observed for those Practicalists who held high positions in their organizations as executives and retired before executive-level employees were expected to complete their own computer tasks. For instance, Dan, who held a high-level executive position in a global non-profit agency, relayed that early computers were seen as being advanced typewriters for typists. At one point, he even asked his mentor if he should be learning to use computers and was told such learning was beneath his position:

I remember I was running a major project in Africa and I didn’t have computer skills. This was 40 years ago or so – in those days you had lots of other people who did computers for you: you had typists etc., etc. But even when we started with computers typists just switched over to computing. Now that’s changed, now you’re expected to have your own skills. I remember talking to a man who was a senior administrator and had retired from some agency in California. I said, “Allen do you think I should be learning the computer?” [...] He said “well, you know Dan at your level, no; you shouldn’t be using a computer. Other people should be doing this for you.” (Dan)

Throughout his career as an executive, Dan believed that computers were simply tools, albeit not tools that he needed to learn for his work: they were the tools of typists and administrative assistants. As computers became more widespread in offices, Dan sometimes felt that he should be using computers, but it always seemed that someone else in the organization would preemptively prepare documents and presentations:

I always had people build [the presentations] for me. Maybe that’s a disadvantage if you have other people do it. If you’re at a certain level in an organization you have other people do things.

Then you haven't really learned [...] I could give a great PowerPoint presentation but somebody else had put it together. I'd really like to learn PowerPoint. (Dan)

Even though Dan previously held a high-level executive position, he found himself struggling in retirement to learn to use office software due to this lack of exposure. Dan wanted to start his own consulting company and was also serving as an advisor to many doctoral students who were studying international development. He felt he lacked many of the computer skills needed to be successful and was in the process of learning to use many office applications, both through lessons from his wife and by reading books.

It is often assumed that an individual's education level and socioeconomic class correlates strongly with their ICT use, proficiency, and exposure in elderhood (Czaja et al., 2006; Peral-Peral, Arenas-Gaitán, & Villarejo-Ramos, 2015; Pick, Sarkar, & Johnson, 2015; Zhang, Grenhart, McLaughlin, & Allaire, 2017). However, despite Dan's high level of education (a PhD holder) and high socioeconomic class (lower upper class), his exposure levels were quite low. This turns our assumptions about the impact of education and socioeconomic class on its head. It is not simply exposure to ICTs that leads to better skills, but the direct use of them. Indirect exposure – where ICTs are available in an office but people do not use the technology themselves – does not result in greater skills. While work is a key point of introduction for Practicalists, it is important to note that not all Practicalists are personally introduced and taught how to use all ICTs during their careers.

Practicalists often purchase their own versions of ICTs for personal use. They tend to readily understand the features and characteristics they want and need in a technology, and have high awareness of the ICTs that are available. Boris relays how he tended to purchase technologies:

If it's something that is going to make your life easier, more pleasant, and you can afford it then you buy it. For years we had normal regular [CRT] TV sets. They worked, they weren't great, but they worked. Two or three years ago both of us agreed that what we would do for Christmas instead of buying a bunch of dumb stuff we would buy a [LCD] TV set. We researched them a little and talked with a bunch of people that had them. We went and looked at them in the store and bought one. Well, then I had a chance to buy a small flat screen for the bedroom at a pretty good price and again I checked with my computer guy to make sure it was a good deal. (Boris)

Like Boris, Practicalists often do an intensive amount of research on any potential ICT purchase. For Practicalists who are in close relationships with Enthusiasts, they often find these relationships' important points of introduction

to new ICT forms and devices in addition to their work lives. Dan's Enthusiast wife often purchased new forms of ICTs for family use:

Probably the only reason I have anything is because my wife has all of this [ICT] stuff. For all of this stuff I don't know what I would have if it weren't for her. Maybe I would have it all and maybe I wouldn't. It's her influence. She's a genius in this type of stuff; I just try to figure out how to use it. (Dan)

While Enthusiasts actively seek out new forms of ICTs in their everyday lives, Practicalists tend to become aware of new forms most often through their work relationships. Since work has an important role in the introduction to ICTs, Practicalists' have very diverse skill levels when it comes to ICT use, depending on their type of work.

ICT Use

Practicalists ICT use patterns tend to reflect their belief that ICTs are function-specific tools. They often use an ICT in only a single life context, such as their family, work, *or* leisure lives. This is in contrast to Enthusiasts, who seek out all the possible applications of a single ICT across all areas of their lives; for their family, work *and* leisure lives. Practicalists, in contrast, are much more specific in their perceptions of an ICT being intended for one area of their life or another. They tend to see television as a leisure device for family, cell phones for work, and computers for work or activities related to maintaining their household:

Primarily I would say the computer is for business, business records and research and things. There is some personal use; I've got a couple games on there I play. I look at the news and the weather, but mostly its business that's in there. (Boris)

For Practicalists, their ICT use is driven by the applications they see for the device or software in their lives, be it professional or personal. When Boris speaks about his computer, there is "some" personal use, compared to being "mostly business." This function-specific description of his computer is much different from Enthusiasts'. Even though Boris does use his computer for leisure (gaming, the weather forecast, and news), he views this use in a functional and purposeful way to fulfill his leisure needs. Even when playing games, the computer is a leisure tool, not a toy, to Practicalists.

Like Boris, Belinda speaks about the precise functions she uses an ICT for, in this case, social media:

I'm a learner. When you're talking about social tools and web-based presentation things and a lot of the new applications I am

fledgling. I push myself to use them. There are two ways I think about using them in my work. One is for my own personal work communication uses. I'm still finding a comfort zone with that because I'm not a real public person in a lot of things, and I prefer to write an article than to do a blog. So, I prefer to have my thinking done rather than just lay it out there in process thinking. The second way that I think about the use of particularly the new social media tools and the new applications is in terms of student research. This second way is to figure out research products that allow students to communicate their research and what they have learned in innovative ways. I think about tweets of George Washington before the battle of Valley Forge, or of all the soldiers on the night before the battle and how could kids capture the research they've done about what it would be like to be a soldier at that time. As a librarian, you collect those tweets to give an overall picture of what it was like to be in that situation the night before a huge battle. I always think about how it can be used by students and if I think it would be useful for me professionally. (Belinda)

Belinda's thoughts on using social media focus on its application in a single life context: her work. She sees two prominent uses: to enable her to communicate (and this communication is focused professionally) and how it can be used in teaching. Like Enthusiasts, Practicalists constantly see themselves as learning, but unlike Enthusiasts, what Practicalists want to learn is targeted toward a small range of function. They do not seek ways to stretch the use of a single ICT into every area of their lives. They are happy, instead, to have every ICT have a single set purpose:

I don't regard the Internet as a toy; I use it for work, for very strategic finding of information, for getting something done. So, I don't just search, I don't just roam around on the Internet [...] I don't have time for that, and I don't want to do that. (Belinda)

Belinda discusses her use of the Internet as "strategic" and purposeful. She directly contrasts her use to someone who is "playing" (or using the Internet for fun). It is important to note that Belinda was very much a power user of the Internet: She taught online courses, maintained social media accounts, and used a plethora of common ICTs. In many ways, her skill levels rivaled several of the Enthusiasts. However, Belinda's perspective and use were quite different from Enthusiasts: she focused on tasks and function, not fun and play. ICTs are not toys to Practicalists: they are tools. While Practicalists can be highly skilled ICT users, their skill set may not be as broad because their use is targeted to a specific purpose. Practicalists know how to use the tools they use frequently, but unlike

Enthusiasts, they are not apt to explore different ways to use the technology in different contexts.

This sense of purposeful use, and this view of ICTs as tools, impacts the Practicalists' use in other ways. In particular, Practicalists believe *they* should be in control of the ICTs they themselves own. As their owners, *they* control how and when they are used. This use is for their own convenience – and not for others'. Most older adult Practicalists, for instance, maintained a separate land-line, which was their primary form of short and long-distance voice communication. Cell phones were seen as personal tools to only be used at Practicalists' discretion – and particularly – when Practicalists' had a desire or need to use it (most often to make an outgoing call):

I'm not big on cell phones. It's the matter of necessity. I have one only in case I get stranded somewhere or had a problem. Half the time I don't even take it with me. I guess I keep it turned off because I've got a couple friends and their phone rang more times in the day than you could count. Half the day is shot because of the cell phone. It's like what did you do before you had a cell phone, somebody waited to talk to you. I don't want to be bothered on construction jobs. Half the time I couldn't hear the phone anyway because I'm using a piece of equipment, saw or sander, or router or something, I'd never hear the cell phone. I don't turn mine on unless I want to make a call. (Boris)

These feelings were echoed by all the older adult Practicalists in the study. The cell phone, as Boris states, is his. He keeps one primarily in case he is stranded in his car or runs into difficulty. He normally keeps it turned off unless he needs to make a call, as that is when it is most useful to him. Dan expressed a similar sentiment:

I normally keep my cell phone in the car. I think it frustrates other people sometimes because I don't hear it if it's in the car. In this house I always use the home phone, and so it doesn't bother me not to have the cell phone in here but it probably bothers a few other people. My wife says, "Why don't you take the cell phone with you?" I forget to take the cell phone out of the car when I go someplace else. (Dan)

Dan hints at some of the conflicts that can arise from Practicalists' view of ICTs as tools for their own use, particularly when they are communicating with others who do not share their user type. Many of the secondary participants echoed this frustration. Peggy, who was one of Belinda's friends and a former coworker, explained that she often would tease Belinda about not answering her cell phone:

Belinda does not text at all. Do not text her. If you need to call her on her cell phone, you have to ask her to turn it on; she has to plan it to receive your phone calls [...] I keep teasing her, I said “why don’t you text and I’ll text you and you can receive it and then you’ll know I’m calling you.” She just gives me one of her looks. *[laughing]* (Peggy on her friend Belinda)

Boris and Belinda keep their cell phones off because, in their minds, this facilitates their own use of their ICT tools. Since Boris views his cell phone as a tool for emergency use; he keeps it off, as he is not constantly in need of an emergency tool. Since Belinda feels that the cell phone is her tool for work; she similarly keeps it off, unless she has a work-related call to make.

For Practicalists, all of their ICTs are life context and purpose specific. Although some ICTs may cross life boundaries (for instance, Jack paid his household bills and donated to community organizations online), the number of contexts each ICT is used for is seen as very limited. For Practicalists, it is easy to classify any device into primarily being used for either family, work, community, or leisure. Their ICT use does not often cross the boundaries of these life contexts.

ICT Display

Practicalists’ apply their view that ICTs are tools used for a specific context in how they organize their homes. Computers, which are primarily used for work, are placed in offices. Televisions, which are seen as instruments of leisure, are placed into living rooms or dens. Phones are placed strategically throughout the home where they facilitate different kinds of conversation (work, family, or leisure). Placing a television, a device for leisure, in their kitchen or office is akin to leaving gardening or woodworking tools in the same spaces. To a Practicalist, neither makes sense. Belinda speaks about her placement of her computer, television, and printer in her den/home office:

I put my computer here [in my office/den] because I love to look out; I love to have a backyard to look at. I spend all my life on my computer, so I need it to be comfortable and facing out. It’s convenient for me; this is sort of a base. I put the television in the room because that’s kind of the den, that’s where I would go to relax, and the living room is more for entertaining people and conversation. Why would you have a television there? (Belinda)

Practicalists often own many of the same ICT devices as Enthusiasts; however, their view that ICTs are tools that are obtained and used for specific purposes leads them to organize them in their homes in very different ways. Whereas Enthusiasts place ICTs in areas where they will get maximal and nearly constant use, Practicalists place ICTs in areas where they will fulfill a specific



Figure 2. (a) Boris' Computer Room and (b) Boris' Entertainment Room.

function. Boris separated his open floor plan log cabin into both a separate office space and a separate entertainment space (Figure 2a and b).

Often, Practicalists tend to label rooms in their homes by the technologies they have within them. For instance, Practicalists will often have “computer rooms” or offices, “television rooms” or dens, and occasionally ICT-free spaces they use for other tasks, such as sitting rooms or reading rooms. Belinda’s quote emphasizes that ICTs have their designated space and this space is based upon their function (be it work, leisure, family, or community use). The room becomes named after the primary activity that occurs in that room – be it

computer use, television use, or communicating with friends, etc. This reflects the Practicalists' view that ICTs are tools, and tools are used in a designated workspace:

We used to have the computer in the living room. The problem with that arrangement was we couldn't get a sofa and chair big enough out here. If you had more than one or two people you couldn't have a conversation because of the lack of seating. We decided that we're better off moving everything and bringing the computer out here. This is my office space. This is my business space. I just got everything to do with business pretty much right here so that I don't have to go anywhere. I keep my personal files in here, but I also keep other stuff to do with the business here like printer paper, ink cartridges, whatever. This is where I do my business. We put the TV in the other room and that is our entertainment room. (Boris)

As Boris speaks, one can see how he readily organizes his space around technological function: the television is in an area used primarily for entertainment, the computer in an area used primarily for work, and there is also a separate seating area for having a conversation.

Jack relates how he and his wife use the space in their home:

We put the computer in here because this is a good little work area to put a computer in, like an office. We have a TV for the grandkids to use in the front room, and this is the TV that my wife and I use when we are downstairs in the living room. We didn't put the TV in the office because that is where the computer belongs. When we use the computer, we're in there. When we use the TV, we're out here. And if the [grand]kids are watching, they're watching a kid's program, so we don't watch that. They have their own TV for that. (Jack)

As Jack states, when they are seeking to use an ICT, such as the computer or television, they enter that space, use that ICT, and when completed with that task, they exit that space. This was observed over and over again in the study. If a Practicalist owned a laptop and their spouse or another member of their family moved it from the "computer room," the Practicalist would pick up the laptop and return it to the "computer room." Cleveland, for instance, commented on how Mary (his wife, a Socializer) would often move their laptop to the upstairs living room, while he preferred to work on the laptop in the basement office. During my interviews with Mary, he would often retrieve the laptop from her chair-side table and return it to the office. Many Practicalists reasoned that their use of ICTs should be self-disciplined, and locating these ICTs in task-specific

rooms helped them to move into other activities, when completed with the task at hand:

I keep the computer out in the office because it allows me to only use it when I want to – otherwise I can read or do something else. (Dan)

Unlike Enthusiasts, Practicalists do not see their ICT use as “fun” or “play” but rather the work of using a tool to accomplish a task. Therefore, part of their reasoning for maintaining these ICT-specific spaces is to facilitate their efficient use of ICTs as such tools.

The Practicalists of the Lucky Few generations tended to view cell phones as their own personal tools (for their convenience, only). As a result, Practicalists of this generation often have multiple landline phones to facilitate communication in each life context: be it in work, leisure, etc. Despite the open floor plan of Boris’ home, a separate telephone had been installed in the kitchen, the office area, and the entertainment area, with these spaces being only a few feet from one another. When someone called during our interviews, five separate phones could be heard ringing simultaneously. Boris shared that his motivation in having multiple phones was to improve function and allow for greater usability:

Having phones everywhere in the house just makes it handy. Those phones from Radio Shack are \$20–25 and they’re cordless and if I’m going to go out in the shed and work or puttering around outside I take that phone with me. If [my wife] gets a phone call upstairs and it’s for me, and she calls me to the phone, I don’t have to run upstairs. I can just come in the door downstairs and use that phone. (Boris)

From the Practicalists’ perspective, this arrangement makes perfect sense. The placement of the phones around Boris’ home reflects the various tasks he may be using the phone for: personal communication, business, or leisure.

ICT Meaning

For Practicalists, ICTs are tools, work, and functional items used for practical purposes. They tend to view each of their ICTs as having a distinct purpose in their lives:

I use the cell phone in a very practical way, it’s strictly for communicating, if I don’t have the home phone I use the cell phone. I don’t do anything fancy on the cell phone at all, just send some voice messages and make calls. (Dan)

The cell phone is valuable as a device for Dan not because it does something “fancy” (has advanced features) but because it allows him to complete his tasks of communication. In many ways, a Practicalists’ main concern with any device or service is its functionality: what it can do and how well it can do it. They tend to be less impressed by new features or the attractiveness of a device, unless these features represent a perceived functional improvement. Practicalists tend to credit the environment around them: their work, their families, but most importantly the tasks they do as influencing their everyday ICT use:

I think it’s what you do, whatever you do, whatever your livelihood is dictates the kind of equipment, the technology that you’re going to require to do your job. Or it’s what you’re comfortable with, whether it be watching a lot of TV or playing a lot of CD’s or talking on the telephone or text messaging all day. It depends on what you’re going to use it for. (Boris)

Boris touches on the importance of use for Practicalists. ICTs that have purpose have value in the Practicalists’ world. Boris’ comment highlights how Practicalists feel: a person’s life and the tasks they perform dictate the ICTs that they use. If they enjoy music they might use a CD player, if they like drama they might watch television. His view of ICTs as equipment highlights the purposefulness of ICTs in his own life. Through its usefulness and practicality, an ICT comes to have value.

While Practicalists would never categorize their use of ICTs as being “fun” or “play,” they do not believe using ICTs is drudgery or devoid of enjoyment. For Practicalists, the “joy” in using an ICT comes from fulfilling a task or doing a job. Some of their joy comes from finding new features in tools they are already using:

I think you get set in your ways in using ICTs and you tend to do the same things every day the same way until one day you try something different and learn something new that’s helpful. It kind of amazed me, I found out something that even my computer guy wasn’t aware of. When I take the digital camera and put the pictures in the computer I can just hit transfer and it will transfer them. Well, one time for some reason I noticed a Canon icon on my desktop, so I clicked it. It’s got every picture that I’ve got stored in that computer no matter where they’re stored. Now if you want to print them that’s handy you can just click on them you pick your paper and how many pictures do you want on a page, hit print and you’re on your way. (Boris)

Practicalists, like Boris, often happen upon these new features passively. They discover them by chance or have new features pointed out to them. While Enthusiasts will deeply explore any device they own to find out every way it

works (and find the exploration process great fun), Practicalists tend to avoid this experimentation and instead focus on the functionality they are already familiar with. Practicalists want technologies to be shown to them and tend to strongly prefer technological training over learning through exploration. They also like having manuals and technical support individuals to walk them through issues, as they are unlikely to try to solve technical problems on their own. Practicalists do not want to play with a technology; they want a technology to work as expected. Practicalists, however, are open to chance discoveries and welcome new uses being pointed out.

Practicalists focus on the usability, and the function of ICTs is easily spotted by those around them, be their coworkers, friends, or family members. These individuals recognize the Practicalists' serious use of ICTs as functional tools, not playthings:

Belinda's ICT use is pragmatic. If she needs to use it she will and she'll use it well. She would never get up at 5:00 in the morning and play with a piece of technology. (Peggy about Belinda)

As Peggy states, Belinda would never "play" with an ICT, but she will learn to use it well. When Practicalists view an ICT as a tool, they see the technology much like a hammer. Returning to Boris' quote which started this chapter, we can see how ICTs are viewed as tools, and like any tool, have accepted uses:

I see my cell phone like a hammer. I take my hammer out of the toolbox when I need it. I don't carry my hammer around with me every day all the time. I use the cell when I need to make a call, just like I use my hammer to drive a nail. I don't walk around carrying my hammer for someone else to use it, it's mine [...] These technologies they are just tools. (Boris)

Practicalists' language is littered with the term "tool" to refer to technologies. Boris, Belinda, Jack, Dan, and Cleveland all referred to ICTs as "tools." For Practicalists, the ICTs in their lives which have the greatest amount of value are ones that serve a practical purpose and have a determined function: they are simply tools.

Practicalists: The Technological Tool Pragmatists

Practicalists are the pragmatic tool users of ICTs: they are more than happy to adopt any technology they believe will serve a purpose in their lives – if you show them the technology and how to use it. They tend to take a serious approach toward using ICTs, viewing their use as more work than play. This work can be joyful, but it is a serious task, not a fun one. Key takeaways about Practicalists include:

- Practicalists have a large diversity of skills as a group, with those who were heavily exposed to ICTs in work having the highest skills.
- They extensively research the functionality of new ICT purchases.
- Technologies are placed in function-specific areas in Practicalists' homes: computers belong in home offices and televisions belong in entertainment rooms.
- Practicalists view ICTs as context-specific tools for work, family, leisure, *or* community.
- To appeal to Practicalists, one should emphasize an ICTs' functional usefulness.

While Enthusiasts love ICTs as fun toys and Practicalists see ICTs as tools that fulfill a certain purpose, Socializers value ICTs for their potential to connect them to others. Chapter 4 explores how the Socializer ICT user type views technology as connectors and, in particular, how technology is a connector between generations.